

Unified Alternative Therapies: A Seven Actions Program

Alternative therapies are *alternatives* to drug therapy for mental distress; each contrasts drug therapy singularly without establishing a relationship to any other alternative therapy program. Alternatives to drug therapy do not ally with each other to provide a unified challenge to drug therapy. We are long overdue for unifying different types of alternative therapies into a single comprehensive program; we are long overdue for *Unified Alternative Therapies*. Unified Alternative Therapies unifies alternatives into seven categories and thereafter advocates actions that promote each category; it should be noted that it can be used in conjunction with drug therapy. Unified Alternative Therapies addresses mental health as emotional health; consistently, mental distress is natural emotional suffering or other natural problem with living. This perspective of mental distress is consistent with the World Health Organization that defines mental health as *emotional well-being* and thereby implies that mental distress is emotional suffering. Distressful experiences naturally cause emotional suffering and extremely distressful experiences naturally cause intense emotional pain; emotional suffering is not a “mental disorder” (biological dysfunction). Emotional well-being is a human right as advocated by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it declared human rights to “nutritious food ...habitable shelter ...and freedom to make sense of (personal) experience in one’s own way.” However, it is not necessary to understand mental distress as natural to understand the value of unifying alternatives to drug therapy. This therapy program is comprehensive; it incorporates behaviors that promote the four dimensions of mental health as advocated by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the US government. Unifying alternatives to drug therapy creates a multi-faceted approach that is far more effective than any single alternative therapy program alone.

There are no magic pills that can change the reality of painful injustice and other distressful experiences. Emotional well-being for individuals is achievable through creating positive habits that promote positive experiences from positive life changes. The journey from emotional distress to emotional well-being is typically a difficult process of countering injustice; assuming personal responsibility for the journey is essential for improving mental health (emotional well-being). Assuming responsibility for mental health care is critically important for positive outcomes, and a sense of agency and empowerment are essential for assuming personal responsibility. Consistently, this program is intended to be self-initiated, self-directed and self-modified (self-modified to meet changing needs over time) to promote agency and empowerment. Although it is difficult to motivate behavior when goals are distant, regular, minimum time commitments at each action category create habits that promote affirming life experiences. The schedule of minimum time commitments for each category is provided solely for

consideration; each person should determine time intervals that best suit themselves. Daily time commitments may start conservatively to promote the establishment of habits since the first step of any journey is the hardest. Habits are difficult to establish but easier to maintain as initial resistance recedes and habits begin to produce rewarding outcomes. Creating positive habits promotes positive experiences that create a path of increased emotional well-being- improved mental health.

When distressful experiences create overwhelming distress and cause difficulty seeing a positive path forward, it is wise to seek assistance from supportive people- people who promote agency, empowerment and self-advocacy. Empathy and transparent social support are critical for a mental health care provider to create a therapeutic environment for a client. Supportive assistance from others can provide important feedback about the environment and our relationship to it; counselors are especially educated about public assistance resources. Mental health care providers should offer crucial empathy for social injustices and promote increased justice when possible. A good counselor replicates a good friend; they should offer “tea and sympathy.” Poorly matched professionals should not pass for acceptable mental health care; “peer support specialists” may provide valuable assistance. For an “intervention” program, *Open Dialogue Therapy* is significantly more successful than most other programs based on a philosophy more consistent with mental distress being natural emotional suffering or other natural problem with living.

Seven Actions for Improved Mental Health

Action 1) Improve physical health for a related improvement in mental health- emotional health. Address physical needs and physical illness; consider a minimum of 15 minutes of moderate cardio-vascular exercise, four days per week, plenty of rest and eating a moderate quantity of healthy foods.

Mental health is related to physical health; satisfying physical needs of safety, regular nutritional food, avoidance of toxins (and allergens), ample clean water, protection from adverse weather, and a comfortable sleeping environment promote emotional well-being- good mental health. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration can assist with difficulties in managing physical needs.

Improved physical health from exercise fosters improved mental health. Exercise should be tailored to a personal concept of recreation to encourage frequency over strenuousness; walking is a good start for most people. Exercise should begin with moderation to ensure wellness; consult a physician if you have any question about whether you are healthy enough for physical exercise.

Besides exercise, sleep is critical for good mental health. Unfortunately, it is naturally difficult to sleep when under duress; hopefully, this therapy program will promote better sleep habits.

Consistent with exercise and sleep promoting mental health, good nutrition also

promotes mental health. Nutritional food and clean water (free of heavy metals) are critical for creating enough physical energy for optimal brain operation that promotes emotional well-being. Consistently, nutritional deficits from compulsive dieting harm emotional health and can harm viability.

