

Section: PPT cases

THE MEANING AND ROLE OF THE BODY IN ADOLESCENTS WITH EATING DISORDERS: A DESCRIPTION OF THE MEANING OF THE SYMPTOM



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Abstract

The article describes the understanding of the function of the symptom of eating disorders in adolescents from the perspective of positive psychotherapy. The work of understanding the symptom is based on the work with 15-year-old adolescents in the Khmelnytsky Regional Medical Center for Mental Health. It is observed that the symptom is based on the need to control one's own emotions and experiences and such control is exercised through the body, namely, through eating behavior. It is described that when dealing with this symptom at the behavioral level, it is important to develop coping mechanisms using the balance model. Our findings on the eating disorder symptom indicate that it is important in the psychotherapeutic process to understand the symptom and how it plays a role in the life of the individual. This understanding contributes to a deeper vision of the client and his or her problem, and also influences psychotherapeutic interventions. At the same time, understanding the symptom is important for the client's internal work.

Keywords: adolescents, eating disorders, positive psychotherapy

Introduction

Adolescence is often accompanied by many changes which occur at all levels: physiological, intellectual, social, and spiritual and thus are very difficult for a person. In such a difficult period of life, adolescents are very vulnerable and many adults around them do not take into account the difficulties that the child faces. The child himself or herself simply does not have the experience to resolve the crisis. A teenager is just beginning to learn ways to solve life's difficulties and to form and rely on his/her own resources and capabilities. One of the most common problems is eating disorders. In particular, Mitchison, D. and colleagues note that from

eating disorders (EDs) affecting 21.0%–36.9% of adolescents, access to the necessary specialized treatment is extremely low (Hammerle et al., 2016; Micali et al., 2015; Mitchison et al., 2019), primarily due to a lack of detection and referral (Mitchison, 2023).

In positive psychotherapy, the problem of anorexia nervosa is described by V. Ivanova, who described the impact of family dynamics on adolescents with anorexia nervosa (Ivanova, 2021); N. Shelest and L. Wojciechowska described how overeating affects the balance of life (Shelest, Voytsekhoska, 2015). Also, in the book PPT, Chekmarov M. in the section on Eating Disorder describes that this disorder belongs to psychosomatic disorders and the leading conflict

area is often in contacts. Despite the existing research, the problematic issue is underdeveloped in the field of PPT, and given the above, the purpose of this article is to describe the understanding of the function of the ED symptoms (Chekmarev, 2020).

During the experience of psychological practice with adolescents suffering from ED in 2022-2023 at the Khmelnytsky Regional Medical Center for Mental Health, we came to a certain understanding of the symptoms and how to work with them. The work was conducted with female adolescents aged 12-17. They had diagnosed anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. In this case study, we plan to share our own views on the problem through about ED's of adolescents

Case

Client S., 15 years old. She came looking for help on her own initiative because she had lost too much weight and was referred to me by her psychiatrist. During the examination, the client was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa.

The client has been raised by her mother only, as her father died a few years ago. The child is very diligent and responsible, she studies a lot. She has a rather small social circle, good relations with her mother, but cannot share her feelings because her mother is constantly tired. During the first diagnostic interview, she said that she had been wanting to lose weight for about six months and wanted to achieve good results to be better. At that time, the client was already underweight and had no menstrual cycle. The client has good analytical skills for her age and therefore realized that this path was more harmful, but she could not cope on her own.

In our work, we began to study the symptom and became interested in what function it performs, as well as what internal conflict is going on inside this girl.

For a better understanding of the problematic issue, we propose to consider the modern classification of disorders. According to ICD-11 - feeding and Eating Disorders involve abnormal eating or feeding behaviours that are not explained by another health condition and are not developmentally appropriate or culturally sanctioned. Feeding disorders involve behavioural disturbances that are not related to body weight and shape concerns, such as eating of non-edible substances or voluntary

regurgitation of foods. Eating disorders involve abnormal eating behaviour and preoccupation with food as well as prominent body weight and shape concerns.

Feeding and Eating Disorders diagnoses should not be used to classify low-level concerns related to eating or behaviours that are common or culturally sanctioned (ICD-11, 2022).

The method of positive psychotherapy considers human problems as a given, which is factual, because the meaning of positum is present. In a conflict, we can see an opportunity and a certain sense of why a person does what he or she does. This is an integral part of the psychotherapeutic process of the method - to see a healthy area that can be relied upon.

