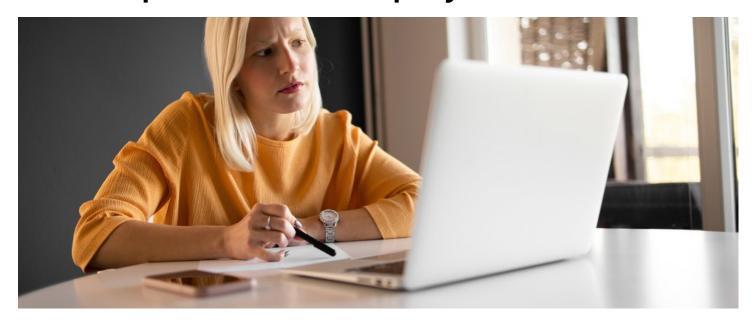# How Online Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Can Empower Your Employees

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) helps people recognize negative thought patterns and teaches them how to reduce and potentially eliminate harmful self-talk and unwanted behaviors.

This mental health treatment includes:

- Training on reflection and self-awareness
- Interactive exercises and coursework
- Educational videos
- Individual and group therapy

Research has shown online CBT to be effective in treating:

- General and social anxiety
- Stress
- Chronic fatigue

- Depression

- Compulsive gambling

- Post-traumatic stress disorder

With online options making CBT programs increasingly accessible, now is a great time to consider adding it to your benefits package.

Your online CBT program

If you're looking to add an online CBT program for your employees, consider the following steps:

- Identify your users.

- Make the program accessible.

- Address mental health stigmas.

- Measure your results.

Identify your users

Your online CBT program can be aimed at:

- All employees

- Specific demographics within your employee population

- Both

If you're not sure where to start, survey your employees to learn about their mental health challenges. Then use those results to inform your approach.

For example, if many of your employees indicate struggles with work pressures, you might want to offer an online CBT program on stress prevention and mindfulness to everyone. If you have a concerning number of employees on personal leave, you might offer a tailored program on return-to-work strategies to employees on leave.

Online CBT programs can also be built with individual pathways, allowing employees to start with broad coursework and then build specific skills that pertain to their unique needs. Some employees might focus on anxiety, while others will look to build resilience, overcome fears like public speaking or successfully transition from disability leave.

Make the program accessible

You are likely to see higher participation rates with online CBT because of its flexibility and ease of access. Participants can choose to meet with a licensed therapist live over video chat, complete a self-paced online course, or both. Therapy visits can be scheduled at their convenience, and online coursework can be performed anytime, anywhere.

Online programs can also remove barriers due to:

- **Geography —** Anyone with an internet connection can access your program.
- **Transportation —** Online therapy eliminates travel times and is accessible to employees without reliable transportation.
- **Health —** If an employee is ill with minor symptoms or has a condition that limits movement, they can still benefit from virtual therapy without restrictions or risk of spreading germs.

To get the most out of your program, make sure it's available:

- 24/7, 365 days a year
- On mobile and desktop
- At low or no cost to employees and, ideally, their dependents

Address mental health stigmas

Communicating about your CBT program year-round can make therapy feel safe and inclusive. Open, frequent discussions around mental health issues let people know they aren't alone and help them feel validated in their need to seek mental health resources.

In your communications, be sure to:

- Make it clear that participation is confidential. Choose a program that allows people to anonymously share thoughts, support and progress.
- Highlight coursework and other online resources for those who may be hesitant about working directly with a therapist.
- Use relatable language like "education," "coaching," "training," "building emotional strength" and "enhancing mental health fitness." This helps people understand that online CBT is a continuous learning opportunity for everyone, and not just a last resort for people with mental health problems.

Promote the program throughout the year by:

- Creating quarterly challenges for staff to brainstorm solutions to specific issues, like stress management, unrealistic goals or perfectionist tendencies. These can be structured as group or individual activities. Be sure to mention the online CBT program throughout.
- Host a Mental Health Week with giveaways, webinars, in-person presentations and reminders about online CBT.
- Invite program participants to share their success stories with colleagues. Hearing directly from peers and even supervisors creates a sense of community and normalizes usage of the program.

Measure your results

Measuring progress on both individual and organizational levels can help you:

- Determine how effective your CBT program is
- Adapt the program to what works and what doesn't, and any new challenges that arise

On an individual level, initial assessments help identify the skills individuals may need to address and the most beneficial exercises for them. You can monitor progress through:

- Coursework completion
- Reflection exercises
- Health assessments and surveys

On an organizational level, examine before-and-after data on key performance indicators, including:

- Absenteeism
- Disability management, including the number of people on leave and the length of that leave
- Health care costs

Your priorities can evolve as you see progress in certain areas. For example, you might shift your focus from absenteeism to productivity levels.

A benefit to you and your employees

The right online CBT program can help your employees manage their mental health for a greater sense of well-being, at home and at work.

For more information on online CBT options and providers, talk to your insurance broker or benefits adviser.

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