



COMMUNICATION-FOCUSED THERAPY® (CFT) AND THE THERAPIST
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Christian Jonathan Haverkamp, M.D.





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Communication-Focused Therapy® (CFT) is a psychotherapy developed by the author, which has been described for a large number of mental health conditions. Research has shown that the personality of the therapist may play a larger role than the school of therapy. CFT focuses on communication patterns which are closely linked with the concept of personality in psychology.

Keywords: objectives, communication-focused therapy, CFT, communication, psychotherapy, psychiatry



The Therapist

Personality is the style in which a person communicates externally, it is what another may see. Someone stranded on a deserted island without any living being to interact, even if only nonverbally, can hardly be considered to have a personality, even though there will be a sense of self. Personality and communication styles depend on the presence of other people, and in this sense the personality of the therapist is determined to a large extent in the interaction with other people, including his or her patients. However, the more a therapist is aware of the own patterns of communicating, the greater will be the ability to select them and work with them. Since in Communication-Focused Therapy (CFT) an important focus is on working with communication patterns, and thereby effecting change in the patient's internal and external communication (Haverkamp, 2017a), the therapist should have practice in working with communication patterns, not only recognizing but also using them in the therapeutic setting.

Important is that the therapist is aware of the communication with the patient in all its various facets. Thinking of communication in terms of communication patterns, communication elements and communication structures helps to organize knowledge (Haverkamp, 2018a). As it may appear close to impossible to identify all that goes into a smile or a sad look, for example, it has been suggested by the author elsewhere, that it is more important to help the patient to connect with the meaningful information that is behind it. For this, the therapist has to help the patient to work with information, internally and externally, more effectively.

Openness, empathy and a willingness to listen and to reflect on everything are important traits in a therapist, all of which are closely linked to the communication patterns used. A CFT therapist may have it easier than others because he or she can view the entire process as dynamics that have rules. Since at its core, communication adheres to basic laws of science, even extrapolating and using heuristics still make a therapy grounded in the rules of communication ultimately more stable and coherent than if it is based on something that is more alien and disconnected from basic science.



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A therapist needs to be close enough to pick up on what the patient is communicating, while also being able to switch to a distance that lets him or her have an eye of the larger communication dynamics. In a sense, the therapist has to be able to be both in it and outside it. To accomplish this depends on how the therapist works with information and with internal and external communication patterns. Some communication patterns facilitate staying in something, while others bring about a distance and an outside view. Questions, for example, can accomplish both (Haverkamp, 2017b). A question about the interaction between therapist and patient would bring about the outside view in the patient, albeit almost by force. Repeating some of what was expressed, on the other hand, particularly if a feeling is amplified, has the opposite effect of letting the therapist participate from a close distance (Haverkamp, 2018a). Important is not only that a therapist can use the patterns but that he or she also uses them at the right time, in the right situation and with a specific patient. Since communication patterns interact with each other, it is important to understand both, the own and the patient's communication patterns.

Empathy is quite easy if one acknowledges that it is a communication construct, working similar to other forms of communication. It is being open to information and letting oneself be guided by meaningful communication coming in. It is thus a back and forth mechanism that ultimately leads to greater insight. Since empathy is about feeling states, the information may sometime be difficult to put into words for both patient and therapist but being able to do so internally and in the interaction is an important part of the therapeutic process. This is not just communication about communication or 'metacommunication' (Haverkamp, 2018b), but it means actually engaging in the interaction and experiencing the meaning that arises. As such a communication-focused approach in therapy is always about new discoveries, a flexibility which is made possible by an appreciation for the stable and predictable ground rules of communication at the same time.

The therapist has to bring together all these strands at once, observing the own and the patient's communication, while reflecting on the dynamics of the communication patterns as they interact with each other, and with a view to the basic parameters of the patient (Haverkamp, 2018c), the needs, values and aspirations as they become clearer through the communication process. As meaningful information is exchanged and awareness and insight directed communication patterns used, more insight can be built,



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which then also allows experimentation with the communication patterns, ultimately enabling the patient to become their own therapist.



Dr Christian Jonathan Haverkamp, M.D. (Vienna) MLA (Harvard) LL.M. (ULaw) trained in medicine, psychiatry and psychotherapy and works in private practice for psychotherapy, counselling and psychiatric medication in Dublin, Ireland. He is the author of over 200 articles and several books and the founder of Communication-Focused Therapy®. The author can be reached by email at jonathanhaverkamp@gmail.com or on the websites www.jonathanhaverkamp.com and www.jonathanhaverkamp.ie.



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