
HOW TO MAKE CBT WORK FOR YOU

DR DAVID PURVES AFBPSS, CSCI, C.PSYCHOL, BABCP



www.berkshirepsychologyservice.com

DR DAVID PURVES

TELEPHONE 0118 9519588

TELEPHONE 07801289787

HOW TO MAKE CBT WORK FOR YOU

In this short e-book I want to help you to see how to make CBT effective for you. This means not only how to make your face to face CBT treatment useful but also how to make any CBT self help you use effective.

I am going to start from the position where I assume you are dissatisfied with some aspect of your life. CBT is commonly used to treat a wide range of common problems so let's work on the assumption that it has the power to help you. Great, now we just have to make that happen.

YOU NEED TO KNOW WHERE YOU ARE STARTING FROM

Throughout this e-book I am going to talk as if I were your treating CBT therapist because in that way I am really able to show you how to approach the task of feeling better. Also, this is the approach I know best and it is the one that works well for my clients.

So my first job is to help you understand what your problem really is! Whoa! You are likely to say, I am depressed or anxious that is my problem. But the reality is depression and anxiety and every other problem that a client has brought to me, in 20 years, are only ever consequences of something else.

The sense of overwhelming dread, the feelings of emptiness, the impossibility of leaving the house, the sense of defeat, the feelings of hopelessness, the thoughts of suicide, the difficulty in relationships, the overwhelming need for order and control, the need to do things perfectly, the constant worry and anxiety and the weight of low mood...and many others are all caused by something else. The problem you have is that you are most likely unable to see the cause because you are immersed and even overwhelmed in the emotions it has created. One of my first jobs is make sure you get a good sense of what the problem really and then what we can do about it. Let me give you two examples that will illustrate this:-

If you are depressed you are going to underestimate yourself in really damaging ways. You will assume you are much less good at what you do and you are going to assume that you have much less personal value than you really have. Your brain is like a newspaper every day publishing terrible lies about you and you have heard it so much you believe it all now.

Clearly my task is to make all of this apparent to you and help you see that you are the author of a lot of terrible lies about yourself. That bit is quite easy because your lies don't connect with reality at all so it all becomes obvious quite quickly.

If you are anxious you have assumed that the feelings of anxiety, in some way, are normal! But you don't know why they are there. This is really upsetting because if you don't know why you feel so wobbly how can you fix it...right! My job is to help you to see that if you are frightened of feeling anxious that in turn causes the anxiety you are frightened of. (This circuit is very commonly seen in panic). So you are caught in a loop that needs to be broken. Once you realize this then the breaking of the loop is achieved through a series of simple exercises you can undertake.

It is much harder to try to directly change emotions than it is to target what caused the emotions and change that. And that is where CBT is brilliant.

In the right hands a great way of changing the emotions is by changing what causes them. Let's explore how CBT does that. To make CBT useful to you create and sustain an interest in your well being, become curious about why you feel as you do and don't assume that your emotions reflect reality. Sometimes they don't.

WHAT IS CBT?

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is a psychotherapeutic approach to understanding and changing some of the unhelpful thought processes (cognitive) and behavioural processes (behaviour) that cause emotional problems in life.

There are many therapeutic approaches that are used in society in general. CBT differs from most of these because it has a very strong research base. This means that it is proven to be innovative, modern and clinically effective; so much so that it is the first line treatment recommended by the government through the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). But what is also means is that the tools of CBT and the understandings that underpin their use are well tried and tested.

The essence of CBT is that the way you think about yourself, other people, the world and your future have an effect on how you feel. Feelings then are both a consequence and a cause of how you think. In therapy I want to help you to feel better. It is hard to directly change emotions, a lot of the time you don't know why you feel any particular emotion. But it is easier to access and examine thought processes.

As an example: research has found that people who are depressed or anxious display a number of faulty thinking processes. When these are modified to be more in line with reality then people usually feel better. At its simplest then CBT is a process for helping you to think more accurately and usefully and to be more in touch with reality and to own your strengths and resources instead of discounting them.

