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## **Cognitive Accountability Training (CAT) Model**

By Terry A. Moore, Founder of Nonviolent Alternatives

CAT meets each individual where they are. It answers questions left open by other current models of education or therapy. In CAT, the necessary connections are made within the mind of the clients that gives them the information they need and therefore the motivation to change their negative behaviors. They come to realize that the things they love and value have been put at risk by their actions. Among others, things like a spouse, children, money, or freedom could be lost.

CAT allows clients, in a non-confrontational environment, to self analyze and self realize behaviors that are harmful to self and others. Training them to embrace a new point of reference from which they can view the world and training them to think in a new way. CAT guides them to become accountable for their actions; with knowledge of how their behaviors impact self and others.

### **Personal Guidance System (PGS)**

Each of us has within us a Personal Guidance System (PGS) that is calibrated by the Golden Rule, "Treat others the way I want to be treated". Our PGS gives us the ability to know right from wrong. It gives us the information that we need to make right choices in our life that ultimately bring us happiness. It is the highest essence of our "True Self". We have an innate desire to love, to be loved, and to be accepted. We have the innate ability to empathize with another being, to feel their pain. We know what hurts someone else because we know what hurts us. The effectiveness of CAT begins with understanding the PGS. More commonly called a conscience; the PGS is in our mind. It is our mind doing an assessment of the situation we are in and giving us feedback. The assessment is whether or not the actions that were taken, are taking, or are about to take, are in conflict with the Golden Rule. The PGS assesses if we are following the Golden Rule or not; questioning ourselves, "Are we treating other people the way we want to be treated?"

Everything is a choice. We can make morally right or wrong choices. Doing the right thing, integrating our PGS with our behavior is acting with "integrity" and is what leads us on a path to happiness. Doing the wrong thing, acting with a lack of integrity, has negative results or as we say in CAT, "outcomes that suck." With a right choice we act to keep and protect the things that we love and value. With a wrong choice we put at risk the things that we love and value. Our PGS notifies us when we are doing the right thing and when we are doing the wrong thing.

We know the difference between right and wrong by heeding our PGS warning system. The PGS warning that we receive is a form of fear; fear being the anticipation of pain. Our PGS provides us with a particular kind of fear called guilt. Guilt is our PGS warning system sounding an alarm.

## **Thinking**

Our thinking is what determines our actions. Our thinking is what determines our feelings. Our mind, our thinking, is sending us this feeling of guilt as a warning because we know we are doing something that we should not be doing when we break the Golden Rule. Our mind tells us “don’t do that because you’re going to have outcomes that suck. Something bad is going to happen.” Healthy cognitive patterns are present when we choose to listen to our PGS to determine how we are going to act, i.e. being true to our self, acting with integrity and choosing the path to happiness instead of the self-defeating path to outcomes that suck (pain).

## **Guilt versus Shame**

We must also understand the difference between guilt and shame. As previously discussed, guilt is the fear warning us we have done, are doing, or are about to do something wrong. Understanding shame is a bit more difficult, but equally as important. Though it feels like guilt, because it is also a form of fear (anticipating pain), shame is actually self-doubt. Shame is the fear of being inadequate and not fitting in, being unacceptable and unlovable, of not being good enough. It feels a lot like guilt, but we feel shame even though we have done nothing wrong. Guilt is when we are doing something wrong and shame is when we doubt our PGS (True Self) and think we have done something wrong when we have not. Because we doubt our PGS when feeling shame, it is a major obstacle preventing us from choosing to do the right thing. Shame (self doubt) attacks the PGS. We don’t trust our PGS, or in essence, we don’t trust our self. In any given situation we can determine whether we are feeling shame or guilt by tuning in to our PGS and discerning whether we have done anything wrong or not. We must ask ourselves, “Have we broken the Golden Rule?” If we have not, then we are feeling shame, and we need to not give it importance so that we can choose to do the right thing and act as our PGS directs us to.

Feelings of shame, self-doubt, and inadequacy are actually healed when we consistently choose to act with integrity, according to the direction provided by our PGS. When we integrate our PGS with our behavior choices, we mature emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically to become a person of integrity. Thus self-confidence replaces the self-doubt also known as shame. We begin to experience good outcomes and happiness.

