

Facts about EMOTIONAL REASONING

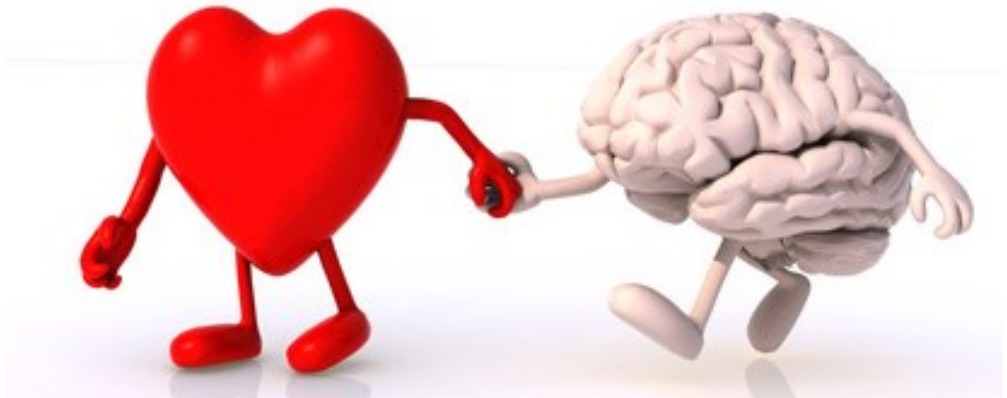
A thought is not a fact. Yet we often allow our thoughts to affect how we feel and what we do. These then affect our well-being and our relationships as in the case of Mr Tan and Jane.

*Mr Tan thinks, 'My children are beginning to talk back at me the way their mother argues with me. My wife must have taught the children to dishonour me.' Does he have evidence to support his suspicion? No. Yet Mr Tan is angry with his wife at this thought and resents his children for learning the wrong things from their mother. Where does this thought come from if it is not based on evidence?

*Jane thinks, 'I am going to do badly in this examination.' The fact is, she has completed her revisions and could complete the past years' questions. Yet that thought causes her sleepless nights. Where does that thought come from if it is not based on fact?

Both Mr Tan's and Jane's thoughts came from their common unhelpful thought habit - a habit of evaluating and drawing conclusions about themselves, people and situations based on their emotions. We call this 'Emotional Reasoning'.

In Emotional Reasoning, the person believes that what he or she feels is true regardless of the lack of evidence or presence of evidence against that belief. His or her emotions become the 'evidence for the truth'. They 'reason' from their emotions. It is a case of '*I feel therefore I am* or *I feel it therefore it must be true.*' Mr Tan's *fear* of losing control over his children the way he feels he has lost the respect of his wife and his *frustration* of not getting through to them



may have birthed the thought that his wife has influenced his children. In Jane's case, her *anxiety* and *fear* of failure resulted in her thinking that she will do badly.

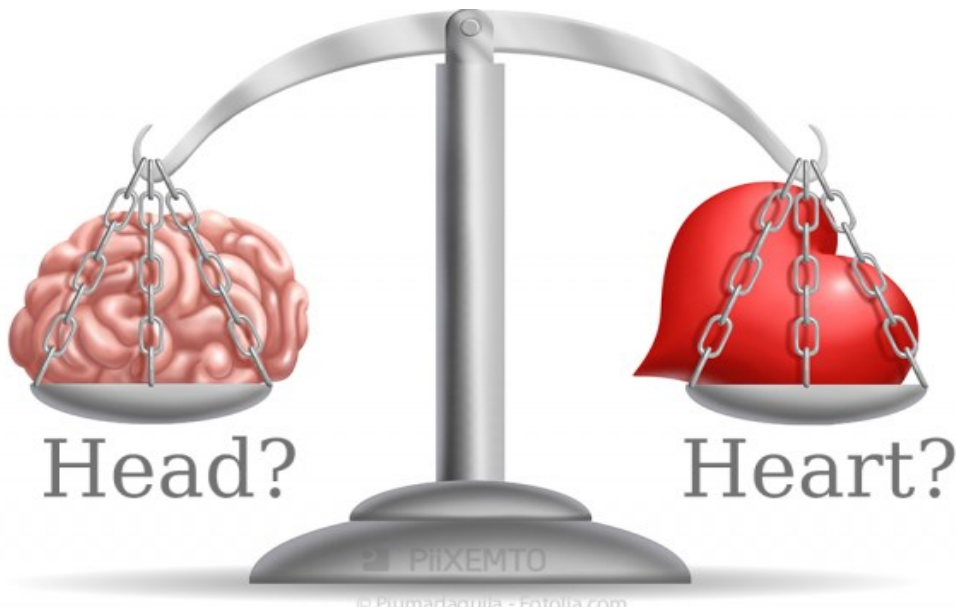
More examples of such thoughts are:-
'*I feel unworthy, therefore I am worthless.*' '*I feel unloved therefore I am unlovable.*' '*I feel unappreciated therefore I am useless.*'

