

## **“Alfred Adler Revisited” (September 25, 2012)**

It has been a long time since I added my thoughts to the blog, so this posting is long overdue! Today I attended a seminar entitled “Strengths-based Approach to Geriatric Assessment” presented by Kathleen Cluff, MSW at Rose Tree Place in Media. Kathy was a wonderful presenter and I was brought back to my graduate school days in my MSW program when I was excited to learn all about the theoretical foundation of psychotherapy and how to incorporate those ideas into direct client work. I particularly enjoyed Kathy’s talk, of course, because as she discussed the work of Alfred Adler and his “Individual Psychology,” she provided examples of how to utilize his approach in our work with elders. Though I remember studying Adler many years ago, it was a welcome refresher to the ideas and techniques that have provided a base for Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Reality Therapy, Solution-focused Therapy, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, Existential Therapy, Holistic Psychology, and Family Therapy.

Much of what Adler’s Individual Psychology focuses on is the premise that we are all social beings in need of contact with others. When we become isolated from others, our mood and behavior can become significantly negatively impacted. Immediately images come to mind of recent violent acts in our society that have been played out by “loners” who express an almost unbelievable amount of anger and hatred towards others. Typically these individuals have a history of dysfunctional interactions with others which led to an increasing level of isolation and the cycle of violence began to manifest.

Among older individuals, particularly those with disabilities, the possibility of homicidal acts decreases, but the isolation and subsequent depression and anger can have a detrimental effect on their mood and behavior. Rates of suicide among the elderly are high. We need to be aware of how important it is that our elders are receiving the support and interaction that we all require as humans to function. During her presentation today, Kathy Cluff mentioned three life tasks that we all need to master to maintain a healthy mental outlook: 1) Work that is meaningful, 2) Social relationships with others, and 3) Love & intimacy with another person(s).

When performing an assessment with my clients, I incorporate everyone’s need to feel connected, competent, valuable, and hopeful into the care plan that I create with them. As a social worker who was trained to view

individuals “in their environment” rather than focusing on the “problem”, I hope to obtain a global understanding of each of my client’s needs in order to best assist him or her.