

“Ordinary People”

Adlerian Approach to Counseling Conrad Jarret

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The recent death of Conrad's brother, Buck, has led Conrad to my office for counseling. Initially, he was reluctant to contact me but then yielded to the advice of his father to see if talking to a therapist would be of some benefit to him. Conrad has been suffering from guilt and depression and attempted suicide approximately five and a half months ago. He has recently returned home from a psychiatric hospital where he was admitted for four months. Conrad stated that his goal for therapy is to have more control over his life so that people, especially his father, can stop worrying about him.

Conrad feels an overwhelming sense of responsibility for his brother's death. He has been having difficulty sleeping; his academic performance has declined. Even though he passed his trigonometry test with a 74, he is still far from his prior "A" student status. Conrad has also become socially withdrawn, isolating himself whenever possible from friends and his parents.

The counseling sessions with Conrad will be based on the Adlerian Theory founded by Alfred Adler, who was once a colleague of Sigmund Freud. Adler collaborated with Freud for many years and contributed to the psychodynamic theory. However, he parted ways and developed his theory of individual psychology with a more social-relational and teleological approach to understanding personality development (Corey, 2015).

In contrast to Freud, who believed there are three elements of personality, Id, ego, and superego, that seem to always be in conflict for control to satisfy their drive, Adler focused on a more complete and integrated view of personality. Adler did not see heredity and the environment as leading factors in personality development. Instead, Adler saw the individual as being in control of their life. They are their own creator through their choices (Corey, 2015) instead of being influenced or directed by unconscious forces that need to be brought to conscious awareness.

Adler describes our personality as being influenced by our fictional view of ourselves as perfect or complete. This begins around age six and is formed into our life goals. Once there is an encounter with feelings of inferiority, the individual begins the journey of pursuing mastery (Corey, 2015). These feelings of inferiority not only drive us toward supremacy but become a significant influence in our pursuit of achieving our life goals (Corey, 2015). Adler, thus, highlighted the future, seeing the individual as striving toward purpose-oriented goals rather than solely zeroing in on the individual's past and the presenting problem.

The techniques that will be used that apply to Adlerian Therapy consist of establishing a good therapeutic relationship with Conrad, exploring Conrad's psychological dynamics, encouraging Conrad to develop insight and understanding, and helping Conrad see new alternatives and make new choices (Corey, 2015).

To thoroughly assess Conrad, his family constellation will be explored, including early childhood recollections and the major areas of his successes and failures. In addition, we will look at Conrad's birth order and the related psychological factors. As the second child, there are some specific experiences we expect to have occurred in Conrad's life. Conrad would not have perceived himself as being at the center of his parents' attention and would have felt he had to compete with his older brother to get recognition. He would know the areas where his brother had lacked or failed and would intentionally strive to master those areas to outshine his brother. This was confirmed when his father came to my office and stated that Conrad was always an 'A' student. Conrad also interprets his father's discipline of Buck as Buck being more loved or receiving more attention than him. When he told his father that he should have also been hard on him, his father replied that Conrad was different—that he did not have to worry about him, but Buck, on the other hand, needed discipline. Also, nothing is mentioned about Buck standing out

academically. However, his room decoratively displayed athletic awards and trophies. From an Adlerian perspective about the second child, we would conclude that Conrad intentionally thrived in the areas Buck did not to gain his family's attention.

Although Conrad wanted to be seen in his family, he lived in his brother's shadow and felt excluded and inferior to him. He also felt especially emotionally detached from his mother, who made Buck the center of her world. Conrad's birth order affected his experiences and psychologically impacted how he saw himself and evaluated his worth within his family and how he interacted with the world. Conrad's inferiority complex caused him to acquire faulty assumptions about his worth and his ability to create his own life. These cognitive assumptions would need to be corrected during counseling to help Conrad reshape his life movement by reframing his childhood experiences and creating a new style of living.

A part of the sessions would also consist of Conrad understanding his private logic—how his erroneous belief that he is responsible for his brother's death has negatively impacted his coping with Buck's death and his view of himself and others, as well as significantly impaired his social interest. Helping Conrad correct all these faulty assumptions is essential to achieving a positive therapeutic outcome and his desire to get more control of his life.

While his brother's death triggered Conrad's depression which led to a disintegration in Conrad's social system, Conrad needs to understand that being socially withdrawn and socially disinterested is further contributing to his depression. Restoration of his mental health is also contingent on his social interest. Encouraging him to be more socially involved and to see how he can positively contribute to the welfare of others will help to eliminate the alienation and inferiority he suffers from (Corey, 2015). In addition, educating him about the importance of social interest and how to use it will help him stay connected with the present and keep him on a

trajectory with the future. Conrad's thoughts of social interest need to be redirected from his time at the psychiatric hospital, where he obviously felt more of a sense of belonging and socially connected to cultivating new friendships in his present life.

As an Adlerian counselor, I will work collaboratively with Conrad. We will be equal partners in re-educating him to devise new strategies to develop his social interest. We will create a new cognitive map to help him attain more realistic self-defined social goals that will aid him in creating a new lifestyle and regaining more control of his life.

Suggestions will be made for Conrad to get out of isolation, enhance his community feeling, and satisfy his sense of belonging. Prominent to Adlerian theory is gaining a sense of belonging to achieve success. This fulfillment will increase his courage and reduce his anxiety and depression.

Conrad has to identify the mistaken beliefs that cause him to burden himself with guilt and make him feel as if he is letting others down. Then, when he is no longer willing to hold on to them as rules for his living, he can be reoriented to a more effective way of being. Once Conrad develops a better understanding of himself and learns to draw on resources and various options to cope with important challenges—life issues and tasks, he will create a new cognitive map.

Reference

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Redford, R. (Director). (1980). *Ordinary People*. Wildwood Enterprises Production.