FIRST PERSON ACCOUNT

The Importance of Talk Therapy

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In psychotherapy, medication was useful for stabilizing me and limiting some of my symptoms, but talk therapy has been the most important medicine for helping me cure my mental illness. I found the roots of my problems were negative and traumatic psychological experiences, which happened during and even before episodes. Talking about issues enabled me to find relief from ailments lodged in my subconscious, which affected me constantly. My first doctor overmedicated me and I also didn't speak much during talk therapy because he was austere and seemed judgmental. I was afraid I would be criticized for past behaviors and mistakes. I only developed symptoms of depression due to lack of progression and overmedication, which compelled me to stop taking medication and lead to a second episode that simply means medication alone cannot cure a patient. After switching to my current doctor, I found true alleviation and healing with the lowest medication dosage I have ever taken (3-mg risperidone) and a great deal of talk therapy.

Growing up with cognitive impairment and a wider emotional range caused me many psychological issues before my psychotic episodes and fully developed mental illness. These impairments caused erratic behaviors in my youth and lead to estrangement and social difficulties, which were precursors and contributing ailments during and after my schizoaffective episodes. I developed schizoaffective disorder partially because I have a wider emotional range which resulted in sleeplessness and other issues, partially from having difficulty thinking from cognitive impairment, but also from derangement from difficult social experiences growing up. On top of this, there are also many traumatizing experiences that occurred during my psychotic episodes, which contributed to my paranoia and social neurosis after my episodes. I became out of touch with reality and developed mental illness not only from physical deficiencies but also from psychological trauma.

At the start of talk therapy, I was paranoid to the point where I was having difficulty speaking even the shortest of sentences, and now, I work in telephone customer service. The first thing my talk therapist did was developing rapport. I was in talk therapy because I had many deeply traumatizing experiences, which I needed to disclose and analyze in detail. I had previously found it fairly difficult to talk about my deepest feelings even to people I had known my whole life never mind a complete strangers, which is why my current doctor's befriending was helpful in encouraging me to talk. It informed me he was on my side. I have had therapists who have been austere (who I didn't make progress with) and therapists who have been friendly, who I am forever grateful for because we have progressed beyond horizons I previously could not imagine.

It was already difficult enough to face the issues that frightened and traumatized me the most without having someone who seemed to be judging me for having them. However, my current therapist created a positive and friendly environment, which encouraged me to talk and helped me face these issues. My therapist kept the conversations positive, which gave me a positive attitude and hopeful outlook toward overcoming my mental illness that created an inclination for progress. The attitude that works best for me is to understand we are talking about ailments to solve problems, not to lament and I have never felt as though I am complaining because of this mind-set.

My austere psychiatrists exuded judgment, while my current psychiatrist is a guide who allows me to think and listens to my thoughts and gives occasional advice when needed. The judgmental therapists were difficult to work with because I made mistakes during episodes, did many strange things, and had many issues I needed to share which outside of therapy would be completely taboo socially. When I felt I was going to be judged, I was far more careful about disclosing information. However, when I was with my current therapist who has been someone who is there to help and is always on my side, I felt it was safe to disclose my deepest and most hidden thoughts and did.

In therapy, I do most of the talking and my therapist guides me toward answers I have trouble finding. There are occasions when he flat out disagrees with me, but I am more willing to listen when this happens because he also listens to me at other times, and there is a give and take in the conversation. Give and take makes me feel as though

I am contributing and my thoughts are important, which encourages me to talk. This also allows him to disagree with me when he needs to say something crucial for my well-being, which may completely contrast my thinking. When I have been preached or lectured in talk therapy, I felt my thoughts were far less valuable and contributed less to the conversation. There were times I developed dependence upon my psychotherapists, but later realized that I am my most useful tool for alleviating the burdens of my episodes and past experiences.

The most difficult facet of having a psychological issue is knowing there is something within your subconscious which frightens or bothers you but being unable to identify it. One of my therapist's most essential functions has been helping me identify the issues affecting me because when we have identified issues they have been extremely easy to eliminate.

I believe I have been my most valuable tool in my therapy because I have a record of all my experiences in my mind and I am the one experiencing the feelings of the trauma. This means I am the one who has had the information that needed to be worked with to alleviate my troubles, and the disclosure of this information only began once I was encouraged to talk. I have also known when the right "medicinal words" have been hit upon because I have felt the alleviation from those words as soon as I have understood them. My talk therapist not only created a method for resolving and thinking through issues but also created an extremely positive environment, which inclined me to develop an affinity toward psychology. I developed such a liking for psychotherapy's results that I eventually made a journal and began self-administering psychotherapy and progressed far faster than I could if I waited for just one hour of therapy per week.

Another important facet of psychotherapy is discussing social norms. After experiencing two and a half years of psychosis, I had no idea of what was culturally acceptable, but my therapist gave me the answers I was unable to ask others for. Sometimes I would pace rapidly outside of his office, other times I would laugh out loud in public by myself, and other times I would not respond to people after being spoken to but we worked through these issues and I wouldn't have known I was doing anything wrong if someone never informed me. Being in talk therapy helped me start talking again because after I said even the strangest of things my therapist gave a warm response to validate my thoughts, which encouraged me to talk and informed me I am worth hearing.

Initially, progress was slow and I didn't push too hard because I was becoming comfortable talking about issues that were difficult to face. As my well-being improved, I increased my expectations and set higher goals for myself and eventually progressed to better states of being than I had ever experienced before my episodes. Most of the progress I have made and will continue making during psychotherapy has been a result of talk therapy, and most of my symptoms of paranoia and neurosis have been completely alleviated. Although it has taken time and tenacity, I have made progress with each session and words I have come to live by which are the reason for my well-being and enjoyment of life today are "To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often."(Winston Churchill)