Experiential Counseling and Coaching Techniques

Moving People Forward in Growth and Change

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Housekeeping
- Goals
- Consent Form/Self Care
- Ground Rules
- Schedule

Session 1
Introduction to Experiential Work: Research, Theories, Models and Techniques

What is Experiential Therapy?

Experiential Therapy
- Traditional “talk” therapies often focus on thinking.
- Experiential Therapy allows people to see themselves in action and “play out” relational dynamics.
- Many experiential techniques get past traditional defense mechanisms.

“Resolving inner conflicts by recreating personal stories from past and present circumstances and transforming them into tolerable life experiences.”

Mark Felber, LPC
Experiential Therapy

- Many clients use compulsive behaviors to avoid experience of self: experiential therapy offers opportunities to have direct experience of self in a safe and structured environment.
- Experientially, clients are able to move out of their heads and into a fuller experience at which time they can experience problems and rehearse solutions in a new way – expanding their sense of self and replacing compulsive behaviors with creativity and internal safety.

Effectiveness

- Empirical studies show that experiential methods help clients achieve dramatic results in areas of psychological symptom reduction.

Many clients utilizing experiential methods report

- Less intensity of perceived distress
- Fewer compulsive thoughts, impulses and actions
- Fewer feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
- Fewer symptoms of depression, anxiety, fear, and anger
- A greater orientation to the present
- A tendency to be more independent and self-supportive

Many clients utilizing experiential methods report

- More sensitivity to their own needs and feelings
- A greater likelihood to express feelings and be themselves
- An improved capacity to develop meaningful and warm interpersonal relationships with others.

Quote from a client/patient

"I know about denial; I know about compulsion; I know about feelings. But I still do the same kinds of things that get me in trouble."

That’s where actual experience – personally encountering or undergoing specific emotions and behaviors – can be helpful in breaking out of compulsion and denial.

Types of Experiential Therapy

- Psychodrama – J.L. Moreno
- Gestalt – Fritz Perls
- Virginia Satir
- Carl Whitaker
- EFT
- Animal-Assisted therapies/Equine Therapy
- Art Therapy/Music Therapy
- Play Therapy
Indications

- Grief
- Depression
- Addictions
- Codependency
- Trauma
- Eating Disorders
- Marriage/Family
- Anxiety and Stress
- PTSD (some types of experiential therapy)

Also used increasingly outside traditional mental health in education and healthcare settings

- Autism
- Alzheimer's/Dementia
- Cancer
- Any condition that can be helped by decreased stress and increased immune function

Contraindications

- Dissociative Disorders
- Personality Disorders (BPD)
- PTSD
- Recent crisis/trauma
- Any client who is hyper-aroused, suicidal, or psychotic

Session 2

Experiential Work With Marriage and Family

The Return of the Prodigal Son - Rembrandt

Experiential Family Therapy

1. Carl Whitaker’s – Symbolic Experiential Approach
2. Walter Kempler’s – Gestalt Experiential Approach
3. Virginia Satir’s – Communications Approach

**All focus on the unique self of the therapist**
Family Therapy Techniques

- Drawing the Family
- Genograms
- Family Sculpting
  Building awareness of family dynamics and how all members perceive the roles and relationships between members

Forgiveness Techniques

1. Hurt, Hate, Hook, Heal
2. The Forgiving Experience

Visioning

- Creative techniques to help people create a vision for their lives – professionally, personally, spiritually.

Vision Boards

Session 3

Experiential Work With Trauma and Abuse
Cautions for Experiential Work with Trauma and Abuse

- There are types of experiential work that can be very helpful – but careful assessment must be made to determine if individuals are ready.
- Techniques that bring emotions to the surface must be applied only when the client is emotionally stable.
- Do not use if client is dissociative, suicidal, hyper-aroused, or if there is any indication of psychosis or mania.

Types of Trauma and Abuse

- Childhood sexual, physical and verbal abuse
- Rape/sexual assault

Techniques with music, drawing and writing are very effective
Psychodrama in groups can be very effective

Inner Child Work

- Many theorists and models have used some form of inner child work.
  - Carl Jung
  - Charles Whitfield
  - Transactional Analysis
  - John Bradshaw

Speaking to the Child Inside

- Writing a Letter to your child

Animal Assisted Therapies

- Equine Therapy
- Canine Therapy
Oxytocin

- Oxytocin is a hormone in mammals produced in the hypothalamus and released from the posterior lobe of the pituitary gland that primarily acts as a neuromodulator in the brain.
- Oxytocin is best known for the role it plays in reproduction during and after childbirth.
- Called the “bonding” hormone, the “cuddle” hormone or the “trust” hormone.

