

DEFINITION OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

INTRODUCTION

The College of Psychotherapy has undertaken a piece of work to articulate what it is that we have in common as psychotherapists and what distinguishes psychotherapy from other therapeutic approaches.

The following Psychotherapy definition is the result of that process.



DEFINITION OF PSYCHOTHERAPY

What is psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy is a holistic engagement that focuses on the mental, emotional, relational or spiritual health of a human being. It is useful when psychological, developmental, relationship and wellbeing issues arise in life. A psychotherapist engages with a person or group in a process of working together to build understanding and acceptance of how the person makes meaning of their life. Together they create life giving solutions to old and new problems.

What does the psychotherapist do?

A psychotherapist and client work together to understand conscious and unconscious aspects of the present lived experience of the client. A key element of the practice of psychotherapy is the relationship between the therapist and the client. This process may include looking at how earlier experiences impact on the person's daily life and future. Together they may refer to personal story, experiences in family of origin, relationship history, imagination, illness as well as sexuality, spirituality, ethnicity and culture.

What issues does the psychotherapist deal with?

Many people come to a psychotherapist because they are experiencing discomfort, dissatisfaction or suffering in their lives. Some come seeking further development. Psychotherapists work with people who have a wide range of presenting concerns: depression, anxiety, sleeplessness, eating problems, illness, addiction, trauma, abuse, relationship difficulties in personal life or at work, communication, intimacy and commitment problems.

What outcomes may be expected?

Psychotherapy supports a process of change. A person may come to understand patterns of discomfort, dissatisfaction or suffering in their life. They may make meaning from this and be more able to make conscious choices that lead to a different experience of themselves and the world. A person can develop a greater capacity to be in charge of their life, empowered and self-directing, and experience increasing joy, meaning, peace of mind and heart, purposefulness, insight and self-knowledge.

The process of psychotherapy addresses symptom reduction in a person's life. In addition, it goes further and addresses the causes of longstanding patterns, supporting improved functioning.

What training do psychotherapists have?

A psychotherapist will have extensive and lengthy training in one or more psychotherapeutic modalities which draw on a theoretical base that is well recognized. The training will have involved the psychotherapist in their own process of psychotherapy and close supervision during their learning. Psychotherapists continue supervision, professional development and involvement in a community of psychotherapists throughout their professional life. Psychotherapists abide by a Code of Ethics for professional practice.

The training curriculum will have included extensive practical clinical skills and the integration of theories of psychotherapy, human development, and human diversity. A sound familiarity with relevant current research in psychotherapy and rigorous ethical discernment are all important components of training in the profession of psychotherapy.

What modalities of psychotherapy exist?

There are various psychotherapy modalities. Participating members of the Working Party for the College of Psychotherapy have been drawn from the following modalities within PACFA:

- Buddhist Psychotherapy
- Gestalt Therapy
- Psychodrama
- Somatic Psychotherapy
- Soul Centred Psychotherapy
- Transactional Analysis
- Transpersonal and Experiential Psychotherapy