FAMILY EDUCATION SHEET:

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Pain Management



What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a type of psychological therapy. It helps people feel better by focusing on the links between **what a person thinks**, **how they feel**, and **what actions they take**. By learning to change the way they think and feel, people find ways to be enjoy life and be more comfortable, even when their life circumstances don't necessarily change. It's been proven to be extremely powerful for people with chronic pain, and opens up new ways to **feel better and more in control of their pain.**

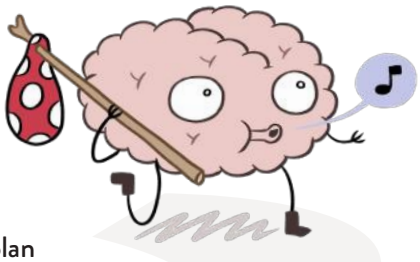
Who does CBT help?

Research demonstrates that CBT is helpful in treating a lot of problems that are really common for kids and teenagers. It's proven useful for managing stress, improving mood and worries, adjusting to illness, dealing with problems at school or with friends and family, and yep, coping with pain. In fact, **some studies have shown that CBT can be more helpful than medication** in treating pain, stress, and negative feelings.

What happens in CBT?

It's about powerful collaboration. Therapists and patients work together as a team to make a treatment plan that lines up with what the patient's personal goals. Through learning a variety of skills and strategies, patients explore ways to cope with their particular challenges and discover the ways that work best for them. The real change happens when people practice those skills in their daily life.

So what exactly does this mean when it comes to pain? Let's break it down.



Patients often learn:

- Skills to help relax the brain and body
- Helpful ways of thinking about pain and stress
- How to improve certain health behaviors that are important for pain management (like good sleep!)
- How to develop a structured, step-by-step recovery plan
- Ways to do the things you want and need to do in day-to-day life

Parents often learn:

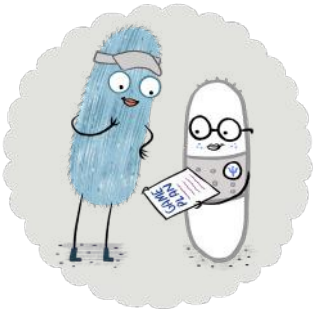
- Research-backed strategies for parenting a child with pain
- Strategies for how to monitor and support their child's progress
- How to best support school attendance and participation
- Guidance for how to reinforce new skills at home

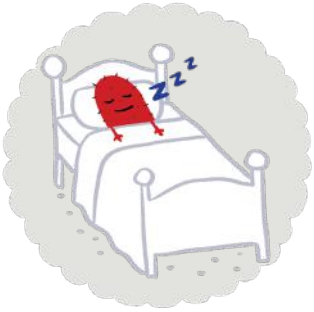


How is CBT different from other types of therapy?

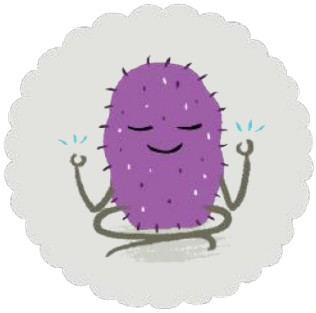
Unlike some therapies, CBT is focused on **skills** and has a particular structure to how it is done. Therapists teach specific skills that are designed to help people feel better and have a direct impact on what happens in their lives every day. CBT also tends to be short-term (typically 8-16 sessions) and is designed to create solutions to specific problems that are getting in the way of what a person wants to do or how they want to feel. Some people say it feels like working with a "**coach**" who teaches skills and helps people practice them until they get good at using them on their own.











WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN A CBT THERAPIST?

Sometimes it's difficult to know whether or not a therapist is using CBT. They best way to know? Ask! Any therapist using CBT should be able to explain it, and how it would work in your particular situation.

As you are looking for a good provider, it's also helpful to know that CBT typically includes:

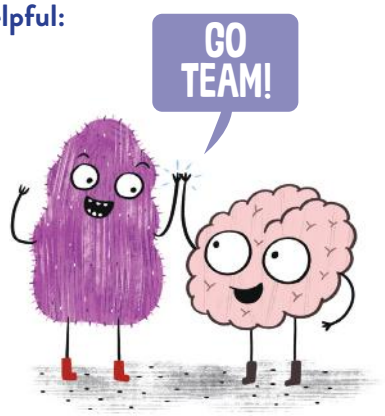
- A clearly defined treatment plan with goals for completion
- A variety of skills such as relaxation training and thinking strategies that are used to manage symptoms
- Homework designed to reinforce the use of new skills
- Parent training / support to help a child's progress (if age appropriate)

How do I find a CBT therapist?

CBT is most commonly practiced by mental health providers (psychologists, therapists, counselors, or clinical social workers). Often pediatricians can be a good resource for identifying local referrals.

These agencies and websites can also be helpful:

- Psychology Today:
  https://www.psychologytoday.com/us
- The Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies:
  https://www.abct.org
- The American Psychological Association:
  https://locator.apa.org



How do we know if we've found the right therapist?

Trust and a good relationship is key in therapy, so finding a therapist that feels like a good fit is important. Some therapists will do a free consultation (by phone or in person) to help you start to figure out if this is the right person for you. You should keep in mind that it can take a few weeks to build a relationship with a new therapist, so it's often useful to attend a few sessions before deciding whether the therapist is really a good fit or not. If you or your child doesn't feel comfortable after giving it a few weeks, it may be a good idea to look for a new therapist.

For more in this series:

A collaboration between Meg Foundation and the Society of Pediatric Psychology Pain SIG

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