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# Basic CBT Terminology

These are terms commonly used during CBT sessions, and it helps to understand and memorise them before your sessions.

**Automatic Thoughts:** Thoughts that surface in your mind without any effort. They occur on their own. When you are depressed or anxious, you may experience random negative thoughts, also known as “Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANT)”.

**Beliefs:** A belief is an idea that you are convinced is true. You may believe in something with or without evidence. These beliefs control how you think, process information, reach conclusions, and behave.

**Core Beliefs:** Your core beliefs are your central beliefs about life and how the world operates. These are deeply ingrained convictions about yourself and the world around you. They are often formed when you were a child, and crystallised during adolescence and adulthood. Your interactions with your parents or caregivers are likely to have had a significant impact on how you formed your core beliefs. They can be positive, negative, or neutral. Examples: “I am unlovable”, “I need to be helped always”, “This world is not safe”.

**Intermediate beliefs:** These differ from automatic thoughts and often follow you throughout your life. Intermediate beliefs often consist of assumptions about the world and how it operates. Consequently, these beliefs colour your thoughts and dictate how you behave in general. Examples: “If I help others, they will like me,” “I need to be thin to be attractive,” “It’s better to reject people before they reject me.”

**Cognitive distortions:** Unhelpful and irrational patterns of thinking that do not align with objective reality. For example: jumping to conclusions, overgeneralising, catastrophising, etc.

**Cognitive restructuring:** Cognitive restructuring (CR) is a CBT technique that helps you identify your cognitive distortions and replace them with helpful cognitive patterns. CR helps you challenge irrational beliefs and thinking patterns, which, in turn, helps you manage your symptoms better.

**Early experiences:** These are important events and experiences that likely took place in childhood or adolescence. They may have a lasting effect on your mind and help shape your core beliefs.

**Antecedents:** Antecedents refer to events or triggers that take place before a behaviour occurs. In other words, antecedents describe how you were feeling (emotion), what you were doing (your actions), what you were thinking (thoughts), what state your body was in (physiological experiences), and if there were other people involved (relational), or if it was something to do with the environment you were in (context) before a problematic behaviour occurred.

**Behaviours:** In simple terms, a behaviour is anything that you do, feel, or think, just after a triggering event (antecedent). Please note, in this context, a “behaviour” is not merely an action, but may also refer to how your

body reacted (somatic/physiological response), how you felt (emotions and mood), and what happened in your mind (thoughts and other cognitions).

**Consequences:** The results of your behaviour, either positive or negative. If you notice positive consequences after engaging in a behaviour, you are more likely to repeat it. However, not all positive consequences are helpful. Similarly, negative consequences make it less likely for a certain behaviour to occur again. Just because the consequence of a behaviour is negative does not mean you must avoid the preceding behaviour. Consequences can also be classified as either short-term or long-term.

**Disputation:** With the help of your treating clinical psychologist, you will learn to examine and challenge your unhelpful beliefs and cognitive distortions. You will learn to challenge deeply held beliefs and identify how evidence is often lacking for irrational thinking patterns.

**Effective New Belief:** You will learn to examine available evidence against your core beliefs and intermediate beliefs. You will also learn to identify cognitive distortions that maintain your core beliefs and replace them with helpful, realistic beliefs that lead to desirable consequences.

**Note:** *Before you attempt to categorise your psychological processes into antecedents (A), behaviours (B), consequences (C), and begin with disputation (D) and implementing effective new beliefs (E) — also known as “ABCDE,” please read about thoughts, beliefs, emotions and behaviours in the much simpler “Introduction to CBT” handout.*

**Obstacles:** These are social, financial, relational, psychological, and personal hurdles that may interfere with your healing. It is important to share your potential obstacles with your clinical psychologist so that he or she can formulate your treatment plan accordingly.

**Behavioural Activation (BA):** A CBT technique that helps you identify activities and behaviours that can improve your mood and overall sense of well-being. You have the freedom to choose activities that feel rewarding to you.

**Thought Diary:** A thought diary, also known as a thought record, is an essential but often resisted component of CBT. A thought diary or daily journal helps you to segregate your thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and identify triggers that keep you trapped in a loop. A thought diary also helps your therapist better understand your problems, identify your core beliefs and cognitive distortions, and guide you through cognitive restructuring.

**Relapse Prevention:** These are specific skills that your clinical psychologist may teach you towards the end of psychological intervention to prevent relapses. You are required to practice these skills regularly to prevent and/or manage emotional distress in the future.

**Mindfulness:** A skill that helps you be present in the moment and aware of what you are thinking and feeling. This skill helps you to observe your psychological processes without judgment.

**Schema:** A schema is a mental framework that you may develop very early in life. This framework allows you to understand and process the world around you in your own way. However, not all schemas are helpful, and some may continue to harm you in later life.