

**Applied Theory Case Study: Sasha**

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### **Abstract**

Sasha is a 60-year-old recently retired woman experiencing feelings of general and social anxiety. She has stopped hosting get-togethers, avoids leaving home, and has not returned calls to her son. She also has difficulty doing chores that she previously enjoyed for her husband. She has expressed feelings of guilt when her behavior deviates from her usual, conditioned routine. However, her anxiety lessens when she is away from her everyday responsibilities. In the following paper, I will present Sasha's experience through the lens of Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) and Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) as a Sport and Performance Psychology (SPP) consultant working with a non-athlete. This paper will show evidence of how this approach can benefit Sasha and present two goals for Sasha's path to healing. After applying Cognitive Behavior Therapy to Sasha's case, this paper will offer two intervention techniques to combat Sasha's irrational thoughts: mindfulness training programs and positive self-talk protocols. Both methods have evidence that supports their ability to increase confidence and teach clients anxiety regulation.

### **Cognitive Behavior Therapy**

Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) is a form of psychotherapy that helps people manage their mental health issues through identifying and changing negative thought patterns and behaviors. The difference between Cognitive, Behavioral, and Cognitive-Behavior Therapies is small. Often, the approaches are closely related and use many of the same principles, models, and strategies.

CBT suggests that how a person perceives a situation reflects their reaction rather than the problem. "Cognitive Behavior Therapy helps people identify their distressing thoughts and

evaluate how realistic the thoughts are. Then, they learn to change their distorted thinking. When they think more realistically, they feel better. The emphasis is also consistently on solving problems and initiating behavioral changes” (Beck Institute, 2020). This approach explores the relationship between situations, automatic thoughts, and reactions. “CBT is a non-pharmacological approach to improving mental health through individualized interventions including thought monitoring and restructuring, worry control, relaxation training, adjustments to sleep hygiene, and other strategies capable of altering the cognition and behavior of patients” (Wu et al., 2024).

In contrast, a psychodynamic approach would seek to bring the unconscious processes into awareness. Then, Sasha could understand why her past experiences affect her current circumstances. Adler’s psychodynamic approach could be another interesting solution for Sasha. Her background shaped Sasha’s view of her “ideal self” as a responsible, subservient family member. This resulted in possible feelings of inferiority, which can arise from “subjectively felt psychological or social weaknesses” (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). While this approach may help Sasha, a CBT intervention plan could help Sasha because she already knows about her difficult upbringing. Also, a psychodynamic approach may not be appropriate for this case because the treatment may require competencies from a licensed mental health counselor rather than an SPP consultant.

An example of CBT with this approach is Ellis’s general rational-emotive behavior therapy (REBT). Studies have shown that REBT has “an enduring effect that extends beyond the end of treatment, comparable to or even slightly better (at 6-month follow-up) than pharmacotherapy, and therefore they can be considered (also based on the patients’ choice), a first-line therapy for patients with nonpsychotic major depressive disorder” (David et al., 2008).

“REBT attempts to change cognitive processes by advocating unconditional self-acceptance, focusing explicitly on reducing secondary problems such as depression about depression, focusing on demandingness, and emphasizing the proximal causes of negative feelings” (Sava et al., 2009). For Sasha’s case, I will use principles from CBT and techniques from REBT to outline an intervention plan and set goals for her healing journey.

### **How CBT Could Relate to Sasha**

Historically, Sasha has placed value on her role as a woman and caretaker. Sasha’s family history defined this role. Her family’s treatment of her influenced her deeply rooted thoughts that men are more valuable than women. Consequently, her feelings were less important and pushed aside. Now, her behavior, routine, and schedule have been disrupted, causing severe anxiety. Before advising intervention plans, an SPP should be curious about Sasha’s background. A consultant should ask questions about her beliefs, their origins, and how they affect her now. These answers provide crucial context to Sasha’s story and her healing journey.

On the surface, Sasha’s retirement may be the activating event for her depression. In reality, it has merely uncovered her irrational thoughts and attitudes regarding her self-worth, social anxiety, and gender roles. Specifically, Sasha believes her worth is only gained through helping others, throwing parties, and keeping her house clean. She must earn her value to those closest to her. Otherwise, she could feel rejected, like she was rejected and unwanted by her parents. A CBT approach would attempt to confront this ideal by confronting and then leading her to a new ideal. Any SPP intervention approach would take these ideals, dispute them, and replace them with effective new philosophies. Positive Self-Talk modules and training would help Sasha build her sense of self-worth.

Another irrational and dysfunctional belief stems from Sasha's dysfunctional views of social interaction. When a person feels general or social anxiety, they often fall into the trap of irrational inferences. Sasha may be more worried about what others *might* think. This can stem from Sasha's upbringing. Her family displayed irrational views of gender roles and conditional acceptance. Many cultures, families, religions, and communities may have similar views. But Sasha's views have become dysfunctional because they impede her ability to function daily.