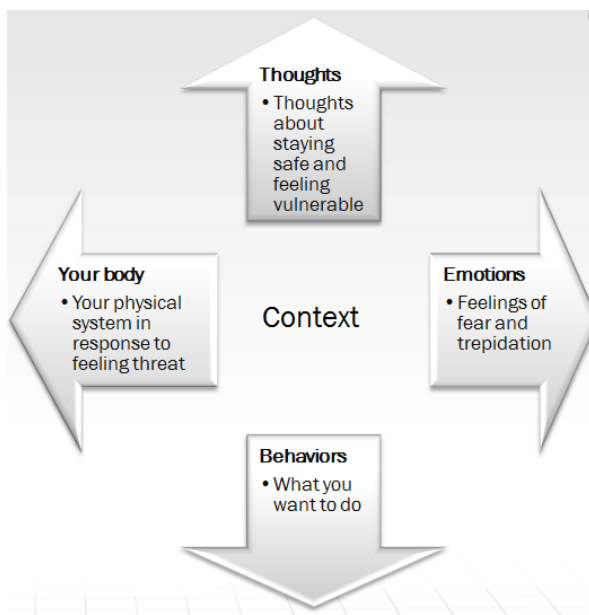
CBT is not usually a past focused therapy. It tends to be focused in what is happening to you now. It is focused on there here and now. By looking at the processes that are causing you problems right now in your life you will be able to modify your future. When you change things even by small amounts you will have a different future path. That is how things work.

The tools of CBT involve uncovering your thinking style. That may include discovering whether you are an outcome focused thinker or a process oriented thinker. It may include looking for examples of faulty thinking like the overuse of *all or nothing thinking, black and white thinking or mind reading*.

It may include looking at your habitual attribution style and your attentional biases; do you expect bad things to happen, do you blame yourself when bad things happen but fail to take credit when good things happen?

THE COMPONENTS OF YOUR EXPERIENCE

Typically in a CBT therapy we would look at the components of your experience. These include as I have said your thoughts, behaviours, emotions, sensations and the context in which it all happens.



This map of forces is a good roadmap to the things that a full CBT would look at.

CBT is collaborative

CBT therapy is a collaborative therapy. You and I will work together to resolve your problems. This approach is one of discovery. Each week you will learn more and gain the tools to change more.

Many of the emotional problems that are experienced are a consequence of distorted and

unhelpful thinking. As well as changing a lot of old and outdated habits of thought. When these processes are challenged you feel better. Taking control of these unhelpful thought processes is a powerful intervention to change your emotional landscape. It can feel a little odd to start to challenge outdated patterns of habit and thought. So be prepared to accept that change needs to happen but also that things will be different.

DO YOU REALLY UNDERSTAND YOUR PROBLEM?

How you think about your problem is pretty important in helping you to resolve it. There is a lot of relevance in the name you give something. Depression is usually characterised by pervasive low

mood, by a feeling that things are not going to work out for you and that there is something wrong with you. When people tell me about their depression it usually has distinctive characteristics.

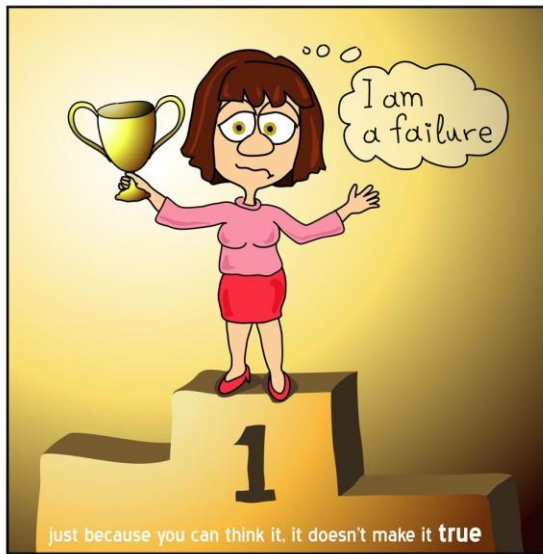
First, feeling down all of the time is horrible and when they first visit me they need to talk about how hard it is to feel that the light has gone from life. Second, People are deeply concerned about the effect their depression is having on the people they love and care about. Not feeling able 'to be as they used to be' is painful and often creates a feeling of failure to be a full member of a family. Third, and the most revealing from a psychological perspective, is that people usually blame themselves for depression. This is the most damaging and most challenging aspect of depression to resolve. But it is the most critical in treating and removing depression from life. Therefore expect that some of the things you believe about yourself will turn out to be wrong. Allow this process to develop and create deeper changes in your self-concept.

SELF BLAME

A further damaging aspect of depression is that it makes you to feel you are directly responsible for your feelings of low mood. Depression makes you feel flawed, a fraud, useless, unlovable, a waste of space or at fault. But this is simply a consequence of the depression itself. You won't realise this if you suffer from depression but once you have completed a few sessions of CBT you will start to recognise this fact and that is always a liberating experience.

