

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy for Children

Cognitive-behavior therapy (CBT) helps improve a child's moods, emotions and behavior by examining confused or unhelpful patterns of thinking. CBT therapists teach children that thoughts cause feelings and moods which in turn influence behavior. During CBT, a child learns to identify unhelpful and/or harmful thought patterns. The therapist then helps the child replace these patterns with accurate, helpful ways of thinking that result in improved moods and behaviors.

In CBT, children:

- Learn to spot unhelpful types of thinking.
- Practice thinking more flexibly, accurately and positively about things that happen to them.
- Learn strategies for stopping automatic, but unhelpful, responses.
- Develop skills for calming themselves when upset or anxious.



What Happens in Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy Sessions for Children?

CBT is considered short-term therapy, with 8-16 sessions typically needed. CBT is highly educational in nature, and when used with children, child-friendly teaching methods and techniques are used to help children learn cognitive-behavioral concepts, strategies and skills. For example:



1. **Games and activities** demonstrate specific CBT concepts such as **response inhibition** (stopping unwanted thoughts and behaviors) and **cognitive and behavioral flexibility** (changing course or switching gears when that is the most helpful thing to do.)
2. **Stories** demonstrate CBT concepts with examples of children who have overcome problems by using specific cognitive-behavioral strategies.
3. **Demonstrations and role play** help children understand the benefits of helpful and adaptive coping strategies.
4. **Assignments** give children practice in using new strategies and skills.

Can All Children Benefit from Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy?

To benefit from CBT, a child must have the ability to understand concepts such as self-talk.

The child must also be willing to set goals and to learn new skills and practice them.

For those children who are suited for CBT, benefits include:

- Recognizing and stopping unhelpful patterns of thinking and behaving.
- Incorporating healthy strategies for dealing with stress and frustration into their daily lives.
- Receiving emotional support and gaining confidence in their own ability to handle problems.



Who Provides Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy?



Cognitive-behavior therapy is provided by licensed mental health professionals such as psychologists, social workers and counselors. The minimum educational requirement is a master's degree plus additional training and experience in CBT.

In parent-led, therapist-guided CBT (see next page), the licensed therapist works with the parent to enable the parent to be the primary teacher of the CBT concepts and skills, applying them to their child's unique set of challenges.