



# Thoughts, Feelings & Behaviors: How They're Connected & What We Can Do to Help

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# Disclosures

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- No one involved in the planning or presentation of this activity has any relevant financial relationships with a commercial interest to disclose.
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# Learning Objectives

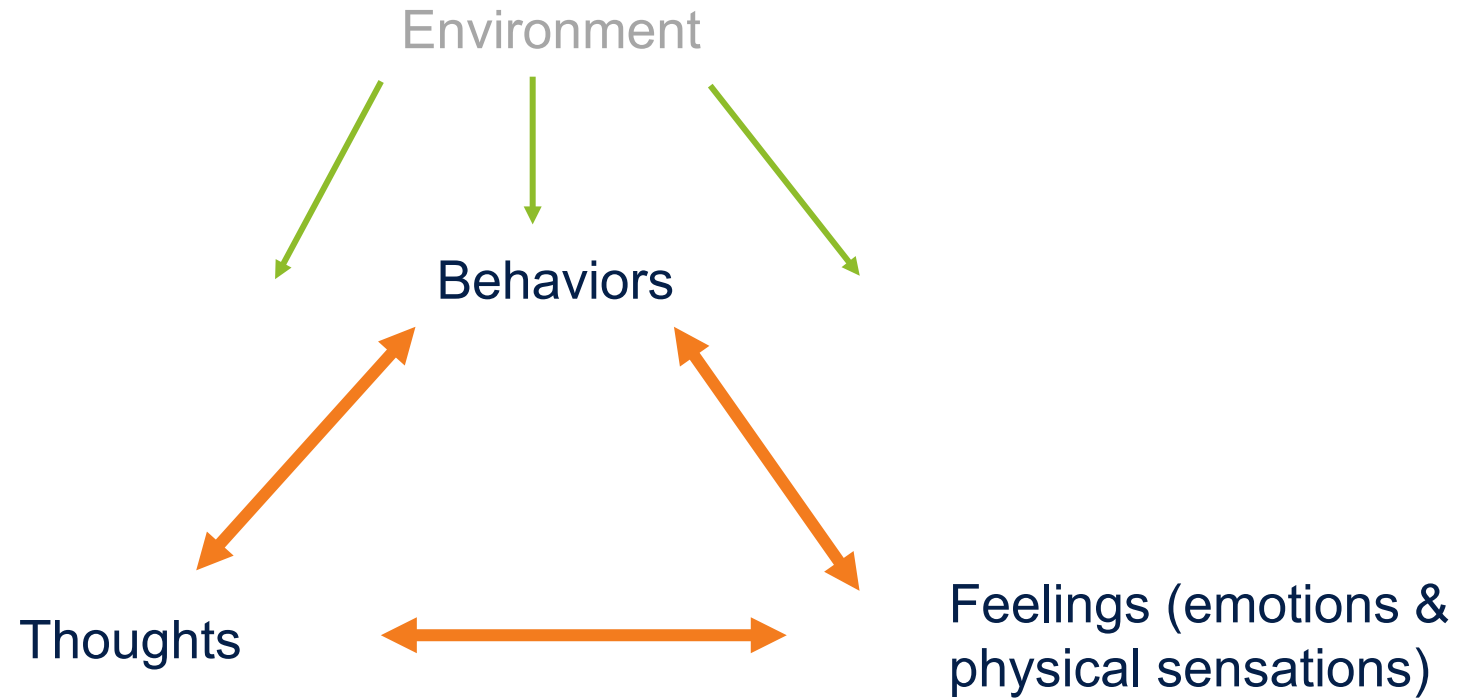
1. Explain how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are connected.

