

*An Adlerian model for supervision, using early recollections. By Rachel Shifron*

## • A dance of two lifestyles

- by Rachel Shifron

- Supervision assists development for professionals in the field of therapy, counselling and teaching. By combining attention to the internal worlds of both therapist and client, the supervisor and supervisee aim to identify what it is that has created frustration or discouragement in the therapist sufficient to make them choose to bring this client to supervision at this point.

Experience, knowledge and understanding of the profession are shared in supervision. However, according to the Adlerian model, supervisees at all stages are not inferior students who learn from their masters; every supervisee is a unique individual who works according to his/her own 'lifestyle'. 'Lifestyle' is defined as 'their own biased perception of themselves, others and the world', that is, the social and psychological implications of their assumptions or internal working models. Since these are developed early in life, Adlerians explore early memories, known as ERs or 'early recollections' to suggest the roots of the person's lifestyle.

### Early recollections

The supervisor - who ideally is a very good listener, has to become expert in understanding the supervisee's 'lifestyle'. Therefore, in addition to the presentation and the analysis of the case, the supervisor works with the supervisee's early recollections while they both work together on the client's.

Therapy and supervising are each a 'dance' of two lifestyles: the counsellor's and the client's; the supervisor's and the supervisee's.

This paper focuses on the therapist-client dance, the dance that is to be understood and analysed by the supervisor. The use of early recollections (ERs) is very effective in supervision. It enables the supervisor to understand, very accurately and in a relatively short time, the therapist's frustrations in the therapeutic relationship.

For many years, therapists tended to emphasise the patient's basic mistakes in order to correct or to aid the process of changing and growing. But growth is possible only after the person is aware of the abilities and strengths that are needed in order to change. Therefore the necessary first stage will be to show the positive potentials.

A key idea of this method is that exploration of each ER can reveal hidden creative abilities that the person is using in order to survive and to cope with life, and of which they are often not consciously or fully aware. It is the therapist's role to point out to the client his/her strengths, just as it is the supervisor's role to show through the use of ERs the supervisee's strengths. Therefore, the therapist/supervisee is encouraged to bring to the supervision session notes of:

- The client's family constellation - ie birth order, parents' relationship and siblings' relationship.
- At least three ERs of the client before the age of 10.
- At least three ERs of the therapist/supervisee before the age of 10.

### The supervision process

A. To make a list of the strengths that the therapist finds in the client's ERs, with the supervisor's help.

- This will build the client-therapist relationship.
- It will start the next steps in the therapy with focus on strengths and not weaknesses.
- It identifies strengths that the client can use in the course of therapy.

B. To look for 'extreme overuse of strengths' when this is not necessary. 'Extreme overuse' occurs when a quality one has, which contributes to one's survival needs and personal development, is not modified according to circumstances. Modifications might arise with flexibility relating to 'place', 'time', 'roles', 'rules' and 'boundaries'. Without this, overused strengths will become destructive, and might lead to an addiction.

C. To learn how to use the 'memory language' in order to talk about therapist/client relationship. In therapy, when the patient tells his/her memory, it is essential to write down the entire memory precisely as told. Every word in the memory is a metaphor that describes the person's lifestyle and feelings. Therefore, it is important in the course of interaction with the patient to use the memory's vocabulary. It will increase the therapist's ability to connect with the patient and will affect the patient's self-awareness.

In order to supervise, it is important to show the supervisee the 'blind spots' in the therapeutic relationship by employing the following steps:

a. Use of the supervisee's ERs - to show their strengths and when these are being extremely overused.

b. Taking the three ERs of the therapist in order to find the parallels between the therapist's ERs and the client's ERs. When there are parallel themes, the 'therapeutic dance' stops!

That is when therapy does not progress - and supervision becomes useful in exploring these parallels. Supervision that attends to both the client's and the therapist's lifestyle is very productive. It assists effective supervision by identifying the place where the therapy is stuck because of the overlap of the inner worlds of client and therapist, and that is basically the difference between supervision and teaching.

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### Further reading:

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