

A short guide to CBT

What is CBT?

CBT stands for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and is a mixture of Cognitive therapy and Behaviour therapy. Cognitive therapy examines our thoughts, ideas, beliefs, attitudes and mental images, to identify whether the difficulties we experience are a result of the way we think. Whereas behaviour therapy focuses on our actions to establish whether these are harmful and cause us problems in some way.

CBT asserts that the way we think affects how we behave and vice versa, and ultimately, determines how we feel. Therefore in order to feel better we can change unhelpful ways we think and behave which cause us distress.

What does CBT entail?

CBT is a type of 'talking therapy' which typically involves meeting with a therapist on a weekly basis for approximately 50 minutes at a time to discuss any issues or problems. Unlike other talking therapies, clients take a more active role in CBT, working collaboratively with the therapist to develop a shared understanding of their difficulties and devise a plan of how to tackle these, rather than being told what to do. Clients are expected to do 'homework' outside of sessions which is important as it helps them consolidate, and apply the techniques they have learned in therapy.

CBT also focuses more on current thoughts and behaviours and how they affect the present rather than dwelling on past events.

CBT generally lasts between 6-20 sessions, although the number of sessions required depends on the nature and severity of the clients' problems and their needs.

What problems can CBT help treat?

CBT can help with a variety of problems, including anxiety, panic, phobias, depression, anger, stress, obsessive compulsive disorder and sleep problems, to name a few.

How effective is CBT?

Research has shown that CBT is an effective treatment for a wide range of issues (including the above) and has been found to be as effective as medication for treating depression and certain anxiety disorders.

What are the pros and cons of CBT?

CBT may not be effective for all conditions and may not suit everyone. For instance, those with complex mental health needs may struggle with its structured nature. Furthermore, the outcome of treatment is often dependent on a clients' commitment to tackle their problems and work hard, as well as their ability to apply what they have learned in sessions to their everyday lives which is not always easy or possible.

Nevertheless, some people thrive with CBT because they like its practical and problem focused nature. Moreover, CBT takes place over a relatively short period of time but can have long lasting benefits since the techniques learned to combat problems enable clients to essentially become their own therapist.

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