ARC Module 7: Emotions Theory A/ Theory B

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Mid-America (HHS Region 7)
MHTTC Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

How to Navigate this Activity

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Theory A/Theory B: Being a Scientist with Our Own Thoughts

Our initial thoughts and reactions to situations are not always accurate. The feelings we get from them may be valid. Those feelings, though, may also further distort our perceptions. Although it's easy to jump to conclusions and feel confident about our assumptions, our human minds are meant to, in most cases, make rapid decisions—not smart decisions.

So although we might feel a certain way about something, we also need to check in on how accurate our thoughts might be about a situation. We can be like our own personal scientist and create competing hypotheses to explain a situation, and then find evidence to support them.

Important! The hypothesis with the most evidence may not always be the one we want to be true or the one that feels right. This is a common experience any scientist can empathize with.

To begin, select a problem you are facing. Write it below:

_____

_____

_____

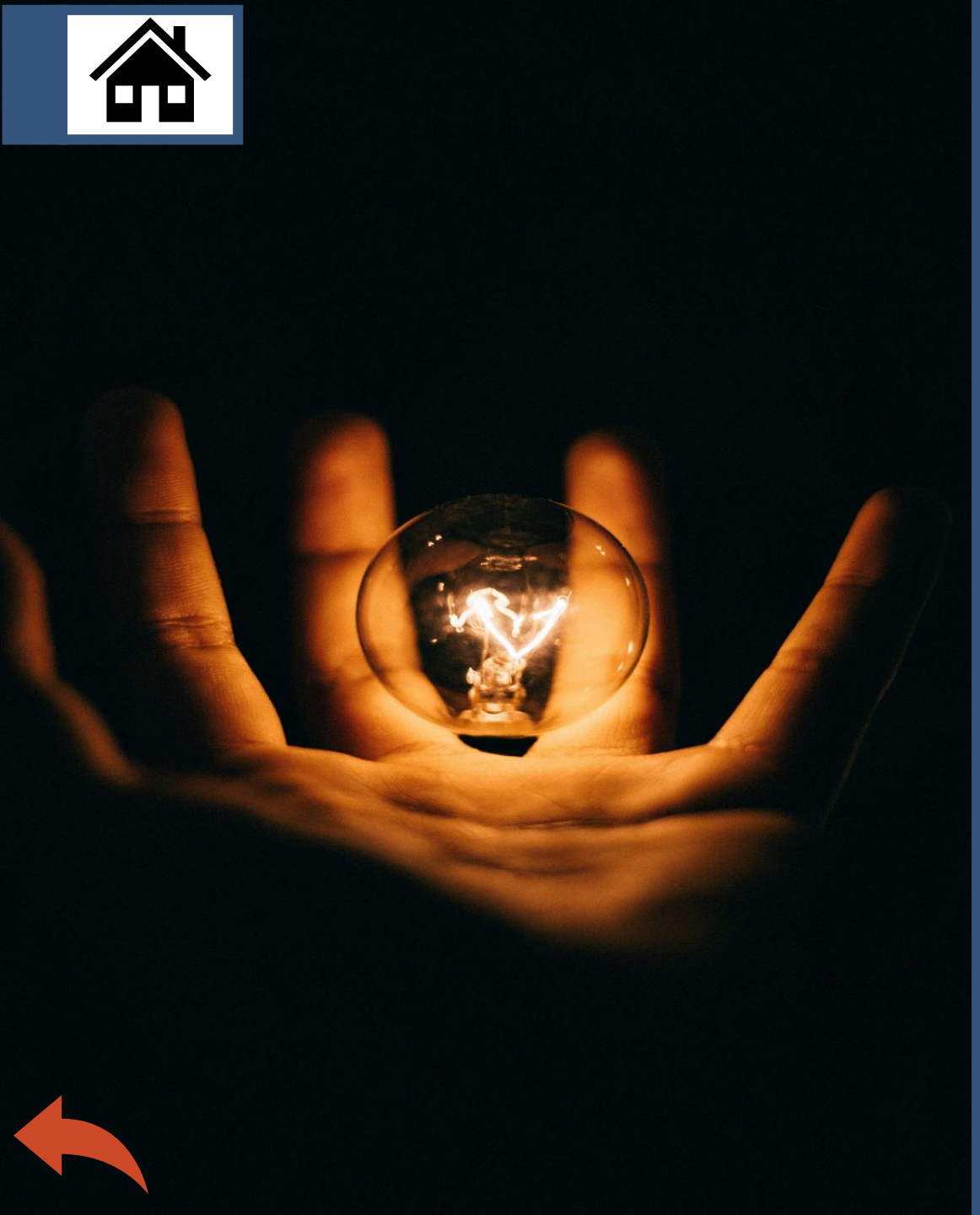
Theory A

Answer these questions:

How do you see the problem?

How long have you thought this?

How much do you believe this now (from 1-10)?



Theory A

Now to gather our evidence. Be as objective as you can. And also watch out for extreme pieces of evidence, such as thinking things “always go wrong” or “there is nothing I can do about this”.

Evidence

Evidence

Evidence

Theory A

If Theory A is supported with good evidence and is true, what now?

What strategies are you using to address this problem? _____

_____

How well have they worked? _____

_____

What have they cost you? _____

_____

Theory A

Answer this prompt below:
If Theory A is true, what does it mean for your future 5, 10, 15 years from now? Will it have as much weight then? What will you miss out on if the problem is true?

Theory B

To develop an alternative theory, answer the prompts below:

What is another way to think about the problem?

How might someone else look at the situation?

Where can you find your own control in the problem?

Theory B

What reasons are there to think Theory B is true?
What would a friend think about Theory B

Evidence

Evidence

Evidence

Theory B

Answer this prompt below:
If Theory A is true, what does it mean for your future 5, 10, 15 years from now? Will it have as much weight then? What will you miss out on if the problem is true?

Theory B

On the next page, you will complete the final step which is to set up your own experiments to test Theory A vs Theory B.

An example of an experiment could be, if your Theory A is “There is no way I can manage all this work” and Theory B is “I can address two of the biggest priorities”,

THEN

Your experiment would be to select a high priority work task, set aside a predetermined amount of time, and allow yourself to work only on that.

After the time is up, determine the progress you made and make a prediction about your capability to get the rest of your tasks done.

Setting up my experiments

To test which of my theories about a problem I am dealing with—Theory A or Theory B—I will:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Once you have set up at least one experiment, you have completed this exercise.

Avoiding Confirmation Bias

This WHOLE Theory A/ Theory B exercise is about how to avoid confirmation bias with our own thoughts and behaviors. Here is an interesting video detailing the most recent conceptualization of reason, argument, and confirmation bias.

Watch if you are interested. How does this video's content relate to your own experience?

Unhelpful Thoughts

Since our thoughts are actually internal behavior patterns, we can name these patterns. In this part of the exercise, we are paying special attention to evidence that is extreme, as this evidence is likely biased and unhelpful. This type of thinking pattern is known as “All-or-Nothing Thinking” or, depending on the context, “Overgeneralization”.

Here are other common unhelpful thinking patterns:

Magnification & Minimization—Our mistakes seem bigger than they are and our accomplishments unimportant

Catastrophizing—Only seeing the worse possible outcomes

Personalization—Believing we are responsible for events beyond our control

Mind Reading—Thinking you know exactly how someone might respond

Shoulding All Over Yourself—The belief that things HAVE to be a certain way, and becoming frustrating when those rules are not followed.