## **Abuse**

Abuse is the opposite of integrity. In CAT abuse is defined as anything said or done that would break the Golden Rule. Understanding the model begins with understanding the Personal Guidance System (PGS) chart. This basic design gives a visual of the main principles of CAT.

## **Subconscious “Habit” Beliefs**

An accepted belief prevails among most advocates in the domestic violence community that one who behaves abusively acts with conscious malice, and with conscious awareness of their intentions. CAT challenges that belief. This model presumes the intentions are subconscious, habit level thinking and beliefs.

CAT guides clients to awareness of the underlying cognitive belief structure we all possess which is the foundation for immoral behavior. CAT clients are introduced to themselves and become able to see, most often for the first time, why they do what they do. Understanding is gained for why they persist in behaving the way they do even when they are doing, what we call “shooting ourselves in the foot.” The phrase “shooting ourselves in the foot” is used to describe the situation in which our actions have results that are generally the polar opposite of the outcomes we desire.

When beginning CAT, clients most often are unaware of why they have continued acting a certain way when those actions have resulted in such negative outcomes. CAT is a method by which the client recognizes unhealthy beliefs.

## **Duluth Model**

The Duluth Model was an innovative giant leap forward in the field, focusing on violent and abusive behavior instead of identifying anger as the issue needing to be addressed. It also brought awareness to violence serving the agenda of the perpetrator to achieve power and control over the victim as well as attention to victim blaming. However, it incorrectly presumes conscious malicious intent of the perpetrator. This is the core of why it is often viewed as men bashing.

The Duluth Model was created because a gap existed in advocates developing coordinated community responses to domestic violence. The Duluth Model curriculum batterer program was pulled together as a need to put something in place to fill this gap. Many true Duluth Model practitioners do not consider a batterer intervention program to be much more than part of the judicial accountability process.

Because of the model’s bias that patriarchal belief systems are the ultimate cause of male violence, it does not adequately address other problems in the field, such as females who abuse.

*Note: I don’t want to discount the monumental contribution the Duluth model has made in the field of counseling abusers. CAT supports the keystones of Safety, Accountability, and Collaboration found in the Duluth Model. I have so much respect for these issues that I require facilitators who train with me in the CAT Model, to first be trained in the Duluth Model.*

Research indicates males inflict a greater, more intense violence, and the violence is more destructive when perpetrated by men; however, female violence is just as prevalent. Men and women abuse equally as often, but when men are abusive they cause more measurable harm. Duluth Model recognizes female violence as a self-defense reaction to male dominance and oppression. Though it may sometimes be just that, for me this explanation carries very little credibility. Often female violence is perpetrated against other females, children, and nonviolent men. It is widely accepted that violent men are very coercive and manipulative, yet when interviewing the wives and girlfriends involved with these men, you will more often than not, find the same dangerous blame shifting thinking patterns as well as problematic behavior. You hear the same disturbing dialogs coming from both genders. My efforts have been to take the basic intervention style of the Duluth model and evolve to a deeper understanding and more effective evidence based educational intervention counseling for abusive individuals.

CAT raises accountability for actions to a higher level. A higher level even than the list of abusive behaviors found on the Duluth Model Power and Control Wheel. CAT recognizes abuse begins long before crossing the threshold of criminal behavior. We need to be accountable for all levels of abusive behavior, not just those choices that land us in court. In the CAT Model, abusive behavior is defined as any behavior that breaks the Golden Rule. It is anytime I say or do anything that I would not want said or done to me. This can be generalized to include any immoral behavior choice and is not limited to coercive or violent behavior. Accountability to self and others begins here. A need exists to address ALL forms of abuse. I can be abusive to someone even though that person never has a fear that I am going to be physically violent. For example, a drug addict can abuse a friendship by stealing money.

### **Patriarchic Beliefs**

Many in the field of domestic violence intervention view patriarchic belief structure is the ultimate explanation for why men abuse. Violence is different between a man and a woman because of the size difference. "I wear the pants and because I am bigger than you and I have a right to control".

