

Healthier Thinking

Wellness Workshop

Student Wellness Services, University of Calgary



Acknowledging the Land and the People

We acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes

the **Blackfoot Confederacy** (the **Siksika**, **Piikani**, and **Kainai First Nations**), the **Tsuut'ina First Nation**, the **Stoney Nakoda** (the **Chiniki**, **Bearspaw**, and **Goodstoney First Nations**), and **Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III**.

The University of Calgary is situated on land adjacent to where the Bow River meets the Elbow River. The traditional Blackfoot name of this place is “**Moh'kins'tsis.**”

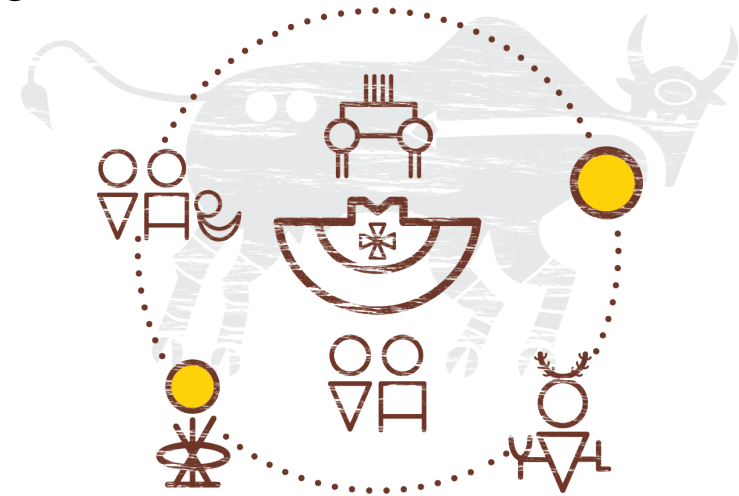


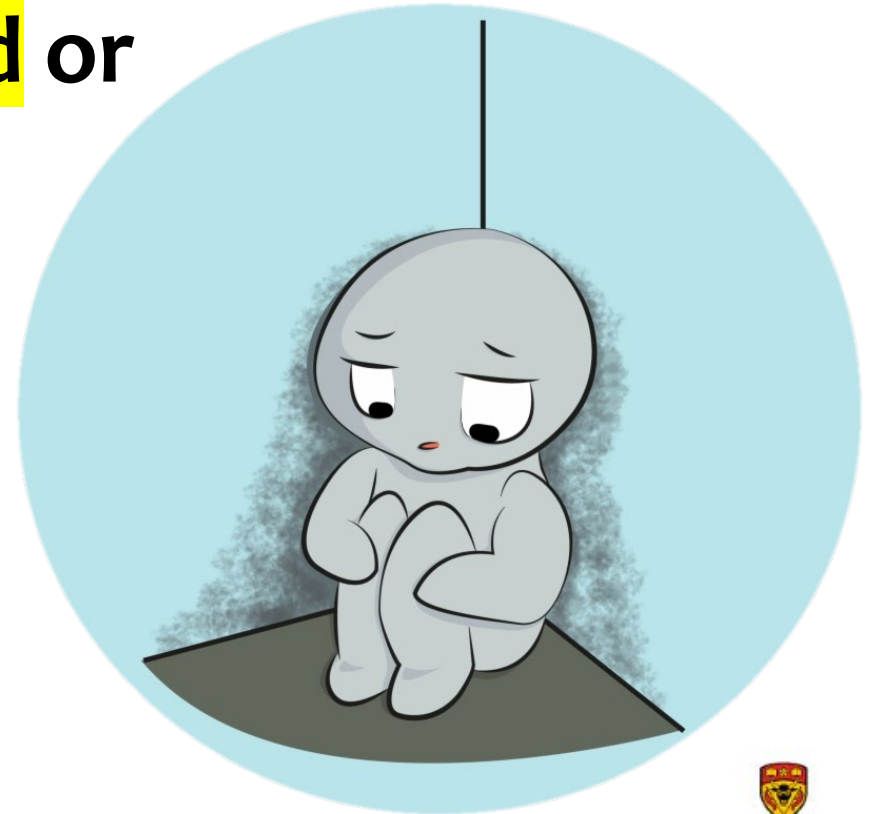
Image: The Cultural Model for the University of Calgary's Indigenous Strategy, ii' taa'poh'to'p

Learning Objectives

- Identify the impacts of our thoughts
- Understand the science behind the impact of our thoughts
- Explore how your own thoughts and thought patterns influence your well-being and resiliency
- Learn practical skills to empower oneself to engage in change in pursuit of healthier thinking

Think about the last time you felt **bad** or something didn't go very well.

