

What is Experiential Training?

Experiential training is training where each participant actively practices the skill and receives direct and specific feedback on what he or she is doing well and can improve.

There are 4 roles in experiential psychotherapy training.

1. The trainer—This person is generally an expert in the field and structures the training as well as offers feedback to each participant and that participant's skill level
2. The therapist—this person practices specific therapy skills for a short duration during the group and in front of the group.
3. The client—the client volunteers from the group members and shares a real situation in his or her life. The therapist responds with therapeutic interventions.
4. The observers—These participants watch the therapist/ client interchange and after the interchange is complete they offer feedback to the therapist. Observers are expected to take notes on what is being said so that feedback can be accurate and specific.

The process:

Generally the therapist and client are in the central area of the group with observers on either side. In a small group there may be 3-4 observers on either side of the group.

The trainer will ask for a volunteer to be the therapist and client. The therapist indicates what he or she wants to accomplish in the therapist chair. If the therapist is unsure the trainer will assist and creating a practice goal for that interchange. The client then shares a real issue and the therapist responds. After about 5- 10 minutes or approximately 10-15 therapist responses the trainer stops the interchange and engages the feedback cycle.

The feedback cycle begins with the therapist offering self feedback, followed by client feedback, observer feedback and trainer feedback. Questions are integrated into the feedback cycle. After the feedback the client remains as a client and the next therapist continues with the client on the same issue as if the first therapist were continuing the session. Clients generally remain as clients for the entire training session.