



INTERNAL DIALOGUE

BREAK THE CYCLE: REDIRECTING YOUR INTERNAL DIALOGUE

It is easy to get caught up in thinking patterns that can sabotage our well-being. Some people are not even aware of their internal dialogue! What we say to ourselves matters. How we identify and respond to emotions and our own actions can cause a chain reaction that can take us closer to where we want to be or further away.

If we look back on behaviors to restrict food intake, often a common cycle emerges – trying to control our food intake both in choice and amount, then feeling badly (shame, guilt, remorse, regret) about failing to do so, and starting the pattern over again. It’s important to learn ways to interrupt that inner voice that may keep us stuck in this cycle. How can you break out?

Our internal dialogue usually starts with an emotion.... Which leads to a thoughtWhich leads to an action ... Which leads to a reaction/emotion ...Which leads to another action, etc...

While we are not going to try and change the emotion (that can be explored in therapy), it is helpful to explore the reaction to an emotion as it relates to food.

Look at the “chain reaction” to the right.



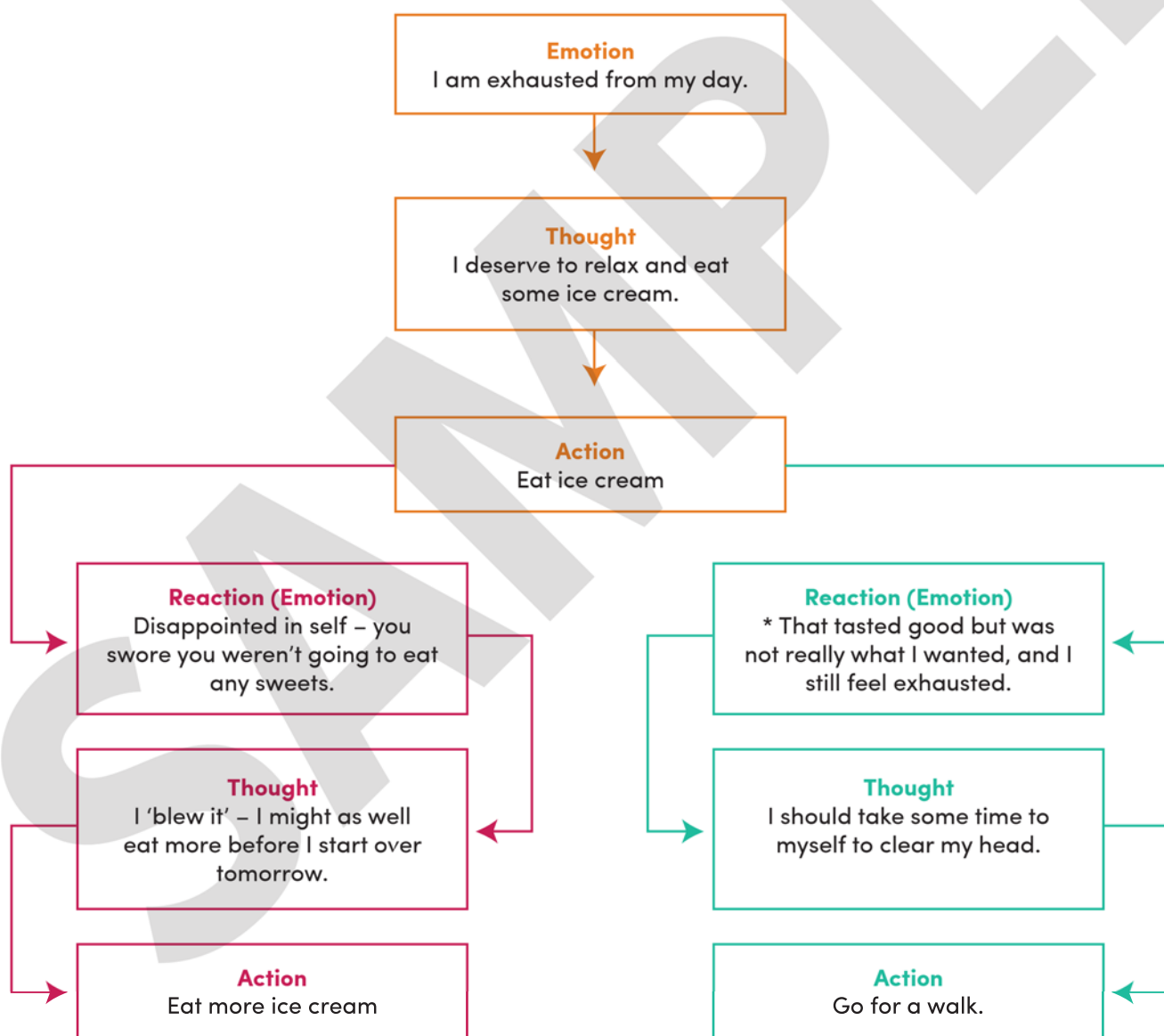
There are several things to unpack in this example. Without changing the emotion, what can you do that would be a healthier response to the emotion of tired (or angry, disappointed, etc) that would encompass better self-care?

“I am tired, I am going to relax, put my feet up on the couch, read a magazine, call a friend, pet my dog, etc.”

Check ‘in’ to see if you are hungry (see *Mindful Eating and Hunger Scale*) or eating in response to an uncomfortable emotion. If you are hungry, then eat a meal or snack that is satisfying and fulfilling. If you want ice cream, have some ice cream, but do not eat the ice cream as a way to relieve the feeling of being tired/angry/disappointed/bored.

In fact, by eating instead of recognizing and sitting with the feeling, you replace the original uncomfortable feeling with self-loathing (more familiar for many) instead of dealing with the actual issue (in this example, your day, your relationship, etc).

What might also be very helpful is to realize that at any step along the cycle, you can redirect your internal dialogue to a different thought/action. Let’s say you eat the ice cream at step one. Instead of beating yourself up, acknowledge what just happened “wow, I was so tired/angry/disappointed I just reacted by turning to food. Now that I can think more clearly, I will journal my feelings (or walk the dog, call a friend).” You do not have to stay in the cycle.



* Often when we “react” eat, it is not about the food, so it is difficult to really enjoy and savor it (see *Mindful Eating Handout*) as opposed to when you really want to eat a specific food to enjoy the taste!

ACTION STEPS

This week, see if you can “catch your internal dialogue” a few times, even if you do not alter any actions. Bring your observation back to our next session so we can see how what you think and say to yourself might affect what and how much you eat. It is also a good idea to bring these observations to talk over with your therapist.

