Extensive evidence shows that trauma can eventuate in detrimental changes in cognitions. This is captured well in Janoff-Bulman's concept of shattered assumptions (1992).

Studies have suggested that pre-held negative cognitions distinguish sharply between those who develop PTSD following a traumatic incident and those who do not. In particular, pre-held negative views of self correlate highly with post-traumatic stress symptoms, whereas negative views of others are less significant.

Foa and colleagues (1999) discerned three core domains of traumatic cognitions:

- Negative cognitions about self
- Negative cognitions about the world
- Self-blame for the trauma

Cognitive intervention involves educating the client about trauma and about the role of maladaptive cognitions in PTSD.

Having elicited the memories, the treatment involves directly exploring and confronting the associated maladaptive cognitions.