

What is Relational Psychotherapy?

Relational Psychotherapy is one branch of modern psychoanalytic psychotherapy that I think is most useful to the people I see. It is a powerful, effective model for working with individuals who suffer from chronic emotional, psychological, and/or relational distress.

It is based on the following principles

Emotional well-being depends on having satisfying mutual relationships with others. Emotional distress is often rooted in patterns of relational experience, past and present, which have the power to demean and deaden the self.

The relational therapist tries to understand the client's unique self-experience in its social/ relational context and to respond with empathy and genuine presence. Together, the client and therapist create a new in-depth relationship, which is supportive, strengthening, and enlivening for the client.

Within this secure relationship, the client can safely re-experience, and then find freedom from the powerful effects of destructive relationships past and present. Empowerment and growth through interpersonal connection are both the process and the goal of relational psychotherapy.

Relational therapists help clients understand, on the one hand, their own patterns of thoughts and feelings about themselves, and on the other hand, the power of

significant relationships, past and present, to shape this self-experience. Through the interpersonal process of therapeutic interaction, relational therapy strengthens and transforms a client's sense of self, which in turn enhances his or her confidence and well-being in the world.

With this perspective on therapy and relationships, a relational therapist takes seriously the inter- personal impact of power differentials and social issues such as race, class, culture, gender, and sexual difference. Working with these issues as they present in the client's life and the therapeutic relationship. The principles of relational psychotherapy are drawn from self-psychology, intersubjectivity theory, relational psychoanalysis, psychodynamic developmental theory, trauma theory, and feminist theories of psychotherapy.