



The Nature of Healing *in Psychotherapy*

By Cheryl Yanuck, MD

Much has been written about the emotional healing a cancer patient may go through, regardless of whether they are cured or eventually die of the cancer. The same can be true of other life-transforming events. Two people could have been equally mistreated during their childhood. One grows up to be a drug addict and an abusive parent. The other becomes a compassionate social worker who helps others heal as he or she did. What factors determine how that person will turn out?

One major factor is resilience, the ability to spring back from a shock. This may be partly inborn, but external forces can increase resilience. Having even one competent, consistent caregiver (for instance, a nanny, aunt, or coach) can offset the effect of bad parenting or loss and make a person more resilient. For instance, two people may have a parent die when they are young. For one, other relatives and friends rally to provide comfort and support. For the other, all the adults are too caught up in their own grief to notice the bereft child. It is clear which one will fare better in the long run.

Having healthy, nurturing partners (spouse, friends) in adulthood also helps

healing to occur. Psychotherapists can provide the powerful experience of a relationship based on consistency and trust. A good psychotherapist is attentive to your needs and allows healthy attachment to develop. Within this trusting relationship, you can learn to re-pattern how you interact with other people so that you stop unconsciously replaying old negative roles. This allows all your relationships to go better. An effective therapist should be calm, grounded, and functioning at a mature level when interacting with you. In my practice, I help patients stay connected to themselves by being emotionally present with them and helping them stay grounded while they're going through difficult transformations. The most rewarding aspect of my work is witnessing people gaining awareness and moving forward to happier, healthier lives: giving up drinking, finishing school, getting a better job, making true friends, accepting themselves, finding love, becoming a good parent.

Motivation is also key to healing. I have worked with patients who are extremely motivated to change, and they generally do well. I can be emotionally present, make suggestions, offer insights, and prescribe just the right medicine, relaxation technique, or exercise program, but it is up to you to

take action. An ability to be insightful and self-aware rather than blaming of others also makes healing much more likely to occur. Self awareness gives you back control. Believing that other people cause your distress leaves you helpless to change your situation. We can only change our own behavior, not that of others! Helping patients strengthen their capacity for insight and take charge of their lives is a key part of the relationship between therapist and patient. **l&h**

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