

CBT: Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a treatment modality based on the concept that thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interconnected. This approach focuses on bringing awareness to each of these areas, specifically thought patterns, to support the client in recognizing their own distortions in thinking that are creating problems, gain a better understanding of their behavior, learn problem-solving skills to cope with difficult situations, and learn to develop a greater sense of confidence in their own abilities. This approach is based on the belief that: 1) Psychological problems are based on unhelpful ways of thinking. 2) Psychological problems are based on learned patterns of unhelpful behavior. 3) People suffering from psychological problems can learn better ways of coping with them, thereby relieving their symptoms and becoming more effective in their lives.

Our STEP Skills Group integrates CBT skills by supporting youth with understanding their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Youth explore the different purposes of their emotions, which emotions are most difficult for them to express, obstacles preventing them from expressing them, and what influences their emotions. Youth also learn about different cognitive distortions and how to reframe their negative thoughts. Our Circle group also explores these concepts by unpacking their various narratives and recognizing what aspects of their emotional states they have control over.

DBT: Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) is a treatment modality used in therapy to support those struggling to manage their emotions and behaviors. DBT focuses on skill building to support clients with learning interpersonal effectiveness, distress tolerance, reality acceptance skills, emotion regulation, and mindfulness skills. This approach makes assumptions that 1) People are doing the best that they can. 2) People want to improve. 3) People must learn new behaviors both in therapy and in the context of their day-to-day lives. 4) People cannot fail in DBT. 5) People may not have caused all their problems, but they have to solve them anyway. 6) People need to do better, try harder, and be more motivated to change. 7) The lives of people who are suicidal are unbearable as they are currently being lived.

In our STEP Skills Group, we teach DBT skills to support youth in learning how to manage their symptoms of depression and anxiety and to cope with stressors. Youth are taught distress tolerance skills through distraction and self-soothing. They are also taught crisis survival skills of pros and cons, urge surfing, and opposite action. These skills are taught in theory and then practiced through managing various emotions in the milieu environment to prepare youth for managing emotions in their daily life.

Narrative Therapy: Narrative therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach that empowers clients to explore and reshape their life stories. This approach focuses on supporting clients to separate themselves from their problems and destructive behaviors. This allows clients to distance themselves from their stressors and take on a new perspective that can empower them to make changes in their lives. The goal is to support clients by rewriting their life stories to reflect who they really are and who they want to become.

Narrative Therapy is integrated into STEP's Circle Group, where youth can process what's currently going on in their lives through verbal processing and several different art activities. Youth are also invited to share their stories individually with our direct care staff, which allows them to receive more individual support in understanding their personal narrative. These individual meetings can occur throughout the day as needed.

Mindfulness: Mindfulness is utilized in therapy to support clients with being more aware of internal thoughts, feelings, and emotions, as well as external surroundings and situations, without automatic

responses such as judgment or stress. Mindfulness is often integrated into other treatment modalities to aid in their overall awareness and improvement in functioning.

Mindfulness is integrated throughout treatment at STEP – the importance of using Mindfulness is explored in our Skills Group, mindfulness skills are taught in our Skills and Recreation Groups, and youth are guided in mindfulness exercises as needed throughout the day as a strategy for distress tolerance. During Skills group, STEP staff review the effects of stress and the different responses to stress. Youth then explore their mind and body connection and how stress shows up physiologically – identifying the importance of increasing Mindfulness around their emotional responses. During Recreation, youth are taught techniques to ground themselves, using concrete skills such as the 5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique, deep breathing, mindful walks, and other tactile activities. Youth learn about utilizing their wise mind to make decisions through the Skills group, Circle group, and individual meetings with Staff.

Motivational Interviewing: Motivational interviewing is a counseling approach designed to elicit behavior change by helping clients to explore their ambivalence. Motivational Interviewing uses skills and principles to guide the client and therapist through the process of resolving their ambivalence.

Our entire STEP team is trained in Motivational Interviewing techniques to support our clients better. Motivational Interviewing is utilized in our Check-In and Check-Out groups to support youth with exploring their feelings, communicating their emotional state out loud, and developing goals to remain safe and practice the skills they are learning in groups. Motivational Interviewing is the primary approach used in individual check-ins with youth who might have difficulty identifying reasons for hope when faced with their life challenges. Motivational Interviewing is also highly utilized during Family Meetings and Risk Assessments to support youth with exploring behaviors they are unsure about changing, to understand their symptoms of depression and anxiety better, and to develop a safety plan.