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INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY
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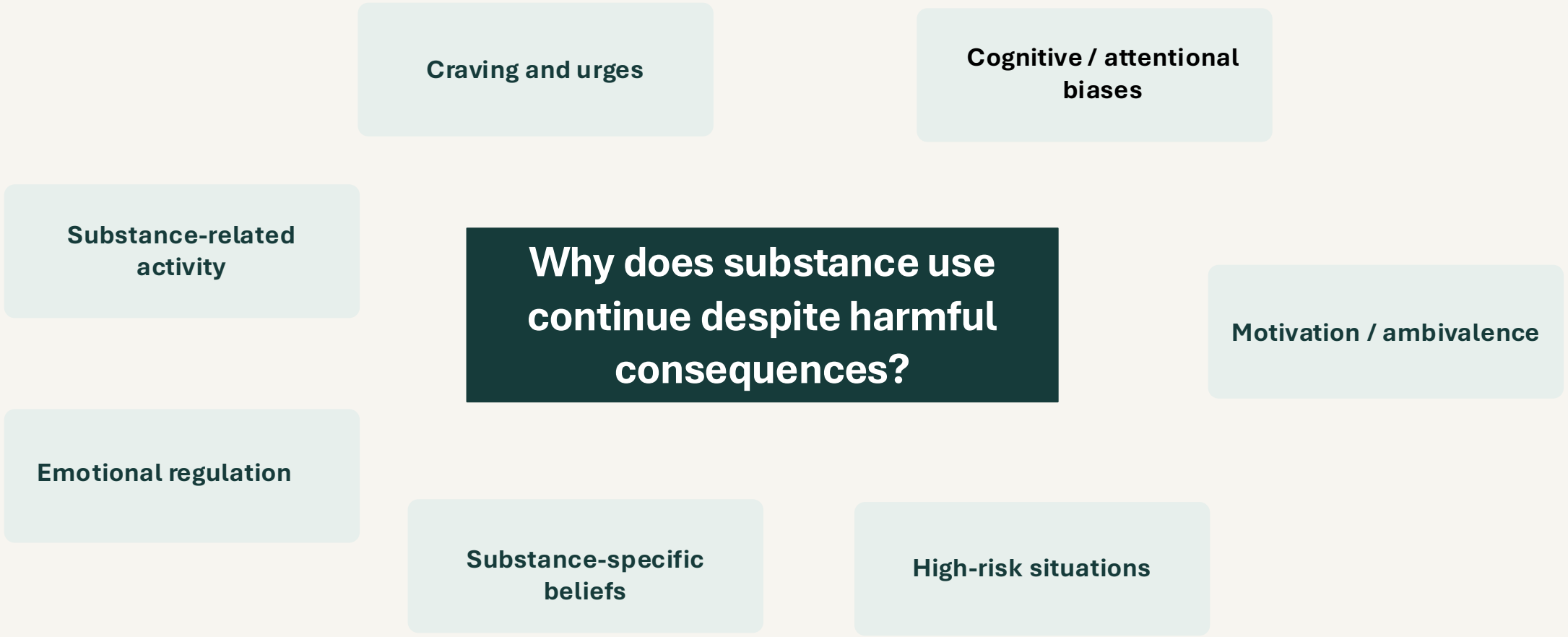
From Managing Risk to Building Recovery: The Evolution of Cognitive Behavioural Approaches in Addiction

Tim Meynen | 2026

Addiction is a BioPsychoSocial disorder maintained by interacting processes



Different mechanisms require different intervention targets

CBT offers a flexible framework for complexity

FORMULATE

Integrates developmental, motivational, maintenance, relapse, social and environmental factors.

COLLABORATE

Creates a structured shared understanding linked to the person's goals.

TARGET CHANGE

Connects cognition, reinforcement, behaviour and skills development.

ADAPT

Works across harm reduction and abstinence goals and co-occurring problems.

INTEGRATE

Works alongside motivational, mutual-aid and recovery approaches.

SUPPORTS RECOVERY

Works alongside motivational, mutual-aid and recovery approaches.

From relapse processes to a cognitive model of addiction

1984

RELAPSE PREVENTION

Marlatt & Gordon

& Wanigaratne, Wallace, et al (1990)

High-risk situations • coping • self-efficacy • expectancies • Abstinence Violation Effect

1993

COGNITIVE THERAPY OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Beck, Wright, Newman & Liese

Development and core beliefs → assumptions → activated beliefs and automatic thoughts → affect, urges, permissive beliefs and action plans.

CBT now draws on a broad, integrated set of techniques

MANAGE URGES + CUES

Delay, distract, stimulus control, relaxation, mindfulness, managing emotions

CHANGE THINKING + CHOICE

Pros and cons, thought challenging, imagery work, tackling permission giving, reviewing values, acceptance and commitment

BUILD ALTERNATIVE BEHAVIOUR

Activity scheduling, behavioural activation, behvaioural experiments, contingency management

PRACTISE + GENERALISE

Roleplay, life-enhancement skills and homework

Techniques follow clinical formulation and goal setting in line with recovery stage

Preventing breakdown is not the same as building recovery

“How do we break into the cycle of addiction and prevent relapse?”

Raise awareness • triggers • craving • coping skills

“How do we protect and strengthen recovery?”

Agency • identity • meaning • wellbeing • participation

Translate CBT formulation and interventions into structured support

1

RELATIONSHIP

Build a strong therapeutic alliance.

2

DIRECTION

Use session structure and shared goals.

3

ACTIVITY

Develop alternative rewards and daily recovery-supporting activities.

4

CONNECTION

Strengthen recovery-oriented social networks.

5

CAPABILITY

Build self-efficacy and coping skills for abstinence or controlled use.

Use the formulation to decide: What are we doing? Why this intervention? Is it working?

Key sources

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