Addressing What’s Missing From Our Conversations about Resilience: The Role of Cognitive Biases

April 7, 9:15-11:15

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Disclosures

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Objectives

1. Define “cognitive bias” and identify how cognitive biases perpetuate anxiety, stress and burnout in ourselves and our trainees.

2. Distinguish between a range of cognitive biases and recognize how they operate in our daily lives.

3. Practice strategies to help ourselves and our trainees address cognitive biases to achieve greater resilience and well-being.
# Agenda

1. Resilience: What does it mean and how do we achieve it?  9:15-9:30 am
2. Define and discuss “cognitive biases”  9:30-9:45
3. Reflection and small group activity to discuss how biases operate  9:45-10:00
4. Introduce a 5-step approach to address cognitive biases  10:00-10:10
5. Practice applying the approach to 3 cases  10:10-10:50
6. Identify red flags and when to seek help  10:50-10:55
7. Develop an action plan for implementation  10:55-11:15
What does resilience mean?
Multiple Definitions

1. The process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress such as family and relationship problems, health or workplace stressors. (American Psychological Association, 2014)

2. One’s ability to recover, re-bound, bounce-back, adjust or even thrive following misfortune, change or adversity. (Garcia-Dia, 2013)

3. A process to harness resources to sustain well-being. (Panter-Brick & Leckman, 2013)

4. Behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and developed by anyone and may be present at different times. (Southwick, 2014)
Characteristics associated with resilience

- Optimism
- Self-esteem
- Self-efficacy
- Sense of control
- Problem-solving skills
- Insight and self-awareness
- Environmental/social resources
- Strong relationships
- Spiritual influences

Windle, 2011
Conceptual Model of Factors Related to Resilience

Olson et al., 2015
Conceptual Model of Factors Related to Resilience

Olson et al., 2015
What Are Cognitive Biases?

Definition and Examples
Cognitive Biases

- **Automatic** thought patterns:
  - Arise in response to a trigger
  - Distort reality
  - Reinforce negative thinking

- Underpinnings in cognitive psychology (Aaron Beck, 1976)

- **Normal** part of mental processing
  - We all have and use them at varying times
  - May seem accurate/logical but focusing on them impairs mood, behavior and productive thinking

Beck, 1976
“I’m late!”

“They’re going to think I don’t take my work seriously.”

“My whole day is ruined! I’ll never get everything done.”

“They’re going to make important decisions without me.”
Cognitive Biases

• Some truth, but often counterproductive

• Biases limit our ability to:
  • See the whole picture
  • Act in our own self interest
  • Achieve a sense of control
Characteristics associated with resilience

- Optimism
- Self-esteem
- Self-efficacy
- Sense of control
- Problem-solving skills
- Insight and self-awareness
- Environmental/social resources
- Strong relationships
- Spiritual influences

Internal factors

External factors

Windle, 2011
10 Cognitive Biases
# Cognitive Biases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bias</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All-or-nothing thinking</td>
<td>You look at things in absolute, black and white categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overgeneralization</td>
<td>You view a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat. You use words such as &quot;always&quot; and &quot;never.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Filter</td>
<td>You dwell on the negatives and ignore the positives, so the vision of reality becomes darkened.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discounting the positive</td>
<td>You reject positive experiences or feedback by insisting it &quot;doesn’t count.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Burns, 1999
### Cognitive Biases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Jumping to conclusions</strong></th>
<th>You interpret events negatively without definitive evidence to support your conclusion (mind reading, fortune telling).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Magnification or minimization</strong></td>
<td>You exaggerate the importance of your shortcomings or minimize the importance of your desirable qualities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Reasoning</strong></td>
<td>You assume your negative emotions reflect the way things really are.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Cognitive Biases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>“Should” statements</strong></th>
<th>You criticize yourself or others with “should’s” (guilt, anxiety, shame vs. anger).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Labeling</strong></td>
<td>An extreme form of all-or-nothing thinking where you attach a negative label to yourself.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personalization/blame</strong></td>
<td>You hold yourself accountable for something not entirely under your control.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You blame others and overlook ways your own attitudes and behavior may have contributed to a problem.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Burns, 1999
Activity 1: Identifying Cognitive Biases

1. Using your worksheet, think back on a time when an event or interpersonal encounter left you/your trainee feeling stressed, anxious or discouraged.

