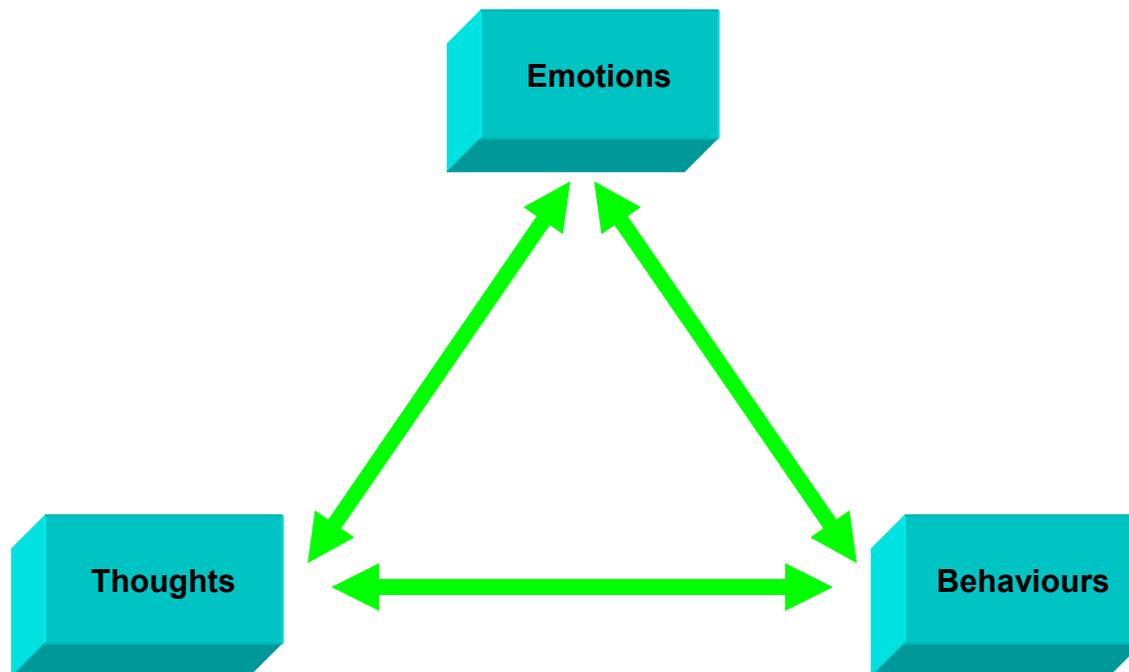




WHAT IS COGNITIVE BEHAVIOURAL THERAPY?

Cognitive behavioural therapy, or CBT, is one of many types of psychological treatments that fall under the general term of psychotherapy. Although research has demonstrated that there is much overlap between most forms of psychotherapy, CBT's strength lies in that it is a psychological treatment that was developed through scientific research. This means that psychologists have tested 'what works' for specific problems, such as anxiety disorders or depression, using scientific studies.

CBT combines the scientific advances made in one branch of psychology from roughly the 1930-60's called behaviourism, with the branch of cognitive psychology, which came later around the 1970-80's. These two branches were combined because psychologists came to the realization that thoughts, behaviours, and emotions are all interlinked as shown in the figure below. CBT is based on the idea that our thoughts lead to how we feel and how we act and that external things, such as people, situations and events play a much lesser role. Thus, CBT psychologists aim to make people feel better by changing how they think and behave.



CBT is not just 'talk therapy'. CBT aims to teach individuals suffering from emotional disorders different ways of thinking and behaving that can alleviate their suffering, which scientific studies have shown to be helpful for most people.



KEY PRINCIPLES OF CBT

The main key principles of CBT include the following:

Collaboration. In CBT, the psychologist is not the sole authority of the patient's problem. The psychologist aims to establish a collaborative relationship to help the other person understand their problem through questioning, the testing of hypotheses and beliefs and guided discovery, always with warmth, empathy and genuineness.

The psychologist will regularly solicit the

thoughts and opinions of the person seeking help. In turn, the role of the client is to ask questions, to learn and implement new ways of thinking and behaving.



Hint: Remember that what you get out of CBT will depend on what you put into it! Make sure to ask questions, ask for further information, clarification on what was said, disagree, etc. Make your psychologist work as much as you are!!

Tailored to the individual. CBT does not aim to tell the person how they should think or feel because each of us is an individual with a unique personality and set of experiences. In fact, the client is the best judge of how they feel in the moment and how they would like to feel. CBT aims to tailor therapy to the person's goals and to help them find the best ways to feel better using what research studies have shown to be effective.

Focusing on the 'Here and Now'. CBT aims to target the main symptoms or problems that are causing emotional distress in order to alleviate the person's suffering. Thus, it focuses on the 'here and now'. Specific techniques and concepts are taught. Once a reduction in symptoms has been experienced, more deep and underlying issues and beliefs can be discussed.

Acceptance of the person. Because each of us is unique, CBT uses both Socratic Questioning and the Inductive Method to help the person understand themselves. Your psychologist will ask you many questions to understand your problem and in turn to help you understand yourself and discover things you may not have been aware of. And because each of us is a distinct and rational individual, CBT does not aim to tell people that their beliefs are wrong. Rather, a logical approach is taken in which evidence is gathered and hypotheses are tested in order to evaluate the person's reality and thoughts. CBT encourages us to look at our thoughts and beliefs and test them by gathering evidence. If we have missed a fact, assimilating it into our beliefs might lead to a change in our belief. For example, if someone believes that everyone is laughing at them, a CBT approach accepts that this may be true. Evidence is gathered (e.g. Are there times when no one is laughing at you?) and then the belief is re-evaluated.

Structure and education. At the beginning of each session, an agenda is set in order to structure what is to be accomplished and discussed in the current meeting. Agenda items can include psychoeducation, teaching of specific skills or techniques, a review of recent problems, or a review of homework. It is important that both the psychologist and patient set the agenda collaboratively in order for the session to be meaningful and beneficial to the person seeking help.

Teaching of skills and techniques. In CBT, skills and techniques that science has shown to be effective in relieving the symptoms of the target problem are taught to the individual. These focus on changing ways of thinking, as well as how to engage in behaviours that will help change how the person feels.

Brief and time-limited. Research has shown that symptom relief can be accomplished after 10-16 weekly sessions of CBT. In contrast, other types of psychotherapy, such as psychoanalysis, can last years with no end in sight. Although CBT aims to relieve suffering in the shortest time possible, it can last longer than 10-16 sessions depending on the problem. Both the psychologist and client can collaboratively discuss the number of sessions that are required based on how the person is progressing. They can even decide to decrease the frequency of sessions from weekly to bi-monthly or even monthly. Thus, unlike other forms of psychotherapy, CBT aims to have a beginning and an end.

Importance of homework. It is unlikely that just meeting for one-hour per week with a psychologist will lead to any significant change. The real work occurs outside regular therapy sessions when what you have been taught can be tested and practiced in the real world. Your psychologist should be suggesting regular homework exercises in order for you to practice what you have been learning during therapy. These exercises should be reviewed during the next therapy session in order for you to obtain some feedback. Homework is essential in CBT. Research studies have shown that those who consistently engage in homework exercises achieve quicker and more long-lasting changes than those people who do not.



Hint: Remember that “practice makes perfect!” So practice! practice! practice! what your psychologist has been teaching you.

Becoming your own psychologist. If your psychologist has done a good job, you should eventually become your own psychologist! This means that you can identify and apply what you have learned if ever any new problems develop in the future. If needed, you can always schedule ‘booster sessions’ with your psychologist whenever necessary in order to review any material or to get their help.