

Psychodynamic Therapy

The primary focus of psychodynamic therapy is to uncover the unconscious content of a client's psyche in order to alleviate psychic tension.

KEY POINTS

- Psychodynamic therapy often works to uncover repressed childhood experiences that are thought to explain an individual's current difficulties. There are several forms of psychotherapy, a couple of which are interpersonal therapy (IPT) and person-centered therapy or non-directive therapy.
- Sigmund Freud first used the term psychodynamics to describe the processes of the mind as flows of psychological energy (libido) in an organically complex brain. The idea for this came from his first year adviser, Ernst Brucke at the University of Vienna.
- Psychodynamics emphasizes systematic study of the psychological forces that underlie human behavior, feelings, and emotions and how they might relate to early experience. It is especially interested in the dynamic relations between conscious motivation and unconscious motivation.
- A few core characteristics define psychodynamic therapy, including the use of free association, the belief that many current tensions have foundations in childhood, an emphasis

KEY POINTS (cont.)

- on unconscious conflicts, and the belief that defense mechanisms develop to avoid unpleasant consequences of conflict.
- Interpersonal therapy (IPT) is a structured, supportive type of psychodynamic therapy that links recent interpersonal events to mood or to other problems, and pays systematic attention to current personal relationships, life transitions, role conflicts and losses.

Defining Psychodynamic Therapy

Psychotherapy is an umbrella term that describes a number of different forms of therapy, one of which is **psychodynamic therapy**. The goal of psychotherapy is to explore thoughts, feelings and behaviors for the purpose of problem solving and/or achieving higher levels of functioning. Psychotherapy aims to increase the individual's sense of his own well-being. Psychotherapists employ a range of techniques based on experiential relationship building, dialogue, communication, and behavior change that are designed to improve mental health, relationships, and/or functioning. During

psychotherapy, an individual talks with a trained professional about how he feels, thinks, and reacts to challenges in life with the ultimate goal of resolving or reducing negative symptoms of an emotional or mental health problem.

The primary focus of psychodynamic therapy is to uncover the unconscious content of a client's psyche in order to alleviate psychic tension. Psychodynamic therapy is similar to psychoanalysis in that it works to uncover repressed childhood experiences that are thought to explain an individual's current difficulties. However, psychodynamic therapy tends to be briefer and less intensive than traditional psychoanalysis. Compared to other forms of therapy, psychodynamic therapy emphasizes the relationship between client and therapist as an agent of change. There are several forms of psychodynamic psychotherapy, such as interpersonal therapy (IPT) and person-centered therapy.

History

Sigmund Freud first used the term psychodynamics to describe the processes of the mind as flows of psychological energy (libido) in an organically complex brain. The idea for this came from his first year adviser, Ernst Brucke at the University of Vienna, who held the view that all living organisms, including humans, are basically energy-systems to which the principles of conservation of energy apply.

Psychodynamics was further developed by psychologists such as Carl Jung, Alfred Adler, Anna Freud, and Erik Erikson. By the mid-1940s, the general application of the “psychodynamic theory” was well established.

Core Characteristics of the Psychodynamic Approach

Psychodynamic theory emphasizes the systematic study of the psychological forces that underlie human behavior. It is especially interested in the dynamic relations between conscious motivation and unconscious motivation. In the treatment of psychological distress, psychodynamic therapies target the client's inner conflict, from where repressed behaviors and emotions surface into the patient's consciousness. All psychodynamic therapies have a core set of characteristics:

- An emphasis on unconscious conflicts, and their relation to development, dysregulation, and dysfunction.
- The belief that **defense mechanisms** are responses that develop in order to avoid unpleasant consequences of conflict.
- The belief that psychopathology develops from early childhood experiences.
- The idea that representations of experiences are founded upon interpersonal relations.

- A conviction that life issues and dynamics will re-emerge in the context of the client-therapist relationship as transference and **countertransference**.
- The use of free association as a core method to explore internal conflicts
- The focus on interpretations of defense mechanisms, transference and current symptoms.

Types of Psychodynamic Therapy

Interpersonal therapy (IPT) is a structured, supportive therapy linking recent interpersonal events to mood or to other problems, paying systematic attention to current personal relationships, life transitions, role conflicts and losses. It is usually a time-limited treatment, typically lasting 12–16 weeks, that encourages the patient to regain control of mood and functioning.

Person-centered therapy relies on the client to be the catalyst for their own healing, and is therefore less structured and non-directive. Developed by Carl Rogers, the foundation of this method of therapy is derived from the belief that every human being strives to find their own fulfillment and the fulfillment of his or her own potential. The function of the therapist is to extend consistent, warm, unconditional positive regard toward clients. By reflecting the clients' own verbalized concerns, the therapist may enable them

Figure 19.2 Person-centered therapy



Person-centered therapy, also known as non-directive therapy, is a type of psychodynamic therapy where the client guides each session and the therapist provides unconditional positive regard. The goal of PCT is to provide clients with an opportunity to develop a sense of self wherein they can realize how their attitudes, feelings and behavior are being negatively affected.

to see themselves more clearly and react more openly with themselves, the therapist and others ([Figure 19.2](#)).

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