

# Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Skills Group: Physician & MOA Information

Are your patients struggling with...?

- Sadness or depression
- Worry, nervousness or anxiety
- Illness, or health problems causing distress
- Insomnia (related to anxiety)
- Relationship stress
- Parenting stress
- Work stress
- Life transitions causing distress
- Loss causing distress

**Our MSP-covered physician-led CBT skills program could help.**

[Frequently Asked Questions](#) (Click to jump to section).

1. What is a CBT Skills Group?
2. Who is eligible to participate in the Vancouver program?
3. What is the course like?
4. Who is the course for?
5. Who does not fit well?
6. Groups sound terrifying, especially for people with anxiety!
7. When and where are the courses?
8. What is the cost?
9. How can I refer?
10. What do participants need to know before they go?
11. What do referring physicians say about the groups?
12. What do past participants say about the group?

## What is CBT Skills Group?

A CBT skills group is a MSP-covered group medical visit that delivers a clinically effective psycho-educational program designed to impart self-management tools for managing mild to moderate mental health symptoms. The program has proved to have high efficacy with statistically significant reductions in PHQ 9, GAD 7 and Sheehan disability scores.

The program was developed by a group of psychiatrists in Victoria in response to the dearth of publicly-available non-pharmaceutical options for treating anxiety and depression. The program teaches practical skills based on evidence-based psychotherapies.

The course material draws on concepts from neuroscience, mindfulness, and cognitive behavioral therapy. Patients are taught how the mind works, how to bring mindful awareness to patterns of feeling, thinking and behaving and how to make choices to improve well-being. Skills are also provided that help patients to cope with intense emotions, to cultivate more helpful thinking, and to develop improved self-compassion.

The program is delivered to adults 17.5 and older over 8 weeks of 1 hour and 45 minute groups, led by specially trained family doctors or psychiatrists, and are provided in locations across the City of Vancouver. We have partnered with several community health centers and community recreation centers to host the groups, which helps to decrease the stigma of attending, and also allows the groups to be offered in geographically diverse areas.

## Who is eligible to participate in the Vancouver program?

The Vancouver program is currently only offered to participants living in the City of Vancouver (with a family physician practicing in the Greater Vancouver) **or** participants living outside of the City of Vancouver with a family physician practicing in the City of Vancouver.

If the participant does not meet one of the two criteria, we encourage him/her to contact their local Division and inquire if their local Division has plans to bring the program to their community.

For Victoria residents, please refer to Victoria's CBT Skills Group Program:  
<https://www.divisionsbc.ca/victoria/resources/mhsu-program/cbt-skills-group>

## What is the course like?

Each series consists of 8 weeks of 105-minute sessions, facilitated by a specially trained family physician, psychiatrist, or both. There is also 10-60 minutes of home practice each week. The group medical visits are like an interactive classroom with up to 15 participants. The program involves skills training, not psychotherapy, so personal sharing is very limited, but each participant shares a brief report on their learning each week. Most people say this learning from other participants is the most powerful part of the course.

## Who is the course for?

A screening PHQ9 questionnaire is required, with score 18 or lower.

### *Who can you refer?*

Adults 17.5 years or more (for patients 76 and over, a MOCA score is required along with the completed referral form) with:

- Depression - currently or in the past
- Anxiety
- Insomnia
- Chronic medical conditions associated mental distress or preoccupation
- Adjustment disorder (stress resulting in impairment):
  - Loss of a loved one
  - Relationship stress
  - Parenting stress
  - Job change or distress
  - Financial stress
  - Life transitions

## Who does not fit well?

Although some patients with the following may personally benefit from the group, their interactions with the group may make it difficult for others to participate. We depend on you NOT to refer patients with:

- Cluster B personality disorders or strong traits (borderline, narcissistic, histrionic, antisocial)
- High severity of any of the illnesses listed above

- Trauma history and a high potential for becoming destabilized
- Cognitive impairment
- Active psychosis, mania, or impairing substance use

These individuals should be referred to individual or group therapists who can better manage their complexity; either through AAC or private therapy.

