

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Depression and Behavioral Activation

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?

A: Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is an evidence-based treatment for depression. CBT incorporates behavioral activation techniques to help individuals increase a sense of mastery and experience pleasure and teaches individuals how to evaluate beliefs about themselves, the world, and their futures that may keep them stuck in a depressive cycle.

Q: What is Behavioral Activation?

A: Behavioral Activation (BA) is an empirically- based treatment for depression that follows the tradition of Behavior Therapy and helps depressed individuals identify activities that once gave them pleasure, a sense of accomplishment, or were in some ways “antidepressant” behaviors. In BA therapists help clients to systematically re-engage in their lives, and modify barriers that prevent such engagement and keep them in a downward cycle of depression.

Q: If someone is depressed, don't they need medication?

A: While many people benefit from anti-depressant medication, the empirical evidence has shown that CBT is an effective treatment for depression and some studies suggest that CBT is as effective as medication for individuals who are mildly or moderately depressed. Some studies show that CBT in combination with medication provides greater results for depressed patients. Studies have also shown that BA is equal to an antidepressant medication in treatment outcome, even for severely depressed individuals. No studies have yet been done evaluating the benefits of BA combined with antidepressant medications. Research consistently demonstrates that CBT or BA have more enduring effects once treatment has ended than antidepressant medications alone.

Q: Can CBT help someone who has been depressed for many years?

A: While CBT is not a miracle cure, the skills that are taught can be helpful to many individuals with chronic depression. A skilled CBT therapist may modify treatment with techniques specifically designed to help individuals who have long histories of depression.

Q: Can BA really help someone who has difficulty doing even the most basic tasks because of depression?

A: A skilled BA therapist will work in collaboration with a client, like a coach, to help the client to do the things that he or she currently experience as difficult. As therapist and client identify the barriers to getting engaged in life, they will work together to identify ways to overcome the barriers and modify behaviors that may be keeping the individual stuck in depressive patterns.