



# What is Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT)?

## A Factsheet for young people

Therapy involves talking to someone who can help you understand yourself better and help you find different ways of thinking, feeling or behaving.

The main idea in CAT is that what happens to us as a child and the way we are brought up affects our personality and the kind of person we become. If we have parents or carers who treat us well and encourage us, but set limits when they need to, then we are likely to become adults who feel cared for and valuable, have confidence in ourselves and can accept limits. Our relationships with other people will generally go well. If we had a different experience though, being criticised, rejected, neglected or even abused as a child, things are not so likely to go well. We are likely to grow up feeling that we are not valuable or worthwhile, that others are going to hurt us or let us down and that limits are a punishment. These feelings will get in the way of what we want to do with our lives and will make relationships difficult.

The first few sessions of CAT involve talking about your past and trying to understand what sort of patterns you have learnt from your childhood. The therapist does not need to know every detail but some examples of what happened to you and how you reacted. It will also be important to try and recognise whether these patterns are still happening in your life at the moment and how that might be causing you problems. The therapist will write, with you, a letter describing your story and your patterns and will also draw it on a diagram with you. The rest of the therapy is about trying to recognise and change the patterns that are causing problems, while building up the patterns that are going well. Usually CAT lasts for between 16 and 24 sessions. As you can see, CAT is an active therapy with you and the therapist working together, and you will get out of it as much as you put in. You shouldn't expect to be completely better by the end of therapy but you should have a much

better idea of how to work on your problems into the future – how to become your own therapist.

One thing that sometimes happens in therapy is that the problem patterns get in the way of you working with the therapist. For example, if you feel that everyone in authority has always let you down or hurt you, you will find it really difficult to trust the therapist and will not want to risk saying how you really feel. The therapist may realise this and help you to talk about it as part of the therapy. If you can start to open up and trust the therapist, then you may be able to start trusting other people who are trying to help you.

## Is it Confidential?

What you talk about in the therapy will not be shared with anyone else unless you agree to it. It is often helpful to let your parents, or carers, know how the therapy is going at some point. However, the therapist will check with you how much you want to share. In a few cases, the therapist will have to share things, for example, if there is a high risk of you doing serious damage to yourself or others. Even in these extreme situations, the therapist will try and work out with you the best way to share this information.

## Are there any side effects?

Any therapy can stir up painful memories and feelings, hopefully the work will help you come to terms with these and let go of some of the pain, but sometimes you may need to wait until your life is more stable before you have therapy. If you manage to make changes in therapy, other people may have to change the way they react to you and this can be difficult for some people and put a strain on relationships.