
Lecture: Introduction to Psychotherapy

Objective:

- *Today, we'll learn how two forms of therapy—supportive psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy—can serve as powerful tools in your pastoral care. By the end, you'll understand when and how each of these approaches can help people through difficult times.*
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1. Opening and Context

- *Today, we're going to talk about something that goes hand-in-hand with pastoral care: the basics of psychotherapy. Think of psychotherapy as a way to help individuals navigate life's challenges, much like the guidance and support you offer in ministry. But psychotherapy provides structured methods that deepen this support."*
 - *"We'll focus on two types of therapy: supportive psychotherapy and cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT. Supportive psychotherapy provides comfort, encouragement, and validation, especially for those experiencing high levels of stress or uncertainty. CBT, on the other hand, is a more practical, hands-on approach that helps individuals identify and change unhelpful thinking patterns. These techniques can be incredibly valuable tools when someone comes to you seeking comfort or clarity."*
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2. Overview of Supportive Psychotherapy

Definition and Techniques

- *"Let's start with supportive psychotherapy. This type of therapy is grounded in offering emotional support and reassurance. In simple terms, it's about being a compassionate, non-judgmental listener. Here, your role is to provide a safe space for people to express their feelings. You don't need to 'solve' their problems right away—just listen and validate their experiences."*
- *"Supportive psychotherapy relies on several key techniques. First, there's active listening. This means being fully present, avoiding interruptions, and sometimes even just offering a gentle nod or a simple 'I see' to show you're with them. Then we have empathy—understanding and sharing their feelings. This can be as simple as saying, 'I can see how difficult this must be for you.'"*

Goals of Supportive Therapy

- *"The goal here isn't necessarily to challenge their thoughts but to help them feel seen and understood. When people feel supported in this way, they often begin to feel more capable of handling their challenges."*

Role in Pastoral Settings

- *"Supportive therapy fits naturally into pastoral work. Imagine someone in your parish going through a difficult time—they may not want advice right away, but rather, someone to walk alongside them. This approach builds a foundation of trust."*

1. Introducing Reflective Listening

- **Explanation of Reflective Listening:**
 - *"Reflective listening goes beyond simply hearing words; it's about capturing the essence of what the person is expressing. You reflect back their feelings and thoughts, helping them feel understood and encouraging them to dig deeper into their own experiences."*
 - *"In pastoral care, reflective listening can create a space where people feel comfortable sharing openly, knowing that they won't be judged but will be supported."*
 - **Purpose of Reflective Listening:**
 - *"Reflective listening reassures people that their emotions are valid. By reflecting back what they say, we help them see and perhaps reframe their feelings in a safe way."*
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2. Key Techniques in Reflective Listening

- **Steps in Reflective Listening:**
 - *"Let's go over some practical steps in reflective listening."*
 - **Listen Carefully:** *Avoid interrupting. Focus on the person's words and body language.*
 - **Paraphrase and Reflect Back:** *After they finish, reflect the essence of what they said. Avoid using their exact words; instead, capture the emotion or key point.*
 - **Check for Understanding:** *Ask if you got it right, inviting them to correct or expand on your reflection.*
 - **Encourage Elaboration:** *Use open-ended questions if they're comfortable, allowing them to delve deeper into their thoughts.*
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Keyword Feelings for Reflective Listening

Positive Feelings

- **Joy:** happy, content, cheerful, excited, hopeful, delighted, optimistic, proud
- **Calm:** peaceful, relaxed, serene, reassured, at ease, comfortable
- **Empowered:** confident, strong, determined, capable, courageous

- **Connected:** loved, supported, understood, included, valued, appreciated
 - **Grateful:** thankful, blessed, humbled, inspired
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Neutral or Mixed Feelings

- **Curious:** interested, intrigued, thoughtful, reflective
 - **Uncertain:** hesitant, unsure, conflicted, torn, ambivalent
 - **Pensive:** contemplative, nostalgic, thoughtful, introspective
 - **Hopeful:** optimistic, encouraged, motivated, expectant
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Negative Feelings

