

# *Spiritually Sensitive Psychotherapy*

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# *Spiritually Sensitive Therapy (SST)*

## ■ Is Not

- Religious proselytization
- Doctrinal instruction
- Spiritual direction
- Focused exclusively (or even primarily) on religion or spirituality
- Reducible to certain techniques

# *Spiritually Sensitive Therapy (SST)*

## Is

- Therapy
- That is attentive to both psychological & spiritual dynamics
- That utilizes the presenting problems as both a focus for help as well as an opportunity for psychospiritual growth
- That seeks to nurture a response of spirit to Spirit

# *Markers of Psychospiritual Health*

1. Reality grounding
2. Awareness
3. Hopeful openness
4. Loving connectedness
5. Transcendent meaningfulness
6. Capacity for love, work and play

# 1. *Reality Grounding*

- ▶ Seeing things as they are

*“There is no greater disaster in the spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality, for life is maintained and nourished in us by our vital relation with realities outside and above us. When our life feeds on unreality it must starve and die. The death by which we enter into life is not an escape from reality but a complete gift of ourselves which involves a total commitment to reality.”* (Thomas Merton)

*“It is the acceptance of what reality can and cannot fulfill that leads to real change because, short of the progressive destruction of illusion and consequent mourning, one cannot discover the world as it is.” (Winnicott)*

*“Reality itself - my limited and sometimes misinterpreted experience - is the revelatory place for God. But for some reason we prefer fabricated realities to the strong and sensitizing face of what is. The spiritual life begins with accepting and living our reality.” (Richard Rohr)*

## 2. *Awareness*

*“The spiritual life is, first of all, a matter of keeping awake.” (Thomas Merton)*

*“We have to accept that we are all sleep walkers. We need to awaken and we need to learn to see. Spirituality is about seeing. Once you see, the rest follows. Jesus tells us that if our eye is healthy our whole body will be full of light.” (Richard Rohr)*

### *3. Hopeful Openness*

- ▶ To life
- ▶ To others
- ▶ To the transcendent
- ▶ Requires trust and a sense of safety
  - most important question each person has to answer - “is the universe friendly” (Einstein)

## 4. *Loving Connectedness*

- ◆ Solidarity with all humans
- ◆ Connectedness with the earth
- ◆ Connectedness with the Divine
- ◆ Detachment and autonomy as way to honour separateness
- ◆ Surrender - Willing versus willful living
- ◆ Balanced longing and belonging

## 5. *Transcendent Meaningfulness*

- ▶ Making sense of personal reality in a way that gives direction and purpose to life
- ▶ Having a framework to make sense of failure and suffering
  - making suffering sufferable
- ▶ Movement beyond egocentricity and entitlement
  - Capacity for grace and gratitude

## 6. *Capacity for Love, Work & Play*

- ▶ Altruistic attitude toward others
- ▶ Sense of vocation
- ▶ Spontaneity and playfulness

# *Goals of SST*

1. Help people attend to their spiritual longings and become aware of how they have been responding, or may wish to respond, to them
2. While doing this, continue to do everything else that any other well trained therapist would do

# *Overview of Process of SST*

1. Build a spiritually open and safe therapeutic alliance
  - ▶ Informed consent
  - ▶ Avoiding disclosure of details of personal spirituality until asked
  - ▶ Communicate an openness to spiritual concerns and an absence of a coercive agenda
  - ▶ Deal with religious differences that exist in an open, respectful manner. Refer if you cannot

# *Overview of Process of SST*

2. Express interest in spirituality and openness to inclusion in therapy process
3. Begin with a broadly ecumenical posture
  - Watch for bias of only seeing the best in your own tradition and the worst in others (contrasting the ideals of Christianity with the reality of others)
4. Watch for the presence of the Spirit and experiences of the numinous
5. Conduct a spiritual assessment

# *Spiritual Assessment*

- ▶ Begins with questions about R/S upbringing
- ▶ Determine if R/S is important, or ever has been
- ▶ Importance of understanding function and expression of R/S commitments
- ▶ Availability of R/S resources
- ▶ Client's perception of role of R/S factors in problems
- ▶ Client's interest in addressing R/S issues
- ▶ Listen for spiritual story behind whatever other story is being told

# *Spiritual Assessment*

- ◆ The holy – sense of the sacred
- ◆ Faith – capacity for trust
- ◆ Providence – is the universe friendly?
- ◆ Surrender – is life lived willfully or willingly?
- ◆ Grace – capacity to accept the undeserved
- ◆ Gratitude – sense of gratefulness

# *Spiritual Assessment*

- ▶ Repentance – capacity for self-responsibility and sorrow
- ▶ Transcendence – relatedness to “the other”
- ▶ Communion – connectedness to others
- ▶ Vocation – sense of calling

# *Overview of Process of SST*

6. Be prepared, when appropriate, to adopt a more explicitly Christian perspective
  - Be slow to align in a more explicitly denominational way – danger of a collusive misalliance that feels good but which blocks effective therapy (therapeutic alliance as collaboration of healthiest parts of therapist with healthiest parts of client, not feeling connected or identification)
7. When appropriate (and with consent), utilize relevant spiritual interventions