

# COUNSELING SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES

## 2. PRIMARY COUNSELING THERAPIES

**Note:** When deciding on an appropriate counselor or psychotherapist, it can be useful to understand the different therapies they may use. Although all can be effective, you may find one approach more appealing than another, or find that some approaches are better for a certain area of counseling or psychotherapy than others. Psychological therapies generally fall into four categories. These are **behavioral therapies**, which focus on cognitions and behaviors, **psychoanalytical and psychodynamic therapies**, which focus on the unconscious relationship patterns that evolved from childhood, **humanistic therapies**, which focus on self-development in the 'here and now' and **arts therapies**, which use creative arts within the therapeutic process. This is a generalization though and counseling or psychotherapy usually overlaps some of these techniques. Some counselors or psychotherapists practice a form of 'integrative' therapy, which means they draw on and blend specific types of techniques. Other practitioners work in an 'eclectic' way, which means they take elements of several different models and combine them when working with clients. There are also a number of specific other therapies that can be used.

Following is a summary of some of the four categories of psychological therapies available.

### 2.1. Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies

Behavioral therapies are based on the way you think (cognitive) and/or the way you behave. These therapies recognize that it is possible to change, or recondition, our thoughts or behavior to overcome specific problems. When it comes to initiating major, lasting changes in your life, one of the secrets of success is a series of minor modifications, as opposed to a single, major overhaul. This is why behavioral therapy is a practice that many individuals and groups turn to when seeking transformation. In the midst of all of this training and transformation, the overwhelming emphasis is on yielding day-to-day improvements in behavior. For those new to the concept of behavioral therapy or behavioral counseling, it is by

definition a variety of psychotherapy that focuses efforts on providing personal training in:

- **Strengthening social skills**
- **Providing problem-solving pointers**
- **Big-picture scheduling strategies**
- **Developing discipline and self-control**

While just about anyone can find ways to benefit from behavioral therapy, there are specific psychological conditions that are well suited to these treatment methods. These conditions include but are not limited to attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and certain addictions and addictive behaviors. Of course, while these are the ideal conditions to treat, those suffering from chronic fatigue, phobias and even insomnia have also seen astonishing results under the care of a behavioral therapist. In some cases, behavioral therapy has even been used to break the cycle of obesity and overeating.

Generally, the first step in behavioral therapy begins with an initial consult and analysis with a chosen behavioral therapist or professional. During the course of your first meeting, you will be analyzed and observed in an effort to identify stressors, behaviors that are sabotaging your happiness and other triggers. After this analysis has been completed, the next step in the process is for the therapist to decide upon which specific treatment technique will be most suited to your individual needs. Behavioral therapy is also sometimes referred to as behavior modification because its basis lies in the assumption that a person's emotional problems, just like any other behavior, are actually nothing more than a learned response to their environment and, as such, can be effectively unlearned. This differs from psychodynamic therapies because there is no focus or emphasis on coming to an understanding or unearthing the unconscious motivations that may lie behind the behavior or behaviors in question. In essence, this means that your behavioral therapist isn't going to waste time trying to find out exactly why you act the way you do, instead, they're going to focus their time and attention on bringing about a change in your behavior.

### **Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)**

Acceptance and commitment therapy (or ACT) is a form of behavioral analysis that uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies to help increase psychological flexibility. While the therapy isn't considered a long-term treatment, it is

considered helpful in the treatment of depression, anxiety and other psychological disorders.

### **Behavioral Therapy**

Behavioral therapy focuses on an individual's learned, or conditioned, behavior and how this can be changed. The approach assumes that if a behavior can be learned, then it can be unlearned (or reconditioned) so is useful for dealing with issues such as phobias or addictions.

### **Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT)**

Cognitive analytic therapy brings together ideas from both cognitive therapy and analytic psychology into one integrative model. By looking at past experience, the therapy aims to help clients understand why they think or behave in a certain way, before looking to develop new ways of coping.

### **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) combines cognitive and behavioral therapies. The approach focuses on thoughts, emotions, physical feelings and actions, and teaches clients how each one can have an effect on the other. CBT is useful for dealing with a number of issues, including depression, anxiety and phobias.

### **Cognitive Therapy**

Cognitive therapy deals with thoughts and perceptions, and how these can affect feelings and behavior. By reassessing negative thoughts an individual can learn more flexible, positive ways of thinking, which can ultimately affect their feelings and behavior towards those thoughts.

## **2.2. Psychoanalytical and Psychodynamic Therapies**

Psychoanalytic therapy is insight driven and therefore looks to foster change by helping you to understand your past and how events from your early life could be affecting you now. Sessions will vary according to where you are in the course of your therapy, but much of the time will be spent talking freely to your therapist in a safe, non-judgmental environment.

The psychoanalyst will listen to your concerns and look out for patterns or certain events that may hold significance. In this type of therapy it is believed that unconscious feelings and childhood events play a key role in mental distress.

As well as listening to you discuss your experiences, your therapist may use other techniques to help identify potential causes for your concerns. Such techniques may include:

**Free Association** - Free association involves you talking about whatever comes into your mind without censoring or editing the flow of memories/ideas. Your therapist will encourage you to speak freely to help you return to an earlier emotional state so they can better understand any recurrent patterns of conflict you may be experiencing.

**Therapeutic Transference** - Transference relates to the way you may be transferring thoughts or feelings connected to influential figures in your life (for example your parents or siblings) onto your therapist. While this may not happen in every case, if it does your therapist should discuss transference with you to help you gain further insight into the way you deal with people in your daily life.