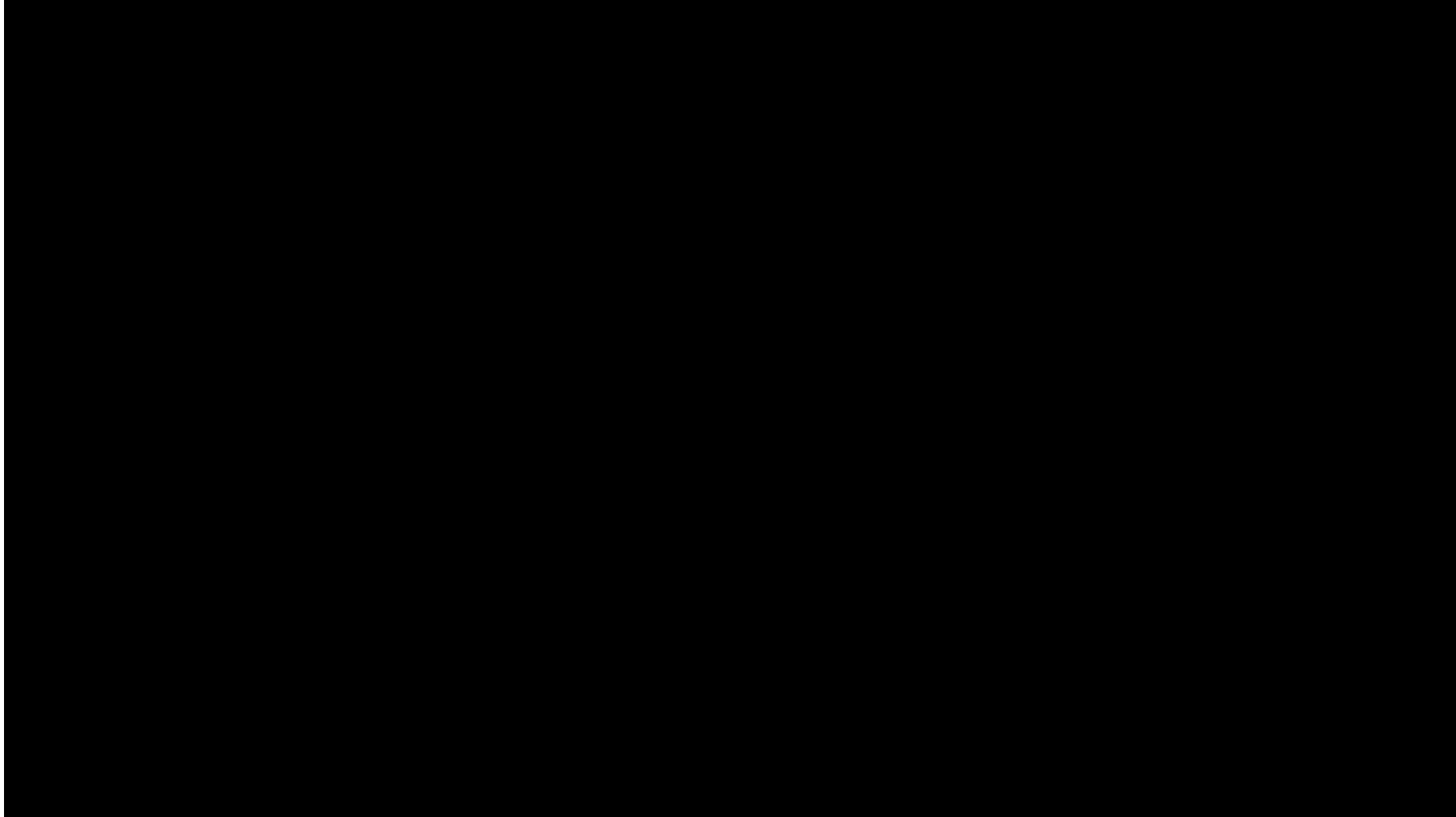
- What happened?
- What did you experience (thoughts, emotions, physiological responses)?
- What did you do?



Power of Thought

- Our thoughts have a big impact on our mental health and our resiliency.
- What you tell yourself about a situation affects how you feel and what you do.
- Our thinking can be faulty, and we often don't see the whole picture.
- As a result of faulty thinking, our well-being can be impacted. We may feel sad, anxious, or stressed, and may not respond in resilient ways.

