

Psychotherapy Guidebook

HOLISTIC COUNSELING

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Holistic Counseling

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e-Book 2016 International Psychotherapy Institute

From *The Psychotherapy Guidebook* edited by Richie Herink and Paul R. Herink

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Holistic Counseling

William B. Woodson

DEFINITION

Holistic Counseling, a comprehensive approach to mental health, allows the total person to develop — mind, body, and spirit. It is based on the fundamental understanding that any effort to achieve mental health must include attention to physical well-being. A sound mind in a healthy body is the optimal human condition.

Holistic Counseling is directly concerned with “wellness,” not with sickness. Unlike psychotherapy, which is designed to remove symptoms of mental illness, Holistic Counseling, using practical techniques, provides a way that people can obtain and integrate physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health. The objective of Holistic Counseling is total “wellness.”

The role of the holistic counselor is to clarify and educate the total person. In the “clarification” process, the counselor helps clients obtain perspective about their behavior, particularly as it relates to their immediate dilemmas. When clients comprehend that their activities are manifestations of the universal laws of human behavior, confusion and uncertainty

disappear, courses of action become apparent, and, in the long run, consciousness becomes clarified.

The counselor teaches clients how to cleanse their bodies and minds, balance their emotions, and gain more energy. Toxins reside in the body as a result of improper or incomplete food processing. Mental “toxins” (unhealthy emotions or behaviors) result from improper or incomplete emotional processing. The holistic counselor teaches effective ways of eliminating both.

Preoccupation or obsession with a single problem limits our effectiveness and ability to function. Often, the individual’s behavior becomes limited to painfully few emotional responses. He feels “out of control,” uncomfortable in life, or just plain “unwell.” With the holistic counselor, clients learn how to gain more control over their emotions and attain a healthier balance.

When we can simultaneously release previously restricted energy, experience inner calm, and remain alert, we have made significant strides toward self-realization. The holistic counselor assists clients make such gains.

Clients facilitate their own progress by taking responsibility (not blame) for their health. To ensure success, they practice exercises and carry out agreed-upon routines between sessions. The new techniques become an integral part of their lives.

HISTORY

Holistic Counseling began evolving in 1975 when, after three years of full-time study at Arica Institute, I (Bill Woodson) began to introduce Arica practices into the more traditional approach to counseling and psychotherapy I had been using. At first I added relaxation techniques, physical conditioning, and Chua K'a (a system of muscle tension release) to a form of counseling that emphasized clarification and cleansing of both mind and emotions. Later the sessions were expanded to include meditation, visualization, nutrition, and techniques drawn from disciplines other than Arica. From its inception in 1975, however, the underpinnings of Holistic Counseling have been firmly rooted in the theory of human development set forth by Oscar Ichazo (1976).

One important aspect of the theory is that the healthy or “natural-ego” emerges when our instinct for self-preservation, social relations, and harmony with the world are in balance and are satisfied. When this natural ego is the principal actor, the whole self knows (understands and intuitively) that: 1) there are natural laws that determine our behavior, 2) there is an equilibrium for the psyche that must be sustained if we are to maintain optimal health, 3) in the normal course of living, we experience psychic pain that we compensate for in specific ways, and 4) there are discrete levels of consciousness that human beings experience and move through. As Ichazo states, everyone has an internal drive to achieve the natural-ego, and the

process can be accelerated. Introducing expanded consciousness techniques into the counseling process is one way of accomplishing this.

In 1977, I began working at the Center for the Healing Arts in New York City in collaboration with other mental health and health professionals familiar with the Arica system and have continued to develop the concept of Holistic Counseling.

TECHNIQUES

Currently, there are six groups of techniques used in Holistic Counseling: 1) clarification processes, 2) Chua K'a, 3) exercise, 4) relaxation, 5) meditation, and 6) nutrition. The six work together to help clients cleanse, energize, and balance themselves.

1. Clarification processes. These help clients understand the effects of their assumptions (or mental structures), unresolved emotional conflicts, and their expectations. Interventions are based on Ichazo's theory of human development. By clearly isolating and examining their belief systems, clients begin to see patterns of behavior and the effects these patterns have on their lives.

