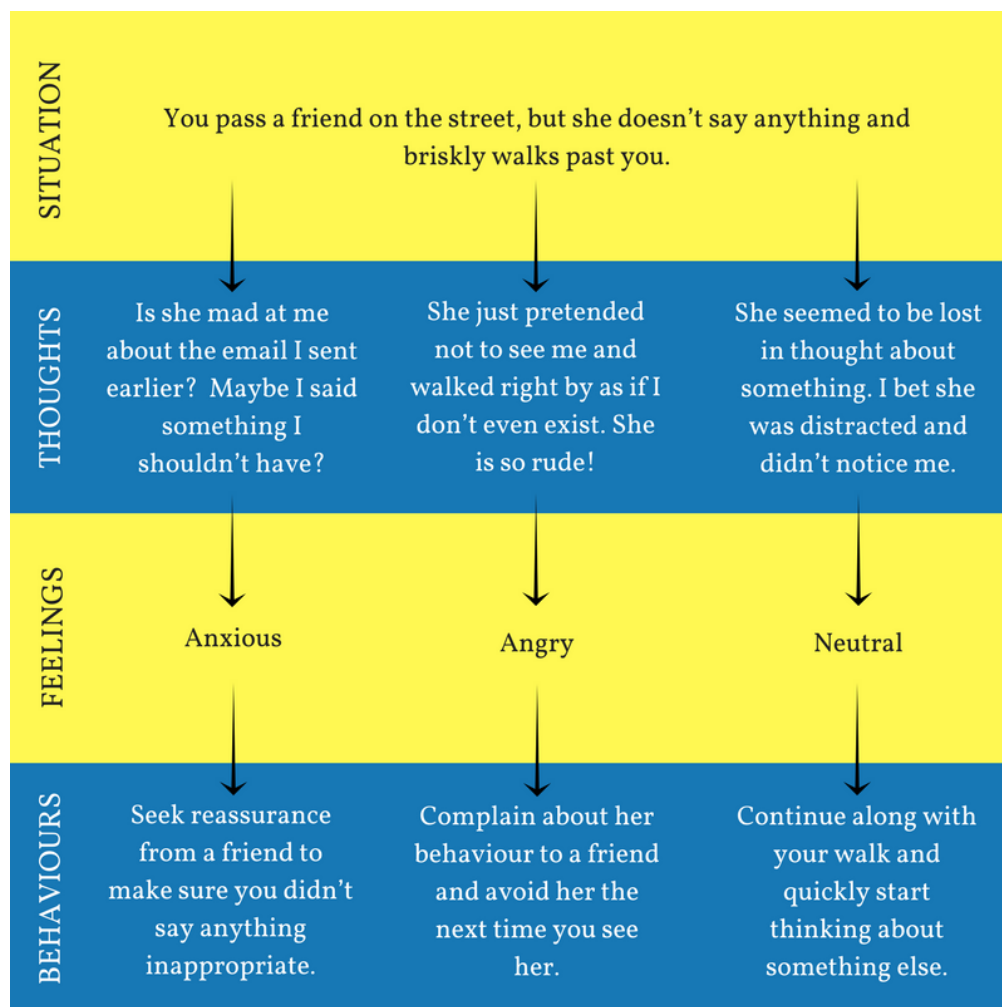


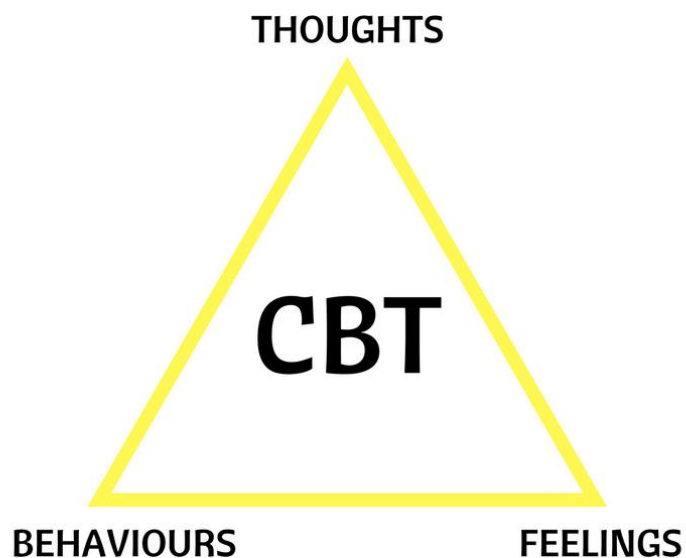
# What is CBT?



Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is a psychological treatment that has been scientifically proven to be effective for a wide variety of mental health difficulties. The goal of CBT is to identify and modify unhelpful thoughts and behaviours that may be contributing to emotional difficulties and keeping you stuck. CBT is based on the premise that how we think (e.g., our beliefs and assumptions) impacts our feelings and behaviours. Consider the following situation and how three people might respond differently to it:



In CBT, you work collaboratively with your therapist to learn skills and strategies for dealing with unhelpful thoughts and behaviours. When people experience persistent negative moods like anxiety or depression, there is a tendency to focus on some parts of the situation (the negative parts) and ignore others (the positive or neutral parts). The aim of CBT is not to “think positively” but rather to consider situations from various perspectives in order to see things in a more realistic or balanced way. Furthermore, some behaviours that may feel good in the moment (e.g., slamming a door when we are angry) can actually maintain our difficulties or make things worse. Making changes to unhelpful patterns of thinking and behaving can have significant and long-lasting effects on our mood, relationships, and overall quality of life.



## Does CBT Work?

CBT was first developed in the 1960's and is now considered an evidence-based psychological treatment for a wide range of mental health difficulties. In order to be considered “evidence-based”, a treatment must have been delivered to large groups of individuals and data collected on how well the treatment actually works. This data is then carefully analyzed by researchers and scientifically shown to be effective. The psychologists at the Waterloo CBT Clinic have extensive training as mental health clinicians as well as scientists, and are committed to providing treatment based on the most current scientific evidence available.

## What is the format of CBT?

A standard course of CBT lasts for 8 – 20 sessions, which typically take place once per week. CBT focuses on helping you learn skills and strategies for dealing with your problems more effectively. In each session, your therapist will help you learn and practice a specific skill. The skills that are learned will be tailored to your particular concerns and treatment goals. The goal of CBT is to teach you a set of skills so that by the end of therapy, you will have the tools you need to be your own therapist.

- **CBT is a structured psychological treatment.** A standard course of CBT lasts for 8 – 20 sessions, which typically take place once per week. The sessions will be structured and there will be a specific set of topics to cover in each session. These topics are designed to target the specific difficulties that brought you to our clinic. You will be encouraged to think about the material presented and share how it applies to you as well as your thoughts and experiences with it. Since CBT is a skill, practice between sessions is essential for success.
- **CBT is focused on the present.** Although everyone has different experiences that have contributed to the development of their current difficulties, it is not possible to change things that happened in the past. CBT therefore targets the factors that are maintaining your difficulties currently.
- **CBT treatments offered through our clinic are focused on specific problems.** It is common to experience a number of mental health difficulties at the same time. However, trying to tackle everything at once is hard, and is often not going to be successful. For this reason, CBT targets a specific problem (the one currently causing the most distress), so you can really focus on it, and see the progress that results from your work.
- **CBT is a skills-based approach.** The goal of CBT is to teach you a set of skills so that by the end of therapy, you will have the tools you need to be your own therapist. It is expected that after the treatment has finished, you will keep using these strategies on your own to continue making progress.
- **Between session homework is assigned every week.** Because CBT is a skills-based approach, the skills you learn in session each week have to be practiced throughout the week. In CBT, what you do between sessions counts as much (or more!) than what you do in session. This means that the treatment will not be

beneficial to you unless you commit to devoting time and energy between sessions to applying what you have learned.

- **Regular attendance is important.** You will typically meet with your therapist on a weekly basis, although other arrangements can be made in certain circumstances. Regular attendance and frequent sessions allow you to build momentum and address your difficulties more effectively.

Research shows that CBT is a highly effective psychological treatment for many mental health concerns. However, as with any new skill, CBT also requires time and effort, and will only be effective if you are able to make a commitment to attending sessions regularly, are open to challenging yourself to learn new ways of dealing with problems, and are able to devote time to attending sessions and completing between session exercises regularly. If you do not feel you can commit to this right now, it is better to wait until you can really take full advantage of this treatment. However, if you are ready to fully commit, you can expect that the work you do will help you cope with problems in new and more effective ways and will improve your overall psychological functioning.