

Existential therapy



The structure of Existential theory is based on four givens, or the structure of existence. There are different catalogues and list surveying these basic life conditions: that we are all going to die, that in decisive moments we are alone, that we have freedom to choose our life, and that we struggle to create meaning in a world in which our life meaning is not given in advance (Yalom 1980). In looking at these four conditions to see how they fit into my belief system and if it would help me counsel my clients. I don't really know how I would focus on the first one that we are all going to die.

I personally don't spend a lot of time and energy thinking about death. That's probably because I've got some specific beliefs that have put that dilemma to rest, at least for me. However I think that I could offer some good insight and an empathetic ear to a client who was asking such questions, and hopefully try and help them find their own way, which I think is the foundation for the freedom to choose and creating meaningful life.

Existential isolation refers to the fact that no matter how close we may find ourselves to another person, there is a fundamental separateness that we cannot remove.

This ultimate aloneness of the human condition is that we enter and leave the world alone despite our best wishes (Bauman & Waldo, 1998) Again I think that this condition is not something to be feared. Many people would rather avoid talking about and relating these basic conditions of death and isolation, but this fact does not weaken their impact it strengthens them. By addressing these issues with a client, it helps build rapport and empathy, and creates common ground. Because we all have to face these conditions, I think this is a good place to be with a client.

This in turn will lead you into freedom of choice, and creating a meaningful life, which is the ultimate goal of existential therapy. As a result, I have chosen existential therapy, because it fits into my basic beliefs that we all have the power to choose, and that we all struggle to create meaning or purpose in our lives. The existential approach disclaims the view of human and nature and emphasizes the freedom that human beings have to choose what to make of their circumstances.

One of the main goals existential therapists share is for their clients to get in touch with their real selves and to make deliberate choices in accordance with the real self and its wants, rather than permitting other persons or events to determine their behavior. One's real self is the way one is, with authentic feelings and emotions. When individuals are able to see themselves with their own feelings and emotions they are also able to see their potential to grow and improve as a person (Fernando 2007) That we have choices in every situation is a view confirmed by Viktor Frankl's experiences in the concentration camps (Frankl 1984).

After reading Frankl's book "Man's Search for Meaning". This really struck a chord with me and has left a lasting impression. As a person who has spent most of their life living in what existential therapists call, existential guilt or an existential vacuum, the idea that I have the power to choose and that I was responsible for my misery, was a pretty new idea for me, even more than that is the revelation that I have a responsibility to create a meaningful existence in the limited time I have available, for me personally this is what I call being part of the solution and not part of the problem.

May (1989) believed that a human being will not change undesirable behavior patterns until forced to do so by suffering. Suffering is known to be one of the most potentially inspiring forces in nature (May; Frankl, 1984). I think that when working with a client who is experiencing suffering and pain from the choices that he or she has made.

That if you can get he or she to get ahold of this fact that the last of human freedoms is to choose ones attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose ones own way (Frankl, p. 5), that if you can get he or she out of restricted existence and get them to see that the real problem is the choices that he or she is making, then whatever negative cycle they are in can be broken or at least you can start to change it. I believe that the power of choice, on a daily basis is the foundation for this change and having an existential life. Over all I think existential therapy fits me and my role as counselor and helper, because I have been on the other side of the fence.

I have lived without meaning and purpose and have drowned in avoiding responsibility. Therefore, I think I can offer a unique perspective while working with a client by being genuine with where they are at, and by being empathetic to whatever he or she is going through. I fully believe in the existential approach and look forward to learning more about it, so I can effectively work with clients and help them to find meaning in their lives.