GENERAL

feeling good by david burns

Published: September 3, 2026 | Index ID: #-

Feeling Good by David Burns: A Transformative Guide to Mental Well Being

In an era where mental health is at the forefront of public discourse, the quest for reliable, evidence based tools to manage mood and anxiety has never been more urgent. Among the most influential resources available today is **Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy** , a classic self help book written by psychiatrist Dr. David D. Burns. First published in 1980, the book has sold millions of copies worldwide and remains a cornerstone for both clinicians and lay readers seeking practical strategies to overcome negative thinking.

This article offers a comprehensive exploration of *Feeling Good*, delving into its core concepts, therapeutic techniques, and real world impact. Whether you're a mental health professional looking for a refresher, or someone who simply wants to improve your own emotional resilience, the insights presented here will help you navigate the book's transformative ideas with confidence.

About Dr. David D. Burns

Dr. Burns is a psychiatrist and a pioneer in the field of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). He earned his medical degree from the University of Pennsylvania and later completed training in psychiatry at the Yale School of Medicine. Over the course of his career, he has authored more than 20 books, including the highly acclaimed *Feeling Good* series, and has been recognized as one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th century.

His work is distinguished by a clear, engaging writing style that demystifies complex psychological concepts. Dr. Burns also developed the *Thought Record* and the *Negative Thought Record*, tools that have become standard practice in CBT therapy worldwide.

What Is Feeling Good About?

At its core, *Feeling Good*is a practical guide that teaches readers how to recognize and reframe the automatic negative thoughts that fuel depression, anxiety, and other mood disorders. Drawing on the principles of CBT, the book offers a step by step framework for identifying cognitive distortions, challenging them, and replacing them with healthier, evidence based beliefs.

The book is structured around three primary sections:

- Part One: The Science of Mood – explains how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors interconnect.
- Part Two: Cognitive Distortions – identifies common thinking errors that sabotage mental well being.
- Part Three: Practical Tools – provides worksheets, exercises, and real life examples to apply the concepts.

Why It Still Resonates

Even decades after its publication, *Feeling Good*remains relevant because its core ideas are rooted in robust psychological research. The book's emphasis on self efficacy, structured problem solving, and the power of language aligns with contemporary therapeutic practices. Moreover, its accessible format makes it suitable for readers of all backgrounds, from students and professionals to caregivers and family members.

Core Concepts of Feeling Good

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a structured, time limited therapy that focuses on the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Dr. Burns popularized CBT by simplifying its core tenets, allowing readers to apply therapeutic techniques without formal training.

The three pillars of CBT, as presented in *Feeling Good*, are:

1. Thoughts: Automatic mental processes that influence mood.
2. Feelings: Emotional responses that arise from thoughts.
3. Behaviors: Actions that either reinforce or challenge thoughts.

Cognitive Distortions

Dr. Burns identifies 12 common cognitive distortions that distort reality and foster negative emotions. Below is a brief overview of each distortion and how it manifests in everyday life:

- All or Nothing Thinking: Viewing situations in black or white terms, ignoring the gray areas.
- Overgeneralization: Drawing broad conclusions from a single event.
- Filtering: Focusing only on negative aspects while ignoring positives.
- Discounting the Positive: Rejecting good experiences as unimportant.
- Jumping to Conclusions: Assuming negative outcomes without evidence.
- Magnification (Catastrophizing): Exaggerating the severity of a situation.
- Minimization: Downplaying personal strengths or achievements.
- Emotional Reasoning: Believing that feelings reflect objective truth.
- Should Statements: Rigid expectations that lead to guilt or frustration.
- Labeling: Assigning negative labels to oneself or others.
- Personalization: Taking responsibility for events outside one's control.
- Blame: Attributing problems solely to others.

Thought Records

A central tool in *Feeling Good* is the *Thought Record*, a worksheet that helps readers track:

1. Situation
2. Automatic thoughts
3. Emotions (rated on a scale of 0–100)
4. Evidence for and against the thoughts
5. Alternative, balanced thoughts
6. Resulting emotional change

By systematically evaluating thoughts, individuals learn to replace distorted beliefs with realistic, evidence based alternatives, thereby reducing negative affect.

Practical Techniques from Feeling Good

1. Identifying and Challenging Negative Thoughts

Step 1: Notice the thought.
Step 2: Ask yourself if it's fact or interpretation.
Step 3: Gather evidence that supports or contradicts the thought.
Step 4: Replace the distorted thought with a balanced perspective.

2. The "What If" Exercise

This exercise helps individuals confront catastrophic thinking. By asking, “What if the worst happens?” and then systematically evaluating the likelihood and impact, readers can reduce anxiety and gain perspective.

3. The “Positive Self Statement” Technique

Dr. Burns recommends creating a list of positive, self affirming statements that counteract common distortions. Repeating these statements daily can rewire negative neural pathways.

4. Behavioral Activation

Engaging in rewarding activities can counteract depressive symptoms. The book outlines a simple schedule for planning enjoyable tasks and tracking mood improvements.

Applying Feeling Good in Everyday Life

Below are actionable strategies for integrating the book’s principles into daily routines:

- Morning Reflection: Spend 5 minutes writing down three positive experiences from the previous day.
- Midday Thought Check: When feeling overwhelmed, pause and identify any negative thoughts using the thought record template.
- Evening Review: Reflect on the day’s successes and areas for improvement, noting any patterns in cognitive distortions.
- Weekly Goal Setting: Choose one new behavior to practice that aligns with your values (e.g., exercise, meditation).

Impact and Reception of Feeling Good

Since its release, *Feeling Good* has received widespread acclaim for its clarity and effectiveness:

- Over 12 million copies sold worldwide.
- Endorsements from leading mental health professionals, including the American Psychological Association.
- Inclusion in clinical training programs for CBT.
- Positive reviews highlighting its user friendly format and evidence based approach.

Studies have shown that readers who consistently apply the book’s techniques experience significant reductions in depressive symptoms and improvements in self esteem.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is Feeling Good suitable for people with severe depression?

While the book provides valuable tools, individuals with severe or chronic depression should seek professional therapy. *Feeling Good* can complement formal treatment but is not a substitute for clinical care.

Can the techniques be used for anxiety disorders?

Yes. The cognitive restructuring methods are effective for generalized anxiety, panic, and social anxiety. The book offers specific exercises tailored to anxiety symptoms.

Do I need to be a mental health professional to use this book?

No. The book is written in plain language and includes worksheets that guide readers through each step, making it accessible to anyone.

How to Get the Most Out of Feeling Good

1. Read Actively: Keep a journal to record insights and questions.
2. Use the Worksheets: Print or copy the thought records and complete them regularly.
3. Seek Support: Discuss your progress with a friend, family member, or therapist.
4. Revisit the Book: Re read chapters when you encounter new challenges.
5. Apply to Relationships: Use the techniques to improve communication and reduce conflict.

Conclusion

*Feeling Good*by David D. Burns remains a timeless resource for anyone seeking to transform negative thinking patterns into healthier, more constructive beliefs. By combining rigorous scientific research with practical, step by step guidance, the book empowers readers to take control of their mood, reduce anxiety, and cultivate lasting emotional resilience. Whether you're a mental health professional, a student of psychology, or simply someone who wants to feel better, the strategies outlined in this classic text offer a roadmap toward a brighter, more balanced life.

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