

What Is Christian-Identity Therapy?

The goal of Christian-identity therapy (CIT) is to bring your self-image into alignment with your God-given identity. Having your self-image out of sync with your true identity can produce a significant level of discomfort. Most people cope with this pain through distraction and numbing. But grieving and lamenting are healthier options because they communicate any emotional pain directly to God.

CIT is an insight-oriented therapy. It helps you build awareness of your identity so you can grow into who God made you to be. Your **identity** is who you are. Your **self-image** is who you think or feel you are. Your **identity** can't change, while your **self-image** changes frequently. Life's challenges (sin, loss, abuse, and neglect) and creation's curse can seriously distort your self-image so that you can no longer comprehend who you are. The resulting confusion prevents God's people from thriving.

Symptoms Christian-Identity Therapy Can Address

CIT can help clients with a wide range of struggles, including the following:

Anxiety and Depression

Clients who suffer from depression or anxiety typically struggle with feeling inadequate and dissatisfied with life. These struggles likely stem from unmet needs during childhood. CIT helps people explore these issues and gain insight into how to develop a life worth living.

Dissociation and Numbing

Clients are considered dissociated when they lack insight into the connection between their symptoms and their experiences. Emotional numbing blocks understanding. Unresolved hurts may cause problems in adulthood, especially when they are hidden from conscious awareness. Unexplained symptoms such as a lack of ability to feel, depression, anxiety, panic, flashbacks, irritability, work-a-holism, escalating conflict, avoidance, isolation, and addictions may be signs of deeper subconscious emotional wounds rather than present-day circumstances.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

Those struggling with PTSD are unable to cope with or resolve a trauma. They are compelled to actively avoid experiences that remind them of their trauma. CIT can be beneficial for people living with PTSD, as it guides them to identify and heal the emotional injury underlying their symptoms.

Shame and Poor Self-Worth

When clients struggle with people-pleasing, codependency, or boundary-setting, CIT helps them develop confidence in their God-given identity. They can come to understand why they need others' approval so much and how this relates to their past. Clients learn to make peace with, find acceptance of, and enjoy being who God made them to be.

Addiction

CIT helps clients who wish to overcome addiction, which can be defined as a reliance on something other than God for well-being ("idolatry"). Clients will come to understand the motivations behind using substances. Their therapist can work with them to direct their attention to God to see how He meets their emotional needs.

Techniques of Christian-Identity Therapy

Beyond using the Bible as the source of authoritative truth, the major techniques used in CIT include these six methods: Eliminate Weak Coping, Express Emotions, Expose Negative Beliefs, Explore Experiences, Expand Understanding, and Exercise Insights. CIT uses an iterative approach to maximize your healing. Each pass through this therapy will utilize most, if not all, of these techniques. Multiple passes allow you to work through the layers of your hurt.

Eliminate Weak Coping

Coping maintains the status quo; healing moves you forward. It's much better to analyze and then relinquish how you cope instead of blindly treating the symptoms away. You will work to understand how your symptoms might be related to unresolved wounds. Instead of continuing to manage pain through coping, CIT will encourage you to *stop coping* and *increase insight* into your underlying problems so you can *start healing*.

In some cases, your therapist may need to confront you about your behaviors or beliefs. This is particularly true if you are engaging in destructive behavior, such as emotional eating, self-harm, or substance abuse. Your therapist will try to help you understand why you feel the need to engage in these behaviors and direct you to healthier ways to address difficult feelings or situations.

Express Emotions

This technique encourages you to express whatever you are feeling without censorship. A lack of emotional expression can show up as unexplained anxiety, panic, or even disturbing dreams. As you become in touch with your emotions like anger, fear, or sadness, your level of pain will likely intensify. This is the desired outcome so you can work through your emotions rather than avoiding them.

Talking, journaling, or praying your emotions are all valid and healthy ways to release what is troubling you. When you can feel more, you can deal (with) more. Dreams can provide insight into unconscious conflicts and memories that may be affecting your behavior in the present. Your therapist may encourage you to express the feelings you encounter during your dreams.