Exercise, rest and a healthy diet promote physical and mental health while toxins harm physical and mental health. Compulsive substance abuse of alcohol and many other drugs causes extreme emotional distress that is often relieved by more drugs in a cycle of abuse that can harm viability. Although the sedative affect of psychiatric drugs may be beneficial during emotional crises; heavy, long-term use of neuroleptic drugs is generally counterproductive. Over time, heavy psychotropic drug therapy causes harmful side-effects and reduces the physical energy and mental acuity required for reversing a history of distressful experiences. Unfortunately, most neuroleptic drugs are addictive (especially in heavier doses) and withdrawal can be dangerous. The *Harm Reduction Guide to Coming Off Psychiatric Drugs* (by Will Hall) and an educational seminar at the Mad in America website (MadinAmerica.com) may provide valuable information.

Action 2: Create a behavior habit that counters emotionally distressful experiences; consider a minimum of an hour, two days per week. Consider behaviors that best neutralize, confront or otherwise counter personally distressful experiences and tailor a behavior with that goal in mind.

Neutralizing distressful experiences often centers on preventing others from experiencing similar distress or comforting people who have experienced similar distress. Thus a rape victim might consider volunteering at a rape hotline, advocating for educational programs for youthful offenders or campaigning for stronger laws against rape. Consistently, someone who was abused as a child might consider advocating for better foster care programs or parenting programs, advocating for stronger laws against child abuse or volunteering at a Boys & Girls Club. Moreover, someone afflicted by the sorrow of war may consider joining a veterans support organization or an anti-war organization. Consistently, guilt is reduced by actions that help people like those hurt by a transgression- that make a person deserving of forgiveness. Thus a person who injured someone while driving impaired might consider volunteering at Meals-on-Wheels or with programs that make homes more accessible for people with disabilities. If actions that counter personally traumatic experiences are difficult to specify, consider community service to generally counter social injustice.

Undesirable reactions to distressful experiences may be reduced by this program and behavior therapy; conditioning techniques can assist with distressful compulsions (broadly construed) or emotionally distressful phobias (broadly construed).

This therapeutic action is designed to counter the effects of past distressful experiences; a life change may be necessary if a personal environment is toxic to mental health- emotional well-being.

Assistance from supportive people who promote agency and empowerment may

be helpful when having difficulty imagining an action that counters personally distressful experiences or when changing personal environments.

Action 3) Create behavior habits that promote emotional well-being; consider a minimum of an hour, two days per week. Consider behaviors that are most likely to eventually create enjoyment in life and create habits that will be the foundation of improved mental (emotional) health.

Actions that promote emotional well-being often relate to creative arts including dance; other options include hobbies, social recreation and time spent emerged in a comforting natural environment. A habit that promotes well-being often plays to personal strengths or strengthens personal weaknesses. Consider behaviors that increase personal efficacy (including peer education) if mental distress makes it temporarily repugnant to foster an enjoyable experience.

Assistance from supportive people who promote agency and empowerment may be helpful when having difficulty imagining behaviors that might eventually promote some enjoyment of life.

Action 4) Create a behavior habit of relaxation therapy (broadly construed); consider a minimum of 15 minutes daily.

Relaxation therapy is a natural form of therapy that reduces stress and increases a sense of emotional well-being for better mental health. Different forms of relaxation therapy from hot mineral baths to meditation have been popular in different cultures for thousands of years. It is impossible to be emotionally agitated while physically relaxed.

Choose a form of relaxation therapy that is the most personally enjoyable. Broadly construed, relaxation therapy include progressive muscle relaxation and deep breathing techniques, massages, saunas and sweat lodges, spas and hot baths, meditation, yoga and tai chi, acupuncture, and hypnosis. Consistently, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy may also be valuable.

Consider increasing time spent with relaxation therapy during periods of increased emotional distress.

Action 5) Manage personal business to reduce personal problems that promote mental distress; consider a minimum of 15 minutes of planning and organizing personal tasks, two days per week.

Painful emotional suffering often distracts attention from taking care of the personal business that promotes physical and emotional well-being; failing to manage personal business promotes distressful experiences and related mental distress. Organize and expedite personal tasks including scheduling and managing appointments, grocery shopping, cleaning personal space, paying bills and balancing checkbook, etc. List regular daily and weekly activities to create a comforting and more productive structure or routine to daily life and occasionally reconsider improving the list. A weekly

and daily schedule should allocate time for each of the seven actions of this therapy program. Managing personal business may include scheduling time for obsessive thoughts (to reduce their intrusiveness) and for creating scenarios in advance that promote better outcomes for “triggers.” Consider Occupational Therapy that focuses on promoting the management of personal business if some guidance seems valuable.

For those who have been deep in the mental health care system, the Wellness Recovery Action Plan wisely advocates an advanced crisis plan including a legal Advanced Medical Directive. A proactive crisis plan often includes information about responsibility for decision-making during a time of crisis, health care information including choices about primary care and support, a plan for staying at home, things that help during a crisis and things that aggravate a crisis, and people that help during a crisis and people that aggravate a crisis. A legal Advanced Medical Directive Plan can promote some feelings of empowerment when things seem otherwise; the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration can assist upon request.

