

What is all the fuss about? - A brief guide to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)

CBT is currently the preferred talking psychotherapy recommended by NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence). It is used within the NHS for the treatment of depression and anxiety.

CBT aims to help individuals manage their problems by changing how they think and act.

You are encouraged to talk about:

- how you think about yourself, the world and other people.
- how what you do affects your thoughts and feelings.

By talking about these things, CBT can help you to change how you think ('cognitive') and what you do ('behaviour'), which can help you feel better about life.



CBT can help you see how your thoughts and behaviour relate to the way you feel, and how this might contribute to problems in your life. You are encouraged to find ways to change your thought patterns and behaviour so you can cope with your problems and anxieties better. CBT cannot remove your problems, but can help you to manage them in a more helpful way.

CBT has been shown to help with many different types of problems. These include: anxiety, depression, panic attacks (including agoraphobia and social phobia), stress, bulimia, obsessive compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress. CBT may also help if you have difficulties with anger, a low self-esteem or physical health problems, like pain or fatigue.

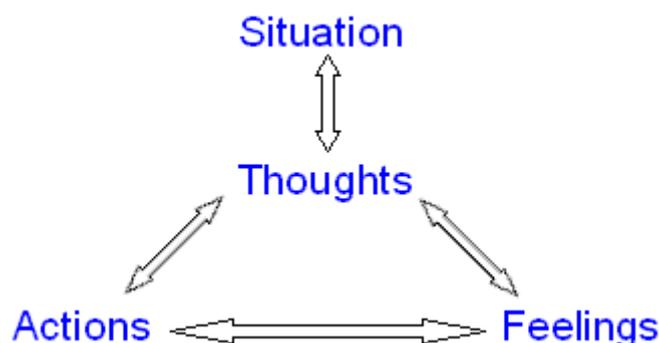
How does it work?

CBT can help you to make sense of overwhelming problems by breaking them down into smaller parts. This makes it easier to see how they are connected and how they affect you. These parts are:

- **A Situation** - a problem, event or difficult situation

From this can follow:

- **Thoughts**
- **Emotions**
- **Physical feelings**
- **Actions**



There are helpful and unhelpful ways of reacting to most situations, depending on how you think about them. How you think about a problem can affect how you feel physically and emotionally. Each of these areas, as shown in the diagram above, can affect the others. It can also alter what you do about it.

This 'vicious circle' can make you feel worse. It can even create new situations that make you feel worse. You can start to believe quite unrealistic (and unpleasant) things about yourself. This happens because, when we are distressed, we are more likely to jump to conclusions and to interpret things in extreme and unhelpful ways.

CBT can help you to break this vicious circle of altered thinking, feelings and behaviour. When you see the parts of the sequence clearly, you can change them - and so change the way you feel. CBT aims to get you to a point where you can 'do it yourself', and work out your own ways of tackling these problems.

What does CBT involve?

How do I work with CBT?

- I usually expect to meet you for between 6 and 20 weekly, or fortnightly sessions. Each session will last up to 60 minutes.
- In the first 2-4 sessions I will check that you can use this sort of treatment and you will check that you feel comfortable with it.
- I will ask you questions about your past life and background. Although CBT concentrates on the here and now, at times you may need to talk about the past to understand how it is affecting you now.
- You decide what you want to deal with in the short, medium and long term. Together we will set goals for our work.

The work

- You may be asked to keep a diary. This will help you to identify your individual patterns of thoughts, emotions, bodily feelings and actions.
- Together we will look at your thoughts, feelings and behaviours to work out:
 - if they are unrealistic or unhelpful.
 - how they affect each other, and you.
- I will help you to work out how to change unhelpful thoughts and behaviours.
- It's easy to talk about doing something; much harder to actually do it. So, after you have identified what you can change, we will agree "homework" - you practise these changes in your everyday life. Depending on the situation, you might start to:
 - question a self-critical or upsetting thought and replace it with a more helpful (and more realistic) one that you have developed in CBT.



- recognise that you are about to do something that will make you feel worse and, instead, do something more helpful.

At each meeting you discuss how you've got on since the last session (we review the homework together).

You will not be asked to do things you don't want to do - you decide the pace of the work and what you will and won't try. The strength of CBT is that you can continue to practise and develop your skills even after the sessions have finished. This makes it less likely that your symptoms or problems will return. The aim is that you will become your own therapist.

Problems with CBT

- CBT is not a quick fix. A therapist is like a personal trainer that advises and encourages - but cannot 'do' it for you.
- If you are feeling low, it can be difficult to concentrate and get motivated.
- To overcome anxiety, you need to confront it. This may lead you to feel more anxious for a short time.
- A good therapist will pace your sessions. You decide what you do together, so you stay in control.

I recognise that CBT isn't for everyone and as an experienced Integrative psychotherapist I am able to adapt my approach to meet your specific needs.

