

TEACHING CHILDREN THE CBT MODEL TOOL

NATALIE: Welcome to Episode 276 of the Flying Free Podcast. I've taken numerous coach training courses and certifications over the years, and one of those certifications taught me how to use a cognitive behavioral therapy tool called the CBT Triangle. But this particular coach trainer added some things to it and created what she calls The Model. I've talked about The Model in episodes 160, 105, and 107. And you can find those episodes by going to flyingfreenow.com/ and then the number. So if you were going to want to listen to Episode 160, you would type into your browser, flyingfreenow.com/160 and then it would come up.

I use the model tool in my weekly group coaching in the Flying Free Sisterhood program paired along with some IFS concepts. IFS stands for Internal Family Systems. I've had hundreds of women offer me feedback on how this tool has changed their lives in different ways, and sometimes they will ask how they can explain or use this model with their children.

SABRINA: My name is Sabrina, and I'm so grateful for your teaching on the model. I'm just learning it. I'm brand new to Flying Free and just became a member. I am wondering if you have a version of this that I could teach to my younger children. I have grade school children, two adopted boys that came from a trauma background, and I really would love a way to present this to them in a way they can understand. I have my own ideas of how I could talk to them, but if there's a resource for teaching my children how to use this, it would be great.

NATALIE: Okay, I don't know about you, but my kids tend to react in negative ways if I say, "Okay, kids, let's sit down and learn a lesson about our brains." I mean, I've tried doing it that way. I used to be a homeschooling mom. I homeschooled for twenty years. So I know what that looks like, and it's possible. There are probably people out there, if you Googled "The Model" and "teaching kids The Model," I bet you there are resources out there. But I don't think kids learn best that way anyway. I mean, maybe some do — maybe some can just hear about The Model and then they retain it and that's a part of their lives.

But I think most kids are going to learn better out in the wild of life as things come up in their lives when it emotionally matters to them. Now, this isn't always convenient for us parents because it means we have to think on our feet and answer questions or address issues in real time when emotions might be running high and we're running late for something. I know my kids, especially my teens, they love to talk about their problems at night when I'm ready to hop into bed and go to sleep. But these are the

best times to kind of covertly teach them life skills that are going to serve them well as adults.

Now, if you as a parent are not used to using this model on yourself in your own life and circumstances, you won't know how to quickly apply it to what they are going through when they come to you with their issues that they're experiencing. It's one thing to learn about a tool and to understand it intellectually, and you can do that with a picture or an infographic or whatever. But if you want to actually know a tool inside and out, you need to be using it in your own life on a regular basis. It needs to be a part of how you do life.

So first I'm going to tell you about this tool. This isn't going to be a deep dive into the tool this episode, but if you want to just have an episode that's totally devoted to learning about the tool or The Model, you go to Episode 160. So flyingfreenow.com/160. So you can listen to that, and then, of course, you're listening to this one now, right? But then I want to invite you to join me inside of the Flying Free Sisterhood to actually deep dive into using this tool and other tools that we integrate into it and make them part of your daily practice.

I use this tool every day. It's literally part of how I think about everything that happens to me now. But that's because I've practiced it over and over again until it's become really natural to me.

So basically just a quick overview, this tool teaches us that our feelings or our emotions, they all come from our thoughts, not from our circumstances. So for example, it might be raining outside. Rain is a circumstance. One person feels happy in the rain, another person feels angry, and another person feels disappointed. Is the rain making them feel all those different ways? Nope. Rain is just a circumstance. Rain can't make us feel things. It's what we each, in our own minds, are making that rain mean. Our thoughts about it — that's what's creating our feelings about it.

The farmer feels happy because his thought is, "Yay, my crops needed this rain." The children feel angry because their thought is, "Ugh, now we can't go to the beach." The bride feels disappointed because she's thinking, "Now my wedding has to be inside, and I wanted it to be outside." So same rain, different emotions.

So our thoughts and our brain create our emotions, but what do our emotions create? They cause us to do the things we do. If the farmer feels happy in his body, he might sit back in his rocker and smoke a pipe in bliss. Or maybe he'll go out for dinner with his wife or go enjoy his grandchildren. If the kids are feeling angry in their body, they might

have a temper tantrum or slam a door or yell at their sibling. If the bride is feeling disappointed in her body, she might cry or complain to her mother or snap at the caterer.

