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**Proposition 1: The Capacity for Self-Awareness**

Freedom, choice, and responsibility constitute the foundation of self-awareness. The greater our awareness, the greater our possibilities for freedom (see Proposition 2). We increase our capacity to live fully as we expand our awareness in the following areas:

* ♦ We are finite and do not have unlimited time to do what we want in life.
* ♦ We have the potential to take action or not to act; inaction is a decision.
* ♦ We choose our actions, and therefore we can partially create our own destiny.
* ♦ Meaning is the product of discovering how we are “thrown” or situated in the world and then, through commitment, living creatively.
* ♦ As we increase our awareness of the choices available to us, we also increase our sense of responsibility for the consequences of these choices.
* ♦ We are subject to loneliness, meaninglessness, emptiness, guilt, and isolation.
* ♦ We are basically alone, yet we have an opportunity to relate to other beings.

   We can choose either to expand or to restrict our consciousness. Because self-awareness is at the root of most other human capacities, the decision to expand it is fundamental to human growth. Here are some areas of emerging awareness that individuals may experience in the counseling process:

* ♦ They see how they are trading the security of dependence for the anxieties that accompany choosing for themselves.
* ♦ They begin to see that their identity is anchored in someone else's definition of them; that is, they are seeking approval and confirmation of their being in others instead of looking to themselves for affirmation.
* ♦ They learn that in many ways they are keeping themselves prisoner by some of their past decisions, and they realize that they can make new decisions.
* ♦ They learn that although they cannot change certain events in their lives they can change the way they view and react to these events.
* ♦ They learn that they are not condemned to a future similar to the past, for they can learn from their past and thereby reshape their future.
* ♦ They realize that they are so preoccupied with suffering, death, and dying that they are not appreciating living.
* ♦ They are able to accept their limitations yet still feel worthwhile, for they understand that they do not need to be perfect to feel worthy.
* ♦ They come to realize that they are failing to live in the present moment because of preoccupation with the past, planning for the future, or trying to do too many things at once.

   Increasing self-awareness—which includes awareness of alternatives, motivations, factors influencing the person, and personal goals—is an aim of all counseling. Clients need to learn that a price must be paid for increased awareness. As we become more aware, it is more difficult to “go home again.” Ignorance of our condition may have brought contentment along with a feeling of partial deadness, but as we open the doors in our world, we can expect more turmoil as well as the potential for more fulfillment.

**Proposition 2: Freedom and Responsibility**

A characteristic existential theme is that people are free to choose among alternatives and therefore play a large role in shaping their own destiny. Schneider and Krug ([2010](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13967)) write that existential therapy embraces three values: (1) the *freedom to become* within the context of natural and self-imposed limitations; (2) the *capacity to reflect* on the meaning of our choices; and (3) the *capacity to act* on the choices we make. Although we do not choose the circumstances into which we are born, we create our own destiny by the choices we make. Sartre claims we are constantly confronted with the choice of what kind of person we are becoming, and to exist is never to be finished with this kind of choosing. Living an authentic existence requires that we assume responsibility for our choices ([Ruben & Lichtanski, 2015](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13943)).

   A central existential concept is that although we long for freedom we often try to escape from our freedom by defining ourselves as a fixed or static entity ([Russell, 2007](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13951)). Jean-Paul Sartre (1971) refers to this as the **inauthenticity** of not accepting personal responsibility. We can then avoid choosing and instead make excuses such as these: “Since that's the way I'm made, I couldn't help what I did” or “Naturally I'm this way, because I grew up in a dysfunctional family.” An inauthentic mode of existence consists of lacking awareness of personal responsibility for our lives and passively assuming that our existence is largely controlled by external forces.

**Freedom** implies that we are responsible for our lives, for our actions, and for our failures to take action. From Sartre's perspective, people are condemned to freedom. He calls for a *commitment* to choosing for ourselves. **Existential guilt** is being aware of having evaded a commitment, or having chosen not to choose. This guilt is a condition that grows out of a sense of incompleteness, or a realization that we are not what we might have become. Guilt may be a sign that we have failed to rise to the challenge of our anxiety and that we have tried to evade it by not doing what we know is possible for us to do ([Deurzen, 2012](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13851)). This condition is not viewed as neurotic, nor is it seen as a symptom that needs to be cured. Existential guilt can be a powerful source of motivation toward transformation and living authentically ([Ruben & Lichtanski, 2015](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13943)). The existential therapist explores this guilt to see what clients can learn about the ways in which they are living their life. This guilt also results from allowing others to define us or to make our choices for us. Sartre said, “We are our choices.” **Authenticity** implies that we are living by being true to our own evaluation of what is a valuable existence for ourselves; it is the courage to be who we are. One of the aims of existential therapy is to help people face up to the difficulties of life with courage rather than avoiding life's struggles ([Deurzen & Adams, 2011](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13859)).

