



Center for Psychotherapy, Education & Spiritual Growth, Inc.

What is Psychotherapy and How Can It Help?

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There are many ways to try and describe what psychotherapy really is and how it helps people develop better, more peaceful and more meaningful living. Some have described it as the “talking cure” because it is based on the idea that expressions of thought and feelings and understanding them can bring great change in a person’s life. Psychotherapy has also been described as the “hard work miracle” because the change it can often bring seems almost miraculous but the process is very hard work for both the therapist and especially the client. In this computer age there is another analogy which might help us understand. If we think of the human being as somewhat like a computer then we can say that the person has hardware called the brain and software called the mind. Problems with the brain (the hardware) are treated by psychiatry and neuropsychology with medications and other medical procedures. But the mind (the software) is something different. The mind is the seat of our identity and most of our personality. Like all software, the mind is programmed. It is programmed by our life experiences and relationships and how we have been affected by them and how we understood (or misunderstood) them. The mind’s function is meaning making - it stores feelings and experiences; successes and traumas; sadnesses, anxieties, angers and joys - and assigns a meaning to each of these and then uses that assigned meaning to understand and address the rest of life. Often the memory of the stored feelings, thoughts and understanding is pushed into an unconscious “file” in the mind affecting us in ways we are not aware of and “triggered” in unexpected ways often causing a “software glitch” - a psychological problem.

What psychotherapy offers is a safe place to find the passwords to open these files and understand how they have affected the ways a person acts, reacts, thinks, feels and relates. It then helps the person fix this “file” through re-experience and new understanding within the therapeutic relationship.

There are many forms of psychotherapeutic activity. A short description of some of them follows but all of them, to a greater or less degree depend on the match between therapist and client because the mind was programmed by relationships and will be re-programmed by insight in the context of new relationships. In some ways it is the new and understood relationship with the therapist which becomes a new pattern of being and living within the world.



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There are several approaches to psychotherapy:

COGNITIVE/BEHAVIORAL THERAPY - Some therapists believe that it is possible to “fix the glitch” without opening the old “file”. They believe that the therapist can teach a new way of conscious thought and behavior without especially focusing on the old patterns and triggers. These therapists will typically prescribe certain exercises and provide certain tools to control and change one’s thought and behaviors.

RE-LIVED EXPERIENCE THERAPY - Some therapists focus on the catharsis of experience. These professionals offer highly intense emotional experiences which allow the client to either re-live the trauma or other deep experience which has caused patterns of chronic emotional pain. Some of these approaches are called Neo-Reichian, Gestalt, Rapid Ego Movement Therapy, etc.

FAMILY SYSTEMS THERAPY - There are many different approaches to family and couple therapy. Most have these two basic ideas. First, that the problem should be addressed within the marital or family system and second that changes in the system may bring profound changes in individuals and patterns of relationships in the family. Some marriage and family therapists will focus on offering cognitive and behavioral prescriptions for improvement in the family relationships and some will address the unconscious patterns in individuals and in the system as they are acted out in the family or marriage.

PSYCHODYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY - Psychodynamic (or psychoanalytic) therapy seeks to find the unconscious “password” to open the file where troubling patterns of relating, thinking, feeling and meaning-making are stored. Once found and brought to consciousness, a psychodynamic therapist will use the relationship with the client, empathic understanding and interpretation to assist the person in making long-lasting changes in the way he or she understands, relates and lives in the world. Psychodynamic therapists may treat adult individuals, children, adolescents, couples and families and groups.

PROBLEM-SPECIFIC THERAPY -Using some of the ideas of other therapeutic approaches some therapists will focus specifically on the symptom (the expression of the problem). These therapists will focus specifically on treating and alleviating the symptom. This usually short-term approach by-passes the core source of the problem and offers some immediate relief.



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PASTORAL PSYCHOTHERAPY - Usually but not always using the approaches of psychodynamic psychotherapy and marriage and family systems therapy, a certain small group of therapist are specifically trained to address the spiritual dimension of the mind and its meaning-making (see article on “Spirituality and Psychotherapy” on this website).

No open and competent therapist is dogmatically married to one approach knowing that different persons respond to different therapists and different methods. Though open to other approaches, therapist at the Center for Psychotherapy, Education and Spiritual Growth are trained and believe most in the psychodynamic, family systems and pastoral psychotherapeutic approaches. If other methods are indicated the therapist will help locate and refer you to the person who can best meet your needs.

For further information on dynamic psychotherapy see the article, “What is Dynamic Psychotherapy?” on this website.



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**TYPES OF PROBLEMS TREATED
BY PSYCHOTHERAPY/MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPY**

Some of the problems treated effectively by psychotherapy are:

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| Reactive depression | Other Anxiety disorders |
| Chronic depression | Episodic explosive disorder |
| Grief/Mourning | Problematic ways of being -
“Personality Disorder” |
| Psychological factors related to
physical illness | Marriage problems |
| Generalized anxiety disorder | Family problems |
| Panic Attacks | Parent/Child |
| Eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia,
obesity) | Other relational problems |
| Problems controlling impulses | Life transition problems |
| Self-defeating personality | Sexual problems |
| Some forms of Psychosis* | Sexual identity confusion |
| Difficulties with intimacy | Manic-Depressive (Bipolar)* |
| Dual diagnosis (When a drug or alcohol
problem has underlying
psychological manifestation?) | Difficulties with boundaries |

* Some of these problems are best treated through therapy and medication (Both a Hardware and a Software Problem). Though research is still on-going we do know that changes in brain chemistry affects the functioning of the mind and that changes in the mind brought about by psychotherapy affects the chemistry of the brain.