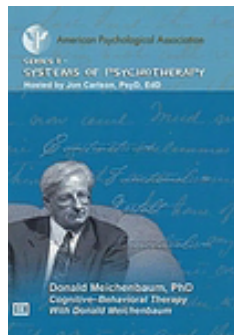


## Mastering the Art of Psychotherapy: Learning From a Master Psychotherapist

A review of the video



### **Cognitive–Behavioral Therapy With Donald Meichenbaum**

with Donald Meichenbaum

Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2007. American

Psychological Association Systems of Psychotherapy Video Series, Item No.

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Reviewed by

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The art and science of psychotherapy are of great interest to practicing psychotherapists, those in training to become psychotherapists, and those who train them. Each group shares an interest in achieving the highest degree of competence possible. Competence is widely accepted as being composed of knowledge and skills as well as the attitudes, values, and judgment needed to apply them effectively (e.g., Haas & Malouf, 2005). Much less agreement exists on the methods to be used and on practices to be engaged in to

develop and achieve competence as a psychotherapist.

For the practicing psychotherapist, limited opportunities may exist beyond reading journal articles and books, in addition to attending continuing education workshops. Many agree that all effective training will include an experiential component such as that provided in supervised clinical settings. However, access to supervisors who possess a high degree of skill in psychotherapy as well as in teaching these skills may be limited for many. Access to master psychotherapists who have participated in the development of the science and art of a particular type of psychotherapy, and who possess the ability to effectively convey what they do in a meaningful way, may be rarer still.

*Cognitive–Behavioral Therapy With Donald Meichenbaum* is an expertly produced video that provides psychotherapists and those in training with the opportunity to learn from one of the true masters of cognitive–behavioral psychotherapy (CBT). As one of the founders of this form of psychotherapy, Meichenbaum has a long history of participation in its development both as a clinician and as a researcher.

The video includes an interview of Meichenbaum by Jon Carlson, the host of the series; a psychotherapy session with Meichenbaum and a client; a discussion of the session by Meichenbaum and Carlson; and a listing of related products that may be of interest to viewers. In the interview, Meichenbaum provides an explanation of what CBT is, its goals and core tasks, potential problems faced, and skills needed to be effective. Meichenbaum does an expert job of demystifying CBT and removing misconceptions that some may have in viewing it as a mechanical, manualized treatment approach (Gluhoski, 1994). His focus on the importance of a collaborative and caring relationship in CBT and his use of the relationship to assist clients are noteworthy.

Meichenbaum bases his psychotherapy approach on solid research. Yet, although CBT is a well-studied, empirically supported treatment approach, he takes a clearly evidence-based treatment approach that integrates the best research with a clinically sensitive treatment

relationship that attends to the complexity of the client, the client's personal history, and clinical skill (Goodheart, Kazdin, & Sternberg, 2006). He shares how the expert use of questions actually moves the client's thinking forward and helps set the stage for future cognitive and behavioral changes.

A unique feature of Meichenbaum's CBT is the use of a constructive-narrative perspective—how he elicits and listens to the stories clients tell (Meichenbaum, 2006). Meichenbaum truly is a master in helping clients to tell their story and in hearing the rest of the story, that part that tends not to be shared or heard. He expertly demonstrates this in the psychotherapy session and explains the value and merit of this approach in the discussion that follows.

On a very practical level, Meichenbaum informs the viewer of the essential questions to ask clients, obstacles and barriers that may be encountered, and how to address them. He highlights specific “choice points” of the session with this particular client; he shares with the viewer his thought process throughout the psychotherapy session in a way that makes the art of CBT (as applied by a very skilled clinician) much more accessible. We are able to see and understand the nuances of how he makes a connection with a client and how he assists her to change. His use (and explanation of his use) of nonjudgmental listening and questioning, phrasing, pacing, tone of voice, and body language are most instructive. His awareness of himself and of his impact on the client highlights a very broad view of CBT and the importance of the relationship in helping the client to develop hope, a new perspective, and lasting change. His own analysis of his actions and thought processes during the session really does provide us with a unique view of what is happening behind the scenes as this master psychotherapist works with a client.

Meichenbaum's CBT is very positive and builds on clients' strengths and resources (both internal and external). He sees clients in a social context and utilizes others as allies in the

psychotherapy process and the process of change. Yet, like all good cognitive-behavioral psychotherapists, he bases his approach on data, engages the client in a collaborative relationship, and helps the client to translate thoughts and ideas into positive behavior change. It is not the review of these basics of CBT that makes this video such a noteworthy contribution to the training of all psychotherapists, novice and experienced clinicians alike. Rather, it is having the opportunity to see a master clinician at work in a psychotherapy session with a client and then, even more importantly, hearing him share his thought and decision-making processes throughout this session.

Although receiving individual training and ongoing clinical supervision from Meichenbaum would indeed be a unique training opportunity, watching this video (repeatedly, as I did) may be the next best thing. In addition to attending workshops and reading the professional literature, using this video should be an essential part of every psychotherapist's training as he or she strives to achieve competence as a psychotherapist and perhaps even move forward to becoming a master psychotherapist.

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