

Family Voice Bulletin – Issue 19 (May 25th) A Primer for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Summarized by KJ (Krystal-Jyl) Thomas, MSW, RSW

In this week's session, facilitators KJ Thomas and Tracey Baker were joined by guest speaker; clinical psychologist Dr. Phil Grandia presenting a primer for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

CBT is an evidence-based form of psychotherapy that helps develop insight into mental health challenges, and skills to assist with coping and addressing them. CBT looks at the connection between our feelings, thoughts, physical sensations, and actions. CBT acknowledges that you are the expert on your own life, and therefore you are the best person to determine what areas make the most sense to address. In CBT, you work with a clinician in active participation where together thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are monitored for opportunities of positive long lasting change at a neurological level. The impacts of CBT tend to work for most folks.

CBT helps to evaluate and understand different schemas (ways of thinking) a person may have. These schemas can at times be a lens of negativity (e.g. assuming the worst) which can result in impacting our core beliefs about the world. Once we identify unhelpful schemas, we begin to monitor by documenting through thought records, journaling, mood-behaviour tracking, or being aware of physical feelings happening within us. This helps us identify patterns of thinking and actions, and where opportunities lay to break the cycle.

Take for example stress. Generally, it is not good. When we begin to pay attention to our stressors, we can evaluate if they are avoidable, or unavoidable. Areas that we may be able to change include environments, routines, or social surroundings. For unavoidable stress, we can use coping skills. Things like diaphragmatic/mindful breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or exercise can help with this. Lastly, sometimes motivation does not come naturally, in these circumstances, try to remember that action precedes motivation - sometimes we do it, even when we don't feel like it.

Another way to help in accomplishing goals is activity scheduling. Building enjoyable or healthy activities into our schedule can help us stay accountable to doing them. Try to remove obstacles that may slow you down or dissuade you. Specific goals are easier to follow through, SMART goals can help keep you on track: **Specific Measurable Achievable Relevant Time-bound**

Strategies for challenging unhelpful thoughts:

- ☒ Avoid "all or nothing" thinking.
- ☒ Try not to overgeneralize situations or people.
- ☒ Keep an open mind. Incorporate all the evidence (avoid only seeing failures while missing successes).
- ☒ Embrace the positive, good, or accomplishments you have done. Avoid downplaying your own successes.
- ☒ Avoid jumping to negative conclusions. We don't know what people are thinking, nor what the future holds.
- ☒ Avoid magnification or catastrophic thinking (blowing things out of proportion) or minimising things that are important to us.

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- ☒ Remember that how we feel is not always reflective of the truth of a situation (emotional reasoning).
- ☒ Words like “should” or “must” can reflect heavy criticism or a sense of frustration and failure. Focus on balanced thoughts.
- ☒ Avoid assigning labels e.g “I’m a loser”; “they are useless”.
- ☒ Avoid personalization, such as blaming yourself or others when things were not in your, or their complete control.

Strategies to support a loved one:

- ☒ Validate feelings and use empathetic listening.
- ☒ Ask how you might be able to support, or offer to listen to their situation. If yes:
 - Be gentle in bringing awareness to thinking errors
 - Consider the evidence and facts when making decisions
- ☒ If a loved one is experiencing psychosis, challenging delusions can increase stress for the person which can lead to further illness.
 - Again, focus on empathetic listening.
 - Avoid confronting or encouraging false beliefs
 - Create distraction by shifting focus to meaningful, value-based activities

CBT Resources for...

- ☒ Depression- Mind Over Mood by Dennis Greenberger, PhD
- ☒ Bipolar Disorder- The Bipolar Workbook by Monica Ramirez Basco, PhD
- ☒ Anxiety- The Anxiety & Phobia Workbook by Edmund J. Bourne, PhD
- ☒ Obsessive Compulsive Disorder- Getting Over OCD by Jonathan S. Abramowitz, PhD
- ☒ Psychosis- Think You’re Crazy? Think Again by Anthony P. Morrison, Julia C. Renton, Paul French
- ☒ Relaxation- The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook
- ☒ The Royal Ottawa- <https://www.theroyal.ca/osp>