In positive psychotherapy, a conflict or crisis is analyzed according to the Balance Model (BM). The model includes four spheres of life:

- Body (physical sphere);
- Activities (material sphere);
- Contacts (social sphere);
- Fantasies/dreams (spiritual sphere);

In this case, the use of the BM served as an auxiliary diagnostic tool and at the same time helped the client to expand her vision of her own problem.

According to the method, people resolve their own crises by addressing them in the area where they arise. Or they can escape to other areas to avoid the internal tension that is felt in connection with their experiences. But then the conflict is not resolved and this can lead to negative consequences in life. The balance model presented by N. Pezeshkian is depicted in the form of a rhombus for better clarity when analyzing the problematic issue. Each symptom has a specific function for a person. The psychotherapist must see and rely on the understanding of the symptom as a guide that points to deeper problems.

As a result of cooperation and the formation of a conflict and resource map, it was noticed that regardless of stressors and crises in life, adolescents try to compensate by bringing out their own okayness through the body. Often, adolescent girls come to the ED because they are unable to cope with their experiences using other strategies.

In this experience, adolescents try to control their emotions first and foremost, they try to control themselves, but this is not always possible due to their lack of experience. During our work, we often observe situations in which

the mothers of such children cannot control their own emotions and are unable to containerize the emotions of their children. In this case, such a mother-child relationship creates additional pressure on the adolescent, as the emotions of the parents are added to their own situations in life.

That is why we need to ask clients about resources and what helps them solve problems in their lives. In this work, we first focused on maintaining and expanding support methods and also on the desire to be better not only through the body. The distancing stage in dealing with such symptoms acted to help increase motivation for change and support for one's own strength. After 20 sessions with this girl, we were able to restore her weight to normal and help her expand her vision of life, while working with her continues. We were able to stabilize the client and only now we were able to move on to working through the deep feelings that this girl was experiencing.

Discussion

In the course of the work, a hypothesis was put forward that ED can serve as a way of responding to internal experiences. The body is one, and often the only, object in adolescents' lives that they can influence. It is through changing the shape and weight of the body that they can achieve:

First, it gives a sense of control in their own lives, which helps to fight anxiety, which is a very common phenomenon in people's lives. In the language of PPT, they can decompensate their own experiences through a certain area;

Secondly, by influencing life through the body, they will receive approval from others and themselves that they have changed for the better. In the language of PPT, they satisfy their own emotional needs for self-worth and acceptance.

Symptom functions exist to help a person cope with experiences, but this is not a way to solve the problem, and that is why over time the symptom begins to harm and leads to mental disorders. In his work *What does our body tell us in therapy?* A. Remers describes the importance of emotions and their impact on the body and mental health. And with this in mind, how this relationship manifests itself in the psychotherapeutic process [5]. The above understanding of the symptom leads to the Conclusion that when working with adolescents

at the behavioral level, it is advisable to use options for expanding ways to cope with stress. That is, mastering more coping strategies using the balance model. Such work has the following features:

- It helps to reduce the intensity of experiences;
- Develops self-help and self-regulation skills in adolescents;
- Gives the opportunity to gain strength to move forward in the therapeutic process.
- At the same time, such work helps to master the skills of reflection and perception of emotions as informants that help to understand what the person is hurt about and needs.

An article by K. Ovcharek is useful when working with this symptom. The author describes exercises for regulating one's own emotions through the body, relying on body-oriented psychotherapy (Ovcharek, 2017).

Each area of the balance model should be used in the work on expanding ways to overcome stress and regulate emotions. Each possibility of working with emotions should be analyzed, talked through and practiced separately in sessions, for example:

- Working with the body: breathing, relaxation, physical activity, taking care of basic needs;
- Working with the field of activity: skills and abilities, disciplines that are used in education;
- Working with contacts: people who can help to cope with emotions through communication, games, joint activities;
- Working with the sphere of dreams and fantasies: hobbies, video content (movies, anime, TV series), where the adolescents can release emotions and make dreams to strive for. At the same time, the characters can be examples of how to solve problems.

Conclusion

Our findings on the eating disorder symptoms indicate that it is important in the psychotherapeutic process to understand the symptoms and how they play a role in the life of the individual. This understanding contributes to a deeper vision of the client and his or her problem and also influences psychotherapeutic interventions. At the same time, understanding

the symptom is important for the client's internal work.

We see prospects for further research in the in-depth study of eating disorders and the use of positive psychotherapy with people suffering from these disorders.

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