- **Sadness/Grief:** sad, heartbroken, lonely, isolated, rejected, abandoned, disappointed, grieving, helpless, hopeless
 - **Fear/Anxiety:** nervous, scared, anxious, worried, uneasy, stressed, insecure, doubtful, panicked, overwhelmed
 - **Anger/Frustration:** frustrated, angry, irritated, resentful, annoyed, betrayed, bitter, outraged, misunderstood
 - **Shame/Guilt:** ashamed, guilty, embarrassed, regretful, self-conscious, unworthy, inadequate
 - **Fatigue/Exhaustion:** tired, drained, weary, overworked, burnt out, defeated, overwhelmed
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Tips for Using Keyword Feelings in Reflective Listening

1. **Match the Intensity of Emotion:**
 - Use words that align with the level of emotion expressed.
 - Example: If someone says, "I'm so hurt by what they said," respond with, "*You're feeling deeply hurt and betrayed.*" Avoid minimizing by saying, "*You're a little upset.*"
2. **Pair Feelings with Context:**
 - Tie the feeling to the situation to demonstrate understanding.
 - Example: "*You're feeling proud of yourself for overcoming that challenge.*"
3. **Clarify When Unsure:**
 - If you're unsure of the emotion, reflect tentatively to invite clarification.
 - Example: "*It sounds like you might be feeling overwhelmed—is that right?*"

4. Acknowledge Mixed Emotions:

- Many people experience conflicting feelings. Reflect both sides to show understanding.
 - Example: *"You're excited about the opportunity, but also nervous about what it means for your future."*
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Using Keyword Feelings in Reflective Statements

Combine these words with reflective phrases to form responses. For example:

- *"You feel __ because __."*
- *"It sounds like you're __."*
- *"You're experiencing __."*
- *"What I hear is that you're feeling __-is that right?."*

3. Scenarios and Examples of Reflective Listening

Scenario 1: Feeling Overwhelmed by Expectations

- **Context:**
 - *A seminarian shares with you that he feels pressured by the expectations of his family and mentors. He says, "I just feel like I'm never doing enough, and I don't know how to handle it."*
- **Reflective Listening Example:**
 - **Reflective Response:** *"It sounds like you're carrying a heavy burden, feeling as though no matter what you do, it doesn't quite measure up to what others expect. That must feel really overwhelming."*
 - **Checking for Understanding:** *"Am I understanding that right? Is there more to it?"*

Scenario 2: Coping with Loneliness

- **Context:**
 - *Another seminarian confides, "Even though I'm surrounded by people, I often feel lonely. It's like no one really gets me."*
- **Reflective Listening Example:**
 - **Reflective Response:** *"You're feeling disconnected, almost as if, despite being around others, there's no one who truly understands you. That sounds really isolating."*

- **Encouraging Elaboration:** *"Is there something that would help you feel more connected?"*

Scenario 3: Dealing with Self-Doubt

- **Context:**
 - *A parishioner comes to you and says, "I'm always second-guessing myself, especially when it comes to making decisions. I feel like I can't trust my own judgment."*
 - **Reflective Listening Example:**
 - **Reflective Response:** *"It sounds like you're struggling with self-confidence, feeling like you're constantly questioning your choices and whether you're doing the right thing."*
 - **Checking for Understanding:** *"Does that capture what you're feeling, or is there more?"*
 - **Encouraging Elaboration:** *"What do you think makes you feel this way?"*
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5. Tips for Effective Reflective Listening (5 minutes)

- *"To make reflective listening effective, keep these tips in mind:"*
 - **Stay Non-Judgmental:** *Reflect without adding personal opinions or judgments.*
 - **Avoid Advice-Giving:** *Let the speaker guide the conversation; focus on understanding rather than solving.*
 - **Express Empathy:** *Acknowledge their emotions. Even a simple, "That sounds really hard" can mean a lot.*
 - **Example:**
 - *"If someone says, 'I'm not sure if I'm making the right decisions,' rather than saying, 'Maybe you should think about it more,' you could say, 'It sounds like you're feeling uncertain and looking for clarity.'"*
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Comfort as a Key Component of Supportive Psychotherapy

Why Comfort Matters:

- *"When someone is deeply hurt or expressing emotional pain, they often seek solace rather than solutions. Comfort doesn't mean offering hollow reassurances or fixing their problems; it means creating an emotional space where the person feels safe, heard, and soothed."*

Strategies for Providing Comfort:

1. Use Gentle and Reassuring Language:

- *"I'm here for you, and I want to understand what you're going through."*
- *"You're not alone in this, and it's okay to feel what you're feeling right now."*
- Avoid phrases like, *"It will all be fine,"* which can feel dismissive or unrealistic.

