

Psychotherapy Guidebook

A close-up photograph of a black butterfly with white spots on its wings, perched on a red, fleshy flower. The butterfly is the central focus, with its wings spread. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green.

SELF PSYCHOTHERAPY

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Self Psychotherapy

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DEFINITION

Self Psychotherapy is a natural psychological process of self-emergence that is activated by “spontaneous introspection,” a technique of looking into one’s own mind. The subject turns his attention internally to observe those mental images that appear by their own power across his internal psychic screen. This activates a dynamic psychological process that completes any undone steps in personality development and maturation.

HISTORY

Self Psychotherapy has its roots in the psychoanalytic techniques of “free association,” and introspective technique in which the subject turns his attention internally to his feelings, images, and ideas. This type of introspection, as used in classical psychoanalysis, focuses especially on those images, feelings, and ideas that refer to the relationship between the psychoanalyst and the subject. Self Psychotherapy takes this freedom of association a step further in that the subject is free to become emotionally involved with any spontaneous images without restriction.

TECHNIQUE

To begin self therapy, the subject simply looks internally at the mental images that come spontaneously across his “mind’s eye.” He closes his eyes, clears his mind of thinking and daydreaming, looks straight ahead, and focuses internally on those pictures that appear on their own power (Steinkirchner, 1974).

This spontaneous introspection is similar to turning on a television set without knowing in advance what program is scheduled for that time. You flick a switch and simply watch the screen for whatever picture appears. You do not cause the picture to appear; it comes from inside the television apparatus. Suddenly, on the screen you see an image, and only then do you know what it will depict.

In precise parallel, the subject turns on his psychic set by closing his eyes and looking intently for whatever mental pictures that begin to appear spontaneously on his internal psychic screen. This deceptively simple technique activates the process of Self Psychotherapy.

The basic psychology of this spontaneous introspection is that it starts with definite mental pictures. From these psychological images come ideas, meaningful insights, and emotional reactions. When people first attempt this unique introspection, they often err by turning their attention to random

ideas or thoughts to produce significant imagery. Actually, unpremeditated pictures themselves stimulate the production of thoughts that are significant to self psychotherapy. Thus, the rule of thumb for the subject is: look, don't think. He should look for the spontaneous picture in his mind's eye, for this is the precise technique that activates the Self Psychotherapy process.

Visual images are usually the first to be observed. However, during the course of Self Psychotherapy, images from all of the senses show themselves: sights, sounds, conversations, things smelled, tasted, eaten, touched with pleasure or pain, heat or cold, etc.

From these spontaneous images come ideas, associations, judgments, and later reasoning. There are important emotional reactions to the imagery and its meaning.

After about three hours of this introspection, the imagery will begin to show a particular theme from the subject's childhood. This feels like a "settling into" a childhood situation, a feeling as though part of the psyche is living in the situation pictured in the imagery. This is when strong emotions are felt — emotions that are quite appropriate to the scene observed. Gradually, the imagery becomes clearer, less disguised. As the subject forces himself to concentrate on the imagery, the story being played out develops and opens up more completely in its meaning. He begins to relive an

emotional conflict from his childhood that has become conscious.

During the first part of Self Psychotherapy, the most important disruptions to the personality development and maturation emerge. These emotionally charged issues erupt from the unconscious part of the personality in a global or gross form. As psychotherapy proceeds, the psyche deals with separate parts of these major conflicts as they affect development and maturation of each psychological function.

After this initial phase of therapy, we begin to see the emergence of just two different kinds of conflicts: 1) those dealing with issues of development or 2) those involved with conflicts of personality maturation.

Maturation conflict occurs between several functions; e.g., between intellect and emotion, and the resolution is always toward some kind of getting together and balancing of the conflicting functions.

Developmental conflicts are solely involved with individual psychological function; e.g., memory, the emotion of anger, etc. A developmental conflict is concerned with a more basic step in personality growth because it focuses, simply, on the functioning of an individual psychological faculty, such as the oral function of taking nourishment. This will come up in psychotherapy, for example, when there is guilt blocking the pathway between oral desire and food, which is its natural object. The

developmental conflict is resolved by therapeutic efforts that remove the guilt that stands between the oral faculty and its object, food (Aquinas, 1946).

Maturation and development both contribute to personality growth and are the natural emergence of the personality potentials. They are the important dynamism (along with conscious determination) that cause the Self Psychotherapy process to proceed successfully.

APPLICATIONS

This technique is limited to the resolutions of the psychoneuroses. It is not applicable to the resolution of psychoses or borderline states because in these disturbances the personality is not strong enough to tolerate the reliving and resolution of unconscious, primary emotional conflicts.