Existential psychotherapy and counselling

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What is existential therapy?
The diversity of existential therapies

‘Existential therapy means something to everyone yet what it means precisely varies with the exponent’

- John Norcross
Definition

Forms of therapeutic practice that are based, primarily or wholly, on the assumptions associated with the existential school of philosophising.
‘Human beings are nothing else but what they make of themselves’ - Sartre

‘The script of life is so unspeakably beautiful to read because death looks over our shoulder’ - Buber

‘He [or she] who has a why to live can bear with almost any how’ – Nietzsche

‘Life is a endless struggle, where moments of ease and happiness are the exception rather than the rule’ - van Deurzen
Martin Heidegger
1889-1976

What is being?
Jean-Paul Sartre
1905-1980

Being as freedom
Subjectivity and self
Friedrich Nietzsche
1844-1900

Critique of ‘herd mentality’
The essence of existential philosophy

• Critique of systems of thought that de-humanise: that reduce the richness of human lived-existences to impersonal laws, systems, numbers

• A return to the person ‘of flesh and bone’ (de Unamuno, 1954) – the concrete realities of existence
What is our existence?

1. ‘Here-and-now’ being

2. Our lives ‘as-a-whole’
The essence of existential therapy

Helping clients acknowledge, live ‘in tune with,’ and make the most of the actuality of their existences
The branches of existential therapy

Daseinsanalysis

The existential-humanistic Approach
FRANKL

Meaning centered Therapies

Yalom

The existential-phenomenological approach
VAN DEURZEN
Relational and phenomenological foundations

Buber

Husserl
**I-Thou**

Standing alongside  
Other as subject  
Other as free  
Listening holistically  
Open to otherness  
Confirming  
Relating as wholeness  
Relating as wholeness  
Dialogue/relational depth

**I-It**

Standing opposite  
Other as object  
Other as determined  
Atomising  
Solipsism  
Disconfirming  
Relating in parts  
Relating in fragments  
Monologue
experiencing being

Phenomenological perspective

I-It stance

scientism
Core practices of relational-phenomenological therapy

- Active listening
- Empathising
- Bracketing
- Descriptive rather than interpretative
- Non-judgmental
- Asking open-ended questions
- Exploring the here-and-now encounter
- Using symbols and metaphors
- Engaging in dialogue
- Helping clients to unpack their experiencing
Existential therapies are a spectrum of therapeutic practices, based on existential philosophy, that aim to help clients acknowledge, affirm, and make the most of the actuality of their lives.
Existential Therapies
Second Edition
Mick Cooper

Sage, 2003, 2016
The Existential Counselling Primer

a concise, accessible, comprehensive introduction

Mick Cooper

A Steps in Counselling SUPPLEMENT

PCCS, 2012
EXISTENTIAL PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COUNSELLING
Contributions to a Pluralistic Practice
Mick Cooper

'S Mick Cooper brings his passion for existentialism, pluralism, and the core principles underlying them to this superb book and companion website.'
John Norcross

Sage, 2015
There is no one ‘best’ therapy

Different clients benefit from different therapeutic understandings and methods at different points in time

If we want to know what is most helpful for clients, let’s talk to them about it