

Psychotherapy Guidebook

SENOI DREAM GROUP THERAPY

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Senoi Dream Group Therapy

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DEFINITION

Senoi Dream Group Therapy organizes the experience and telling of dreams within natural and therapeutic social groups according to several simple rules of conduct. The rules emphasize conduct within dreams and between dreamers in waking life to achieve the integration of dreamed private experience with waking interpersonal actions. Adequate action toward oneself and others is held more important than is adequate understanding of dream imagery.

HISTORY

Senoi Dream Group Therapy was initially based on Stewart's (1951, 1953) discovery of systems of dream use among the Senoi people of Malaya. In 1969, I began utilizing the principles of the Senoi dream work, first in classes on dreaming, then as leader and member of dream groups (Greenleaf, 1973). Several students of mine and psychologists have since initiated dream therapies based on Senoi or other ancient approaches to dreaming and to life. Many techniques in psychotherapy have long been in the public domain in

one form or another, but they are “rediscovered” from time to time and put to use in modern life.

TECHNIQUE

First and most important: tell your dreams. Tell them to your mate; tell them to your children; tell them to the people who appear in your dreams. This can be done at home, at work, at school. Second, listen to the dreams of the people you live and work with. Third, continue unfinished dreams, either the next night, or in waking daydreams, or active imagination (dreams continued in the presence of a sympathetic guide or friend).

Dreams are most often interrupted by fear. It's crucial to continue the dream to a successful conclusion. So, if you dream of falling, continue the dream to see where you fall. If you dream of a contest or battle, carry the fight through with the aid of friends summoned in the dream. If you dream of love, carry the lovemaking through in the dream until the partners are satisfied.

The Senoi suggest ways of dealing with the most common emotions in dreams. Fear: call on your allies and friends to help you. Continue to fly, or travel in the dream. Anger: fight monsters until you subdue them, then they will become allies in your later dreams. Also, give a gift in waking life to those you've injured in your dreams. Request a gift in waking life of those who've injured you in dreams. Lust: within the dream, make love with whomever you

choose. In waking life, if the dream lover is available to you, court him or her. Curiosity: explore, investigate, pursue the dream. In waking life, test the discoveries and plans made in dreams to see if they work out.

Besides these principles, the Senoi suggest ways of dealing with important figures encountered in dreams, those majestic, or frightening or helpful images that visit us: the “archetypes,” or common figures of human emotion and thought, which C. G. Jung has described (1952). In daydreams, or in nightly dreaming, we’re advised to talk and to strike a bargain with these figures. Inquire what they wish of us, and then, if we agree wholeheartedly to give to them (love, attention, activity of some kind), we find that they will guide us in future dreams and in our waking lives. Often, the shadowy side or monstrous aspect of our own selves appears to us in dreams as frightening. By incorporating this side of ourselves, we grow less afraid and more whole (Greenleaf, 1975). An example:

GUIDE: What did you dream?

DREAMER: The image of a grotesque face: jowls, fat lips, a stubbly beard. His mouth always moving, angry, hostile.

GUIDE: Wrestle him to the ground and see how he can help you.

DREAMER: He says, “Death” to me, defiantly. Then I wrestle him. He says, “Live, or I’ll spit in your eye.”

GUIDE: Ask him how you can be of help to him.

DREAMER: He says, "Cuddle me and love me." He's awful, but I do it. He's not so grotesque anymore.

APPLICATIONS

Methods of dealing with dream imagery during dreaming, or in waking imagination, are practiced in all forms of psychotherapy (Greenleaf, 1977). Indeed, all forms of human interaction use the sort of methods we think of as therapeutic, from calming a child after a nightmare to rousing the passions of athletes before a contest. Mental rehearsal and mental problem solving utilize these techniques. The Senoi sense that we may share our fearful and curious dreams, gain strength from our families, friends, and communities, and pit human love against the fearsome demons of the night. This makes all the difference between using the wonders of the private images of life and hiding from them in fear and bitterness. Senoi Dream Group Therapy is an attempt to use the communal sense to relieve this fearful isolation.

Some of the application of dream principles comes from the spontaneous good sense of people confronted with challenge. The therapeutic application of dream principles is necessary only when fear or violence overcome the heart. The first two dreams of my three-year-old son show the deep-sources of the Senoi principles:

"I dreamed me and my friend are outside and we hit the monsters with

baseball bats and knock them down dead.”

Then, several nights later: “I dreamed of the deer jumping through each other’s horns and I riding one. And I, swimming with the ducks in the water.