Psychic cleansing, one of the dimensions of the clarification process, is accomplished by showing clients how to release distress associated with past

traumatic events. In many cases, the trauma has been so intense that the client retains only a vague, murky recollection of the incident and has a strong aversion to recalling any of the details. The cleansing process helps the client trigger clearer memories. It is similar to reviewing a movie rerun of an incident that was uncomfortable and confusing when first experienced but became comprehensible and even amusing when viewed with detachment and objectivity. The “rerun” is introduced verbally by the client with the counselor giving technical advice on ways of getting clarity. The catharsis occurs when the client locates the point of impact where distress was first experienced and is able to identify the fears and belief structures crystallized in that moment.

The client, guided by the counselor, learns to defuse the highly charged emotions associated with the original trauma. The result is the ability to recall the incident with detachment and objectivity.

Another aspect of the clarification process is providing clients with information about the “maps of consciousness” set forth by Ichazo. A number of charts or templates for measuring the territory of the psyche are communicated when relevant. The ones most commonly used are: the “levels of subjectivity,” the systems of the body, the “domains of consciousness,” the personality types or “fixations,” and the “doors of compensation” — ways we attempt to alleviate pain. With this additional information, clients become

able to begin seeing their behavior in greater perspective, increasing their understanding of their behavior and allowing change to occur.

2. Chua K'a, muscle tension release. Many therapies either implicitly or explicitly accept a mind-body dualism. In Holistic Counseling, the mind and the body are viewed as one. If the physical body is constricted, inelastic, or imbalanced, so is the mind. "When we liberate the tensions in our body, we also liberate psychic tensions, because every group of muscular cells is connected to our brain." (Ichazo, 1976b) Chua K'a is the basic form of muscle-tension release used in Holistic Counseling. Its function is to release tension stored in the body, to cleanse the body of toxins, and to restore maximum flexibility of thought as well as of action. After pressure is applied along the bones, more vitality is experienced within the body, muscles and tendons return to their proper positions, and the body/mind becomes an effective, healthy instrument for perceiving and responding to the world.

3. Exercise. This is important because the body must be kept in good physical condition if it is to be psychologically healthy. Holistic Counseling emphasizes use of such activities as Psychocalisthenics, Hatha Yoga and T'ai Chi Chuan. All of these exercise forms increase the flexibility and elasticity of the body, restore and maintain the balance of body and psyche, increase the flow of vital energy, and elicit a sense of inner calm.

4. Relaxation. Even though the above exercises condition and relax the body, there are others that are taught because their primary benefit is relaxation. Included in this group are breathing and deep relaxation exercises. Many Americans, unfamiliar with these simple, effective methods of relaxing and regenerating, benefit greatly from this instruction.

5. Meditation. Three different types of meditation are used to activate the healing energies within the body: a) meditations with repeated words or phrases (mantra) are used to quiet the constant useless chatter in the head; b) meditations with precise body positions are used to make the body receptive to positive emotions; and c) meditations with visualization and visual symbols awaken the body's natural healing energies. These meditations are selectively taught and assigned to complement the work in the sessions.

6. Nutrition. The idea that the food we eat is a primary source of energy upon which our physical and mental wellness depends is gaining wide acceptance. However, most people know little about the real benefits of certain foods and the dangers of the chemical/commercial food production and preparation processes. The holistic counselor devotes attention to such areas as the significance of food selection, preparation and combining, as well as to food additives, preservatives, supplements, and to the importance of the periodic cleansing diets or fasts.

APPLICATIONS

Holistic Counseling has application in individual and group work with adults and adolescents who are facing difficult and stressful life situations. It may be used with equal effectiveness for couples, families, and groups of adults or adolescents who have similar conflicts or concerns.

It has also been beneficial for persons suffering from psychophysiological disorders, such as hypertension, arthritis, and colitis as well as with post- and pre-heart attack patients who have been prepared to adopt a definitive program of stress reduction. Business and professional persons experiencing situational depressions, those experiencing tension headaches or extreme body tensions have also found relief and obtained insights for more satisfying living. Businessmen and women experiencing anxiety or indecision about career choices, as well as those in the throes of mid-life crises, have gained assistance from Holistic Counseling. Couples who have found their relationship in difficulty or on the verge of failure have found ways of resolving their situations.

Up to the present, this nontraditional approach has been used only in private practice. With the appropriate facilities and supportive environment, however, the approach can be equally effective in corporate and educational settings.

