

## Introduction to the Principles of Contemporary Psychotherapy

**“Each person is an individual. Hence, psychotherapy should be formulated to meet the uniqueness of the individual’s needs, rather than tailoring the person to fit the Procrustean bed of a hypothetical theory of human behaviour”**

**Milton Erickson 1979**

### **Descriptor for Inclusion in UKCP Recognised Modalities of Psychotherapy**

Contemporary Psychotherapy is an integrative outcome oriented approach that draws on the diversity of traditional theory according to best current knowledge, in respect of the client's context, resources and needs. Therefore therapy may be brief, mid-term or longer term.

The overall endeavour is to increase in-the-moment alignment between self-regulated somatic experience and flexible cognitive construct in an accepting relationship with self and other. Outcome Orientation in this context assumes that even when experience or action is painful or incongruent, a positive intention or unrealised outcome can be revealed within the client's self-balancing system. The client's formulation of and commitment to meaningful outcome offers a direction for new awareness, action and evaluation. The unfolding activity and reflection reveal deeper patterning and stimulate systemic healing.

The therapeutic relationship provides opportunity to recognise re-enactment of past in current experience offering fresh learning opportunity in present and future challenges, as a life-long heuristic pursuit. Claiming a valuable life narrative as a product of the human capacity to create meaningful trajectories over time is balanced with learning through practice to bring accepting attention into here and now (mindfulness). These complimentary activities embrace current best practice afforded by neuroscience's revelation of brain plasticity as it corresponds with integrated psychotherapeutic wisdom.

Contemporary Psychotherapy submits to constant review as human need responds to social context and change. A Contemporary Psychotherapist respects the wisdom of other models, embraces new developments in their field and digests ongoing personal growing as factors for authentic presence in the therapeutic encounter.

## The Contemporary Psychotherapist

Contemporary Psychotherapy is an integrative outcome oriented model that combines and utilises the commonalities of the main contrasting and effective models of psychotherapy. To remain truly 'contemporary' the model's theory resists static definition so that it may be constantly updated according to the progresses of research and achievement in the field, and in tandem with the practitioner's unending personal and professional growth.

The aim of CP training is to develop in the Practitioner a sensitive and informed adaptability to diverse practice contexts and variety of client needs. The CP Practitioner develops a honed technical eclecticism, guided by robust understanding of the sameness and differences in the key theoretical mainframes of our age. To this end, the practices and principles of Neuro-Linguistics are mastered by the CP Practitioner. This provides a meta-discipline through which they may develop a logically levelled appreciation of theory and behaviourally clear and authentic communication skills and process facilitation.

Some common features of Contemporary Psychotherapy include facilitating the client towards:

- Affect regulation, called in this model "state management"
- Relating openly to the present moment through positive sensitisation to somatic intelligence
- Alignment of cognitive and somatic self
- Attuning behavioural patterns to own desirable beliefs and values
- Conditioning healthy responses and choices in the place of problematic reactions
- Establishment of values-driven, manageable goals
- Resolution of past through linking current cognitive and emotional resources to past episodes and safely processing trauma
- Integration of "parts", sub-personalities or aspects of a fractured identity
- Development of a meaningful self-narrative
- Opening and developing ecological relating systems, intimate, social and spiritual

The Contemporary Psychotherapist must adapt to the needs and resources of a diversity of individuals and practice settings. To be both adaptive and ethically consistent the CP Practitioner is required to attend to 6 Key Considerations in the delivery of ethical and effective treatment protocol.

- They remain aware of and respond to current advances in their own and other fields of knowledge pertaining to the client's best treatment
- They are sensitive to current sociological, cultural and political issues that may affect the client's issues
- They are able to work with the full life trajectory - past, present and future - of the client as relevant to the client's presenting issues
- They respond flexibly to different stages and cycles in the client's progress
- They utilise the naturally occurring cycles and altered states of the human physiological system
- They recognise the differing time requirements and time constraints affecting the treatment of each client, according to the client's level of need and available resources

Contemporary Psychotherapy regards no single model of psychotherapy to be complete or superior to other models and therefore the Contemporary Psychotherapist welcomes opportunities to be exposed to different models and to form collegiate relationships with those propounding a diversity of theory and praxis.

## Defining Contemporary Psychotherapy

Pamela Gawler-Wright, May 2004, Updated July 2005  
Updated with Dr Ernest L. Rossi in April 2006 (In Bold)

Whenever we speak of psychotherapy we have to ask “which psychotherapy?” as the numerous and divergent modules of theory and practice are confusing even to the professional practitioner. Leaders in the field of psychotherapy, from Alfred Adler to Jeffrey Zeig, have reached beyond the confines of their subjective perceptions and specialisms to flexibly combine and build upon their treatment practice and principles with the benefit of other complementary and contrasting schools of psychotherapy, attempting to integrate divergent theories (Lazarus, A. A., 1985). The last two decades has seen a greater integration of various denominations of psychotherapy, resulting in a “post-schoolist” movement where positive similarities are embraced more than negative differences are fought over (Balick, A. et al, 2004). For the purpose of this document, Contemporary Psychotherapy shall be referred to as a product of this movement, defined generally below.

The word “con-tempo-rary” means literally “*with time*” or “*moving in time*”. There are many ways in which this title can refer to some of the defining principles of Contemporary Psychotherapy.

