
Assessment & Formulation in CBT

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Role of CBT Theory

- Assessment & formulation is based on CBT theory
 - CBT is an umbrella term
 - There is no one single theory of CBT
 - Different theories will emphasise different aspects of CBT
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CBT Assessment & Formulation of Anxiety Disorders

- There are a number of anxiety disorders
 - There are a number of different theoretical accounts of anxiety disorders
 - GAD: Borkovec, Wells
 - Panic: Clarke
 - OCD: Salkovsis; Clarke
 - Social Phobia: Rapee
 - Different anxiety disorders & theoretical accounts will also emphasise different targets for assessment & treatment
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CBT Assessment & Formulation of Anxiety Disorders: Common Elements

- **Increased attention to threatening & dangerous stimuli**
 - **Distorted perception & interpretation of internal & external events**
 - **Irrational assumptions & beliefs (themes)**
 - **Maladaptive coping responses**
-

Increased attention to threatening & dangerous stimuli

- More likely to be aware of what they perceive to be threatening &/or dangerous
 - Biased & distorted attention
 - Example:
 - Panic: bodily sensations such as heart rate or breathing
 - OCD: intrusive thoughts or images
 - Social Phobia: other people's reactions
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Distorted perception & interpretation of internal & external events

- Overestimated perception of threat & danger: *“What if ...?”*
 - Exaggeration of the consequences of negative events occurring: *“It will be absolutely awful”*
 - Underestimated perception of own ability to cope: *“I won’t be able to handle this”*
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Irrational assumptions & beliefs

- *Danger Schemas* (Beck): “The world is a dangerous & threatening place”
 - *Acceptance*: “I am nothing unless I am loved”
 - *Competence*: “I have to do everything perfectly”
 - *Responsibility*: “I am solely responsible for how things turn out”
 - *Control*: “I have to be in control at all times”
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Irrational assumptions & beliefs: Metacognitive beliefs about worry

- “If something might be dangerous or unpleasant I should worry about it a lot”
 - “Worrying keeps me in control”
 - “Worry protects me from danger”
 - “Worrying is uncontrollable”
 - “Worry can cause mental illness”
 - “Worry can lead to a loss of control”
 - “Worrying can damage my body”
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Irrational assumptions & beliefs: Metacognitive beliefs about obsessions

- **Significance:**
 - “Every thought or image is meaningful”
 - **Thought-action fusion:**
 - “Thinking something increases the chances that a negative outcome will occur”
 - “Having a bad thought is just as bad as performing the act”
 - **Control:**
 - “I can & must control my thoughts. Failure to do so will lead to dire consequences”
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Maladaptive coping responses

- Avoidance of feared objects or situations
 - Escape from feared objects or situations
 - Safety behaviours:
 - Panic: Using the lift rather than the stairs so as to avoid an increase in heart & breathing rate
 - Social Phobia: Carrying a bottle of water when in social situations so no one notices they have a dry throat
 - OCD: Checking that the iron is turned off repeatedly
 - Cognitive avoidance: thought suppression; distraction, thought rituals
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Modes of Assessment

- Behavioural interview
 - Self-monitoring
 - Self-report questionnaires
 - Information from other people
 - Direct observation of behaviour in clinical settings
 - Role play
 - Behaviour tests
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Behavioural Interview: Brief description of problems

General outline of the person's problems

- “Can you describe what happened last time you were upset?”
- “When was that?”
- “What was the first thing you noticed?”
- “In what way has your life changed since you developed these problems?”
- “What does the problem prevent you from doing?”
- “What have you had to give up because of the problem?”

Provide summary to patient & check for accuracy

- “You seem to be saying that
 - “Have I got that right? Is there anything I have missed?”
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Behavioural interview: Development of the problem

Onset & precipitants

- May be a clear immediate precipitant such as a stressful life event of major change
 - Consider typical life events that may be associated with the onset of the problem (developmental or phase of life issues)
 - Problem may have developed gradually with a succession of events contributing to the problem
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Behavioural interview: Development of the problem

Time course

- The way the problem has developed since it's onset
 - Why has the patient presented for therapy at this time?
 - Has it persisted steadily or has it fluctuated?
 - Plot an event-time chart
 - Emphasis on the present rather than the past at this stage of the assessment
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Behavioural Interview: CB Functional Analysis: ABC Technique

- **Antecedents**: what precedes the onset of the problem
 - **Beliefs & Behaviour**: what are the thoughts, beliefs & actions displayed
 - **Consequences**: positive & negative outcomes that result from the behaviour (reinforcers)
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Behavioural Interview: CB Functional Analysis

Situation

- Where were you?
- What were you doing?
- When did this happen?
- Who else was there?