2. Normalize Their Experience:

- *"What you're feeling is completely natural after what you've been through."*
- *"It's okay to cry or feel angry—those are natural responses."*

3. Reassure Their Emotional Safety:

- *"It's safe to share your feelings here. Whatever you're feeling right now is valid."*
- This reassurance is particularly important for those who may feel judged or vulnerable.

4. Offer Quiet Presence:

- Sometimes, silence can be comforting. Sitting quietly and attentively conveys care without needing to say much.

Scenario: Comforting Someone in Emotional Pain

Scenario 1: A Person Grieving a Loss

- **What They Might Say:** *"I feel like my world is falling apart. I don't know how to go on without them."*
- **Response:**
 - *"Losing someone so close is incredibly painful. It makes sense that you're feeling this way—it shows how much they meant to you. You don't have to carry this alone; I'm here to support you."*

Scenario 2: A Person Feeling Rejected

- **What They Might Say:** *"No one seems to care about me. I feel so unlovable."*
- **Response:**
 - *"I'm really sorry you're feeling this way. It's incredibly painful to feel that kind of rejection. You're valuable, and your feelings matter. I'm here to listen."*

Validation as a Form of Comfort

- *"Validation reinforces that the person's emotions are real, understandable, and important. It tells them their feelings matter."*

Examples of Validation Statements:

- *"It makes sense that you feel this way after what you've been through."*
- *"Anyone in your position would feel hurt—it's a lot to carry."*
- *Avoid invalidating phrases like, "It's not that bad," or, "You'll get over it soon."*

3. Introduction to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (15 minutes)

Definition and Basic Principles

- *"Now, let's move on to cognitive behavioral therapy, or CBT. CBT is a bit more hands-on and focuses on the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Think of it as a practical toolkit for helping people challenge negative or irrational thoughts."*
- *"In CBT, we believe that how we interpret situations affects how we feel and behave. For example, if someone thinks, 'I'm not good enough,' they may feel defeated and start to withdraw. In CBT, we teach them to recognize these thoughts, challenge them, and replace them with healthier ones."*

Common Techniques in CBT

- *"CBT uses specific techniques like thought challenging, where we help someone look for evidence that may or may not support their negative beliefs. For example, instead of saying 'I'm a failure,' we might help them reframe this as, 'I made a mistake, but I'm learning.' Another technique is behavioral activation, which involves encouraging positive actions even when they don't feel like it—sometimes taking action first can help shift thoughts and feelings."*

Guided Thought Exercise

- *"Let's practice this. Think of a common negative thought someone might have. How about, 'I'm not good enough'? Now, as a group, let's brainstorm evidence that challenges this thought."*
 - **Guided response:** *"Is it true that I'm not good enough? Well, I've managed to get to this stage in my training, which suggests I am capable. And I've received positive feedback from my mentors."*
- *"This exercise helps reframe the initial thought, showing it may not be as absolute as it first seemed."*

4. Comparing Supportive Psychotherapy and CBT (10 minutes)

- *"Now, let's discuss when you might use each approach. Supportive therapy is often the first step when someone is in crisis or emotionally overwhelmed. You can begin by offering empathy and encouragement without immediately challenging their thoughts."*
- *"On the other hand, CBT can be useful when someone has an ongoing struggle with negative thinking. For example, if a parishioner constantly feels like they're failing in life, you might encourage them to reflect on and challenge this mindset."*
- *"Think of supportive therapy as planting seeds of hope and encouragement, while CBT is like weeding out thoughts that hinder growth. Both can be used together for a more holistic approach to helping someone."*