Emotion-focused therapy: The
Transforming Power of Affect
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Overview of Therapy Process

Process:

• Empathic Attunement to clients’ emotional meanings or feelings
• Communication of relational attitudes
• Facilitation of particular modes of emotional processing and meaning creations at particular times

Goal:

• Self-reorganization of emotion schemes and personal meaning
Emotions: Fundamentally Adaptive

- Emotions tell us what is personally important & whether things are going our way (information)
  - Emotions help us to survive by providing an efficient, automatic way of responding rapidly to important situations
- Emotions prepare us for action:
- Emotions involve wishes/needs, which generate action
- Emotions integrate experience; give us meaning, value & direction
- Basic concepts: Emotion Schemes; Emotion Assessment. Emotion Change Principles
Affect/Emotion/Feeling

Feelings are the leaves

Emotions are the branches

Affect is the trunk and roots
Emotion Scheme Concept

• Scheme is a pattern of mental organization.
• Provides implicit higher-order organization for experiencing
• Experience and action producing
  – a plan of action not for action
• Self-organizing processes, not things
• Consists of component/elements linked together in a network
Emotion Scheme (Narrative Structure)

Belief: I’m going to fail on expectation

- Visual image of mother's face in context
- Tactile sense
- Sensation/feeling in my stomach
- Narrative unfolding

Me

Fear

Mother

Action tendency to shrink away

Rapid breathing

Heart rate
Narrative Structure

• Emergence and an unfolding over time.

• Nonverbal or imagistic representation

• Protagonist with intentions engaged in an action with a plotline

• Beginning middle and end

• Implications and consequences
Neuroscience
• Neurons are interconnected within complex networks

• Most emerge in the first 3 years

• Functional units for different tasks—distinct areas of brain are active during specific tasks

• Located on different hierarchical levels

• Networks and pathways can change
Real Network Structure in the Human Brain.
Figure 3. Emergence of the Neuronal Interconnection System in the Infants’ Brain
Emotion Schemes

1. Represent internally our emotional reactions plus the evoking stimulus situation.

2. Later we represent our conceptual learning and beliefs associated with our emotional experience.

3. Result is a “high level” synthesis which when evoked provides our sense of things such as feeling unsure, confident, vulnerable or “on top of the world.”
Assessment

1. Primary
   - Biologically adaptive
   - Maladaptive

2. Secondary

3. Instrumental
SIX MAJOR EMOTIONAL CHANGE PROCESSES

A) Accessing Emotion

1. Increase Emotional Awareness & Symbolization in the Context of Salient Personal Stories.
Symbolizing emotional experience in awareness in order to make sense of one’s experience. What am I feeling?

2. Express Emotion.
Expressing changes the self and changes interactions both by mobilizing and revealing self. Overcome control and inhibition. Completion of expression. Neuro-chemical changes.
B) Modulating & Understanding

3. Enhance Emotion Regulation

4. Reflect on Emotion.
C) Transforming Emotion

5) **Change Emotion with Emotion.** An alternate self-organization, set of emotion schematic memories, or “voices” in the personality based on primary emotions are accessed by (a) attentional re-allocation or (b) focus on a new need/goal (c) changing interactions. The maladaptive emotional response is synthesized with, or transformed by, more adaptive emotional response.

6. **Change Emotion with New Interpersonal Experience.**

New lived experience with another provides a corrective emotional experience. Disconfirms pathogenic beliefs. Provides interpersonal soothing. New success experience changes emotion.
Transforming Emotion

1. Completion/Detachment/Habituation/Extinction
   - Blocked
   - Needs to be unblocked
   - Let it run its course
   - Arising & passing away
   - Letting go
   - Desensitizing/Exposure

2. Changing Emotion with Emotion
   - Undoing
   - Generating Novelty

= Synthesis
Accessing Alternate Emotion
0. Empathic relationship
1. Shift attention to present subdominant emotion
2. Access adaptive need/goal and associated emotion
3. Expressive enactment of alternate emotion
4. Imagery to evoke emotion
5. Evoke emotion memory of alternate emotion
6. Mood induction via music
7. Humour
8. Cognitive creation of new meaning
9. Therapist expresses emotion for client
10. Relationship evokes new emotion
Basic Change Process

Secondary Distress
↓
Primary Maladaptive
↓
NEED
↓
Primary Adaptive