

Information Handout

Professional Version | US English

Cognitive Behavioral Model Of Panic (Clark, 1986)



Description

Panic attacks are characterized by an abrupt surge of intense fear or discomfort that reaches a peak within minutes. They are accompanied by physiological symptoms including sweating, sensations of shortness of breath, chills or heat sensations, or a fear of losing control. Panic disorder is diagnosed when panic attacks have been followed by persistent worry or concern about further panic attacks or their consequences, or by significant maladaptive changes in behavior related to the attacks.

Clark's (1986) cognitive behavioral model of panic identifies catastrophic misinterpretations of bodily sensations as a central feature. When an individual appraises a body sensation as threatening (e.g. "My sweating means that I'm losing control"; "My heart palpitations mean that I'm going to have a heart attack") they trigger physiological arousal leading to further body sensations. Mis-appraisal of these additional sensations as threatening can lead to an upward spiral of panic. The expanded model identifies how safety-seeking behaviors maintain panic disorder by preventing disconfirmation of threat beliefs. Recommended treatment approaches for panic attacks and panic disorder include: identification of client appraisals of body sensations, interoceptive exposure to uncomfortable body sensations, and cognitive restructuring (decatastrophizing).

Instructions

This is a Psychology Tools information handout.

Suggested uses include:

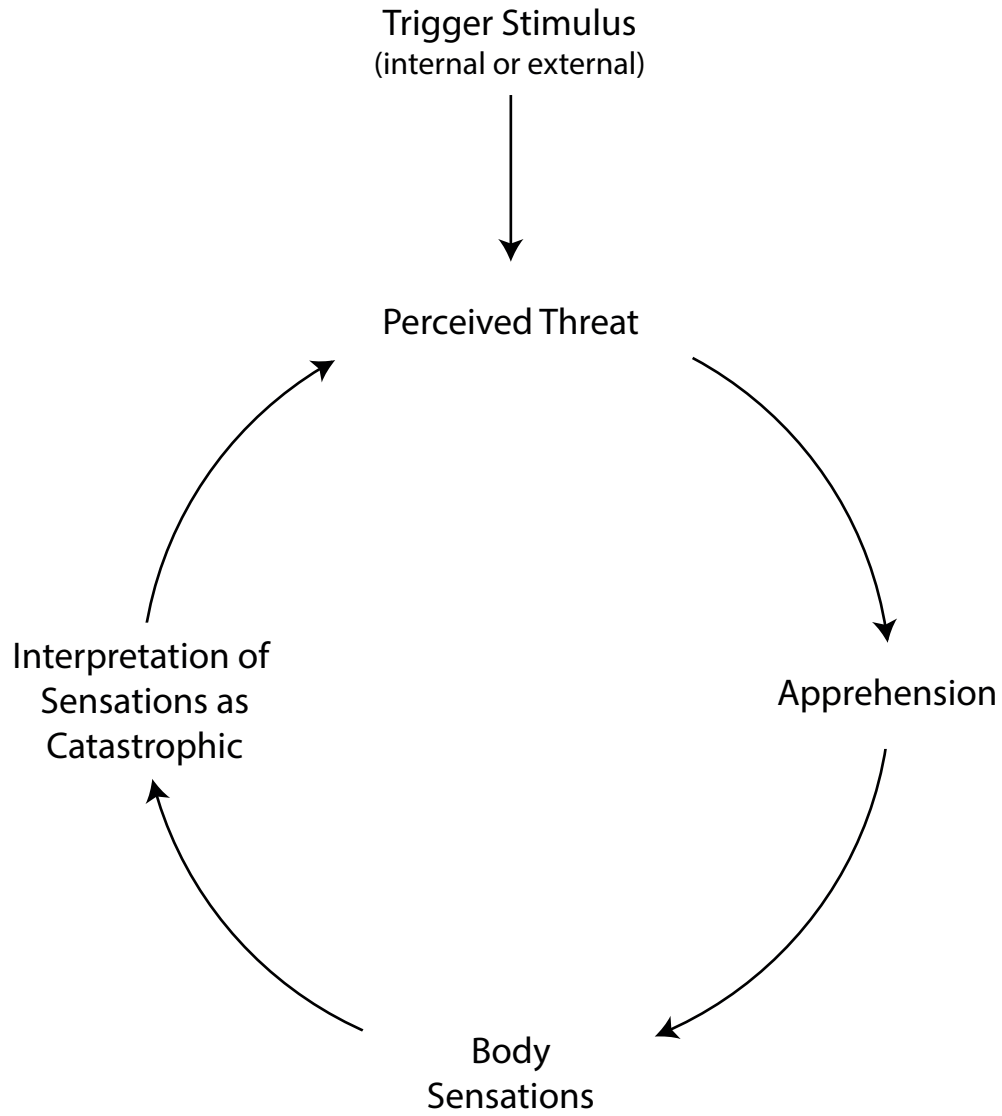
- Client handout – a psychoeducation resource.
- Discussion point – to provoke a discussion and explore your client's beliefs.
- Therapist learning tool – to improve your familiarity with a psychological construct.
- Supervision tool – to develop formulations and knowledge.
- Teaching resource – a learning tool during training.

