

CBT For PTSD

How CBT is delivered

CBT, including TF-CBT, is available in a wide range of settings, as well as hospitals or clinics. It can be offered in individual sessions with a therapist or as part of a group. It is sometimes provided in the form of written or computer-based packages. This may be combined with flexible telephone or face-to-face appointments to check progress and help overcome any barriers to putting into practice what you have learned. Different ways of delivering CBT have made it more accessible to people with busy lives, and has also reduced delays in getting help.

Finding a therapist

TF-CBT is available on the NHS. If you feel that TF-CBT may be helpful, then you should first discuss it with your GP. Private therapists are also available. Before starting TF-CBT, it is recommended that you check that your therapist is accredited by BABCP and has received additional training in trauma focused CBT.

To find details of BABCP accredited CBT therapists visit www.cbtregisteruk.com

About BABCP

BABCP stands for the British Association for Behavioural & Cognitive Psychotherapies. It has been the lead organisation for CBT in the UK and Ireland since 1972. BABCP members work in the NHS, social care, education and universities.

BABCP also provides accreditation to those who practise CBT in the NHS and privately. It is widely recognised by health and social care employers, training institutions and health insurance companies. BABCP believes that accreditation is important in protecting the public and raising the quality of CBT.

What is CBT?

CBT, or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, is a talking therapy that has been proved to help treat a wide range of emotional and physical health conditions in adults, young people and children. CBT looks at how we think about a situation and how this affects the way we act. In turn, our actions can affect how we think and feel. The therapist and client work together in changing the client's behaviours, or their thinking patterns, or both of these.

CBT can be used if you are on medication which has been prescribed by your GP. You can also use CBT on its own. This will depend on the difficulty you want help with.

Trauma Focused CBT, or TF-CBT, is a type of CBT that is specifically related to working with people experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder.

What is post-traumatic stress disorder?

Post-traumatic stress disorder, often known simply as PTSD, is classed as a trauma and stressor related disorder. PTSD is a debilitating mental disorder that follows experiencing or witnessing an extremely traumatic, tragic, or terrifying event. People with PTSD usually have persistent frightening thoughts and memories of their ordeal and feel emotionally numb, especially with people they were once close to.

Types of event which can lead to PTSD include:

- military combat
- violent or sexual assaults
- terrorist attacks
- serious accidental injury
- serious transport accidents
- natural disasters
- witnessing violent deaths
- being in a fire

The onset of PTSD can happen immediately after someone experiences a disturbing event, or many years later, known as delayed onset PTSD. The main symptoms of PTSD are:

- Repeatedly re-living the trauma in the form of nightmares and disturbing recollections during the day. The nightmares or recollections (sometimes called flashbacks) may come and go. You may be free of them for weeks at a time, and then experience them daily for no particular reason
- Problems with sleeping, depression, feeling detached or numb, or being easily startled
- Losing interest in things you used to enjoy, and have trouble feeling affectionate
- Feeling irritable, more aggressive than before, or even violent
- Seeing things that remind you of the incident may be very distressing, which could lead you to avoid certain places or situations that bring back those memories. Anniversaries of the event are often very difficult

PTSD can occur at any age, including childhood. The disorder can be accompanied by depression, substance abuse, or anxiety.

Symptoms may be mild or severe. In severe cases, the individual may have trouble working or socialising. In general, the symptoms seem to be worse if the event that triggered them was initiated by a person, such as a murder, as opposed to a natural disaster (eg a flood).

TF-CBT works

There is a great deal of research evidence to show that TF-CBT works effectively in treating PTSD. This research has been carefully reviewed by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE).

NICE provides independent, evidence-based guidance for the NHS on the most effective ways to treat disease and ill health. TF-CBT is recommended by NICE for those with severe PTSD. CBT can be used if you are on medication which has been prescribed by your GP. You can also use CBT on its own. This will depend on the difficulty you want help with.

■ How TF-CBT is used to treat PTSD

You and your CBT therapist will discuss your specific difficulties and set goals for you to achieve. CBT is not a quick fix. It involves hard work during and between sessions. Your therapist will not tell you what to do. Instead they will help you decide what difficulties you want to work on in order to help you improve your situation. Your therapist will be able to advise you on how to continue using TF-CBT techniques in your daily life after your treatment ends.

Some of the aims of TF-CBT in treating PTSD are:

- Helping you understand how your PTSD symptoms have developed
- Gradually confronting situations which have been previously avoided until the anxiety subsides
- Gradually dealing with your memories of the trauma until there is a significant reduction in anxiety and other related symptoms
- Challenging unhelpful thoughts and beliefs which you have about yourself and others who may have been involved in the traumatic event
- Learning relaxation and confidence-building techniques to reduce the physical symptoms of PTSD
- Using CBT to treat the related symptoms of anxiety and depression