

Cognitive Treatments for Abnormal Behaviour



This activity will help you to:

- Understand the process of cognitive therapy
- Think critically about cognitive therapy

There is a range of treatments for abnormal behaviour that are grouped together under the 'cognitive' umbrella. What they tend to have in common is that they try to alter abnormal behaviour by challenging and changing the **maladaptive thinking** processes that underlie it.

Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy

One set of therapeutic techniques is called cognitive behaviour therapy. As its name suggests, this therapy combines elements of the behavioural model of abnormality. The therapy has two parts.

The cognitive part

The cognitive part of the therapy involves identifying the faulty or irrational thinking processes that are affecting the client. This is done through questioning and getting the client to give examples of situations, what they would think and what they would do. During the cognitive part, the therapist develops ideas about what the client's irrational beliefs are **but does not challenge these directly**.

The behaviour part

The behaviour part of the therapy involves setting **homework** for the client to do. The therapist gives the client tasks that will help them challenge their own irrational beliefs. The idea is that the client identifies their own unhelpful beliefs and them **proves them wrong**. As a result, their beliefs begin to change.

What you need to do...

Work in pairs. One person will take the role of the client, the other of the therapist. The client should put themselves in one of the following roles:

- A student who never does her or his psychology homework
- An office worker who spends 80 hours a week at work
- A person who spends four hours in the gym every day
- Someone who never speaks to other people at parties
- A person who spends £500 a week on shoes
- Or another unreasonable behaviour of your choice

The therapist should question the client about their behaviour, and try to get at the irrational or unreasonable beliefs that lead to the behaviour. Make a note of what you think the unreasonable beliefs are.

Hints...

Quite often, clients block off questions by saying 'I don't know' – for this reason, it's not usually helpful to ask, "why do you...?" It's usually better to think of concrete situations and ask the client how they would feel. Useful questions include:

- When do you...?
- What would happen if you didn't...?
- How would you feel if...?

Do this for **10 minutes** each way, then answer the questions on the other side.

Thought Questions About Cognitive Therapy

- 1. Do you think that cognitive therapy would be suitable for the following situations? Briefly explain your views.
 - (a) Mild depression
 - (b) Severe depression
 - (c) Stress related anxiety
 - (d) Schizophrenia, where the person has hallucinations and delusions

- 2. Helen has gone to her GP suffering from depression. Her GP has referred her to a cognitive therapist. During therapy, it emerged that Helen is in an abusive relationship, where her partner continually undermines her and she is frequently threatened with violence.

What would be the arguments for and against using cognitive therapy to treat Helen’s depression?

- 3. “Everyone has irrational beliefs. It is not up to a therapist to assume the right to define on behalf of someone else what is irrational or rational. To do so is simply an abuse of power.”

Explain the issues raised by this quotation, and assess them according to your own views.

And if you finish that...

Describe the cognitive model of abnormality and explain its implications for the treatment of abnormal behaviour. (6)

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