The Society for Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology (SCCAP): Initiative for Dissemination of Evidence-based Treatments for Childhood and Adolescent Mental Health Problems

With additional support from Florida International University and The Children’s Trust.
Keynote
Basics of Cognitive Behavior Therapy with Children and Adolescents: Social Learning Theory

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Cognitive-Behavioral Approach

- Integrationist perspective

Internal <-> External Environment

- Emphasis on learning process
  - Environmental Contingencies, Modeling

- Parent-Child interaction
  - Both parties shape each other’s behavior
Some Myths About CBT

- **Mechanistic**: all clinical procedures take place within an interpersonal context
- **Superficial**: do not ignore the private internal life of the patient
- **Ahistorical**: past history is very significant in determining present behavior
- **Simplistic**: successful therapy calls for knowledge beyond basic techniques

Principles Underlying CBT

• Social Learning Theory

• Reinforcement/Learning Theories
Guiding Principles

- Assess and formulate conceptualization
- Collaborative empiricism and therapeutic alliance
- Set observable and measurable goals
- Present CBT model and provide corrective information
- Home-based monitoring and experiments/exposure facilitate process, insight and change
Social Learning Theory

• Learning occurs in a social context.

• Learning can occur by observing others.

• Thinking influences learning---awareness of and expectations about future reinforcement or punishing events will shape behavior.
Fundamental CBT Concepts

- **Stimulus**: something that influences the occurrence of behavior
- **Response**: the behavioral result of applying a stimulus
- **Reinforcement**: the act of following a response with a reinforcer
- **Reinforcer**: something that strengthens the probability that the response will occur again
Even More CBT Concepts

- **Extinction**: when a response no longer occurs because it is no longer followed by a reinforcer.

- **Shaping**: reinforcing successive approximations of the desired behavior.
Considerations: Child Therapy

• Multifactorial
  – Endogenous & Exogenous risk factors
  – Biological & Psychological vulnerabilities

• Transactional
  – Individual <-> Environment

• Developmental Issues
The Role of Modeling in Learning

• Many behaviors can be observed by watching others (modeling)
  – Fear reactions
  – Aggression
  – Altruism
  – Moral behavior
  – Academic tasks
  – Motor tasks
    • The list can go on and on……
Four Conditions Necessary for Modeling

1. The client must pay attention to the model.
2. The client must be able to remember what has been observed. Rehearsal helps.
3. The client must be able to replicate the behavior (developmentally appropriate).
4. The client needs to be motivated to learn!
Rationale for CBT

**Multidimensionality**

**Physical:** increases in sympathetic nervous system activity, physical tension, arousal

- *Relaxation*

**Cognitive:** “I can’t control this kid!”

- *Cognitive restructuring*

**Behavioral:** Tantrums, rule-breaking

- *Time-out, labeled praise, positive attention*
Conceptualizing Cases in CBT: Some questions to ask

- What factors are maintaining the child’s problematic behavior?
- What are the child’s weaknesses/strengths in coping?
- What role do parents play in maintaining the problem?
The Behavioral Analysis

Approach for analyzing & understanding maintenance of the child’s existing behaviors

And, therefore...

Methods for determining & implementing behavior change
  • Applications to parenting, in-session work, school behaviors, individual child therapy
What is reinforcement?

- Strengthening a behavior so that it will continue to be performed.

- Reinforcement occurs whenever the consequences of a behavior increase the likelihood that it will be repeated.

*Reinforcer must be contingent on the behavior being performed*
Reinforcer or Reward?

Reinforcers are defined by their accelerating effects on the behaviors they follow.

Rewards are given for accomplishing something, but do not necessarily increase the probability of that behavior occurring again.
A child can win a prize in a pie eating contest, but this won't necessarily make him want to eat more pies.
Positive Reinforcement

**Positive Reinforcer:** A stimulus that, when presented as a consequence of a response, results in an increase or maintenance of that response

**Tangibles**
- Material objects w/personal value e.g., stickers, stars

**Activities**
- Free time, recess, playing a game, doing artwork

**Token Reinforcers**
- Symbolic items with value e.g., grades, stickers, points, money

**Feedback**
- Information about one’s behavior can serve as a reinforcer
Social Reinforcers

- Attention, praise, approval, & acknowledgement
- Communicated verbally, physically, and through gestures
- Easy to administer
- Can be administered immediately

Natural reinforcers--and among the most powerful of all reinforcers
Negative Reinforcement

**Negative Reinforcer:** A stimulus whose removal, if paired with the occurrence of a behavior, will increase the probability of the occurrence of the behavior.

- *Rarely* used as a therapy procedure
- Examples usually involve aversive stimuli
- Powerful in maintenance of problematic behavior
How negative reinforcement works
The example of tantrums

Impact of giving in:
- remembers situation at the height of tantrum
- prevents learning of positives
- no experience calming self down
- tantrum is reinforced

Impact of ignoring:
- remembers that calm behavior is reinforced
- learns tantrum will not be rewarded
- appropriate behavior is shaped

From Tamar Chansky (2004)
Coercive Process/Negative Reinforcement Trap

Parent: “Mike, please clean up your room.”

