

Ordinary People: Existential Theory

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Existential theory (ET) is based on the counselor's perspective of the therapy. It is not independent of other approaches having their own exclusively held techniques. In this theory, the counselor's perspective of the theory most influences its practice. The theory aims to deal with the varying anxieties of life by confronting them and in turn designing one's own life by choosing how one reacts to it (Corey, 2021).

Existential theory does not pathologize anxieties of life, but it views them as normal and to be expected. Often, they are viewed as positive as they can aid the client in achieving self-actualization. ET acknowledges that the individual requires courage to face anxieties. It also proposes that it is only once the individual accepts the anxiety that one can make the changes that are required for a positive outcome. The individual must also accept and acknowledge that there are and will always be uncertainties in life (Grande, 2016). While clients cannot control what happens in their lives, they are responsible for choosing and planning for the future (Corey, 2021).

Conrad quitting the swim team can be seen as a moment where he surrenders control of his situation. When he is later confronted by a former teammate about his behavior, Conrad admits that this relationship which also used to involve his brother Buck has become too painful for him. The memories of his brother are more than he feels he can bear. Conrad has given fear control of the future of this friendship and his future as a swimmer.

While ET is not technique oriented, as Dr. Berger I could use self-disclosure as a tool in Conrad's session. I could share with Conrad a situation where I let fear choose my future for me. I would explain how I came to recognize my passivity and decided to make a different choice. I could talk Conrad through why he chose to quit the swim team and the pain he is avoiding. I would then indirectly encourage him to confront that pain.

In treating Conrad with ET, it is important that I reassure him that I am along for the journey, whatever that might look like for him. I would intervene when called for according to

where Conrad is in his process. I would also allow space for him to create the reality he desires and ensure he does not get lost in that space.

This theory could prove helpful in treating Conrad due to its emphasis on the therapeutic alliance. It would be beneficial for Conrad to have a relationship in his life where he feels he is safe and accepted. He does not feel that in his home. Often the lack of an alliance with his parents, particularly his mother, amplifies his own grief and leads to what seems like unprovoked outbursts.

References

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