Expose Negative Beliefs

Your therapist will encourage you to confront your negative self-beliefs (lies about, or negative interpretations of, your identity) so you can increase your positive self-beliefs. You will develop understanding about how your current life problems may be connected with emotional wounds. This can be accomplished by exploring your experiences and identifying patterns or themes. Then, you can come to realize truths like God loves you, you are valuable, and your source of satisfaction doesn't come from this life.

Explore Experiences

Your therapist will encourage you to remember any traumatic experiences that have occurred. Trauma can result from a single explosive event, but it could equally come from relatively minor, repetitive events. This can help to identify patterns that may be affecting your present-day beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. The context into which you were born, your formative years, and other significant life experiences greatly impact how you see yourself today.

Expand Understanding

Wisdom and insight are on the pathway to progress. Metaphors can help convey complex ideas in a way that is easier to understand. Your therapist may use metaphors to help facilitate your self-awareness by making the abstract more real. During therapy you can test your understanding by asking questions like: *What have I learned about myself?* You can also ask your therapist for feedback and encouragement.

Exercise Insights

When you are improving, you will know it because you are pursuing new experiences by taking calculated risks. CIT helps you gain insight into your emotions and motivations. Working in-between sessions will greatly enhance what happens during the counseling session. You will benefit from learning how your thoughts influence your feelings and how your actions are driven by your unconscious thoughts and feelings.

Your therapist might assign movies, worksheets, books, or other tasks to help you put your learning into practice. Movies, for example, can help you identify with others who struggle and see how they overcome their problems. Worksheets guide you through the healing process. Books provide deeper, supplemental information.

Benefits and Challenges of Christian-Identity Therapy

CIT is an effective form of treatment if you are willing to explore your thoughts and feelings in depth. It can help you understand why you feel the way you do, identify your unhealthy patterns of behavior, and heal from emotional injury.

CIT will help you develop a better understanding of yourself so you can pursue God's calling. This increased self-awareness can lead to positive changes in both personal and professional relationships.

CIT is a practical therapy for growing in emotional health, but it is not right for everyone. Consider the following before beginning this Christian, insight-focused therapy:

Do you believe in a biblical worldview that defines your God-given identity as fixed?

If you believe you can define who you are apart from who God created you to be, CIT may not be right for you. This type of therapy requires a belief in God's absolute authority as creator of you: a creature made in His image.

Can you invest the emotional energy to know yourself on a much deeper level?

If you are not prepared to delve into the root of your problems, CIT may not be right for you. It requires a great deal of introspection and willingness to face uncomfortable experiences and feel uncomfortable emotions.

Are you willing to reveal what is uncomfortable or even shameful?

In order for CIT to be effective, you need to be willing to risk digging up and confronting potentially painful thoughts and feelings. It is essential for you to be able to communicate with your therapist how you are feeling about the counseling process.

Are you prepared to implement and practice what you are learning?

In order for CIT to be successful, it is necessary for you to apply what you are learning. You must be willing to experiment with new approaches to life. If you are not willing or able to make these changes, the therapy may not be effective.

Do you prefer a long-term healing over short-term coping?

Will you commit to attending frequently and regularly enough to achieve your goals?

In order for CIT to be effective, it is important for you to attend regular sessions. If you are unable to commit to a regular schedule, this type of therapy may not be right for you. Significant change/growth is hard work—it requires a consistent effort.

The process can be short (as in months) or lengthy (as in years) depending on the severity of your concerns and your willingness to explore your emotions and memories.

Resources

Matt Pavlik authored the following books to guide people through their emotional healing journeys.

Help Me Help You

Learn how to gain the most from your counseling.

To Identity and Beyond

Understand how God grows you into the person He has in mind.

Confident Identity

Breaks down into practical steps how to understand your identity and move forward confidently in life.

Soar Like Eagles

Introduces the Journal-in-layers method to help you grow emotionally.

Journal Your Way to Hope

A devotional which focuses on the Hope core-longing and uses the Journal-in-layers method.

Journal Your Way to Significance

A devotional which focuses on the Significance core-longing and uses the Journal-in-layers method.

Journal Your Way to Love

A devotional which focuses on the Love core-longing and uses the Journal-in-layers method.

Marriage From Roots To Fruits

Covers a comprehensive range of topics needed to establish a strong foundation for marriage and bear fruit.