

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Patient Information



The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust is completely committed to equality for all regardless of age, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, marital or civil partnership status.

What is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy?

Cognitive behavioural therapy, also known as CBT, is an active therapy that looks at the way our thoughts and feelings affect the way we behave. Within CBT, our early experiences are seen to shape the way we see the world, ourselves and others, causing us to develop particular ideas and beliefs. These can be helpful or unhelpful. Sometimes we can experience events that make us focus more on the unhelpful ideas and beliefs. When this happens, our thoughts, feelings and behaviours can be affected, keeping the difficulties going without us realising.

CBT can help you to weigh up the way you are viewing the world and your experiences, and consider what you, and others, can do differently to help you feel better and improve your lives. CBT can help to break problems down into smaller parts, and manage them more effectively. CBT can have a beneficial effect in lots of different areas, such as with friends, family, school and in the workplace.

Who is it for?

CBT can be used for children (from around seven years and over), adolescents, and adults. Usually people are seen individually for CBT, but it is sometimes offered to couples and in a family or group context. When seeing children, parents/carers are often invited to participate in the therapy as this has been found to improve the outcomes, or they may be offered parent/carer support sessions alongside the young person's therapy. With your consent your therapist may work alongside other services, such as schools, to support the treatment.

What issues can we help with?

There is good evidence for the effectiveness of CBT for the following difficulties:

- Anxiety.
- Depression.
- Phobias including social phobia.
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.
- Post Traumatic Stress disorder.
- Eating problems.
- Relationship difficulties.

What will happen during your assessment?

You will have an initial meeting to understand what the difficulties are, and consider with your therapist what would be the most appropriate treatment. We will look at how your difficulties developed, and what keeps them going. Although CBT tends to focus on the here and now, you will be asked questions about your background and earlier experiences, as you may need to figure out how they affect you now. In addition, your therapist will be interested to know what has been helpful to date.

Together with your therapist, you will develop a shared understanding of your difficulties, agree some goals for the work, and develop an agreed plan. You will be asked to complete some questionnaires during the assessment that will help you and your therapist to monitor the progress of your work together over time.

What happens in a typical session?

In a typical session, you and your therapist will use different ways to think together about your difficulties. This might include talking, drawing, writing things down, or acting things out. Each session will usually follow a similar structure. This is likely to include:

- Agreeing an agenda for the session.
- Reviewing what you covered in the previous session, and whether you managed to practise inbetween or complete homework tasks.
- Exploring alternative ways of thinking or doing so that it improves how you are feeling.
- Consider how you might put these new ideas into practice, and begin to test them out.
- At the end of the session you will go over what you have covered, and will have an opportunity to plan how you are going to test out the ideas.
- You will be encouraged to think about whether there is some one else in your family or other support network that could help you, if appropriate.
- Towards the end of your treatment, you will be supported to manage future challenges as they arise, and to reduce the likelihood of your difficulties coming back.

How often does the therapy take place?

Individual CBT usually takes place on a weekly or fortnightly basis, with each session lasting between 30 to 60 minutes. Group CBT usually takes place on a weekly basis, with each session lasting between 60 to 120 minutes.

CBT is usually offered in blocks of treatment, which can be either short or longer term, ranging from around 6 to 20 sessions. In the first few sessions, your therapist will check that you can use this approach, and that you are comfortable with the way of working. As you come to the end of treatment it is likely that your sessions will be more spread out to give you a chance to put some of the things you have learnt into practice, and to help build your confidence in managing without ongoing therapy.

Are there any risks or side effects?

CBT is not a quick fix. CBT therapists work together with you to advise and support you, but they cannot 'do' the work for you. Within CBT, you need to confront anxiety to overcome it. This might cause you to feel more anxious for a short time, and your therapist will help with this, through talking about what is going on for you emotionally. If you are feeling low in mood, it can be difficult to get motivated, and it can be difficult to concentrate.

Are there any alternatives?

Yes there are. CBT is not for everyone, so we offer a range of alternative treatments for different problems. You can discuss the range of other appropriate treatments that are available within the service/Trust with your therapist. Other psychological treatments include psychotherapy, group therapy, and family (systems) therapy. Please see the leaflets in this range on these treatments for more information.

In some cases patients may find they are helped by medication which can be prescribed by a doctor or on rare occasions by staff at the Trust.

Other patients may choose not to take up any form of professional help for their problem and manage the problem themselves.

How else does it differ from other therapies?

CBT is an active therapy, which means that it involves you 'doing' things. You will practise doing things in the therapy, and then practise them in your own time and environment. CBT is a collaborative therapy, which involves you and your therapist deciding together about what you will do, and at what speed. This helps you to stay in control of the therapy.

Who can I contact if I have any questions or worries about my treatment?

Therapy can bring up difficult issues. We want you to feel able to discuss any concerns or raise any questions you may have with your therapist as this will be important to progress the therapy.

If you would like to discuss any concerns with someone independent of your therapy please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) office on 020 8938 2523 or via email at PALS@tavi-port.nhs.uk and someone will get back to you. You can also leave positive feedback about the treatment you have received from us with the PALS office. Alternatively, if you have a complaint you can contact the Complaints Manager via e-mail at Complaints@tavi-port.nhs.uk.

On request we can provide this publication in your first language or another format (e.g. electronic version or large print).