

Alexithymia or inability to identify feelings



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Sometimes clients struggle to identify their feelings. Inability to identify feelings or failure to recognize them properly is called alexithymia. According to Taylor & Bagby (2000) alexithymia is defined inability of the person to talk about his feelings because of lack of emotional awareness.

Such people are not able to identify and to describe their own feelings and emotions. In other words, alexithymia can be defined as deficit in emotional functioning. Alexithymia is associated with externally oriented cognitive style as the person lacks words to describe feelings and emotions.

Of course, working with such clients is a challenge for everyone as therapist should develop specific techniques to allow clients to release their feelings. For example, Taylor & Bagby (2000) argue that the most important moment in responding to clients with alexithymia is to allow clients to feel their emotions, not to control or hold them back. Clients should release their feelings to recognize them properly. Only permission to reveal emotions, feelings and energy will improve clients' confidence and clients will feel their problems are addressed and managed. (Taylor & Bagby 1997)

Counselling sessions are of great importance as therapists have an excellent opportunity to assist clients in coping with their feelings and emotions. For example, clients should be allowed to talk about their feelings and emotions because, in such a way, they will experience and deepen in them. Further, it is important to assist the client in identifying the feelings by means of summarizing exercise and reflections.

Clients should be allowed to reflect on what they feel and what emotions they experience. Inner experiences should be interpreted and discussed with the therapist. Therapist shouldn't concentrate on clients' inability to identify
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feelings; instead, therapist should focus on psychotherapeutic interventions. Getting the problem recognized is the greatest challenge to treatment alexithymia. (Nemiah, Freyberger & Sifneos 1976)

References

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