

## **Applying Logic-Based Therapy to A Student's Stress from Parents over Grades**

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**Abstract:** Utilizing the six-step philosophical practice method of Logic-Based Therapy, this paper analyses and discusses the faulty thinking of a student who feels unworthy because of her parent's criticisms of her grades. It was written as part of a student mentorship program offered at Indian River State College wherein students coach other students about problems related to their academic life.

The person whom I coached using Logic-Based Therapy (LBT) has a problem that many students can relate to. I will refer to her as Victoria in this paper. That problem is her parents being strict on grades, but her issue is probably a little more extreme than what most other students experience. At the start of our session, she told me that she gets A's and B's on tests and assignments. Then, even with those grades, her parents tell her that it's still not good enough because she is not getting 100 percent and they compare her to her sister who gets 100 percent on everything. Continuing the conversation, she gave me a recent example. Before dinner the other day, her mom was saying a prayer for the family and said "Thank you God for our children getting A's, well a bumped up B and an A... and help them continue..." referring to the fact that she got a 91 on a test while her sister got a 100 on the same test. She then explained to me that her mom saying that during the prayer made her very upset and she left the dinner table and went to her room to cry. After that, I asked her how she feels when her parents tell her that her grades aren't good enough. She responded that she feels unworthy, and that she is not good enough. Accordingly, I applied the first step of LBT, which is to identify the emotional reasoning.

### **Victoria's Emotional Reasoning**

To accomplish this, I first identified Victoria's intentional object, which is the object of her emotion. I was able to identify her exact emotion, which is that of feeling demoralized. The sense of unworthiness that she feels when she doesn't get approval from her parents leads her to lose confidence in herself, thus feeling demoralized. The object of this emotion is her mom's criticizing her for getting low A's instead of 100 percent. Then I identified her rating, or evaluation of the intentional object, which is that she is unworthy. From these aspects of her thinking, I was able to construct her emotional reasoning as follows:

If my mom criticizes me for not getting 100 percent on exams and assignments, then I am unworthy.

My mom criticizes me for not getting 100 percent, like my sister, on exams and assignments.

Therefore, I am unworthy.

The second step of LBT is checking for fallacies in the premises. From her emotional reasoning I was able to find the fallacy in her premise. Her fallacy is Self-Damnation according to LBT's list of Cardinal Fallacies. Self-Damnation is when one devaluates oneself, as a person, because one perceives oneself to have failed in some way or done something wrong. In Victoria's case, she

feels unworthy or without merit because she is not receiving approval from her mom (which she thinks she must have in order to be worthy), but not because of the grades themselves. That logical deduction allowed me to identify another fallacy in her thinking, namely Demanding Perfection. According to LBT, Demanding Perfection involves thinking that one cannot have the world be any other way besides perfect, and that it *must* conform to one's idea of perfection. Victoria's ideal state that she demands is her mom's approval. Subsequently, this second fallacy adds onto to her emotional reasoning. Accordingly, her extended emotional reasoning was as follows:

I must have my mom's approval (Demanding Perfection).

If so, then if my mom criticizes me for not getting 100 percent on exams and assignments then I am unworthy.

Therefore, if my mom criticizes me for not getting 100 percent on exams and assignments then I am unworthy (Self-Damnation).

My mom criticizes me for not getting 100 percent on exams and assignments.  
Therefore, I am unworthy.

At that point, Victoria and I were able to see clearly that her emotional reasoning included two fallacies: Self-Damnation and Demanding Perfection. Next, I asked her on a scale of 1-10, 10 being the worst thing in the world, how she would rate her mom's criticism of her. She said that she would rate it as an 8 out of 10. A high score like that implies that she thinks her mom's criticizing her grades is really terrible and is almost the worst thing that could happen to her. She expressed that she is frustrated that her parents won't accept a 91 even though it is an A. Victoria thinks that it is not fair that her parents compare her to her sister and say she is not performing well enough.

### **Victoria's Second Line of Emotional Reasoning**

At this point in the session we were able to discover a second emotion that she was experiencing. That is the feeling of indignation because she feels frustrated by the unfair treatment from her parents. Her high rating of the event made me realize that she has a third fallacy in her thinking. LBT refers to her fallacy as Awfulizing, which is when one reasons from bad to worst. If something bad happens to you then you think it's totally terrible and is the worst (or nearly the worst) possible thing that could ever happen. Victoria feels that her parents not approving of her is totally awful, which led her to cry and get very upset. This other line of emotional reasoning was as follows:

My mom must treat me fairly (Demanding Perfection).

If so, then if my mom criticizes me for not getting 100 percent when I still get A's, then this is terrible--an 8 out of 10 on the badness scale (Awfulizing).

My mom criticizes me for not getting 100 percent when I still get A's.

