

An Introduction to Cognitive Behavior Therapy: An Evidence Based Treatment

About twenty years ago, the Neuropsychologist who directed one of my work/study programs stated:

“Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) involves changing the way we think, to change the way we feel, to improve the way we live.”

Since hearing this, I have devoted much of my professional training and practice to exploration and application of it in helping others improve their day-to-day quality of life. The following introductory overview is taken from a book by the CBT pioneering psychiatrist Aaron T, Beck M.D.:

Cognitive Therapy and The Emotional Disorders

The Principles of Cognitive Behavior Therapy

CBT Principle One: Psychological disorders center around problems in thinking.

CBT Treatment Approach: Psychological skills can be applied to correcting the psychological aberrations.

CBT Principle Two: Cognitive therapy is made up of approaches that alleviate psychological distress through the medium of correcting faulty conceptions and self-signals. The three main methods for making more realistic appraisals of oneself and one's world are:

- Intellectual Approach-This consists of identifying misconceptions, testing their truth and validity, and then substituting more appropriate concepts and thoughts.
- Experiential Approach-This exposed one to experiences that are powerful enough to change misconceptions.
- Behavioral Approach-This approach encourages the development of specific forms of behavior leading to more general changes in ways one views self and the real world.

Aims and Techniques of CBT

CBT techniques are most appropriate for helping people who are already capable of introspection and reflecting about their own thoughts and fantasies. This kind of intellectual functioning is analogous to formation of speech. The rules of pronunciation and grammatical construction become applied without a consciousness of rules.

Four Beginning Target Questions of CBT

1. Am I ready to communicate about possible incorrect judgments having probably become deeply ingrained?
2. Have I become aware of what I have been thinking?
3. Do I recognize what thoughts are awry?

4. Do I recognize feedback necessary for making behavioral changes such as correcting or improving a move in a sport or dance?

CBT Considers Powerful, Tangible Distortions of Reality

This area presents approaches to helping with less obvious distortions in one's perception of reality. For example, a business person who is depressed might say, "I lost this deal and I feel like I am about to go bankrupt." Upon examination of the business person's bank accounts, it is apparent that the business is completely solvent and actually thriving.

The label "Distortion of Reality" is in order because an objective appraisal of the situation contradicts the business person's appraisal.

What are some other examples of distortions of reality?

CBT and Illogical Thinking

This takes into account that your appraisal of reality may not be distorted. What may have been happening is that your system of making inferences and coming to conclusions for your observations may be at fault. CBT helps develop new insights and approaches for healthier outcomes.

CBT is a Therapeutic Collaboration

A basic component of effective psychotherapy is a real collaboration between therapist and patient. It is effective CBT practice to conceive of the patient and therapist relationship as a joint venture.

Primarily, it is not the therapist's job to try to reform the patient. The therapist's role is working with the patient against "it." The "it" is the problem the patient wants to address.

This emphasizing solving problems, as opposed to focusing on presumed bad habits or disorders, helps people examine personal difficulties with less shame, less sense of inferiority, and less divisiveness. This kind of partnership of patient and therapist helps to determine the effectiveness of treatment.

CBT is a Credible Approach

The appropriate CBT approach is within the following message from a CBT therapist to a patient:

"You have experienced certain ideas that upset you. The ideas may or may not be accurate. Let us examine the ideas."

Problem Reduction

Problems can come in clusters. Solving each problem may literally take a lifetime. Identifying problems with similar causes and grouping them together is termed "problem reduction."

The principle of problem reduction is applicable to groups of symptoms that make up a specific disorder such as depression or anxiety. By focusing on specific components of a disorder, such as poor

self-image or constant negative thoughts, the therapy results in improvement in mood, obvious behavior, hygiene, sleep and other self-care.

Also, “problem reduction” is the identification of catalyst or first link in a chain of symptoms. An in-depth history can possibly delineate causal sequences.

Learning to Learn

It is not necessarily the job of therapy to help solve every problem that is troubling us. It is not necessary to anticipate all the problems that might happen after formal therapy ends. Effective therapeutic collaboration is conducive to developing new ways to learn from personal experiences and to solve problems. In a sense, in this approach we are *learning to learn*.

“Learning to learn” is much more than adopting techniques for use in a variety of situations. **At the heart of it is attempting to remove obstacles that have prevented you from profiting from experience and from developing ways of dealing with internal and external problems.**

Where to from here?

Before proceeding with formal therapy, ask yourself:

What, if anything, has fostered maladaptive growth for me?

Is there any problem solving I have long avoided?