

though a normal reaction it can, at times, feel worrying. Claremont's therapists know that this can happen and know how to navigate through it and to help you to increase your self-awareness, skills acquisition and independence.

#### **How long will I be in therapy?**

Different clients have different needs and the number of sessions a client has varies enormously. Claremont recommends an initial module of six sessions, followed by subsequent modules of twelve sessions. The maximum time in therapy with Claremont is two years.

#### **Will I be diagnosed and have something on my medical record?**

As mentioned earlier, existential therapy is not about trying to cure a disease or a condition, it is about finding ways to live in the condition of being human. We think that your specific personal circumstances are much more important than any formal diagnostic category. We do not therefore label or formally diagnose our clients.

Claremont will not share any information about you with anyone else, including your doctor, unless this is either agreed with you beforehand or is required by court order or the law of the land.



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## **What to Expect from an Existential Phenomenological Approach**



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## What to Expect from an Existential-Phenomenological Approach



This short document is intended to give you a flavour of Claremont's existential approach to psychotherapy. In reality there are probably as many approaches to existential therapy as

there are therapists but a number of key aspects are shared and this document tries to describe some of those aspects. (A list of some books on the subject is available from us for those wanting to explore the approach in greater depth.)

Existential therapy is about exploring the ways we have chosen to be, right now and in the context of the worlds we have built and find ourselves within. It is about putting into words the feelings we have about our life and about naming and discovering the choices we have before us, even when choices may seem to be few or non-existent. It is expressly not about an attempt on the part of the therapist to cure or change behaviour which may in fact be fundamental to our existence.

However it is about facing up to our situations and understanding that sometimes we choose to be deeply unhappy rather than face personal change. It is about developing the perspective and skills to try and live one's life artfully:

“Every move we make, everything we decide, is...regarded as the outcome of a multitude of influences, which include elements of past, present and future expectations. There are determining factors of class and country and culture and intelligence. There are situational, contextual and interpersonal elements to every move forward.

None of these factors alone determine what will happen. Each situation is a new combination of elements, like waves in an ocean rolling together and forming new patterns and currents. We, ourselves, are neither at the mercy of these patterns and waves, nor are we able to choose our way across deliberately and single-mindedly. We are rather just capable of learning to weave our way around the waves, creating some new patterns as we throw ourselves in the surf or ride the crest of the wave, leaving new currents in our wake.”  
Emmy van Deurzen, *Everyday Mysteries* (Existential Dimensions of Psychotherapy), 1997.

### What does the therapist do and what am I expected to do?

There is compelling research which appears to show that the best outcomes from therapy depend not so much on the type of therapist (Freudian, Jungian, Cognitive, Existential, etc.) but the degree to which that therapist and client can form a therapeutic relationship.

Claremont's therapists are selected because they can truly engage with what matters most to other people. They work to understand the world and meanings of other people, rather than focusing on their own or believing that everyone sees or should see the world the same way, and they are trained to recognize people's assumptions.

Although clients may often feel very stuck about what to do with their lives, Claremont's therapists will not offer advice to someone about what they should do. Rather they will work with the client to look at the situation from different perspectives and to look at choices and the consequences of those choices. Sometimes there is significant healing in moments where the therapist and client simply share together the client's pain and difficulties. Therapy can be very challenging, especially emotionally.

Claremont's therapists do not try to interpret a client's situation for them. For example, the therapist is unlikely to interpret a client's dream (“Ah, so you had a dream about the Eiffel Tower, eh?”) but will help the client to interpret their own dream.

If you want to talk about your childhood then our therapists will engage with you about that. However the existential approach isn't much like the classical Freudian model where how you are now is heavily determined by your childhood. The existential approach is more interested in how you are right now and how the way you see the world right now might have consequences for you and your life. It may be that the way you see the world is based heavily on childhood experiences but the origins are perhaps not as important as how you want to deal with life issues right now. The existential model suggests that you always have choices about the kind of person you are (and want to be) and always have the ability to some extent to change and transform yourself.

Sometimes the therapist will point out what appears to be inconsistencies in what you are saying and sometimes they will challenge you directly about how you are seeing the world and your place within it. In some senses, the therapist can be thought of sometimes as being like your own conscience – helping you to feel or to state things honestly.

Generally speaking, the existential approach is all about increasing self awareness and developing wisdom about living from this. As the old saying goes, “Know thyself”.

### Do I have to lie down on a couch?

No! Claremont has comfy chairs and the talking is face to face.

### Will I get hooked on therapy?

It is possible that during therapy you will develop some feelings of reliance upon the therapist. Al-