

Cognitive Therapy

What is Cognitive Therapy?

Cognitive Therapy is a therapeutic approach that holds 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 to distressed feelings and faulty behaviour. It follows that if we correct the distorted thinking, feelings and behaviour will likewise be corrected.

Cognitive Therapy is especially attributed to Aaron Beck, and has been developed into various models by many others. Especially, it has developed to include modifying behaviour as well as thoughts, and now often referred to as *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy* or *CBT*. CBT is one of the most popular, evidence based therapies used in the mental health industry, especially by counsellors.

Faulty Beliefs

To help clients, therapists encourage clients to look critically at their beliefs. They look at the source of the beliefs that are causing the distress, and consider whether they are faulty and untrue. Challenging faulty beliefs assists clients to see things more accurately. This is often not easy, as beliefs can be ingrained and difficult to change.

The next step is for clients to take up new, more accurate and positive beliefs about themselves. 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, stepping out of their comfort zone, or being more assertive. This is where the behaviour change occurs.

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.

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 As a result of these experiences, the client becomes shy and withdrawn.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 do not reflect reality, the door is open to cognitive change and producing and maintaining accurate and usually, more positive beliefs.

Successful Cognitive Therapy 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 think that Cognitive Therapy or CBT could help you, get in touch via the details below.

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