

Psychotherapy Guidebook

SEPARATION THERAPY

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Separation Therapy

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Separation Therapy

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DEFINITION

Separation Therapy is based on an attempt to produce a separation in our consciousness between the adult and the child within all of us. The purpose of this is to prevent the child part from sabotaging our rational effective adult functioning and, concurrently, to prevent the adult part from putting restraints on the childlike, fun-loving, free-spirited, creative emotional parts of us. We feel it is the lack of a clear separation between these two parts of us that creates many of our difficulties both in functioning and in enjoyment.

HISTORY

Though there have been many other psychotherapeutic systems that have employed the idea of a split (e.g., Freud's id, ego, and superego and Berne's parent, adult, and child), this system did not evolve from an intellectual continuation of these or other systems. Actually, it evolved clinically. A patient in group therapy spontaneously began to conceive of his problems in terms of this conflict and began to initiate dialogues between the

child and the adult parts of himself (somewhat similarly to some Gestalt therapy techniques). The idea was picked up by some other group members and supported by the therapist. Within a short time many of the members of the group were employing this technique — sometimes within the group, but mainly by themselves at home. Many patients, some of whom had had years of psychotherapy, reported remarkable results from the use of this technique. It grew and finally evolved into a specific conceptualization of a theory and technique by the authors.

TECHNIQUE

This is the most novel contribution of Separation Therapy. The person using the technique imagines himself as a child, from birth to age five, standing at his “weak side” (left if he is right-handed), about five feet away from him. He imagines the effective adult part of himself at his strong side, about five feet away. Then he commences a dialogue between these two parts. When he is a child, he speaks in a child’s voice and tilts his head up. When he is an adult, he speaks in an adult voice and tilts his head down. Out of these dialogues he gets a better understanding of the needy and happy child in himself and also of the effective adult. Actually, these two parts may have been so intertwined as to preclude a clear awareness of either of them. Having a consciousness of their existence, he may subsequently be able to improve his functioning as an adult and increase the gratification of his

emotional needs as a child.

APPLICATIONS

This technique has been used only in out-patient work. It has not been used in hospitalized patients, though there is no reason to believe it might not be effective there. It has been used in nonpatient groups (such as the wives of compulsive gamblers) and in patients whose diagnoses ranged from neuroses or character disorders to borderline personalities or chronic schizophrenia. It has not been used with drug addictions, psychopathic personalities, or organic brain damage problems.