Emotions cause — or create — our behaviors. They are the reason why we show up in the world in the ways that we are showing up. They're the reasons why we are making the decisions that we're making for our lives. And that's the triangle, okay? Three sides. Thoughts create feelings which create behaviors. So imagine that triangle.

So when a woman who is being abused says, "I'm confused," I immediately put that confusion in the on the feeling side of that triangle. And I think to myself, "I wonder what this woman is thinking in her mind that is creating the feeling of confusion in her body?" Or if she says, "I feel so guilty," I think to myself, "I wonder what this woman is thinking in her mind or believing that is creating the feeling of guilt in her body?"

Now, she might say to me, "Well, I feel guilty because my husband told me I should give him more sex, but I just had a baby so I'm wiped out and I'm also trying to heal." So she thinks her guilt is coming from her husband saying, "I want more sex," but it's not. Because someone else might have a husband who says that and that woman might not feel guilty at all.

Let's look at some different thoughts that different people might have when their husband says, "You should give me more sex." Woman 1, when her husband says that, she thinks, "You should give me more space. Hello!" Now, this thought might cause that woman to feel maybe indignation in her body. Woman 2 thinks, "Oh, I am not my own. My body belongs to my husband, so if I don't do what he wants, I'm a bad person." This belief is creating guilt in this woman's body.

Woman number 3 thinks, "I am married to a selfish man." This thought might create a feeling of sadness or loss, but she doesn't feel guilty because she isn't making his selfishness about her. She's just recognizing this reality. Woman number 4 might think, "I don't even know what to do now," and this thought might create anxiety in her body.

So do you see how the husband's demands are not the issue? I mean, they are definitely an issue, don't get me wrong. But they're not the issue when it comes to what you make it mean. And that's good news because there's nothing we can do about what other people choose to do or say around us anyway. We can't control those people. That's not even our job. They're out of our power. But what we do have power over is what we make the circumstances in our life mean.

So that's what I help women do. I help them recognize those inner beliefs that they have and how their beliefs that they've probably had since they were kids are making them feel inside of their bodies. I help them to radically accept the things that they can't control so that they can then turn their focus on what they can control and make their own choices and see where their opportunities are. And that is their own thoughts, feelings, and behaviors or choices. And when women get really good at doing this, that's when they are able to pass this skill on to their children.

So before we talk about how to talk to our kids about this, let's look at those four women and just see what each of them might do when they feel the way they do in their body, okay? We've got the thought and we've got the feeling, and now we're going to look at what they do.

So woman 1, she's thinking, "You should give me more space. Hello!" This thought might cause her to feel indignation in her body. So what does she do if she feels indignation in her body? Well, she might tell her husband, "You should give me more space. Hello!" She might tell him that she will not be sexually servicing him until she is sleeping through the night.

Okay, now, I'm not going to get into the fallout of this for some of you. That's not what this episode is about. But I do want to acknowledge that for some of you, there may be serious consequences to pay for refusing to have sex with your husband. And we have talked about this kind of thing in other episodes. If that's the case for you, then you need to know that you're not only in an emotionally abusive marriage, but you are also in a physically and sexually abusive marriage. You're being raped if your husband is not respecting your "no." Anytime that there is sex without consent, that's rape. So if you want to learn more about this, I would recommend episodes 104, 108, 170, 221, and 230. These links will be in the show notes too just so you know.

All right, woman 2 is thinking, "I am not my own. My body belongs to my husband, so if I don't do what he wants, I'm a bad person." And then she feels guilty. So what does she do when she feels guilty in her body? Well, she might say "yes" when she really wants to say "no." She may pray harder to be a "better person." She confesses her sins to her priest or her elders. She apologizes and begs for forgiveness for her bad attitude and selfish ways. The episode that really focuses on this is Episode 170. So go to flyingfreenow.com/170.

Woman number 3 is thinking, "I am married to a selfish man." Now, this thought might create a feeling of sadness or loss, so what does she do? What are her behaviors when she feels into this loss? Well, she might grieve. Maybe she cries. She may go and get a

therapist. She may begin to think about whether or not she wants to remain in a relationship with someone who has this level of pathology.

Woman number 4, she's thinking, "I don't even know what to do." And this thought might create anxiety in her body. So what does she do when she feels anxious? Well, she has a hard time sleeping. She experiences heart palpitations. She gets snippy with her kids. She has brain fog. Maybe she buffers with food or shopping or Netflix. She has a hard time finishing tasks. Maybe she shuts down.

