

# cognitive therapies

## AIMS OF THERAPIES

To cure or alleviate the underlying mental causes of disorder by restructuring the maladaptive thought processes that are causing it. Cognitive therapies aim to alter the way people think about themselves and their environment, to prevent illogical or irrational thoughts and to enable thought to control behaviour and emotion. Cognitive therapists concentrate on current thinking.

## TECHNIQUES

There are a variety of cognitive behavioural therapies that differ in technique and directiveness. All, however, aim to alter thought processes (the cognitive part) and monitor the effectiveness of this on everyday behaviour or in role play situations (the behaviour part).

### Beck's cognitive restructuring therapy

Beck's therapy (Beck et al, 1979) involves the identification and restructuring of faulty thinking as a collaborative process between the client and therapist. The therapist challenges the client's assumptions by gently pointing out errors in logic and contradictory evidence in their life and letting the client decide for themselves whether their thinking is accurate.

### Ellis's rational emotive behaviour therapy

Ellis's therapy (Ellis, 1962) involves identifying generalised irrational and false beliefs (such as 'I must be successful at everything I do' or 'I must be liked by everyone') and forcibly persuading the client to change them, often through reality testing, to more rational beliefs.

### Meichenbaum's self-instructional training

Meichenbaum (1975) assumes many problems are caused by negative, irrational and self-defeating inner dialogues – individuals may talk themselves into maladaptive behaviours with internal thoughts such as 'I can't do this' or 'something is going to go wrong'. The therapy identifies these maladaptive inner dialogues and gets the client to substitute them for better inner statements such as 'I can do this' by verbally repeating them until they become internalised, natural, and self guiding.

### Kelly's personal construct therapy

Kelly's (1955) therapy is based upon his theory of personality. The client's personal constructs (ways of seeing the world) are identified through the use of the Repertory Grid technique and then altered or 'loosened' so they become more accurate or functional.

## APPLICATION

Cognitive therapies have been applied to treat a variety of mental disorders including:

- **Depression** – Beck's therapy aims to correct the cognitive triad of negative thoughts about the self, the environment, and the future.
- **Anxiety disorders** – Beck's therapy and attribution training have been used to counter panic attacks and phobias.
- **Impulsive children** – Meichenbaum's self instructional training has been used to internalise dialogues of self-control.
- **Stress** – Meichenbaum has also applied his ideas to stress management in industry.
- **Schizophrenia** – Cognitive therapists, such as Beck, have even tried to help schizophrenics cope with, if not remove, their delusions and hallucinations.

## EFFECTIVENESS

With depression, cognitive therapies have been shown to be just as effective as drug therapy – some studies have even reported higher success rates. Perhaps more importantly, lower relapse rates are gained if cognitive therapy is used in conjunction with medication.

Anxiety disorders also respond well to cognitive behavioural therapy although some research indicates that they are not superior to pure behavioural techniques, such as systematic desensitisation in some cases.

## APPROPRIATENESS

Ellis's therapy is more forceful and directive than the others, but generally cognitive therapies aim to empower the patient with self-control strategies. Although cognitive behavioural therapies emphasise thought processes, they do tackle all aspects of a problem and are thus more complete in their approach. As Ellis's (1993) 'ABC' principle illustrates, many therapists assume that an activating event (A), such as being rejected for a job, directly causes an emotional consequence (C), low self-esteem. However, in reality it is often the intervening belief (B), such as 'I am suitable for all jobs', that is responsible for the emotional effect.