

# **Increasing Access to Structured Psychotherapy – North Simcoe Muskoka**

## **FAQ for Clients**

**Increasing Access to Structured Psychotherapy (IASP) is a program funded by the Government of Ontario to provide free, in-person individual and group Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) to individuals who are experiencing anxiety and/or depression.**

### **What is Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)?**

CBT is an evidence-based, effective treatment for anxiety and depression. It is a structured, time-limited psychotherapy that focuses on present difficulties and teaches specific skills that clients can use for the rest of their lives<sup>i</sup>. These skills involve identifying unhelpful thinking patterns, modifying beliefs, relating to others in different ways, and changing behaviours. CBT is also collaborative, which means the therapist and client work together on issues and there is usually homework for the client to complete between sessions.

### **What will a typical session look like?**

The first couple of sessions will involve an assessment of mental health symptoms and presenting concerns. Clients will be asked to complete some questionnaires during or after these sessions, which are an important part of the therapy process and will help the therapist to better understand the client's symptoms. Based on the assessment, the therapist will determine whether this treatment program is likely to be beneficial for the client. The treatment sessions will typically last 50-60 minutes and will be offered weekly for a range of 8 up to 12 sessions until the client has made progress.

### **What is expected of clients?**

CBT requires a great deal of commitment and is not a “quick fix”. For CBT to be effective, clients are required to attend weekly sessions and complete homework assignments to help strengthen the skills that they are learning with their therapist. Treatment may be put on hold if a client is not ready to commit to the CBT process.

Homework is a key part CBT and a client's progress will highly depend on using the skills in everyday life. Examples of homework are: recording thoughts, moods and behaviours, reading CBT information, scheduling enjoyable activities, and confronting fears (if the focus of treatment is anxiety).

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Attending CBT sessions every week is important for optimal outcomes. The skills clients learn in CBT build on each other, and the homework is the opportunity to try out and practice those skills in real life. If CBT sessions are only held every 2 or 3 weeks, then momentum can be lost, clients may misunderstand a homework assignment and practice incorrectly for weeks, and dropout is more likely. Obviously things may come up and a client has to miss an occasional session, but the hope is that every effort will be made to attend weekly and maximize the chance that skills will be learned and ultimately that symptoms of depression and anxiety will decrease.

### What is the next step?

Once IASP has received a client's referral for CBT treatment, a member of the Clinical Access Coordination Team will call the client at the number on the Referral Form, usually within one to two weeks. During that call, the Clinical Access Coordinator will ask a number of questions to try to ensure that the IASP program is a good fit for the client's needs. If it appears that the program may be a good fit for the client, then they will be paired with a CBT therapist in the community. If the program is not a good fit, then attempts will be made to suggest a more appropriate alternative treatment.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.beckinstitute.org/get-informed/cbt-faqs/>