

Cognitive Therapy - Youth



1919 University Avenue West, Suite 400, St. Paul, MN 55104 Tel. 651-645-2948 or 888-NAMIHELPS www.namihelps.org

Cognitive therapy may be used for children who have depression, anxiety, behavior problems or alcohol and drug abuse. Cognitive therapy is based on the idea that how you think largely determines the way you feel. This therapy focuses on a child's thoughts that cause distress. Children learn that his or her negative thinking is not based on real facts. By correcting a child's negative thinking, his or her emotions and behaviors change as well.

How does this therapy work?

1. Child is trained to identify thoughts that make him or her feel anxious.
2. Child writes down these negative thoughts.
3. Child and therapist review the thought record and discuss whether the thoughts are accurate.
4. Therapist gives the child accurate thoughts to replace the negative ones.
5. Child practices replacing the negative thoughts with positive ones.
6. Children think more realistically and feel better as they learn to challenge negative or fear-inducing thoughts.

Example: Marsha is 14 years old. For some time she has been telling herself that she is not pretty enough to hang out with the "in" group of girls at school. Marsha's mother was concerned for her daughter because she notices her worrying about many things. She decides to take Marsha to a therapist to help her with her anxiety. Marsha cooperates and tells the therapist all the negative thoughts she has about herself. The therapist explains to Marsha that these negative thoughts are not true. The therapist tells Marsha she has homework to do. Marsha listens to the instructions and goes home and starts writing down all the negative thoughts she has. Then she took a look at each thought and wrote down proof that these thoughts make sense. Next Marsha thinks about the reasons these thoughts are not true. She writes these reasons on her thought record. Marsha notices that she had very little proof that her negative thoughts were true. However, she did notice that it was much easier to write down why the thoughts are false. Marsha starts to believe that she can turn her negative thoughts into positive ones. At Marsha's next therapy session she shows the therapist her thought record. The therapist is pleased to see how well Marsha did with her homework. With the therapists help, Marsha started to talk differently to herself when the negative thoughts would come. With practice Marsha started to feel less anxious and felt much more positive about herself. In fact, Marsha started to have lunch with the "in" group of girls at school.