



Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) Strategies to Improve Mental Health during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is an umbrella term for a wide range of evidence-based cognitive and behavioural psychotherapies that involve techniques and strategies to help address unhelpful thinking and behaviour across many psychological issues, including anxiety and depression. Thousands of scientific trials have supported CBT as an effective treatment for a range of psychological problems. The World Confederation of Cognitive and Behavioural Therapies (WCCBT) is a global alliance of CBT organizations, dedicated in part to the dissemination of this treatment approach.

In these unprecedented times of global concern associated with the effects of COVID-19, we provide the following advice and resources from the field of CBT. There are various internet-based CBT programs, websites, and self-help books available as e-books to help you recognize and address different types of unhelpful thought patterns and behaviours. The suggestions and resources provided are not complete and do not imply an endorsement, but are provided as examples of some of the many suggestions and resources you might find helpful.

It is normal to feel worry and anxiety: The lack of predictability and lack of control are two key factors associated with stress and anxiety. There is much that we do not know about COVID-19, so it is an understandable and normal response to feel concern, anxiety, and worry about its impacts and spread. Accept and validate these reactions in yourselves and others, even as you take positive steps to respond to these reactions.

Challenge unhelpful thoughts and take a balanced perspective:

Stressful times often lead people to engage in unhelpful thinking, examples can include negative predictions about the current or future situation, focusing on the negative, predicting the worst-case scenario, or pessimistic thinking. Often, people also worry that their worries will harm them or believe that the process of worrying can protect them. These thoughts are unhelpful and can heighten anxiety over time. Taking a flexible, balanced and optimistic view of the situation can help ease your stress. It is natural to have negative thoughts and fears at this time and at the same time, taking a balanced perspective, not assuming the worst, and taking the long term, optimistic view can help reduce your anxiety and stress. We have survived world crises before and this too shall eventually pass.

Engage in helpful behaviours:

Anxiety and worry are natural and adaptive reactions when we face danger. Worry is intended to help mobilize us to take appropriate action to face danger. Unhelpful worry remains in our minds and can drain us. Take action to protect yourself and engage in helpful behaviours to help ease distress.

- **Take action to protect yourself:** Use your worry to be proactive and take the necessary steps to protect yourself from the COVID-19 virus based on guidelines suggested by experts ([cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/index.html](https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/index.html)), follow the guidelines of your government in physical distancing and staying at home.
- **Engage in general self-care:** Set regular times to go to bed and wake up, exercise at home, and eat a balanced diet with regular mealtimes. Avoid naps or shifts in your sleep cycle, avoid excessive alcohol and caffeine, or doing things you might regret (e.g., excessive on-line shopping).
Tips on self-care can be found at: [psychology.org.au/getmedia/38073179-4701-48bd-afd9-988c560ee2f9/20APS-IS-COVID-19-P1.pdf](https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/38073179-4701-48bd-afd9-988c560ee2f9/20APS-IS-COVID-19-P1.pdf).
This article has information on anxiety over shopping:
theconversation.com/psychology-can-explain-why-coronavirus-drives-us-to-panic-buy-it-also-provides-tips-on-how-to-stop-134032.
- **Engage in pleasant events:** Pleasant events are helpful to improve mood, so it is very important to do things you enjoy. Brainstorm the activities that you enjoy that you can do at home and engage in them every day. For example, you may want to listen to music, watch favourite movies, exercise at home, cook a nice meal and savour the food in the moment, read a book, play board games, arrange social events with friends and family via internet programs such as Skype, Zoom, or WhatsApp and have telephone contact with family and friends. Savour enjoyable experiences by anticipating them, enjoying them in the moment, and reflecting upon them afterwards. This website has ideas for pleasant events: cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Depression.
- **Ways to deal with worry and rumination:** While it is normal to worry and be focusing more on health at this time, you can take some steps to try to manage your degree of worry. One idea is to limit the amount of time you worry by setting set aside a limited minute “worry time” at the same time each day. Set a limit on the amount of information you are reading on the internet; you might choose to set a limit of 30 minutes per day. Think about the best time to do this activity. It is not recommended to read worrying news just before bedtime, as it may interfere with sleep.
Accurate information on COVID-19 can be found on the World Health Organization website: [who.int](https://www.who.int).

