Therapy Care
Carey Webb MBACP · 07826 774307 · carey@therapycare.co.uk · www.therapycare.co.uk

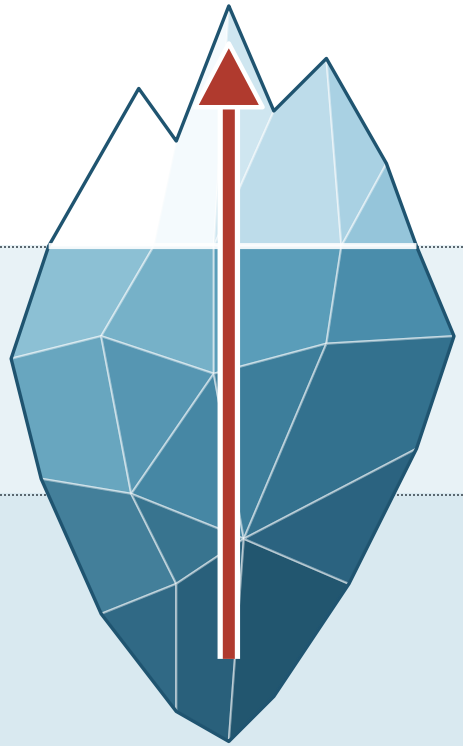
How your past affects your present

In cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), how we feel about something depends on the **meaning** we give it. That's why two people can go through the same thing and react in very different ways. The meaning comes from what has happened to us, and what we've come to believe because of it. It can help to picture this as an iceberg in the sea.

You can't change the past, but you *can* change how you think about things now, and that can help you feel better. Depending on what you're finding hard, you might work on your automatic thoughts, the rules you live by, or your core beliefs.

Automatic thoughts

Above the water: thoughts pop into our heads all day long. They're our quick take on what's happening, fairly easy to notice, and shaped by the rules and beliefs beneath them.



"They think I'm useless. I should have got it right."

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What happened: My manager suggests changes to my report

The rules you live by

Just under the water: ideas about how the world works and how we ought to behave. These rules steer what we think and do, often without our noticing them.

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"If I don't get everything right, people will see I'm not up to it."

Core beliefs

Deep under the water: firm beliefs about ourselves, others and the world, built from what has happened to us, especially as children. We rarely notice them, so rarely question them, and some are harsh.

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"I'm not good enough."

Experiences

The sea: what we've lived through, including how others treated us and saw the world, shapes how we see life and who we become.

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"At school, I was only praised when I came top."