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An interview with Dr. Judith S. Beck

An [interview](#) with [Dr. Judith S. Beck](#), author of "Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond"

Many therapists are now using cognitive therapy as a way to help their clients change their moods, behavior and thinking patterns. Unlike psychoanalysis, cognitive therapy emphasizes solving that are happening right now, rather than delving into the past.

In very simple terms, would you explain to our readers what cognitive therapy is?

Cognitive therapy is an active, goal-directed process which helps people to understand and change thinking and behavior. By learning and applying CT skills, anxiety, depression, anger and other problems can be ameliorated.

How does cognitive therapy differ from psychoanalysis and other forms of therapy?

Cognitive therapy uses a variety of cognitive and behavioral techniques to change thinking, mood and behavior and is time-limited. It initially emphasizes solving present problems and teaching individuals skills to reduce their distress.

How does cognitive therapy teach a patient to solve their own problems?

Cognitive therapy is collaborative. The therapist teaches the patient to identify and modify dysfunctional thinking and behavior that has impeded problem solving.

What are core beliefs? How do we develop our core beliefs? How do our core beliefs impact our lives?

Core beliefs are people's most fundamental ideas about themselves, other people, and their worlds. They develop at an early age as we attempt to make sense of our environment and to organize our experience in a coherent way so as to function adaptively.

How does changing our core beliefs change our behavior?

Changing one's most basic ideas about oneself modifies how one perceives situations. Seeing situations and problems more clearly and rationally aids in responding emotionally and behaviorally in a more adaptive manner.

How can a person discover their deepest core beliefs? What questions could they ask themselves?

An individual can ask herself, when she is feeling distressed, what a situation or problem means about her. For example, does it mean she is helpless, vulnerable, incompetent, or powerless? Or does it mean to her that she is unlovable, unworthy, defective, or bad? Core beliefs can be identified by looking at the themes of thoughts the individual has across many distressing situations and across time.

How can we change our negative core beliefs to positive core beliefs?

We change negative core beliefs to more realistically positive ones through an active process. First, the individual "catches" herself interpreting a problematic situation as meaning that there is something fundamentally wrong with her. Second, she looks for alternative, realistic explanations for the problematic situation. Third, she learns to realistically interpret relevant positive events and situations as being due, at least in part, to her positive attributes.

What are coping cards?

Coping cards are simply index cards which individuals compose and read regularly (several times a day) to help them change their unrealistically negative

ideas or to remind themselves of adaptive ways of behaving when they are distressed.

What is a positive self-statement log? How can a person begin keeping one?

The individual reviews her activities every few hours (e.g., at lunch, dinner, bedtime) and records anything she did that she deserves credit for-which might be anything she did reasonably well or anything she did that was difficult but she did it anyway. Keeping track of positive accomplishments helps boost one's mood, motivates one for further positive action, and counteracts a tendency to recognize or dwell only on one's shortcomings or problems.

What are the spontaneous images that come into our minds-and how can this impact our moods and emotions?

"Images" are fantasies or automatic thoughts that come to our mind in the form of pictures. Negative images such as imagining another person frowning at you can make you feel worried, sad, or angry.

How can people change their images?

First one must recognize that she's had a distressing image by asking herself when she is upset, whether she is imagining something. If so, she can ask herself whether the image has indeed happened, is likely to happen, or is only fantasy. Then she can deliberately try to imagine a more likely scenario. Other methods are best learned through more extensive reading or in therapy.

How can a person monitor her automatic thoughts?

An individual can start to monitor her thoughts by asking herself, "What's going through my mind right now?" when she is upset. She can then ask herself a series of questions to evaluate the validity and utility of the thought.

Can you explain how thoughts precede emotions?

Individuals interpret situations in various ways and react emotionally in accordance with that interpretation. For example, your friend is late. If you think, "She must not care about me," your emotional reaction is likely to be one of sadness. If you think, "What if something terrible happened to her?" you are likely to feel anxious. If you think, "How dare she keep me waiting!" you will probably feel angry. Your perceptions, in the form of your thoughts, influence your emotional reaction.

Is it really possible for a person to control their thoughts, thus preventing negative and unpleasant emotions?

It is not helpful for people to control their thoughts in an attempt to prevent negative emotions. Cognitive therapy doesn't try to eliminate unpleasant emotions; it tries to help people think more realistically about their problems so they don't feel excessively upset and/or behave in maladaptive ways. Negative emotions associated with real life problems are as much a part of life as positive emotions associated with pleasant events. People who try to control their negative emotions usually end up reducing their positive emotions as well.

How can a person who is not in therapy utilize the principles of cognitive therapy to live a happier, more successful life?

Cognitive therapy can help a person recognize when distorted or dysfunctional thinking is interfering with their sense of well-being, is leading to maladaptive behavior, or is interfering with solving problems. It helps them set reasonable goals and change their thinking and behavior to achieve them.

Other books on Cognitive Therapy:

Reinventing Your Life: How to Break Free from Negative Life Patterns and Feel Good Again by Jeffrey E. Young, Janet S. Klosko and Aaron T. Beck.

Mind over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think by Dennis Greensberg, Christine A. Padesky.

Cognitive Therapy of Depression by Aaron T. Beck.

Cognitive Therapy and Emotional Disorders by Aaron T. Beck.

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