

Existential Therapy

Existential Therapy is a modality of counselling and psychotherapy with strong roots in existentialphenomenological philosophy, and in the heritage of psychology and psychiatry. Existential Therapy focuses on the clarification of human existence to enable a person to engage with problems in living in a creative, active and reflective manner in order to find new meaning and purpose.

Existential worldview

Existential Therapy values the interactive, relational and embodied nature of human consciousness and human existence. It considers that human beings are free to effect change in their lives in a responsible, deliberate, ethical and thoughtful manner, by understanding their difficulties and by coming to terms with the possibilities and limitations of the human condition in general and of their own life in particular. It emphasizes the importance of finding meaning and purpose by engaging with life at many levels, physical, social, personal and spiritual. It does not prescribe a particular worldview but examines the tensions and contradictions in a person's way of being. This will include a consideration of existential limits such as death, failure, weakness, guilt, anxiety and despair.

How does it work?

There are many forms of Existential Therapy and each has its own specific methods and ways of exploring difficulties and change, but all forms of existential therapy work with dialogue to enable a person to find their own authority in exploring their life and the way they want to live it. This will often involve a philosophical and ethical exploration of the big questions of human existence, such as truth, meaning, justice, beauty, freedom, consciousness, choice, responsibility, friendship and love. Existential Therapy is a pragmatic and experiential approach which favours embodiment, emotional depth, clarity and directness and which employs the principles of logic, paradox, dialectics, phenomenology and hermeneutic exploration amongst other methods.

What does it aim for?

Existential therapists aim to approach a person's un-ease or suffering in a phenomenological, holistic way. Symptoms are not seen as the defining aspect of a person's troubles, but rather as an expression of the person's disconnection from reality, or distorted reality. Therefore Existential therapists see symptoms as a way of coping with difficulty, a problem, or an existential crisis. A person's experience will be considered at all levels. Equal attention will be paid to a person's past, present and future. Existential therapists facilitate a person's greater awareness of their mode of being in the world, helping them to be more in touch with their concrete physicality, their interactions and relationships, their engagement with their own identity or lack of it, their concept of what grounds their being and the ways in which they may be able to bring the flow and their capacity for transcendence, learning and pleasurable forward movement back to life. It helps people to tolerate and embrace suffering and difficulty to engage with it constructively.

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