



Clear Thinking Issue 096

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In this month's issue;

- How to terminate therapy with your clients
- How to lift depression quickly

How to terminate therapy with your clients

3 ways to signal the end of therapy

These days, knowing how to terminate therapy elegantly is a core therapeutic skill. Gone are the days when psychotherapy was supposed to continue maybe twice a week for decades. In fact, the international guidelines for the treatment of depression suggest that if your depressed client doesn't feel significantly better after five sessions you should refer them on to another professional (1).

It's not right to keep someone in therapy when they no longer need it. And remember – they're paying! If someone sometimes wants to 'catch up' or 'just talk' once in a while, that's fine, of course. But who was it who said: "A therapist should assist where they can but not leave footprints in their client's life"? Therapists supply a *service*.

If you went to a lawyer for help but then continued to visit and pay them on a regular basis *even after they'd completed the work*, you'd kind of want them to draw your attention to that, would you not?

Terminating therapy as soon as possible isn't about throwing clients out when they still need help. It's about setting clear guidelines and helping them *be emotionally ready* for their therapy to end.

So what do we need to do?

1 Ensure basic emotional needs are met *outside* of the therapy room

Everyone has basic needs for attention and intimacy. If you don't actively encourage and help your client to meet these needs *outside* of their therapy with you, then they'll feel dependent on you. If you're someone's only real source of human contact and attention, then of course they'll *feel* as if they can't stop seeing you. But don't confuse this with 'successful therapy'.

Clean therapy happens when the therapist:

- understands that the role of the therapist is to help the client with specific problems and not to meet their basic needs on an ongoing basis
- helps the clients be clear about what these needs are and how to meet them effectively in their own life

2 Draw their attention back to their original therapy goals

This is why it's so important to be clear with someone *from the beginning* by establishing very clear and measurable goals. If nobody knows when therapy has been successful (because no clear goals were ever defined), then nobody knows when it's supposed to finish. Imagine a builder doing this to you when working on your house.

So from the beginning you need to build in the expectation that therapy will end and clarify the parameters that will govern it. You'll be saying things like

So we'll know you won't need to see me anymore when

- *you're sleeping better*
- *you feel more confident sexually*
- *you have stopped smoking*

The end should be there from the beginning.

When these goals have been achieved, you draw the client's attention back to them:

You came to see me because you wanted to [...] Now that we have achieved those goals to your satisfaction, was there anything else you wanted to work on before we wrap up therapy?

3 Make it clear from the beginning that therapy will be finite

Of course, you can't always tell exactly how many sessions a person will need to get over a depression, or to successfully stop drinking, but you can give them an indication. So I might say:

Many people can be helped within a few sessions and often times feel better even after a single session. (Remember the power of the placebo effect!)

If they ask what happens if they *don't* feel better, I might suggest that if after four or five sessions they feel they haven't benefitted (above and beyond enjoying the companionship of therapy), then I will refer them onto someone else.

If someone wants to pay me to be a professional ear every couple of months, that's fine – as long as neither of us think that anything else is happening and I'm clear with the client that this is what we are doing. You don't need to throw someone out in the cold, but what you do need to do is ensure the outside is 'warm enough' for them.

Nothing does, or should, last forever – including therapy.

Note

(1) Diagnosis, Vol. 2 Treatment Aspect. United States Public Health Service Agency.

How to lift depression quickly

When people become depressed, it takes over their lives. They *feel* and *believe* that it's going to go on... and on... and on... When they come for therapy, they expect that it's going to take ages to deal with their complicated problems - and it's not uncommon for them to expect that their therapy will never end.

It will come as a huge surprise to many if you know how to help them overcome their problems in a relatively short time (and say goodbye to them) because you are a graduate of our online course on how to lift depression quickly.

The next course starts on Tuesday 7 September 2010 and you can participate from anywhere in the world. And you still have time to take advantage of the Early Bird Discount of 25% - we're holding this open until 17 August 2010.

See you in a fortnight.

Mark Tyrrell
Co-Founder
Uncommon Knowledge
Psychology trainers since 1995

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