

What is Cognitive Processing Therapy?

Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) is a 12-session protocol designed to address the distorted and inaccurate thinking that can often be the result of trauma. It was initially developed to help victims of sexual assault but gradually expanded to help people who have experienced other types of trauma. It has been very well researched and tested.

The first few sessions explain PTSD symptoms and why they occur. Particular attention is paid to how PTSD changes the way people think about themselves, other people and the world.

CPT is a *cognitive therapy*. Though clients may be asked to *write* about the trauma in detail, this is not necessary for the treatment to be effective.

After the educational portion, the rest of the protocol focuses on helping the client learn how thoughts and feeling are connected. By using gradually more complex worksheets the client learns how to modify extreme thinking which is referred to as “stuck” thinking. The therapist does not tell the client what to think but engages in a special type of dialog called “Socratic questioning” which helps the client come up with their own new thoughts and beliefs.

A measure of PTSD symptoms called the PCL-5 is used to track progress during therapy. Clients are also asked to write an “Impact Statement” at the beginning of therapy and again at the end. This often dramatically shows how much entrenched, “stuck” thinking has changed. When we change how we think about a traumatic event(s), we change how we feel mentally, emotionally and physically. When we feel different, we behave differently.