Mike: I don’t want to.
    I DON’T WANT TO.
    I DON’T WANT TO!

Child begins to cry louder and louder . . . .

• From Rex L. Forehand
And on it goes . . .

• Parent gives in . . .
  – “Okay, but next time you have to do this when I ask”

• Outcome:
  – Mike’s inappropriate behavior is REINFORCED because his parent gave in and withdrew the request/direction.
Yet another reinforcement trap

- Parent: (in a louder voice)
  - “I really mean it! Pick up your room!”
- Child does not comply
  - NO! I won’t! (while spitting and kicking)
- Parent intensifies her/his reaction
  - “That’s it mister! I’ve had it with you!” (while grabbing and make angry faces at child)
- Outcome:
  - Child complies while the parent’s angry and intimidating behavior is reinforced through the child’s compliance.

- Also from Rex Forehand
Reinforcement Procedures

• Shaping
  - Components of a target behavior are reinforced in a step-by-step manner

• The Premack Principle
  - High frequency behaviors serve to reinforce low frequency behaviors
    • “Grandma’s Rule”: You can’t get your ice cream until you finish your spinach!
Reinforcement should be:

- CONTINGENT on performance of the target behavior
- CONSISTENTLY applied
- Administered IMMEDIATELY after the behavior
- Initially on CONTINUOUS schedule, then changed to INTERMITTENT
- Kept POTENT
  - use small amounts and change reinforcers periodically
  - involve natural reinforcers whenever possible

**The child should be aware that a reinforcer is a consequence of the target behavior**
Extinction

- All behaviors are maintained by reinforcement
- When the reinforcers that maintain a behavior are no longer available, the child stops engaging in the behavior
- Useful for: tantrums, crying, whining
Ignoring: Promoting Extinction

- The opposite of paying attention—removal of positive reinforcer
- Used in conjunction with paying attention & praising
- Consists of:
  - no physical contact
  - no verbalizations
  - no eye contact
- Once you start ignoring, keep at it!
- Effective for decreasing whining, crying, demanding attention, and tantrums
It may get worse before . . .

- Extinction, applied consistently, will decrease undesirable behavior over time
- An extinction “burst” may occur at first . .
  - A sudden and temporary *increase* in the problem behavior (e.g., more frequent tantrums)
  - This brief increase is followed by eventual decline and cessation of the behavior
The infamous and always expected “Back to square one”

- After a period of change . . . the “problem behavior” reappears
  - e.g., John’s tantrums are brought under control by ignoring and concurrent reinforcement of appropriate behavior
  - The parents enjoy a full month “tantrum free”
  - Suddenly . . . . John throws a nuclear tantrum!
  - Are we back to square one?
Challenges to delivering CBT: Mismanaged Spontaneous Recovery

- “We’re back to square one!”
- Sticking with the program
- Prepare the parents & child in advance
  - “Diet” analogy
- Review prior accomplishments
- Problem solve: What gets in the way of sticking with the program?
Time Outs

- Temporarily withdrawing a child’s access to reinforcers immediately after the client performs an inappropriate behavior
  ~1 min/year of child’s age

- Not provide access to generalized reinforcers (e.g., objects to play with; windows to look out of; peers)
Negative Consequences

• **Response cost:** removing a valued item or privilege when an undesirable behavior is performed
  (e.g., loss of points, loss of recess time)

• **Overcorrection:** correcting the effects of an action and intensively practicing an alternative behavior
  (e.g., cleaning up spitballs, then writing “I am sorry” 100 times)
Contingency Contracts

A written agreement that specifies the relationship between a target behavior and its consequences

1. The target behavior must be specified in explicit, unambiguous terms
2. The consequences of performing (or failing to perform) the behavior are clearly stated
3. The contingency is clearly specified:
   
   - If John stays in his seat for the morning session, he gets to feed the class fish.
   - If Mary puts her toys away when asked, she gets an extra 15-minutes of computer time
Parents in the Treatment Process

- Identify potential parent role in cycle of negative interactions
- Provide model of coercive family process & education
- Examine maintaining variables
- Contingency management training
Level of Parental Involvement in CBT

CONSULTANT
provide information

CHEERLEADER
provide encouragement

COACH
supervise/administer treatment components

CLIENT
target of specific aspects of intervention

• Courtesy of John Piacentini, PhD
When in trouble . . .

- Non-CBT trained clinicians “abandon ship”
- Unable to maintain formulation
- Inconsistent message to patient
- “Watered-down” CBT
For more information, please go to the main website and browse for workshops on this topic or check out our additional resources.

**Additional Resources**

**Books:**

