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Adult Mental Health Teams

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Cognitive Analytic Therapy

Psychological Therapies

**What is Cognitive Analytic Therapy?**

Psychological Therapies

Adult Mental Health Teams

Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) takes the perspective that as children we take on board, sometimes quite unconsciously, the values of those around us and their views on how to deal with conflicts and challenges. If our childhood years have included painful experiences, or we have felt unsupported in dealing with difficulties, most of us try to find ways of coping with the feelings in order to get by and ‘survive’.

What often happens is that our attempts can become ‘fixed’ or unhelpful and they can end up keeping our problems in place, rather than solving them. An example of this is what CAT describes as a ‘Placation Trap’, where we start out feeling bad about ourselves, so we try and please others and fit in with them, in the hope that this will make them like us. However, what often happens is that we then end up feeling taken for granted and resentful, which confirms our low opinion of ourselves and keeps us miserable. And so it goes round.

**Why might I need CAT?**

CAT is open to and based on research into how therapy makes a difference to people’s problems. It has shown itself to be particularly helpful where problems are more complex and deep-rooted, involving abrupt or unmanageable mood swings and disrupted relationships as well as self-harm.

CAT acknowledges that changing can be hard, as it at times will feel like we are asked to give up parts of us, or at least the very ways of going about things that have seemed to keep things safe. But the open and shared work with your therapist, following a clear structure, seems to make it easier for people to stay with the therapy through challenging patches and to start breaking long-standing patterns.

**What can I expect when I’m in therapy?**

What you can expect in CAT therapy is to be actively involved with your therapist in trying to identify your patterns of behaviour and to consider different ways of going about things. It will involve noticing patterns between sessions and gradually setting yourself manageable tasks for changing them.

We also pay attention to how the difficulties may be activated between you and your therapist, so that you can together seek solutions or ways out from the patterns.

CAT is concerned to help you understand yourself and your relationships. Particular symptoms and difficulties will always be considered within this overall understanding. Very often, as the wider picture is worked on, symptoms will fade away, but if necessary, some specific, focused work can take place to look at these. Both you and your therapist will be actively involved, devising written descriptions and understandings of your problems, or using diagrams to understand how your current ways of thinking, acting and relating to others may inadvertently maintain them. These descriptions can offer you a new way to think about and feel in charge of the patterns that underlie your difficulties.

**Practical Information**

CAT is always offered within a time limit. The standard format for CAT is of 16 weekly individual sessions, usually lasting 50 minutes, with the same therapist and at the same time throughout. The more active and involved you are both in and between sessions, the more you are likely to get from your therapy. About three months after the end of therapy you will meet your therapist for a review of how things have gone for you.

Where problems are long-standing or involve more severe difficulties managing moods and relationships, therapy is extended to 24 sessions with four follow-up sessions spread over six months. In these circumstances it is usually helpful for therapy to go hand in hand with any other treatment you may receive.