

## Dr. Jaiyant Cavale

Clinical Psychologist  
MPhil, PhD (Clinical Psychology)  
RCI CRR No. A32093  
New Zealand Psychologists Board: 90-07466

## fiendish® therapy

18, Corporation Building, Residency Road,  
Bangalore 560025, India  
+91 88264 02788 | +91 80 2221 9745  
[jaiyant@fiendishtherapy.com](mailto:jaiyant@fiendishtherapy.com) | [fiendishtherapy.com](http://fiendishtherapy.com)

# Introduction to Cognitive Processes

Cognitive processes are mental activities that help you understand the world around you. They also allow you to process information stored in your memory and respond to various situations in life. Further, cognitive processes help you form ideas, challenge your beliefs, and continually store, process, and recategorise information, enabling you to manage your internal state of mind and adapt to life's challenges.

Below are some basic cognitive and related processes that you might be asked to become aware of during your therapy sessions.

**Sensation:** Sensation takes place when your sense organs (eyes, ears, skin, taste buds, nose) receive information in the form of external stimuli. There are other sensory systems, such as your senses of pain, balance, and temperature. If the stimulus is strong enough, your brain receives the information and processes it further.

**Perception:** Information detected by your sense organs is perceived by your brain. For example, if your eyes detect a car approaching you while standing on the road, your brain perceives it as “a car that is approaching me.” Your brain may combine other simultaneous sensory input, such as the sound of the car's engine, the place where you are standing, and the speed with which it approaches you.

**Attention:** Our brain receives a lot of sensory information and perceives it. However, it focuses only on information it deems important. This is an adaptive mechanism that helps your brain filter unwanted information. The process of focusing on selected information is known as “selective attention,” which can be a double-edged sword. For instance, your brain may choose to focus on the approaching car while ignoring a bicyclist riding your way on the wrong side of the street.

**Memory:** What your sense organs detect and your brain perceives and pays attention to are stored in your memory. If pre-existing mental models deem new information as valuable, it is retained in your long-term memory. We tend to remember things that will prove useful for survival in the future, a process known as “selective retention.” Yet again, your mind may store information in a biased manner and retrieve it based on your emotional state.

**Judgement:** Every time you process information and come to conclusions, you are judging. Judging is an essential cognitive skill that helps you take meaningful actions. For example, if your brain judged that the car was dangerously moving towards you, you could take a few steps back. On the other hand, if your brain failed to give importance to the cyclist heading your way, you might risk an injury. In other words, while judgment is an essential cognitive process, it is not always perfect.

**Imagination:** Imagination helps you to create mental images, thoughts and sensations that are not present in your immediate environment. Imagination is closely related to creativity. Being able to imagine helps you to categorise and use existing information in creative ways to achieve various possible goals. However, when imagination runs wild, it can also cause anxiety and other emotional problems.

**Learning:** At the basis of all our behaviours and cognitive processes is learning. We learn new information by paying attention to certain stimuli and responding to them in specific ways. The process of learning is intricate and depends on various factors such as your emotional state, immediate environment, pre-existing mental models and memory. In fact, we learn to think and act in certain patterns very early in life. These patterns may be helpful or unhelpful. Psychotherapy is the process of learning new ways of thinking and unlearning maladaptive and irrational ways of thinking and behaving.

**Language:** A structured system of communication that helps us describe what we think, imagine, and feel. It helps us to communicate not just with others, but also with ourselves. We use language to process and use information that is perceived and stored in our minds. Language is also necessary to put words into our mental images. People who are depressed or anxious often use language in ways that are depressive or anxiety-provoking, which can further reinforce pre-existing beliefs and disordered thinking.

**Thinking:** While thoughts are automatic, they can also be goal-directed and induced voluntarily. Your mind uses language to connect different mental images in the form of thoughts to help you understand different situations.

**Executive Functions:** These include higher cognitive processes such as planning, problem-solving, multitasking, impulse control, decision-making, and introspection. These higher-order cognitive processes allow you to function efficiently and effectively manage life's challenges.

**Social cognition:** Social cognition is your ability to understand, predict, and empathise with what others may be thinking or feeling. This skill helps you to observe others' verbal and non-verbal behaviour and infer their state of mind. This skill makes social interactions easy and effective. A closely related concept is that of mentalisation and the theory of mind.

During therapy, you will learn to reflect and use basic cognitive processes to live the life you want to. You will also learn how to use the same cognitive processes to your advantage when things go awry.