
Twelve Stages of Classical Adlerian Psychotherapy

Classical Adlerian psychotherapy is characterized by a diplomatic, warm, empathic, and Socratic style of treatment. This climate embodies the qualities of respect and equality necessary for building a trusting cooperative, relationship.

A full psychotherapy can be envisioned as a progression through twelve stages. These stages should be considered as teaching guidelines and should not be interpreted as a systematic procedure. Psychotherapy is an art that must be practiced creatively. The best therapeutic strategy is frequently a unique invention for the individual client.

1) Empathy and Relationship Stage:

Establishing an empathic, cooperative, working relationship. Offering hope, reassurance, and encouragement.

2) Information Stage:

Unstructured gathering of relevant information. Details of presenting problem and overview of general functioning. Exploration of early childhood situation, memories, and dreams.

3) Clarification Stage:

Clarifying vague thinking with Socratic questioning. Evaluating consequences of ideas and behavior. Correcting mistaken ideas about self and others.

4) Encouragement Stage:

Encouraging thinking and behavior in a new direction. Beginning to move in a new direction, away from life style. Clarifying feelings about effort and results.

5) Interpretation and Recognition Stage:

Interpreting inferiority feelings, style of life, and fictional final goal of superiority. Identifying what has been avoided in development. Integrating birth order, earliest recollections, and dreams.

6) Knowing Stage:

Reinforcing client's self-awareness of life style and feelings about new successes. Client knows what needs to be done but may feel blocked.

7) Emotional Breakthrough Stage:

When needed, promoting emotional breakthroughs with "missing experiences" that correct past or present negative influences. Use of role-playing, guided imagery, and group dynamics.

8) Doing Differently Stage:

Converting insight into a different attitude. Experimenting with concrete actions based on abstract ideas. Comparing new and old behavior.

9) Reinforcement Stage:

Encouraging all new movements toward significant change. Affirming positive results and feelings. Evaluating progress and new courage.

10) Social Interest Stage:

Using client's better feelings to extend cooperation and caring about other people. Learning to give generously of oneself and to take necessary risks. Awakened feeling of equality.

11) Goal Redirection Stage:

Challenging client to let go of self and the old fictional goal. Dissolving the style of life and adopting new values. Discovering a new psychological horizon.

12) Support and Launching Stage:

Launching client into a new, creative, gratifying way of living for self and others. Learning to love the struggle and prefer the unfamiliar. Promoting a path of continual growth for self and others.

Cognitive, Affective, & Behavioral Change

Comprehensive treatment strategies stimulate cognitive, affective, and behavioral change. The Socratic method guides clients to insights that generate decisions and plans for action. Guided and eidetic imagery, as well as "missing experience" techniques facilitate affective change and growth. Role-playing and "future scenarios" provide safe and encouraging behavioral preparation and practice.

Classical Adlerian psychotherapy attempts to bring each individual to an optimal level of personal, interpersonal, and occupational functioning. For some clients, brief therapy is the limit of their interest or budget and therapy stops at the fourth stage of treatment. For others, after completing the twelve stages, philosophical and/or spiritual issues are discussed.

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