

Some simple questions and answers related to a therapy process

What is mental health?

As you can imagine, not being healthy is not the same as being sick or being unwell or abnormal. We are the result of the interaction of body-mind-society/culture, so that illness is not merely a biological dysfunction, but a multifactorial behaviour in which all the above mentioned elements play a part. Therefore personal well-being goes beyond the realm encompassed by a biomedical description or diagnosis. An advantage of this integral paradigm is that it implies a positive concept of health, opening the way to preventive programs promoting healthy lifestyles. All this within the frame of a critical sense that, freeing us from dogmatic notions of “what is normal and what is not”, allows us to develop a fulfilling relation with nature, life and existence, i.e. to be happy

Should I worry about feeling sad?

No. Sadness is a natural reaction to painful events and to the hits of life. Nevertheless, if sadness persists after the afflicting stimulus has gone and we keep being sad without any apparent cause for a long time, it may be advisable to visit a psychologist, just as you would go to a doctor if your cold persists for an unreasonably long time

Is using drugs recommended in order to manage anxiety or sadness?

In principle not. Psychological discomfort, symptoms like anxiety or sadness, gives the psychologist, just as physical pain gives the medical doctor, valuable information about the subjacent mechanisms causing us to suffer. Just as it would be dangerous to suppress the pain from an inflamed appendix with pain-killers, since doing so would put the person's health at risk, likewise taking drugs in order to manage psychological discomfort is not advisable since it may cover up an underlying disturbance, which may become chronic. Through various types of therapy the clinical psychologist addresses the subjacent cause, thereby reducing the symptoms and the discomfort they produce. Therefore, in principle, the use of drugs should be a resource carefully managed in parallel with the psychological treatment

What is self-esteem? How is it related to one's health?

Self-esteem is the opinion we entertain about ourselves as a result of the balance between our physical appearance, skills, professional success and emotional fulfilment. It is an essential source of psychological well-being, since a good self-esteem helps us to accept ourselves as we are, which allows us to love ourselves and others. We can develop a healthy self-esteem in the course of our life, and doing so helps us to unfold the full

potential each one of us carries as a unique being, which in turn affects all aspects of our experience. Our self-esteem grows when we live respecting our own values, and decreases when our behaviour is not congruent with them

Can we transform?

Yes!! The “plasticity” of the brain, beside reflecting the brain’s functional capacity to adapt and minimize the effects of structural lesions, is a more general process dealing with the adaptation of our nervous system to changes in our inner and outer environment. This implies, among other things, that our psychological identity is not something fixed, but mobile, and that we therefore can change and overcome even the most persistent of our difficulties. Knowing this resilience of human beings, psychologists strive to support psychological change through the therapeutic process

What is a therapy?

It is the process, guided by a therapist, seeking to produce psychological change in the person seeking help. The process unfolds through the client-therapist relationship and the dialogue that takes place between them. The choice of techniques and therapeutic objectives depends on the specific approach of the therapist and her or his school, as well as on the nature of the difficulties the client experiences.

Are all therapies and all therapists the same? And how do I know I am with the therapist most adequate for me?

As I said, no: not all therapies and all therapists work in the same way. Carrying this to an extreme, we could even say there are as many forms of therapy as there are therapists and therapeutic relationships. Although there are schools therapists adhere to, and these with their principles somewhat define the types of intervention, each therapist brings to the therapy her or his own experiences and characteristics. Moreover, every client-therapist relation is an idiosyncratic dialogue that keeps growing throughout the therapy, and in this respect we could say that each experience is unique. We therapists offer an informative first session, in which we explain the details of how we operate and we give a first elaboration of the therapeutic goals, i.e. the changes the therapy would aim for. Use this first session for enquiring about anything you feel unclear about. You can also ask the therapist for some bibliographic or internet reference about the therapy school she or he belongs to... Take your time to think and decide if that is what you need. Finally, keep in mind that techniques and therapeutic objectives are always the result of a consensus between client and therapist, so you participate from the beginning in the definition of what you need

What are the consequences of having a good relationship with ourselves?

“The way we feel about ourselves affects decisively all aspects of our experience, from how we function in our work, love and sex to how we handle parenthood and the chances we have of progressing in life. How we respond to events depends on who and what we think we are. The dramas of our life are reflections of the inner perception we have of ourselves. Therefore self-esteem is the key to success or failure. Likewise it is the key to understanding ourselves and others. Of all judgements we submit to, none is as important as our own.” (Nathaniel Branden, *How to improve our self-esteem*)

Can we control our emotions and our impulses? Can we manage and direct our life?

The good news is that of course we can! Emotions are not bad in themselves... It is us who handle them improperly and end up at their mercy in a compulsive way. The difference between well-being and discomfort resides in being in control of our emotions rather than being controlled by them like a frightened horse: in other words it resides in our being trained or not, in being good riders of our emotional states or not. Therapy is a form of training.

Can the therapist share some type of information about me without my consent?

No. You can feel totally safe within the frame of the therapeutic relationship. The Informed Consent procedure involves a commitment to use any information that may have surfaced in therapy only with your explicit consent. Furthermore all actions of a therapist are bound by a set of general ethical principles of Confidentiality and Fidelity that commit us to respect the intimacy and privacy of our clients, even when you may not be the one who initially requested the therapy. In order to implement these principles we have deontological codes, which through various articles direct ethical decisions in therapeutic practice. Operationally these principles translate into psycho-ethical rules... Therefore you can feel totally safe.