Sticky Thoughts



Navigating Our Bodyminds: Cultivating Somatic Awareness

- When we do not notice or attend to signals from our bodymind, we are often indirectly teaching ourselves that we do not matter
- When we feel like we do not matter, we can experience increases in negative thoughts and thinking patterns
- To attend to and notice signals from our bodyminds, we need to feel connected to ourselves
 - To increase the connection we feel to ourselves, we can choose an activity to engage in
 - Some possibilities include deep breathing exercises, moving in a way that feels good for you (e.g., yoga, tai-chi, shaking it out, etc.), checking in and trying to actively let go of tension (e.g., progressive muscle relaxation), or doing something which allows us to reflect on our experiences rather than avoid or distract ourselves from them (which can be helpful in other ways for some folx)



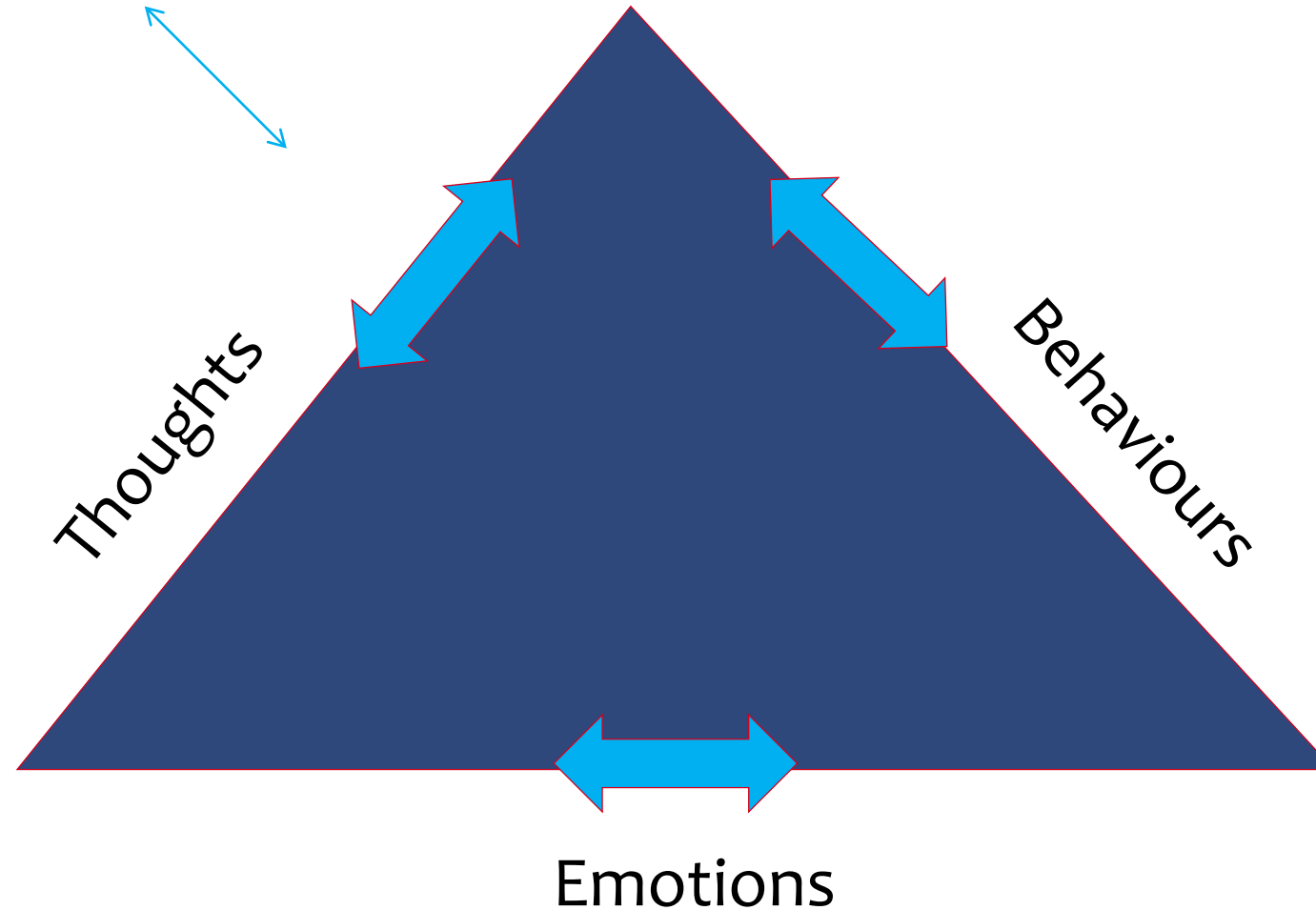
"Neurons that fire together, wire together." - Donald Hebb (1945)

