

Existential Therapy and Ordinary People

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Existential Therapy is a form of psychotherapy that focuses on the human condition, free will, and the nature of the human being. This form of therapy derived from the works of philosophers Friedrich Nietzsche and Soren Kierkegaard. Otto Rank was one of the first existential therapists to pursue this form of therapy. Psychologists, Paul Tillich, Rollo May and Irvin Yalom helped bring existential therapy into the mainstream. Similarly to person-centered therapy, existential therapy uses a positive approach in which it focuses on human capacities and aspirations. This approach emphasizes that all people have a unique identity and a capacity for self-awareness. It also emphasizes the importance of recreating oneself and anxiety as being a part of the normal human condition. By focusing on concepts such as freedom and responsibility, existential therapists help clients find the meaning in the face of anxiety by choosing to think, being authentic and responsible. Existential Therapists believe that there are specific universal concerns rooted in every human being such as death, isolation, freedom and emptiness. When confronting these concerns, anxiety arises. In this approach, anxiety is viewed to be a incentive for change so clients can live fully and authentically. Creativity, free will and authenticity are what is needed in order for a person to live their lives in the mist of these issues. This form of therapy stresses the importance of the client's ability face their fears, make choices and gain control of the direction of their life. Existential therapist believe that the greater self-awareness a person has, the more they are able to obtain freedom. Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand and taking responsibility allows the client to transform their life. The goals of existential therapy include helping client move towards authenticity, face their anxiety, create a meaningful existence, help clients reclaim their lives and listen to their inner voice. Therapists assists their clients in which they have prevented themselves from living fuller lives. Clients are also

challenged to take responsibility for their present lives. They are also encouraged to make better choices in order to live more fulfilling lives.

In the film, *Ordinary People*, we see that Conrad is struggling with the concepts of freedom and responsibility. In his therapy sessions with Dr. Berger, we can see that Conrad represses his feelings and believes he is unable to express himself. Conrad is also unable to deal with the feelings surrounding the death of his brother. I believe that Conrad would benefit from parts of existential therapy. Existential therapy helps clients become more aware of their choice and the freedom they have to make decisions. Given that Conrad feels as if he has no control over his life, this form of therapy would allow him to feel as if he is in control. This approach will benefit Conrad as he learns that he is the creator of his life and can choose how to respond at every moment. As a therapist, it is essential for me to help Conrad realize the importance of listening to his inner voice that will allow his authentic self to push through. Throughout the film, we see that Conrad has previously made decisions based off of what others felt was best for him. Conrad was no longer interested in swimming class but struggled with the idea of quitting due to his fear of what others would think of him. Through existential therapy, Conrad will be able to make his own choices based on his needs and desires. Existential Therapy has no direct technique but through open dialogue without judgement, Conrad will be able to freely express himself. This approach also encourages mindfulness which will allow Conrad to focus on the present moment and the changes he can make in his in the now. I don't believe that this approach would work for Conrad in the long run. This form of therapy can help Conrad become his authentic self and feelings of hopelessness. However, existential therapy is not as effective for those needs that require medical intervention. Conrad suffers from depression and could

possibly need medication. This form of therapy is more concerned with the present and not the past. I believe that Conrad needs to revisit parts of his face in order to achieve healing.

References:

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