

## Framework for Assessment

**Disclaimer:** This is a basic framework and is not to be assumed complete. People are complex and framework gives us a starting spot ONLY. It takes years of practice to know when to adjust. Framework has to be adjusted routinely based on the presentation of the client. Urgency may require more rapid adjustments when decompensation is imminent.

### Theoretical approach:

It is important to have a theoretical approach to assess, diagnose and treat mental illness. There are many options available to choose from. The most successful are ones that are relational by nature or closely tied to relational approaches. Theories stem from these main categories; humanistic, cognitive, behavioral, psychoanalytic, constructionist and systemic.

### Examples of theoretical approaches are:

- Humanistic – person-centered, existential, emotion-focused, Gestalt and positive psychology.
- Cognitive – cognitive behavior therapy, reality therapy, motivational interviewing, and acceptance and commitment therapy.
- Behavioral – behavior therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, multimodal therapy and conjoint sex therapy.
- Psychoanalytic – psychoanalysis, attachment therapy, object relations therapy and Adlerian therapy.
- Constructionist – solution focused brief therapy, narrative therapy, feminist therapy, Eriksonian therapy and identity renegotiation counseling.
- Systemic – structural family therapy, strategic family therapy, human validation process family therapy and Gottman method couples therapy.

### Practical Application:

There are many variables to consider in the practical application phase of assessment. There are multiple options for looking into different variables. As a therapist, I have honed in on several pieces that routinely help uncover the things a client needs. The following is a list of concepts and categories used to discover what is going on in spite of faulty reporting, blind spots and other factors that interfere with accuracy.

- What is not being stated? This question drives a lot of the information gathering process.
- What are their blind spots? This question points to areas where they may be misrepresenting information in a patterned way.
- Lies, secrets and deceptions. This is an area that can become clear as we explore minimizations and exaggerations. Often, the defensive mechanisms point to the secrets, lies and deceptions.
- Biological, psychological, sociological, cultural and spiritual. These represent a way in which to pull pieces apart and look at them individually. There is a lot of overlap in categories so exploring them can be difficult but it provides clear framework for bouncing thoughts, feelings and behaviors off.
- Time. Looking at the past, present and the future creates opportunities for a lot of insight. Looking at what was, is and what they want will often lead to areas of free communication and blocked communication. The change in the flow of the communication often points to areas where stuff is being minimized, exaggerated or even withheld. One way this is accomplished is through a complete bio-psych-soc assessment. Categorically we cover family history, family dynamics, developmental history, nutrition/nourishment, mental health, suicidality, trauma, sexual development, medical history, substance use, social atmosphere and mental status.