- This commonly-encountered saying found in realms of neuroscience and psychology is an expression of the concept of neuroplasticity (Power & Schlaggar, 2017)
- Neuroplasticity is the ability of our nervous systems to change based on various factors, including repetition – such as of thought (Power & Schlaggar, 2017)
 - We might hope that this would equate to equal amounts of change, dependent on whether we engage in positive or negative thinking patterns – but this is unfortunately not the case...
 - Not all emotions are created equal, referring to the negativity bias, which means that us humans tend to engage with negative information far more than positive information (Vaish et al., 2008)

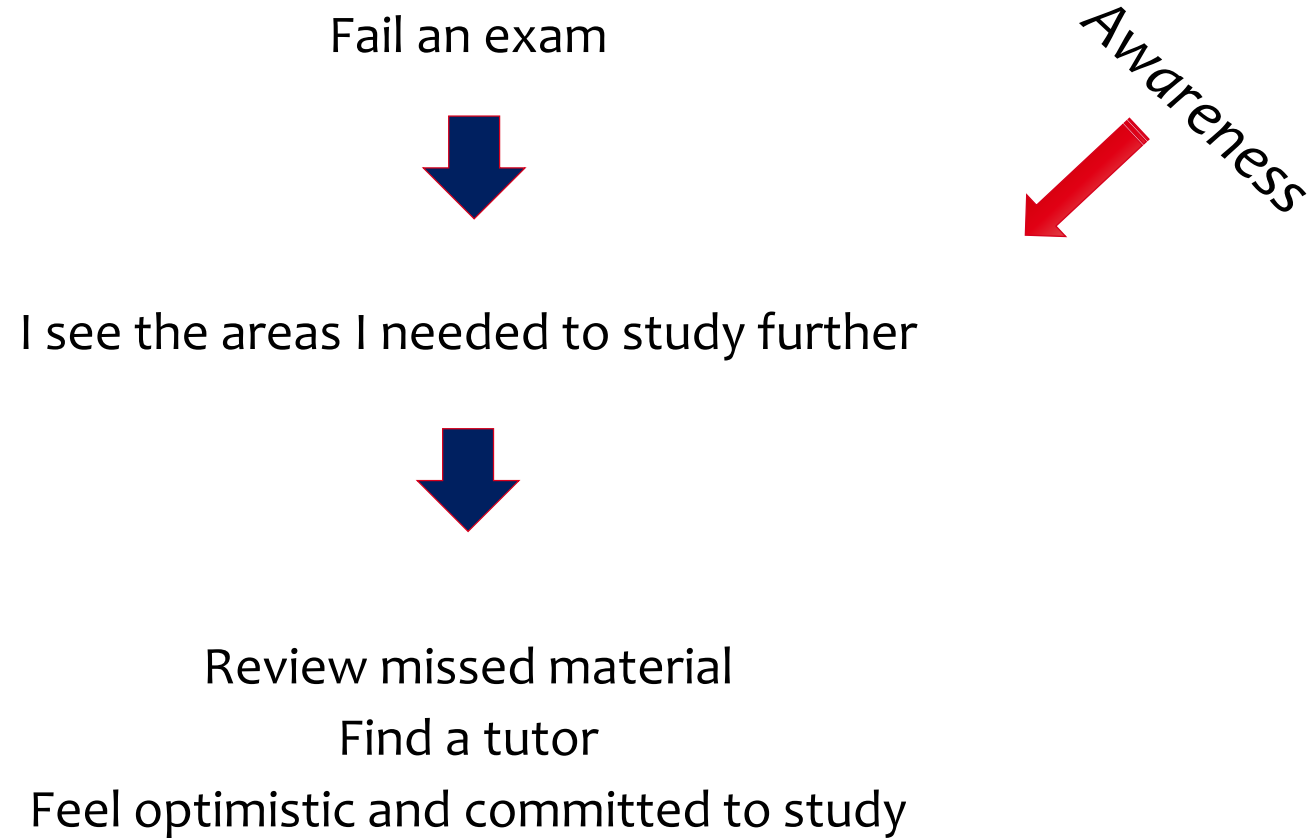


Thoughts-Emotions-Behaviours

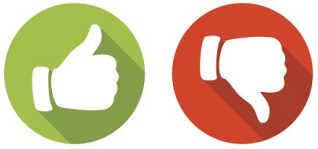
Situation



Role of Interpretation



Common Thinking Traps



- **All-or-Nothing Thinking**

- *I wanted to eat healthier, but I just ate a piece of cake. I might as well eat the whole cake now!*