- **Engage in problem solving:** Here are some evidence-based steps that are often helpful in solving problems: (1) identify the problem; name it, and be as precise as you can about the nature and extent of the problem, (2) generate potential solutions, (3) decide on a potential solution, (4) plan the chosen solution, (5) carry out the solution, (6) evaluate the result. This may be a useful strategy, especially given we are spending time at home. For example, this technique may help you plan how to solve the problem of structuring your time at home by thinking of projects and activities you want to achieve and enjoy while you are at home and not able to go out. Or, if you are having difficulty organizing yourself while you are working at home, or find yourself getting distracted here are a set of possible problem- solving ideas:

1. The problem: Procrastination.
2. Designate a certain amount of time to work before rewarding self by taking a break.
3. Set a timer for 30 minutes of work, then take a short break.
4. Get a timer and set it. Sit down to work.
5. After 30 minutes, stop and take a break. Get up and move around for a few minutes.
6. Did you manage to get some work accomplished during the 30 minutes? How do you feel? Do you need to modify your plan? If so, start again and try it!

Ease physical stress and tension

- **Relaxation Exercises:** Research shows that diaphragmatic breathing (slow, abdominal breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation exercises (alternating tension and relaxation to identify and combat signs of physical tension) are useful in reducing general physical tension and promoting relaxation. Applying these relaxation exercises in your daily life once you have learned them is optimal in gaining benefits. There are several apps and self-help books available online that can help you learn these exercises.
- **Meditation and Mindfulness:** Meditation is a practice anyone can use to help manage their physical and mental health. Research shows that regularly taking time to develop present-focused, non-judgmental awareness (i.e. mindfulness) can reduce stress, anxiety, depression, and the burden of many chronic health conditions. Cultivating mindfulness usually involves a mix of structured meditation exercises (e.g. sitting still and following the flow of your breathing for 10 minutes) and 'informal' exercises where you apply this mindset to everyday activities (e.g. mindful cooking, mindful communicating). The more you practice mindfulness, the more automatic this helpful way of responding to internal and external events becomes. One of the reasons mindfulness seems to be so beneficial in managing anxiety and mood problems, is that it changes your relationship to unhelpful thoughts and feelings. It helps you to acknowledge,

accept and let go of troublesome thoughts, rather than getting stuck in a cycle of worry/rumination and unhelpful behaviours. There are many different ways to start practising meditation. Research shows that engaging in a structured program such as the 8-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) or Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) program is a good way to start. For example:

- Oxford Mindfulness Centre's MBCT courses: <https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/learn-mindfulness/find-a-course/>
- UMass Centre for Mindfulness: <https://www.umassmemorialhealthcare.org/umass-memorial-medical-center/services-treatments/center-for-mindfulness/mindfulness-programs/mbct-8-week-online-live>
- Palouse Mindfulness free online MBSR program: <https://palousemindfulness.com/>

Another option is to guide yourself through a mindfulness program using a book with accompanying audio of guided meditations:

- Williams, M., & Penman, D. (2011). *Mindfulness: a practical guide to finding peace in a frantic world*, penguinrandomhouse.com/mindfulness-meditation-downloads/
- Williams, M., Teasdale, J., Segal, Z., & Kabat-Zinn, J (2007). *The Mindful Way through Depression: Freeing Yourself from Chronic Unhappiness*.
- Burch, V. & Penman, D (2013). *Mindfulness for Health: A practical guide to relieving pain, reducing stress and restoring wellbeing*.

There are also now a vast range of meditation apps for your smart phone. For example:

- Insight Timer: <https://insighttimer.com>
- Headspace: <https://www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app>
- Smiling Mind: <https://www.smilingmind.com.au/mindfulness>
- Calm: <https://www.calm.com>

The current Coronavirus pandemic has also prompted some mindfulness teachers to offer free resources and online forums. Engaging with others who are practising meditation is a great way to stay motivated, share your experiences, and have your questions answered in a supportive environment:

- Jon Kabat-Zinn daily livestream of practices and inquiry: <http://www.wisdom2conference.com/live>
- Oxford Mindfulness Centre Free Online Mindfulness Sessions & Introductory Course: <https://www.oxfordmindfulness.org/free-online-mindfulness-course-sessions/>
- Mindful in May challenge: <https://www.mindfulinmay.org>

General CBT Resources

This website provides you with symptoms of common conditions and how they are treated using CBT. abct.org/Information/?m=mInformation&fa=FactSheets

Specific CBT Resources to manage anxiety and worry:

