



Untold Story Counseling Services

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Understanding Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)

Cognitive Processing Therapy

"Recovery is not about forgetting what happened. It is about changing the way trauma continues to shape how you see yourself, others, and the world."

What Is Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)?

Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) is an evidence-based psychotherapy approach specifically designed to help people recover from trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

After a traumatic experience, it is common to develop beliefs about yourself, others, or the world that helped make sense of what happened at the time but may no longer be accurate or helpful. These beliefs can leave you feeling stuck in fear, shame, guilt, anger, or self-blame.

CPT helps you identify these unhelpful beliefs, examine whether they are accurate, and develop more balanced perspectives that support healing.

The goal is not to convince you that what happened was acceptable. Instead, CPT helps you understand how trauma has influenced your thinking so it no longer controls your life.

What Can CPT Help With?

CPT is considered one of the gold-standard treatments for PTSD and trauma-related symptoms.

It may be helpful for individuals who have experienced:

- Military or combat trauma
- Sexual assault
- Childhood abuse or neglect
- Domestic violence
- Medical trauma
- Serious accidents
- Natural disasters
- First responder trauma
- Moral injury
- Complicated grief related to trauma
- Other distressing or life-threatening events

Many people also notice improvements in anxiety, depression, guilt, shame, and relationship difficulties as trauma symptoms decrease.

How Does CPT Work?

Trauma can change the way we interpret ourselves and the world around us.

For example, someone may begin believing:

- "It was my fault."
- "I cannot trust anyone."
- "The world is completely dangerous."
- "I am permanently damaged."

These beliefs are called "**stuck points**."

A stuck point is a belief that keeps you feeling trapped in emotional pain and prevents healing.

During CPT, you and your therapist work together to identify these beliefs, evaluate the evidence supporting them, and develop more balanced and accurate ways of thinking.

This process helps reduce emotional distress while increasing confidence and flexibility.

What Happens During CPT?

CPT is a structured, collaborative therapy that typically includes:

- Learning how trauma affects thoughts and emotions
- Identifying stuck points
- Examining patterns of thinking
- Challenging beliefs that are inaccurate or unhelpful
- Practicing new ways of thinking
- Applying these skills to everyday life



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Some sessions may include written exercises to help organize thoughts and reinforce learning between appointments.

Your therapist will guide you through each step at a pace that supports your progress.

Common CPT Skills

Depending on your goals, your therapist may help you learn to:

- Recognize stuck points
- Identify thinking patterns after trauma
- Evaluate evidence for and against beliefs
- Reduce self-blame
- Develop balanced thinking
- Improve problem-solving
- Increase self-compassion
- Understand the relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors

These skills help you respond to trauma-related thoughts with greater flexibility rather than automatically accepting them as facts.

What Might I Experience?

As treatment progresses, many people notice:

- ✓ Reduced PTSD symptoms
- ✓ Less guilt and shame
- ✓ Decreased anxiety
- ✓ Fewer intrusive thoughts
- ✓ Improved confidence
- ✓ Better relationships
- ✓ Greater emotional freedom
- ✓ Increased ability to engage in daily life

Healing often occurs gradually as your understanding of the traumatic experience becomes more balanced and less emotionally overwhelming.

Common Misconceptions

"CPT is about convincing me my trauma was not serious."

No.

CPT fully recognizes that traumatic experiences are painful and life-changing.

The focus is on examining beliefs that developed because of the trauma, not minimizing what happened.

"My therapist will tell me what to believe."

No.

CPT is collaborative.

Your therapist helps you evaluate your own thoughts and beliefs by examining evidence together. You remain the expert on your own experiences.

"If I stop blaming myself, I am making excuses."

No.

Reducing self-blame is not about avoiding responsibility when responsibility exists.

It is about accurately understanding what happened instead of carrying guilt for things that were outside of your control.

Is CPT Right for Everyone?

CPT is often recommended for individuals experiencing PTSD or trauma-related symptoms.

It may be especially helpful if you notice persistent:



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- Guilt
- Shame
- Self-blame
- Anger

- Distrust
- Fear
- Negative beliefs about yourself or the world

Your therapist may also integrate CPT with other evidence-based approaches such as:

- Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)
- Mindfulness-based approaches

Treatment is individualized to meet your specific needs and goals.

How You Can Prepare

To get the most from CPT:

- Attend sessions consistently.
- Complete any between-session practice your therapist recommends.
- Be honest about difficult thoughts or emotions.
- Remember that examining beliefs can feel challenging at times, but it is an important part of the healing process.
- Give yourself patience and compassion as you learn new ways of understanding your experiences.

Healing takes time, and each step forward contributes to lasting change.

The Goal of CPT

The goal of Cognitive Processing Therapy is not to erase traumatic memories.

Instead, CPT helps you develop a healthier, more balanced understanding of what happened so trauma no longer defines your identity or controls your future.

Over time, many people experience reduced PTSD symptoms, greater self-compassion, healthier relationships, increased confidence, and a renewed sense of safety and hope.

Questions?

If you have questions about Cognitive Processing Therapy or whether it may be appropriate for you, please bring them to your next session. Your therapist is happy to explain the process, answer your questions, and help determine the treatment approach that best supports your goals.

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Helping you become the main character in your story, not the experiences that have shaped it.