



COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES
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SCHEMA FOCUSSED EMOTIVE BEHAVIOR THERAPY (SET)

Peter ZORN, University Psychiatric Services, University Hospital of Psychiatry, Department of Psychotherapy, Bolligenstrasse 111, CH-3000 Bern 60, Switzerland; ph +41 31 930 99 15 / fax 88

Definition: In SET a therapist and a group of patients discuss structured case histories of people with various personality disorders. This is to activate, clarify and modify each patient's maladaptive schemas and associated feelings that drive distorted ways of relating to others, and so help them feel less injured and accept themselves more.

Elements: The group discusses each case portrayed in 4 parts – that person's:

1. Formative relationships generating negative core schemas e.g. repeatedly feeling rejected, ordinary, dependent, a devalued outcast.
2. Maladaptive ways of interacting with others (e.g. trying to be superior in order to avoid feeling inferior).
3. Ensuing bias of perceptions, interactions with others, and emotional responsiveness (e.g. self-centredness in relationships, compensatory achievement at work, inability to enjoy leisure time).
4. Activation of crises (e.g. failure to meet one's own standards, so confirming a sense of inferiority; loss of work preventing compensatory achievement).

Each patient's beliefs and feelings are modified primarily by schema-therapy methods (e.g. reframing childhood experiences as negligent or abusive), modifying negative core schemas, role-playing becoming satisfied with hitherto frustrated needs, improving self-acceptance of one's own needs. Relating to the therapist and patients in the group leads to new and corrective experiences.

Related Procedures: Cognitive restructuring, interpersonal reconstructive therapy, problem solving, role play, schema-focussed therapy, transference interpretation.

Application: In closed 90-minute twice-weekly groups of 6-9 out- or in-patients who have any personality disorder, to a total of 30-40 sessions.

1st Use? Zorn et al (2003)

References:

1. Zorn P, Roder V, Tschacher W, Thommen M, von Osterhausen K, Lächler M (2003) Evaluation eines neuen kognitiv behaviouralen Gruppenprogramms (BIT) für Patienten mit Persönlichkeitsstörungen – erste Ergebnisse. (Evaluation of a New Cognitive Behavioural Group Therapy Programme (BIT) for Patients with Personality Disorders – First Results). *Nervenarzt*, 74 (Suppl. 2), S311
2. Zorn P, Roder V, Müller DR, Tschacher W, Thommen M (2007) Schemazentrierte emotiv-behaviorale Therapie (SET): Eine randomisierte Evaluationsstudie an Patienten mit Persönlichkeitsstörungen aus den Clustern B und C (Schema Focussed Emotive Behavioral Therapy (SET): Randomised controlled trial of patients with Cluster B and C personality disorders). *Verhaltenstherapie*, 17, 233-241.
3. Zorn P, Roder V, Soravia L, Tschacher W (2008) Evaluation der "Schemazentrierten emotiv-behavioralen Therapie" (SET) für Patienten mit Persönlichkeitsstörungen: Ergebnisse einer randomisierten Untersuchung (Schema-focussed emotive behaviour

therapy (SET) for patients with personality disorders: Randomised controlled trial). *Psychotherapie, Psychosomatik, Medizinische Psychologie*, 58, 371-378.

4. Zorn P, Roder V, Tschacher W (2009) Schemazentrierte emotive-behaviorale Therapie (SET) – Theorie, gruppentherapeutisches Konzept und empirische Befunde zur Behandlung einer Patientin mit narzisstischer Persönlichkeitsstörung (Schema-focussed emotive behaviour therapy (SET) – Theory, concept of group therapy, and empirical results in a patient with narcissistic personality disorder). *Persönlichkeitsstörungen*, 13 (2), 104-115.

Case Illustration (Zorn et al, 2009)

In her thirties Ann entered a SET group of 9 patients for her ‘lonely depression ... at all times’. 6 years earlier she had her first of several admissions for major depression. Years before she had become anxious and begun to beat herself, mostly by hitting her face. Her group SET sessions began with the therapist describing ‘Mr. Great’ (narcissistic personality disorder) who alternately felt excessive admiration for his “grandiose” abilities and cold scorn when he failed to live up to those, so his quest for unconditional love remained unfulfilled. This prompted Ann to recall unpleasant memories of childhood and adolescence, saying she’d struggled for love from her mother, who mostly faced Ann with contempt and approved of Ann only when she achieved something her mother hadn’t attained. Ann’s father had been emotionally distant but spoiled her materially. Ann became her parents’ ‘little princess’ when she got top marks. If Ann failed, her parents didn’t speak to her for weeks, making her feel inferior and deserving of punishment. Ann now understood that, like Mr Great, she’d always tried to excel to please her parents, and saw similar patterns in her seeking approval from others. She chose cold unapproachable partners and tried to gain their love by excelling, e.g. by trying to be a ‘perfect’ housewife while also excelling in her job. If she failed, she made demands on herself and punished herself as her parents had with her. Group discussions clarified such feelings and behaviours to help her become aware of and modify those. A key therapy scene was Mr Great’s dream of being lost in space without contact to Earth. Hearing this led Ann to feel her chronic unbearable loneliness and frantic ineffectual attempts ‘to be included’. She remembered a childhood dream of being an angel soaring through space desperately seeking, but not finding, her home planet. This activated grieving over her isolated cold childhood. For the first time Ann began to give herself the affection she had lacked by treating herself more tolerantly, regarding herself lovingly, harming herself much less, and gradually spending more time on recreation and well-being. Near the end of her SET groups her self-esteem improved and she fell in love with a more-available man who related well to others. She decided to end her current relationship and in group sessions role-played ending it without feeling guilty. By the end of session 31 she also felt less depressed and less anxious.