

The Cognitive Model

(Jane's Cognitive Diagram-1)

Event

John Walked past Jane without saying Hi



Automatic Thoughts & Images

"John is angry with me"
"He is rude and he does not like me"
Having the image of John walking away disgusted



Body Sensations

Heart racing, shortness of breath, and dry mouth



Emotions & Action Urges

Feeling anxious, sad, and angry.
Having the urge to confront him.



Behavior

Calling John and leaving angry messages



More Automatic Thoughts

"He is going to be so mad t me and spread rumors about me"
"I am such a loser" "Why can't I control my temper?"

The above diagram (Jane's Cognitive Diagram-1) is a simplified cognitive model to demonstrate how automatic thoughts influence our emotion and behavior. In the above example, Jane's automatic thought "John is angry with me" triggered other negative thoughts and emotions. Instead of utilizing effective coping strategies to regulate her emotions, Jane used maladaptive coping behaviors (e.g., calling and leaving an angry message) in an attempt to stop her negative emotions. Although Jane might have felt a sense of relief immediately following her maladaptive behavior, she soon had fearful thoughts of the possibility of John's retaliation in the future. To further illustrate the cycle of maladaptive coping, we could say that her fearful thoughts triggered several panic attacks as well as intense guilt and shame throughout the night. As soon as she woke up the next day, she continued to worry and impulsively decided that she would not go to school. She felt guilt and shame about not being able to "control herself and handle the situation." She started to excessively drink and eat which triggered more negative feelings toward herself. Again, to avoid experiencing emotional pain, she engaged in unhealthy and unskillful coping behaviors. Each of her maladaptive behaviors made her feel a brief relief before feeling worse again, and this can continue on if she does not have the skills to stop it. Jane's cognitive diagram would be much different if she has learned and applied CBT skills, as one can see in the next diagram- Jane's Cognitive Diagram-2.

The Cognitive Model

(Jane's Cognitive Diagram-2)

Event

John Walked past Jane without saying Hi



Automatic Thoughts & Images

Jane caught her automatic thought immediately and asked herself: "Is my assumption - John is angry with me, based on facts or my emotions?" "Am I jumping to conclusions?" "What has been left out? What are other possible reasons that he did not say hi?" "Maybe he simply did not see me or maybe he is stressed, like he said in the office last week, and did not pay attention to his surroundings, and this has nothing to do with him being angry with me."



Body Sensations

Calm and relaxed



Emotions & Action Urges

Feeling curious about investigating her own automatic thoughts and distortions
Feeling compassion for John when thinking that he might be stressed
Having the urge to ask him how he is doing



Behavior

Calling John and leaving a kind and friendly message



More Thoughts

"Wow, I am getting better at this. I did not react to my anger right away."
"I can change, and I am taking control of my life"

CBT Changes Life at a Much Deeper Level

Some critics questioned whether CBT can facilitate changes in a deeper level of personality or sense of self instead of merely treating visible behavior problems. The answer is “yes and it certainly does have a positive impact on clients’ deeper core personality structure.”

Let’s look at our previous example of Jane. In her second cognitive diagram, her effective coping skills lead to both symptom reduction and change in her assumptions and core beliefs.

When she was able to successfully apply adaptive and skillful cognitive and behavioral strategies, it led her to:

- Stop the cycle of suffering anxiety and depression.
- Foster a sense of self-mastery and self-worth (“Wow, I did it. I responded to the situation skillfully and effectively” “I can change and I am in control of myself”)
- Weaken the negative assumptions of herself and others beyond improvement in symptoms and behaviors. Instead of believing that “People don’t like me” “I am not lovable,” her view about herself and others became more flexible and less rigid - “Sometimes people are too involved with their own world to notice others around them. Even if they don’t say hi to me, it does not mean that they don’t like me.”
- Elevate her positive emotions such as curiosity, creativity, and loving-kindness attitude toward herself, others, and the world.
- Generate positive feedback and social interaction from others.

As one can see, CBT does not just target visible problem behavior, it goes much deeper than that! With CBT, clients can experience a positive outcome across levels of symptoms reduction and positive changes in personality.