

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT QUESTIONS FOR YOU TO ASK

- *What is your purpose in becoming a psychotherapist?*
- *What is it that therapists do that is therapeutic?*

Do you remember visualizing yourself approaching your client with confidence? Bring that image back again.



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What is your purpose in being a psychotherapist?

As a school kid I used to love when my classmates' parents came in to tell us what they did for a living. If *you* were to go to your child's school one day and tell the students your purpose in being a therapist, what would you say? How would you tell the students, simply and honestly, what that purpose is? Let's answer this question now.

Beginning therapists usually see themselves as having (or having the potential to have) positions of great importance in the lives of their clients. Interns fret over saying or not saying the right things. They take the purpose of psychotherapy seriously; it's good that beginning therapists do so.

I believe the central purpose of psychotherapy is to reduce the suffering of our clients. I also believe the vast majority of students are earnest in their efforts and genuinely want to help their client's change. *But for the most part, believing you can make someone change is an illu-*

See yourself in detail. Picture again the hallway you walked down to meet your client. See and feel yourself confidently reaching out your hand to greet your client. Picture and then feel confidence and competence. Now, fast forward your visualization to where you are an experienced, seasoned therapist. Visualize yourself walking back to your office with your client. Notice you feel confident in your understanding of therapy. Your clients, simply by looking at you can tell you are a capable therapist. Notice how you feel inside as a therapist who understands what it is to be therapeutic. Give yourself the opportunity to take a minute, close your eyes and visualize what you have just read. Do this right now.



What is your purpose in entering this field? What are your sincere and thoughtful reasons for being a therapist? What values and beliefs do you hold true that express your role as a therapist? Take out a piece of paper and write down your responses.

sion which is more about the therapist than the client. Many students and interns hope that their growing skills or knowledge will provide the magic key—that pearl of wisdom which sheds a new light of understanding on the client—so that he or she will have a classic “A-ha!” experience and say, “Thanks Doc, I never saw it that way before. I’m all better. I don’t need to come and see you anymore.” In reality, these statements from clients come somewhat few and far between.

Therapy is in our modern sense, an invention. In order to help clients, you learn various therapeutic techniques, you watch training tapes, you read books, and try it all out on your own clients. *Yet therapy has existed long before there were graduate schools.* Therapy has been around ever since one person successfully helped another.

I suggest that to understand what therapy is, you must consider what happens to help one person make the changes they are seeking. Grandmothers, bosses, strangers and religious leaders can all be therapeutic. Hell, even some therapists are therapeutic. What's more, none of these folks (with exception to therapists) need a license to be therapeutic.

And to make it even more confusing, therapists have many different types of therapy to choose from, such as: Adlerian, Behavioral, Cognitive, Dialectical, Emotive, Family, Gestalt, Humanistic, Interpersonal, Jungian, Marital, Narrative, Object Relations, Parent Effectiveness Training, Rational Emotive, Solution-Focused, Transpersonal, etc. I think you get the idea.

Therefore, the purpose of a therapist, by my definition, is to help facilitate a desired change by the client.

To do this I believe the therapist can, at best, act like a gardener. As we know, a gardener cannot *make* a rose grow. In fact, a gardener can't *make* anything grow anymore than a therapist can *make* a client change. The gardener can learn all about roses, soils, different fertilizers, and apply them thoughtfully, but at the end of the day, the gardener and the rose (like the therapist and client) are forever separated in their ability to *make* any changes. The therapist can do all the facilitating, but the client must



do all the changing.

I suggest you review your answers to the question, “What is your purpose in being a psychotherapist?” If you are not sure, that is OK. Keep an open awareness to the thoughts and experiences you have while you seek an answer to this question. There is no *right* answer. There is only *your* answer.