Cinderella in Therapy

TR-HO2-082303

Cognitive Therapy

Reporter: As a Cognitive therapist, how would you conceptualize Cinderella's difficulties?

Therapist: Cinderella's thought processes are clearly full of certain excesses, deficits, and warped world views that would predispose her to difficulties in life. For example, Cinderella spends much of her time engaging in avoidance behavior such as daydreaming and is far to self-critical. Compounding these problems is the fact that she spends too little of her time planning or making decisions. In fact she has poor problem solving skills. In addition she tends to "awfulize".

Reporter: What do you mean by "awfulizing".

Therapist: Cinderella tends to view her entire world as terrible. She fails to recognize any good in her situation.

Reporter: What are the goals of therapy with Cinderella and how would you attempt to meet these goals.

Therapist: Let's look at an example.

Cognitive Therapy Session

Cinderella: I always have to work for my mean and ugly stepmother and stepsisters and they never let me go out and have a good time.

Therapist: It seems to me that you think that your stepmother and stepsisters have control over your life.

Cinderella: Not only that, but they make my life miserable. I have to cook and clean for them, sew their clothes, fix their hair and make-up, no easy task, tend animals and the garden. Why I hardly have time for myself!! It's always them, them, them!

Therapist: When you do have spare time, what do you do?

Cinderella: To be honest, I just sit among the cinders and daydream that someday a handsome prince will come along and rescue me from this drudgery.

Therapist: Have you ever tried to think of a different way out of your present situation?

Cinderella: Why no! I could never free myself from this mess. Besides, how can I make plans when I'm just a plain woman in ragged clothes. I'm worthless!

Therapist: I think you're wrong about that. In fact, I think that you are entirely worthwhile and that if we just put our minds to it, we can come up with a solution to your dilemma.
Psychoanalysis Therapy

Reporter: How do you conceptualize Cinderella's difficulties?

Therapist: I believe that Cinderella is engaging in what we call "splitting". In other words, she sees the world in only black and white terms. People and/or events are either totally good or totally bad. I believe Cinderella started this process because of traumatic childhood events. Specifically in this case it appears that Cinderella has never resolved the conflict she experienced when her father married her stepmother. Because her stepmother in essence "replaced" her mother, she began to view her as all wicked and ugly. In contrast, she began to idolize her father and see him as all good.

Reporter: What would you recommend for Cinderella as far as therapy goes?

Therapist: To help her resolve these conflicts, we need to engage her in long-term psychoanalysis to help her resolve this conflict.

Reporter: What techniques would you use?

Therapist: One technique that would help Cinderella access these unconscious conflicts and work through them is called free association. Let's look at an example.

Psychoanalysis Therapy Session - Free Association

Cinderella: I always have to work for my wicked and ugly stepmother and stepsisters and they never let me go out and have a good time.

Therapist: Cynthia, I'd like you to lie down on this couch and just tell me whatever comes into your mind no matter how trivial it seems.

Cinderella: I'm a little embarrassed about doing this. I don't really know what to say.

Therapist: Just relax and say the first thing that comes into your mind.

Cinderella: OK, ummmm, cleaning, working, tired, hate, love, mice, men, Steinbeck - oops, wrong story, handsome, wealthy, powerful, prince, palace, slipper, lost, pumpkins, coaches, run. . . .
Biomedical Therapy

Reporter: Being biomedically oriented, how do you conceptualize Cinderella's difficulties?

Therapist: I believe that Cinderella is suffering from an organic disturbance. Probably a brain disturbance of some sort, for example, an overabundance or lack of a neurotransmitter. For Cinderella, we postulate that she is suffering from a psychotic disturbance, due to her delusions of being persecuted and then rescued by a handsome prince.

Reporter: How would you treat Cinderella?

Therapist: Since we believe that Cinderella is suffering from the effects of some sort of psychosis, we would recommend prescribing her an antipsychotic medicine.

Drug Therapy Session

Cinderella: I always have to work for my mean and ugly stepmother and stepsisters and they never let me go out and have a good time.

Therapist: How do you envision getting free of this situation?

Cinderella: I know that one day a handsome prince will carry me off to live as his queen in his grand castle.

Therapist: And how will this occur?

Cinderella: Well, first he will invite everyone in the town to come to a ball and, of course, my stepfamily will not allow me to attend, yet they all will. I'll have to get them ready, but go by myself. But I know that later that night, my fairy godmother will appear, turn my rags into a beautiful gown, mice into men, a pumpkin into a coach, and rats into horses. In this way, I will be able to attend the ball where the prince will fall instantly in love with me and nobody else will recognize me. Oh, one last thing, I'll be wearing glass shoes and still be able to waltz better than anyone and run away at the stroke of midnight!

