

Cognitive Behavioral Theory is an umbrella theory for several cognitive and behavioral theories and is the basis for cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). The core theoretical notion is that people’s emotional reactions and behaviors are strongly influenced by cognitions (thoughts, beliefs, and interpretations of themselves or situations in which they find themselves). When experiencing an event, a person’s cognitions can influence their emotional and behavioral reaction more than the event itself. As such, individuals react differently to similar events. Additionally, these cognitions, emotions, and behaviors interact with each other in complex feedback processes, and also interact with the environment.

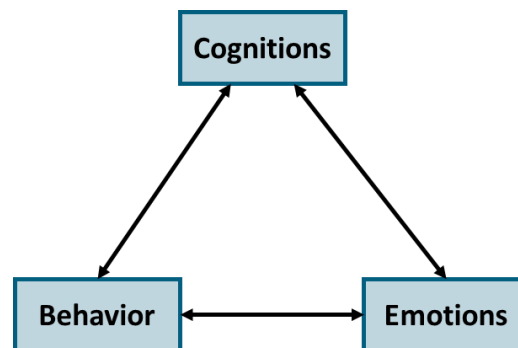
There are different kinds of levels of cognition. At the center of a person’s cognition is their core beliefs. These are fundamental beliefs that one holds about themselves, others, the world in general, and the future. These underlying beliefs must be addressed for changes in emotion and behavior to occur.

Developer

Aaron Beck, 1976

Graphical Representation of Theory and Constructs

(Adapted from Beck, 1976)



Cognitions – Thoughts, beliefs, and interpretations about oneself and events or situations.

Emotions – Emotional states and feelings.

Behavior – What one says or does.

Application to the Precision Paradigm: Alignment of Theory Constructs with Mechanisms of Action Taxonomy

Mechanisms of Action (MoA), derived from theories of behavior, are the processes through which specific intervention techniques are expected to affect behavior. Interventions grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Theory might include techniques to achieve specific changes in behavior by acting through any of these MoAs.

Aspects of constructs in **Cognitive Behavioral Theory** correspond to the [Mechanisms of Action taxonomy](#) as follows:

Theory Construct	Corresponding Mechanism(s) of Action
Cognitions ^a	General Attitudes/Beliefs
Emotions	Emotion

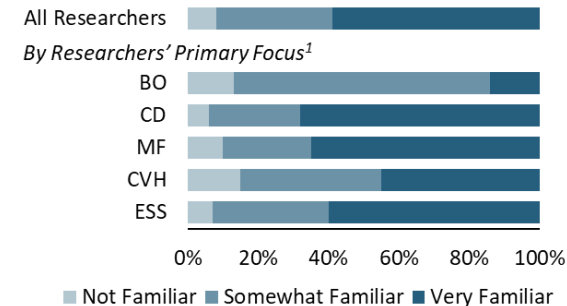
^a As defined, cognitions are very broad and capture the whole of an individuals' thought processes. As such, no exact MoAs can be specified, though many MoAs from our taxonomy may apply. For example, MoAs that operate through attitudes, beliefs, and cognitive interpretation/processing may be relevant to this construct.

Examples of Use of Theory in Intervention Development/Research

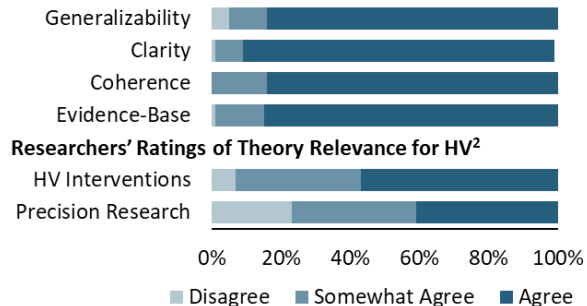
Hill, R. M., & Pettit, J. W. (2019). Pilot randomized controlled trial of LEAP: A selective preventive intervention to reduce adolescents' perceived burdensomeness. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 48(sup1), S45-S56. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15374416.2016.1188705>

Key Results from Intervention Researcher Survey

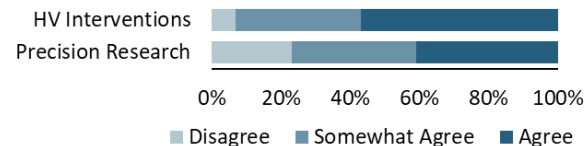
Researchers' Familiarity with the Theory



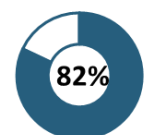
Researchers' Ratings of Theory Quality²



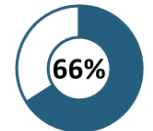
Researchers' Ratings of Theory Relevance for HV²



High Quality³



High Relevance⁴



¹Intervention researchers' primary or secondary area of research; BO=Birth Outcomes; CD=Child Development; MF=Maternal Psychosocial Functioning; CVH=Cardiovascular Health; ESS=Family Economic Self-Sufficiency

²Of those who indicated they were familiar with the theory. Those answering 'Not Sure' to the quality and relevance items were excluded from the denominator.

³Percent of researchers answering agree/somewhat agree to all four quality items.

⁴Percent of researchers answering agree/somewhat agree to both relevance items.

Methods for the intervention researcher survey can be found [here](#).

Theory Citation

Beck, A. T. (1976). *Cognitive therapy and the emotional disorders*. International Universities Press.