A powerful CBT strategy I have commonly used is to help the depression sufferer develop the deeper understanding that depression is a distortion in the way they understand and think about things.

Without this new perspective it makes it easy to believe that you are at fault for being depressed. This creates a circular self fulfilling movement within your mind.



I am at fault for being depressed = if I weren't depressed I would be able to do everything I previously could = It is my fault for being depressed

The distorted thinking inherent in depression must be separated out from reality of life. Depression will make you feel down without your being flawed or at fault in any way.

Therefore when you describe or understand your depression it is essential to take out the bit where you criticise yourself for being down. This only keeps the problem in place and it is not accurate nor does it contribute to your feeling better.

ANXIETY IS A CASE OF OVERESTIMATION OF THREAT

Following the theme of empowerment: Suppose you fully understood the mechanics of anxiety, well then you would be in a much better position to deal with it. Let's turn things upside down then for a moment. If you knew how to be chronically anxious you would have a great understanding of what causes anxiety. Here I will reveal to you how to become chronically anxious. I will also reveal what you need to do to destroy your life with chronic anxiety. If you struggle with anxiety it may be that you can recognise some of the things you have done to turn an anxiety attack into a chronic state. It may seem a bit backwards but when you know what part you have played in creating your anxiety then you can access the tools and techniques to eradicate chronic anxiety from your life altogether.

SUFFERING IS NORMAL IT IS WHAT YOU DO WITH IT THAT CREATES THE PROBLEM

I was recently at the European Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies conference in Marrakech, Morocco. I met lots of people searching for more effective and useful ways of helping

people with things like the depressive disorders, the full range of anxiety disorders, psychosis and of course serious physical health problems. It was also nice to be reminded of a simple truth; that unhappiness is a normal part of living and sometimes we might prolong that unhappiness by interfering with its normal course.

EMOTIONS ARE MESSAGES

Emotions are messages from your brain preparing you to take some action. With anxiety, the message 'you need to be ready to respond to a threat' is activated. This message is sent from your brain via the amygdala through the limbic pathways precipitating a cascade of rapid actions. This creates the distressing and disturbing physical sensations you experience. As far as you are aware you simply feel anxious. This system is very efficient and has kept your ancestors safe for many millennia. Indeed you are the result of your ancestors staying safe.

Once the threat has passed your system needs to take a break. So a second message must be sent that the threat has passed. And so you can relax. Sometimes the second message gets lost or not even sent at all. This is one reason you become chronically anxious when you really don't need to be. However, you can send the second message that the threat has passed, manually and then relieve your system of the burden of chronic anxiety.

Chronic anxiety may be as simply explained as a missing neural message that you can manually replace. You are safe but you don't feel it! Reinstating this message is one of my most important goals in CBT for anxiety.

HOW CAN YOU INTERFERE WITH TURNING OFF ANXIETY?

Once any perceived threat has passed your system is designed to return to its normal baseline of relaxed attention. If this does not happen it is because you have interfered in some way with the process. Let's look at how you could do this.



HOW TO BECOME CHRONICALLY ANXIOUS

From out of the blue you have an anxiety attack. This is the most common experience I hear of. It almost seems that there is no reason for the anxiety attack but it is so distressing and upsetting that it gets your brain engaged in trying to figure out 'what on earth just

happened to me'?

It is what happens next that determines the course of your anxiety. To become chronically anxious you have to interpret the initial anxiety attack as a personal weakness. Something like; I am not strong enough; other people would have been able to manage without getting so anxious about it. Then you also need to tune your brain into trying to figure out why you are so weak that you became anxious when everyone else you know would have been able to manage much better than you.

In therapy with my clients I call this an unanswerable question and it is guaranteed to get your brain chewing over something that does not have an answer. Not because you are weak but because you are not weak hence you can never find an answer to the question as it is posed. In essence you are asking your brain to solve a problem when no problem exists. And hence no answer exists.

To turn an anxiety attack into something chronic you need to become very frightened of having another attack

The fact is that for many people a strong anxiety attack is the build up of stresses and strains leading to a momentary overwhelm of your system and the trigger of the threat response (fight or flight system). This floods your blood stream with adrenaline and cortisol and this is one of the things that

gives you the sense of light headedness, dizziness, shortness of breath, rapid heart rate etc. No question it is a frightening experience. But it will only be a 'one off' and not lead to chronic anxiety. To make it chronic you have to start trying to avoid having another attack.