CAT gives a more comprehensive, yet simpler explanation for male violence that also includes the "I have a right to" thinking that absolutely does exist. Patriarchal beliefs that justify abusive behavior are only one small piece of the pie of the blame shifting thinking processes used by an abuser to justify and make abusive behavior okay.

## Anger Management

Anger management counseling, though widely adopted, especially among mental health professionals, in my opinion totally misses the mark. By definition, anger management is treatment to decrease or eliminate angry emotions. Anger is not the problem. Immoral behavior is the problem. An unhealthy belief structure must be present to support the immoral, abusive behavior and that is where intervention must be made.

## Cognitive Based

CAT encompasses the areas of focus of previous models, but also covers greater areas of intervention. CAT is a hybrid cognitive based approach to address abusive behavior; in which violence is included, and neither angry feelings nor any other emotions are allowed to be used to justify abusive behavior. CAT would be beneficial for intervention of any inappropriate behavior. Behavior is inappropriate, or abusive, if it results in losing, or the risk of losing, something that is loved and/or valued. So, anything I say or do that result in harm to others or to myself is abuse. I harm myself when I go against my PGS.

How do we shut off our PGS? Why do we shut off our PGS? How do we make it so we do not have to pay attention to the warnings, so we don't have to feel guilty? CAT is simple, direct intervention of the distorted belief systems that justify and thus underlie all abusive behavior.

Current anger management model programs, though many are cognitive based, focus on changing angry feelings. I contend that is wasted effort. The distorted belief system that provides justification for abusive behavior is the issue and where I believe intervention must occur. Teaching anger management techniques could actually be potentially harmful by validating unhealthy Blame Shifting thoughts. By giving the perpetrator of abuse an out, "I couldn't help it. I was angry", allows him to evade accountability and internal consequences. Guilty feelings are suppressed. The man then comes to a counselor or therapist and says, "I couldn't help it. I just lost it." A therapist using conventional anger management approaches will start exploring the distorted thinking that resulted in the angry feelings. My question, to the same man would be, "What did you say or do that was abusive when you felt angry?" I would then ask, "How did you justify that behavior just because you were feeling angry? How do you make it okay with yourself to act that way?" With these questions, the true issue begins to come into focus. The distorted beliefs that result in the upset feelings are not the cause of the abusive behavior. The abusive behavior is caused by distorted beliefs that provide us with justifications, which turn off the PGS and allows us to tell ourselves "It's okay and I have a right to abuse because..." CAT intervenes at that point.

## Blame Shifting

Blame Shifting is a destructive, habitual, way of thinking we use to give ourselves permission to say or do what we innately know is wrong. When we are in this mode, we easily deceive ourselves. We avoid our own PGS, our guilty feelings, to avoid dealing with problems in our life on an honest level.

Blame Shifting is a dysfunctional cognitive process in which we separate consequences from the behavior that caused them. We essentially shut down our innate ability to discern right from wrong. We turn off our PGS. If the switch is flipped so that the PGS is turned off, we can make choices that feel good at the time and cater to our wants even if it is “shooting ourselves in the foot.” CAT is simple and effective. As a matter of fact, most people that have observed my approach are amazed the concept is so simple. Observers and participants in my sessions often claim, “It’s common sense.” But it is actually not so common at all.

Facing problems such as domestic violence, substance abuse, and other irresponsible and dysfunctional behaviors, we always try to look for the underlying, deep-seated core or root of the issue. We over-complicate and intellectualize so much that we become blind to the simple truth that is right in front of our face.

The problem is in our ways of thinking, habit thoughts that counter healthy thinking. In my class, I call these distortions, “Thinking in the Red” because I write them with a red marker. There is also symbolism in the fact that we refer to businesses that are in a position of loss as “being in the red” or “we see red” when we are angry. Thinking in the Red are the ways of thinking that suppress our PGS. In other words, the phrase refers to the thoughts that provide justification for breaking the Golden Rule and doing what I know is wrong. I make it okay. These justifications fall under the category of Blame Shifting.

