

Common Cognitive Errors

Overgeneralization

Definition: A conclusion is made about one or more isolated incidents and then is extended illogically to cover broad areas of functioning.

Example: A depressed college student gets a B on a test. He is overgeneralizing when he has automatic thoughts such as “I’m in trouble in this class; I’m falling short everywhere in my life; I can’t do anything right”

All-or-nothing Thinking

Definition: Judgments about oneself, personal experiences, or others are placed in one of two categories – all good or all bad, total failure or total success

Example: David, a man with depression compares himself with Ted, a friend who appears to have a good marriage and whose children are doing well in school. David is engaging in All-or-nothing thinking when he tells himself “Ted has everything going for him and I have nothing.”

Selective Abstraction (aka ignoring the evidence)

Definition: A conclusion is drawn after looking at only a small portion of the available information. Important data are screened out or ignored in order to confirm the person’s biased view of the situation.

Example: A depressed man does not receive a holiday card from an old friend. He thinks “ I’m losing all my friends; nobody cares about me anymore”. He ignores the fact that he has received cards from a number of other friends and still has a very good relationship with this old friend.

Magnification and Minimization

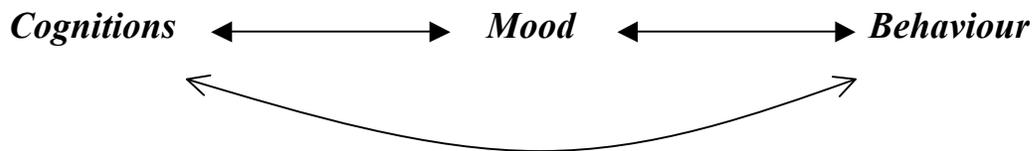
Definition: The significance of an event, attribute or sensation is exaggerated or minimized.

Example: A woman with panic disorder starts to feel light-headed during the onset of a panic attack. She thinks, “I’ll faint; I might have a heart attack or a stroke”.

Summarized from “Learning Cognitive Behavior Therapy: an illustrated guide”. Jesse Wright et al. 2005.

Basic Principles of CBT

- CBT is an approach to therapy that is based on 2 basic ideas:
 - Our thoughts have a controlling influence on our emotions and behaviours and...
 - How we behave can strongly affect our thought patterns and emotions
- These ideas are summarized in the following schematic that can be a very useful visual aid when teaching patients about CBT.



Case Example:

Jeff suffers from social phobia and is preparing to attend a party on his street:

Cognitions (automatic thoughts): “I won’t know what to say at the party. I will look out of place. No one will want to talk to me”.

Mood (emotions): Anxiety. Tension.

Behaviour: Jeff made an excuse and avoided the party.

CBT Session Structure:

Early Sessions:

1. Greet patient and perform symptom check
2. Set an agenda for the session
3. Teach basic CBT concepts and methods
4. Patient practices identifying relevant events and his/her automatic thoughts and mood at the time
5. Give Homework Assignment, including behavioral homeworks
6. Review key points, give and elicit feedback, arrange next appointment.

Middle Sessions:

1. Greet patient and perform symptom check
2. Set the days agenda
3. Review homework from previous session
4. Go through new thought records, adding “evidence” columns
5. Develop new homework assignments (thought records and behavioral homeworks)
6. Review key points, give and elicit feedback, arrange next appointment.

Later Sessions:

As above, but also working on relapse prevention and preparing for termination of therapy.