

# Foreword

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**Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**, a powerful psychological treatment, is rooted in a coherent, comprehensive theory of emotions as well as the behaviors connected to those emotions. The theory can guide the discovery of the sources of each individual person's emotional difficulties. Just as important are the tools of CBT, derived from the theory that practitioners have developed over the past 40 years. This great variety of techniques allows therapists to tailor their interventions to the specific needs and preferences of each patient. So how can the power of CBT, which would seem to require a skilled therapist to help patients identify their unique patterns and to select and adapt the right tools, be conveyed in book form? Enter Dr. Seth Gillihan, who in clear and plain yet elegant language is able to connect with any reader who wants to understand and address his or her own barriers to good mental health.

The soothing and confident voice behind this book is one I know very well. In 2005, Seth became the 50th PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) whom I taught and supervised in a yearlong practical course in CBT. Over the past 35 years I have been privileged to teach the principles and practice of CBT to some of the most impressive and motivated young professionals one could hope to meet. Their level of talent and knowledge, along with their commitment to learn, continues to amaze me. But Seth left a lasting impression on me for his wisdom and ability

to connect to individuals from all backgrounds and walks of life. He possesses an unparalleled ability to convey the best of what I learned from my own mentors, Drs. Steven Hollon and Aaron T. Beck, and he has added extremely useful insights of his own.

I first encountered Seth's gift as a helping professional while watching video recordings of his therapy sessions, reading his case notes, and hearing his crystal-clear descriptions of the successes—and hiccups—he and his clients experienced as they worked together. I now see the same Seth Gillihan, with vastly more experience, who has “warmed up” to the current project by authoring *Retrain Your Brain: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in 7 Weeks*, a fine workbook, and also coauthoring a practical and sensitive guide for individuals and the families of those who suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder.

His newest book is a delightful read, which is no small accomplishment given the seriousness of the subject matter and his honest, realistic treatment of the problems he addresses. The book manages to cover a lot of ground, in detail, and yet remain “simple,” as its title suggests. It draws even further upon Seth's strengths, including an unmatched ability to organize and structure material, which makes it easy to grasp and retain the many nuggets found within its pages. Unique to this book is the rhythm that Seth establishes at the outset and carries through each chapter, spelling out how to address unhelpful thinking, how to use behaviors to alter problematic patterns, and finally, how to attend to, and be mindful of, the important things in our lives. I was so impressed by this rhythm that I now include it in my own teaching: Think, Act, and Be. What could be simpler? And yet the ideas these words reflect are rich and powerful enough to produce seismic positive shifts in the lives of clients in therapy. They can do the same for readers of this book.

Even if a reader does not have difficulties in all the areas covered in the book (sadness, worry, fear, anger, procrastination,

self-criticism), I highly recommend the sections on three topics in particular: procrastination, anger, and “safety behaviors.” The insights Seth provides about these often-puzzling yet all-too-common patterns are really interesting! And if nothing else, his characterizations of these patterns can help the reader understand a bit better how they trip up friends, colleagues, or family members.

Most of us procrastinate, yet we do not have insight into the sources of or the processes behind procrastination. Anger, inappropriate or excessive versions of which are all too common, can be understood. This is half the battle in getting anger under our control or in helping a partner who is in its grip. Finally, safety behaviors prevent those with unrealistic fears or compulsive behaviors from breaking free and enjoying what life has to offer. Reading Seth’s analysis of these patterns is revelatory and engaging. This is a great example, well explained, of the progress made by psychologists in our understanding of “what makes people tick.”

Some readers will turn to this book to brush up on the principles and practices of CBT they had encountered in personal therapy or in another form. Others will learn about CBT for the first time and find all they need to free themselves from unnecessary and unproductive emotional distress and be set on a path to better living. This book can also serve as a much-needed first step for those with more severe problems who have considered taking antidepressant or anti-anxiety medications or who have tried them and not found them to be helpful, as well as for those who haven’t been able to find a therapist they are ready to work with. Many such people will find everything they need within these pages. There will also be others who will begin to learn about the sources and remedies for emotional difficulties that have held them back and kept them from enjoying life, and this will motivate them to seek appropriate professional guidance or help. They can carry

what they have learned from Seth and from engaging in the exercises in this book into individual or group therapy if that is the right next step.

Let me sum up by reflecting on how lucky I was to have had the opportunity to contribute to Seth's growth as a psychologist. It is now your luck that you have encountered this truly helpful and (I'll say it again) really interesting guide to common emotional problems and effective ways to overcome them. I urge you to take advantage of this bit of luck and set yourself on a path to better living.

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