Blame Shifting has two parts: the first is blaming or shaming the other person, attempting to have that person take on our guilt. If we are successful, then we don’t have to feel it. We say things like “Shame on you! Look at what you are doing!” and “I would not have done this if you had not done that!” and we think, “You are the problem, not me.” The second part of Blame Shifting is the justification-thinking, “I’m not doing anything wrong, because...”

Typically, when speaking to clients, the distorted thoughts are quite evident. If you ask them, “Didn’t you know yelling at them would scare them? Do you think that it is okay to scare someone?” “Don’t you know it is wrong?” The answer “Yeah, I know it’s wrong to scare them, BUT they knew what they did would piss me off!” The “Yeah, but” is the signal. The “Yeah, but” cognition is the justification for the actions. The “but” turns off healthy thinking. Negative actions become justified. The switch that shuts off the PGS has been thrown.

My model focuses intensely on what we say after the “but.” “...but they knew I didn’t like that”; “but they shouldn’t be doing that...” Whatever is said after the “but” is justification. In essence, it is saying, “I know it is wrong, but I have a right to do it in this case, because...” or “It’s okay and I have a right to yell, because they did this.” These are cognitions that give justification for the choice to do the wrong thing.

To counter this in CAT, I respond to those who use the “yeah, but”, with “Okay, now we have a new Golden Rule. It says treat others the way I want to be treated unless...I’m upset...unless they piss me off. Treat others the way I want to be treated unless things aren’t going the way I want them to go...or unless I am afraid.” They get the point.

A justification is any way I give myself permission to do what I am doing even though it goes against my conscience, even though it is abusive. Feeling angry is used as a justification, when really the Thinking in the Red is the root of the problem. Distorted thoughts are justifications that remove me from accountability and also result in me feeling victimized. Thinking in the Red results in me feeling like I got cheated, screwed over, or picked on, and that pisses me off. Anger management models intervene at this point. They miss the mark by focusing on the feelings of anger that have been created while “Thinking in the Red” rather than focusing on the negative behavior. A correlation exists between feeling angry and being abusive because feeling angry is the byproduct of the cognitive justification process that we are actively involved in. Anger is often present in abuse but not always.

## **Intentions**

Our distorted thinking happens at the habit thought level. Most models assume abuse includes only conscious intent to gain power and control. There is not a conscious intent to gain power and control in the mind of the batterer. Control is most certainly wanted, but the intentions are on the subconscious habit level, as are the cognitive justifications.

The male entitlement that is programmed in our patriarchal system is only one justification. A batterer will never accept being told that they are consciously trying to intimidate. The defense mechanisms (dysfunctional cognitive justifications) will become very strong and that impedes progress towards change.

## **Cognitive Affirmation**

CAT is unique, in that it focuses on the PGS and Thinking in the Red. If I am Thinking in the Red, I remove myself from listening to my conscience and I switch off my warning system, my PGS. Not listening to my PGS results in

making choices that have outcomes that suck, putting at risk the things I love and value. Learning how to switch the PGS back on so that right choices can be made is where the work is. A cognitive affirmation that interrupts the unhealthy thinking and counters the justification process is very effective.

The heart and soul of my model is interrupting the Blame Shifting process with the understanding of the cognitive affirmation statement “There is nothing another person can say or do that can make me say or do something I know in my conscious is wrong.” In class, the cognitive affirmation statement is simply referred to as, “The Saying”. Repetition of the saying trains the mind to recognize when the PGS is giving us a warning, and to keep the switch in the on position.

### **Repetition**

An important element to CAT is the repetition process, which brings to conscious awareness the ways we “Think in the Red”, thus teaching us how we flip the switch and turn off the PGS. The saying then counters and turns it back on. It becomes so deeply engrained during the period of the 26-week program because we repeat it frequently and apply it to different situations. It needs to become a habit thought. We are working to redesign and rebuild the underlying belief structure to support healthy thinking.