   For existentialists, then, being free and being human are identical. Freedom and responsibility go hand in hand. We are the authors of our lives in the sense that we create our destiny, our life situation, and our problems ([Russell, 1978](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13947)). Assuming responsibility is a basic condition for change. Clients who refuse to accept responsibility by persistently blaming others for their problems are not likely to profit from therapy.

   Frankl ([1978](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13891)) also links freedom with responsibility. He suggested that the Statue of Liberty on the East Coast should be balanced with a Statue of Responsibility on the West Coast. His basic premise is that freedom is bound by certain limitations. We are not free from conditions, but we are free to take a stand against these restrictions. Ultimately, these conditions are subject to our decisions, which means we are responsible.

   The therapist assists clients in discovering how they are avoiding freedom and encourages them to learn to risk using it. Not to do so is to cripple clients and make them dependent on the therapist. Therapists have the task of teaching clients that they can explicitly accept that they have choices, even though they may have devoted most of their life to evading them. Those who are in therapy often have mixed feelings when it comes to choice. As Russell ([2007](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13951)) puts it: “We resent it when we don't have choices, but we get anxious when we do! Existentialism is all about broadening the vision of our choices” (p. 111).

   People often seek psychotherapy because they feel that they have lost control of how they are living. They may look to the counselor to direct them, give them advice, or produce magical cures. They may also need to be heard and understood. Two central tasks of the therapist are inviting clients to recognize how they have allowed others to decide for them and encouraging them to take steps toward choosing for themselves. In inviting clients to explore other ways of being that are more fulfilling than their present restricted existence, some existential counselors ask, “Although you have lived in a certain pattern, now that you recognize the price of some of your ways, are you willing to consider creating new patterns?” Others may have a vested interest in keeping the client in an old pattern, so the initiative for changing it will have to come from the client.

   Cultural factors need to be taken into account in assisting clients in the process of examining their choices. A person who is struggling with feeling limited by her family situation can be invited to look at her part in this process and values that are a part of her culture. For example, Meta, a Norwegian American, is working to attain a professional identity as a social worker, but her family thinks she is being selfish and neglecting her primary duties. The family is likely to exert pressure on her to give up her personal interests in favor of what they feel is best for the welfare of the entire family. Meta may feel trapped in the situation and see no way out unless she rejects what her family wants. In cases such as this, it is useful to explore the client's underlying values and to help her determine whether her values are working for her and for her family. Clients such as Meta have the challenge of weighing values and balancing behaviors between two cultures. Ultimately, Meta must decide in what ways she might change her situation, and she needs to assess values based on her culture. The existential therapist will invite Meta to begin to explore what she *can* do and to realize that she can be authentic in spite of pressures on her by her situation. According to Vontress (2013), we can be authentic in any society, whether we are a part of an individualistic or collectivistic society.

   It is essential to respect the purpose that people have in mind when they initiate therapy. If we pay careful attention to what our clients tell us about what they want, we can operate within an existential framework. We can encourage individuals to weigh the alternatives and to explore the consequences of what they are doing with their lives. Although oppressive forces may be severely limiting the quality of their lives, we can help people see that they are not solely the victims of circumstances beyond their control. Even though we sometimes cannot control things that happen to us, we have complete control over how we choose to perceive and handle them. Although our freedom *to act* is limited by external reality, our freedom *to be* relates to our internal reality. At the same time that people are learning how to change their external environment, they can be challenged to look within themselves to recognize their own contributions to their problems. Through the therapy experience, clients may be able to discover new courses of action that will lead to a change in their situation.

**Proposition 3: Striving for Identity and Relationship to Others**

People are concerned about preserving their uniqueness and centeredness, yet at the same time they have an interest in going outside of themselves to relate to other beings and to nature. Each of us would like to discover a self or, to put it more authentically, to create our personal identity. This is not an automatic process, and creating an identity takes courage. As relational beings, we also strive for connectedness with others. Many existential writers discuss loneliness, uprootedness, and alienation, which can be seen as the failure to develop ties with others and with nature.

   The trouble with so many of us is that we have sought directions, answers, values, and beliefs from the important people in our world. Rather than trusting ourselves to search within and find our own answers to the conflicts in our life, we sell out by becoming what others expect of us. Our being becomes rooted in their expectations, and we become strangers to ourselves.

