

Ordinary People: Adlerian Approach

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The basic goal of the Adlerian approach is to help clients identify and change their mistaken beliefs about self, others, and life so that they may have the ability to participate more positively in the social world. Therapists that practice this approach believe that clients are not psychologically sick but that they are discouraged. The goal of therapy is to help clients become aware of their patterns so that they are capable of making basic changes to their lifestyles. Doing so would hopefully lead to changes in the way they feel and behave. In this approach, the role of the family in the development of the client is greatly considered. This style of therapy challenges clients to look for insight within themselves and bring them into action so that they may apply it in the real world. Contemporary Adlerian theory combines cognitive, constructivist, existential, psychodynamic, relational, and systems perspectives. There is great emphasis on establishing a respectful client-therapist relationship and focusing on an individual's strengths and resources in an optimistic and future-oriented way.

In the movie *Ordinary People*, Dr. Burger attempts to gather information about Conrad's family constellation as it pertains to his parents, his late brother Buck and his friends. In the film, Conrad is positioned as the second child in the family. Even before his brother's passing, there was a strong notion to believe that Conrad felt the competitiveness to keep up with his brother Buck and everything that he was. His brother Buck was the favorite child made obvious by their mother. During one of Conrad's sessions with Dr. Burger, Conrad expressed some faulty assumptions that he was deemed unlovable and that his mother hated him. He proceeded to tell Dr. Burger that his mother had every reason not to love him because of what he did. In this instance, Conrad was talking about his suicide attempt that occurred months ago. Dr. Burger challenged Conrad's self-defeating cognition by challenging his thinking and reminding him that his father still loved the "unlovable kid" he saw himself as, insinuating that he indeed is lovable. Dr. Burger brought new and encouraging insight into his relationship with his mother, throwing in

the possibility that his mother may not have been capable of extending more love to him due to her internal conflict. Conrad also felt better about his decision to quit the swim team and he also developed the courage to terminate the friendship between himself and his late brothers' friend.

In the case of Conrad, there are a few techniques that I would use to treat his symptoms. The first technique that I would use is subjective and objective interviews. I would use an objective interview as a means to facilitate open conversation about his life. Doing this would allow Conrad to feel completely heard. This technique would facilitate empathic listening and understanding thus, creating a stronger alliance between Conrad and myself. In conjunction with subjective interviewing, I would also utilize an objective interview which seeks to discover information about how Conrad's life began, give insight into any participating events, discover any medical history past or present, look into his social history, understand his reasons for starting therapy and helping him to cope with life tasks. I believe using this technique would be essential for the success of Conrad's treatment outcome. Another technique that I would use is interpretation. Interpretation in the Adlerian perspective deals with the clients underlying motives for behaving the way that they do in the present. This technique would help Conrad become aware of his direction in life, his goals, and purposes. This would also shed some information about his private logic and how it works and give insight into his current behavior.

I believe this approach would be appropriate for Conrad considering his initial desire to have some control over his thought process and how he currently views his environment and the people around him. This approach would greatly help Conrad gain some positive insight into adopting new ways of thinking about his current situation and how his family life structure may have contributed greatly to his faulty and distorted thinking about himself. I believe that this approach would allow Conrad to adopt a new lifestyle by encouraging insight into his current behavior and how it may have been shaped so that he can overcome the challenges from his upbringing while also overcoming the tragedy of losing his brother.

References

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