Oxytocin

- Oxytocin is also released when we have contact individuals with whom we share close, intimate bonds – especially when we touch, hug or kiss them.
- Oxytocin is released during sex – particularly in long-term, monogamous relationships. Just seeing the partner can increase levels of oxytocin.
- Many of the studies done on prairie voles

Oxytocin

- Has calming effect over the fight/flight defensive network
- If the amygdala excites the sympathetic nerves, they will cause the arousal centers of the brain to release noradrenalin, which gets our hearts pumping blood to our muscles and makes us feel anxious.
- Oxytocin can block this effect by dramatically increasing the number of noradrenalin’s inhibitory receptors that act as off switches. In this way, oxytocin not only prevents a rise in heart rate and blood pressure but actually causes both to be lowered, producing a sense of well-being.

Oxytocin

- Psychological effects of oxytocin
  - Evokes feelings of contentment
  - Reduces anxiety
  - Increases feelings of calmness and security
  - Increases trust
  - Reduces fear

Oxytocin

- A number of studies in the last several years suggesting that oxytocin might be beneficial in the treatment of PTSD.

- One published article titled “The rational for the use of oxytocin in the treatment of Post-traumatic stress disorder” from the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands

Oxytocin

- Abstract
- Although cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is an effective treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), many patients fail to attain remission with CBT. The authors propose augmentation of CBT with oxytocin in the treatment of PTSD. Oxytocin has a combination of pharmacologic effects that result in a “sense of safety” for the patient, which is a prerequisite to successful treatment of PTSD. We suggest a dual explanatory mechanism as to why oxytocin may be effective: through a reduction of fear response (decreasing amygdala activation, inhibiting fear response, and enhancing extinction learning) and through an increase of social interaction (activating social reward-related brain regions increasing engagement in the therapeutic alliance). Given that PTSD is marked by deficits in anxiety/stress regulation and in social functioning, and that oxytocin is implicated in both of these areas, oxytocin seems a likely candidate for treatment of patients with PTSD. Further clinical studies of the therapeutic value of oxytocin are indicated.
### Oxytocin and Pets

- 2003 study by two South African researchers (Johannes Odelindall and R.A. Meintjes) showed that when eighteen men and women interacted with their dogs (talking to them and gently petting them) the owners blood levels of oxytocin almost doubled.
- The owners had a significant decrease in blood pressure and a significant drop in their levels of stress hormones.

### Saved

- Series on Animal Planet about how animals “save” people.
- This story caught my attention.
- Father a psychologist. Little girl named Kate (2) was home with nanny on September 11, 2001.

### Kate and Scout

![Image](image1)

### Informal Use of Animals

- In hospitals and nursing homes
- In schools
- Recommending pets

### Formal Use of Animals

- Trained Therapy Dogs
- Equine Therapy
- Dogs for vets with PTSD
- Dogs for children with autism
- Crisis Response
Special Guests

- Mike Levine
- Murphy
Session 4

Experiential Work with Grief and Loss

I walked a mile with Pleasure,
She chattered all the way;
But left me none the wiser,
For all she had to say.
I walked a mile with Sorrow
And ne’er a word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!

Along the Road
ROBERT BROWNING HAMILTON

C.S. Lewis (1960) in his book The Four Loves states:
"There is no safe investment. To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket - safe, dark, motionless, airless - it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside of Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell."

Experiential Therapy with the Grieving
- Helps griever to experience their pain in a safe environment
- Gives practical techniques to face into their pain/loss
- Can help with unresolved issues with the person who died
- Can facilitate "saying goodbye"
- Helps relocate the deceased

Experiential Therapy with the Grieving
- Different individuals will respond differently to different techniques
- Not every exercise works for every person
- Discuss options with clients to see what appeals to them
- Take their personality and grieving style into account
### Grief Pattern Inventory

#### Patterns of Grief

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instrumental</th>
<th>Intuitive</th>
<th>Blended</th>
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#### Instrumental Grief

- Focus on cognition/moderated affect; while they share common feelings with intuitive grievers, feelings are less intense
- Brief periods of cognitive dysfunction are common
- A desire to master environment; thus a majority of grief energy is focused on problem-solving and planned activities as an adaptive strategy