Anxiety and panic is so distressing that you're going to test various theories and exclude things from your life. 'Maybe it was coffee, or caffeine in general so better drop all normal caffeinated beverages'. Maybe it was tiredness so you worry about not sleeping which makes your sleep really bad. Maybe it is crowds so you go out less. Maybe it's work; maybe it's because of some undiagnosed physical illness so you pester your doctor who relents and gives you an anti depressant or an anxiolytic. But s/he says you better stay on it for six months so now you are a mental health patient with a chronic anxiety problem. Now you have to contend with getting off the meds and that brings back the symptoms again. You're stuck in the system now.

To become a chronic anxiety patient you have to become intolerant of troubling physical reminders of anxiety. The fact is to genuinely accept chronic anxiety into your life you will need to become highly intolerant of any physical symptom of anxiety. Because the fear response (fight or flight) is a normal human reaction to high stress and genuine threat you cannot eradicate it from your life. Just like you can't eradicate your heart beat from your life....without a life changing consequence anyway!

Consequently if you manage to become intolerant of anxiety symptoms you will find that you turn the fear response on whenever you think about being anxious. So this is a perfect solution to the problem of how to become chronically anxious. Simply become intolerant of being anxious. This makes you ever watchful and wary of any sign or signals that you might become anxious which in turn activates your fear response and that makes you feel anxious which then starts a circle of:-

'oh no I am getting anxious', see it is getting worse now, I knew it would, I can't control it, I need to get somewhere safe right now because I won't be able to control myself and then everyone will see how anxious I am'.

If you have managed to achieve a state of chronic anxiety then there is no reason for it to go away by itself. Your path, the one that took you to chronic anxiety is now strong and well trodden. You will need to create an alternative route away from it. One that helps re-train your brain to see that you don't have to fear anxiety and that you don't have to organise your life around managing symptoms. It is much better, by far, to eradicate chronic anxiety from your life for good.

CBT is very good at stopping all of these troubling (but normal) thought processes. And the best news is that once you have dealt with anxiety it usually doesn't come back again.

I have provided quite a lot of detail about how to become anxious because when we reverse the process the anxiety disappears. It is really gratifying to see every time this happens.

CBT FOR ANXIETY REQUIRES A CHANGE IN PERSPECTIVE

To make CBT for anxiety helpful you will need to work on the acceptance that your body does not always obey you. The fear of fear that is so often the hallmark of anxiety needs to be cut through in therapy and the more you recognise that physical symptoms are consequences not causes the quicker the process will proceed. How you can bolster the CBT process is to:-

- Recognize that fear is a normal response in some situations,
- Remember to look around and ask...where is the threat that requires such a strong emotional response anyway?
- Recognize that fear of anxiety maintains anxiety longer.
- Recognize when something is an unanswerable question, these are usually future oriented and often start with 'what if',
- Don't become intolerant of physical symptoms but embrace them because this reduces the fear of anxiety.

SEEK CBT WITH A SPIRIT OF CURIOSITY AND YOU WILL FIND
MUCH TO ENGAGE YOUR INTEREST

CBT SELF HELP

There are tons of books that will tell you what to do to solve any problem. And it has to be said that information is useful. But all self help books miss two important elements that prevents them from being truly fully helpful. They don't explain in detail what you need to do nor how you are suppose to do it. If self help books were truly effective why then are depression and anxiety increasing. The same argument is also applicable to antidepressants and anxiolytics.

The only Self Help CBT that is worth considering is via programs that are computer based. These are becoming very common although many fall into the trap of giving you information without really empowering you to complete the process through to wellness.

Therefore the programs I have tested and proven to work are the ones I have personally developed and hence can stand behind. These are:-

Blues Begone

www.bluesbegone.co.uk

Mood Control

www.moodcontrol.com

Panic Pit Stop

www.panicpitstop.com

In addition I have build a very large CBT Self Help resource website called:-

www.drpurves.com

And a site more specifically devoted to anxiety at:

www.anxietywizard.com

CBT CAN BE A GOOD EXPERIENCE

Therapy of any sort is not as bad an experience as you probably imagine it would be. In fact, it can be interesting and engaging. This is certainly the atmosphere I try to foster then I provide therapy. If you

are considering CBT please get in touch and let us see how together we can change things for the better.