Emotional Reasoning can be traced back to childhood. Our inherent need to make sense of our experiences preceded our ability to reason properly. Being ill-equipped to rationalise, we made meaning of things that happened to us using our emotions. This inevitably resulted in immature conclusions. For instance, if we felt neglected, we concluded that our parents did not love us. In later years, if we 'reopen the case' and 're-examine the facts', we may come to a different conclusion. We may realise that because our parents loved us, they had to work hard to ensure our survival and so could not afford time nor energy to give us attention. How did this change in conclusion come about? As our reasoning abilities increase with age, we are able to integrate rational thinking into coping with situations more and more. We are able to

make better sense of our experiences by better engaging our reasoning. From time to time, we continue to fall back on emotional reasoning out of habit. We are most vulnerable to doing so during times when we are stressed.

A group of people, however, may find it a challenge to get out of this mode of operating psychologically. They are those who have experienced past traumas and remain unhealed from them. For these people, Emotional Reasoning tends to become their default mode of making sense of what they are experiencing. External events may trigger emotions associated with the traumas. They then interpret situations, events and people based on these emotions. Their overwhelming emotions can become 'reason enough' to drive them to behaviour based on irrational conclusions. Someone who was terrorised can easily be triggered by a person who remotely acts or sounds like the culprit. This will drive him to avoiding or reacting negatively towards the person even if there is no fact or evidence to justify that reaction.

Connect-Point



Emotional Reasoning (ER) is so entrenched in us, it is subtle, sneaky and difficult to recognise. We can forget about convincing someone that he or she is using ER. But when we ourselves are aware of its existence and apply effort to identify, confront and manage it, we can disrupt its functioning.

How do we do that? Being willing to do something different is a great start. Rather than allowing a thought to lead us down its

own path, which we usually do, why not stop and pause and catch the thought in its tracks? We are talking about thoughts that trigger further negative emotions and create streams of other negative thoughts, such as the ones that Mr Tan and Jane harboured. Pause and backtrack. Check and identify the source of the thought. What was going through my mind as this thought was conceived? Do I have evidence to support this thought? If they are not based on evidence or facts, what emotions have led to its conception? If the source is indeed an emotion, identify and label it. Ask 'Why do I feel this way?' Becoming more 'emotionally literate' is a big help in this process. This means improving our ability to connect with, identify and label emotions that arise within us.

If we had been honest in our self-confrontation thus far, we would have some answers to help us work on changing our thoughts. We will be ready to ask 'If this thought is inaccurate and unreliable, how else can I look at this situation?'

Did you realise that we were using the Catch, Check and Change strategy mentioned in the previous issues for Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTs)? The process can seem troublesome and complicated at first. With practice, it becomes second nature. It may not eradicate the psychological mechanism of ER. But as this new habit of disrupting the function of ER becomes strengthened, we will be better at recognising ER at work and pre-empting its consequences. In the long-run, it will lead us to greater self-awareness and psychological shifts for the better. This is a natural psychological progression.

Our mind has the ability to adapt, reorganise and renew. It is up to us to take advantage of this. What is stopping us from harnessing this God-given ability for better well-being and improved relationships?

**fictitious name*

Contact Us

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