Bodily reactions

- What did you notice happening to your body?
 - What sensations did you experience?
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Behavioural Interview: CB Functional Analysis

Cognitions

- At the moment you were feeling anxious, what was going through your mind?
 - What were you thinking to yourself?
 - What were you saying to yourself?
 - Did you have an image in your mind at the time?
 - Did you see anything in particular?
 - What were you afraid might happen?
 - What was the worst thing you thought might happen?
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Behavioural Interview: CB Functional Analysis

Behaviour

- What did you do?
- Did you avoid the situation?
- Did you leave the situation?
- Did you do anything to feel less anxious?
(safety behaviours & cognitive avoidance)

Behaviour of others

- How did X react?
 - What did X do/say?
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Behavioural Interview

List of situations the problem is most likely to occur or is severe

- Are there any situations in which you are particularly likely to feel anxious/have a panic attack/worry/feel nauseous etc?
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Behavioural Interview

Avoidance/escape/safety behaviour/cognitive avoidance

- Are there any situations which you avoid because of anxiety?
 - Are there any things you used to do before you developed an anxiety problem that you don't do now?
 - When you notice anxiety symptoms are there things that you won't do?
 - When you notice anxiety symptoms are there any things that you do in order to protect yourself (from fainting, going mad, losing control)?
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Behavioural Interview

Modulators

- Are there things that make your symptoms stronger or more likely to occur?
- Are there things that make your symptoms better or less likely to occur?

Attitudes or behaviours of significant others

- What does X think about your anxiety?
 - What does X do when you are feeling anxious?
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Behavioural Interview

Beliefs about the cause of their anxiety

- Patients are unlikely to engage in treatment if they harbor beliefs that is incongruent with their own beliefs about the nature of their anxiety
 - Examples”
 - “I have a physical condition that can only be helped by physical treatment”
 - “I have a biochemical imbalance & only medication will be effective”
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Behavioural Interview

- Medication (prescribed & non-prescribed)
 - Previous treatment (types, outcome)
 - Personal strengths & assets
 - Psychosocial situation
 - Family
 - Relationships
 - Accommodation
 - Occupation
 - Hobbies/Interests
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Self-Monitoring

- Requires the patient to collect information on their problems between sessions
 - Needs to be specific with clearly defined targets
 - What to collect: Frequency, intensity & duration of the targets
 - Provide patients with a record form
 - Keep it as simple as possible
 - Record information as soon possible after the event
 - Examples:
 - Record of events & experience of anxiety
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Self-Report Questionnaires

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Information from others

Interviews:

- What impact has the problem had on the person?
 - What are the person's beliefs about the problem?
 - How does the person cope with the problem?
 - How does X respond to the problem? Do they reinforce maladaptive behaviour & coping strategies:
 - Do they encourage or support avoidance, escape or safety behaviours?
 - Do they challenge the person's negative thoughts & beliefs?
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Direct Observation of Behaviour: Role Plays

Especially useful for the assessment of problems in social situations:

- Interpersonal skills deficits
- Communication skills deficits
- Assertiveness skills – saying no

Can be self-monitored thereafter

- Identify thoughts that contribute to feelings & physical sensations
 - Link with behaviours displayed in role-play
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Direct observation of behaviour:

Behaviour Tests

- Confront rather than avoid the phobic situation or object
 - Confront phobic situation without safety behaviours
 - Examples:
 - Attend work drinks rather than making an excuse & avoiding
 - Don't carry a bottle of water while at work drinks
 - Walk up the staircase rather than take the lift
 - Don't check the iron
 - Self-monitor thereafter
 - Thoughts & beliefs; feelings; physical sensations; behaviours; consequences or outcome of the behaviour
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CBT Formulation

- CBT Formulation will stem from a thorough CBT assessment
 - Incorporates consideration of the following:
 - Predisposing Factors
 - Precipitating Factors
 - Perpetuating Factors
 - A thorough CBT formulation will incorporate a consideration of these factors & thereby guide any therapeutic intervention
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CBT Formulation: Predisposing Factors

