



Therefore, some clients may leave if they do not get on with these basic assumptions. They may want something more prescriptive or didactic. Existential therapy is not for everyone. It requires the client's willingness and ability to take responsibility for the way they are in the world.

## QUESTIONING ASSUMPTIONS

Questioning is at the heart of existential therapy but it is a collaborative 'questioning-with' rather than an interrogative 'questioning-of'. We are trying to find out something we do not already know. We also question ourselves about the best way to tackle life's problems.

But first of all, as therapists, we need to question our assumptions, judgements, biases and prejudices of how life and the world are or should be. The client's own concern and distress about their life, shown by their presence in therapy, indicate that their assumptions are flawed, erroneous, inconsistent or unexamined. We need to show them how they can become aware of their particular way of being in the world.

It is not important initially whether clients are objectively correct. It matters far more to find out what they mean and how these meanings inform the client's decisions about their life, and whether these choices are satisfactory. What matters most is that the client is able to take charge of life and accomplish their goals in life with awareness, courage and understanding.

Existentially, all assumptions relate to the givens of existence. These are:

- ◆ *Physical assumptions* like: 'My children will not die before me.'
- ◆ *Social assumptions* like: 'Other people are a lot of trouble.'
- ◆ *Psychological assumptions* like: 'I never get to do things the way I want.'
- ◆ *Spiritual/ethical assumptions* like: 'People should be punished if they do bad things.'

### EXERCISE

Write about one of your assumptions on each of the four levels as indicated below for 15 minutes. Then read through it and think about what it was like writing this and what assumptions are embedded in it.

1. What I intend to do before I die.
2. How I get on with my friends.
3. What I owe myself in my life and what I do to get it.
4. My moral values and how I live up to them.