2. Name 2 reasons why feelings are helpful.

3. Name 3 strategies that can help with difficult feelings.



# CBT Triangle (plus)



All influenced by culture

# CBT Triangle

Classroom ambiance, social relationships,  
home structure, caregiver availability,  
psychosocial resilience factors +  
stressors, etc

Environment

Behaviors

Ask to stay home from  
school; quiet in the  
classroom; acting out in  
the classroom; etc

Thoughts

“I’m going to fail this math test”

Feelings (emotions &  
physical sensations)

Worried, anxious  
Butterflies in tummy, increased heart rate,  
feeling flushed, etc

All influenced by culture

# Emotions help:

- Give us information
- Communicate to, and influence others
- Motivate and prepare us for action

# We don't always want to change emotion!

- If emotion change isn't the goal, consider validation or other tools: "It makes so much sense that you're sad because you miss your mom."

## When might we want to change emotion?

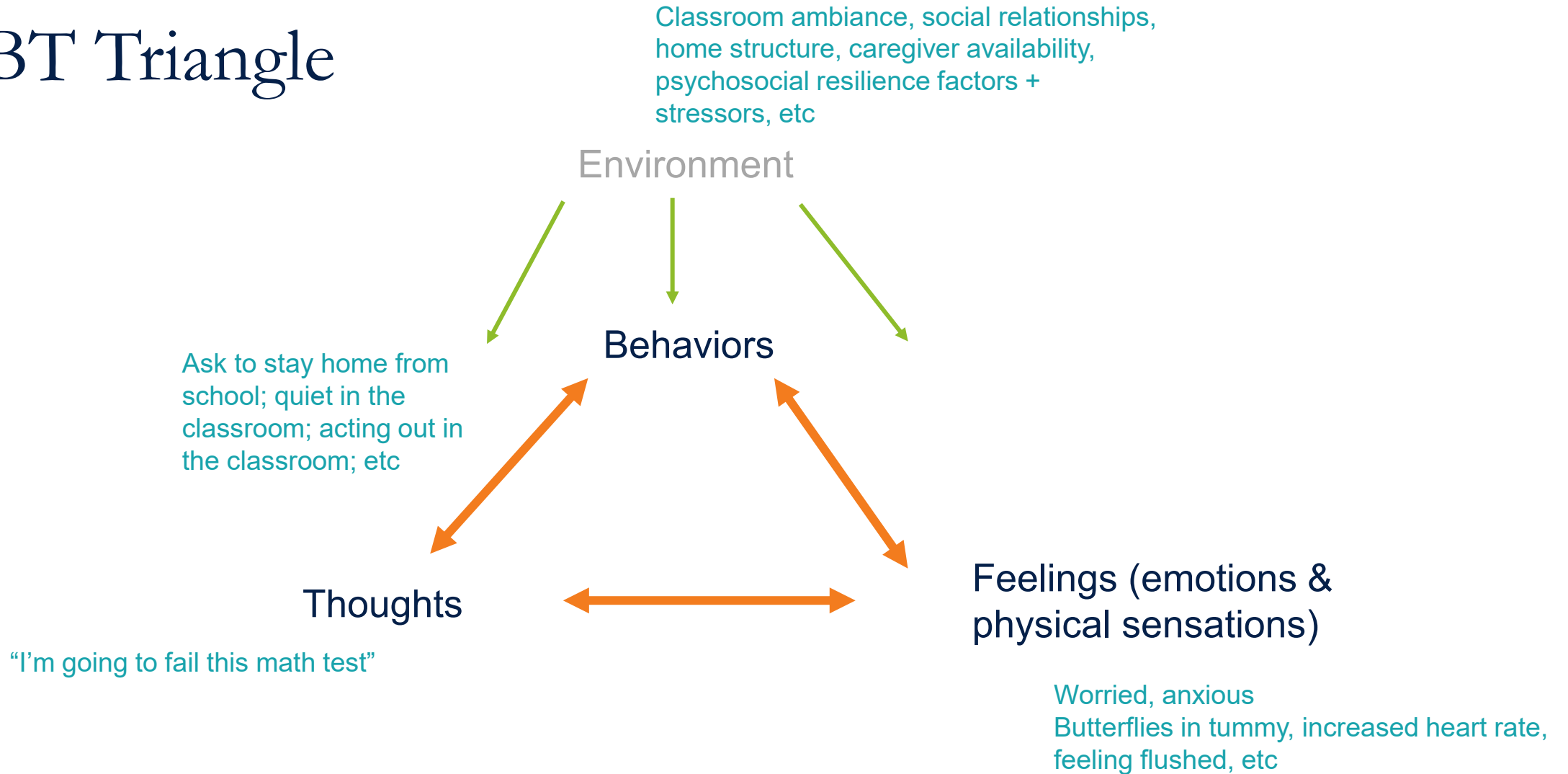
- Getting in the way of what a child wants (playing, friendships) or needs (attending school, doing schoolwork, participating with peers) to do
- Doesn't fit the facts (e.g., extreme anxiety about going outside in a safe environment)

