

# WHAT IS COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY?

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- **WHAT IS CBT?** The key idea behind Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is that...



Sometimes, through no fault of their own, people get 'stuck' in vicious cycles: the things they do to solve a problem can inadvertently keep it going. CBT is about finding out what is keeping us 'stuck' and making changes in our thinking and doing things differently in order to improve the way we feel. CBT works with thoughts and feelings in the here-and-now, however with many people we do find it useful at times to review the sources of your problems to understand the impact they have in the present.

- **NUMBER OF SESSIONS:** If you are offered Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), this tends to be 8-12 sessions in the first instance. In some cases shorter courses of therapy are agreed. The number of sessions provided depends upon your needs, and this is discussed after the assessment stage.
- **STRUCTURE:** Therapy sessions last 50-60 minutes. At the beginning of each session you and your therapist will set an agenda/plan for the session. The agenda might include a review of your experience in the previous session, what you have done in between sessions, one or two current problems, a summary of what you've accomplished in this session and a plan for the next week.
- **QUESTIONNAIRES:** When you begin CBT, your therapist will ask you to fill out several questionnaires that assess a range of symptoms and problems. This is to gather as much information as possible, so that you and your therapist can learn quickly what kinds of problems you do (or do not) have and decide what to work on.
- **BETWEEN SESSION ASSIGNMENTS** If you went to a personal trainer at a health club, you would expect to get guidance on how to exercise when the trainer is not there. The same thing is true in CBT. What you learn in therapy is what you practice *outside* of therapy on your own. Research demonstrates that patients who plan and carry out homework assignments get better faster and stay better longer. This might include keeping track of your moods, thoughts, and behaviours; practising strategies from sessions or changing the way you approach certain situations. Essentially; the more you put in, the more you are likely get out of therapy.
- **WHAT ABOUT MEDICATION?** Using CBT does not rule out the use of medication. For most problems, there is considerable evidence that CBT is as effective as medication. For certain problems/ severe levels of depression and anxiety, it may be best to combine medication with therapy. An advantage of CBT is that you also learn ways to solve your problems on your own.
- **MEASURING PROGRESS** You and your therapist can identify specific goals at the beginning of therapy—and you can modify these goals as you continue. You should feel free to give your therapist feedback on your progress. Because sometimes people gain insight into their problems and learn strategies to manage them in therapy, they are often able to maintain their improvement after therapy has ended.