



Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)

Introduction

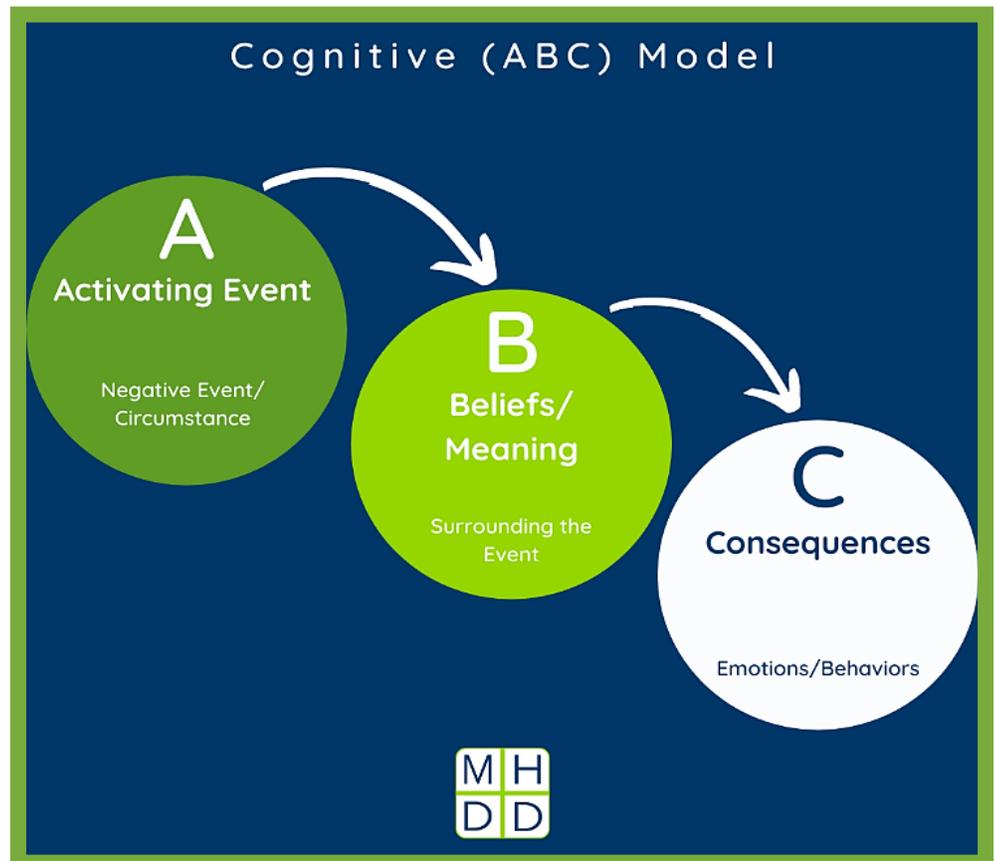
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based treatment that is helpful in treating mental health conditions. An evidence-based treatment is a treatment that has many studies supporting that it is effective for helping people that have mental health conditions. CBT is used to treat a variety of mental health conditions including mood disorders, general stress and anxiety, and substance use issues.³ CBT is also accepted as an effective therapy method for people with developmental disabilities.^{2, 4} Because CBT might be a model of therapy you hear about when attending therapy, the following factsheet will help you understand more about CBT.

This fact sheet will explain:

- 1) How CBT works;
- 2) What a person can expect to do in CBT therapy;
- 3) How to make therapy successful; and
- 4) How to find a CBT provider if you feel that CBT is the right option.

How CBT Works

CBT can be one-on-one or group therapy. This therapy helps clients understand how thoughts, feelings, and behaviors affect each other. The ABC model, commonly used in CBT, is helpful in understanding these relationships. 'A' stands for activating event, 'B' stands for beliefs and meanings about the event, and 'C' stands for emotional and behavioral consequences. Emotional consequences include any feelings you might have, and behavioral consequences include everything that you do, what you say, how you act and how you solve problems. For example, sometimes people experience events (A) that result in negative emotional and behavioral consequences (C). However, if a person can learn how to change their beliefs, thoughts and meaning surrounding the event (B), the consequences would



also change.⁶ A CBT provider can help you understand the unhelpful beliefs that are resulting in negative consequences, and help you create more helpful patterns.

