

Therapy Overview

Overview of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a structured, time-limited, present-focused approach to psychotherapy that helps patients to modify negative or harmful thoughts or behaviors that are commonly observed in depressed and anxious patients. The goal of CBT is to help patients to reduce the severity of their depression or anxiety by teaching skills to identify negative thinking or behavioral patterns and to develop more adaptive ones. For example, cognitive strategies, such as thought records, may be used by patients to help them recognize automatic thoughts that occur during a shift in their mood, to develop an alternative response to such thoughts by following a list of specific questions and then to evaluate whether the alternative response helps to improve mood and anxiety. Behavioral strategies may include an activity schedule that involves scheduling a pleasant or achievement-oriented activity during a specific date and time and then evaluating whether scheduling such activities helps to improve mood and anxiety.

CBT typically consists of 16-20 sessions and patients are usually seen every week or every other week until the goals of treatment have been met. CBT sessions are usually structured by including a weekly assessment of mood and other depressive and anxiety symptoms, a summary of the previous session, a review of homework assigned during the last session, an agenda of topics to be discussed, periodic summaries, feedback, and homework for the coming week. A case conceptualization of patients' problems is developed during the initial phase of treatment and is used to guide the selection of specific cognitive and behavioral strategies that would be the most beneficial for them. Although CBT is a structured psychotherapy, CBT therapists use a warm, empathic, and understanding approach and emphasize an optimal collaborative relationship with patients.

CBT is considered to be an evidence-based psychotherapy with over 75 randomized controlled trials that provide support for short-term as well as long-term efficacy. Although most research studies have implemented CBT using an individual modality, some research has supported the implementation of CBT using a group format. CBT has been found to be efficacious with younger adults as well as with older adults.