

# Introduction to Theories of Counselling

## Introduction to Theories of Counselling

(A concise, organized guide for students and practitioners)

### 1. Why Study Counselling Theories?

| Purpose                     | What It Gives You                                                       |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Framework for understanding | Helps you see patterns in client behaviour and emotions.                |
| Guides intervention choices | Matches techniques to the client's needs and the therapist's style.     |
| Professional identity       | Shows where you fit within the broader counselling landscape.           |
| Ethical grounding           | Provides a basis for informed consent, confidentiality, and boundaries. |

### 2. Core Dimensions of Any Theory

| Dimension    | Typical Questions                                                                                 |
|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Ontology     | What is the nature of the person (static vs. dynamic, rational vs. emotional)?                    |
| Epistemology | How do we know what we know about the client (observable behaviour, inner experience, narrative)? |
| Methodology  | What techniques are used (talk, activity, body?work, art)?                                        |
| Goal         | What is the desired outcome (symptom relief, self?actualisation, insight, empowerment)?           |

### 3. Major Counselling Theories (Overview)

| Theory                         | Founder(s)                                | Timeframe      | Key Assumptions                                                 | Primary Techniques                                             |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Psychoanalytic / Psychodynamic | Sigmund Freud; later Jung, Adler, Erikson | 1890s? present | Unconscious drives shape behaviour; early relationships matter. | Free association, dream analysis, transference interpretation. |

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| Theory                                           | Founder(s)                            | Timeframe         | Key Assumptions                                                                           | Primary Techniques                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Humanistic / Person-Centered</b>              | Carl Rogers                           | 1940s?<br>present | People are inherently growth-oriented; therapeutic relationship is central.               | Unconditional positive regard, empathy, reflective listening.                         |
| <b>Gestalt</b>                                   | Fritz Perls                           | 1940s?<br>1970s   | Awareness of present experience leads to change; the "here-and-now".                      | Empty-chair dialogue, body awareness, experiments.                                    |
| <b>Existential</b>                               | Viktor Frankl, Rollo May, Irvin Yalom | 1940s?<br>present | Humans confront freedom, responsibility, meaning, death.                                  | Exploration of values, confronting existential anxieties, paradoxical intention.      |
| <b>Cognitive-Behavioural (CBT)</b>               | Aaron Beck, Albert Ellis              | 1960s?<br>present | Thoughts, emotions, behaviours are interlinked; maladaptive thoughts can be restructured. | Cognitive restructuring, behavioural experiments, exposure, skills training.          |
| <b>Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy (REBT)</b> | Albert Ellis                          | 1950s?<br>present | Irrational beliefs cause emotional distress.                                              | ABC model (Activating event? Belief? Consequence), disputation, new rational beliefs. |
| <b>Behavioural</b>                               | B.F. Skinner, Joseph Wolpe            | 1950s?<br>1970s   | Learning principles (reinforcement, conditioning) shape behaviour.                        | Systematic desensitisation, operant conditioning, modelling.                          |
| <b>Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT)</b>     | Steve de Shazer, Insoo Kim Berg       | 1980s?<br>present | Clients have resources; focus on solutions rather than problems.                          | Miracle question, scaling, exception-finding.                                         |
| <b>Narrative Therapy</b>                         | Michael White, David Epston           | 1980s?<br>present | People construct meaning through stories; problems are separate from the person.          | Externalisation, re-authoring, mapping the influence of dominant narratives.          |

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| Theory                        | Founder(s) | Timeframe | Key Assumptions                                                          | Primary Techniques |
|-------------------------------|------------|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Integrative / Eclectic</b> | Various    | Ongoing   | No single theory fits all; combine elements based on client and context. | Tailored blend of  |