

REFLECTIONS ON WORKING IN THERAPY

Keith Pickstock, professional therapist, Boarding Recovery
Summary comments from 2012 Boarding Concern Conference

The limitations of therapy:

It has been my experience that the serious woundings of childhood never totally disappear through the process of therapy. What can happen is that we learn to manage those woundings in such a way as they no longer dominate our lives.

This work of therapy is likely to be very arduous at times and take a lot of commitment to change. There are likely to be times when it feels like a lost cause. It will take time. It's a journey.

It is the client who does the tough therapy work. The therapist is there to guide, challenge and support this process as best he or she can.

Since intimacy in relationship is likely to be a difficulty for many ex-boarders, the importance of relationship with the therapist is even more crucial than usual.

I have a strong belief that this journey is worth undertaking. Life becomes fuller, richer and, to quote Phillip Adams, more interesting. It is never a miracle cure.

What are the factors that make therapy effective?

There has been much research on this issue, very often paid for to promote a particular model of therapy. It can be bit like competing religious beliefs. The therapy profession is notoriously sectarian. Separate schools should be taken with a pinch of salt, as researchers tend to find the results they are looking for.

If we look at some of the research into what makes therapy effective there are some revealing facts (origin of research unknown by the author, but reflecting his views):

- The particular model of therapy used made absolutely zero difference to outcomes for the client
- Who the therapist was as a person counted for about 10%
- The relationship with the therapist counted for about 20%
- By far the greater factor was the client's motivation to change – about 30%

- But by far the greatest factor was a category called “unknown factors” which accounted for a full 40% as an agent of change. This finding raised a gasp from an audience of therapists

I was relieved when I heard this because it’s my belief that as therapists we must always come from a place of humility. From a place of knowing nothing about the inner life of another. We have to learn this from the client as best we can.

I conclude with words from T.S Eliot from The Four Quartets:

“The only wisdom we can hope to achieve is the wisdom of humility”