

'It felt like we had hit the nail on the head'

Experiences of an in-patient CFT group

Dr Kate Barker and Hannah Buckland



Abstract

Hannah Mills supports men and women with complex mental health difficulties. Individuals struggle with a range of difficulties including self-harm, dissociation, suicide attempts, drug and alcohol use, relationship problems, eating related difficulties and psychosis. One of the main therapeutic approaches used on the unit is CFT. Participants were asked, via the process of semi-structured interviews, about their experiences of CFT within the group.

Findings

The interviews highlighted several themes that are described below:

New learning

- 'I've learnt that I have an amygdala! I know that I've got different parts of my brain, like the old brain and new brain and can use them at different times'
- 'I've learnt about the new brain and old brain, the different feelings they have and how they affect me today and the links this has to today's society'
- 'I've learnt about the fight, flight, freeze system and how you do one of these when threat happens. I've learnt about the old brain/new brain too, as the old brain is how you respond to threat'.

An Increased understanding of self

- 'The model helped me to realise that my threat system is always quite high and it's driving the drive system. It felt like we had hit the nail on the head when I learnt this'
- 'It has helped me understand myself as I know more about how my brain work'
- 'It has been helpful. It showed us in slow motion how the brain works. This means I can process my thinking..and makes it easier to understand what is going on when threat happens'

Using CFT to make changes

- '[CFT] has helped me with my self-harm as I turned these thoughts into more compassionate ones that didn't involve harming myself'
- 'It's helped me in the way I see my relationship with my daughter and with anxiety. It's helped me turn around negative images I had about myself.'
- 'If I'm stressed or angry...I can employ the new brain to find out if those emotions are warranted in the here and now, I can then work out if the emotional response is valid or if it's an old emotion from the past and so I can let it go'

Relationship with Compassion

- 'It has taught me to be more compassionate towards others. I think compassion is good for other people but not for myself ...I still don't think I deserve compassion myself'
- 'Before attending the group I hadn't thought about being compassionate towards myself, only towards others'
- 'It was easier to think of ways to be compassionate towards other people. It got a bit easier towards the end as I had more tools to facilitate self-compassion'

Discussion

CFT has proved to be a popular model with the participants of the CFT group. The findings indicate that the psycho-educational element of the CFT model helped participants to increase their understanding of themselves and this increased knowledge has led to changes in behaviour and an increase of self-compassion.