



# THE B IN CBT

By Maura Calvert, Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist

The B in CBT is Behaviour - that is what we do, or what we don't do. This is hugely important when we look at mental health, indeed at health and functioning generally. If we engage in a behaviour, then there is usually a response or a consequence of this behaviour. If we work then we get paid, which therefore increases the likelihood of us continuing to work. The behaviour is reinforced by the pay check. It can be reinforced by many other things too such as the reward of the job itself or the interactions with others when in the job. This is also known as classical conditioning. Another example of classical conditioning is the survivor of a bomb explosion might flinch at the sound of fireworks, even though they know the difference between the two.

Behaviour change is a way to improve mood and recover from depression. It is important to reflect on our actions to find out which behaviours are helpful and which are hindering or getting in the way. What are you doing that helps you move towards the way you want to be and what are you doing that moves you against the way you want to be. For someone who is depressed, their behaviour can add to their depression in layers, though they don't intend it to.

An example: Stu stays indoors on low mood days. When he decides to stay at home, he notices an instant reduction in his negative feelings, which makes it more likely that this will happen the next time. However, we can see that this behaviour pattern becomes problematic. It can become a trap, as what can tend to happen is that a different kind of

negative emotion then occurs-guilt/shame/boredom, also tension in the relationships around him. Avoidance and inactivity were problems to be tackled for Stu, and he had to decide what he could do more of to help (more activation, such as going out even if his mood is low) and what he could do less of to also help (less deactivation, such as less staying indoors). For example, more going out and less avoidance were what helped Stu's mood to improve in the longer term.

In Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, we focus on changing behaviour in a gradual way to encourage success in doing it. Goals are set around what the client wants to do and work towards. The purpose of the activities planned are to create opportunities for positive reinforcement/reward, to increase a sense of achievement, enjoyment, and new ways of thinking. When trying to make changes to our behaviour patterns such as overcoming avoidance or increasing activation, short term worsening is an understandable and normal process. If we can be prepared for this, and know that the evidence supports the treatment, it can help with the hurdles. The outcomes can be worth the challenge involved.

**If you would like help in managing your low or anxious mood and adopt more rewarding behaviours, please contact services administration at PRRT to book an assessment and to speak to one of our clinical team at the Psychology Department.**

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