

# COGNITIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY

is a short-term focused approach to the treatment of emotional, behavioural & psychiatric problems.

CBT aims at rapid improvement in feelings, moods, & early changes in self-defeating behaviours.

Most people who come to counselling through an **EFAP** come with the need to change something about their lives. For example, they may wish to change the way they act, the way they feel, or the way other people treat them.

For most of us it is difficult to behave differently than we think or feel. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) addresses this by combining two very effective forms of psychotherapy - cognitive therapy and behaviour therapy.

- **Cognitive Therapy** addresses how certain thinking patterns are causing or contributing to your problems / symptoms. These cognitive distortions about what is going on in your life can make you feel anxious, depressed or angry without reason and can provoke you into poorly chosen actions.
- **Behaviour Therapy** addresses the connections between troublesome situations and your habitual reactions to them (such as fear, rage, or depression). Behaviour therapy weakens the connections by teaching you to calm your mind and body so you feel better, think more clearly and make better choices.

These therapies combined provide powerful tools that help individuals identify counterproductive thoughts and behaviours and learn healthier skills and habits.

## CBT Is Not New

Pioneered by psychologists Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis in the 1960s, CBT has been in extensive use by therapists for more than 30 years with demonstrated effectiveness with a wide variety of emotional illnesses. CBT has been described as -

- **an active therapy** with both you and the therapist taking an active part in solving your problems. CBT is similar to coaching in that under expert guidance you will share in setting therapy goals and deciding which techniques work best for you.
- **structured or focused therapy** as it stays the course, changing only when there are good reasons to do so.

CBT examines all elements that maintain a problem, including our thoughts (cognitions), feelings, behaviour, and our environment. As an active, structured and focused therapy, both you and your counsellor are fully involved with each session including discussion, explanation and practice of skills and techniques. As homework you often practice these skills.

While the therapy sounds simple, it takes a skillful therapist to be effective. Most counsellors at the masters or doctorate level will have had training in CBT.



## Is CBT Different From Other Therapies?

CBT tends to be **more centered in the present and more forward oriented** than a number of the more traditional therapies. Some of the more traditional therapies explore clients' life histories. This can be helpful if their current problems result from a repeated pattern of difficulties. While focusing on the past can help to explain a person's difficulties and provide insight for the person, all too often the therapies do little to help the person overcome their current problems.

## Why Is CBT Popular & Recommended?

In the last decade or so, a number of groups in Canada, Britain, and the States have endeavoured to identify and publicize empirically supported psychological interventions.

CBT has been extensively investigated in rigorous clinical studies and, as a result, its effectiveness is empirically supported. **Empirically supported means evidence for its effectiveness is based on research and observation (outcomes) not just theory.**

In particular, CBT has demonstrated effectiveness (and the endorsement of the American Psychological Association) for problems such as- stress, depression, generalized anxiety, panic disorder, and marital stress.

CBT is also recommended as-

- it is compatible with a number of other medical treatments you might be receiving
- it is individualized and can be adapted to a wide variety of settings
- the individual is actively involved so is more likely to stick with the therapy
- the therapy is often intermittent, as and when needed
- what the client learns is transferable to other problems

## What Happens In A CBT Session?

Typically a CBT session would begin with the client and therapist together deciding what topics would be discussed and what cognitive and behavioural techniques would be used in the session. For example, the techniques might include learning to identify and change ways of thinking that prevent the client from achieving their goals.

The session may end with an agreement on activities to be completed by the client before the next session. This may be reading related material or practicing some of the techniques learned in the session.

## How Long Does CBT Take?

Unlearning troublesome, maladaptive behaviours and establishing new ways of dealing with various aspects of life are usually quite gradual. The time needed is dependent on the severity of the problems and the areas of functioning (work, family, or self-management) that have been impacted.