

In a straight forward manner Four Bitter Pills For Feeling Better Fast offers concrete actions you can take to control your mood. Using the time tested principles of Cognitive Therapy you will learn what actions you can take to bring comfort and calmness to your life.

Four Bitter Pills For Feeling Better Fast: A Guide to Cognitive Behavioral SELF Therapy

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**Four “Bitter Pills”**

**For Feeling Better Fast**

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## **A Quick Start Guide to Feeling Better**

We all want answers fast. When we attend a lecture or read a book we want the speaker/author to get to the point. I'm going to start right at the beginning by giving you the conclusion. I call this the Quick Start Guide to Feeling Better.

When we buy a new technological device it usually comes with a Quick Start Guide to get us started. After we get the device up and running we can go back to the manual and get the details about how to fine tune the device. I see no reason why this manual on Cognitive Behavioral SELF Therapy can't offer you a quick start guide. My only CAUTION to you is that this is about changing something that you do and changing habits may require some further explanation, encouragement and fine tuning. Also this is a book about a technique for changing your feelings and behavior, and the technique does require some explanation. So after reading the eight steps below you can start doing them, but please read the fine details in the rest of the manual.

1. Swallow the first bitter pill: Accept the fact that you can't change someone else but you can change you. Stop wasting your time.
2. Swallow the second bitter pill: Accept the fact that your thoughts cause your feelings. No thing and no one else makes you have the feelings you do.
3. Do your ABC's and pay very close attention to the B's or BELIEFS/THOUGHTS. Write them down so you can study them and learn about your thoughts.
4. See the connection between how you think and how you feel and behave.

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5. Swallow the third bitter pill: Apply the 5 rational criteria to your thoughts and accept the fact that some of these thoughts you have are irrational.
6. Identify the specific types of irrational thinking you are doing. Use the list of Types of Irrational Thoughts to identify them.
7. Swallow the fourth bitter pill: Talk back to yourself and develop alternative thoughts using the 5 rational criteria about the situation that you formerly had irrational thoughts about
8. Recognize how your feeling and behavior differs (becomes more calm) as a result of thinking using the 5 rational criteria.

## **Chapter One: The First Bitter Pill - You Can't Change Others but You Can Change You**

For over twenty years I have been asked to engage in many conspiracies. No, I am not some high ranking government official or secret agent operative. I'm a therapist. Several times each week when I have a new client come to one of their first few appointments they present me with the details of their life. This person or that person is upsetting them. Their job is making them miserable. The economy is making them anxious. They are depressed about their marriage. The kids are driving them crazy.

They have sought out a professional therapist to advise them on how to change their situation. They hope that I can tell them the magical things to say or the magical things to do to make the troubling person(s), or thing(s) less disturbing. They want me to enter into the **conspiracy** to change someone or something else. "What can I do to get my husband to stop drinking?" "How can I handle my boss when she makes unrealistic demands on me?" "What can I do to get my girlfriend to come back to me?" "Is there a way I can help my wife stop spending so much money?" "How do I help my daughter see that her boyfriend isn't right for her?" "How can I feel better about my situation?" The list is endless but it's usually about changing someone else.

Early on in counseling we have to be clear that a counselor can not help you change someone else. It doesn't matter how much you love that person or how angry you are at them. You can't change them. It's not that they *can't* change. It's just that you can't *make* them change.

If you are my client and I am your counselor- I can't even change you. That's right. We counselors have no ability



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to change our clients. But all of our clients have the ability to change themselves. Contrary to the belief of some people, counselors are not master manipulators. Counselors are just guides. I will discuss this later in this chapter.

**Locus of Control**

The concept of “Locus of Control” is helpful in increasing our awareness of what we can control and what we can’t. Things that are within our locus of control are things that we can have control over, like how fast we drive our car. Things that are outside of our locus of control are things that we have no control over, like how fast someone else drives their car. As a homework assignment I sometimes ask my clients to draw a big circle on a sheet of paper. I then tell them to put everything that is in their control inside the circle, and everything that is not in their control outside the circle.

Sometimes they come to the next appointment with several things written inside the circle and only a few things outside the circle. But often they return with only a couple of things inside the circle and most everything else outside the circle. In many cases though when we examine some of the things people put inside the circle we find things that really don’t belong there because the person doesn’t have control over them.

The point is that there are only a very few things that we are in total control of and our emotions are one of the things we have that control over. That’s what this book is about. We don’t have control over the behavior, actions or feelings of other people. When we give up trying to cause change in others it allows us to more effectively work on improving our own emotional state.