Therapist: Cinderella, I'm going to ask you a few questions. What year is it now?

Cinderella: Oh, about 1563.

Therapist: Who is the present President of the United States?

Cinderella: Well, I couldn't tell you that, but I do know that Prince Charming is soon going to inherit this kingdom and I will be his queen.

Therapist: Of course you will. But for now, I'd like you to take this medication. It will help you feel much better.
**Behavioral Therapy**

**Reporter:** How do you conceptualize Cinderella's difficulties?

**Therapist:** It seems to me as if Cinderella's major problem is her fear of her stepmother and stepsisters. She has not learned how to deal with them in a way that is good for her.

**Reporter:** What would you suggest she do?

**Therapist:** I would suggest that Cinderella change her behavior at home. Specifically, she should not fear her family members. This fear is the source of her unhappiness.

**Reporter:** How would you do therapy with her?

**Therapist:** One thing I might try is a technique called systematic desensitization. Through this approach, the client gradually overcomes her fears and consequently, changes her behavior.

**Systematic Desensitization Therapy Session**

**Cinderella:** I always have to work for my mean and ugly stepmother and stepsisters and they never let me go out and have a good time.

**Therapist:** How do you behave when you're around your step family?

**Cinderella:** I can't walk out of my room when they're around because of what I might have to face.

**Therapist:** Cinderella, I'd like you to sit back and get as comfortable and relaxed as you can. Breath deeply and just relax. Are you comfortable and relaxed? (Cinderella nods). Good! Now, I'm just going to say a few words and I want you to remain as relaxed as possible as I do. The first word is "Stepmother". (Cinderella fidgets) Now Cinderella, try to relax. Clear your mind. Now, I'm going to repeat the word. "Stepmother". (Cinderella is calm) Good job Cinderella!! Now I'm going to say another word. This time the word is "Stepsisters". (Cinderella fidgets) Just relax Cinderella. Take a deep breath. Now let's try that again. "Stepsisters". (Cinderella is calm). Nice job Cinderella. Now let's suppose that I mention the names, Drizella and Anastasia.(Cinderella is visibly agitated). Please try to maintain your state of relaxation. Imagine yourself on a warm, tropical island, basking in the sun and imagine that Drizella and Anastasia are nowhere in sight. (Cinderella remains calm). Good work!! I'd like to try one more thing this session. I'm going to show you a picture of your stepfamily. Open your eyes and look at this picture of your stepmother and stepsisters. (Cinderella looks at the picture but turns away in fear). Try to remain calm Cinderella. I've put the picture away now. Just relax. We'll try that one again next session.
Humanistic Therapy

Reporter: How do you conceptualize Cinderella's difficulties?

Therapist: I don't think I or anyone but Cindy can truly understand her difficulties. She is a unique person with unique experiences. Right now, it doesn't seem like Cindy understands herself or accepts herself for who she is.

Reporter: What would you suggest she do?

Therapist: I think Cindy is beginning a process of self-exploration that will result in growth and self-acceptance. The key to this process, I think, is expression of true feelings.

Reporter: How would you do therapy with her?

Therapist: I am going to try and give Cindy a safe and supportive environment in which to grow. Also I will try to facilitate her exploration of her true self. I will do this by offering her unconditional positive regard, empathizing with her, and being genuine with her.

Client Centered Therapy Session

Therapist: So Cindy, may I call you Cindy? What brings you here today?

Cindy: I always have to work for my mean and ugly stepmother and stepsisters and they never let me go out and have a good time.

Therapist: It sounds like you are frustrated with your current situation.

Cindy: Oh yes! I just can't believe that they make me work so hard without rest or vacation.

Therapist: It must make you very angry, Can you tell me more about how you are treated by your stepmother and stepsisters?

Cindy: Well, they constantly tell me how ugly and useless I am.

Therapist: How does it make you feel when they say these things to you?

Cindy: It makes me feel ugly.

Therapist: When people criticize me it hurts me. Is that how you feel when your step family calls you ugly and worthless?

Cindy: Yes.

Therapist: Let's talk more about that.
Humpty Dumpty, (multiple personality),
Chicken Little, (anxiety attacks),
Little Boy Blue, (depression),
The Itsy Bitsy Spider, (Obsessive/Compulsive),
The Big Bad Wolf, (antisocial personality)