

The Elements of Good Therapy: There are many models or types of therapy to choose from. We believe there are a handful of common denominators present in all forms of healthy therapy. These elements are described below:

Non-pathologizing

Viewing a person as greater than his or her problems is the hallmark of non-pathologizing therapy. It does not mean problems do not exist, it means NOT viewing the problems as the whole person or the whole person as the problems. Working nonpathologically does not negate pathology, it depathologizes it. So for example, rather than labeling a person who's angry as an angry person, non-pathologizing therapy views one's anger as just an aspect of the person, but not all of who the person is. We do justice to a person's true nature when we remember that behind the layers of protection, no matter how self-destructive or hurtful to others one has been, there is a loveable and vulnerable person at the very core.

Empowering

Empowering therapists maintain the belief that people can grow, heal, and transform. This hope is held no matter how intense one's defenses and wounds are. People can heal if they want to and if they can contribute to their own growth whatever is sufficient and necessary to that end. When a therapist views a person as fundamentally flawed or incapable of change, the person is more likely to feel and become flawed. Yet, one is more likely to discover one's true nature when therapy sees beyond wounds and defenses. Some people may not heal in this lifetime, but let the therapist not be an additional barrier to whatever other obstacles may be presenting.

Collaborative

The spirit of collaborative therapy is summarized in the words of Albert Schweitzer who wrote, "Each patient carries his own doctor inside him.... We are at our best when we give the doctor who resides within each patient a chance to go to work." Collaborative therapy can be established when a therapist encourages a client to become the co-therapist. Therapists who work collaboratively trust people to know themselves (or have the potential to know themselves) better than anyone else, to access their own wisdom, and to attend to their wounds. This orientation puts the client in the driver's seat of therapy. Collaboration is not directionless nor does it put the client at risk of further trauma.

Self

Self is a state of being that a therapist can embody when with his or her clients. It's defined as a state of calm, curiosity, compassion, creativity, confidence, courage, connectedness, and clarity. Self is considered a requisite of good therapy because it is this state that allows a therapist to work collaboratively without pushing, without pathologizing, and without retraumatizing.

Relationship

Beyond technique and theory is the realm of the relationship: the ongoing human-to-human connection, which provides the foundation for change. The relationship is the safe container, which allows one to more fully and completely feel the presence of Self while in the presence of another. A therapist who embodies Self and feels unconditional positive regard in the face of whatever the client may be experiencing, nurtures the therapeutic relationship. Without a therapeutic relationship there is no therapy.

Depth

Therapy often times needs to go deep. There seems to be a split in the mental health field between types of therapy which emphasize cognitive solutions and those which emphasize emotional/ or body-oriented healing. Both are important. However, our experience is that healing takes more than insight about a problem, cognitive countering, and surface behavior change. Rather than turning away from, countering, or compensating for our suffering, healing requires an exploration into the depth of the wounds which fuel extreme beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. To counter and turn away from the deeper suffering is 'more of the same' and often leads to more suffering. Also, healing requires feeling. As it is said, "If we can feel it, we can heal it." Many of our extreme beliefs, feelings, and behaviors are maintained because we have, in an effort to survive, avoided the painful wounds and burdens, which lurk beneath. Good therapy helps one to process and complete whatever hidden and unhidden wounds one has harbored. Treatment without going deep can be like stitching up a wound without taking the bullet out; it's more likely to remain sore, to infect, and require ongoing attention. "Enlightenment consists not merely in the seeing of luminous shapes and visions, but in making the darkness visible. The latter procedure is more difficult and therefore, unpopular." ~ Carl Jung

Good Therapy is Imperfect

The phrase "good therapy" encourages a misconception: the idea that there is such a thing as pure good therapy, a process exempt of any problems or issues. In the same way that a good marriage is not one without problems, but rather one that works through problems – so is good therapy. No therapist is perfect and no therapy can be provided perfectly, no matter how ideal a therapy may be in theory. Even those therapists, who do the best they can to be conscious of their inner world and attuned to the therapeutic process, have aspects they are unaware of, pieces of themselves unhealed, and mistakes they make. Good therapy is the sum of all the experiences, internal and external, occurring as a result of the imperfect psychotherapy process; and it leads toward self-awareness, growth, and the release of extreme feelings, energies, and beliefs. And what a blessing it is that even the best therapy can be lined with areas of unawareness, mistakes, challenges to the therapeutic relationship, and yet still turn out good...like a marriage... Think of the beautiful repairs you and your life partner may have made, the important problems you've worked out with friends, and perhaps the repairs you've made in therapy with the people you work with. A solid repair improves the connection and deepens the trust. So, cheers to road bumps in therapy, within all relationships, and within ourselves!

Sometimes We Can't Help

We are limited. We greet our clients with great hope. We have spent countless hours studying our trade, doing our own inner work, mastering our technique, and learning to "be" with our clients. We have parts of ourselves that want to do good work. We are compelled to help others release burdens and cope with suffering because we know how good it feels to do so. Yet, there are times we can't help. We believe a good therapist never gives up hope that a person can heal in this lifetime, but also recognizes that he or she may not be the one to help, that the time may not be right, the person not ready, and that, for whatever reason, one may never do the work we envision them doing. Good Therapy means letting go of expectations and outcomes for ourselves and for the people we work with, though, without giving up hope.

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