Therefore, this is terrible.

## **Refuting the Fallacies**

The next step in LBT is to refute the fallacies. My first refutation that I mentioned to her was that you cannot satisfy everybody and not everyone needs to approve of you. I further explained this by saying many people have become successful without approval from their parents. She agreed with this refutation and was able to see why her Self-Damnation is irrational. Then I approached the refutation for Demanding Perfection by saying it's not a law of nature to need approval from one's parents. It is nowhere written that people need approval from their parents to be worthy. Last, the refutation I suggested for Awfulizing was that there are much worse things that could happen to her. Breaking a bone, losing one's eyesight, and/or death is much worse than her mom's criticizing her grades. Victoria agreed with these refutations and was able to begin to think in a different way about her circumstances.

## **Some Guiding Virtues and Philosophies for Victoria**

This led us to the fourth step, which is identifying the guiding virtue of each fallacy, followed by the fifth step of finding a philosophy, for each guiding virtue, that provides an antidote to the fallacy in question. I explained to Victoria that the guiding virtues are what you want to strive to have in your evaluative process and she should pick a philosophy that suites her and her morals, and with which she is comfortable. I further explained that guiding virtues help to overcome faulty thinking and to move one to adopt more rational and productive thinking. I told her that the guiding virtue to Self-Damnation is Self-Respect. Self-Respect involves unconditional, self-acceptance based on a deep philosophical understanding of human worth and dignity. A great philosophy for this guiding virtue that we both thought fit her well was Kant's philosophy, according to which one should "accept your self-worth unconditionally, not as a variable that changes with successes, failures, or the approval and disapproval of others".<sup>1</sup> This tells her not to assess her self-worth based on what other people think about her. Next, I explained that the guiding virtue for Demanding Perfection is Metaphysical Security. Metaphysical Security is the ability to accept imperfection in reality. We both chose Epictetus' philosophy as the best one for her. Epictetus holds that one should focus one's energy on things one can control instead of worrying about what one cannot control.<sup>2</sup> Victoria cannot control how her parents react to her grades so she shouldn't worry about their approval. Epictetus also provided us with a philosophy that we both agreed was a great antidote to Awfulizing. The guiding virtue to Awfulizing is Courage, which is acting according to the merits of the situation. His philosophy advocates the idea that people should compare what seems awful to much worse things and content themselves with the fact that it could be much worse.<sup>3</sup> She could think that not getting approval from her parents isn't so bad because dying or having a fatal injury would be much worse.

## **Applying the Philosophies**

The final step of LBT is applying the philosophy to her life. We were able to come up with many possible applications of the philosophies. But the best application we thought of was that when her parents don't approve of her grades or compare her unfavorably to her sister, she should do something productive and enjoyable instead of getting upset and sulking over the opinion of her parents. For example, she likes to walk her dog and go on runs, so next time her mom says that a low A isn't good enough, she could go on a walk or run and get fresh air to clear her mind. Then she could focus on the positive things and think about how she doesn't need approval from anyone. Repeatedly practicing that way of dealing with disapproval can help her overcome her faulty thinking and make her a more (metaphysically) secure and rational person.

## Assessment of the Coaching Experience

Victoria really benefitted from this LBT experience. She is really happy with the way the process went and it opened her up to new ways of thinking. Going through the six steps helped her reason through her thought process and discover the fallacies in her thinking. She totally agreed to the fallacies that I was able to point out and she thought that the refutations made sense and they really helped reform her emotional reasoning. She also felt very comfortable with the philosophies and felt that they were really helpful with reframing her thinking and promoting the guiding virtues. I also benefitted greatly from this LBT coaching experience. I learned that the best way to find someone's faulty thinking is to let them speak and explain their problem. Intervening and immediately providing a solution would not make the person comfortable and it would neglect possible fallacies in her thinking that haven't been discovered. Also, I learned that when you find one fallacy, you very well may find another that is causing the first fallacy. It seems that faulty thinking can be caused by other layers of faulty thinking. So I had to keep listening to Victoria and question her to discover new fallacies and talk to her to see if she recognizes a fault in her thinking. Next time, I will try to offer more philosophies and refutations for the person to formulate her new way of thinking. That way, this person can have more options to choose from and feel like she picked the best philosophy. Finally, I will spend more time trying to come up with ways to apply the philosophy because that is the defining step of this therapeutic approach. Providing more applications can help one to find the best way to actually change one's emotional reasoning.

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### End Notes

<sup>1</sup> Elliot D. Cohen, *The New Rational Therapy: Thinking Your Way to Serenity, Success, and Profound Happiness*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 75. This is a paraphrasing of Kant given by Cohen.

<sup>2</sup> Cohen, *New Rational Therapy*, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Cohen, *New Rational Therapy*, 61.