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Game-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (GB-CBT)
An Innovative Treatment Approach
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What is evidence-based practice and why does it matter?

Slide 3

Evidence-Based Practice for Child Mental Health

- Psychological interventions based on the best available evidence, delivered by clinicians operating from a foundation of informed practice and conducted within the values and cultural framework of the client (APA, 2006).
- Structured, time-limited and well-controlled interventions have been found to have beneficial outcomes for a variety of child symptoms and behavioral problems (Weisz & Jensen, 2001; Weisz & Kazdin, 2010).
- Behavioral and cognitive-behavioral therapies (CBT) have been the most widely studied and supported interventions for treating childhood behavioral disorders (Christopherson & Mortweet, 2005; Kazdin & Weisz, 1998; Kendall, 2006; Weisz, Hawley, Jensen-Doss, 2004).
- Caregiver involvement in children’s treatment is important because it impacts treatment attendance, skill utilization, and outcomes (Corcoran & Pili, 2008; Dowell & Ogles, 2010).
Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

• Empirically supported for treating a variety of child and adolescent mental health difficulties including:
  • Anxiety
  • Depression
  • OCD
  • ADHD
  • Oppositional Behavior
  • Eating Disorders
  • Tics/Tourette Syndrome
  • Selective Mutism
  • Organizational Skills

Key Components of CBT for Children

• Psychoeducation
• Emotional Expression Skills
• Coping Skills
• Exposure Therapy
• Parent training

Play Therapy

• Natural Method of Exploration and Communication
• Fun and Engaging
• Effective for improving academic functioning, behavioral symptoms, and risk assessment abilities (Hetzel-Riggin, et al., 2007)
• However, PT has less evidence to support effectiveness than CBT
How can we make evidence-based practice more fun and engaging?

Game-Based Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy
An Integrative Framework for Treatment

- Data Driven:
  - Data is collected before, during, and after treatment
  - Individual needs determine treatment components, methods, and length
  - Incorporates evidence-based behavioral techniques

- Directive and Structured:
  - Each session has a prescribed structure, length, and covered topic(s)
  - Role plays and games are rule-governed and goal-oriented

- Making Therapy Fun and Engaging:
  - Games are designed to elicit children's interest and motivation while teaching skills
  - Games reduce defenses, make therapy fun and engaging and increase participation

- Experiential Learning:
  - Allows children multiple opportunities to learn, practice, demonstrate skills
  - Provides opportunities for naturalistic interactions between children and caregivers
  - Allows for learning skills in a similar context to which they will be used
Components of GB-CBT

Structured Therapeutic Games (STGs)

- Consideration of child's developmental age
- Therapeutic game concepts modified from popular game models that are familiar to the client for example:
  - Taboo
  - Card games
  - Charades
  - Races
- Game concepts that are entirely unfamiliar to the client for example:
  - Musical Pirates of Mohiki
  - Feelingless Freddy

STGs (cont.)

- Games may rely on teamwork or individual effort
- Healthy competition
  - Use of points
  - Incorporation of token economies to enhance motivation
- Cooperative play
  - Turn taking
  - Communication
  - Supportive feedback between participants
- Clinicians participate along with clients
  - Use of strategic self-disclosure
  - Clinician is approachable and engaged in the games
Psychoeducation

- Clients are provided with information pertaining to a particular behavioral problem (e.g., anxiety)
- Didactics are utilized to teach new behavioral skills or coping strategies (e.g., anger management techniques)
- Clinicians facilitate discussion and utilize Socratic questioning and other cognitive techniques to address common myths and misconceptions

Skill-Skits (Role-Plays)

- Used to demonstrate skills
- Clinician and caregiver serve as role models
- Facilitates experiential learning
- Multiple opportunities to practice skills

Session Structure: Behavioral Expectations

Established at the beginning of treatment
Rules are formulated as goals
- Elementary School-Age Goals:
  - Follow Directions
  - Control Your Body
  - Be Polite
- Middle and High School-Age Goals:
  - Be respectful
  - Actively participate
  - Be responsible
Session Structure: Token Economies

Fixed Interval Token Economies - Positive Reinforcement
- Star Awards
- Daily Score Cards

Variable Ratio Token Economies - Positive Reinforcement
- Super Bucks
- Super Checks
- Check Marks
- Positive Verbal Feedback

Fixed Interval Token Economy

Star Awards
- Reviewed collaboratively once at end
- 3 target behaviors - “rules or goals”
- Earns trip to “Prize Box”

Variable Ratio Token Economy

Super Checks
- Intermittent labeled praise
  - For 3 target behaviors
  - For Participating
- Models skills for parents in conjoint therapy
- Earns free play time in individual therapy
- In group children earn the “Super Prize”
**GB-CBT Modalities**

**Group Therapy**
- Manualized curriculum
- Fixed sequence of skills presentation
- Importance of screening for eligibility

**Individual and Conjoint-Family Therapy**
- Modular curriculum
- Children and caregivers present in the session
- Flexible sequence of skills tailored to needs of clients
- Importance of pre-screening in order to identify areas of difficulty

**GB-CBT: Broad Interventional Components**

- Social and Emotional Skills
- Disorder-Specific Skills
  - Child Sexual Abuse and Trauma
  - Anxiety Disorders
  - Disruptive Behavior Disorders

**Social and Emotional Skill-Building Modules**

- Rapport Building
- Personal Space and Boundaries
- Emotional Identification and Expression
- Linking Feelings to Experiences and Creating Experiential Narratives
- Coping with Difficult Emotions and Negative Thoughts
- Relaxation Training and Self-Control
- Social Problem Solving
Disorder-Specific Modules

- Psychoeducation
- Parent Management Training
- Exposure Procedures
- Personal Safety Skills Training
- Skills Review and Termination Processing

GB-CBT Sample Games

Rapport Building Example:
Getting to Know You Cards
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Emotional Expression Example:
Feelings Fast

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Coping Skills Example:
Thought Awareness Game

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Relaxation Training Example:
The Relaxation Competition
Psychoeducation Example:
Knowledge By Letter

Parent Training Example:
What if My Child Did...

Tic Disorders and Tourette’s Syndrome Example:
Catch the Tic
Exposure Therapy Example:
Unlock the Path

Empirical Research

Empirical Findings

GB-CBT has been found to be effective for:
• Improving internalizing symptoms
• Improving externalizing symptoms
• Improving overall behavioral problems
• Reducing sexually inappropriate behavior
• Enhancing knowledge of abuse and personal safety skills
• Gains were maintained at three month follow-up for both individual and group models for child sexual abuse
Questions and Answers

Select GB-CBT Publications

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Thank you