References

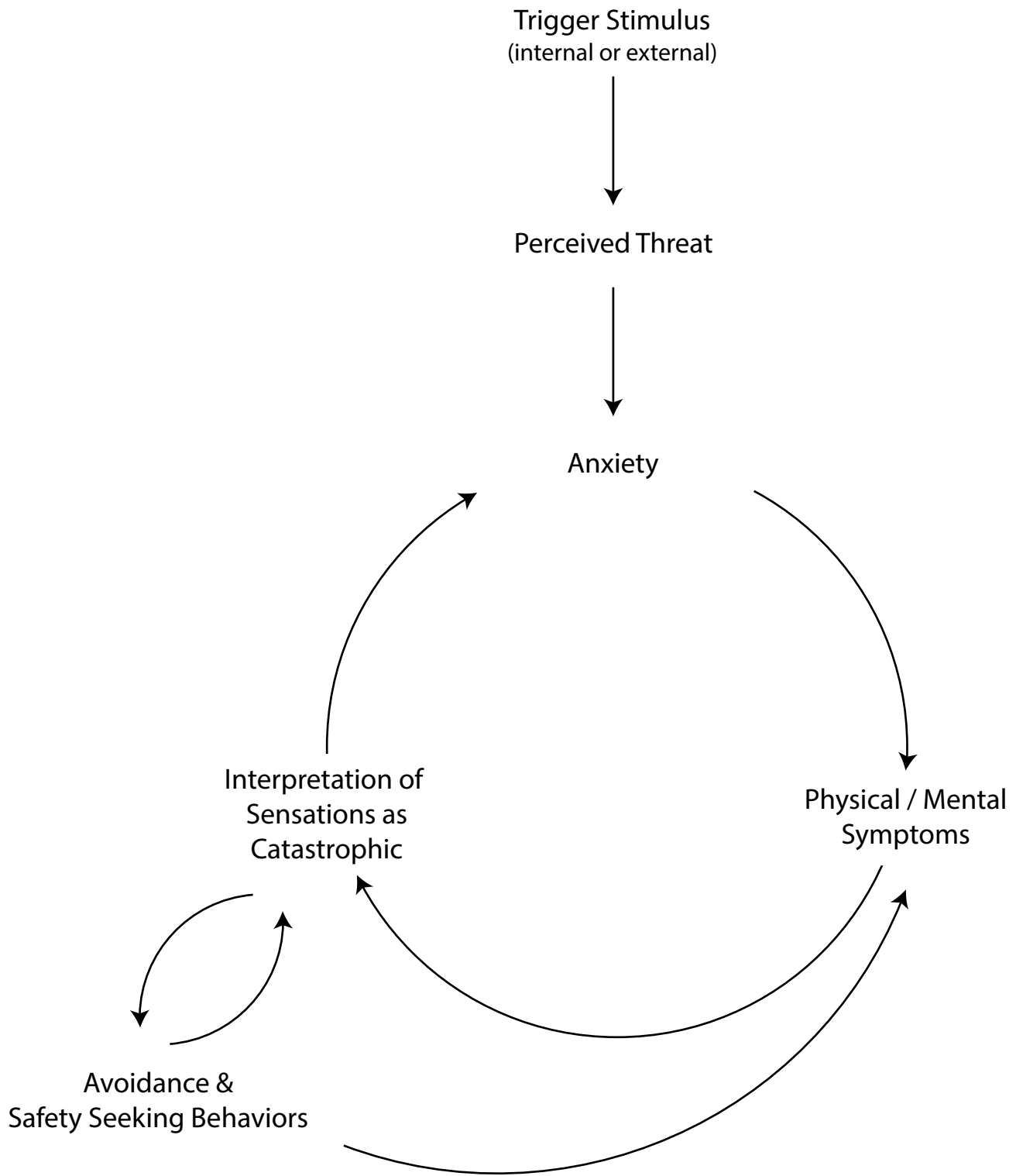
Clark D. M. (1986). A cognitive approach to panic. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 24:461–470.

Salkovskis, P. M., Clark, D. M., & Gelder, M. G. (1996). Cognition-behaviour links in the persistence of panic. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 34(5-6), 453-458.

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Relevant personal history

Father was a smoker and I saw him gasping for breath when he died.

Trigger Stimulus (internal or external) Notice a tightening of the lungs.

Perceived Threat Is this dangerous? Perhaps I won't be able to breathe.

Anxiety

Chest becomes tighter. Dizziness. Racing heartbeat. Racing thoughts.

Physical / Mental Symptoms

Interpretation of Sensations as Catastrophic

I'll suffocate to death (90% belief). People will notice and think I'm weird (50% belief).

Avoidance & Safety Seeking Behaviors

Avoid exercising or getting out of breath (avoidance). Take deep breaths (safety behavior). Pay attention to my breathing (selective attention).

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