



THEORIES AND THERAPIES WE LOVE

A hallmark of a clinical psychologist is the understanding and ability to use a variety of therapeutic theories and interventions according to the clients' needs. Essentially, we assess what is going on for the client or family and consider which of the evidenced based therapies is most appropriate. We are trained to deliver several distinct therapies ourselves but we will refer on if we think a client would be most suited to a different therapy, one which we do not have sufficient knowledge or expertise to deliver.

However, a word of warning, it is not all about the technique. The research is clear that the therapeutic relationship is one of the most important factors in determining the success of therapy, allowing the client to feel safe and begin the process of change (Carona et al. 2017; Ribeiro da Silva et al. 2019). So, when choosing your therapist, it is crucial that you feel they are someone you can connect with and trust.

At Pocket Family, we do, however, have several favoured therapies which we thought we would share with you so you get a feel as to what to expect should you book a Family Consultation.

Systemic Therapy

Systemic or family therapy and thinking is a cornerstone of Pocket Family Psychologist – we know the importance of understanding and working with a difficulty in the context of the family or wider system (think school, work, community, or cultural context). We have seen a family therapy approach freeing a family or individual, dissolving blame and shame and bringing about important changes very simply and quickly. There is often a domino or ripple effect where one change in a family system leads to multiple adjustments for everyone.

Please go to our website www.pocketfamilypsychologist.com for additional family resources.

It can be used to treat a wide range of difficulties including the more obvious relationship issues and adjusting to trauma or family changes. But it has also been shown to be effective for previously considered individual problems such as anxiety, addiction, depression, eating disorders and psychosis.

Systemic therapy understands that even the most unhelpful behaviours emerged as a tool for survival and protection, that can span several generations but may become outdated. Patterns of behaviour, relationships, history, and context are explored together as a family. One technique often used is to draw a detailed version of a family tree/genogram to understand how certain rules, values and assumptions are passed between family members. Physically seeing how the family has been transformed following a lifecycle change, such as a stroke, can be compelling.

If you're interested in learning more, take a look at our videos on our website to see what family therapy looks like and the types of problems it can help with.



EMDR

EMDR is a highly effective treatment that was developed initially to treat trauma and PTSD and has since been found to be helpful for anxiety, relationship difficulties, depression, and psychosis as well – pretty much anything in which there are painful experiences underlying the difficulty.

Just like when you cut yourself and your body's immune system will fight the open sore, so too, our brain acts as our mental immune system, helping us heal. Over time, the brain updates itself by making new meaning out of previous experiences. However, sometimes, memories get stuck and stay frozen in time – like a splinter preventing normal healing and tissue growth.

It means we can end up reacting in the same way as we did or felt during the traumatic experience because the brain feels as if the past disturbing event is happening currently. EMDR works to correct this by processing the painful memory, allowing thinking and feeling to take place so that 'the wise lesson' is learnt and the memory is updated and integrated. In doing so, the memories lose their emotional and physical charge. People often comment that the painful memory looks less vivid or seems more distant after EMDR. It becomes something that just happened rather than something painful that the person tries hard to avoid thinking about.

We have seen some astonishing results with lifelong phobias disappearing, while panic attacks and PTSD symptoms dissolve into something of the past.

Have a look at our sister site www.shortlandpsychology.com for more information on EMDR and other trauma therapies.

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Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

ACT is one of our favourite new wave therapies because it is so freeing and empowering. It can be used with an individual or family and can be easily combined with Systemic therapy or EMDR. It can also be used in a single-family consultation session to give a family tools or shift of perspective very quickly.

In ACT, the focus is on noticing and allowing our thoughts, feelings, and experiences rather than getting caught up in avoiding or battling with those that we don't like. The aim is to increase action that is in line with our values – going towards and doing the things that are most important to us rather than wasting time and energy avoiding things that make us uncomfortable. That is the hard part; humans do not like discomfort and can very easily get caught up in avoiding uneasiness rather than doing what really matters. ACT suggests that while it is possible to suppress emotions and avoid feeling, it is then impossible to enjoy the good feelings life has to offer; there is no rainbow without the rain.