When emotion change is effective:

Hard to change emotions directly – use actions or thoughts



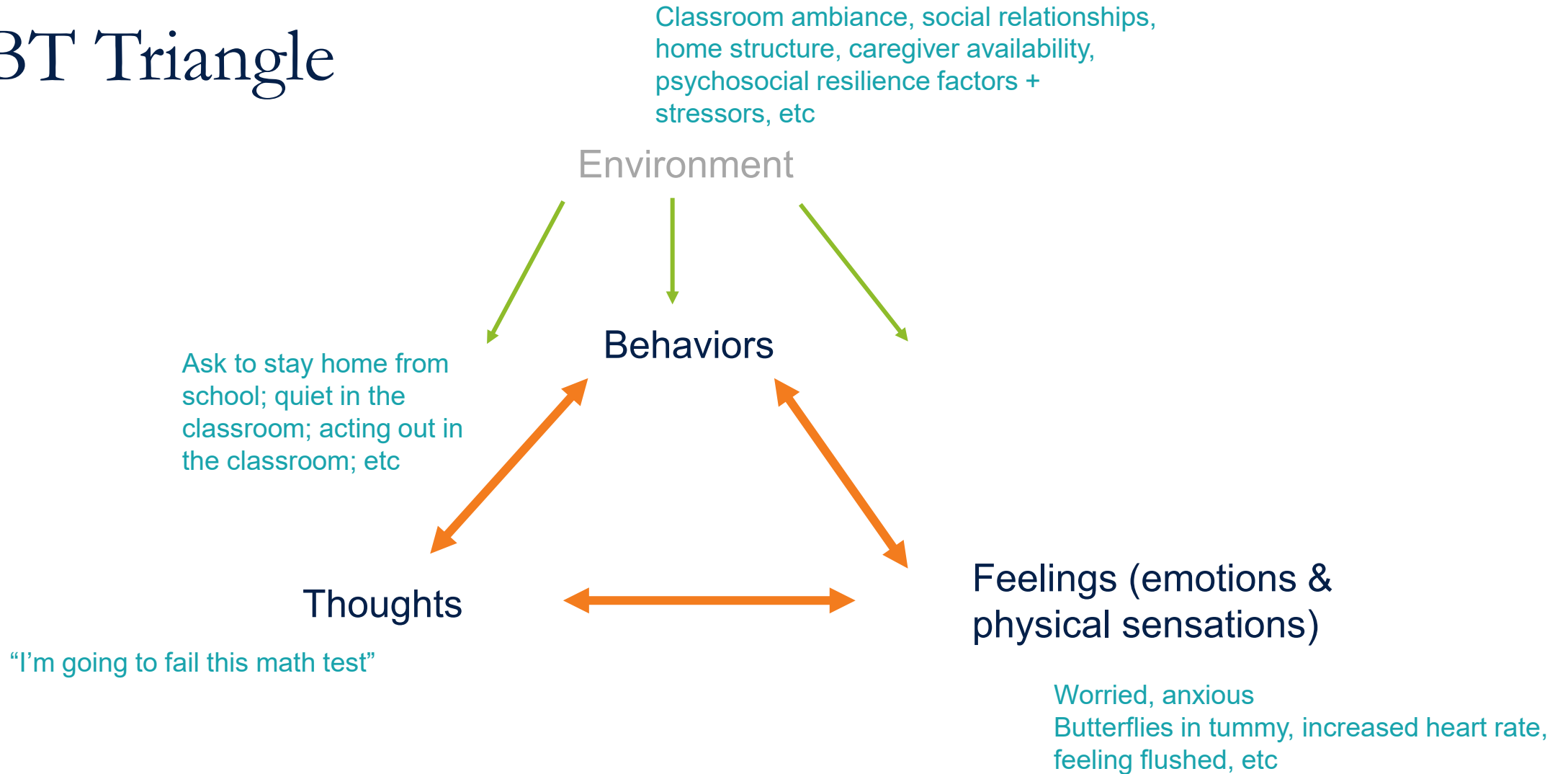
# CBT Triangle



All influenced by culture

What can be improved by  
action (environmental or  
behavioral) & what by  
mental (thought) change?

# CBT Triangle



All influenced by culture

# CBT Triangle

Classroom ambiance, social relationships, home structure, caregiver availability, psychosocial resilience factors + stressors, etc

Sit in a calmer place in the classroom, give a tangible support if possible (snack, drink of water, a short rest)

Support the student/family to make a plan to get to school, or a classroom behavior plan (e.g., speaking up in class 1x/day)

Ask to stay home from school; quiet in the classroom; acting out in the classroom; etc

Thoughts

- “I’m going to fail this math test”
- “I studied hard and I’ll do my best”
- “I did pretty well on the last test and I’ll probably do well on this one too”
- “Even if I don’t do well on this test, I can try again next time – I will be OK”

Environment

Behaviors

Feelings (emotions & physical sensations)

Worried, anxious  
Butterflies in tummy, increased heart rate, feeling flushed, etc

All of the above influenced by culture

# Common Thinking Traps

- **Overgeneralization** – making a broad statement based on one piece of evidence
- **Personalization** – taking things personally when not actually connected to you
- **Filtering** – noticing the bad and ignoring the good
- **Catastrophizing** – blowing things out of proportion, dwelling on worst possible outcomes
- **Jumping to conclusions** – judging something without all the facts
- **Emotional reasoning** – thinking that how you feel is fully and inarguably true
- **Discounting the positive** – explaining all positives away as luck/coincidence