- **Overgeneralization**

- *You miss the bus and say to yourself, “This always happens to me, the world is against me.”*



- **Mental Filter/Disqualifying the Positive**

- *You receive positive feedback on a presentation from 5 people and 1 constructive criticism, and you ignore the positive feedback and only focus on the criticism, interpreting that as the only accurate feedback.*

Common Thinking Traps

- **Mind Reading**

- *My friend did not stop to say hello, she must be mad at me.*

- **The Fortune-Teller Error**

- *Even though I am studying hard, I know I am going to fail my exam.*



- **Magnification**

- *Yes, I got the scholarship but it's not a big deal. I'm not even sure why they gave it to me*
- *I did not do well on this assignment, so I am going to fail the whole class*

Common Thinking Traps

- **Catastrophizing/Magnification**
 - *Why did I use that word in that email? I'm sure I'm going to get fired*

- **Emotional Reasoning**
 - *I don't feel very smart so I don't deserve to be in this program*



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- **Labeling**
 - *You label yourself as stupid because you missed one question on your exam*

- **Personalization**
 - *Our relationship ended because I was a bad partner*

Catching Your Cognitive Traps

- Most people use more than one of the cognitive traps/biases described. Which one(s) seem to give you the *most* trouble?
- In which situations are you most likely to use this bias?
- What would be more of a reality-based way of thinking in one of the situations you have listed?

Changing Thought Patterns

The 5 C's...

- Step 1. Catch it.
- Step 2. Challenge it.
- Step 3. Change it.
- Step 4. Cut yourself some slack.
- Step 5. Commit to healthy thinking.

Cognitive Defusion

- See thoughts as thoughts
- Become a good consumer of your thoughts and make choices related to how you think
- If you feel stuck in unhelpful thinking, TRY:
 - Adding the prefix “I am having the thought that...”
 - Repeat the thought in a funny voice, such as a cartoon character or a sports announcer



Are all negative thoughts unhealthy thinking traps?



There are times when negative thoughts are realistic.

Reflection Activity: 2+ Thoughts

Think about a time when you had two opposing thoughts (e.g., "Getting more sleep tonight would be nice." And "I don't want to miss going out with my friends tonight.")

Was one positive, and the other negative? How did each thought come to exist? For example, did past lived experiences of yours inform one or both of your thoughts?

Now further your reflection - is it possible that two or more thoughts can exist at once? If so, how?



In Closing

- Thoughts have a lot of power in how we feel about ourselves and the actions we take
- Thinking traps are common, and they can distort our perception and negatively impact our well-being
- By catching our distorted thoughts and changing them to more realistic thoughts, we can increase our well-being and respond in a resilient way

Normalizing Failure

Oprah Winfrey was publicly fired from her first television job as an anchor in Baltimore for getting "too emotionally invested in her stories."

Walt Disney was fired from the Kansas City Star because his editor felt he "lacked imagination and had no good ideas."

Thomas Edison's teachers told him he was "too stupid to learn anything."

And we cannot forget that...we are all human! Humans make mistakes, as making mistakes is a primary pathway from which we can learn and grow.

Questions to Ask After a Setback

1. What can I learn from this?
2. What could I have done differently?
3. Do I need to work on certain skills?
4. Where can I ask for help/support?
5. What is my next step?

Resources for Further Information

- University of Calgary Student Wellness Services:
<https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellness-services>
- Realistic Thinking:
<http://www.anxietybc.com/adults/realistic-thinking>
- Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking, and Positive Thinking:
https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTCS_o6.htm

Conflict Management Digital Badge

Earn the Conflict Management Digital Badge

Conflict management is a key skill for relationship building and achieving success

Increase your confidence in your ability to manage conflicts at school, work and in other parts of your lives. Training within the Conflict Management Digital Badge includes learning about conflict styles, navigating conflict in relationships, and intercultural communication.

Get a virtual LinkedIn badge to show your skill development in this area!



Want More Workshops?

Check out our other wellness workshops:

- Managing Stress and Anxiety
- Motivation & Time Management
- Boosting Self-Compassion
- Pushing Past Perfectionism

For the most up-to-date information on our resources and services, visit our website!

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/wellness-services>

References

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