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# The Use of Homework in Psychotherapy: An Introduction



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Homework assignments have evolved into a highly important feature of psychotherapy research and practice. In essence, homework allows the practitioner to make use of the time between sessions by engaging the client in activities that are targeted toward therapy goals. While originating in behavioral and cognitive therapies (e.g., Herzberg, 1941; Kelly, 1955), the broader implications of acquiring new knowledge and skills through the completion of homework are becoming progressively more apparent. In fact, learning through the completion of homework assignments has recently been described as “a common process” to both cognitive and dynamic therapies (Badgio, Halperin, & Barber, 1999).

Two decades of research have supported the assertion that psychotherapy involving homework yields a greater treatment effect size than psychotherapy without homework (Kazantzis, Deane, & Ronan, 2000). It is also clear that compliance with homework assignments, as rated by different sources, and as measured in different ways, is a consistently significant predictor of treatment outcome. Furthermore, a recent practitioner survey demonstrated that 98% of practicing psychologists use homework in their clinical practice (Kazantzis & Deane, 1999). There is also increasing evidence to suggest that psychotherapy outcomes are predicted by practitioner competency in the administration of homework (e.g., Shaw et al., 1999).

Despite the increasing attention directed toward homework in psychotherapy, surprisingly little has been published about the process by which homework is integrated into therapy. This is the focus of the current issue of *In Session: Psychotherapy in Practice*. The way in which the homework is designed with the client is as important as the

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extent to which the client attempts the homework activity (Beck, Rush, Shaw, & Emery 1979). Therapists' clarity in describing the homework, provision of rationale, anticipation of problems, and enlisting client involvement are all crucial components of the beneficial effect of homework. The evidence is beginning to suggest that the way in which the practitioner uses homework is important for its effectiveness.

In this issue, we asked prominent psychotherapists to describe and illustrate how they integrate homework into psychotherapy. Anne Garland and Jan Scott illustrate the use of homework in the treatment of depression. This is followed by Robert Leahy's approach for anxiety; Arthur Freeman's and Bradley Rosenfield's approach for personality disorders; Jennifer Hudson's and Philip Kendall's approach for children and adolescents; and Frank Dattilio's approach for couples and family therapy. David Coon and Dolores Gallagher-Thompson present their approach for older adults, which is followed by Michael Tompkins' description of general strategies to increase homework compliance in psychotherapy. In the final article, we provide a review of the empirical research on homework assignments in psychotherapy and summarize clinical applications.

#### Select References/Recommended Readings

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