**Interpretation** - A key element of psychoanalytic therapy is interpreting and 'reading between the lines'. While your therapist is likely to stay relatively quiet and allow you to talk freely, they will occasionally interject with thoughts or interpretations of the topics you discuss. Your psychoanalyst may also ask you about your dreams as Freud wrote a lot on the subject of dream analysis and believed that dreams were important resources for understanding the unconscious.

### **Jungian Therapy**

Jungian psychotherapy is a specific branch of psychodynamic therapy that works from the theories of Carl Jung, considered to be one of the forefathers of psychology.

### **Psychoanalysis**

Psychoanalysis was developed by Sigmund Freud and focuses on an individual's unconscious, deep-rooted thoughts that often stem from childhood. Through free associations, dreams or fantasies, clients can learn how to interpret deeply buried memories or experiences that may be causing them distress.

## **Psychoanalytic Therapy**

Based on psychoanalysis, psychoanalytic therapy also focuses on how an individual's unconscious thoughts are influencing them. However, psychoanalytic therapy is usually less intensive than psychoanalysis.

## **Psychodynamic Therapy**

Psychodynamic therapy evolved from psychoanalytic therapy and seeks to discover how unconscious thoughts affect current behavior. Psychodynamic therapy usually focuses on more immediate problems and attempts to provide a quicker solution.

### **2.3. Humanistic Therapies**

Humanistic therapies focus on self-development, growth and responsibilities. They seek to help individuals recognize their strengths, creativity and choice in the 'here and now'. For over fifty years a humanistic approach has been used in the field of therapeutic counselling. Although behavioral and psychoanalytic forms of counselling are also available, the humanistic approach is an extremely successful option. Counseling clients with a humanistic approach provides them with an opportunity to explore creativity, personal growth and self-development, as well as acknowledging a variety of choices. The foundations of the humanistic approach provide the client with a deeper understanding of who they are, what they feel and the opportunity to explore the possibility of creating personal choices. It encourages self-awareness and self-realization. A humanistic approach provides a distinct method of counselling and focuses predominately on an individual's unique, personal potential to explore creativity, growth, love and psychological understanding. Human Givens psychotherapy is a relatively new approach that has been described by its founders as a 'bio-psycho-social' approach to psychotherapy. The therapy's basic assumption is that humans have innate needs (called givens) that need to be met for mental well-being.

## **Existential Therapy**

Existential therapy focuses on exploring the meaning of certain issues through a philosophical perspective, instead of a technique-based approach.

## **Gestalt Therapy**

Gestalt therapy can be roughly translated to 'whole' and focuses on the whole of an individual's experience, including their thoughts, feelings and actions. Gaining self-awareness in the 'here and now' is a key aspect of gestalt therapy.

### **Person-centered therapy (also known as client-centered counseling)**

Person-centered therapy focuses on an individual's self-worth and values. Being valued as a person, without being judged, can help an individual to accept who they are, and reconnect with themselves.

## **Psychosynthesis**

Psychosynthesis aims to discover a higher, spiritual level of consciousness.

## **Reality Therapy**

Reality therapy is an approach to therapy that focuses on the here and now rather than issues from the past. Developed by William Glasser in the 1960s, the theory behind the therapy is that an individual in mental distress is not suffering from a mental illness; instead they are suffering from a socially universal human condition as they have not had their basic psychological needs met.

## **Solution-Focused Brief Therapy**

Also known as solution-focused therapy or brief therapy, this approach predominantly looks at what the individual wants to achieve rather than historical problems. Questions are asked by the therapist to help the individual uncover their own strengths and resources. Solution-focused therapy can be especially helpful to those who are goal-orientated and have a desire to change.

## **Transactional Analysis**

Transactional analysis is based on the theory that we each have three ego states: Parent, adult and child. By recognizing ego-states, transactional analysis attempts to identify how individuals communicate, and how this can be changed.

## **Transpersonal Psychology**

Transpersonal psychology means beyond the personal and seeks to discover the person who transcends an individual's body, age, appearance, culture etc.

### **2.4. Arts Therapies**

Creative expression plays an important role in our development and in many cases has been found to assist in the recovery of mental distress. Arts therapies employ creative arts in a therapeutic setting with a trained therapist, with the aim of encouraging individuals to draw on their inner creative resources and express their feelings without necessarily using words. Definitions of art therapy vary due to its origins in two fields: art and psychotherapy. It can focus on the art-making process as therapeutic in and of itself, art as therapy, or it can be art in therapy (art psychotherapy). The psychoanalytic approach was the earliest form of art psychotherapy. This approach employs the transference process between the therapist and the client who makes art. The therapist interprets the client's symbolic self-expression as communicated in the art and elicits interpretations from the client. Analysis of transference is no longer always a component. Current art therapy includes a vast number of other approaches such as: Person-Centered, Cognitive, Behavior, Gestalt, Narrative, Adlerian, Family (Systems) and more. The tenets of art therapy involve humanism, creativity, reconciling emotional conflicts, fostering self-awareness, and personal growth.

#### **Art therapy/Art Psychotherapy**

Art therapy or art psychotherapy is a form of psychotherapy that uses art materials such as paints, clay and paper. These tools are used to communicate issues, emotions and feelings and can provide an insight into any conflicts that may be present.

#### **Drama Therapy**

Drama therapy is a form of psychological therapy that applies acting and performance techniques within a therapeutic environment. The aim of drama therapy is to help those taking part to express themselves while helping to address difficult emotions in an indirect way.

## **Music Therapy**

Music therapy is a type of creative therapy that harnesses the communicative power of music to foster positive change. Versatile by nature, music therapy can be used for a range of issues including autism, dementia and anxiety.