### The Six Defining Principles of Contemporary Psychotherapy

1. For psychotherapy to be described as moving with time, or in the times, it must show a flexible yielding to the progression of knowledge over time, acquired within its own field and a variety of related fields from philosophy, the arts and cultural studies, to social politics and psychobiology (Varela, F.J., Thompson, E. Rosch E. 1991). In this post modern era, psychotherapists need to display a willingness to build on traditional wisdom and experience with new developments in thinking, practice and appraisal, harnessing a confluence of development from European, American and Eastern models (Fenner, P. 1995). Therefore, Contemporary Psychotherapy is such that is aware of and responds to most useful current advances in the understanding of and practice with individuals, families, communities and organisations, while bringing a multiple perspective to assessment and treatment protocols. To this end, Contemporary Psychotherapy teaches the advanced modelling skills from the work of Albert Bandura (1977), developed further by Richard Bandler, John Grinder, Robert Dilts and Judith DeLozier (1976), whereby practitioners may observe and absorb from the most successful approaches to psychotherapeutic treatment, resulting in a model of psychotherapy that is constantly evolving, and a practitioner’s self attitude is as life-long learner.
2. A psychotherapy that is with, and in, its time is a psychotherapy that is sensitive to the moving historical and cultural influences that shape the challenges and resources of the users of psychotherapy, namely, individuals, families, organisations and society. Contemporary Psychotherapy seeks to adapt itself to best serve the most pressing needs of society and individual. Therefore a Contemporary Psychotherapy embraces challenges and needs experienced by people through current prevalent circumstances as providing focus to its methodological and theoretical aspirations. Current examples at the time of writing may be considered as increasing prevalence of addiction, work-related stress, non-conformist family units, gender-influenced challenges, minority group

experience such as racism and cultural displacement and various political perceptions and anxieties such as global instability and conflicting positions resulting from wars and other major political conflicts. At the place of writing, East London, 2005, there is a greater experience of neighbourhood tension and post traumatic shock following the 7/7 bombing in Whitechapel and across London.

3. A psychotherapy that is “with time” works with the full life trajectory (“timeline”) of the subject and the internal representation of past, present and future that is present within the human mind. This promotes attending not only to past analysis and etiology, but focussing especially on motivational factors present in current experience of life – decisions, behaviours, stresses, resources and health – reaching progressively into time by attending to recovery outcomes through expectations, plans, future challenges and goals (Erickson, M. H. 1954). Therefore Contemporary Psychotherapy focuses not just on causation, but especially on the immediate needs of the client and their short and long term well-being, concerning the client’s management of their condition or situation, recovery and personal development, for now and in the manageable future.
4. A psychotherapy that is flexibly responding “with time” observes that people and their conditions are never static but in constant process. Therefore a person’s identity is an evolving entity, for better or worse, and a condition, situation or circumstance is seldom constant, but moving either further to or away from health and equilibrium. A person is as they are in this moment and locating and accepting the client’s experience of “this now” is a key skill operating from the practitioner’s trained acuity and authentic personhood. Psychotherapeutic activity nurtures this acuity in both client and practitioner, engaging them in a co-created process of emergent possibilities through ever-changing states. These processes often follow patterned cycles, with these states under constant redefinition. Contemporary Psychotherapy must be equally fluid in its response to the client’s progression, especially where progressive states require different approaches necessitated by evolving priorities, evolving dangers and evolving realistic possibilities. Similarly, recovery and personal development are not single events, but a series of processes that may go through several stages over time. Treatment is likewise required to be responsive, appropriate and synchronised with the client’s progress. The Cybernetic Theory of Mind of Gregory Bateson offers the key body of theory in support of these goals of Contemporary Psychotherapy, but they are by no means confined to this. The Contemporary Psychotherapist is trained in the practical skills of cognitive, linguistic and behavioural modelling offered through the work of Robert Dilts and Judith DeLozier in Systemic Neuro-Linguistics, to enable them to be accurately adaptable to the unique experience and functioning patterns of the client, constantly evolving their model of the client’s world according to the client’s progress and communication.
5. A psychotherapy that is responsively pacing the development over time of the client, is aware of the “biological timepiece” that is the human body and the crucial engagement of the somatic intelligence in affecting positive psychotherapeutic change. Effective treatment is sympathetic and sensitive to the innate circadian and ultradian rhythms of the human biological and affective systems that are observable to the trained practitioner who is able to synchronise to and utilise these cycles, also called “trance”, “hypnosis” or

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“altered state”, to facilitate the client’s process of change (Rossi E.L. 1982, 1986). Therefore Contemporary Psychotherapy approaches treatment with a consideration of psychobiological components of distress, recovery and development. Treatment recognises and utilises the natural biological and behavioural cycles of the client, such as the rhythm and sequence of affective and somatic experiences, the pace set by behavioural routines and the utilisation of naturally occurring altered awareness states (Rossi, E.L. 1992).

**This therapeutic utilization of psychobiological cycles is a way of accessing and facilitating the new neuroscience of gene expression and brain plasticity to optimise the client’s health and well-being at the most fundamental molecular-genomic levels of mind-body healing, memory, learning, consciousness, and creativity (Rossi, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2007).**

6. Contemporary Psychotherapy responds flexibly to the time requirements and time restraints pertaining to each case and the clinical context that provides the environment for treatment. Therefore, frequency and duration of treatment are determined through discussion and agreement with the client, considering the client’s needs and resources, and clinical context, to best achieve the agreed outcomes of therapy. Therapeutic projects may usually be brief (up to 12 sessions), sometimes mid-term or, less commonly, long-term (over one year) according to needs, co-created choices and available resources.

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