

therapist'. However, it seems it is still hard to identify quite how we can go about finding them. ■

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# Should we be happy?

**Ros Pirani** ponders an age-old question

We live in an age where we are expected to be rich, healthy and happy. Instead we run up debt, flirt with obesity and moan as much as ever. The elusive quality of happiness has always been a tall order, perhaps more so when it is prescribed, and even more especially when it is prescribed for the many as opposed to the few. Taking political correctness seriously, shouldn't we make the lowest common denominator the base from which we all strive for a better life, on the assumption that striving produces happiness? We will, of course, end up unequal again, share what we have striven for, and court happiness by striving some more.

Our clients have a certain amount of say over choosing a service that concurs with their outlook on life and helps them progress towards individual goals. Maybe they don't choose and are 'sent' instead. Occasionally they get re-abused. We need national regulation, a single trusted method of eradicating abuse, incompetence and practices that are under the wrong umbrella, to give our profession credibility and authority.

There are and always will be (despite current hysteria) many different kinds of psychological help. This diversity avoids putting plasters over issues that need deeper, more ephemeral, less direct, more subtle kind of help than positive psychology can provide. A good aim for any therapy is to understand ourselves, other people and the world we live in, in order to make the best shot of life in our

particular circumstances. This involves the clearing of emotional baggage. Aiming for happiness directly, bypassing the deeper or unconscious level, may encourage any current narcissistic tendencies and/or set the scene for greater defensiveness and denial. To go for happiness directly is certainly contra-indicatory in clients for whom enjoyment has always been viewed as tempting fate.

Happiness may come upon us unawares, after achieving things we find difficult and which involve a calculated risk. Happiness is by definition not something we can experience all the time, or it wouldn't have meaning and we shouldn't know what it was. It is hardly an appropriate reaction to everything.

Genuine happiness, as opposed to a brave or deceitful front, is a consequence of being comfortable with who we are, with our past, with what it is we both want and need and coming to terms with our own, other people's and the world's limitations. Happiness comes out of the transformation of despair, or after long spells of existence where we feel we have just been 'getting by'. The achievement of something more than a sense of fleeting happiness can be likened to a tightrope walker holding her balance, not swaying too much to one side or the other, while making the resolve not to look down.

We need art, science, therapy, wellbeing, lack of debt, health, self-value, altruism, involvement, good

ways of dealing with loss, injustice and abuse, and the wisdom to have times when we rest and do nothing. What makes some people happy may not work for others. Learning to deal with our emotions when we are not happy is the province of most therapy. We must not berate ourselves for not feeling happy all the time, nor for having 'bad' emotion, only for what we do with it, the best answer being to tell someone or express it somehow, not act it out.

If the tightrope walker is too much of a perfectionist, she will not achieve happiness. Happiness exists when she loses herself in the moment, does not succumb to the anxiety of competition, but basks in the afterglow of realising she didn't fall. Life is, on the whole, better than death. Irrational thought, however, may prevent us from seeing the world will not be better off without us. It is hard to achieve rational thought when such a thought strikes. Rational thought, like happiness, is hard to gain directly, even in a system where cognition, emotion and physicality are all taken into account. Resistance to a system can be clients' horror of a system in which they found themselves in the first place, where irrational thinking was a creative taking in of a desire of the perpetrator. Their level of unhappiness signifies how little they have been listened to and heard.

Perhaps the best answer to the question, 'Should we be happy?' is 'When we have something to be happy about'. Even then, we can't necessarily be happy to order. 'Should' is not a word that is applicable to happiness, or figures very much in counselling at all. As for happiness, don't worry. It will sneak up on us once we've stopped looking for it. Something in the world outside our head will trigger it off by distracting us from the ongoing internal analysis. If we stick around and don't give ourselves too hard a time, it will, like the toy thrown out of the pram, stay when we don't any longer need to test its validity. ■

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# Online supervision: perspectives

'Virtual' supervision is becoming increasingly popular. **Jane Evans** considers the implications and two of her supervisees share their experiences

The advent of the internet and a broad range of computer-mediated communication resources have opened gateways for innovative ways of providing counselling and supervision<sup>1</sup>. Online supervision can be conducted in a variety of ways including email, secure instant chat facilities, and resources such as Skype with a webcam. The latter strongly resembles face-to-face supervision. Ideally, counsellors will be flexible and able to work with a supervisor in a number of modalities including computer-mediated exchanges, as circumstances may arise where the preferred channel is not available<sup>2</sup>. This article offers an insight to the online supervision process, benefits and potential pitfalls, from a supervisor's and supervisees' viewpoints.

## Supervisor's perspective

### Advantages for online counsellors

- Online supervision offers a parallel process to online counselling.
- A supervisor experienced and trained in online counselling and computer-mediated technology offers a chance for appropriate reflection on client work and development of online skills, along with expertise in ethical and legal requirements, and risk management specific to computer-mediated therapy<sup>3-5</sup>.

- The expertise of an online supervisor can provide reassurance, a sense of security, and support for online counsellors who are new to computer-mediated therapy, and for those continuing to develop their skills<sup>6</sup>.

### Advantages for face-to-face counsellors

- Convenience of access to supervision without the need to travel or take time out of a work routine.
- Increased choice, particularly when restricted by geographical location<sup>7</sup>.

### Common benefits

- A full record of supervision can be referred to for reflection, any follow-up required, and strategies for assisting with client work – a particular benefit where either the counsellor or supervisor requires evidence of specific matters raised during supervision<sup>8</sup>.
- Where supervision by email is adopted, or background to client work is forwarded prior to supervision, the process of writing itself can facilitate a deeper level of insight into the presenting issues, similar to that achieved in self-supervision. In online client work, the supervisor can access the actual content of counsellor and client exchanges, increasing insight and understanding, and enhancing the supervision experience<sup>9</sup>.