
Counselling Framework

The existential approach to therapy is one of those that many of my clients and I have found helpful. It says that as we become aware of our true thoughts, feelings and actions in a caring counselling relationship, we are better able to respond to the core struggles we face in other parts of our lives.

I've created the P-E-R-S-O-N mnemonic to help us keep in mind what those core struggles might be, and what the existential approach says about them. It's not a road-map for every counselling journey, rather a guide to some conversations we might have as we move towards healing and wholeness.

P Purpose. Something to do, someone to love, something to look forward to. With clarity about these things, we can cope better with life's challenges. But when they are lacking or unclear, life seems short of meaning and we are more vulnerable to overwhelming anxiety or depression.

E Emotions. Our feelings, of anxiety in particular, can point us towards healing insights about ourselves. For instance, we might learn how we are needing, or perhaps dreading, change. Or how our need to be accepted and loved, leads us to hide or compromise some deep part of ourselves.

R Relationships. We form, and re-form, our identities in the crucible of relationships with others. They help us understand ourselves, and keep loneliness and isolation at bay. But for fully rewarding relationships we need skills that we can learn and practice in the counselling context.

S Self-awareness. What are we really thinking, feeling and doing, moment-by-moment? How have we been wounded? Where are we vulnerable? What are we afraid of? Why do we get angry? What drives us? Awareness of our deep selves is the gauge and goal of our journey to wholeness.

O Options. We **can** make choices in life. Sometimes we're ready for the burden of exercising those choices, and taking responsibility for the results. And sometimes we want the security of having others make our choices and take the responsibility. But not to choose, is itself a choice.

N Narrowing. As we go through life, our range of options reduces. Because of finance, health, loss or earlier choices that limit what we can do now. This causes us frustration and anxiety, and is eventually overshadowed by the prospect of our own deaths, and the need to evaluate our lives.

End.