

Psychotherapy Guidebook

INSTIGATION THERAPY

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Table of Contents

[DEFINITION](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[TECHNIQUE](#)

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DEFINITION

Instigation Therapy is closely allied to behavior therapy. It refers to the systematic use of homework assignments that the client completes outside the therapy hour. Planned jointly by the therapist and client, Instigation Therapy puts the client to work outside the consulting room in an effort to increase efficiency, enhance self-regulatory skills, and to promote transfer of training.

In addition to the increased efficiency that comes from putting the client to work using the hours of the week he is not in therapy, Instigation Therapy results in a number of benefits often not achieved by other forms of therapy. For example, Second and Bachman (1964) noted the increase in self-control skills acquired by clients who perceive themselves as the principal agent of change during therapy. Additional reports by Phillips (1966) and Davidson (1968) have shown that instigation procedures result in a greater motivation and maintenance of changes resulting from therapy.

HISTORY

Although in this writer's opinion, few traditional psychotherapists make adequate use of homework, the basic notions surrounding Instigation Therapy are not new. Even before the arrival of behavior therapy, writers such as Dunlap (1932), Herzberg (1941), and Karpman (1949) pointed out the advantages that come from putting clients to work outside the therapy hour.

Three modern developments have helped make Instigation Therapy an important therapeutic endeavor. The first of these three developments was the work of Kanfer and Phillips (1966, 1969), who coined the term "instigation therapy" and provided the vital theoretical concept for this approach.

The second development was the work of professionals like Masters and Johnson (1970), who make systematic homework assignments an important part of their therapy with men and women with sex problems. However, the most important work to date has been done by Shelton and Ackerman (1974) and Shelton (in press). They took the abstract notion of Instigation Therapy and translated it into more than 150 examples of homework assignments useful with a wide variety of client ailments. Their study was a landmark in as much as they were the first to discuss homework as the focus of therapy rather than as a seldom-used adjunct.

TECHNIQUES

Instigation therapists believe counseling and psychotherapy to be primarily an educational, skill-building endeavor. The more clients participate in the endeavor, the greater their chances of making desired changes. Ideally, the client and therapist co-participate in treatment; they work together to clarify, select, and attain the goals of therapy. A cooperative rapport is best established between a client and therapist who share a bond of empathy, warmth, and genuine caring. Besides conveying empathy, warmth, and genuineness, the effective therapist is an active, directive teacher, expert in skill training. A friend to his client, the professional also guides the client toward attitudes and behavior that will increase the client's ability to live a more satisfying life. Under the direction of the therapist, the client practices new behavior and develops new attitudes. Homework provides an ideal vehicle for clients to extend practice of new skills from the therapy hour to the world in which they live.

The above beliefs about psychotherapy leads this writer to follow a particular sequence, consisting of six steps, in conducting therapy:

1. The careful identification of client problems.
2. A precise definition of therapy objectives in behavioral terms.
3. A contractual agreement between the client and therapist to work

toward these objectives.

4. A rank ordering of the therapeutic intervention so that the first objective pursued will make the most difference to the client and is, in the judgment of the therapist, technically the most feasible to pursue.
5. Selection of skills and methods of skill training acceptable to the client and effective for working toward the first behavioral objective.
6. Systematic skill training using homework assignments as integral parts of behavioral skill building.

When client and therapist agree upon the behavioral objectives of the therapy contract, work toward attaining these begins. The therapist directs the latter portion of most therapy hours so that a precise set of homework instructions is written before the sessions end. At that time, the reason for and nature of the homework is carefully explained to the client by the therapist. Summarized homework instructions usually are written on NCR (no carbon required) paper so both therapist and client have a copy. The homework provides continued practice for the client in acquiring the knowledge, attitudes, or skills upon which the therapy session was focused.

The format for homework includes one or more of the following instructions:

1. A do statement. "Read, practice, observe, say, count ... some kind of homework/'
2. A quantity statement. "Talk three times about...; spend thirty minutes three times...; give four compliments per day...; write a list of at least ten ..."
3. A record statement. "Count and record the number of compliments; each time he hits, mark a on the chart; whenever that thought comes to you, write a on the..."
4. A bring statement. "Bring ... your list; the chart; the Cards; your spouse ... to your next appointment."
5. A contingency statement. "Call for your next appointment after you have done...; for each activity you attend, one dollar will be deducted...; each minute spent doing ____ will earn you ____; one-tenth of your penalty deposit will be forfeited for each assignment not completed."

An example of this format, as written out for the client, is the following:

1. Both read two marital papers.
2. Discuss 3 times for fifteen to thirty minutes each time.
3. Write separate lists of at least three behaviors you want more of from spouse. (These are positive behaviors, not negative ones.)
4. Make next appointment after above is done.

5. Bring lists with you to next appointment.

The therapist should give manageable amounts of homework. Early in therapy, especially following the first session, a single item of homework may be enough. As the professional becomes more acquainted with the client's attitudes, expectations, and habits, the amount and complexity of homework may be increased. Excessive amounts of homework require too much planning time, may frustrate the client, and simply may not get done.