

Using Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) Techniques to Heal from Trauma

Objective

To understand and cope with the effects of trauma.

What to Know

Trauma can significantly impact how you think and feel, sometimes leading to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) focuses on helping you change unhelpful thoughts and beliefs that may have developed because of your trauma. CPT helps you:

- learn about PTSD and how it affects your thoughts and emotions.
- process trauma by writing and discussing your experiences.
- challenge and change harmful beliefs related to trauma.
- develop skills to create more balanced and realistic thoughts about trauma and its aftermath.

What to Do

PTSD can develop after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, severe anxiety, and uncontrollable thoughts about the event. How do you think trauma affects how you feel (your emotions)? Be specific.

Trauma can cause changes in the way you think. Reflect on any changes you have noticed in your thoughts since the trauma. Have you experienced increased self-blame or other negative thoughts? Explain.

Write a detailed account of your traumatic experience. Include what happened, how you felt, and what thoughts you had during and after the event.

How did writing about your trauma make you feel?

Write down any negative beliefs you have about yourself, others, or the world because of your trauma. For example, "I am to blame," "The world is unsafe," or "I can't trust anyone."

Choose one belief to focus on. Circle the belief in the above list and answer the following questions.

What evidence do you have that supports this belief?

What evidence do you have against this belief?

Is there an alternative explanation or perspective?

Take a belief from the previous section and reframe it into a more balanced thought. For example, change "I am to blame," to, "I did the best I could in a difficult situation." Write the reframed belief below.

Write down three situations where you can apply this new, balanced thought.

1.

2.

3.

How do you think this new thought will change your feelings and behaviors in these situations?
Be specific.

Reflect on your thoughts and beliefs about the trauma. Write down any specific thoughts or beliefs that feel like obstacles to your recovery. These are your "stuck points."

Choose one stuck point and circle it in the above list. Use the following questions to challenge this stuck point.

What evidence do you have that supports this thought?

What evidence do you have against this thought?

Is there another way to look at this situation?

What would you tell a friend who had this thought?

Based on your answers, write a new, more balanced thought to replace the stuck point.

How does this new thought make you feel? How might it change your behavior?

Brainstorm some ways you can release or reframe your stuck points.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this activity? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