### **A CBT Plan for Sasha**

For Sasha, I would use CBT and REBT techniques to create an intervention plan. For this plan, we will use the ABC model of REBT. Situations are described as **activating** events (A), automatic thoughts are individual **beliefs** (B), and reactions are the emotional and behavioral **consequences** (C). Many people believe that a person's situations lead to reactions. REBT suggests that "it is not the activating events that prove decisive but rather the person's perceptions and interpretations of the events" (Prochaska & Norcross, 2018). Therefore, a person's reactions reflect beliefs and attitudes. Through treatment, professionals **dispute** (D) irrational beliefs and dysfunctional attitudes. Then, they help clients find an **effective** new philosophy (E). Using this model, we will systematically identify irrational beliefs and behaviors, reframe them, and teach Sasha mental skills to help her adopt an effective new philosophy. Sasha's two goals will be to 1) identify and dispute irrational beliefs and 2) learn self-regulation techniques. The following intervention plan will identify two of Sasha's specific irrational beliefs and offer appropriate self-regulation skills to dispute those beliefs.

Sasha's first irrational belief is "I am not important unless I am useful to others." As a young girl, Sasha considered herself responsible, and "she would cook dinner and take care of the house while her parents were away." She also described her mother as "more concerned with

the state of the house rather than with her young daughter.” After identifying these irrational beliefs, Sasha should work to refute them.

A consultant can use mindfulness practices to help Sasha recognize her thoughts without judgment. Researchers have proposed that “optimal self-regulation necessitates low levels of self-criticism, vigilance, and worry concerning outcomes” (Williams & Krane, 2021). Before selecting a program, a consultant should administer a mindfulness assessment such as the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) by Baer et al. (2006). This questionnaire allows the client to self-report items across the following mindfulness tenets: observing, describing, acting with awareness, nonjudging, and nonreacting. The results help the consultant and client understand mental well-being and emotional regulation. Once scored, a consultant can choose the mindfulness protocol best suited for Sasha’s needs.

Mindfulness programs teach and develop a person’s ability to self-regulate. For example, the Mindfulness-Acceptance-Commitment (MAC) program is a protocol consisting of seven modules that aim to help clients through “acceptance, values-commitment, and mindfulness training” (Williams & Krane, 2021). Although this program was designed to help athletes, its principles and program would still be appropriate for a client such as Sasha. MAC includes education, meditations, and values clarification. Sasha’s education would help her understand that her worth is separate from the tasks she does for others. She does not need to clean a home or return phone calls to have worth. Her meditations should include breathing exercises that can teach her body how to handle her anxiety physically. During values clarification, Sasha can identify her beliefs and how they may impact her mental health. According to Williams & Krane (2021), “these processes are meant to enhance awareness, attention, and emotional regulation

and, subsequently, performance and overall psychological well-being.” Using a mindfulness approach would be a good step in Sasha’s journey to healing.

Sasha’s second irrational belief is “I am not as important because I am a woman.” Since Sasha was a young girl, her parents repeated two critical messages about her: 1) she was an unplanned baby, and 2) her parents wanted a girl. Sasha internalized these messages and manifested the beliefs through her behavior. She stayed in the background since her brother and father were the “important” members of the family. Sasha admits that “she had been conditioned from childhood to believe males were more important.” This belief has caused Sasha much distress and anxiety. After identifying this irrational belief, Sasha should work hard to dispute this message. A core tenet of REBT is self-acceptance. Any mental skills training modules should encourage and build Sasha’s self-acceptance. In this case, an intervention plan should include positive self-talk.

A consultant should start with a self-talk assessment like the General Inner Speech Questionnaire (GISQ) from Racy et al. (2020) or the Automatic Self-Talk Questionnaire for Sports (ASTQS) from Zourbanos et al. (2009). These two questionnaires assess a client’s self-talk by rating how often a client uses specific phrases. The phrases are scored and sorted into categories such as negative self-talk, positive self-talk (Zourbanos et al., 2009), self-reflection, and inner speech accompanying activities (Racy et al., 2020). After scoring and analyzing the results, a consultant can create a module that helps Sasha develop a Positive Self-Talk Script.

Positive self-talk can help Sasha because positive self-talk has been shown to increase confidence and self-efficacy (Williams & Krane, 2021). Sasha should use her self-talk to bolster her self-acceptance. Her script should include phrases such as, “I accept myself unconditionally” and “I am enough.” As Sasha practices this mental skill, her self-acceptance will increase, and

she will develop the skills to dispute this irrational belief. The positive self-talk can help Sasha reframe her self-concept and free her from feeling guilty when she makes mistakes.

These two examples of using CBT and REBT for Sasha demonstrate that she would benefit from this approach. By identifying and disputing Sasha's irrational beliefs, a consultant can use mental skills training to teach her self-acceptance, confidence, and anxiety regulation. Consultants should be patient with Sasha and her progress. Since many of Sasha's struggles stem from her childhood, she may need time to reframe her thoughts. Her success will rely on diligent daily mindfulness practice and positive self-talk programs. Through these applications, Sasha can progress toward her two goals.

### **Conclusion**

Cognitive Behavior Therapy offers many techniques and strategies, and Sasha can benefit from many of them. Specifically, positive self-talk and mindfulness exercises can help with her general and social anxiety. As a consultant educates Sasha and teaches her these techniques, she will be empowered to combat harmful messages from her childhood. Also, SPP consultants should be mindful that they focus on assisting Sasha within ethical limits. If her conditions worsen or she stays the same, Sasha should be referred to a licensed mental health counselor.

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