TOPICAL PANEL 06: The Initial Interview
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What causes people's problems?
How you answer this question is the single most important determinant of how you will deliver treatment... and how you will relate to what each of us has to say
Is the goal to provide support? Or direction? Or both?

Defining the relationship and defining the session’s intent are critical factors in shaping both process and outcome.
Factors to Consider

• How is the therapy relationship defined?
• How are the goals of treatment defined?
• How is the client introduced to the therapy process?
• How are realistic expectations established to avoid disappointment?
• Who is included in the treatment process?
Distinguishing Content From Process

• The client presents a story, including a description of symptoms, about what has happened – the content

• The therapist’s task is to identify how the client generates symptoms - the process

• Changing the process (sequence or pattern) inevitably changes the content as well
Symptoms are Generally Ambiguous in Nature

The danger is in interpreting the “meaning” of the symptoms and then treating the interpretation
Lines of Interviewing

• How the person experiences the symptom patterns and how the person self-organizes to generate them
• Identifying resources the person has that may be organized and utilized therapeutically
• How the person maintains the symptom pattern
How Does Someone Expend Effort in Staying the Same?

• Defining the problem in **unchangeable** terms (e.g., “it’s genetic”)

• Defining the problem in **global** (nonspecific) terms that obscure a starting point

• Defining oneself as **helpless** and **hopeless**

• Using a **past orientation** as the reference point
How Does Someone Expend Effort in Staying the Same?

• Attributing the problem to **negative motivation** (e.g., secondary gains)

• Ruminating and avoidance as coping strategies

• Ignoring or not seeking either **objective** or **contradictory evidence**

• Justifying ideas about **how things “should” be**
Motivation and Ability, Awareness and Action

What can a motivated or aware person accomplish without a defined series of steps to follow (action)? Motivation without ability is as empty as the reverse. Both are needed to succeed.
“Therapists (must be) skillful tacticians while responding sensitively to a client’s misery and distress.”

Jay Haley
Discovering and Creating Client Possibilities

- Identifying exceptions in the pattern
- Identifying possible solutions
- Identifying alternative framings
- Identifying dissociated client resources
- Encouraging experimentation
- Avoiding labeling
- Using presuppositions
Communicating the need for action is critical in treatment.

How do you communicate your expectation that the client will be active in treatment?
A goal without steps is merely a wish
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