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Introduction

Ruth has a lot on her plate, is feeling overwhelmed and is asking for help in how to cope with the many demands made on her time and energy, and how to cope better with tension and stress, unnecessary strain, and avoid panic attacks and feelings of anxiety. Her therapist suggests self-management skills, a relaxation technique involving breathing and visualization strategies, muscle relaxation and mantras to help Ruth calm down, and to sleep better.

My Assessment of These Behavioral Therapy Self-Management Skills

I am not particularly impressed with this advice. I think that with all Ruth has going on, and all that is on her mind and required of her, this simplistic self-management advice through relaxation techniques would only, in my opinion, cause more stress. I would think to myself, "I'm wasting more time and paying for this?!"

I don't think behavioral therapy is a therapeutic modality that can stand on its own. I do think breathing and relaxation skills can be added to a larger strategy, but for it to play such a central role I do not think is all that helpful. Although certain kinds of meditation is helpful, I do not agree with using mantras with strange words like "Om" with ties to Eastern spirituality. Mindfulness connected to yoga is also dangerous. Why? Because whether the therapist or client are aware of it or not, they are dabbling in spiritual things that can be spiritually dangerous. Caution is required when dealing with the spiritual. Why? Because there is, of course, a spirit world that goes along with 'being spiritual' and you don't want to invite the wrong things in. When a therapist asks a client to clear her mind and repeat a mantra like 'Om,' for example, he doesn't know what he's doing. We may be counselors who are Christian, and not necessarily

Christian counselors, but since we are Christians, believers in Christ, and believers in the existence of a spirit world, we need to be aware of these things.

I am aware, of course, that mindfulness using yoga and eastern practices have been empirically analyzed and have been found in some cases to be effective. Negative effects from wrong spiritual practices may show up several years later. When they do finally show up, it may not be clear what caused the negative effects on the mind, body, and soul, which can filter to any and every area of the infected person's life. The spirit world affects everyone differently, but the enemy is "subtle," as the Bible teaches us, and often (or usually) operates in a way that the negative effects are not attributed to spiritual problems.

Other Behavioral Techniques for Ruth

While I agree that "mindfulness, acceptance, and compassion-based treatments [can be] effective in promoting physical and psychological health (Corey, p. 254)" Ruth's problem is not just about stress, it's about time management. Her therapy needs to include more than just focusing on relaxing, meditating and being aware of body sensations. I would talk to Ruth about practicing interpersonal effectiveness which "teaches clients to ask for what they need and how to say no while maintaining self-respect and relationships with others (Corey, p. 252)." As Corey goes on to say, this skill helps clients meet their goals while not damaging relationships that are important to them. Ruth needs to learn how to be able to communicate her needs with her family, so that she is able to free up more of her schedule, manage her life better, and get at least some of what she wants.

Even though mindfulness-based cognitive therapy is applied to the treatment of depression, I would introduce the concept of mindfulness as a way of developing self-compassion and kindness toward oneself. I would "assist [Ruth] in developing an attitude of

open awareness and acceptance of what is rather than being self-critical (Corey, p. 254).” In practice, “when [Ruth acknowledges her] shortcomings without critical judgement, [she] can begin to treat [herself] with kindness (Corey, p. 254)” and learn not to driver herself to extremes that cause more stress.

Behavioral Approach Critique

The good news about behavioral therapy is that it has branched out to take into account thought processes, what’s happening internally with a person. For many decades it excluded references to ‘mediational concepts’ like thinking, attitudes and values. I still don’t think it works well as a stand-alone therapy. I think behavioral therapy can be helpful as part of a larger strategy, but I do not think it is a comprehensive therapy. I do like the social learning approach (social cognitive approach) in behavioral therapy which states that “the environmental events on behavior are mainly determined by cognitive processes governing how environmental influences are perceived by an individual and how these are interpreted (Corey, p. 235).” It brings in thinking and reasoning. It states people are capable to make positive changes in behavior by increasing their self-efficacy. According to Behaviorist Albert Bandura, self-efficacy is “the individual’s belief or expectation that he or she can master a situation and bring about desired change (Corey, p. 235).”

To help Ruth, I would introduce techniques from other modalities, including Gestalt therapy’s two chair technique where Ruth can have mock conversations with members of her family members to explain the changes that need to be made to get the things done that are important to her. I would focus on the therapeutic relationship and setting concrete goals and milestones for Ruth to meet as well.

Conclusion

Overall, I think that behavioral therapy techniques can certainly be ‘helpful but not sufficient’ in most cases. I do think this modality has a lot of helpful practices that can be used as an “add on.” I like how behavior multimodal therapists “take great pains to determine precisely what relationship and what treatment strategies will work best with each client and under which particular circumstances (Corey, p. 250).” I like this therapeutic versatility. Of course, each client has his or her unique set of circumstances and should be approached differently. Tools from various therapies should be used, mixed, and matched as appropriate.

References

Corey, G., (2021). *Theory and practice of counseling and psychotherapy* (10th Ed.). Cengage.

