

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

for Substance Use Disorders

What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders (CBT-SUD)?

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Substance Use Disorders is a treatment that addresses substance use disorders and related problems. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a well-researched, efficacious, and time-limited psychotherapeutic approach that has been successfully applied to problematic substance use. CBT involves a structured approach that focuses on the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behavior. As the name suggests, CBT is guided by an integration of cognitive and behavioral theories. CBT-SUD has been adapted specifically for Veterans and can be integrated with other SUD treatment services including mutual-support groups and pharmacotherapy.

What is a substance use disorder (SUD)?

Substance use becomes problematic when it interferes with daily life and causes pain for both the person using the substance and those who care about that person. SUDs are common, serious conditions. Symptoms of SUDs include:

- Using more of the substance or using it over a longer period of time than intended
- Having a persistent desire to use or unsuccessful attempts to cut back or quit using
- Spending a lot of time in activities necessary to obtain, use, or recover from the effects of substance use
- Craving or strong urges to use
- Not fulfilling major social or work related obligations or giving up hobbies due to substance use
- Using in physically hazardous situations
- Using despite negative effects on one's physical or emotional condition
- Development of tolerance requiring an increased dose of the substance to achieve the desired effect or a reduced effect when the usual dose is used
- Experiencing uncomfortable withdrawal symptoms when use is reduced or stopped

What does CBT-SUD involve?

CBT-SUD consists of meeting weekly with a therapist for about an hour for approximately 12 weeks or until the goals of treatment have been met. CBT-SUD differs from approaches that are primarily psycho-educational or exclusively skills-based. CBT-SUD sessions are usually structured by including an assessment of substance use, a summary of the previous session, a review of homework assigned during the last session, an agenda of topics to be discussed, and development of a new homework assignment for the coming week. CBT-SUD strongly emphasizes case conceptualization, the therapeutic relationship, and use of therapeutic CBT strategies. The conceptualization guides the direction of the therapy as it takes place within the context of a collaborative and supportive therapeutic relationship. Although CBT-SUD is structured, the treatment engages the Veteran in an active, collaborative, and individualized process.



Who is CBT-SUD for?

CBT-SUD has been adapted specifically for Veterans with substance use disorders. Veterans should be available to attend approximately 12 weekly sessions. Veterans who currently require high intensity, acute stabilization should be stabilized before beginning CBT-SUD.

How effective is CBT-SUD?

Meta-analyses and review articles have found that CBT-SUD is efficacious. CBT-SUD may be combined with pharmacotherapy to provide even more robust outcomes. Studies with diverse groups of clients with a variety of different SUD diagnoses have been conducted.

How do I get more information?

Consult with your treatment team, Local Evidence-Based Psychotherapy Coordinator, or any of the trained CBT-SUD providers in your area. Visit the CBT-SUD SharePoint site for additional information and materials.

<http://vaww.mentalhealth.va.gov/ebp/cbt-sud.asp>

Discussing CBT-SUD with Veterans

- CBT-SUD is a highly effective treatment for individuals with SUDs and related problems.
- The therapist collaborates with the Veteran to establish specific treatment goals including learning new ways of thinking about situations and coping with future problems. These new skills often lead to fewer SUD symptoms and help the Veteran to maintain gains.
- Veterans who complete CBT-SUD report better management of cravings and urges, improved problem solving, and increased commitment to making and maintaining changes in substance use. Veterans also often report getting more enjoyment or fulfillment from daily activities.

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