Using Behavioral and Cognitive Strategies in the Home

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Learning Objectives

1. Define the core components of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
2. Describe practical behavioral strategies to promote positive behavior change in the home
3. Describe practical cognitive strategies for promoting positive thinking and effective coping skills

What is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy?

CBT: A model of psychotherapy helping a client to examine maladaptive thought patterns and use behavioral strategies to improve mood, anxiety and behavioral patterns

Modifying “traditional” CBT for students with ASD

- Include disorder-specific goals along with co-morbidities
- Emphasis on concrete and visual strategies
- Use interests and “preoccupations” to enhance motivation
- Parental involvement

Examples of “maladaptive” thought patterns

- All or nothing thinking
- Perfectionism
- Catastrophizing
- Minimizing
- Discounting the positive
- Personalization
- The “shoulds”

Example Scenario

Your student with ASD has just come home from a long day at school. He (she) had an “OK” day, but you can tell that he (she) really worked hard to “keep it together.” Now, he’s (she’s) home, and there is homework to do, as well as other afternoon and evening routines before bedtime.
As in the previous example scenario:

- There are often tasks/non-preferred activities to be done (homework, chores, evening routine, etc.)
- How do you promote independence and success in these important, often daily, activities without "setting off" the individual?

Behavioral Strategies can help...

Choices:

- Which activities or tasks?
  - (e.g., take out the trash or clean out the dishwasher?)
- Which order?
  - (e.g., start with Math or start with Reading?)
- When to do? With whom to do? How to do?
  - A "less-preferred" choices strategy
    - (e.g., turn off the computer in 5 minutes or turn it off in 2 minutes)

Timing strategies:

- Momentum:
  - Avoid too long a break between difficult activities (e.g., between school & starting homework)
- Timing:
  - Deliver the demand when the individual is NOT engaged in a highly preferred activity
- Transition warnings:
  - (e.g., "In 5 minutes, it will be time to come to dinner")

Start easier:

- Provide assistance:
  - Help with the task before there are behavior issues
- Fade in demands:
  - Start with easier/shorter demands; increase over time
- Break tasks into smaller portions:
  - (e.g., ½ the math before dinner and ½ after)
- Provide short, frequent breaks:
  - Makes escape/avoidance problem behavior less valuable

Structure and Predictability:

- Visual schedules:
  - Motivational arrangement
    - Challenging/less preferred activities
    - Easier/more preferred activities
- Visual cues/Visual reminders
  - Bus 7:30
- Routines
  - Predictability and consistency
    - (e.g., morning & evening routines, etc.)

Examples of a visual schedule

1. Snack - 10 min
2. Set up for HW - 3 min
3. Math HW - 20 min
4. Break - 5 min
5. Spelling HW - 15 min
6. Break - 5 min
7. Chores: set the table - 10 min
8. Relax (preferred activity) - 20 min
Other strategies:
- Allow enough time for an independent response
- Provide hints/partial prompts to increase independence
- Give behavior-specific praise:
  - (e.g., "That’s great! You already took your shower!")
- Praise genuine efforts:
  - (e.g., "Wow! You got most of these right!")
- Catch the individual being good!!!
Practice labeling and rating emotions

- Emotion thermometers
- 5 pt scale
- Build mood ratings into the after school routine
  - School was ___ today. (What happened? Why was it ___?) This makes me feel ___.
  - Practice rating mood on a scale – 1 to 5, 1 to 10, 1 to 100, etc.
- Use emojis

Expectations Game

Describe the situation...

Social stories (www.thegraycenter.org)

- Build into after-school routines, display visually
  - Today, I have homework in math and vocabulary. I like doing math problems, and I will try my best. Vocabulary is sometimes hard for me, and I will ask for help if I need to. I can take a break (for 5 minutes) if I need to. I can say, "This is tough! I need a short break."

Catch it, check it, change it!

- Identify a negative emotion - pay attention to physiological state and behaviors
  - Anxious/nervous - body feels jittery, don't want to talk
- Identify the thought that created the emotion
  - What if I mess up? I never get this right!
- Evaluate the thought - is it negative? Is it accurate? Could I change it to be more positive?
  - Messing up is negative. I sometimes get things right.
- Change the thought to a positive self-statement - something that will motivate appropriate behavior
  - I can do this. I can always ask for help and it will be OK if I make a mistake.

Practice making positive self-statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>What Happened</th>
<th>How I Feel</th>
<th>What Should I Do?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Really difficult homework</td>
<td>Angry, frustrated</td>
<td>Take a break, take deep breaths, come back to it later</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Homework is tough I'm trying really hard</td>
<td>Frustrated, exhausted</td>
<td>Take a break, get help</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Working independently</td>
<td>Confused, anxious</td>
<td>Ask for help, check out my positive statement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Transitioning to a new task getting work done</td>
<td>Bored, OK</td>
<td>Keep going, ask for help if I need to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>First game, leisure</td>
<td>Calm, relaxed</td>
<td>Think positive thoughts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Mean of all scores: 2.97

5 point scale

Emotion Thermometer

Label the numbers

- There are too many problems!
- Ask for help or ask to have a break

5 choices:
- Not at all
- A little
- Somewhat
- A lot
- Extremely
Some helpful resources

- Autism Speaks Toolkits
- www.autismchatroom.com (Michelle Garcia Winner)
- Social skills picture book (Jed Baker)
- The Incredible 5 Point Scale (Kari Bruun Dunn)
- Navigating the Social World (Jeanette McAfee)
- The Hidden Curriculum (Brenda Smith Myles)
- How Rude! (Alex Packer)

CBT is for parents, too!

- Being a parent of a student with ASD is tough – not just because of the challenging behaviors and long list of goals...
- But also because we can be hard on ourselves when we respond or prompt in ways we are taught to avoid. It's not easy to consistently apply all of these strategies.
- Monitor your own emotions and thoughts, and practice positive thinking and rewarding behavioral routines
- Practice self-compassion – it's OK to feel frustrated and overwhelmed

Contact Information

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