These are all just examples, okay? These are not hard and fast, "This is what's going to happen." It's just examples of different ways that you can put these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors together to figure out and gain some self-awareness. I hope this helps you to see how our thoughts really matter and our emotions really matter. They cause us to show up with certain behaviors, and those behaviors on repeat over the course of our lives create results in our lives that may or may not be serving us.

The most important first step is to notice. Notice our feelings, notice our thoughts, notice the things we do, and from that place of noticing, being curious about all of these things. From there, we can figure out why. "Why do I feel the way I do? Why do I believe the things I believe? Why do I do the things that I do?"

So first we're going to look at noticing our thoughts. I like to do this by thinking about my brain as being like my little me. And I talk about this in my new book, *All the Scary Little Gods*. When I notice a thought in my brain, I think, "Oh, interesting. Little Natalie actually believes that. I wonder why?" And I get curious about it. I start asking myself questions about it, questions like, "Why do you believe that? When was the first time you started believing that? Who taught you that? How did that belief help you when you were a child? Is that belief still helping you today? Why or why not? How does that belief make you feel in your body? How do you show up for your life when you have that particular feeling in your body? Do you like how you're showing up? Why or why not?"

And I might even write these thoughts down in my journal so I can examine them more objectively. I'm creating space between me and my thoughts, recognizing that I am not my thoughts. I am separate from my thoughts, but I can look at them the way that we would look at maybe the thoughts of someone else.

So second, we're going to notice our feelings. Let's say I'm driving down the road and someone cuts in front of me and I have a big emotion about that. I suddenly feel angry. I notice that feeling and I immediately see little Natalie feeling angry, and I say, "Why do you feel angry? What are you thinking that is causing this anger?" And I can hear little

Natalie saying inside of me, "It's not fair. Everyone should take their turn. They got away with not following the rules."

Okay, now I can have a conversation with little Natalie about her belief. And in this inner conversation inside of myself, I realize that a younger version of me is very committed to life being fair. And I can see that as an adult, life will not always be fair. There are many things out of my control. I can resist that reality and fight against it, and sometimes I will want to do that. Sometimes I will want to protest injustices in the world by writing about them or attending a march or talking about it.

Other times, it is a waste of my effort, and I will choose to let it go. Flipping the guy in the other car off is not how I want to show up for my life, so I will let him go and I will shift my thoughts to things I can control, such as making a conscious choice to drive safely for the sake of myself and maybe kids in the car with me and for the sake of others on the road.

But for little Natalie, I can reassure her inside of me that even though life isn't always fair, I get it — I get that belief. But even though it's not always fair, I love her and I'm going to take good care of her.

So sometimes we notice our thoughts first, and then we figure out our feelings and our behaviors from that starting place. And sometimes we notice our feelings first, like the anger, and we figure out our thoughts and our behaviors from that starting place. And then sometimes we notice our behaviors first, and then we figure out our thoughts and feelings from that starting place.

Now, noticing behaviors first might look like noticing how we're biting our cheek. I might notice that and think, "I wonder why I'm biting my cheek? How do I feel in my body that is causing me to bite my cheek? Oh, I feel anxious in my body. What is my brain thinking right now, either consciously or unconsciously, that is causing me to feel anxious in my body right now? Oh, I bet I know what it is. My son is driving a long way today home from college, and I'm anxious about him getting home safely."

So my younger part is worried he's not going to get home safely. So then from there, I can have a conversation with my younger self about that. She might say, "I could never ever live if my child died!" And then I would be able to remind her that this has not happened yet and that if it does, I will be here to help her get through that. We will take it one day at a time, and we will get the help that we need to survive such a horrible thing. But in the meantime, we're going to live in this moment right now, and we're going to look forward to seeing our son soon.

Now, as parents, we can only pass on to our kids what we ourselves are used to doing for our own little selves. The better we are at taking care of and helping our own little me, the better we will be at helping the little selves around us, whether that is the little selves of our children or other adults that we know and love. So our own inner work matters. And again, if you want to see an example of how this actually plays out in real life, I recommend reading my new book, *All the Scary Little Gods*. You can get it on Amazon, in paperback, Kindle, and Audible formats. And if you want to work with me on building these skills, you can join us in the Flying Free Sisterhood by going to joinflyingfree.com and complete an application.