We love ACT's powerful analogies. For example, imagine yourself as a bookshelf. Books will come and go, just as thoughts and feelings will, but the bookcase will remain sturdy through time. There is no point struggling with those books, rather, just make sure you are good at being sturdy and...what else is important in being a happy bookshelf?

Compassion Focused Therapy (CFT)

Another third wave behavioural therapy, CFT is best described as an integrated, multi-modal therapy including elements of CBT, Buddhist philosophy, social psychology, developmental theory, evolutionary psychology as well as neuroscience. It was developed to help people who experience high levels of shame and self-criticism cultivate a compassionate care orientation towards themselves and others. It provides psycho-education on the nature of the evolved human mind and utilises techniques such as breathing exercises, visualisations, and mindfulness. Developing a compassionate inner voice for our thoughts can help us reduce hostile self-criticism and focus on correction and growth. There are countless studies to suggest CFT can improve chronic pain, depression, anxiety, mood disturbances, social phobias, as well as stress levels.

Like ACT, we seem to integrate aspects of CFT into much of our work with individuals and families.



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Narrative Therapy

Throughout life, personal experiences become personal stories which are given meaning that help shape a person's identity. Narrative therapy uses the power of these stories to uncover life's purpose while separating people from their problems. In doing so, it allows people to externalise sensitive issues which can lower a person's resistance and allow them to address concerns in more productive ways. It can be used for individuals, couples, and families who are brought together around a difficulty in a playful way to foster positive interactions and transform negative communication to be more accepting. An example of this is the 'sneaky poo'. A story is created around children faecal soiling which can be deeply distressing for both the child and parents. The story is told in a fun and light-hearted manner which enables an open discussion and removes any shameful feelings while ensuring the child feels understood. Narrative therapy reflects our philosophy at Pocket Family in that it can be fun and filled with laughter while addressing key problems.

Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP)

DDP aims to help parents and their child form a deeper emotional connection and trust. We use DDP a lot in our work with fostered and adoptive families. DDP sessions create a safe and emotionally containing environment that helps foster positive relationships between parents with their child. It provides a safe place for a child to explore thoughts, feelings, and memories so that the parent can share the child's emotional experiences and make sense of them together. The therapy aims to build trust and help the child feel accepted. This is done alongside helping parents learn effective ways to respond to their child using PACE: playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy. PACE is a way of thinking, feeling, and communicating that aims to make a child feel safe and help parents connect to their children. We have had some remarkable results using DDP and PACE parenting, even where the child has endured terrible trauma.

Mentalisation

Mentalisation therapy allows us to think about thinking. It helps us to make sense of our thoughts and feelings while understanding how these propel our actions and behaviours forwards. We focus on not just our own mind but also, the minds of others around us. We seek to understand how our actions can change the mental state of someone else whose actions themselves will in turn affect our own feelings. In doing so, the therapy can help clients better understand and control their emotions and behaviours, helping to improve relationships. Mentalisation based therapy is suitable for all ages and can help with a variety of mental health issues including eating disorders, depression, trauma, drug addiction and personality disorders. It is particularly useful for those people who suffer from long-term difficulties in relationships and who experience intense emotional distress and overwhelming emotions which in turn can lead to destructive behaviours.



Dynamic Interpersonal Therapy (DIT)

We love DIT because it puts the client in the driving seat, giving the client the space to discuss what's on their mind, while aiming to understand the connection between presenting symptoms and what is happening in clients relationships by identifying a core repetitive pattern of behaviour. Its heavy emphasis on relationship problems to improve psychological symptoms means the therapy is particularly effective for those suffering with anxiety, depression, and relationship issues. It helps clients better understand their thoughts and feelings, gain a clearer understanding of themselves, take responsibility for their actions and relate better and more confidently with others, while improving mood swings and dampening anxieties. It usually only needs sixteen weekly sessions, so it is cost effective to boot!

The bottom line

As you can see, we cover a wide range of therapies that can be used to treat a variety of issues. If you are particularly interested in a therapy, please don't hesitate to ask us. We are always happy to talk all things therapies!