

What is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

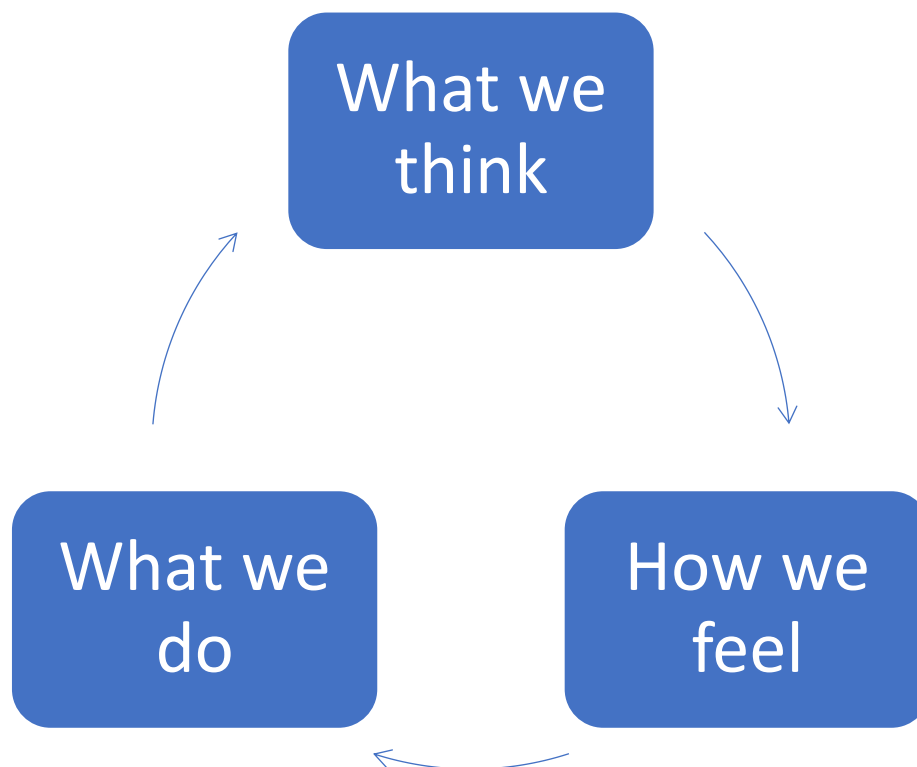
CBT is a fun and creative talking therapy which has been shown to be very effective in treating many mental health difficulties in children and adolescents including anxiety, panic and OCD to name a few.

CBT can be adapted for children with ASD and/or ADHD, and can easily utilise their natural interests and hobbies (a great motivator for many children!).

CBT works on the premise that it is not the situation itself that makes us feel the way we do, but the way we think about and evaluate it. The aim of CBT is to identify unhelpful negative thoughts and thinking styles, and change them into more helpful thoughts.

Although proven to be helpful for many mental health difficulties, its simple ideas and techniques are useful to us all to enable us to think about the world in more positive and realistic ways.

How does CBT work?



In any given situation, a thought/s are triggered which may be considered unhelpful and negative and this leads to a behaviour which is also considered unhelpful. For example, a teacher tells her class that there is going to be a surprise test today during



the lesson. A child thinks 'I am going to fail; I can't do this'. This causes the child to feel anxious and afraid. As a consequence, the child runs out of the class and locks herself in the toilet, refusing to come out. Although perfectly understandable (I would want to run away if someone told me I had to sit a surprise test) and helps to make the child feel instantly better (phew! I've escaped the test!), it actually only acts to keep the anxiety going. If faced with the same situation again and the teacher again springs a surprise test on the class, the child would believe that the only way they could cope is to run out of class and hide in the toilet. A vicious cycle!

CBT would help a child to identify what thoughts are triggered in these difficult, problematic situations and why they may make the child feel the way they do. We thought learn together different ways of challenging these thoughts, and testing out their validity. This is done using lots of fun games, drawings, experiments, and for younger children, lots of play!

CBT also helps the child notice different ways they might behave when they think in the unhelpful ways that they do, and again, learn why such behaviours might inadvertently keep the problem going. We learn to notice behaviours such as avoidance and reassurance seeking which often makes a child feel better, but only make the problem worse. It is important to work together with the family and wider system such as school at this point as avoidance and reassurance seeking can also be maintained by the ways it is responded to by others. Slowly, and with the child in the control, we would act to break down avoidance patterns and reduce/stop reassurance seeking.

Although CBT can be effective, it isn't right for everyone and that's OK. It is my job to adapt the therapy and utilise other approaches to best meet the needs of the child and the complexity of the presenting problem.