**A Brief Introduction to Psychodynamic Psychotherapy**

**What is Psychodynamic Psychotherapy?**

Psychodynamic or psychoanalytic psychotherapy refers to a form of depth psychology where the primary focus is to reveal the unconscious content of a patient’s psyche in order to alleviate psychic tension. Principal psychodynamic theorists are Freud, Klein, Winnicott and Bion, just to name a few. There are some core features of psychodynamic therapy, including a focus on affect and the expression of emotion, exploration of attempts to avoid distressing thoughts and feelings, identification of recurring themes and patterns, discussion of past experiences and histories, a focus on interpersonal relations, exploration of wishes and fantasies, and a focus on the therapeutic relationship.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy encourages exploration and discussion of the full range of a patient’s emotions. The therapist helps the patient describe and put words to feelings, including contradictory, troubling, and threatening feelings that the patient may not initially be able to recognize or acknowledge. Psychodynamic psychotherapists work to identify and explore recurring themes and patterns in patients’ thoughts, feelings, self-concept, relationships, and life experiences. Exploration of early experiences and the ways in which the past tends to “live on” in the present are also of a major component of dynamic therapy. The focus is not on the past for its own sake, but rather to understand and shed light on how the past influences current psychological difficulties. The goal is to help patients free themselves from the bonds of the past in order to live more fully in the present.

**What are the goals of Psychodynamic therapy?**

The goals of psychodynamic psychotherapy include, but extend far beyond, symptom relief. Successful treatment should not only ease symptoms (for example, getting rid of anxiety or depression) but also foster the positive presence of psychological resources, which depending on the person and their individual circumstances, might include the capacity to have more fulfilling relationships, make more effective use of one’s talents, maintain a realistic view of oneself, tolerate a wider range of affect, and face life’s challenges with greater flexibility and freedom.

**Who can benefit from Psychodynamic therapy?**

People who tend to benefit most from psychodynamic therapy are generally those who are curious about themselves and seek self-knowledge in addition to symptom relief. Some of the personal qualities that can facilitate this type of therapy include: the capacity for self-reflection, a desire for honesty and truth, a willingness to tolerate painful and vulnerable feelings, and a curiosity about oneself and one’s internal life.

**Recommended Resources:**

1. Love’s Executioner and Other Tales of Psychotherapy by Irvin Yalom
2. The Talking Cure by Susan C. Vaughan, MD
3. The American Psychoanalytic Association, <http://www.apsa.org>

© Miranda J. Gabriel, Psy.D.**,** Licensed Psychologist, PSY 19388| 1000 Fremont Ave., Suite #250 B, Los Altos, CA 94024 │510-459-1302 │www.mirandagabriel.com