

CBT – Cognitive Behaviour Therapy

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is a recognised talking therapy that combines cognitive approaches and behaviour therapy. Focusing on how you think about the things going on in your life – your thoughts, images, beliefs and attitudes and how this impacts the way you behave and deal with emotional problems. It follows this through with looking at how you can change negative patterns of thinking or behaviour that may be causing you difficulties. In turn, this can change the way you feel.

CBT tends to be short, taking six weeks to six months. You will usually attend a session once a week, each session lasting either 50 minutes or an hour. Together with the therapist you will explore what your concerns are and develop a plan for tackling them. You will learn a set of principles that you can apply whenever you need to. You may find them useful long after you have left therapy.

CBT may focus on what is going on in the present rather than the past. However, the therapy may also look at your past and how your past experiences impact on how you interpret the world now.

What happens in a CBT session?

CBT sessions have a structure. At the beginning of the therapy, you will meet with the therapist to describe specific problems and to set goals you want to work towards.

When you have agreed what problems you want to focus on and what your goals are, you start planning the content of sessions and discuss how to deal with your problems. Typically, at the beginning of a session, you and the therapist will jointly decide on the main topics you want to

work on that week. You will also be given time to discuss the conclusions from the previous session. With CBT you are also given homework, and you will look at the progress made with the homework you were set last time. At the end of the session, you will plan another homework assignment to do outside the sessions.

The client-therapist relationship

CBT favours an equal relationship. It is focused and practical. One-to-one CBT can bring you into a kind of relationship you may not have had before. The 'collaborative' style means that you are actively involved in the therapy. The therapist seeks your views and reactions, which then shape the way the therapy progresses. The therapist will not judge you. This may help you feel able to open up and talk about very personal matters. You will learn to make decisions in an adult way, as issues are opened up and explained. Some people will value this experience as the most important aspect of therapy.

How effective is CBT?

Clinical trials have shown that CBT can reduce the symptoms of many emotional disorders. For some people it can work just as well as drug therapies at treating depression and anxiety disorders. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommends CBT for common mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety.

(This extract is adapted from 'Making sense of cognitive behaviour therapy' at Mind)