

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

What is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy?

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is a therapeutic approach based on the premise that the cause of a client's distress is the presence of distorted and inaccurate perceptions of reality. They don't see things as they really are. This leads in turn to faulty behaviour.

Changing the way we think and behave is key to CBT. According to CBT, inaccurate perceptions lead to the development of irrational beliefs and responses to situations.

CBT aims to achieve and maintain emotional and psychological health by correcting faulty perceptions and replacing them with more accurate ones, accompanied by the corresponding accurate behaviour.

To help clients, therapists get clients to look critically at their beliefs. They consider whether the beliefs that are causing their distress are faulty and untrue. Challenging faulty beliefs assists clients to see things more accurately.

Clients then take up new, more accurate and positive beliefs about themselves. Their behaviour correspondingly changes in line with their new beliefs. They may try things that previously they thought they could not do, such as learning a new skill.

Clients are then more able to move forward with their lives and live more positively and confidently. Their self-confidence improves and their anxiety and distress diminish.

Faulty Beliefs

Therapists uncover inaccurate and mistaken perceptions by questioning clients and getting them to examine the sources of their beliefs. For example, a client may believe she is a worthless person because her father yelled at her as a child or her boss fired her for making mistakes.

As a result of these experiences, the client becomes shy and withdrawn. She finds it difficult to speak up for herself. This would be an example of 'over-generalisation' – assuming that one or a few events represent the whole. This is one of many kinds of inaccurate perceptions that we could have.

To help this client, the therapist will prompt her to examine the cause of her belief that she is worthless. When the client discovers that the occurrence of one or a few incidents is insufficient to draw such an over-arching conclusion, she realises that her belief is based on faulty premises.

The therapist will then ask the client what would be a more accurate belief to hold, such as, 'I am a worthwhile person even if I make sometimes mistakes or don't please everyone all the time.'

When clients see that their beliefs and responses are not connected to the reality of the situation, the door is open to cognitive change, that is, producing and maintaining accurate and usually, more positive beliefs.

To be successful, CBT requires the cooperation of clients, their acceptance of the need for change, and their willingness to actively participate in challenging their often deeply held assumptions. The skill, insight and support of the therapist will help them do this.

If you would like to know more, or think that CBT could help you, get in touch with us via the details below.

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