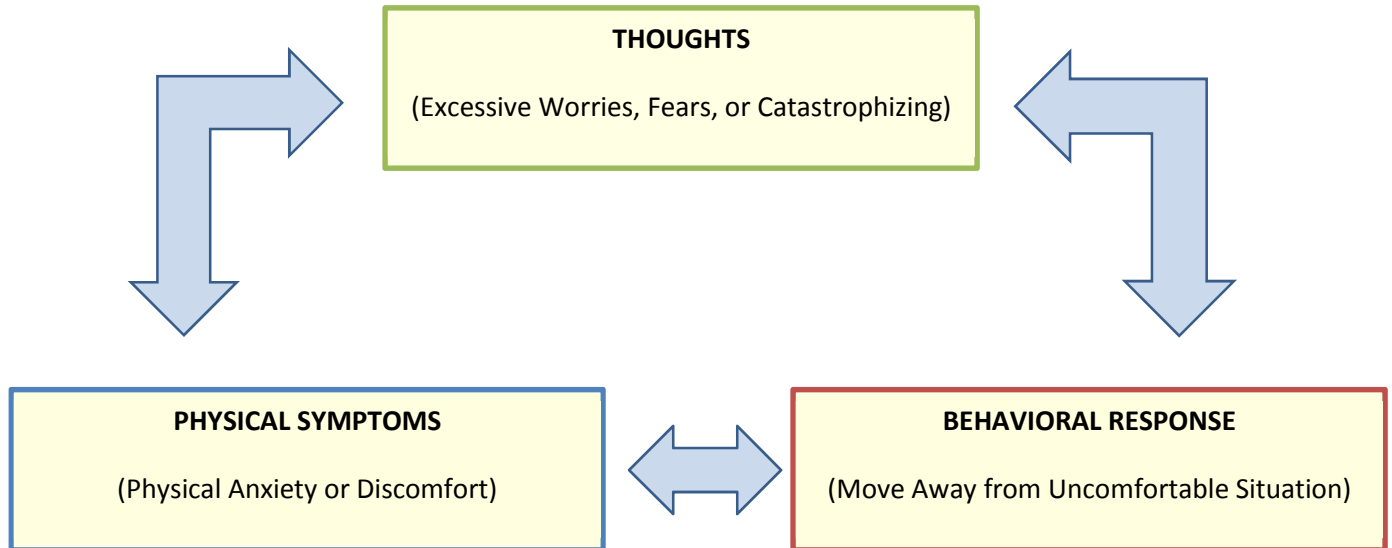


# The Three Parts of Anxiety

One way to think about anxiety is to break it down into components related to thinking, feeling, and behavior:



From the above diagram, we can see that there is a lot of interplay between our thoughts, actions, and physical sensations. An exaggerated fear of thought will naturally cause anxiety, which will in turn cause one to avoid the object or situation that gave rise to the thought. This is the assumptive rationale behind Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT): change the distorted or irrational thought, and the person will feel more relaxed, which should allow them to challenge those things that previously caused them distress or anxiety.

But sometimes people may feel anxious or distressed without necessarily having an 'anxious thought.' Anxiety therefore starts at a physical level, apparently without cause, or at least without one that the person is consciously aware of. Since anxiety is a distressing state, we naturally move away from things that trigger it, which unfortunately reinforces the anxiety (the person has escaped the physical discomfort).

What is interesting about the above diagram is recognizing that there are at least 3 different ways to treat anxiety. As already mentioned, one could use self-help books or a CBT approach in therapy to challenge distorted thinking. One might alternatively use a classical behavioral approach involving graded exposure: if anxiety is partially maintained through avoidance of the anxiety-provoking object or situation, it makes sense that it can be challenged through incrementally facing it. This kind of approach is often helpful for specific kinds of fears or phobias. Finally, one might work with a therapist to address the physical symptoms of anxiety – trying to identify the root cause or set of triggers, which may be related to some underlying feeling or even an outmoded way of coping that was somehow adaptive in light of one's personal history.

In sum, anxiety can be understood from several angles. A good therapist should know how to work with anxiety in various ways and should provide a tailored approach to suit your individual situation and therapeutic needs.