

What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)?

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Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the major evidence-based psychotherapies. Over the past several decades, a significant number of scientific studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in helping people alleviate suffering and improve mental health. From doctors or online, you may have heard that CBT is very useful in coping with issues like depression, anxiety, bipolar, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic, psychosis, insomnia, trauma (PTSD), etc.

What to expect from CBT?

First of all, CBT is time-limited, and it usually takes between 8 and 20 sessions. Most of the time, it will be weekly sessions. The goal is to help you improve coping abilities and become your own therapist ultimately.

Second, you and the CBT therapist will develop clear therapy goals, and that will guide the entire therapy process.

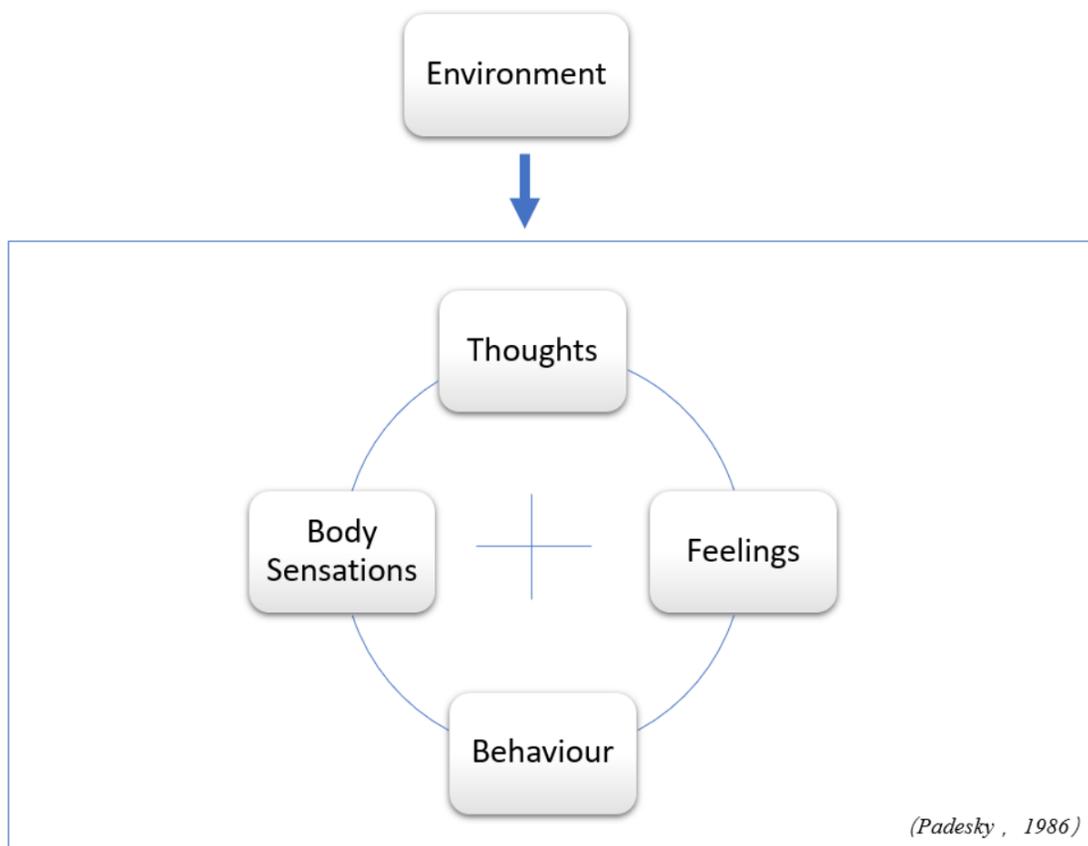
Third, CBT therapists will explore the cause of your concerns, which may or may not involve childhood experiences. It is crucial to understand how the past impact the present. CBT therapists put relatively more emphasis on here and now because understanding the past doesn't always bring meaningful change. For example, understanding why you get angry easily doesn't mean you can automatically manage it well, although it is a critical step.

Fourth, CBT therapists will ask you to do practices during and in between sessions. This is a unique feature of CBT that therapists and clients do not just talk. Don't get me wrong, you will still talk a lot with CBT therapists because it is extremely important to share your experiences with professionals and get validation and understanding. However, from CBT's perspective, if

you want to make more changes, talking is not enough in many situations. You need to intentionally practice various techniques and behaviorally step out of your comfort zone.

Fifth, CBT therapists are highly collaborative. It means that they will constantly check in with you to make sure you are on the same page. Also, although CBT therapists are usually more directive, they won't impose anything on you. Everything should be explained clearly to you and agreed upon by you.

How can CBT help you?



From the perspective of CBT, as shown above, people's experiences can be grouped into five elements: environment, thoughts, emotions, behaviours, and body sensations. Environment refers to the triggers of our experiences (i.e., what happened); sometimes, we can change it, sometimes, we cannot. The other four elements are the responses to the trigger. Thoughts refer to our interpretation of what happened (i.e., trigger). Emotions mean our feelings about what happened.

Behaviours are what we do about what happened, and body sensations are what our body feels after what happened.

Those five elements interact with each other; when things go well, they function well. When things are not going well, they can become a vicious cycle. The more anxious/depressed you are, the more negatively you interpret things. Behaviorally, you may either do too much (overkill) or too little (avoidance). Physically, you may have intense body sensations, such as shortness of breath, chest pain, muscle tensions, etc. CBT aims at changing how those 5 elements interact with each other by working on each element.

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