Sometimes, people have negative beliefs and meanings about events because they are using thinking errors. Thinking errors are unhelpful ways of thinking that almost everyone experiences sometime in their life. These thoughts are not true and often result in unhelpful emotions or behaviors. One example of a thinking error is catastrophizing. Catastrophizing is when a person experiences a minor negative event and imagines the worst possible outcome that could happen. For example, if a person makes a common mistake at work, but believes they will be fired for that mistake. There are many different types of thinking errors, and a CBT provider can help you identify which ones you use and replace them with more helpful thoughts. Like many clients, if you have a developmental disability, you may need help determining the difference between a thought and a feeling. It may also be difficult to express your thoughts and feelings.

What to Expect in Therapy

If you choose to see a CBT provider, there are many activities you might do. When you first meet with a mental health provider, they will tell you a little bit about how therapy works, how long therapy should take, and ask if you have any questions or concerns. Be sure to ask any questions you have about the therapy process and let the provider know if you do not understand what is being said. It is important that you feel comfortable asking questions, expressing your needs, and that your relationship with the provider is a good fit for you. Let the provider know if you will need accommodations so they can be made ahead of time.

Next, the provider will ask you to tell them about yourself, your recent moods, problems that you have that you would like help with, and what you think your strengths are as a person. As therapy continues, the provider will help you identify negative events, thoughts, feelings and behavior patterns that are not helpful, so they can be changed to be more positive and productive.

At times, you may be challenged on some of the thinking errors you are using and be encouraged to view other perspectives. The provider might also teach you skills you can use to cope with unhelpful thoughts and emotions. These may include breathing techniques and muscle relaxation exercises. You might be assigned practice assignments to do throughout the week as “homework” that will help you apply what you learn in therapy to daily life.^{1, 5, 6}

How to Make Therapy Successful

Though the mental health provider will have tools and activities that can be helpful, you as the client also play a significant role in making therapy successful. Before seeing a provider, start thinking about the goals that you want to accomplish in therapy and ways that you would like your life to improve.¹ When you meet with a provider, it is important to form a trusting relationship with them. You may want to ask some questions to get to know them better and make sure they are a good fit for you. It's also important to have a conversation with a provider to find out if they have experience working with individuals with developmental disabilities and if they are able to make any accommodations you may need. As you talk more about your goals for

Helpful Questions to Ask Your Provider

- 1) **Are you comfortable working with someone with a developmental disability?**
- 2) **How do you meet your client's needs?**
- 3) **Can you help me set some goals that focus on my strengths?**
- 4) **What will my treatment plan look like?**

therapy, make sure that your provider is willing to support you in these goals. If you ever feel hesitant about your goals or the therapy process, be honest with your provider and let them know how you are feeling. It might also be helpful to invite someone you trust to come to therapy with you. This will help you feel supported in reaching your goals, and you will have someone that can help with your homework outside of therapy. If you choose to bring someone to therapy, make sure that therapy is still focused on you as the client.⁵

How to Find a CBT Provider

If you feel that CBT would be helpful for you, the next step would be to find a CBT provider. Providers often have websites or online profiles where they will share information about the method of therapy they use. You can also call their office to ask. Some websites have the option for you to search for providers that use CBT methods. Providers might state that they use CBT methods in their therapy, or they might be officially certified in CBT. If they are certified in CBT that means they have done additional CBT training and were observed by experts in CBT to make sure they follow the model correctly. Having a provider who is certified in CBT is not required to have a successful experience in therapy, but it could be helpful if you are looking for someone who has extra experience and expertise in CBT.

Websites that allow you to search for providers:

[Psychology Today's Types of Therapy and Therapist Search Tool](#)

[GoodTherapy's Find a Therapist Tool](#)

Conclusion

CBT is a method of therapy that helps you examine how your thoughts influence your feelings and behaviors. If you enjoy thinking about how this process applies to you, CBT might be a good fit. CBT has been found to be helpful in treating various mental health conditions and could help you or someone you know cope with difficult emotions and changing negative thoughts and behaviors into more helpful ones.^{1, 5, 6}

Contributors

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