

# Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)

CPT is a 12 session therapy that has been found effective for PTSD and other corollary symptoms following traumatic events. CPT is based on a social cognitive theory of PTSD that focuses on how the traumatic event is construed and coped with by a person who is trying to regain a sense of mastery and control in his or her life. The other major theory explaining PTSD is Lang's (1977) information processing theory, which was extended to PTSD by Foa, Stekette, and Rothbaum (1989) in their emotional processing theory of PTSD. In this theory, PTSD is believed to emerge due to the development of a fear network in memory that elicits its escape and avoidance behavior. Mental fear structure include stimuli, responses, and meaning elements. Anything associated with the trauma may elicit the fear structure or schema and subsequent avoidance behavior. The fear network in people with PTSD is thought to be stable and broadly generalized so that is easily accessed.

# Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT) cont.

When the fear network is activated by reminders of the trauma, the information in the network enters consciousness (intrusive symptoms). Attempts to avoid this activation result in the avoidance symptoms of PTSD. According to emotional processing theory, repetitive exposure to the traumatic memory in a safe environment will result in habituation of the fear and subsequent change in the fear structure. As emotion decreases, patients with PTSD will begin to modify their meaning elements spontaneously and will change their self-statements and reduce their generalization. Repeated exposures to the traumatic memory are thought to result in habituation or a change in the information about the event, and subsequently, the fear structure.