

Supporting Your Loved One During CPT

The person sharing this with you is working on a self-guided course of cognitive processing therapy (CPT). CPT is an effective treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Dozens of studies have shown that CPT can help people with their recovery from PTSD. It works by helping people recognize how trauma has changed their view about themselves, others, and the world. CPT teaches people to recognize the negative thoughts that have resulted from trauma. We call them “stuck points” because they get in the way of recovery from PTSD and keep people stuck. Stuck points don’t reflect the full context or reality, and CPT works by teaching people how to think through their stuck points and consider new, more true and balanced perspectives. CPT also helps people break the cycle of avoidance that can maintain PTSD. By allowing themselves to do this work rather than avoiding memories, they can process the trauma and begin to recover.

There are four phases of CPT: (1) education about PTSD and CPT; (2) processing the trauma; (3) learning to examine thoughts about the trauma; and (4) examining stuck points related to safety, trust, power and control, esteem, and intimacy.

You can help your loved one by learning more about PTSD. The National Center for PTSD has some helpful resources: www.ptsd.va.gov/family/how_help_cpt.asp. You can also ask them if they would like you to support them by reminding them about some of the practice and exercises they’ll be doing. If they do, encourage them, but remember that it’s not your job to get them to do the work. At times as people do CPT or other forms of trauma treatment, they may experience emotions they’ve been avoiding, like sadness. This is because they are processing the trauma instead of avoiding. These feelings will decrease over time and become less intense. You can also let them know that you’re there to talk and support them, but respect their wishes if they don’t want to share much information with you.

It doesn’t help to suggest that they stop doing the work if they are feeling bad, because this encourages them to continue avoiding. Instead, let them know that you see how hard they are working and that if they keep it up and get through the tough parts, they can start to see change, or just let them know you’re there and that you support them. This book contains other resources and information about what to do if they aren’t feeling better or if they’re experiencing suicidal thoughts, so if you have concerns about how they’re doing, suggest they look over that section.

Your support means a lot to your loved ones when they’re working through traumatic events. Thank you for being there and supporting them as they take these steps in their recovery.