

Board & Care Quality

F O R U M

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Cognitive Enhancement Therapy: “Physical Therapy for the Brain”

Cognitive Enhancement Therapy (CET) is an evidence-based practice that helps people with schizophrenia and related mental illnesses improve their processing speed, cognition (attention, memory, and problem solving), and social cognition (the awareness to interact wisely with others). Research strongly suggests that impairments in these mental capacities contribute to functional disability in people with schizophrenia. CET rehabilitates these capacities and thus maximizes success in *all* activities of recovery. As a result, participants increase their potential to engage in meaningful social roles and to live independent, self-determined, and satisfying lives in the community. CET has been proven effective in a study funded by the National Institute on Mental Health and published in *The Archives of General Psychiatry* in 2004.

A Neurodevelopmental Disorder

CET views schizophrenia as a *neurodevelopmental* disorder. This means that some parts of the brain have not yet completely developed. For instance, research conducted with functional magnetic-resonance imaging (fMRI) has identified *reduced* activity in the prefrontal cortex of people with schizophrenia and related disorders. The prefrontal cortex is the center for attention, working memory, judgment, and decision making. It helps each of us transform emotions into thoughts and wise,

appropriate actions. It also helps us regulate and edit emotions and thoughts. Impairments in cognition and social cognition among people with schizophrenia appear to be strongly correlated with delays in neurodevelopment.

A Neurodevelopmental Intervention

Research shows that the human brain develops in infancy, childhood, and adolescence in the context of interpersonal (social) relationships with family members, friends, caregivers, and teachers, among others. Brain development and personality development continue in adulthood and throughout life in the context of relationships with other adults. Research also shows that the brain has a natural capacity to repair developmental delays and trauma. This is called *neuroplasticity*. This healing activity is more likely to occur when interventions induce people to use their brains. CET is designed to do this.

Structured Activities that Exercise the Brain & Mind

CET provides holistic, structured activities to help people with schizophrenia and related mental illnesses jump-start neurodevelopment, cognitive development, and social cognition. Therapists in CET are called coaches, because they are trained to help people function better.

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