

## **What is Therapy? What are Therapists Like?**

**Tom Skovholt, Ph. D., L.P.**

### **What is Therapy?**

**Therapy comes in many forms. It can be confusing to understand the different forms. One way to understand what therapy may offer you, as a potential client, is to use the term Common Factors. Research supports the idea that the common factors of different therapy methods make them more similar than different.**

**These common factors are things like: having a highly trained and ethical practitioner who is focused on helping the client, a good working relationship between the client and practitioner, a private meeting place and confidentiality, and possible explanations by the practitioner for the client's situation. All of these together can be of great help to the client in her, or his, attempt to be happier and have a more fulfilling life.**

**There are a lot of stereotypes about therapy. Many come from the movies or TV. One stereotype is that the therapist has a ready answer for everything and just tells the client what to do and also that therapy involves solving problems quickly. Usually, it is more of a joint problem solving process involving the client and the therapist. Sometimes people feel shame about getting help for personal problems. The shame level was much higher in the past but it still affects some people. However, increasingly people think of emotional wellness like physical wellness. For physical health; there are different levels of flexibility, strength and cardiovascular fitness. We can all improve on these dimensions.**

**For emotional health, these are areas like having lower levels of despair, fear and anger and higher levels of joy, happiness and meaning in one's life. Some clients seek help to strengthen close personal relationships in family. Some children and adolescents struggle in school and some adults struggle at their work. Many people want help with major losses like the death of someone they love. Money problems can add a lot of stress. Some realize that they need to face an addiction. Others seek more maturity and wisdom.**

**Ethical, professional therapists do not over-promise. Often problems develop over a long period of time and take a considerable time to overcome. Quick fixes work about as well as quick weight loss solutions. Usually things can get better if both the client and therapist work hard together to get there.**

### **What are Therapists Like?**

**Therapists, as people, like to help other people solve personal problems and have happier lives. Many therapists grew up as the person their friends confided in. They were often told that they were good at listening and helping. Therapists were also good at school because therapy training takes lots of years of school. There is college, then graduate school including many hours of practicum in therapy. Then, therapists have to pass licensing tests. And they have to do continuing education to keep their license.**

**If you go to a convention of therapists, you end up talking to a lot of nice, good people. They are motivated to try, in their own small way, to make the world a place with less human suffering and more human joy.**

**Therapists are female and male, younger and older, married, and single, with children, grandchildren and pets or without. Many have traveled to other countries to see the differences between people and cultures. Therapists like people. Therapists are tolerant, open-minded, and understanding by nature.**

**Their work, as therapists, makes their own lives more meaningful and full. Generally therapists feel very lucky to have the work they have. They are honored to be able to help others live richer, more mature and less stressful lives.**