These websites have information about managing worry and anxiety:

cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/For-Clinicians/Generalised-Anxiety-and-Worry

abct.org/Information/index.cfm?m=mInformation&fa=fs_ANXIETY

abct.org/Information/?m=mInformation&fa=fs_WORRY

These websites have information about managing health anxiety:

cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Health-Anxiety

abct.org/Information/index.cfm?m=mInformation&fa=fs_HEALTH_ANXIETY

The British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapy (BABCP) has a useful podcast on dealing with anxiety about coronavirus: letstalkaboutcbt.libsyn.com/coping-with-anxiety-about-coronavirus

Resources for children and teenagers on coping with COVID-19 and anxiety:

Although adults may be stressed at this time, children also need to be cared for, particularly their anxiety regarding information about COVID-19. Be mindful about your child's level of development, as you choose what to tell them about the COVID-19 pandemic. We encourage you not to let them watch media about the pandemic, especially without some discussion about what they understand about these media encounters. Remember that children may not understand things the way you do.

The following sources of information provide advice about how to talk to children about COVID-19:

- lighthouse.mq.edu.au/march/how-to-talk-to-your-children-about-coronavirus-top-10-questions-answered
- emergingminds.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID19_advice-for-parents-and-carers_20.3_.pdf
- bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/talking-children-about-coronavirus;
- brave-online.com/beating-stress-and-worries-about-coronavirus-covid-19/
- Information booklet explaining coronavirus for children: mindheart.co/descargables
- The National Child Traumatic Stress Network has also created resources for helping families cope with COVID-19: nctsn.org/resources/parent-caregiver-guide-to-helping-families-cope-with-the-coronavirus-disease-2019

The following websites provide information on CBT for anxiety and depression in youth:

- A list of CBT e-books for children: reading-well.org.uk/children
- A list of CBT e-books for teenagers: reading-well.org.uk/books/books-on-prescription/young-people-mental-health
- Cool kids online therapy for anxiety in youth: mq.edu.au/about/campus-services-and-facilities/hospital-and-clinics/centre-for-emotional-health-clinic/programs-for-children-and-teenagers/online-treatment-accordions/cool-kids-online
- Youth Beyond Blue: youthbeyondblue.com/
- Online therapy for children and teenagers with stress and anxiety in Australia: brave-online.com/

- Online therapy for obsessive-compulsive symptoms in children and teenagers: ocdnotme.com.au
- US: The National Child Traumatic Stress Network - nctsn.org/.
- ReachOut has online support and resources to help teenagers and their parents: au.reachout.com/
- Cathy Creswell & Lucy Willetts (2007). *Overcoming Your Child's Fears and Worries*. Constable & Robinson.
- Ron Rapee, Ann Wignall, Sue Spence and Heidi Lyneham (2008). *Helping Your Anxious Child: A Step-by-Step Guide for Parents*, 2nd edition. New Harbinger Publications.

Resources across the Globe

This information is provided with the recognition that many people in different countries and language groups are affected by the current COVID- 19 pandemic. This is not an exhaustive list of areas affected, organizations and resources but represent those that emphasize evidence-based models and therapies, including CBT.

UK

- British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies: babcp.com
- Find a CBT therapist in the UK: cbtregisteruk.com/Default.aspx.
- Anxiety UK: anxietyuk.org.uk/
- NICE: nice.org.uk
- No Panic: nopanic.org.uk/
- OCD-UK: ocduk.org
- OCD Action: ocdaction.org.uk
- Depression alliance: depressionalliance.org
- MindEd: minded.org.uk

US and Canada

- Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT): abct.org
- Find a CBT therapist in the US: findcbt.org/FAT/
- Canadian Association for Cognitive and Behavioural Therapies (CACBT): cacbt.ca
- Academy of Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies (academyofcbt.org)
- Find a certified CBT therapist academyofct.org/search/custom.asp?id=4410
- Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA): adaa.org
- Anxiety Canada: anxietycanada.com
- International OCD Foundation (IOCDF): iocdf.org
- PsyberGuide: psyberguide.org

Australia

- Australian Association for Cognitive and Behaviour Therapy (AACBT): aacbt.org
- Anxiety online: anxietyonline.org.au
- Mindspot Clinic: mindspot.org.au
- The Centre for Clinical Interventions: cci.health.wa.gov.au
- Beyond Blue: beyondblue.org.au
- Virtual clinic: virtualclinic.org.au
- Black Dog Institute: blackdoginstitute.org.au
- E-Mental Health in Practice: emhprac.org.au

