

Transactional Analysis Time Limited Therapy (Counselling)

Background

Transactional Analysis (TA) was developed by Dr Eric Berne in the 1950s and 1960s. Berne recognised that people repeated patterns of behaviour that were directly related to their experience and what they learned as a child. This led to the critical understanding that despite being damaging or inhibiting to the individual, patterns of behaviour are frequently repeated in adulthood outside of our conscious awareness.

Berne concluded that if people gained insight to these damaging behaviours they could re-learn and conduct their lives differently. This gives rise to an effective cognitive behavioural therapy which is very powerful in situations where availability or cost limit the time in counselling for the resolution of a problem.

Contractual Method

A key part of TA practice is contractual method. The thinking behind this is based on a belief that all adults who are not mentally incapacitated, have the power to make decisions and take responsibility for their behaviour. To be a valid contract in TA terms, certain conditions must be met:

- What is contracted must be possible
- It must be stated in positive terms

- Both the counsellor and the client must know when the contract has been completed
 - It must be safe, both physically and emotionally
 - The cost must be understood and accepted
- Much of this is obvious in the making of any agreement but it is surprising how often in everyday life aspects of this are ignored and then we wonder what went wrong.

The Process of Counselling

Counselling starts with the counsellor taking basic information about the client, their life situation and what they want from coming to counselling. With this information the client is invited to make a contract for what they want to achieve in this work. An initial contract may be to explore exactly what is the client does want

to counselling. Through the duration of the counselling, the counsellor's role is to help the client find viable solutions to the issues which, with a cognitive understanding they can translate it into behavioural change, thus finding new ways of relating to their situation and to the people around them.

A viable contract is established, which will include agreement about the duration of the work; this may be dictated by the funding or referring authority. With a clear contract or goal the client is invited to talk about their experience in relation to the issues they bring

In the course of this work other issues often come to the fore; in some cases these can be addressed within the agreed contract and available time; in other cases, if possible, a new contract is negotiated or the client may need to be made aware that issues requiring longer term work are apparent.

Counselling versus Psychotherapy

There is continual and unresolved debate about the difference between counselling and psychotherapy. These range from the extreme positions of “there is no difference” to “they are completely different disciplines”. Often the position taken appears to have a political dimension and there may be a vested interest behind the opinion. It seems that the government is heading for a position where psychotherapy is identified and understood by its modality and counselling by its function in relation to various client groups.

Little of this feels right. A general consensus might be that counselling is short term, say four to twenty sessions and psychotherapy longer term ranging from months to years.

CPTI Brief Therapy

As will be clear from the foregoing, we believe that TA counselling can be effective with a broad range of problems, and for many clients (patients) it will be at least as effective as solutions such as medication, and may provide long lasting change and a permanent solution to problems that cause distress, break up of relationships and lost working time.

Conclusion

TA is an effective and flexible counselling or brief therapy modality that can be applied in many situations and with many different client groups. A benefit of TA counselling training with CPTI is the flexible structure of the training programmes that permit trainees to

Whilst agreeing with this in principle, we prefer to think in terms of the presenting issue or what the client brings. Clients bringing specific problems within their social context, such as marital or relationship problems, with work related problems, with reactive depression or anxiety around identified topics, can be defined as requiring counselling. In these cases a short term mainly cognitive process may bear fruit. When clients present with more general life problems and use phrases like “it’s always been this way” or when they talk about long term dissatisfaction with life or question who they are, longer term work may be indicated as beneficial and that this will go deeper than the cognitive level.

Whilst promoting counselling as beneficial to many people, we also caution against a “one solution fits all” approach. For some people counselling is not suitable, either because they need to engage in long term work or because they are not willing to take responsibility for themselves by engaging with a counsellor to find a solution that is right for them.

change or add to their training goals. For example a trainees who embark on training with the goal of a counselling diploma, may continue to an MSc in TA Counselling or to a psychotherapy qualification.

© CPTI 2008 ref TIS6

See other CPTI Training Information Sheets for detailed descriptions of the training programmes, TA and the available qualifications. Training Information Sheets are downloadable from www.cpti.info in PDF format or can be requested as emails from our office.

Counselling & Psychotherapy Training Institute

86 Causewayside, Edinburgh EH9 1PY

enquiries@cpti.info 0131 667 6173 or 0845 450 1547