So when I talk to my kids about this, I try to help them, first of all, begin the habit of noticing. Noticing their thoughts, noticing their feelings, and noticing the things that they're choosing to do — so the three sides of that triangle.

So thoughts: When it comes to thoughts, I try to help them separate their thoughts from themselves just like I do for myself, where I think of my thoughts as coming from a younger version of myself. Kids think their thoughts are who they are. If someone at school makes fun of their hair, they might think, "Something's wrong with me," and then they think that is who they are, the one that is wrong. Or they think that the other person's thoughts are credible and accurately defining who they are. "Well, they think there's something wrong with me, so there must be something wrong with me."

Some kids have a hard time figuring out what they're thinking, and they might need a little help from you. So you can offer them some ideas when they share about something that's happened to them like, "Mom, today in school, my teacher got mad at me for forgetting my pencil again, and then the kids laughed at me." They may not know what they're making that mean until you ask them questions about it.

I like to start out actually not with asking them a question about their thought or belief but with a question about their feelings, because usually, kids can access their feelings more than they can access their thoughts. Although, I do have a child, and I'll tell you about him in a little bit, who is more able to access his thoughts.

But I'll usually start with this question: "How did that make you feel in your body?" So they present me with a circumstance that happened to them and I'll say, "Wow. How did that make you feel in your body?"

Now, again, like I said before, they might not know. I have a child who had a really hard time figuring out his feelings. When he was asked a question like that, he would just answer it with more thoughts like, "Well, I put a pencil in my backpack, but then it was

gone when I got to class and I don't know what happened to it." So then I might offer an idea of a feeling: "Well, did that make your body feel frustrated or was it mostly worried?" And then he might say, "Well, I just keep forgetting things," and slam his backpack down on the floor.

So then I might say, "I can see your body looks frustrated. I understand why that would be frustrating for your body to try so hard to remember, or even to think that you did, and then you get to class and the pencil isn't there." And I just let that land for a minute and then see where it goes from there. But what I'm trying to do is help him put a name to his feeling: "frustrated." And then from there, you can explore where that feeling is in his body or you can explore more of his thoughts about it.

But the point of all of this is to be an empathetic witness to my son's thoughts and feelings first, and then we can address any behaviors later. So with this particular child who's able to articulate thoughts, we work on finding the feelings in his body. But some kids are really good at feeling their feelings and they know exactly where they can feel them in their bodies, but they have a more difficult time with knowing where the feelings are coming from, with figuring out what they are thinking about what happened or what they're making it mean. I think kids like this are maybe less apt to talk a lot about things and they process more internally or in their bodies because they have a harder time articulating what they're thinking.

So let's say that a child comes home from school and he's just raging. He storms through the house and he goes into his room and slams his door. Now, depending on the age, I might give them a little space. If they're younger, you can give them a little less time alone, but when they get older, I feel like they need a little space to just decompress on their own. But eventually what I do when I feel like the time is right — I don't always get it right, but I try to figure it out — then I'll just go and knock on the door and I'll go in and sit down. I try to get on their level if I can so they can feel like I'm with them, not standing over them.

This makes me think of all this hierarchy in the church that we've talked about. That's not from God. In the Bible, remember when they said Jesus was called Emmanuel, the God who is with us? He's not powering over us like other gods that people back then worshiped. God went to great lengths to make this point by coming into the world in poverty from an unwed mother. But then those who started this new and powerful world religion of Christianity completely missed the point. And now we have the mess that we have today, which includes tremendous abuse, lies, coverups, and masking. That is a complete and total rabbit trail, so let's get back.

I might ask this child, "How are you feeling in your body right now?" "I'm so mad. I hate them. They're all stupid." And so then we try to notice where that feeling of anger is in his body. "Where do you feel mad in your body?" "I feel it in my stomach. My arms just want to punch him."

Next, I want to find out what happened. I just want to know what the circumstance was that this child experienced that was out of his control. So I'll just say, "Tell me what happened." Now, notice, you guys, it doesn't matter where we begin. It doesn't matter if we begin with the situation or with the feeling or with the thought or with the behavior. It's all related. Like I said before, I tend to go to the behaviors last, but it's all related and we can start anywhere we want to on that triangle to go anywhere we want to.

