

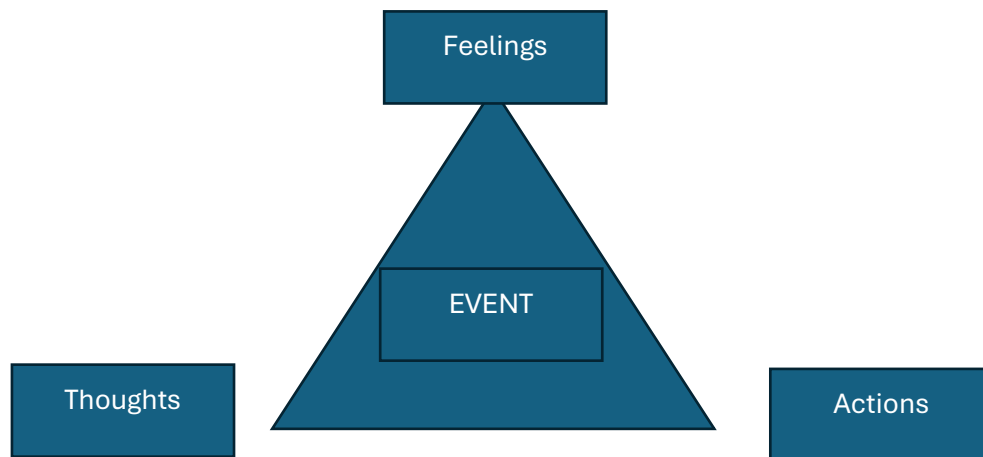
From the School Counsellor

Using the “Magic Triangle” to Challenge Negative Thought Patterns

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has become a very mainstream approach to working therapeutically with both children and adults these days. The focus of CBT challenging (positively reframing) negative thought patterns that influence our feelings and actions.

Because of CBT’s heavy cognitive focus, it has its limitations and is not something I would recommend in all cases or for all people. However, one area where there is strong evidence for CBT’s effectiveness is in treating depression and anxiety, two of the most common presenting issues seen by therapists. I think this is because a core component of both depression and anxiety is how they are fueled by negative thought patterns. If we can challenge and change such patterns, in many cases we see an ability to hold them more lightly whenever they do visit us.

A concept drawn from CBT that is easily explained to kids is the “magic triangle.” The magic triangle is a simple tool to help us visualise how our thoughts influence our feelings and actions. For example:



By helping kids to *reframe* the unhealthy or unbalanced thought patterns that contribute to painful feelings and unhelpful actions, we can support them to plant more positive seeds in the mind. For example:

Situation	Thoughts	Feelings	Actions
Fears about coming to school	“I should get out of school because it’s too scary and hard.”	Worry, frustration, disappointment	Avoidance
Fears about coming to school	“I can ask for help and be brave to meet this challenge.”	Curiosity, confidence, lower levels of worry	Attending school, making new friends, finding new sources of support/help.

So, if you notice your child gets stuck in some negative thought patterns, you may find it helpful to teach them about the “magic triangle.” This may assist them to learn how to positively reframe challenging moments into opportunities for personal growth.

Warm regards,
Damian Gerber, Student & Family Counsellor