France

- Information on COVID-19 for French people can be found at: gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus
- There are numerous self-help books on CBT for anxiety and depression which are listed on the website of the French CBT association - aftcc.org/bibliographie
- “l’atelier du praticien” series, which can be found at : dunod.com/collection/ateliers-du-praticien
- “les cahier du praticien” series which can be found at : deboecksuperieur.com/collection/les-cahiers-du-praticien

Italy

- Associazione Italiana di Analisi e Modificazione del Comportamento e Terapia Comportamentale e Cognitiva (AIAMC) aiamc.it
- A list of CBT therapists, many are able to help online aiamc.it/cerca-psicoterapeuta/
- A blog with a lot of information about CBT and the most common psychological problems aiamc.it/category/blog/

Germany

- German CBT associations: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Verhaltenstherapie (DGVT) e.V., dgv.de
Deutscher Fachverband für Verhaltenstherapie, verhaltenstherapie.de
- CBT therapist search of German federal association of medical and psychological practitioners kbv.de/html/arztuche.php
- Stiftung Deutsche Depressionshilfe: deutsche-depressionshilfe.de
- Suicide prevention: 8leben.psychenet.de
- Network for mental health: psychenet.de
- Crisis line “Telefonseelsorge” telefonseelsorge.de, phone 0800/111 0 111 or 0800/111 0 222 or 116 123
- App for suicide prevention „Krisenkompass“: android.krisen-kompass.app or ios.krisen-kompass.app
- App for meditation and mindfulness-based stress reduction: 7mind.de/
- Online therapy: minddoc.de
- Self-help manuals for depression, OCD and alcohol use disorders: clinical-neuropsychology.de/interventionen/
- German language self-help books (available as e-books):
Hautzinger, M. (2018). *Ratgeber Depression: Informationen für Betroffene und Angehörige*. Hogrefe Verlag.
Heinrichs, N. (2007). *Ratgeber Panikstörung und Agoraphobie*. Hogrefe Verlag.
Hoyer, J., Beesdo-Baum, K., & Becker, E. S. (2016). *Ratgeber Generalisierte Angststörung: Informationen für Betroffene und Angehörige. 2., aktualisierte Auflage*. Hogrefe Verlag.
Reinecker, H. (2017). *Ratgeber Zwangsstörungen: Informationen für Betroffene und Angehörige. 2., aktualisierte Auflage*. Hogrefe Verlag.

Turkey

- There is a source of info on psychological effects and their Management regarding Corona Virus in Turkey organized by the Turkish Psychiatry Association which can be found at psikiyatri.org.tr

- A self-help book written by Mehmet Sungur “Deprem Sonrası Ortaya Çıkan Psikolojik Tepkileri Anlamak ve Kendi Kendine Yardım Etme Yöntemleri” (Understanding the Psychological Reactions following Natural Disasters such as Earthquakes: A Self Help Guide).

Spanish speaking countries

Information on Spanish language resources, and where to find CBT therapists in South America and Spanish speaking countries who offer online or telephone CBT:

- drive.google.com/file/d/1t2EZEcu06TEkiYQmsRXEXiym3EC7JJNY/view?usp=drivesdk
- api.cpsp.io/public/documents/1584932291087-recomendaciones-psicologicas-para-afrontar-la-pandemia.pdf
- academia.edu/6117301/Adios_Ansiedad_David_Burns
- api.cpsp.io/public/documents/1584934751104-coronavirus-guia-psicovida10.pdf
- api.cpsp.io/public/documents/1584682467463-libro-de-prevencion-del-coronavirus-es.pdf
- api.cpsp.io/public/documents/1584663560691-afrontamiento-psicologico-covid19.pdf
- copmadrid.org/web/img_db/comunicados/2020/recomendaciones-dirigidas-a-la-poblacion-para-un-afrontamiento-eficaz-ante-el-malestar-psicologico-generado-por-el-brote-de-coronavirus-covid-19-5e6782284ec74.pdf
- site.cfp.org.br/nota-orientativa-asaos-psicologasos-trabalho-voluntario-e-publicidade-em-psicologia-diante-do-coronavirus-covid-19/

