

CBT, DBT, ACT & Schema Therapy

A GUIDE TO SOME OF THE MORE COMMON THERAPY APPROACHES

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When looking for a therapist, it can be very difficult to make sense of all the different terms used to describe therapy approaches. What do the acronyms mean and what does this therapy actually involve? Below is a simple guide to help you understand what each of four common therapeutic modalities entails.

CBT = COGNITIVE
BEHAVIOURAL
THERAPY

General approach

Identify and correct maladaptive thoughts and behaviours that may be contributing to or exacerbating emotional symptoms. By developing a more positive or realistic mindset, one may feel more confident and positive in their daily life.

Commonly used strategies

- Thought, emotion, and behaviour monitoring forms to increase insight and awareness.
- Cognitive challenging to correct maladaptive thoughts.
- Identifying maladaptive behavioural patterns and changing behaviour.
- Exposure to feared situations, to help correct unhelpful or inaccurate beliefs about these situations.
- Experiments to test out unhelpful or inaccurate assumptions.



ACT = ACCEPTANCE & COMMITMENT THERAPY

General approach

Use acceptance and mindfulness strategies to develop insight and awareness, and focus on building up a meaningful life that is related to one's interests and goals. Learn to "just be" with difficult feelings and thoughts, rather than eliminating them.

Commonly used strategies

- Using 'cognitive defusion' to reduce the strength of maladaptive beliefs and thoughts and learning to take unhelpful thoughts less seriously.
- Learning when one does not have control over particular thoughts, feelings, or situations, and practising acceptance (just "being with").
- Bringing oneself into the present moment and recognising that change and action can only occur in the present.
- Clarifying and connecting with one's values and living a meaningful life in accordance with this.

DBT = DIALECTICAL BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

General approach

Improving emotion regulation strategies and identifying and correcting maladaptive behavioural patterns that contribute to emotional symptoms and relationship difficulties.

Commonly used strategies

- Mindfulness to help one develop the ability to observe thoughts/emotions without acting on them.
- Distress tolerance and emotion regulation skills, including radical acceptance, self-soothing, urge surfing, panic surfing, and imagery.
- Learning to improve interpersonal interactions and addressing anger management issues that may be particularly detrimental to relationships.
- Chain analysis to help identify how triggers, thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are interrelated in different situations.
- Reducing harmful behaviours, including impulsive actions, substance abuse, and self-harming.

SCHEMA THERAPY

General approach

Identify early childhood experiences, particularly where certain needs were not met, and how these have shaped one's current view (or schema) of themselves, others, and the world. Link past to present and help reduce the impact of maladaptive schemas on one's present day life, by correcting maladaptive beliefs, thoughts, and behaviours related to these schemas.

Commonly used strategies

- Building insight and awareness into one's core beliefs, where they came from, and how they impact current thoughts, emotions, and behaviours.
- Cognitive interventions, including thought/core belief challenging.
- Mindfulness to help develop ability to observe one's thought and emotional patterns, without reacting.
- Chair work and role play - to identify and learn to manage different schema modes (reactions/defences) to schemas.
- Imagery and experiential exercises.
- Using interpersonal processes in the therapy room.



INLIGHT PSYCHOLOGY

Dr Liza Chervonsky and Dr Yisha Yu are doctoral-level clinical psychologists who treat a number of common issues, including anxiety, low mood, anger management, social and relationship difficulties, work and academic issues, and personality issues in adults, children, adolescents, and parents. They work from a number of therapeutic modalities, including schema therapy, CBT, DBT, ACT, mindfulness, and solution-focused.

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