Chapter 6

Existential Therapy
A Philosophical/Intellectual Approach to Therapy

1. BASIC DIMENSIONS – OF THE HUMAN CONDITION
   - The capacity for self-awareness
   - The tension between freedom & responsibility
   - The creation of an identity & establishing meaningful relationships
   - The search for meaning
   - Accepting anxiety as a condition of living
   - The awareness of death and nonbeing

2. The Capacity for Self-Awareness
   - The greater our awareness, the greater our possibilities for freedom
   - Awareness is realizing that:
     - We are finite - time is limited
     - We have the potential, the choice, to act or not to act
     - Meaning is not automatic - we must seek it
     - We are subject to loneliness, meaninglessness, emptiness, guilt, and isolation

3. Identity and Relationship
   - Identity is “the courage to be” – We must trust ourselves to search within and find our own answers
     - Our great fear is that we will discover that there is no core, no self
   - Relatedness – At their best our relationships are based on our desire for fulfillment, not our deprivation
     - Relationships that spring from our sense of deprivation are clinging, parasitic, and symbiotic

4. The Search for Meaning
   - Meaning – like pleasure, meaning must be pursued obliquely
     - Finding meaning in life is a by-product of a commitment to creating, loving, and working
“The will to meaning” is our primary striving  
Life is not meaningful in itself; the individual must create and discover meaning

5  Anxiety – A Condition of Living  
Existential anxiety is normal - life cannot be lived, nor can death be faced, without anxiety  

◆ Anxiety can be a stimulus for growth as we become aware of and accept our freedom  
◆ We can blunt our anxiety by creating the illusion that there is security in life  
◆ If we have the courage to face ourselves and life we may be frightened, but we will be able to change

6  Relationship Between Therapist and Client  
Therapy is a journey taken by therapist and client  

◆ The person-to-person relationship is key  
◆ The relationship demands that therapists be in contact with their own phenomenological world

◆ The core of the therapeutic relationship  
◆ Respect and faith in the clients’ potential to cope  
◆ Sharing reactions with genuine concern and empathy

7  Existential Therapy Video

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9  Person-Centered Therapy  
(A reaction against the directive and psychoanalytic approaches)

◆ Challenges:  

◆ The assumption that “the counselor knows best”  
◆ The validity of advice, suggestion, persuasion, teaching, diagnosis, and interpretation  
◆ The belief that clients cannot understand and resolve their own problems without direct help  
◆ The focus on problems over persons
Person-Centered Therapy

- Emphasizes:
  - Therapy as a journey shared by two fallible people
  - The person’s innate striving for self-actualization
  - The personal characteristics of the therapist and the quality of the therapeutic relationship
  - The counselor’s creation of a permissive, “growth promoting” climate
  - People are capable of self-directed growth if involved in a therapeutic relationship

A Growth-Promoting Climate

- Congruence - genuineness or realness
- Unconditional positive regard - acceptance and caring, but not approval of all behavior
- Accurate empathic understanding – an ability to deeply grasp the client’s subjective world
  - Helper attitudes are more important than knowledge

Six Conditions
(Necessary and sufficient for personality changes to occur)

1. Two persons are in psychological contact
2. The first, the client, is experiencing incongruency
3. The second person, the therapist, is congruent or integrated in the relationship
4. The therapist experiences unconditional positive regard or real caring for the client
5. The therapist experiences empathy for the client’s internal frame of reference and endeavors to communicate this to the client
6. The communication to the client is, to a minimal degree, achieved

The Therapist

- Focuses on the quality of the therapeutic relationship
- Serves as a model of a human being struggling toward greater realness
- Is genuine, integrated, and authentic, without a false front
- Can openly express feelings and attitudes that are present in the relationship with the client
Chapter 8

Gestalt Therapy

- **Existential & Phenomenological** – it is grounded in the client’s “here and now”
- **Initial goal** is for clients to gain awareness of what they are experiencing and doing **now**
  - Promotes direct experiencing **rather than** the abstractness of talking about situations
  - Rather than talk about a childhood trauma the client is encouraged to **become** the hurt child

**The Now**

- Our “power is in the present”
  - Nothing exists except the “now”
  - The past is gone and the future has not yet arrived
  - For many people the power of the present is lost
  - They may focus on their past mistakes or engage in endless resolutions and plans for the future

**Unfinished Business**

- Feelings about the past are unexpressed
  - These feelings are associated with distinct memories and fantasies
  - Feelings not fully experienced linger in the background and interfere with effective contact
  - **Result:**
    - Preoccupation, compulsive behavior, wariness oppressive energy and self-defeating behavior

**Contact and Resistances to Contact**

- **CONTACT** – interacting with nature and with other people without losing one’s individuality
- **RESISTANCE TO CONTACT** – the defenses we develop to prevent us from experiencing the present fully
  - Five major channels of resistance:
    - Introjection
    - Deflection
• Projection
• Retroflection

Gestalt Video