



Exercise: Linking Emotions, Thoughts and Behaviours

There are a number of primary emotions we all experience, regardless of background or culture. Three common primary emotions are anger, sadness and fear. All emotions – positive or negative – are associated with certain characteristic ways we think of ourselves, ways we perceive others and the world, and with certain behaviours (actions) and physical reactions.

Understanding the link between emotions, thoughts and behaviours can be a useful tool for managers dealing with negative emotions in the workplace. It helps in stressful situations to have the clearest possible perception of a worker's emotional state, but sometimes this is difficult to ascertain. Sometimes they are too upset to tell you, for example, and sometimes they may not feel comfortable sharing the information. It can work to your advantage to be able to use as many cues as possible to understand the situation. A worker's thoughts (as expressed through their comments, etc.) and behaviours may provide insight into their emotional reactions.

To begin exploring the link between emotions, thoughts and behaviours, revisit some of your own experiences with primary emotions. We all react in different ways to emotional experiences, but building an understanding of your own reactions can provide clues to other people's reactions in similar situations.

The intention of the exercise is to make the link between how our thoughts and emotions can lead directly to our physiological reactions and behaviours. Becoming more aware of thoughts and emotions, can help to better manage or respond to the reactions that follow.

While you may never accurately guess another's thoughts or emotions, you can become aware of their impact and rather than reacting exclusively to the behaviour, become curious about the thoughts and emotions. This can open up the opportunity for a more valuable conversation with the individual.

Be as specific as possible in the tables below. Examples appear in italics.



Think of a time you were angry:

EMOTIONS: Describe the range of emotions you felt	THOUGHTS: What types of thoughts were in your mind?	PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS: How did your body react?	BEHAVIOURS: What did you do?
<i>Frustration at Fred's unwillingness to compromise, and rage at the regional manager's decision to fire him</i>	<i>Both Fred and the regional manager needed to just take a few moments and calm down before talking further</i>	<i>My stomach was in knots and I was sweating right through my shirt</i>	<i>I left the room after telling them that I wouldn't stay and watch them both make damaging decisions</i>



Think of a time you were sad or hurt:

EMOTIONS: Describe the range of emotions you felt	THOUGHTS: What types of thoughts were in your mind?	PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS: How did your body react?	BEHAVIOURS: What did you do?



Think of a time you were fearful:

EMOTIONS: Describe the range of emotions you felt	THOUGHTS: What types of thoughts were in your mind?	PHYSIOLOGICAL REACTIONS: How did your body react?	BEHAVIOURS: What did you do?