

# Psychodynamic Therapy

## What is psychodynamic therapy?

It involves exploring a person's beliefs and inner states, even when that person may not be completely conscious of them.

Psychodynamic therapy is typically used for depression, mood and borderline personality disorders, but not for severe thought disorders.

This therapy is usually done in a group setting and allows participants to have the immediate experience of collaborating and contending with others:

- Feedback comes from people subjectively responding. Group members receive candid and multifaceted views of how they are perceived by others.
- Participants also see how other group members deal with specific kinds of interactions. New behaviours are modeled, and multiple techniques are demonstrated. If a model seems useful, the patient can then experiment with the model and, if the experiments are successful, practice the new behaviour within the group. This can improve their coping skills.

## Foundations of psychodynamic therapies

From Alonso (1989), as cited in Swiller (2009)

Five basic principles form the foundation of all psychodynamic psychotherapies:

1. Psychological determinism: Psychic states have psychic causes
2. Existence of unconscious processes
3. Dynamic motivation: Thoughts, feelings, and behaviour are driven by the desire to gratify a variety of basic instincts

4. Epigenetic development: New psychological developments are layered on top of old ones, and the old patterns and complexes continue to exist
5. Existence of persistent mental structures with aspects of thoughts, feelings, and behaviour that tend to be mobilized in their entirety

## Key elements of effective psychotherapy groups

From Alonso (1989) and Alonso and Swiller (1993), as cited in Swiller (2009)

When establishing a psychotherapy group, these five norms are particularly important:

1. **Honesty:** Group members assume the obligation to respond to one another with maximum candor, and the consequent discussions are spontaneous and emotionally rich.
2. **Respect:** The honest expression of feelings does not mean self-indulgence, and it is important to remain civil. Communication is exclusively verbal, and impulses to act are expressed verbally, never acted upon.
3. **Industry:** Industry involves doing the work of therapy in the psychotherapy group itself. The expression of thoughts and feelings is not an end in itself, but forms the data set for meaningful and probing inspection.
4. **Responsibility:** Each member must do their fair share. Every member has the responsibility to participate with appropriate frequency and to interact with every other group member.
5. **Application:** The gains acquired in the group experience must be used outside the group in one's everyday life. Although the process of group discussion is most fruitful when focused on the present state of the group, applying the new knowledge and skills in group member's outside life can enhance the relevance of the work.