- **“Should” statements** – making yourself feel guilty by pointing out what you should or shouldn’t be doing, feeling, or thinking

# Loosening thinking traps with kids:

- What's a kinder way to talk to yourself?
- What would you tell a friend experiencing the same thing?
- That could happen. What's another possible thing that could happen? What's more likely?
- If that [feared event] happens, what would you do? (i.e. how would you cope)

\*Caution: generally **not** appropriate to use thought-change strategies around experiences of oppression. Use validation instead.

# Behavior Change Ideas:

## **Distraction**

- Tear up paper from the recycling bin
- Do 15 jumping jacks/as many as can in 1 min
- Play a game
- Tell a story together

## **Opposite action**

- Do the hard thing despite challenging emotion (the opposite of what the emotion is telling you to do)

## **Relaxation & Grounding**

- Take 5 deep breaths
- Take a walk down the hallway
- Put cold ice packs on face (place under eyes, hold for 30 seconds, rest and repeat)
- Take a break in a quiet area
- 3-2-1 grounding technique:
  - Name 3 things you see
  - Name 2 things you hear
  - Name 1 thing you can touch

# Environmental change ideas

## School

- Move to another area of the school/classroom
- Implement classroom rituals that support belonging and routine
- Attend to physical needs if possible (e.g., access to snacks, water, short rest)

## Home

- When possible, collaborate with family to, e.g.,
  - Reinforce effort rather than outcome (e.g., taking a test that student wanted to avoid)



# Takeaways

- Emotions serve a purpose
- When we want to change emotion, we can:
  - Take an action
    - Behavioral change
    - Environmental change
  - Change our thoughts

# References

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