#### Intuitive Grief

- Focus on affect over cognition
- Longer term cognitive impairment as there may be prolonged periods of confusion, inability to concentrate, disorganization, and disorientation
- Are less likely than instrumental grievers to seek out potential problems and solve them

#### Instrumental Grief

- A general reluctance to talk about feelings
- Grief is more of an intellectual experience
- May initially respond by explaining the circumstance of their losses rather than to affective cues
- May experience grief physically as augmented energy and take the form of restlessness or nervousness

#### Instrumental Grief

- May be unaware of internal arousal
- May feel disenfranchised as others do not accept their grief pattern
- May be uncomfortable with the strong expressed emotions of others
Intuitive Grief

- Feelings are intensely experienced
- Expressions such as crying and lamenting mirror inner experience
- Grief expressed is a grief experienced
- Go with the experience of grief
- Majority of grief energy is focused on feelings – less energy for cognition

Intuitive Grief

- Successful adaptive strategies facilitate the experience and expression of feeling
- Physical exhaustion and/or anxiety may result
- May feel that people do not allow for adequate expression of their grief
- May be unable or unwilling to distance themselves from feelings expressed by others

Blended Grievers

- Have elements common to both instrumental and intuitive patterns - general preference for one
- More blended grievers and intuitive
- Benefit from a variety of adaptive strategies from which to select.
- May or may not have sufficiently developed adaptive strategies in both areas.

Grief and Loss

- Life Timeline
- Creating a memorial
- Collage
- Keeping a grief journal
- Writing the story
- Guided visualization
- Writing a letter
- Empty Chair
- Funeral rituals

Individual Exercise

Trauma & Loss Exercise

Part 1
Begin completion of a trauma & loss timeline. Consider impacts: both positive and negative.
What did you learn from the experience?

Part 2
Identify situations or population groups of which you need to be aware as they serve as internal triggers for you.

Life Impact Timeline

- Birth
- Today
- Positive
- Negative
### Timeline Impact Exploration
- Narrative of the timeline
- "Tell me why you have ranked them this way"
- How has this incident/person impacted the course of your life?
- Identify the secondary losses
- Help them formulate a theology of suffering
- Assess transformative perceptions, life assumptions and behaviors

### Importance of Exercise for both caregiver & helper
- Defines triggers
- Identifies barriers to care
- Identifies multiple losses
- Defines impacts of life events
- Builds resiliency and personal hardiness

### Collages
- Can use with clients for almost any issue
- Make creation a process
- Utilize music, environment to make creating the collage an experience
- Encourage creativity
- Try to make it about the process – not creating a piece of art

### The Arts in Experiential Therapy
- Music
- Movies
- Paintings
- Poetry
- Books

### Experiential Techniques to Facilitate Healing
Important when
- There are unresolved pre-death issues
- In cases where death is sudden and/or unexpected and there is no time for good bye
- Anytime the griever needs to process emotional and/or relational aspects of the loss
- Facilitates the integration of the cognitive and emotional domains
Session 5

How Clients Tell Their Stories: Individual and Group Applications

Psychodrama

- Created by J.L. Moreno
- Elements of theater
- Explore internal conflicts by acting out emotions and interpersonal interactions on stage
- Allows internal restructuring of dysfunctional mindsets and patterns
- Many different variations on traditional psychodrama
Psychodrama

- Typical session is 90 minutes to 2 hours
- "Reconstruction" can be up to 10 hours
- Elements
  - Warm up
  - Action
  - Sharing

Training in Psychodrama

- Onsite Experiential Therapy Institute - www.Onsiteworkshops.com (800) 341-7432
- American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama - www.asgpp.org

Music Therapy

- Music is experienced in all areas of the brain
- Exhaustive studies about music and the brain
- Some of the most interesting recent studies are on music and Alzheimer’s Disease
- The documentary film “Alive Inside” documents study of how music affects Alzheimer’s patients

Alive Inside

General Structure of Lament

1. An opening address, which often includes a vocative, such as, “Oh Lord;”
2. The lament or complaint, which provides a description of the trouble or distress;
3. A plea or petition for God’s response, often giving reasons for God to act;
4. A profession of trust, faith, or confidence in God, and;
5. A vow of praise to God or a sacrifice.  
   (Westermann, 1981)
Writing Personal Psalms

The Power of Writing
- Journaling
- Letter Writing
- Writing with non-dominant hand

Session 6
Faith in Practice: Integrating Biblical Principles in Experiential Work