



The Mulberry Report

Solutions For Life

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Psychotherapy: Exactly What Is It?

By Ralph Nichols, LCSW, Executive Director

Actually, psychotherapy may be too fancy a term. Instead, most people are familiar with the term “counseling.” Regardless, the objective here is getting a good understanding of what this process is all about.

I recall in my early days of working in the mental health field in Evansville there was very limited access to getting help. In the early 70’s, if you were well-to-do, you could choose among only three psychiatrists in practice. Beyond that, the availability of mental health therapists including psychologists was fairly limited.

Today, there are quite a few more psychiatrists in Evansville compared to 1971 and many more counselors/therapists/psychologists not only with mental health agencies such as Mulberry Center, Southwestern Behavioral Healthcare, Deaconess and St. Mary’s but also several clinicians in private practice. The availability of choices is quite good for a city the size of Evansville.

So, what takes place when a person sees a therapist? In a nutshell, it’s about replacing a sense of sadness and despair (and stress) with hope regardless of the difficulties we all face in our lifetime. It’s also about replacing feelings of not living up to expectations with feeling competent; and, it’s about replacing isolation with rewarding personal relationships; it’s about getting through the stresses of a marital breakup, the loss of a job or the trauma of a major life threatening event. Through psychotherapy (or counseling), people with personal issues can learn to tolerate their symptoms and stresses better by transforming their meaning by way of making connections between symptoms and experiences and replacing negative thinking with positive self-talk.

There is a wide range of psychotherapy interventions including behavioral, cognitive, harm reduction, insight oriented; you name it. Which one works is totally connected with the level of satisfaction experienced by the person getting the help. An interpretation of the meaning of a symptom is persuasive if it is expressed in terms that seem appropriate to the person and promotes confidence in the therapist. By the way, confidence in the therapist cannot be over stated.

In a survey of psychotherapy clients (also referred to as patients) having to do with their perception of what worked when getting help, the following were at the top of the list:

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Continued on page 2

“Through perseverance many people win success out of what seemed destined to be certain failure.”

- Disraeli

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Continued from page 1

- The relationship with the therapist was first and foremost. It was clear those therapists whose interventions were experienced by patients as expressions of caring and genuine interest were a key piece in being able to progress. Without the therapeutic connection between patient and therapist, the outcome was almost always a lack of follow-through.
- Ensuring an office environment that is safe and supportive.
- Providing an explanation of the causes of the symptoms with workable strategies for beginning the process of making mid-course changes.
- Ensuring a counseling environment of privacy and confidentiality.

As one patient noted regarding his coping mechanism, “It’s all about honesty - with myself, my therapist, and others, no matter how tough it may be.” I especially like the statement made by a patient I saw at Mulberry Center a couple of years ago. The statement was made to a friend of his who he was encouraging to seek some help, and it made so much sense to me that it is now a quote in our company brochure. He said to his friend, “Look at it this way, I see this opportunity as an emotional tune-up.” What a neat way to see this process called psychotherapy as an opportunity for a “tune-up” or as I sometimes say to folks, as an opportunity to “reboot.”

Don’t hold back. Help is available, and, the personal issues do not have to be life threatening. They can range from stress at work to major issues of depression and mood changes.

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