WHAT IS REALITY THERAPY?

Reality Therapy was developed in the mid-sixties by William Glasser MD, an American Psychiatrist and psychologist and its techniques, theory and wider applications continue to evolve at his hands.

Reality Therapy is a method of therapy which teaches people to understand the needs that have developed through the evolution of our species and that drive all human beings; to make more effective choices to meet those needs; to take control of their own lives; and to develop the strength to handle the stresses and problems of life.

Choice Theory Psychology is the theoretical base for Reality Therapy. Modern cybernetic research supports the Choice Theory idea that all behaviours – conscious or non-conscious, efficient or non-efficient, normal or abnormal – are chosen as the best option we have at the time in the attempt to control external and internal variables (circumstances) to meet our needs. Choice Theory suggests that the only person I can control is myself and assumptions that I can control others or that they can control me tend to be counter-productive and ineffective. Learning the principles of Choice Theory and applying them to make a more need-satisfying life is a key task of the Reality Therapy process. This is an optimistic, transformative process for the client where s/he becomes aware that almost all behaviour is chosen and so there are possibilities to choose less suffering and more effective behaviour.

The Reality Therapy model places unsatisfactory or non-existent relationships at the source of almost all human problems. The goal of Reality Therapy is to help people reconnect with the important people in their lives.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM A REALITY THERAPY PSYCHOTHERAPIST

The Reality Therapy Psychotherapist will work to build a trusting, empathic, deep relationship with the client from the start. The relationship will be characterised by understanding and by honesty, and may include supportive involvement outside the counselling office.

- There will be a clear focus on the present. What happened in the past that was painful has a great deal to do with who we are today, but continuously revisiting this painful past can contribute little or nothing to what we need to do now: improve an important, present relationship. Therefore, the past will not be discussed too much, because the Reality Therapy model suggests that almost all human problems are caused by unsatisfying relationships in the present. It is true, of course, that there are times when the past is manifest in present experience, which can cause the past to have new meaning, and where this is important it will be explored in therapy

- Symptoms and complaints will not be focused on very much either, since these are understood as the ways that clients choose to deal with unsatisfying relationships.

- Accepting that the behaviour of every person is chosen to satisfy her/his needs, the client realizes that the only person whose behaviour s/he can control is her/his self; it means s/he has to give up the attempts to control
the behaviour of others; therefore, the focus is away from blaming, or criticising or complaining about others, and towards making changes in our own behaviours that will get us closer to a need-satisfying life.

• The therapist will help clients understand the holistic nature of their behaviour, how their actions and thoughts, their feelings and their body physiology all work together as they try to live a need-satisfying life. This means bringing the focus on what they can control directly in the present to improve their relationships and their life – that is, their actions and thoughts. Less time is spent on what they cannot control directly; that is, changes to feelings and physiology. Feelings and physiology can be changed, but only as part of changes in acting and thinking.

• The therapist will remain non-judgmental and non-coercive, but will encourage clients to judge all you are doing by the choice theory principle of self-evaluation: “Is what I am doing getting me closer to the people I need? Is it getting me what I want?” If the choice of behaviours is not working in the client’s view, then the therapist helps the client to find new behaviours that lead to a better connection with the important people in his/her life.

• To teach the client Choice Theory and to give her/him the experience of connectedness and care the therapist will always be patient and supportive but will keep focusing on the source of the problem – the disconnectedness. Counselees who have been disconnected for a long time will find it especially difficult to reconnect. They are often so involved in the symptom they are choosing that they have lost sight of the fact that they need to reconnect.

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