## Groups sound terrifying, especially for people with anxiety!

For those reluctant to participate in a group, we have had extensive feedback from past participants telling us that although they initially felt anxious joining a group, they found it to be extremely beneficial to be in such a supportive environment and to learn that they were not alone in **in** their struggles.

To learn more about others' experiences, you can read an article on our group interviewing past participants at:

[https://issuu.com/divisionsbc/docs/vdfp\\_scope\\_magazine\\_volume\\_1\\_issue](https://issuu.com/divisionsbc/docs/vdfp_scope_magazine_volume_1_issue)

## When and where are the courses?

The courses are run on various days and evenings in several locations within the region. Once a patient is referred, he or she will get an email outlining all the upcoming choices.

## What is the cost?

The cost of the workbook is \$35. The sessions themselves are covered by MSP (and thus no direct costs to you).

## How can I refer?

1. Determine if the patient has the time and energy to commit to attending all of the 8 weekly sessions. Each week also involves 10-60 minutes of practice at home.
2. Fill out the referral form found [here](#). The referral form can be embedded in to many EMRs, and can also be emailed to family physicians.

### **Things to consider:**

Exclusion criteria:

- Is not at risk to harm self and/or others
- Is not cognitively impaired
- Substance use (if present) would not interfere with group-based learning

- Does not have a personality disorder that might interfere with group process
- Does not have active psychosis, mania, or dissociation

Diagnosis for referral (We need one!):

- 300 Anxiety Disorder
  - 311 Depressive Disorder
  - 309 Adjustment Reaction
  - 316 Psychological Factors Affecting Other Medical Conditions
  - 300.4 Dysthymic Disorder
3. Have the patient complete a screening questionnaire (PHQ9). Please note their score on referral form.
  4. Fax the COMPLETED referral form to the number on the referral form 604.428.1170
  5. Once referred and determined to be eligible, we will be in touch with the patient by email about the best series that works with his or her schedule.

**\*\*Referrals must have the patient's PHQ-9 score and email address to be processed.**  
We will return the referral if this information is missing. If the patient does not have an email, please indicate so on the referral.

## What do participants need to know before they go?

The program's viability depends on a limited number of no-shows and dropouts.

### **You can help prevent this by exploring with your patient:**

- Are they likely to be able to attend 7-8 of the 8 sessions?
- Are other life demands manageable, such that adding weekly 105 minute sessions and 5-30 minutes/day of home practice is feasible?
- Are they able to participate in the group check-ins? This involves 2-3 minutes of sharing on one's progress in applying CBT Skills, and is a requirement of the group medical visit. The program involves skills training, not psychotherapy, so personal sharing is very limited.

Direct patients to our website ([www.divisionsbc.ca/vancouver/CBTskillsgroup](http://www.divisionsbc.ca/vancouver/CBTskillsgroup)), where there is more information and a video, [vancouver@divisionsbc.ca](mailto:vancouver@divisionsbc.ca) or for general information call 604-569-2010.

What do referring physicians say about the groups?

**Family physicians who have referred notice impacts in:**

- Improved skills of patients to manage their conditions
- Reduced reliance on medication
- Improved conversation/communication about mental health between physician and patient
- Ability to return to work, or be more effective in their jobs

What do past participants say about the group?

***"This course has been invaluable. I wish I could have learned these things earlier in life."***  
- Participant

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***"Through the CBT skills program I have learned simple approaches I can use to maintain more objectivity in situations where I could become anxious or overly emotional. I have more ways to remain calm and feel more control over my moods/emotions."***  
Participant

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***"I feel more capable of managing and reducing my anxiety by using the concepts (and workbook) taught in class. The group facilitator was compassionate and being with a group helped me feel less isolated and alone."*** - Participant

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***"It brought sunshine to the darkness. An oasis of companionship and sharing. Awakening and aha moments of triggers."*** - Participant

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***"I feel empowered that I direct my life, I have the power to control and change my thoughts, behaviors, and feelings, and I'm worth it to do so."*** - Participant

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***"Realization that I am not alone - everyone is going through something."*** - Participant