

Retrain Your Brain

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in

7

WEEKS

A Workbook
for Managing
Depression and
Anxiety

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Introduction

HOW CAN I HELP PEOPLE SUFFER LESS and live more fully? This question drove me to become a psychotherapist. I still remember when I discovered the answer as a master's student. I was in the library late one night, reading up on something called cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). During that study session, I learned how CBT can help us replace thoughts and behaviors that aren't working for us with new ones that work better.

The treatment approach seemed so reasonable, so collaborative between therapist and client, so respectful of those seeking help. With its implicit assumption that we can use what's whole in us to heal what's broken, CBT appealed to my humanistic leanings. CBT programs were also well tested, so I could be confident they would help many people. I knew right away that I'd found my home as a therapist.

After my master's, I wanted more specialized training in CBT, so I pursued my PhD at the University of Pennsylvania—a school where many of the best-tested cognitive-behavioral treatments were developed. Over the next 12 years, I studied, practiced, and researched CBT for anxiety and depression, first as a doctoral student, and then as a faculty member at Penn. Over and over I was struck by the power of CBT to help people break through major barriers in their lives.

What I hadn't anticipated was how personally useful the principles of CBT would be. Life is hard for all of us, and I've had my share of panic attacks, depressed moods, insomnia, anxiety, stress, and crushing disappointment. I've found that the tools of CBT work as well for the therapist as for the client.

I've been on the other side of therapy, too. I know the value of having another person to listen to us, to validate our perspective, to gently challenge us when

needed, to give us a place where we can say anything and be accepted as we are. If you've found a good therapist, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

Many people who come to my office also have had therapy before. They may have explored their childhoods, identified patterns in their closest relationships, and gained valuable insights. They probably found the therapy very helpful, even lifesaving. And yet they've sought out a CBT therapist because, for some reason, *they haven't been able to make the changes they want.*

Maybe they haven't been able to break their habit of avoiding uncomfortable situations. Or they continue to be plagued by constant worry. Or they can't stop their habitual self-criticism. What they're often looking for are tools and skills to address the issues that they're well aware of. CBT can help a person transform insight into change.

I want as many people as possible to experience the power of CBT to make their struggles more manageable. Unfortunately, many people simply don't know that short-term, highly effective psychological treatment is available. Others have trouble finding a therapist who provides CBT. Still others can't afford treatment. This book is part of an effort to make CBT more readily available to those who need it.

My goal in writing this book is to introduce you to a set of skills that can help relieve anxiety and depression. If you've read other CBT books, you might find this one to be different in some ways. I've strived to make the material easy to relate to, without unnecessary information.

I've also organized the topics around a seven-week plan that builds on itself week by week. Why seven weeks? The structure of this book is similar to what I do with my clients: In the initial session(s), we develop a solid treatment plan, and then work on learning the basic skills of CBT in the next few sessions. The rest of treatment focuses on applying these skills. This book is designed in the same way: Gain the CBT skills you need as quickly as possible, and then continue using the skills on your own—in other words, *learn to be your own therapist.*

CBT has helped countless individuals live better lives. Can everyone benefit from CBT? Probably not. But I've found that the people who do well with it tend to do three things: First, they show up—it's probably a given that coming to treatment consistently is a good thing. Second, they bring a healthy skepticism; being

a “true believer” in the treatment isn’t necessary to benefit from it. And finally, they are willing to try out some new things.

I invite you to do the same. “Showing up” in this case means bringing your full attention and intention to this work, because you owe yourself nothing less. I encourage you to dive into the plan and see if it works for you. If you do these things, my guess is that you’ll join the majority of people who get tremendous benefit from CBT.

Let’s get started.