

CHAPTER 1

Introducing *Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out*

To fully understand the process of the therapy, there is no substitute for using cognitive therapy methods on oneself.

—CHRISTINE A. PADESKY, p. 288¹

Research over the past 15 years has consistently shown the positive impact of self-practice/self-reflection (SP/SR) on the skills of CBT practitioners at all levels of experience, from novice to experienced supervisor. We hope that you will enjoy the SP/SR approach; that your cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) understanding, skills, confidence, and reflective capacity will benefit from the experience; that SP/SR will be valuable to you at both a professional and personal level; and that your experience will be of direct benefit to your clients. The participant quotes at the beginning of the book are a small sample of the enthusiastic response to SP/SR that has been a consistent feature of the programs that we have facilitated.

In this chapter, we give a brief introduction to SP/SR, discuss the rationale for the SP/SR approach, touch briefly on the research findings, and provide an initial guide to help you navigate the rest of the book. Chapters 2–4 provide additional detail to enhance the experience of SP/SR participants and facilitators.

What Is SP/SR?

SP/SR is an experiential training strategy that provides therapists with a structured experience of using CBT on themselves (SP) and reflecting on that experience (SR). In

an SP/SR program, you choose either a professional or a personal problem to focus on, and use CBT strategies to identify, formulate, and address the problem. After the CBT self-practice, you reflect on your experience of the techniques. These reflections appear to be much more valuable if they are written down, rather than simply “thought about,” so written reflections are a core part of SP/SR. Reflection happens at various levels; for instance, SP/SR participants may first reflect on their personal experience of a CBT technique (e.g., a behavioral experiment), and identify what elements were helpful (or unhelpful); then they may consider the implications of their experience for their clinical practice, and for their understanding of CBT theory.

If it is a group SP/SR program, participants may share their reflections on the process with colleagues, enabling them to see in what ways their experiences of particular strategies are similar or different from each other. It is this self-experiential element of SP/SR training that differentiates it from other more “usual” forms of CBT training,² and typically leads participants to report a “deeper sense of knowing” CBT,³ having experienced it “from the inside out.”

Rationale for SP/SR and Research Findings

In its early stages (mid-1970s to late 1980s), CBT was portrayed as a largely technical intervention with little or no attention paid to “person of the therapist.” However, in the 1990s increasing recognition was given to the value of practicing CBT on oneself.^{1, 4-7} The reasons given fell into two main categories: first, trainers such as Judith S. Beck and Christine A. Padesky suggested that self-practice of CBT would facilitate CBT skill acquisition and refinement.^{1, 5} Second, the publication of two seminal books in 1990, *Cognitive Therapy for Personality Disorders*⁴ and *Interpersonal Processes in Cognitive Therapy*,⁸ led to a growing realization that therapist self-awareness and self-knowledge is as important in CBT as it is in other therapies⁷— particularly when working with more complex clients where issues often arise in the therapeutic relationship. The words of these writers, together with our own personal experience of using CBT techniques on ourselves,⁹ inspired us to develop the original SP/SR workbooks.

Since then, other writers have highlighted the value of self-experience of CBT and self-reflection,¹⁰⁻¹² and a significant body of empirical SP/SR research has emerged.^{2, 3, 13-33} The consistent finding across studies in different countries with different groups of participants is that SP/SR enhances understanding of CBT, CBT skills, confidence as a therapist, and belief in the value of CBT as an effective therapy.^{16, 17} This research suggests that the impact of SP/SR appears to be as valuable for experienced therapists as it is for novice therapists.^{13, 15} Participants report that SP/SR gives them “a deeper sense of knowing” of the therapy through “experiencing CBT from the inside out.”^{3, 13} The impact is felt in their conceptual skills (e.g., CBT formulation),¹⁸ their technical skills (e.g., ability to utilize CBT techniques more effectively),¹³ and interpersonal skills (e.g., empathy for the client).^{16, 26, 34, 35} Participants also report that their reflective

skills are enhanced through SP/SR.¹³ This is an important finding since reflection is a key metacognitive competency that “provides the engine for lifelong learning” throughout a therapist’s career.^{14, 34}

