

NWRPA Friday Evening Seminars

3 More Words in Therapy

Friday 8 July 2016

At this seminar we were going to hear about *Silence* from Marjina Mahmood. Unfortunate Marjina cannot be with us. Frank Kelley will come off the subs bench. We have the pleasure of:

Stephen Thompson on Creativity

Stephen, a gestalt therapist working with adults and children, reflects on the role of creativity in the therapeutic process.

Peter Lindsay on Bullying

Bullying - a trauma in so many forms where scars can require years to heal. After a career in finance Peter became a counsellor in 2008 after receiving an MA in Relationship Counselling. He practised for seven years with Relate and now works in private practice in Knutsford with couples, families and individuals.

Frank Kelley on Empathy

Thinking of empathy as a Kleinian projective process casts a different light on empathy in both counselling theory and practice. Frank Kelley was a psychodynamic counsellor in the NHS and is now retired.

Friday 12 August 2016 The NWRPA does not meet in August.

They'll be plenty of time for questions and discussion, and light refreshments are available.

Each of these events represent **2 hours of continuing professional development.**

**Venue:
The Manchester Institute for Psychotherapy
454 Barlow Moor Road
Chorlton,
Manchester M21 0BQ**

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If you would like a CPD certificate for any of the NWRPA seminars email Frank Kelley at nwrpa2010@ntlworld.com

NWRPA Friday Evening Seminars

Forgiveness

Teresa Hampson

10 June 2016

Teresa Hampson is an integrative counsellor working with adults by phone as well as face-to-face, and with young people face-to-face. She drew on the research she did for her Master's in counselling to consider forgiveness and the feelings associated with it, together with the impact forgiving has on individuals and its place in counselling. She also described some of the models of Forgiveness Therapy that originated in the US.

Over recent months our NWRPA Friday Evening Seminars have begun as more formal presentations and spontaneously changed into group discussions. This June seminar carried on that process and was our most personal discussion yet. This was possible because of our members willingness to express themselves and also to Teresa for both introducing a subject of great personal resonance and then fostering a complex and touching group discussion. By group discussion I mean literally that; everybody present joined in and appreciated and built on each others' contributions. I have followed the NWRPA's custom by not including members personal information in this newsletter.

Teresa trained with Egan's model of therapy. Gerald Egan, *The Skilled Helper: a problem management and opportunity development approach to helping*, (2002) and *Essentials of Skilled Helping: managing problems, developing opportunities* (2006). She has been influenced by person centred, existential and psychodynamic approaches.

Her dissertation arose out of her concern about how do counsellors working in a Christian organisation view forgiveness. Throughout this discussion both Teresa and our members noted that it is often not easy to work with spirituality in our therapeutic work and in our organisations and training. One example of this is that I had a degree of cognitive dissonance when Teresa said how important her spiritual director has been.

Forgiveness is a religious idea and some Christians would say that the term acceptance should be used in non-religious contexts. However Teresa noticed, and our members recognised this, that forgiveness is a frequent theme in counselling for both religious and non religious clients. So what is it? What feelings are involved? And how do people do it?

Teresa's research involved a phenomenological analysis of her interviews with four counsellors and trainees in a Christian organisation. She focused her research on an individuals forgiving individuals. This excluded self forgiveness and forgiveness between social groups. She also noted that her interviewees worked with victims rather than perpetrators.

Little has been written on her topic. Teresa thought this was partly because of a Social Science disdain of religion. We also thought that spirituality can be treated awkwardly by therapists. It was significant that this group discussion involved our members being open about their religious beliefs and non beliefs.

What surfaced in the discussion at this point was how damaging a lack of forgiveness can be. There is a Native American saying that *if you are intent on revenge then dig two graves*. Teresa encouraged our connotations of forgiveness. These included:

- Resolution
- Letting them off the hook
- Moving on
- Reconciling
- Forgive but not forget
- Revenge is a poison we take ourselves thinking it kills someone else.
- Stop digging two graves
- Releasing the self from the other person
- Unburdening
- Letting go
- Excusing
- Being non-judgemental
- Can only be achieved in the Kleinian Depressive Position
- Restorative Justice
- Is forgiving condoning?

Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a process that is painful, has to be worked at and can last a long time. It often involves having to let go of our resentments. It means we can make the transition from victim to survivor. It is more of an internal process whereas reconciliation involves other people. However it is very difficult to have reconciliation without forgiveness. And it may not be possible to reach forgiveness unless we first have empathy and compassion for others and ourselves.

This view of forgiveness came from Teresa's research. Her review of the literature showed that there are many different definitions. However most definitions share some constants. Forgiveness arises from an interpersonal offence and is a choice that the victim makes. Forgiveness both benefits the victim and brings a reduction of negative thoughts and feelings about the perpetrator. Without forgiveness we can find that those who affected us badly will be carrying on doing so; even in their absence and from beyond the grave. When these feelings change in therapy clients can come to see their abusers as old, frail or victims themselves rather than the unforgiven powerful monsters who have always haunted us.

Forgiveness has similar phases to grief and leads to a cohesive new narrative with new meaning. We work through painful feelings of shame, hurt, guilt, betrayal, anger, ambivalence and vengeance. We relieve trauma and reopen our wounds. We can hold on to an implicit idea that negative feelings are ones we should not have rather than common feelings we all have and should be able to accept.

Threaded through our discussion was the idea that forgiveness is generally good but it can have a downside. We can forgive the unforgivable and in doing so can be held in, or return to, abusive relationships. Perhaps also we need to not forgive ourselves too easily. Shame is essential in telling us all to live a good and healthy life and forgiveness can undermine this.

We also thought a lot about whether forgiveness is a purely internal experience as it often can be for our clients during therapy. However for some people forgiveness of the self and an act of reparation are always linked. For example two of the 12 steps of Alcoholics Anonymous are: *Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all* and *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others*. One description of the Jewish act of atonement is *Repentance is needed in all cases of wilful sin, and restitution is always required in the case of sin against a fellow person, unless the wronged party waives it*.

Forgiving those who harm us can also be linked to acting in the world rather than being an internal process. In this case it involves an act of confrontation as forgiveness cannot be a forgetting of the harm that was done. We thought that for clients any confrontation is better late in the therapeutic process. This allows a previously frail client the necessary resilience and also avoids the dangers of expressing unthought anger or being drawn into a traumatising reenactment of abuse. In TA terms a realistic confrontation comes from the Adult ego state. Perhaps confrontation is the wrong term as facing someone who has harmed us should be a natural process rather than an accusation.

Whether in or out of therapy, whether with reparation or not, forgiving can be a final freeing step. The end of a process of understanding and acceptance both thought and felt. In my head and heart I forgive you.

Thank to Teresa for introducing us to what is an important part of our lives and for fostering this group discussion. Even more thanks are due to our members present. I have always appreciated the ways we get involved in our seminars and this was a group conversation with a great depth of thought and feeling and clarity of focus.

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