
COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or CBT is one of the most often recommended therapies for many mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, panic disorder, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, low self-esteem, anger and behavioral problems. Pioneered by Dr. Aaron Beck, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pennsylvania, CBT has now been shown in a number of studies to be one of the most effective methods of treating these problems.

CBT begins with the premise that our feelings and actions are primarily determined by our thought, attitudes and beliefs. This is not a new concept. The ancient philosopher Epictetus is quoted as having said “Men are disturbed not by things, but by the view which they take of them.” Henry Ford said “Whether you think you can or you think you can’t, you’re right!” The Random House College Dictionary defines a belief as an “opinion or “confidence in the truth of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof”. Therefore beliefs do not equal truth but merely opinion. Strongly held beliefs can help a person or stand in their way but since they are opinion rather than truth, they can be changed.

Thought patterns, attitudes and beliefs about self, relationships and the world become established during childhood and adolescence. Attitudes and patterns are assimilated by observing and mimicking parents and other important people in one’s life. They are also formulated in response to difficult situations over which the person had no control. These beliefs and habits of thought then become automatic and out of consciousness for the most part, leaving the person in the confusing position of not understanding why he feels what he feels or does what he does. The result is to feel helpless and powerless to change things. For example, a child may watch a parent get very upset about seeing a spider. He assimilates the belief that spiders are scary and dangerous. The original incident is soon forgotten but the belief becomes lodged in the child’s subconscious and as an adult he finds that he is terrified of spiders.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy teaches techniques for identifying automatic thoughts and core beliefs. It also guides one in changing them regardless of whether the origin is clear or not. It focuses on helping one recognize the most common thought pitfalls and harmful thinking patterns, such as Black and White Thinking, Awfulizing, Fortune Telling, Mind Reading, Should Statements and the Fairness Fallacy and then provides tools for substituting other, more helpful thoughts.

The behavioral component of therapy focuses on helping the client become more aware of the specific aspects of their behaviors, and experiments with the substitution of new behaviors for old habits as well as intervening in negative cycles through systematic desensitization, relaxation, exposure therapy and problem solving.

Linda S. Stead, LSCW
670 Superior Ct, Ste. 103, Medford OR 97504
<http://www.lend-an-ear.com>