

Helpful analogies to illustrate cognitive and behavioural processes

Process	Analogy
Selective attention	It's like your attention is a spotlight and it just gets focused on one thing. You miss out on other things because the spotlight is always being drawn to one part of the situation (e.g., the negative part) like a magnet. Our goal is to try to broaden the spotlight to see the whole situation, realistically and in an unbiased way.
Selective memory	I find that when I am trying to remember a song that I have heard many times before, I can only remember the chorus. That's the only bit that comes to mind. I have a 'selective memory' for only the most prominent part of the song.
Disorganised memory	Imagine 'a cupboard in which many things have been thrown in quickly and in a disorganised fashion, so it is impossible to fully close the door and things fall out at unpredictable times. Organising the cupboard will mean looking at each of the things and putting them into their place. Once this is done, the door can be closed and remains shut' (p. 337; Ehlers and Clark 2000).
Expectancy, interpretation and heuristic biases	Here's a personal example from RS. When I was writing my thesis, I was pretty nervous about the first chapter I handed in and thought it was rubbish. When I got it back, the comment was "I've stopped reading for the writing style from hell". It was only after I'd calmed down a bit that I re-read it and realised that it said "I've stopped reading for the writing style from here." It was partly because I expected to see criticism that I got it!
Emotional reasoning	It's like being on a stormy sea in a tiny boat and being jolted around, afraid that you are going to sink. We are not trying to stop the sea from being stormy, because we can't control the weather. Instead we will try to equip the boat with a sail, a rudder, a map and a compass, and try to help you navigate your way through the sea. We can't get rid of your emotions but we can try to understand them better and help you deal with them. [can also be used for intrusive thoughts or voices]
Recurrent thinking	It's like when you have had an argument with someone. The contents of the argument go round and round in your head, you replay it, thinking of all the things you could have said. Has that ever happened to you?
Safety behaviour	An example from Paul Salkovskis. Builders wanted to play a joke on a young, naïve apprentice so they asked him to hold up a wall: "What ever you do, don't let go of this wall or it will collapse to the ground and be ruined!". The apprentice was very keen and did so, even when the other builders went off for lunch, and even though it was raining. He would have stayed there all night except for one of the builders took pity on him and told him to try to let go. The apprentice was terrified of the consequences but he did so. What do you think happened? The apprentice was still hovering near the wall, so he was told to step away, and see what happened. He was even told to push the wall. It was still standing. The point here is that he thought he was preventing something that would never have happened anyway, and sometimes you have to push hard to find out that the bad thing won't happen.
Automaticity of processes	It's like the way that your computer works when you turn it on in the morning. It whirs away for several minutes until it's ready for you to log on. During this time, although you're not really aware of it, your virus scanner is scanning your computer to check for viruses that could threaten the safety of your computer files. In a similar way, many people find that they scan their body or their mind to check for things, like thoughts or feelings, that could be threatening. Sometimes this scanning takes place without us being fully aware of it.
Changing an automatic process	Do you drive a car? Do you find that you have to think consciously about exactly how to change gear, use the pedals, and turn the steering wheel? Most people are not aware of themselves doing these tasks. But what about when you first learned to drive? Did you have to concentrate much harder then? So it seems that many things we do are automatic but we need to put in some effort and control our behaviour to learn new things. But when we've learned them, these new behaviours or ways of thinking become more automatic too. [could phrase in terms of riding a bicycle or baking a cake]

