

Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) is a type of psychotherapeutic treatment that helps patients to understand the thoughts and feelings that influence behaviors. CBT is commonly used to treat a wide range of disorders, including phobias, addiction, depression and anxiety.

Cognitive behavior therapy is generally short-term and focused on helping clients deal with a very specific problem. During the course of treatment, people learn how to identify and change destructive or disturbing thought patterns that have a negative influence on behavior.

Cognitive Behavior Therapy Basics

The underlying concept behind CBT is that our thoughts and feelings play a fundamental role in our behavior. For example, a person who spends a lot of time thinking about plane crashes, runway accidents and other air disasters may find themselves avoiding air travel. The goal of cognitive behavior therapy is to teach patients that while they cannot control every aspect of the world around them, they can take control of how they interpret and deal with things in their environment.

Cognitive behavior therapy has become increasingly popular in recent years, with both mental health consumers and treatment professionals. Because CBT is usually a short-term treatment option, it is often more affordable than some other therapeutic options. CBT is also empirically supported and has been shown to effectively help patients overcome a wide variety of maladaptive behaviors.

Types of Cognitive Behavior Therapy

According to the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies, “Cognitive and behavioural psychotherapies are a range of therapies based on concepts and principles derived from psychological models of human emotion and behaviour. They include a wide range of treatment approaches for emotional disorders, along a continuum from structured individual psychotherapy to self help material.”

There are a number of different approaches to CBT that are regularly used by mental health professionals. These types include:

- Rational Emotive Therapy
- Cognitive Therapy
- Multimodal Therapy

The Components of Cognitive Behavior Therapy

People often experience thoughts or feelings that reinforce or compound faulty beliefs. Such beliefs can result in problematic behaviors that may affect numerous life areas, including family, romantic relationships, work and academics. For example, a person suffering from low self-esteem might experience negative thoughts about his or her own abilities or appearance. As a result of these negative thinking patterns, the individual might start avoiding social situations or pass up on opportunities for advancement at work or at school.

In order to combat these destructive thoughts and behaviors, a cognitive behavior therapist will start by helping the client to identify the problematic beliefs. This stage, known as functional analysis, is important for learning how thoughts, feelings and situations can contribute to maladaptive behaviors. The process can be difficult, especially for patients who struggle with introspection, but it can ultimately lead to self-discovery and insight that are an essential part of the treatment process.

The second part of cognitive behavior therapy focuses on the actual behaviors that are contributing to the problem. The client begins to learn and practice new skills that can then be put into use in real-world situations. For example, a person suffering from drug addiction might start practicing new coping skills and rehearse ways to avoid or deal with social situations that might trigger a relapse.

In most cases, CBT is a gradual process that helps a person make incremental steps towards a behavior change. Someone suffering from social anxiety might start by simply imagining himself in an anxiety-provoking social situation. Next, the client might start practicing conversations with friends, family and acquaintances. By progressively working toward a larger goal, the process seems less daunting and the goal seems easier to achieve.

Uses of Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Cognitive behavior therapy has been used to treat people suffering from a wide range of disorders, including anxiety, phobias, depression, addiction and a variety of maladaptive behaviors. CBT is one of the most researched types of therapy, in part because treatment is focused on a highly specific goal and results can be measured relatively easily.

Cognitive behavior therapy is often best suited for clients who are comfortable with introspection. In order for CBT to be effective, the individual must be ready and willing to spend time and effort analyzing his or her thoughts and feelings. Such self-analysis can be difficult, but it is a great way to learn more about how internal states impact outward behavior.

Cognitive behavior therapy is also well-suited for people looking for a short-term treatment options that does not necessarily involve pharmacological medication. One of the greatest benefits of CBT is that it helps clients develop coping skills that can be useful both now and in the future.

Criticisms of Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Initially, some patients suggest that while they recognize that certain thoughts are not rational or healthy, simply becoming aware of these thoughts does not make it easy to stop having them. It is important to note that CBT does not just involve identifying these thought patterns; it is focused on using a wide range of strategies to help clients overcome these thoughts. Such strategies may include journaling, role-playing, relaxation techniques and mental distractions.