Middle East

- IDRACC: email: idracc@idracc.org

Asia

- **China** – CBT resources and therapists: cbtchina.com.cn
- **Korea** – Korean Psychological Association: koreanpsychology.or.kr, Korean Society of Traumatic Stress Studies: kstss.kr
- **Malaysia** - Malaysian Society of Clinical Psychology: mscp.my; Malaysian Mental Health Association – mmha.org.my; Malaysian Psychiatric Association: psychiatry-malaysia.org; My Psychology: psychotherapy service myspsychology.my has a list of all sources of help for mental health in Malaysia including a list of CBT self-help e-books in Malaysian.
- **Singapore** - Singapore Association of Mental Health: samhealth.org.sg; Institute of Mental Health: imh.com.sg
- **Indonesia** - Get Happy Indonesia: mhinnovation.net; Indonesia Mental Health Care Foundation: kitabisa.com
- **Thailand** - Psychiatric Association of Thailand: omicsonline.org/societies/psychiatric-association-of-thailand/; Bangkok Counselling Service: bangkokcounselling.com
- **Japan** - Japanese Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies: jabt.umin.ne.jp/e/info/1-1info.html
- **India** - Indian Association for Cognitive Behaviour Therapy: iacbt.org
- **Bangladesh** - Bangladesh Clinical Psychology Society: bcps.org.bd
- **Pakistan** - Pakistan Association of Cognitive Therapists: pact.com.pk

Regional CBT Associations:

The World Confederation of CBT (WCCBT): wccbt.org. The WCCBT is a world organisation representing CBT and board members consist of representatives from:

Asian Cognitive and Behaviour Therapy Association (ACBTA): asiancbt.weebly.com
Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT): abct.org
Australian Association for Cognitive and Behaviour Therapy (AACBT): aacbt.org.au
European Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies (EABCT): eabct.eu
International Association for Cognitive Psychotherapy (IACP): the-iacp.com
Asociacion Latinoamericana de Analisis, Modificacion del Comportamiento y Terapia Cognitiva Conductua (ALAMOC): alamoc-web.org

Check with the websites of CBT associations and local health providers for therapists who are conducting CBT in alternative formats i.e., internet and telephone. For CBT therapists, the Standing Committee on Psychology & Health and the Project Group on eHealth website has useful information: ehealth.efpa.eu/

Self-help books

Many self-help books are available in an online format. This is not a complete list, some include:

- NHS Reading Well (formerly Books on Prescription) reading-well.org.uk: This website contains a list of evidence-based CBT books for anxiety and depression.
- The Overcoming series: There are numerous self-help books on CBT listed on the website: overcoming.co.uk

An example of CBT self-help books for adults (search the internet for e-book versions):

- Abramowitz, J.S. (2018). *Getting over OCD: A 10-step workbook for taking back your life*, 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.
- Antony, M.M., & Norton, P.J. (2009). *The anti-anxiety workbook: Proven strategies to overcome worry, panic, phobias, and obsessions*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Asmundson, G.J.G., & Taylor, S. (2005). *It's not all in your head: How worrying about your health could be making you sick – and what you can do about it*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Challacombe, F., Oldfield, V.B., & Salkovskis, P. (2011). *Break free from OCD: Overcoming obsessive compulsive disorder with CBT*. London, UK: Vermilion.
- Clark, D.A., & Beck, A.T. (2012). *The anxiety and worry workbook: The cognitive-behavioral solution*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Gilbert, P. (2009). *Overcoming depression: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.
- Greenberger, D., & Padesky, C.A. (2016). *Mind over mood*, 2nd ed. New York: Guilford Press.
- Kennerley, H. (2014). *Overcoming anxiety: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*, 2nd edition. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.
- Owens, K.M.B., & Antony, M.M. (2011). *Overcoming health anxiety: Letting go of your fear of illness*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Manicavasagar, V., & Silove, D. (2017). *Overcoming panic: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*, 2nd edition. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.

- Meares, K., & Freeston, M. (2015). *Overcoming worry and generalised anxiety disorder*, 2nd edition. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.
- Myles, P., & Shafran, R. (2015). *The CBT handbook: A comprehensive guide to using CBT to overcome depression, anxiety, stress, low self-esteem and anger*. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.
- Robichaud, M.R., & Buhr, K. (2018). *The Worry Workbook: CBT skills to overcome worry and anxiety by facing the fear of uncertainty*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.
- Teasdale, J., Williams, M., & Segal, Z. (2014). *The mindful way workbook: An 8-week program to free yourself from depression and emotional distress*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Veale, D., & Wilson, R. (2009). *Overcoming health anxiety: A self-help guide using cognitive-behavioural techniques*. London, UK: Little Brown Book Group.

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