

Existential-Integrative Therapy: Maximizing (Inner) Freedom and Awe

A New Horizon in Existential-
Humanistic Practice

For more information see *Existential-
Humanistic Therapy* (3rd Ed., APA Press)
by Kirk Schneider and Orah Krug

Conclusion From a Leading Therapy Outcome Researcher

- “An understanding of the principles of existential therapy is needed by all therapists, as it adds a perspective that might...form the basis of all effective therapies.”

--Bruce Wampold (2008), p. 6 in his review of *Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy* in APA's *PsycCritiques*.

Definition of Existential-Integrative (EI) Therapy

- Derives from Existential-Humanistic therapy; Rank, May & Bugental. One way to understand and coordinate a variety of recognized therapies within an overall existential or experiential context.
- “Experiential” emphasizes the immediate, the affective, the kinesthetic or embodied, and the profound or deeply meaningful/spiritual.
- Following May et al. then, EI therapy maximizes *choice* within the natural and self-imposed limits of living; another way to put this is that EI therapy aims at bolstering inner freedom to the degree possible, given one’s circumstances.

El Therapy implies and sometimes poses directly two overall questions

- How is one presently living?
- And How is one *willing* to live?
- These questions pervade the entire therapy, sometimes explicitly but most often implicitly through the presence of the therapist. This also maximizes the client's ability to respond, not just react.

The Framework of EI Therapy

- EI therapy begins with the therapist's *presence*; presence is the holding and illuminating of that which is significant within the client and between client and therapist. This has very primal roots/echoes of birth.
- Presence is like a mirror that helps clients to become aware of their self-world construct (that is, how they are presently living and how they are willing to live-their "battle") at each moment of the therapy.
- Presence helps clients to develop "*life-enhancing anxiety*"—really the aim of therapy, to live with and make the best of the depth and mystery of existence (or to live more on the edge of wonder & discovery). This can lead to an "inner freedom" exemplified by Frankl in the Death Camps and Hawking with ALS.

EI Framework Continued

- Presence also helps guide the therapist's availability to the client for deeper, experiential work.
- This availability is reflective of the client's desire and capacity for deeper change—for example some are not ready for or interested in deeper change—but wish to rid themselves of behavioral symptoms or “get through the night.”

EI Framework Continued

- The art of EI therapy then is knowing when and how to be available to the client for deeper, experiential change—and to work with the client in accord with their desire and capacity for change.
- For many clients however the therapist's *availability* for experiential change is essential and this is what we will focus on now.

Experiential Level of Change

- For those clients who are both ready and interested, the experiential level of contact comprises four phases or conditions:
- Presence like a passive and active mirror—helps clients see their “battle” closer and closer up
- Invoking the Actual-inviting clients *into* presence
- Noting Self Protections or “resistance”
- Rediscovering Meaning and Awe (or the humility and wonder, sense of participating in something much greater than oneself). Greater inner freedom, ability to respond vs. react. Attaining a “Vibrant Center.”

Case of Janice-Key Points

- Severe abuse in background
- Use of EI approach—6 session limit
- Use of role play and rehearsal
- Discussion of dreams
- Brother shot and killed during therapy
- Her presenting problem shifts from problems asserting herself to yearning for freedom
- Her language becomes increasingly existential
- “Embodied meditation” in 6th session promotes meaning and awe or the “more” of who she is

Website: kirkjschneider.com

EI/EH Bibliography

- Schneider, K. (2023). *Life-enhancing Anxiety: Key to a Sane World*. University Professors Press.
- Schneider, K. & Krug, O. (2026). *Existential-Humanistic Therapy* (3rd Ed.). American Psychological Association Press.
- Schneider, K. (2009). *Existential-Humanistic Therapy Over Time*. American Psychological Association Video Series (apa.org/videos).
- Schneider, K. (2008/2015). *Existential-Integrative Psychotherapy: Guideposts to the Core of Practice*. Routledge.
- Schneider, K. et al (2019). EH & EI Therapy. In *The Wiley World Handbook of Existential Therapy*
- Schneider, K. & Hoffman, L. EH & EI Theory. In Leong et al (2024). *APA Handbook of Psychotherapy*

Awe-Based Psychology Bibliography

- Schneider, K. (2004). *Rediscovery of Awe: Splendor, Mystery, & the Fluid Center of Life.*
- Schneider, K. (2009). *Awakening to Awe: Personal Stories of Profound Transformation.*
- Schneider, K. (2013). *The Polarized Mind: Why It's Killing Us and What We Can Do About It.*
- Schneider, K. (2017/2019). *The Spirituality of Awe: Challenges to the Robotic Revolution.*
- Schneider, K. (2020). *The Depolarizing of America: A Guidebook for Social Healing.*
- Schneider, K. (2023). *Life-Enhancing Anxiety: Key to a Sane World.*
- Schneider, K. (2026). *The Vibrant Center: A New Consciousness for Our Broken Age.*