

What is Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT)?

A collaborative and practical form of psychotherapy — talk therapy — developed by Dr Anthony Ryle in the UK but is now used around the world

At the heart of CAT is a simple idea: **we become who we are, and often remain who we are, through relationships**. From early experiences with family, friends, communities and culture, we learn ways of relating to others and to ourselves. These patterns often develop to help us cope, belong or stay safe in relationships. While they may once have been helpful, some can leave us feeling stuck, overwhelmed or repeating the same difficulties in relationships and everyday life.

CAT helps you understand these patterns with curiosity and compassion, so that new ways of relating become possible.

What does CAT involve?

CAT is built around the Three Rs.

1st R

Reformulation — making sense together

You and your therapist work together to compassionately understand your story and the relationship patterns contributing to your difficulties. CAT often uses letters and simple diagrams (maps) to make these patterns easier to see.

2nd R

Recognition — noticing the pattern

As therapy progresses, you learn to recognise these patterns as they happen in everyday life. Rather than judging yourself, CAT encourages curiosity, helping you pause and see that you may have choices and chances.

3rd R

Revision — finding new ways forward

With greater understanding comes the opportunity to try something different. Together, you explore new ways of relating to yourself and others.

A collaborative therapy

CAT is not about being told what is wrong with you. Instead, you work together with your therapist to develop a shared understanding of what has happened, what keeps difficulties going, and what might help. The aim is not to fix you, but to help you understand yourself more fully and build more satisfying ways of relating to yourself and others.

16–24

SESSIONS, TYPICALLY BUT 8 HAVE PROVEN EFFECTIVE

CAT is time-limited, though this varies with individual needs and funding. Because endings matter in relationships, CAT makes space to think together about finishing therapy in a way that supports ongoing growth beyond the therapy room.