- Factors that did not directly cause the development of the disorder but increased the risk or probability of the eventual development of an emotional disorder
 - Also referred to as vulnerability factors
 - Examples:
 - Genetic make-up
 - Learning which occurs in childhood
 - Childhood illnesses
 - **Underlying assumptions, core beliefs, schemas**
 - Usually present some substantial amount of time prior to the development of the disorder
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 - In the absence of predisposing factors they may be the complete cause of the disorder, or contribute to the development of the disorder, in conjunction with the predisposing factors
 - Can be events that are either internal or external to the person
 - Examples:
 - Illness
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- Diathesis = Weakness or predisposing factor that renders the person vulnerable to developing the disorder
 - Stress = Noxious stimulus or precipitating factor that causes the diathesis to manifest
 - Disorder = Diathesis + Stress
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CBT Formulation: Perpetuating Factors

- Factors that cause the disorder to continue to manifest, once the precipitating event has occurred
 - Also referred to as maintaining factors
 - Can be continuations of predisposing &/or precipitating factors
 - Can be sufficient for the maintenance of a disorder by itself or contributory
 - Can be internal or external to the person
 - Examples:
 - Continuation of an illness
 - Continuation of an unhealthy relationship
 - **Maladaptive behaviour pattern such as avoidance of feared situations or objects**
 - **Maladaptive way of interpreting situations**
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

- 25 year old lady

Presenting problems

- A tendency to worry constantly about most things especially what others think of her & being left alone (boyfriend leaving her)
 - Finds it very hard to not worry & just relax
 - Experiencing muscle tension, irritability, agitation, disturbed sleep
 - Finds it hard to socialise & tends to avoid interacting with people she doesn't know very well
 - Tendency to seek reassurance from others, especially her boyfriend who is finding this to be frustrating & annoying, leading to frequent conflict
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Onset & precipitants

- Has felt this way “forever”
- No obvious recent trigger for problems
- Decided to seek help after a recent “melt down” where she became very distressed & anxious.

Time course

- As noted, seemingly life-long
 - Has been better since moving away from her family 8 years ago (interstate)
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

CB functional analysis of recent occurrence of the problem

- **Situation**: At home alone completing some work on a Sunday afternoon. Waiting for a call from her boyfriend to tell her where to meet up with him & their friends for dinner that night. Couldn't go out with her boyfriend & friends because she needed to finish an article by Monday. Some time passes & no phone call is received. Attempts to contact her boyfriend & other friends but no answer.
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Bodily sensations

- Tension
- Butterflies in stomach
- Headache

Cognitions

- “They are having a good time without me”
 - “They are going to leave me out of dinner”
 - “They don’t want me around”
 - “I’m such an idiot”
 - “X doesn’t really love me”
 - “X is going to leave me”
 - Images of her boyfriend & friends having a good time, laughing, joking & talking about her
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Behaviours

- Attempts to distract herself unsuccessfully
- Tries to contact her boyfriend & friends repeatedly with no success

Behaviour of others

- Boyfriend eventually calls. Reassures her there is nothing to worry about. States he had his phone on silent because they were watching a movie. Others didn't have phone on or with them or didn't hear it ring. Tells her where to meet them for dinner.
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List of situations problem is most likely to occur or be severe

- Social situations especially meeting people for the first time & being around strangers
 - Pressure or deadlines at work
 - When boyfriend goes out alone or when away from boyfriend
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Avoidance/escape/safety behaviours

- Tends to avoid social interaction with strangers
- Clings to boyfriend in such social situations
- Often makes excuses when out alone & leaves
- Calls boyfriend a lot when away from him

Modulators

- Being without boyfriend tends to make symptoms stronger or more likely to occur?
 - When feels she is looking better tends to feel less anxious
-

CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Attitudes or behaviours of significant others

- Boyfriend tells her she is being silly most of the time & that she has nothing to worry about
- Tends to argue
- Tends to stay close by her when out socially

Medication (prescribed & non-prescribed)

- Nil

Previous treatment (types, outcome)

- Saw a counselor about 5 years ago but “it didn’t work out”
-

CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Personal strengths & assets

- Intelligent
- Articulate
- Insightful

Psychosocial situation

- Family: parents live in Queensland; eldest of 7 children; described parents relationship as volatile & alternative; little contact with family other than phone & email for the past 6 years
 - Relationships: boyfriend of 9 years who “saved me from my family”
 - Accommodation: lives with boyfriend
 - Occupation: free lance journalist looking for permanent work
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Predisposing Factors:

