

What is Analytic Psychotherapy?

Psychoanalysis is based on the belief that the meanings of personal experiences often remain unacknowledged. These meanings can be understood as standing outside conscious experience, but contribute greatly to the factors that determine emotions and behaviour. If unconscious, the advice of friends and family, the reading of self-help books, and especially the most determined efforts of will, often fail to provide lasting relief.

Someone seeking psychoanalysis can have significant symptoms, which may include depression or anxiety, sexual incapacities, or physical symptoms without any demonstrable underlying physical cause. One person might be plagued by private rituals or compulsions or repetitive thoughts of which no one else is aware. Another might live a constricted life of isolation and loneliness, incapable of feeling close to anyone. A victim of childhood sexual abuse might suffer from an inability to trust anyone. Others experience repeated failures in work or in relationships, brought about not by chance but by self-destructive patterns of behavior. Many seek analysis because their way of being restricts choices and the opportunity for pleasure, or because other approaches have provided only temporary relief – or have failed.

Psychotherapy Sussex members offer two main types of treatment:

1. One-to-one individual sessions
2. Small groups with one or two group therapists.

Individual Analytic Psychotherapy is based on the close relationship with an analyst or therapist that develops in the course of treatment, creating a safe environment for self-revelation. The emotional experience of that relationship can offer the opportunity to explore repetitive difficulties and associated unconscious issues.

Continuity in treatment is essential to developing the closeness and intimacy required for this form of self-exploration. Typically, meetings with the therapist take place regularly, sometimes up to several times a week – details of which need to be decided between therapist and those seeking therapy. Sessions last for fifty minutes. Some who begin treatment may prefer lying on a couch; others prefer sitting upright in a comfortable chair. Everyone sets their own pace and agenda for therapy by saying what comes to mind, as thoughts and feelings emerge.

Through a joint effort with the therapist, someone in therapy gradually may gain mastery over crippling life patterns, and/or incapacitating symptoms. This new-found capacity also helps to expand the freedom to work and to relate. Over the course of time, the person's life including their behaviour, relationships, and sense of self, can change in deep and abiding ways.

Group Analytic Psychotherapy draws on the insights of psychoanalysis and sociology as models for understanding human relationships. Starting life as a member of a family group and carrying memories of those early relationships may continue to influence adulthood. Although there may be some awareness of these, there may also be inner conflicts from the past which result in symptoms needing attention.

The Group represents a personal and social space, and therefore provides the opportunity to explore with others how constricting patterns of thinking and feeling, rooted in the past, reproduce themselves in the present, and can be obstacles to growth and creativity. Group members share the goal of seeking to understand themselves and the group provides the opportunity to see oneself through the eyes of others.

A group consists of no more than eight members and sessions last usually for an hour and a half. The sessions have no fixed agenda, instead, members are invited to talk about whatever comes to mind and others respond freely. The strictly observed group boundaries make it a safe place for trust to develop, offering the potential to explore relationships to others in the group, which may resemble patterns operating in current relationships or carried over from the original family. It may then be possible to try out new ways of being with others as a step towards forming more satisfying personal, social, family or work relationships.

Participation in a group fosters awareness of how the internal world has been shaped by external constraints and then models personal and social relationships. It results in growing understanding, greater skills in interpersonal communication and an increased sense of connection with self and others. This often leads to the discovery of unknown potential and personal growth.