**The Courage to Be**  Paul Tillich (1886–1965), a leading Protestant theologian of the 20th century, believed awareness of our finite nature gives us an appreciation of ultimate concerns. It takes courage to discover the true “ground of our being” and to use its power to transcend those aspects of nonbeing that would destroy us ([Tillich, 1952](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13979)). Courage entails the will to move forward in spite of anxiety-producing situations, such as facing our death ([May, 1975](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13927)). We struggle to discover, to create, and to maintain the core deep within our being. One of the greatest fears of clients is that they will discover that there is no core, no self, no substance, and that they are merely reflections of everyone's expectations of them. A client may say, “My fear is that I'll discover I'm nobody, that there really is nothing to me. I'll find out that I'm an empty shell, hollow inside, and nothing will exist if I shed my masks.” If clients demonstrate the courage to confront these fears, they might well leave therapy with an increased tolerance for the uncertainty of life. By assisting clients in facing the fear that their lives or selves are empty and meaningless, therapists can help clients to *create* a self that has meaning and substance that *they have chosen*.

   Existential therapists may begin by asking their clients to allow themselves to intensify the feeling that they are nothing more than the sum of others' expectations and that they are merely the introjects of parents and parent substitutes. How do they feel now? Are they condemned to stay this way forever? Is there a way out? Can they create a self if they find that they are without one? Where can they begin? Once clients have demonstrated the courage to recognize this fear, to put it into words and share it, it does not seem so overwhelming. I find that it is best to begin work by inviting clients to accept the ways in which they have lived outside themselves and to explore ways in which they are out of contact with themselves.

**The Experience of Aloneness**  The existentialists postulate that part of the human condition is the experience of aloneness. But they add that we can derive strength from the experience of looking to ourselves and sensing our separation. The sense of isolation comes when we recognize that we cannot depend on anyone else for our own confirmation; that is, we alone must give a sense of meaning to life, and we alone must decide how we will live. If we are unable to tolerate ourselves when we are alone, how can we expect anyone else to be enriched by our company? Before we can have any solid relationship with another, we must have a relationship with ourselves. We are challenged to learn to listen to ourselves. We have to be able to stand alone before we can truly stand beside another.

**The Experience of Relatedness**  We humans depend on relationships with others. We want to be significant in another's world, and we want to feel that another's presence is important in our world. When we are able to stand alone and tap into our own strength, our relationships with others are based on our fulfillment, not our deprivation. If we feel personally deprived, however, we can expect little but a clinging and symbiotic relationship with someone else.

   Perhaps one of the functions of therapy is to help clients distinguish between a neurotically dependent attachment to another and a life-affirming relationship in which both persons are enhanced. The therapist can challenge clients to examine what they get from their relationships, how they avoid intimate contact, how they prevent themselves from having equal relationships, and how they might create therapeutic, healthy, and mature human relationships. Existential therapists speak of intersubjectivity, which is the fact of our interrelatedness with others and the need for us to struggle with this in a creative way.

**Struggling With Our Identity**  Because of our fear of dealing with our aloneness, Farha ([1994](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13883)) points out that some of us get caught up in ritualistic behavior patterns that cement us to an image or identity we acquired in early childhood. We become trapped in a *doing mode* to avoid the experience of being. Part of the therapeutic journey consists of the therapist challenging clients to begin to examine the ways in which they have lost touch with their identity, especially by letting others design their life for them. The therapy process itself is often frightening for clients when they realize that they have surrendered their freedom to others and that in the therapy relationship they will have to assume their freedom again. By refusing to give easy solutions or answers, existential therapists confront clients with the reality that they alone must find their own answers.

**Proposition 4: The Search for Meaning**

A distinctly human characteristic is the struggle for a sense of significance and purpose in life. In my experience the underlying conflicts that bring people into counseling and therapy are centered in these existential questions: “Why am I here?” “What do I want from life?” “What gives my life purpose?” “Where is the source of meaning for me in life?”

   Existential therapy can provide the conceptual framework for helping clients challenge the meaning in their lives. Questions that the therapist might ask are, “Do you like the direction of your life?” “Are you pleased with what you now are and what you are becoming?” “If you are confused about who you are and what you want for yourself, what are you doing to get some clarity?”

**The Problem of Discarding Old Values**  One of the problems in therapy is that clients may discard traditional (and imposed) values without creating other, suitable ones to replace them. What does the therapist do when clients no longer cling to values that they never really challenged or internalized and now experience a vacuum? Clients may report that they feel like a boat without a rudder. They seek new guidelines and values that are appropriate for the newly discovered facets of themselves, and yet for a time they are without them. One of the tasks of the therapeutic process is to help clients create a value system based on a way of living that is consistent with their way of being.

