

Cognitive Change Strategies

Control: control of decisions, control of self, and control of the future. A variety of cognitive-behavioral techniques have been devised to help children and young people develop control over their internal reactions and overt behavior.

Listed are three points in cognitive-behavioral theory:

- A)** cognitive events mediate behaviors, therefore, a focus on cognition can be an effective approach to changing behavior.
- B)** young people are active participants in their own learning and can exercise control over it.
- C)** cognition, behavior, and the environment are related. Each affects and is affected by the others.

A model was developed called, DECIDE. This model is specifically for improving the skills in general problem solving for at-risk children and adolescents.

DECIDE stands for the steps to be taken:

- 1) Define the problem - define clearly and will the goal address the problem?
- 2) Examine variables - identify feelings and thoughts of young person. Are there questions and suggestions from other students;
- 3) Consider alternatives - strengths and weaknesses of problem solving is evaluated. Allow brainstorming from other students.
- 4) Isolate a plan - narrow down to best solution.
- 5) Do action steps - encourage students to perform the behaviors that make up the solution plan.
- 6) Evaluate effects - children and adolescents analyze and evaluate outcomes.

Teaching at-risk children and adolescents these steps will contribute to a more internal locus of control which can improve self-esteem, increase a sense of self-efficacy and strengthen resistance to problem behaviors.

Cognitive Restructuring

When a belief is maladaptive, it can be unlearned to produce a new and better belief. As more adaptive beliefs replace incomplete or faulty ones, behavior changes too. The best known approaches to changing maladaptive cognitive patterns are rational-emotive behavior therapy (REBT) (Ellis, 1962, 1996) and cognitive therapy (CT) (Beck, 1976, 1991). These approaches are based on the assumption that faulty cognition cause detrimental self-evaluations and emotional distress and that these experiences lead to behavioral problems. The goal is to help people substitute positive self-statements for faulty ones and recognize them.

Students who learn these skills in cognitive strategies will improve their interactions with others, perform better in school and realize their potential for a more positive future.