



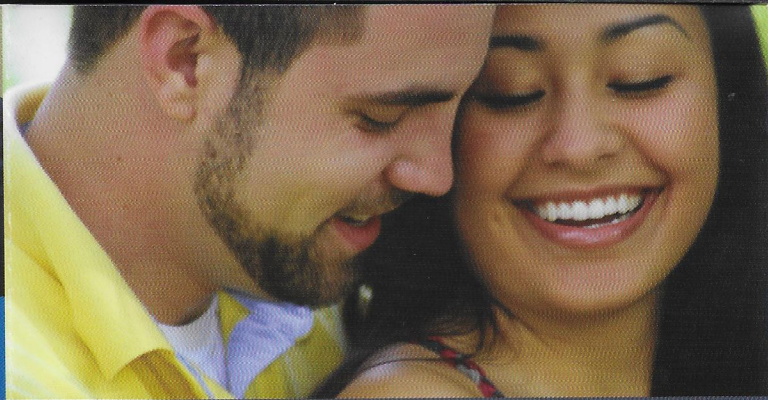
Evidence-Based  
PSYCHOTHERAPIES

# Proven Treatments

FOR PTSD & OTHER MENTAL  
HEALTH CONDITIONS IN THE  
VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

In recent years, a variety of psychotherapies (or "talk therapies") have been developed and scientifically studied in much the same way we evaluate treatments for physical health conditions, such as high blood pressure or diabetes. This research has shown that psychotherapy is very effective for even the most complex mental health conditions that, not long ago, were considered untreatable. Psychotherapies that are repeatedly shown in controlled research to be effective for a particular condition or conditions are referred to as "evidence-based" psychotherapies.

As part of its commitment to providing the best possible care to Veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is making evidence-based psychotherapies for PTSD and other mental health conditions widely available throughout the VA health care system. VA believes that Veterans should have full access to these proven treatments.



## WHAT HAPPENS DURING TREATMENT?

At the beginning of treatment, the therapist and patient work together to identify problems and issues to address in therapy and then develop specific treatment goals. During treatment, the therapist guides the patient to develop new understanding and life skills to overcome personal problems and achieve identified goals of the patient. Evidence-based psychotherapies have helped numerous individuals regain their lives following even the darkest of moments.

Patients serve as active participants in treatment, applying new strategies to their current lives. The enhanced knowledge, perspective, and skills patients acquire in therapy often provide a sense of empowerment that not only helps with current problems but also in overcoming future hurdles. This is one reason why evidence-based psychotherapies usually have long-term effects!

Evidence-based psychotherapies emphasize a team approach, with the patient and therapist working together to make real changes in the patient's life. In the evidence-based psychotherapies provided in VA, the therapist guides (rather than "teaches") Veterans to make new discoveries and changes. In this way, evidence-based psychotherapy differs from psychological skills-based classes that focus more on learning information and less on the therapeutic process.

## WHAT ARE THE SPECIFIC BENEFITS OF EVIDENCE-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPY?

Evidence-based psychotherapies have a number of specific benefits:

- **Are effective** — extensive research shows that evidence-based psychotherapies significantly reduce symptoms, improve quality of life, and promote recovery.
- **Are goal-oriented** — therapist and patient work together in identifying and achieving specific individual goals.
- **Are appropriate for a wide range of patients and conditions** — research shows that evidence-based psychotherapies are effective with men and women, younger and older adults (including Veterans from WWII through OEF/OIF), and individuals from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- **Teach new skills** and provide **new perspective** for reducing symptoms and living life, within a supportive therapeutic relationship.
- **Have lasting benefits** — because evidence-based psychotherapies address underlying issues that involve gaining new perspective and life skills, patients often maintain treatment gains well after treatment ends.
- **Are time-limited** — significant improvement can be achieved within a relatively short period of time, with specific length adapted to the needs of the individual patient. "Booster sessions" later on can help to maintain gains.



## EVIDENCE-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPIES IN VA

For each of the mental health conditions listed below, each VA medical center is making available one or more of the specific evidence-based psychotherapies listed for that condition. Many medical centers and clinics provide additional psychotherapy services in addition to those listed in this brochure.

### PTSD

#### **COGNITIVE PROCESSING THERAPY (CPT) & PROLONGED EXPOSURE THERAPY (PE)**

- are specific forms of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (see below) developed for PTSD
- are recommended in the VA/Department of Defense Clinical Practice Guidelines for PTSD at the highest level
- were concluded by the Institute of Medicine (2007) to be two of the most effective treatments available for PTSD
- have been shown to be effective for sexual trauma, combat-related trauma, and other types of trauma

### Serious Mental Illness

#### **SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING (SST)**

- is a highly structured treatment that helps individuals with schizophrenia and other serious mental illnesses develop new social skills
- teaches specific skills in the areas of basic conversation, assertiveness, conflict management, friendship and dating, health maintenance, work, and coping skills for drug and alcohol use
- treatment improves ability to relate to others and often helps multiple areas of life

### Depression

#### **COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)**

- is one of the most extensively researched and effective psychotherapies originally developed for depression
- is based on decades of research that has shown a strong relationship between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, and how these lead to depression
- helps patients learn new patterns of thinking and to develop new positive behaviors
- is effective for older and younger adults; 75% of patients with depression show significant improvement following CBT

#### **ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY (ACT)**

- like CBT, is also based on the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors and is supported by clinical research
- helps patients overcome their struggle with emotional pain and worry and take active steps to move forward
- helps patients recognize, commit to, and achieve what matters most to them

#### **INTERPERSONAL THERAPY (IPT)**

- was developed specifically for depression, based on years of research showing a strong connection between depression and interpersonal or relationship issues
- focuses on promoting positive relationships and resolving relationship problems that may be due to relationship changes, conflicts, loss, or other issues
- has consistently been shown to produce rapid improvement for both older and younger adults with problems ranging from mild to more severe forms of depression



## HOW IS EVIDENCE-BASED PSYCHOTHERAPY PROVIDED?

Evidence-based psychotherapies are typically provided in weekly sessions of 50-90 minutes in length by mental health professionals trained to deliver these therapies. Full treatment usually requires about 10-16 sessions, but many individuals begin to show noticeable improvement within 6-8 sessions. Evidence-based psychotherapies are delivered in either individual or group format. Some of the evidence-based psychotherapies that VA medical centers and clinics are making available are listed below, and some of these therapies can be effectively provided via teleconference and tele-video.

Veterans currently enrolled in VA health care can speak with their VA health care or mental health care provider for more information about evidence-based psychotherapies for a particular condition. Veterans and other interested parties can find a complete list of VA health care facilities at [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov), or they can call VA's general information hotline at **1-800-827-1000**.



Department of  
Veterans Affairs