CAT is repetitive. The procedure is the same each session, with different examples of abusive behavior to examine. The class reviews a scenario in which there is interaction that is abusive. The Facilitator then leads the class in a discussion to break down what has just been seen. An important element in the process is to be able to look at what someone else is doing. It is much easier to look at somebody else that is doing something wrong than to confess our own wrongdoings. The client’s defensiveness does not kick in. During the discussion the class lists what actions they just saw which were abusive or immoral (wrong). The list reveals what was said or done to break the Golden Rule. We may then look at the goal that was trying to be accomplished. What does the person want other to say or do? What outcome is wanted? As we move through the exercises, the subconscious thinking that is used to justify the abuse is revealed. Inevitably almost everyone in the class sees themselves while we are talking about the abusive behavior, especially when we are going over the “Thinking in the Red.” There is frequently uncomfortable laughter as they identify with what is said because it is what they, themselves, think. They begin to be able to see that the thinking is distorted and results in outcomes that suck. Identifying the feelings that were experienced by the person in the scenario helps to build a vocabulary to address feelings, instead of just being “pissed off.”

There is discussion about how goals are accomplished. For example, we talk about how the loud voice helps to accomplish the goal. We work to identify the subconscious intentions of the behaviors. Those are to scare, to intimidate, and to gain power and control. These are subconscious intents. The class can then

identify how the person is accomplishing their goal by using Blame Shifting to justify actions driven by the subconscious intents. They can see that the person is trying to control the other to get them to say or do what is wanted. Humiliating, belittling, shaming, and scaring accomplish the goal. In other words, trying to control what other says or does by controlling what they think and how they feel. The intimidation is controlling thoughts by causing another to question and doubt their own judgment, which is abusive without ever being physical. The underpinning dynamic in CAT is this: Abuse is controlling behavior.

## **Control**

Our behavior is always a result of our mind and our thoughts. This means, there must exist thoughts of a need to control. Why would I need to control? I need to control because I am feeling out of control. Feeling out of control is fear, fear being the anticipation of pain.

Not only do I have thoughts of a need to control, evidenced by the abuse, but there must also be beliefs that it is okay to abuse. None of us at a conscious level think that it is okay to abuse. Immediately when I bring that up inside the class, there is discontent. "No, it's not! That's not right. We don't believe it's okay to abuse." Through CAT we find that we know how to define abuse within ourselves: when something is done that we wouldn't want done to us.

The belief that it is okay to abuse is at a subconscious level, our habit thoughts. Current models operate with an assumption that there is conscious intent to abuse, but there is not. It is at the subconscious level.

## **Objectification**

To become effective in the intervention of abuse, we must change the dialog. We must stop objectifying the batterer and accept his humanity without minimizing the experience of the victims. Batterer intervention programs that dehumanize participants become adversarial to the participant. That approach is seen by the batterer as, "Okay, you have power over me. You're ganging up on me and beating me up for beating another up. How does that make you better than me?"

Objectification of the client creates a dynamic that continues a power and control struggle. In the program, they are the oppressed instead of the oppressor. The batterer becomes the victim within the program. Practitioners feel that they are justified in what they are doing the same as the batterer feels justified in his abusive actions.

If we hope to truly discover what is going to succeed in changing abusive behavior, we have to recognize clients are human and do not always function with conscious evil intentions. They are not separate from us. All human beings

do things that violate their conscience. We all say and do things that we know we should not, and we all use the same process to justify and make it okay.

### **Compassion without Collusion**

To be able to educate, to affect change, we must accept that we have no entitlement to see the abuser as less than ourselves. Approaches that “look down” on the batterer only serve to increase shame and resistance. Increasing shame makes the abuser more defensive. The more defensive they feel, the less a possibility of a positive therapeutic impact exists. The approach must not be one of condemning malicious intent. Approaching the problem with the belief that they want to be a good person and find happiness, and they, don’t realize what is preventing the achievement of that goal would better prepare them for change. When they are made aware of the problem, many will want to change and be the best person they can be with a desire to achieve happiness. More importantly, this revelation will bring a higher standard of safety for the people around them. We need to be educated on how to get this accomplished. Instead of shaming and degrading, we need to guide. That does not mean that there are not consequences to abusive actions. Utilization of a compassionate approach does not mean we are soft on crime, colluding with the abuser, or enabling abusive behavior.

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For Batterer Intervention Program Facilitators and other counselors seeking more information about training in the CAT Model visit the Cognitive Accountability Training website at:

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