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The CBT Art Activity Book

100 illustrated handouts for
creative therapeutic work

Jennifer Guest



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For Oscar and Jessamy, both forever inspirational and amazing.

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About This Book

The worksheets in the first part of this book are intended for use within therapeutic situations by qualified professionals. They have been developed from the premises of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques, to be used as creative tools in aiding therapeutic work with adults and young people, individuals and groups. As any therapist will know, an emotionally safe space is paramount when encouraging others to explore their deepest feelings. Emotional disclosure can be challenging for clients and leave them feeling incredibly vulnerable. Respect and compassion for this, as for any artwork and written work produced by clients, is an essential part of therapy as well.

The worksheets can be used at various points throughout therapy, either individually or as packs made up with the relevant pages, to complement the theme of the therapy. The pages can help in identifying areas of focus, with themes such as anger management, building self-esteem or clarifying goals. The chapters in Part One are grouped into three broad areas of focus: developing a sense of self and building confidence; managing emotions; problem solving and identifying goals. Part Two comprises of two chapters, the first is made up of letters of the alphabet, the second a collection of mandalas. They are not ordered in this way with the intention of working through the book from beginning to end, but rather to be used with the therapist's discretion as to the most appropriate and helpful pages for each client. It is assumed that professionals using this section of the book would be doing so with prior knowledge of their client's presenting issues and mental health levels, using this knowledge to make ethical and sensitive choices.

The chapters are laid out for ease of access, so that the most relevant pages can be found easily. There is overlap between many of them, meaning that some worksheets are included in two or in all of the chapters. There is also some duplication in the focus of the worksheets, as one particular worksheet may appeal more to one client or age group than another. It is certainly not an exhaustive or definitive collection.

Introduction

There are many Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) worksheets and visual resources available for therapeutic work. An example is the impressive resource book *Helping Adolescents and Adults to Build Self-Esteem* by Deborah Plummer (2005). I thought it would be useful in my clinical practice to develop this idea of having visual stimuli by combining the techniques used in CBT with some aspects of art as therapy. *The CBT Art Activity Book* is a collection of the worksheets I designed with CBT, art therapy and aesthetics in mind. It was a revelation to discover that the hand-drawn images and patterns were a refreshing sight for people living in a world saturated with computer generated, 'perfect' images.

Many of my clients have been inspired to draw after working with these worksheets. The fact that they are drawn by hand seems to allow people to be creative with more confidence, freeing them to make visual mistakes whilst enjoying the therapeutic benefits of working creatively. Inviting clients to create their own artwork can be less daunting for them after being reminded that it's okay to have a resulting piece of work that does not look like it was produced by a computer. It's the process of creating that generates the therapeutic value, not how a piece of artwork looks at the end of the process. Being creative can be extremely cathartic.

I've derived a great deal of pleasure in drawing and designing these pages. It can feel meditative and mindful to be lost in doing something we truly love, giving our minds time to be free from thinking or worrying. I came to this way of drawing through many years of passionate doodling. For anyone interested in learning how to draw in this style, it has been named 'Zentangle' by artists Maria Thomas and Rick Roberts (2012). They have released some fantastic practical books and online resources, teaching how to produce similar artwork.

This book provides an opportunity for people to be inspired by the worksheets and to help people communicate visually, with or without words. It is hoped that there will be an array of art materials available for clients to use with this book,

and that the pages may act as prompts for further artwork to be created on a much larger scale.

The first part contains worksheets for therapeutic purposes. The second part contains illustrated letters of the alphabet for colouring in and potentially cutting out, which can be used as an extension of 'sense of self' work. In this section there is also a collection of mandala designs to be coloured in for pure enjoyment.

*Part One –
Worksheets Collection*

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy Concepts

The idea for these worksheets came about from using CBT techniques within my own clinical practice. Although it is expected that the worksheets in Part One will be used primarily by therapists familiar with these techniques, here is a very brief outline of this major form of psychotherapy.

CBT helps clients to understand how thoughts and patterns of thinking affect their feelings and behaviour, including physiological aspects. The concepts were developed by Aaron Beck, an American psychiatrist working at the University of Pennsylvania in the early 1960s. Originally CBT was intended for researching and treating depression (Beck 1995). Since then, CBT has broadened into applications for treating a wide range of mental health and emotional wellbeing issues and is used extensively as an evidence-based psychotherapy (Neenan and Drydan 2004).

