

Frequently Asked Questions about CBT:

What is cognitive behavioral therapy?

CBT is a form of therapy that gets kids to look at their thoughts, feelings and behaviors. It shows them how to replace negative thoughts with more realistic, positive ones.

For example, if a child thinks, “I’m stupid and I can’t learn,” the therapist might help her challenge that thought and replace it with, “I’m good at lots of things. My dyslexia can make learning harder, but I have tools that help me. I’m just as smart as other kids.”

With some types of therapy, the therapist is considered the expert. With CBT, the therapist and child work together to set goals, identify problems and check progress. Kids often get assignments to do between sessions to build the skills they are learning.

CBT helps kids focus on the present and the future, and to realize they have control over their behaviors.

How does cognitive behavioral therapy work?

With CBT, kids meet with a therapist who may be a psychologist, psychiatrist or social worker. They can meet individually, in a group with other kids or with family members. The therapist first tries to find out what they hope to achieve. That could be anything from stopping being bullied at school to feeling more confident.

There are a number of techniques therapists use in CBT. One is called modeling. In this approach the therapist demonstrates the desired behavior, like standing up to a bully.

Another technique is called cognitive restructuring. This is the approach where kids learn to recognize and replace negative thoughts. For instance, they might turn “I stink at math” into “Some parts of math are hard for me. But there are many other parts I can do.”

Therapists use these and other techniques to help a variety of concerns.

How long does cognitive behavioral therapy last?

CBT is much shorter than some other kinds of therapy, which can go on for years. The average number of sessions adults or kids attend is 16. This takes about four months. But each person is different, and the number of recommended sessions can vary.

What are the benefits of cognitive behavioral therapy?

CBT can help kids learn important skills. It can teach them to question their negative thoughts instead of just accepting them. And it can improve their ability to deal with problems. Kids learn to be proactive by breaking down challenges into steps and conquering one step at a time. Studies show that CBT can be as useful as antidepressant medication for some people dealing with depression. It can also help kids who struggle with anxiety.