- Difficult upbringing: lack of stability, predictability & security
 - Volatile parental relationship with occasions of physical violence
 - Temperament: anxious, sensitive
 - Core beliefs about abandonment & rejection
 - Need for acceptance & approval & perfection
 - Danger Schema
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Precipitating Factors:

- No major stressful life event
 - “melt down” the final straw: no longer wants to “live this way”
 - Fear that boyfriend will tire of her behaviour & leave (ultimate threat)
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CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Perpetuating Factors:

- Illogical interpretations of events & inaccurate predictions
 - Inflated perception of risk for negative events occurring (Worry constantly)
 - Belief that people were constantly judging her in a negative way
 - No belief in her ability to cope on her own
 - Avoidance of or escape from feared situations
 - Seeking & gaining constant reassurance from her boyfriend
-

CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Treatment Plan

- Educate in CBT model: understand causal relationship between thoughts, body sensations, feelings & behaviours
 - Challenge illogical interpretations & predictions using cognitive disputation techniques
 - Use exposure tasks & behaviour experiments to further test negative interpretations & predictions, especially in social situations
 - Learn relaxation skills to reduce anxiety levels
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Summary

- CBT assessment & formulation is grounded in CBT theory
 - Assessment can incorporate a number of different techniques
 - Formulation stems from the assessment
 - Treatment stems from the formulation
 - Both assessment & formulation are ongoing processes & not just relevant at the commencement of therapy
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THE MARIAN CENTRE

Growth through choice and understanding



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- **Maladaptive coping responses**



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Modes of Assessment

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Behavioural Interview: Brief description of problems

General outline of the person's problems

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Provide summary to patient & check for accuracy

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Behavioural interview: Development of the problem

Onset & precipitants

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Direct Observation of Behaviour: Role Plays

Especially useful for the assessment of problems in social situations:

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- Communication skills deficits
- Assertiveness skills – saying no

Can be self-monitored thereafter

- Identify thoughts that contribute to feelings & physical sensations
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 - **Maladaptive behaviour pattern such as avoidance of feared situations or objects**
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- 25 year old lady

Presenting problems

- A tendency to worry constantly about most things especially what others think of her & being left alone (boyfriend leaving her)
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- When feels she is looking better tends to feel less anxious



CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Attitudes or behaviours of significant others

- Boyfriend tells her she is being silly most of the time & that she has nothing to worry about
- Tends to argue
- Tends to stay close by her when out socially

Medication (prescribed & non-prescribed)

- Nil

Previous treatment (types, outcome)

- Saw a counselor about 5 years ago but “it didn’t work out”



CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Personal strengths & assets

- Intelligent
- Articulate
- Insightful

Psychosocial situation

- Family: parents live in Queensland; eldest of 7 children; described parents relationship as volatile & alternative; little contact with family other than phone & email for the past 6 years
- Relationships: boyfriend of 9 years who “saved me from my family”
- Accommodation: lives with boyfriend
- Occupation: free lance journalist looking for permanent work



CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Predisposing Factors:

- Difficult upbringing: lack of stability, predictability & security
- Volatile parental relationship with occasions of physical violence
- Temperament: anxious, sensitive
- Core beliefs about abandonment & rejection
- Need for acceptance & approval & perfection
- Danger Schema



CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Precipitating Factors:

- No major stressful life event
- “melt down” the final straw: no longer wants to “live this way”
- Fear that boyfriend will tire of her behaviour & leave (ultimate threat)



CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Perpetuating Factors:

- Illogical interpretations of events & inaccurate predictions
 - Inflated perception of risk for negative events occurring (Worry constantly)
 - Belief that people were constantly judging her in a negative way
 - No belief in her ability to cope on her own
- Avoidance of or escape from feared situations
- Seeking & gaining constant reassurance from her boyfriend



CBT Formulation: Putting it all together

Treatment Plan

- Educate in CBT model: understand causal relationship between thoughts, body sensations, feelings & behaviours
- Challenge illogical interpretations & predictions using cognitive disputation techniques
- Use exposure tasks & behaviour experiments to further test negative interpretations & predictions, especially in social situations
- Learn relaxation skills to reduce anxiety levels



Summary

- CBT assessment & formulation is grounded in CBT theory
- Assessment can incorporate a number of different techniques
- Formulation stems from the assessment
- Treatment stems from the formulation
- Both assessment & formulation are ongoing processes & not just relevant at the commencement of therapy