   The therapist's job is to trust in the capacity of clients to eventually create an internally derived value system that provides the foundation for a meaningful life. They will no doubt flounder for a time and experience anxiety as a result of the absence of clear-cut values. The therapist's trust is important in helping clients trust their own capacity to create a new source of values.

**Meaninglessness**  According to Frankl ([1963](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13887)), the central human concern is to discover meaning that will give one's life direction. Frankl's life experiences and his clinical work led him to the conclusion that a lack of meaning is the major source of existential stress and anxiety in modern times. He views **existential neurosis** as the experience of meaninglessness. When the world we live in seems meaningless, we may wonder whether it is worth it to continue struggling or even living. Faced with the prospect of our mortality, we might ask, “Is there any point to what I do now, since I will eventually die? Will what I do be forgotten when I am gone? Given the fact of mortality, why should I busy myself with anything?” A man in one of my groups captured precisely the idea of personal significance when he said, “I feel like another page in a book that has been turned quickly, and nobody bothered to read the page.” Frankl believes that such a feeling of meaninglessness is the major existential neurosis of modern life.

   Meaninglessness in life can lead to emptiness and hollowness, or a condition that Frankl calls the **existential vacuum.** This condition is often experienced when people do not busy themselves with routine or with work. Because there is no preordained design for living, people are faced with the task of creating their own meaning. At times people who feel trapped by the emptiness of life withdraw from the struggle of creating a life with purpose. Experiencing meaninglessness and establishing values that are part of a meaningful life are issues that become the heart of counseling.

**Creating New Meaning**  **Logotherapy** is designed to help clients find meaning in life. The therapist's function is not to tell clients what their particular meaning in life should be but to point out that they can create meaning even in suffering ([Frankl, 1978](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13891)). This view holds that human suffering (the tragic and negative aspects of life) can be turned into human achievement by the stand an individual takes when faced with it. Frankl also contends that people who confront pain, guilt, despair, and death can effectively deal with their despair and thus triumph.

   Yet meaning is not something that we can directly search for and obtain. Paradoxically, the more rationally we seek it, the more likely we are to miss it. Meaning is created out of an individual's engagement with what is valued, and this commitment provides the purpose that makes life worthwhile ([Deurzen, 2012](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13851)). I like the way Vontress ([2013](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13983)) captures the idea that meaning in life is an ongoing process we struggle with throughout our life: “What provides meaning one day may not provide meaning the next, and what has been meaningful to a person throughout life may be meaningless when a person is on his or her deathbed” (p. 147).

**Proposition 5: Anxiety as a Condition of Living**

Anxiety arises from one's personal strivings to survive and to maintain and assert one's being, and the feelings anxiety generates are an inevitable aspect of the human condition. **Existential anxiety** is the unavoidable result of being confronted with the “givens of existence”—death, freedom, choice, isolation, and meaninglessness ([Vontress, 2013](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13983); [Yalom, 1980](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13995); [Yalom & Josselson, 2014](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid14031)). Existential anxiety arises as we recognize the realities of our mortality, our confrontation with pain and suffering, our need to struggle for survival, and our basic fallibility. We experience this anxiety as we become increasingly aware of our freedom and the consequences of accepting or rejecting that freedom. In fact, when we make a decision that involves reconstruction of our life, the accompanying anxiety can be a signal that we are ready for personal change and can be a stimulus for growth. If we learn to listen to the subtle messages of anxiety, we can dare to take the steps necessary to change the direction of our lives.

   Existential therapists differentiate between normal and neurotic anxiety, and they see anxiety as a potential source of growth. **Normal anxiety** is an appropriate response to an event being faced. Accepting freedom and the responsibility for making decisions and life choices, searching for meaning, and facing mortality can be frightening. This kind of anxiety does not have to be repressed, and it can be a powerful motivational force toward change and growth (Ruben & Lichtanski, 2015). From the existential viewpoint, normal anxiety is an invitation to freedom. “Anxiety is a teacher, not an obstacle or something to be removed or avoided” ([Deurzen & Adams, 2011](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13859), p. 24).

   Failure to move through anxiety results in **neurotic anxiety**, which is anxiety about concrete things that is out of proportion to the situation. Neurotic anxiety is typically out of awareness, and it tends to immobilize the person. Being psychologically healthy entails living with as little neurotic anxiety as possible, while accepting and struggling with the unavoidable existential anxiety that is a part of living.

