



What is Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT)?

A brief guide for clients seeking therapy

CAT stands for Cognitive Analytic Therapy. As its name suggests, it brings together understandings from cognitive psychotherapies (such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) and from psychoanalytic approaches into one integrated, user-friendly and effective therapy. It is a collaborative programme of looking at the way you think, feel and act; a programme which is tailored to your individual needs and to your own manageable goals for change.

In order to bring about change, CAT offers a way of:

- thinking about yourself differently.
- finding out exactly what your problems and difficulties are; how they started; how they affect your everyday life – your relationships, your working life and your choices of how to get the best out of your life.
- getting under the limitations of a diagnosis or 'symptom hook' (that is, understanding the reasons that underlie a symptom such as bulimia), by naming what previously learned patterns of thinking or behaving contribute to difficulties and finding new ways of addressing them within yourself.
- thinking about the importance of relationships in your psychological life. This includes the relationship you have with yourself, and the relationship you have with the therapist.

How long does therapy last?

A CAT therapy is a time-limited course, usually between 16-24 sessions – this is discussed and agreed with the therapist at the start of therapy. Each weekly session is for 50-60 minutes. Between one and five follow-up sessions are offered after the end of regular therapy. Again this is discussed and agreed with the therapist.

What sort of problems can CAT help with?

You might have problems that have been given a name by a professional such as depression; anxiety; phobia; obsessive compulsive disorder; or borderline personality disorder. You might recognise that you are suffering from unmanageable stress or that you self-harm, have problems with substance misuse or suffer with an eating disorder. You may have a pattern of difficulty in looking after yourself properly or unsuccessful or broken relationships. You might have long-term physical symptoms that have not responded to medical intervention.

What CAT is not:

CAT is not prescriptive or pre-designed, and it's not like 'painting by numbers'. The work is shared collaboratively and right from the beginning you will be involved in your own self monitoring, diary keeping and, alongside the therapist who starts the ball rolling, writing something of your own life story and mapping goals for change.

Is it Confidential?

What you talk about in the therapy will not be shared with anyone else unless you agree to it. 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 will have to change the way they react to you and this can be difficult for some people and put a strain on relationships. Those people who really care about you should be pleased that you are working on your problems and should want to help. However, there may be some people who do not like the "new you" and who may withdraw from contact.

What qualifications can I expect the therapist to have?

ACAT can confirm that all the therapists listed on the ACAT website are accredited CAT Practitioners or Psychotherapists.

CAT Practitioners either have core training as a mental health professional (e.g. as a Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Social Worker or Occupational Therapist,) with a minimum of two years post-qualification experience, or previous training in counselling to an accredited level and a two year training in Cognitive Analytic therapy with accreditation following successful completion.

CAT Psychotherapists have qualified as CAT Practitioners and have undertaken an additional in-depth training leading to this qualification.

How effective is CAT?

Research shows that CAT can help with many different types of specific problems such as depression, anxiety, phobic and panic disorders and eating problems. It can also be particularly helpful for people with complex relationship difficulties, abusive or traumatic past experiences and for people with personality disorders, including those who self-harm. Although it is mostly offered to individuals, it can also be used effectively with couples and groups.

Where is CAT available?

CAT is available in many areas through the NHS, and is also available privately. You can find a private CAT therapist through the ACAT website.

CAT is organised in the UK by the Association for Cognitive Analytic Therapy (ACAT). ACAT is a member of the United Kingdom Council of Psychotherapy (UKCP).

Members of ACAT adhere to a Code of Ethics and there is a formal complaints procedure to protect clients.