Perhaps the most significant finding, which emerges as central in every SP/SR study, is that participants consistently report that SP/SR affects their attitude toward clients, enhancing their interpersonal skills and their therapeutic relationships.²² Through experiencing CBT from the inside out, they gain a firsthand appreciation of the difficulties of change; of the role that underlying patterns such as avoidance, negative cognitive bias, ruminative thinking, and safety behaviors play in maintaining unhelpful ways of being; of the anxiety provoked by some CBT techniques in the service of change (e.g., exposure, behavioral experiments); and of the value of the therapeutic relationship in supporting the change process. CBT training has traditionally been strong at teaching formulation skills and technical skills, but perhaps rather weaker in the interpersonal domain.³⁶ Experienced CBT therapists report that they have found that the best ways to acquire and refine their interpersonal skills is through self-experience of therapeutic techniques and self-reflection.³⁷ SP/SR seems to provide a safe and effective vehicle to enhance interpersonal skills in CBT— “a useful middle path between personal therapy and no experiential work, which is acceptable to institutions, practitioners and students” (p. 155).¹³

We suggest that SP/SR has the potential to play a unique role in therapist training and development. We have come to see it as an integrative training strategy that links the declarative understandings of CBT with procedural skills; integrates the interpersonal with the conceptual and the technical; and enhances the channels of communication between the “therapist self” and the “personal self.”¹⁶ The self-experiential element of SP/SR facilitates the links; reflection provides the glue.

An Initial Orientation to *Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out*

There is now a whole family of “CBTs” with a number of branches³⁸ (e.g., cognitive therapy, rational-emotive behavior therapy, schema therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, low-intensity CBT, metacognitive therapy, and mindfulness-based cognitive therapy). The CBT of *Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out* is focused on the cognitive therapy of Aaron T. Beck, while at times extending this into new methods of formulation. In *Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out*, we have not included techniques from other CBT-influenced therapies such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, acceptance and commitment therapy, schema therapy, and metacognitive therapy because some of these will be the subject of separate workbooks in the Guilford Press series *Self-Practice/Self-Reflection Guides for Psychotherapists*.

Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out is organized into two main sections: the introductory chapters (Chapters 1–4), and the SP/SR modules themselves (Modules 1–12). We suggest that all participants read Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Chapter 2 discusses

the conceptual underpinnings that have influenced the content of the workbook. Readers will find novel as well as traditional CBT approaches in *Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out*. Our approach to CBT has been influenced by cognitive science, clinical innovations, and neuroscientific understandings that have not yet been fully absorbed into the mainstream. Chapter 2 discusses the rationale for some of the more innovative strategies that you will be experiencing, including the *Ways of Being* model, which provides the core structure of the workbook.

It is important that all SP/SR participants read Chapter 3, “Guidance for SP/SR Participants.” This chapter provides guidelines for using the workbook and addresses issues such as how to choose a professional or personal problem to focus on; when to do SP/SR; the pros and cons of doing SP/SR individually or in a group; guidance on how to build your reflective capacity; and how much time to give to SP/SR. This chapter provides instructions for preparing yourself and engaging with the Modules 1–12 that follow. The modules build upon each other in terms of content and theoretical structure. The first six modules (Part I) are focused on “Identifying and Understanding *Unhelpful (Old) Ways of Being*.” The second six modules (Part II) use the Part I platform for “Creating and Strengthening *New Ways of Being*.” We would like to be able to tell you that there are shortcuts, but the truth is that to get the most out of the workbook, it is best to work through it systematically, giving each module adequate time—an average of about 2 hours in Part I, and more like 3 hours in Part II.

Chapter 4, “Guidance for SP/SR Facilitators” is specifically written for CBT therapists planning to facilitate an SP/SR program. You might be facilitating a peer group; or leading a training group that is doing the program for professional development purposes; or you may be planning to integrate *Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out* with an existing CBT training program. Chapter 4 addresses key issues for running effective SP/SR training programs. It is optional reading for those who are doing *Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out* as SP/SR participants.

Experiencing CBT from the Inside Out is not a conventional CBT textbook. In the modules, we provide materials and examples, but not detailed instructions for the CBT techniques that you will be practicing on yourself. It is assumed that either you will already know the techniques, or will have sufficient knowledge to use the module notes and references to refresh your memory and to guide you. For each module, we have provided Module Notes that you can find at the end of the book, just before the References. Here you will find reference to other books or chapters, which provide more detail about specific strategies featured in the modules. In the workbook we have also “created” three therapists of different levels of experience—Shelly, Jayashri, and David—who have the type of therapist or personal issues that participants typically bring to SP/SR. We provide examples of Shelly’s, Jayashri’s, and David’s SP/SR to help guide your use of specific techniques.

We hope that you enjoy the workbook; that you are able to create for yourself *New Ways of Being* that have a positive impact on your professional and personal life; and that your effectiveness with your clients is considerably enhanced as a result.