

PSYCHOTHERAPY IN EVERYDAY LIFE

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Since counseling and psychotherapy have become accessible and widely used today, in what way can they be used as a valuable resource?

Firstly, therapy is not about giving advice. We know that when we experience difficulties there are people in our lives giving us advice and offering solutions to improve our situation. Sometimes it is useful, but not always. It may be what they want for us, but may not be what we want for ourselves. More importantly, the concerned people in our lives are affected when we aren't coping and therefore are not always objective in their advice.

Therapy is an interactive process where you work together with a therapist in a confidential relationship. This person should be registered with the professional body in your country for psychology. In South Africa this is the Health Professionals Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

WHEN DO YOU KNOW IF YOU NEED THERAPY

Grief, loss, trauma, relationship conflict and general life challenges are some of the experiences none of us can totally avoid. Sometimes we can manage them and move on.

At other times, however, we can feel overwhelmed by unwanted emotions or decisions. We all know the difference between knowing in your head what you should do and just not being able to get there.

One may also enter therapy for more specific difficulties e.g. phobias, substance abuse, obsessive compulsive habits, eating disorders, etc that can be very limiting.

However, therapy is not only for dealing with crises. Important life choices and decisions may need to be worked through. Skills training can make differences to your relationships, career and general quality of life e.g., anger management/conflict resolution, stress management, assertiveness training, improving self esteem, are some examples.

Goal setting and working towards some desired outcome in the future is also an aspect of therapy.

Therapy is either done individually, with couples, as a family or in groups.

It may be short term or brief or longterm depending on what the situation requires.

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THIS PROCESS ?

The aims of therapy are broad and work together:-

1. The relief of symptoms, for example, depression, anxiety, chaotic feelings, insomnia, compulsive habits, conflict in relationships, etc.

2. Learning constructive coping mechanisms.

3. Learning skills to deal with life more effectively e.g. relationship skills, social skills, assertiveness skills, anger management.

4. Overcoming a life trauma or event that is overwhelming you.

5. Achieving greater levels of self awareness. The patterns for our thoughts, feelings, behaviours and perceptions are laid early in life and continue into adulthood where our circumstances and needs are different. Unless we become more aware of them, we stay stuck in and repeat old patterns that may not work for us anymore and block

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our progress. We can recognize where we facilitate our lives and where we sabotage ourselves. We also need to become more aware of how we impact on others, both positively and negatively.

6. Making important life decisions and setting goals for meaningful change in an area of your life.

7. Recognizing where your strengths and talents lie so that you can make optimal use of them.

To summarize then, therapy can have many aims beyond just feeling better. It can expand our possibilities in many ways as well as enhancing our personal effectiveness.