   Many people who seek counseling want solutions that will enable them to eliminate anxiety. Creating the illusion that there is security in life may help us cope with the unknown, yet we know on some level that we are deceiving ourselves. Deurzen ([2012](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13851)) believes that existential anxiety is part of living with awareness and being fully alive. In fact, the courage to live fully entails accepting the reality of death and the anxiety associated with uncertainty. Facing existential anxiety involves viewing life as an adventure rather than hiding behind imagined securities that seem to offer protection. Opening up to new life means opening up to anxiety. We pay a steep price when we short-circuit anxiety.

   The existential therapist can help clients recognize that learning how to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty and how to live without props can be a necessary phase in the journey from dependence to autonomy. The therapist and client can explore the possibility that although breaking away from crippling patterns and building new ways of living will be fraught with anxiety for a while, anxiety will diminish as the client experiences more satisfaction with newer ways of being. When a client becomes more self-confident, the anxiety that results from an expectation of catastrophe is likely to decrease.

**Proposition 6: Awareness of Death and Nonbeing**

The existentialist does not view death negatively but holds that awareness of death as a basic human condition gives significance to living. A distinguishing human characteristic is the ability to grasp the reality of the future and the inevitability of death. It is necessary to think about death if we are to think significantly about life. Death should not be considered a threat; death provides the motivation for us to take advantage of appreciating the present moment. Instead of being frozen by the fear of death, reflecting on the reality of death can teach us how to live fully. Deurzen and Adams ([2011](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13859)) write: “Life is a taskmaster, while death is a master teacher” (p. 105). If we defend ourselves against the reality of our eventual death, life becomes insipid and meaningless. But if we realize that we are mortal, we know that we do not have an eternity to complete our projects and that the present is crucial. Our awareness of death is the source of zest for life and creativity. Death and life are interdependent, and though physical death destroys us, the idea of death saves us ([Yalom, 1980](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13995), [2003](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid14015)).

   Yalom ([2008](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid14027)) recommends that therapists talk directly to clients about the reality of death. He believes the fear of death percolates beneath the surface and haunts us throughout life. Death is a visitor in the therapeutic process, and Yalom believes that ignoring its presence sends the message that death is too overwhelming to explore. Confronting this fear can be the factor that helps us transform an inauthentic mode of living into a more authentic one. Accepting the reality of our personal death can result in a major shift in the way we live in the world ([Yalom & Josselson, 2014](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid14031)). We can turn our fear of death into a positive force when we accept the reality of our mortality. In *Staring at the Sun: Overcoming the Terror of Death,* Yalom ([2008](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid14027)) develops the idea that confronting death enables us to live in a more compassionate way.

   One focus in existential therapy is on exploring the degree to which clients are doing the things they value. Without being morbidly preoccupied by the ever-present threat of nonbeing, clients can develop a healthy awareness of death as a way to evaluate how well they are living and what changes they want to make in their lives. Those who fear death also fear life. When we emotionally accept the reality of our eventual death, we realize more clearly that our actions do count, that we do have choices, and that we must accept the ultimate responsibility for how well we are living ([Corey & Corey, 2014](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13831)).

**The Therapeutic Process**

**Therapeutic Goals**

**LO4**

Existential therapy is best considered as an invitation to clients to recognize the ways in which they are not living fully authentic lives and to make choices that will lead to their becoming what they are capable of being. An aim of therapy is to assist clients in moving toward authenticity and learning to recognize when they are deceiving themselves ([Deurzen, 2012](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13851)). The existential orientation holds that there is no escape from freedom as we will always be held responsible. We can relinquish our freedom, however, which is the ultimate inauthenticity. Existential therapy aims at helping clients face anxiety and engage in action that is based on the authentic purpose of creating a worthy existence. Authenticity involves claiming authorship—taking responsibility for our actions and the way we are living ([Deurzen & Adams, 2011](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13859)).

   May ([1981](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13931)) contends that people come to therapy with the self-serving illusion that they are inwardly enslaved and that someone else (the therapist) can free them. Existential therapists are mainly concerned about helping people to reclaim and reown their lives. The task of existential therapy is to teach clients to listen to what they already know about themselves, even though they may not be attending to what they know. Schneider and Krug ([2010](https://jigsaw.vitalsource.com/books/9781337250627/epub/OPS/loc_021.xhtml#eid13967)) identify four essential aims of existential-humanistic therapy: (1) to help clients become more present to both themselves and others; (2) to assist clients in identifying ways they block themselves from fuller presence; (3) to challenge clients to assume responsibility for designing their present lives; and (4) to encourage clients to choose more expanded ways of being in their daily lives.

   Increased awareness is the central goal of existential therapy, which allows clients to discover that alternative possibilities exist where none were recognized before. Clients come to realize that they are able to make changes in their way of being in the world.