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A client who I had assigned the locus of control homework reminded me of the Serenity Prayer. When she returned the following week she presented me with the sheet of paper with the circle on it, and inside the circle she had written the serenity prayer.

**Serenity Prayer**

God grant me the serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
courage to change the things I can;  
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Living one day at a time;  
Enjoying one moment at a time;  
Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace;  
Taking, as He did, this sinful world  
as it is; not as I would have it;  
Trusting that he will make all things right  
if I surrender to His Will;  
That I may be reasonable happy in this life  
and supremely happy with Him  
Forever in the next.

Amen

*--Reinhold Neibuhr*

In my opinion we could all improve our state of emotional well being if we would continue to strive to know the difference between the things we cannot change and instead focus on the things that we can change. While this is a simple concept it can have a profound impact on our mental health.

### **The Therapist of OZ**

As a therapist I like to think of myself as the Wizard of OZ. When many people hear the words *Wizard of OZ* they might be inclined to think of “the great and powerful” being who can read minds and influence future events. As you may recall from the book (by L. Frank Baum) and the movie about Dorothy and her friends (the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion) went to the Emerald city to have a visit with the Wizard of OZ. After getting themselves all cleaned up and looking their best they went into the Wizard’s grand hall.

The Wizard was a very powerful and great man who made it clear to them that they were bothering him with their requests for a heart, brain, courage and Dorothy’s desire to return to her home in Kansas. He was a very busy and important man. However, the Wizard said that he might help them if they completed a task. He instructed them to go off and get the Wicked Witch’s broomstick. Of course this set Dorothy, Toto and their friends off on a treacherous adventure to obtain the Witch’s broom. The mission seemed to put them in great peril and eventually Dorothy was captured and held a prisoner in the Witch’s castle being guarded by flying monkeys. Oh my!

Later, when her friend the Scarecrow was put on fire by the Wicked Witch, Dorothy threw water on the Scarecrow to put out the fire. Dorothy accidentally managed to get some water on the witch, which of course caused her to melt (a happy coincidence). Who knew? It turned out that there was no love lost between the flying Monkeys and their boss, the Witch, and they presented Dorothy with the broomstick to keep as a symbol of her victory. “Hail Dorothy.”

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Upon their return to the Emerald City Dorothy and her friends were eventually given an audience with the Wizard whom they laid the broomstick before. Being such a great and important man he was not very impressed and as he was in the process of sending them away, Dorothy’s little dog Toto pulled back the curtain of the Wizard’s control booth. (I am not making this up). The Wizard said “Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain”. This is one of my favorite movie lines of all time. What a spectacle. Toto had revealed that the great and all powerful Wizard of OZ was just an ordinary man. He wasn’t a bad man, just a bad Wizard as he himself admitted.

Let’s not forget why Dorothy and her band of bizarre friends were there in the first place. The Scarecrow wanted a brain, the Tin Man wanted a heart, the Cowardly Lion wanted courage, and Dorothy just wanted to go back home. The Wizard had absolutely no ability to give them any of these things. Remember I said I like to think of myself as the Wizard of Oz. I have no power to give my clients these things either. The Scarecrow, Tin Man, Cowardly Lion and Dorothy already had the things and qualities they were seeking. During their adventure the Scarecrow showed his brains by concocting a plan to rescue Dorothy. The Tin Man was shown to possess great enthusiasm. And the Cowardly Lion demonstrated himself to be filled with courage. As for Dorothy- she had never really been that far away from home as the entire fantastic tale was all in her head while she dreamt.

What a wonderful story this is, but it is also a great metaphor for our own lives. We each have what we need within us. Each of us is complete having the brain, the heart and the courage. We also have the ability to call wherever

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we are home. The problem is that we sometimes think that we don't have the intelligence, the motivation or the bravery. The things we think are what this book is about and it is also the focus of my work with my clients in therapy.

**Conclusion**

The first step to helping yourself feel better is to swallow the bitter pill that you can't change other people. Once you stop wasting your energy and time on trying to get others to change you can focus on the changes that you can make. Your feeling of being effective will immediately improve, since you will stop doing the impossible. You simply can not change someone else.

Like me you are like the Wizard behind the curtain. There are severe limitations to your powers. However, if you look close enough at what you do have, you are likely to find that the resources you need to feel better are already within you. You can change the way that **YOU** feel and behave, by changing the way you think.

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