Action 6) Seek positive thinking with mindfulness towards a personal affirmation and gratitude for one’s blessings; consider a minimum of 20 minutes creating habits that promote positive thinking, two days per week; 30 minutes developing social relationships for positive thinking once per week; and a minute of personal affirmation, three times daily.

Be mindful of your emotional state and seek a more positive disposition. Although most people with a history of distressful experiences resent the repetition of the theme of positive thinking, “counting one’s blessings” promotes emotional well-being and related mental health. Consistent with the central theme of most self-help books, positive thinking promotes positive thoughts, experiences and memories; conversely, negative thinking promotes negative thoughts, experiences and memories. A positive disposition includes being kind to oneself and less self-critical of perceived shortcomings; self-acceptance is vitally important. Be mindful that you are not alone in suffering; a multitude of people are experiencing extremely distressful experiences.

Numerous popular alternative therapies promote positive thinking. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is the most popular form of psychotherapy; it provides valuable strategies for promoting positive thinking (including visualizing positive change) and for reducing self-defeating behavior patterns and triggers. Cognitive behavioral therapy may also assist with strategies to improve social relationships (including tips on how to be supportive without being imposing) and to overcome attachment to abusers. *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Basics and Beyond* (by Judith Beck) is a popular CBT resource. Narrative Therapy also provides valuable tools for seeking a positive disposition by investigating the injustices underlying negative self-images and “rewriting the narrative.” Consistently, social service organizations may assist with strategies to improve social and/or employment skills to increase social welfare- mental health. Consider the therapeutic value of social support (empathy and compassion) from a supportive friend,

counselor or peer-specialist. The Wellness Recovery Action Plan program, Peter Breggin's Empathetic Therapy, Emotional CPR, Well-being therapy, Positive therapy and Paul Gilbert's Compassion Focused Therapy are additional tools for promoting personal affirmation and reducing self-criticism.

Affirming music and other entertainment, pleasant aromas and a comforting personal space promote positive thinking and emotional well-being; additional lighting may also be desirable during long, dark winters.

Mental health is also promoted by the natural affirmation of fellowship- social relationships; humans share a therapeutic, affirming natural bond based on our common humanity. Collaborating with people who are confronting similar types of distressful experiences generally promotes affirmation and mental health. Social relationships (through peer groups, community service and volunteerism, school and work, and recreational and political activities) promote positive thinking and improved mental health.

Consistent with the natural affirmation of fellowship, animal companionship can also promote natural affirmation.

Positive thinking is also promoted by habitually reminding oneself (morning, noon and night) to respect oneself and others, and seek a positive perspective of personal challenges.

Be mindful that emotional suffering is the natural reaction to distressful experiences and not a "mental disorder." Mourn for the emotional suffering caused by distressful experiences and use the suffering as motivation for empowering actions; self-advocacy and increased authenticity promote mental health. Also, be mindful that humans are naturally resourceful and adaptive, and that there is always hope for improved mental health because "the only constant in life is change."

Action 7) Consider the meaning to life and your purpose in life for improved mental health; consider a minimum of 5 minutes of consideration twice a day (morning and evening).

Consider how best to understand the natural and/or spiritual meaning to life and how to achieve your individual purpose.

Human nature and our common humanity produce natural purpose that provides therapeutic meaning to life; life has natural meaning as a function of human nature (our common humanity). Unfortunately, human nature has been historically maligned for self-promotion and greed; the cooperation and compromise that have promoted the survival of the human species are discounted. It is irrational to believe that despicable behaviors (consistent with "social 'Darwinism'") are human nature while admirable behaviors are not human nature (are philosophical or theological). All behavior is natural (a function of human nature) and increasingly altruistic (albeit with setbacks). Our natural motivation promotes increased fellowship and an increased appreciation for the stewardship of Mother Earth. Some people instinctively know their natural purpose; others should consider promoting fellowship and the stewardship of the environment.

A therapeutic purpose to life may be spiritual as well as natural; many people want to consider a theological purpose to life beyond our natural purpose (and the scope of natural science). Natural science is our best tool for understanding ourselves and our environment but is limited in understanding meaning beyond natural science and the physical world. Understanding spiritual purpose promotes mental health whether your spiritual purpose has natural or theological meaning.

Conclusion:

The previous seven actions promote seven categories of alternative therapies that promote emotional well-being (mental health). Creating positive habits promotes a more positive life path to more positive experiences of increased emotional well-being-improved mental health. Humans have intrinsic value and a human right to emotional well-being as advocated by the UN Commission on Human Rights with their *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. **“Keep your eyes on the prize;” never abandon your inalienable right to improved mental health!**

Acknowledgment: Unified Alternative Therapies is a work-in-progress; feedback is appreciated through the contact form.

Disclaimer: As a work-in-progress, this therapy program is not intended to substitute for professional medical or mental health advice; please see a mental health care professional for specific needs.