So let's say that he says, "Johnny told the whole class that I liked Amy and everyone laughed at me, and I don't even like her. She's stupid." I might ask, "Well, when Johnny told the class you liked Amy and everyone laughed, did you feel stupid or like they thought you were stupid?" And then we explore that. So I give them some ideas of things that I might think that they might be going through. That also can help them feel seen. If I can articulate what I think that they might be feeling or experiencing or thinking and I can do it accurately, then they will feel like, "Someone gets it." And doesn't it feel good when you feel like someone really understands what you're going through?

So again, I like to separate out their feeling from their identity. So, "You feel stupid, but you aren't stupid." And I use a lot of IFS language, Internal Family Systems language, like, "A part of you feels stupid when the other kids laugh at jokes made at your expense." Now, this parts language is another way of helping them to separate from that part of him that feels stupid, and it creates a little bit of space for him to view himself objectively and see that even though the feeling is big and important, it is just a feeling and it's not actually him. It's not his identity. It's separate from him. He is not angry: A part of him inside of himself feels very angry.

And in fact, part of him might feel stupid, but parts of him, they're not thinking he's stupid at all. There might be actually be a part inside of him at the same time who simultaneously feels sad for him and wishes people could be kinder.

One of my younger kids — it's the same one who had a hard time identifying where his feelings were in his body. In fact, in therapy, every time his therapist asked him where he was feeling his worry, for example, he would always point to his head. "I feel it in my head. I feel it in my head." Everything was always in his head. Well, she finally decided to try some EMDR therapy where she put a clicker in each of his hands that would go

click, click, click, click from right to left, right to left. So that just stimulates both sides of the brain. And so while he was feeling this clicker going, he would tell the story of what happened and then how it made him feel.

And then she would say, "Where are you feeling that in your body?" And all of a sudden, he could feel it not in his head. He could feel it in his stomach, he could feel it in his shoulders, he could feel it in his chest. He was starting to feel his feelings in other places in his body, not just in his head. So he is very cerebral and he's a thinker and he does have very big emotions, but the way I think he's handled his big emotions is to just go straight to his head. What his therapist wanted to do is get him to start feeling his feelings in his body and start recognizing when those feelings were starting to come up, just to gain that self-awareness for him. And he's really gotten a lot of help from this.

Okay, so notice I have not given you an infographic. I've not given you a worksheet with five steps to follow for your kids. And that's because I don't think this is a cut-and-dried thing that we teach our kids and then move on from. Kind of like, "We've learned our lesson and now we're done." It's really a way of thinking and a way of living and a way of growing in self-awareness and compassion that is practiced and lived. And we can help our kids when we have been in the practice of helping ourselves with this.

If you can just remember a triangle and that the three sides are feelings, thoughts, and behaviors, and that you can start anywhere on the triangle and find the other two sides by asking yourself a few questions, you will gain so much self-awareness, and that self-awareness will help you to see opportunities to change the way you think about things. And when you change the way you think, you change your life.

Romans 12:2 says, "Don't follow the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person." How? By changing the way you think. Do you need help with this? Consider joining me inside Flying Free where you'll get to take classes, hear weekly coaching sessions, participate in our private forum as well as two live events each month, and have access to dozens of expert workshops, butterfly stories, and an extensive, multi-year archive of coaching and Q&A sessions.

And all of this is only \$29 a month or \$290 for an entire year, which gives you two months free. Not only that, but if you join for a year, you get a free digital download of *Is It Me? Making Sense of Your Confusing Marriage: A Christian Woman's Guide to Hidden Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* and the workbook that goes with that book. This is the only way to get my workbook in a digital format. You can buy my book and workbook on Amazon if you want to, but the actual book will come in a Kindle format. So that's digital, obviously, but the workbook does not come in Kindle format because

it's something that you fill out and complete, so it's only in a paperback. It's a nice big paperback book, and like I said, you can buy it.

Or, there have been people who have reached out and said, "I really wish I had it in digital format because I don't want my husband to see this workbook lying around," well, you can get it, but you have to join Flying Free for a year and do this work with me, and then you get the workbook for free.

Here's what one person said recently who had just finished her one-month evaluation after joining Flying Free. She said this: "I just completed the one-month evaluation and it really showed me the progress that I've been able to make. For this, I am so grateful for this program and that I'm able to be part of it. I came to the program initially just to figure out if I was in an abusive marriage and to gain some support, but I have gained so much more than that as I continue to work with the program. I still have a long way to go, but I'm much further along than I ever have been up to this point. Thank you, Natalie, and thank you, Flying Free."

So head over to joinflyingfree.com to complete an application.