



COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY (CBT)
Information for Patients and Families
Covenant Health
Mental Health Program
Grey Nuns Community Hospital & Misericordia Community Hospital

What is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a type of talk therapy used to help people overcome a wide range of problems. While the description of CBT in this pamphlet uses depression as the main example, CBT is also used to treat many other problems, such as anxiety disorders and various personality problems. It is one of the most widely researched and scientifically supported psychological therapies currently available.

According to cognitive theory, the way a person interprets their experiences determines how they will feel and behave. For example, if a person interprets a situation as dangerous, this might result in anxiety (feeling) and attempts to escape (behavior).

For certain types of problems, such as depression, there are often changes in the way the person processes information. This causes distortions in how they view their day to day experiences. For example, a depressed person habitually holds a negative view of themselves, the world and people around them and their future. This negative point of view helps to maintain and/or magnify the depression.

CBT is a structured approach to helping people learn how to examine their thoughts, feelings and behaviors in the light of available evidence. The goal of such analysis is to help people to determine if their thinking is realistic (supported by the evidence) and helpful (is working for them). The outcome is that the individual learns to generate other ways of thinking (and feeling) about this type of situation or points to changes he/she needs to make in the situation itself.

How Is CBT Done?

CBT can be conducted in groups or in one-on-one sessions with a CBT therapist. A number of studies have shown that for the majority of people group therapy is as effective as individual treatment. For some people and for some problems, group therapy may actually be more helpful than one-on-one treatment.

CBT is time limited and very structured. An average course of CBT treatment is usually 12 to 14 sessions. However, for some problems therapy can last 20 sessions or more. The sessions are generally conducted once per week for one hour (for one-to-one therapy) to two hours (for group therapy). For people being treated while they are patients in hospital, the sessions may be more frequent.

CBT involves learning skills necessary for examining thoughts, feelings and behaviors in various (usually stressful) situations. These tools include such things as thought records, behavioral experiments and action plans.

Thought Records are used to clearly examine a specific situation, and the resulting moods and thoughts in the situation. Then the thoughts are examined in relation to facts that support and facts that don't support the thoughts.

Based on the facts, the individual learns to develop alternative ways of thinking and thereby change their emotions and behaviors. If the evidence supports the uncomfortable thought, then CBT suggests ways to alter the situation.

Life experience leaves people with a particular set of 'core beliefs' about themselves, others and the world around them and about the future. These beliefs may include ideas like "I have value", "people are trustworthy", "the world is fair" or "the future offers possibilities for positive change".

For most people these beliefs are flexible. However, for people suffering with things like depression or anxiety, they may get 'stuck' in their beliefs that are mainly negative. They may include beliefs like "I am worthless", "people are not dependable", "the world is dangerous" or "nothing will ever change".

'Underlying assumptions' develop in association with the person's core beliefs. Underlying assumptions are generally 'if ... then' statements. A depressed person may have underlying assumptions such as 'if I reach out to others for support then I will only be rejected and disappointed'.

In CBT, tools like Behavioral Experiments are used to help people test out their core beliefs and underlying assumptions. As with the Thought Record, the Behavioral Experiment guides the person through a process of information gathering, evidence testing and generation of alternative ways of viewing themselves, those around them, the world and the future.

Referral Criteria

Currently, individuals diagnosed with a wide range of Affective Disorders such as Bipolar Disorder, Major Depressive Disorder, Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Obsessive Compulsive Disorder may be referred for CBT. Various forms of CBT are also being applied effectively to problems that may be more resistant to change. These problems include such things as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and various long-standing personality problems.

Referral Procedure

Generally any physician who has admitting privileges at the Grey Nuns Community Hospital may refer their patients for CBT. In the case of group therapy, it is also possible to accept referrals from allied health professionals within the hospital.

Individual therapy is offered to persons who are currently or have been inpatients within the past 60 days.

Usually individual therapy referrals are only accepted from physicians working in the Mental Health program.

Where can you get more information?

- ask your doctor or nurse
- call Health Link - 780 408-5465

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