

## **APPROACH TO PSYCHOTHERAPY**

**Rick Hanson, Ph.D.**  
**Licensed Psychologist: PSY 12938**  
**25 Mitchell Blvd., Suite 3, San Rafael, CA 94903**  
**415/491-4900**

I would like you to understand my general approach to psychotherapy so that you can be an informed and involved participant. Everyone's therapy is unique and is determined in large part by the client. Yet in general terms, I have a theoretical stance and use techniques which are relatively set. Please let me know at the beginning of therapy, or at any time along the way, if you do not understand or are having difficulty with my approach.

### **FOCUS AND GOALS**

People come to psychotherapy to deal with one or more concerns. Perhaps it is a difficult relationship or situation. Or maybe troubling feelings, such as depression, anxiety, or anger. Sometimes it is a difficult choice or a major life transition. Other reasons include internal conflicts, addictive behaviors, or simply increasing self-knowledge and self-actualization.

What brings you to psychotherapy? Why now?

Your concerns give therapy a focus (or foci), and help us to identify your goals. Goals may be specific, such as "I want to stop drinking," or "I want a new career." Or they may be general, such as "I want to be more aware of my true feelings." Goals help us to have realistic expectations, give therapy direction, and let us see how you are progressing. At the start of therapy, we will identify foci and goals. Periodically thereafter, we will review them, discuss progress, and perhaps make some changes in goals and/or approach.

What do you want to get out of therapy? How do you want things to be in your life when we are done?

### **GENERAL PROCESS**

The process of psychotherapy, as I conduct it, is based on these general principles:

- The self develops through an interaction between our constitution (including health, temperament, and intelligence) and our environment. Our personality forms over time in large part in response to important people and events. The experience of growing up influences both the strengths and the issues which one brings to psychotherapy. Therefore, I am very interested in your childhood experiences and their meaning to you then and now.
- Many of the wants, feelings, and beliefs which shape our experience and behavior are unconscious. When things are unconscious, they are outside our control, and they tend to take on a life of their own. As a result, it is important in therapy to uncover and connect with your wants, feelings, and beliefs. As this occurs, sometimes clients may re-experience feelings and events from childhood. This is a normal process.
- Psychotherapy is an interpersonal process. In the context of the relationship that emerges between us, you will probably experience and behave in various ways that

are also typical for you in other relationships. By periodically discussing what is occurring in our relationship, we can gain insight into your other relationships as well.

- We are affected by numerous "objective" factors. These include health, gender, race, age, economics, culture, housing, urban stressors, and family arrangements. These are real influences on anyone, and I believe that it is realistic and responsive for both of us to be sensitive to their effects in your life. This may lead us to consider changes in your lifestyle, work, and/or relationships. And we must also recognize that many problems are not amenable to psychotherapeutic treatment, and that we need to come to grips with the facts of loss and limitation, imperfect responsiveness by others, and personal mortality.
- Within each of us, there is a core of being which is a compassionate witness of oneself and others, fundamentally benign and interested, and always already peaceful and happy. This core can be a refuge from the sometimes difficult material raised by psychotherapy, as well as a source of perspective, insight, and courage. I encourage the development of a deep sense of this core.

Some may experience this core of the self to have a spiritual dimension. Psychotherapy as I practice it is not directed at spiritual life, but it is respectful toward any religious or spiritual approach, or none at all.

- In some ways, psychotherapy is the search for truth (with a little "t"): what really happened, how it really was and is for you, what's connected to what, and how come. Facing reality and developing insight into oneself and others are valuable. Yet "truth" looks different from other angles, and is ever changing as we learn and grow. In the end, the "what" of one's life probably matters more than the "why."

### YOUR ROLE AND MINE

The heart of psychotherapy is people talking together about things that matter. On the one hand, this is a common and ordinary activity. On the other hand, our conversations take place within the context of a time-limited, goal-directed, asymmetrical, and somewhat contrived relationship. The oddities and limitations of the therapeutic relationship need to be recognized by both therapist and client.

The therapist is a professional, and not the client's friend. Clients can expect more from their therapist than from their friends in some ways, and less in others. When therapy is over, I will never not have been your therapist and you will never not have been my client. It is also important to preserve the option of resuming therapy at some time in the future. Therefore, an ordinary social relationship or friendship is not possible between us after therapy.

The mysteries of the body and mind, and the pathos of human suffering, can bring out unjustified dogmatism and rigidity in medicine and psychology. There is some scientific evidence for various psychological theories and techniques, yet the questions outnumber the answers. Psychotherapy is more art than science.

You are the expert on your life, not me. I do not know how you should live, nor what might be best for you in a particular situation. We are barraged with input in

modern society. I believe in psychotherapy as a safe, supportive environment in which you discover your own truth with minimal input from me. While I may occasionally share something from my own life, your psychotherapy should be about you, not me.

You bring to therapy many strengths and internal resources. I am not the sole repository of mental health and you are not the helpless client. I will learn things from you, and you have much to offer toward your own healing and growth.

What you get out of psychotherapy is largely up to you. I will be as effective as possible, but studies show that the most influential elements in positive therapeutic outcomes are client factors, notably commitment and skillful use of the feelings and insights which emerge in therapy. Perseverance, will, discipline, hard work, compassion for self and others, the courage to examine one's life and tolerate uncomfortable experiences . . . these all have a place in a productive psychotherapy.

And so do bogging down, wanting to quit, getting confused, or feeling upset with yourself or me. Struggling with therapy does not mean that you are a bad client or person. Actually, it probably means that you are engaged with the therapy and encountering some important yet tough material. I really want to know if you are having a hard time.

### **ADJUNCTS TO PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Depending on your needs and interests, various activities or resources can make psychotherapy easier, briefer, and more productive:

- Creating a supportive environment for psychotherapy can be helpful. You may want to consider lifestyle changes which could aid your growth. These might include reducing your use of alcohol or other drugs, exercise (under a physician's supervision), improving diet, reducing stresses, increasing recreation and leisure, yoga, or meditation. Please keep me informed of any lifestyle changes you undertake related to your therapy.
- Through doing mutually agreed upon homework -- such as trying out what you are learning, reading books, writing letters, or doing psychological exercises -- you can leverage the value of face-to-face sessions and get more out of your therapy. Therefore, I may suggest certain homework, or refer you to courses, workshops, or professionals in other modalities. Whenever I make such a suggestion, please really consider and discuss with me whether it is right for you. You know best what you are ready for, and what will be helpful.
- Often it is useful to explore the psyche with various assessment tools. I may do some assessment with you myself, or refer you to other professionals.
- Occasionally it appears that psychotropic medication might be helpful to a client. In these cases, I will discuss the option of medication with you, and if appropriate, make a referral to a psychiatrist for an assessment.

What do you think might be helpful adjuncts to your psychotherapy?

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I have read and understood the above:

Client Name:

\_\_\_\_\_

Client Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

If client is a minor:

Parent/Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_