There is a widespread belief amongst many people that it is external events or other people which are to blame for how they are feeling, especially when these feelings are anger, upset, disappointment, distress or anxiety. CBT aims to challenge and dispel this idea by helping clients understand that there are a variety of perceptions we can have about how we view the world and our experiences. If this were not the case, then all our feelings and reactions would be identical to one another's. It is evident that it is our interpretation of an event which determines how we feel about it. It is therefore essential that to make a change in the way we feel about external events and experiences, we need to make changes in the way we think about them. Our interpretations are wholly subjective and open to being distorted, and can be inaccurate. People often mistake their interpretations for facts, without realising the difference between the two.

Emotional wellbeing can be severely affected when the assimilations of our experiences begin to exist as negative beliefs, particularly when these are in relation to ourselves, our competencies and ultimately our self-worth. CBT aims to enable people to acknowledge this, so that a different perception can be chosen, which will affect how that person feels. This may serve to negate or minimise the problem. This

is not to say that we consciously create emotional problems by our negative thinking and beliefs, but that when external events happen in our lives our perceptions can help or hinder how we manage and deal with the effects of the event (Neenan and Drydan 2004).

Psychologist Albert Ellis (1997) developed the 'ABC model' to demonstrate how our thoughts affect our feelings, which in turn affect our behaviour:

Activating event.....leads to

Beliefs – based on interpretations.....leads to

Consequences – emotional and behavioural.

This model illustrates the concept of changing our thoughts and ways of thinking first, in order to alter the ways we feel and make changes in our behaviour. The beliefs are defined as three different levels of cognition:

1. Core beliefs

These kinds of thoughts are statements we make to ourselves, which have often become fixed, inaccurate and damaging to our self-esteem. They are often referred to as schemas, and are believed to be the deepest level of thought. Core beliefs inform how we interpret our experiences because we focus on selecting information from events that confirm these, and filter out information that contradicts them.

High emotion can be an indicator that there are fundamental core beliefs underpinning what is initially being expressed. Helping clients become aware of these can be hugely enlightening and empowering for therapeutic change. Once recognised, clients can then aim to return to a more logical, evidence-based way of processing information (Beck 1995).

2. Intermediate beliefs

These usually lie in between our core beliefs and automatic thoughts. They are often defined as being rules, attitudes and assumptions, and are affected by our core beliefs. Usually we are only semi-aware of our intermediate beliefs, and so they are often unarticulated (Beck 1995).

3. Automatic thoughts

These thoughts are the ones that continually run through our mind, and can be verbal or visual. They make up the inner, running commentary often described as 'self-talk'. They are usually situation-specific and considered the most superficial of the three levels of thinking. Some theorists define these as 'negative automatic thoughts' (NATs). If we are experiencing distress, these have a detrimental impact on our thinking. A correlation can be made between our level of emotional upset and how logically we are thinking. Once again, these automatic thoughts can become habitual patterns we might not be fully aware of until we do some exploration after the distressing event or situation (Neenan and Drydan 2004).

The three interactive levels of how we think can each be a focus within therapy. It is common for CBT to begin at the NATs level, facilitating clients to become aware of the nature of their inner self-talk, before shifting the focus towards them becoming aware of their underlying assumptions and rules, and their core beliefs (Neenan and Drydan 2004).

The habitual nature of our thoughts and belief systems can lead us to feel safe in their familiarity, even when they no longer serve us. Despite recognising this, there can be a resistance to change because it falls into the realms of the unknown and unfamiliar. To explore and practise new ways of thinking and being can feel scary, so therapy can be a valuable arena.

This book can be considered a vital part of a therapist's toolkit, to be dipped into as and when appropriate, to facilitate the myriad CBT techniques available to challenge and change these non-helpful patterns of thinking. The aesthetic aspect of the worksheets may trigger new revelations for people in recognising the connections and being able to establish more valuable constructs. Rather than forms and columns, the creative nature of the designs may inspire anyone who is searching for a different perspective to problems or feels stuck in their ways of thinking. The worksheets are suited to clients whose communication will be supported by pictures, patterns and images, together with suggestive comments, phrases and questions. Many people's learning is aided and accelerated by doing, and using these worksheets can be an effective way to enhance the experiential aspect of therapy.