2. What thoughts did you/your trainee associate with that event?

3. How did you/your trainee respond to those thoughts? What emotions arose?

4. Which of the 10 biases can you identify from the response? Share these in small groups of 3-4.
Addressing Cognitive Biases
A 5-Step Approach
Addressing Cognitive Biases

- Evidence-based strategies (Beck, 1976)
- Goal is to shift/reframe thinking
- Foster awareness of - and attention to - thoughts, emotions and behaviors
- Cultivate resilience through mindfulness, emotional regulation and self-control
- Begins as reflection “on action,” but with time and practice, can turn into reflection “in action” (Schon, 1983)
## 5-Step Approach to Address Biases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Reflect on the triggering event</td>
<td>Reflect on and describe the situation that triggered your response. How did you/your trainee feel about the situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Identify the negative thoughts that arose and any cognitive biases</td>
<td>Make a list or discuss what thoughts arose in response to the situation. Were any cognitive biases operating?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Evaluate the evidence for and against your thoughts</td>
<td>Write down or discuss evidence that supports and contradicts thoughts listed in Step 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Take a fair and balanced view</td>
<td>Identify a more realistic view of the situation, yourself and/or others in light of the evidence. Assess your mood with this balanced view in mind. How do you feel about yourself and/or others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Develop an action plan</td>
<td>Do you need to take action? If so, what can you do? How can you use this knowledge in the future to help yourself and/or others?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“I’m late!”

“They’re going to think I don’t take my work seriously.”

“My whole day is ruined! I’ll never get everything done.”

“They’re going to make important decisions without me.”
1. Reflect on the triggering event
You’re stuck in traffic and running late to a meeting with your division and division chief. You feel frustrated and anxious.

2. Identify the negative thoughts that arose and any cognitive biases
   “I don’t take my work seriously.”
   “I can’t keep up with my responsibilities.”
   “I should have known better than to stay up last night.”
   “They’re going to fire me.”

3. Evaluate the evidence for and against your thoughts
   *Sometimes you feel overwhelmed and can’t keep up with everything.*
   *You knew you were staying up past your usual bedtime, but did it anyway.*
   *Your colleagues have recognized your dedication to your work.*
   *You’re rarely late and usually complete your work on time.*
   *You didn’t think less of your colleague when he was late last week.*
   *And he didn’t get fired.*

4. Take a fair and balanced view
   “I will be late today and that’s okay. This isn’t a pattern.”
   “I know I’m dedicated to my work and always do my best.”
   “I made a mistake staying up late. We all make mistakes.”

5. Develop an action plan
Make a call, send an email, make sure to go to bed on time when you have an important meeting.
### Eliciting Emotions: Using Precise and Descriptive Language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scared</th>
<th>Mad</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>Hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure</td>
<td>Irritated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helpless</td>
<td>Skeptical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confused</td>
<td>Angry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate</td>
<td>Misunderstood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overwhelmed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sad</th>
<th>Ashamed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remorseful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guilty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rejected</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Apprreciated/valued</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hopeful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energetic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimistic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative</td>
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</table>
Activity 2: Addressing Cognitive Biases

1. In your small groups of 3-4, read each case (3 total)

2. Identify at least 2 cognitive biases evident in the scenario
   • Discuss and write down how you would approach each encounter using the 5-step framework

3. Be prepared to share with the large group
Potential Challenges & Solutions

- Difficulty recalling thoughts
  - Start with emotions, behaviors, physiological sensations, images

- Limited awareness of own emotions
  - Use yourself or inquire as to how others might feel in the situation

- Focus on abstract, general views of things
  - Use specific situations to bring about change
Red Flags: When to Seek Professional Help

- Comments about harming oneself or others
- Substance use/abuse
- Poor hygiene, appetite changes, weight loss or gain
- Changes in personal and professional relationships (irritability, anger, lack of empathy, isolation)
- Increase in medical errors
- Professionalism lapses (missing service, lack of communication, routinely skipping meetings)
If Someone Is At Risk

• Act immediately if you are concerned about someone’s safety
• Do not leave her/him alone
• Explore, empathize and express care and concern
• Remind the person that she/he is not alone
  • Help them get help
• Learn what supports are available; ask to bring in Program Director, APDs, and others including family and friends who can act in the person’s best interest
• Take care of yourself – this is essential!
Developing An Action Plan

Application and Implementation
Activity 3: Set Goals for Implementation

1. Use your worksheet to complete your action plan
2. Be prepared to share 1 key insight or skill learned today with your small group

10 minutes
Conclusions

- Cognitive biases are normal, automatic processes
- Awareness of our biases improves:
  - Emotional intelligence and regulation
  - Self-control
  - Self-compassion
- Use of the strategies discussed builds resilience and adaptability under stressful conditions
Thank you!

• What questions can we answer?

• Please take 1-2 minutes to complete the workshop evaluation at your table.