Yes, you do have a choice.

Understanding and using Choice Theory with clients
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What is Choice Theory?

- Theory developed by William Glasser, M.D., that is put into practice via Reality Therapy.
- Belief that unsatisfactory or non-existent connections with people we need are the source of almost all human problems.
- The goal of reality therapy is to help people reconnect in meaningful ways.
- A “new psychology” (paradigm) to successfully answer the question, “How can I be free to live my life the way I want to live it and still get along with the people I need?”
- Effective even in time limited counseling relationships.
- Challenges the age old “I know what is right for you” tradition.
How is it different from other approaches?

- Dreams are not explored or even mentioned. Time spent on dreams is considered wasted.

- Clients are only diagnosed if insurance requires it. Diagnoses are considered descriptions of behaviors people choose to deal with the pain of a current unsatisfying relationship.

- There is no such thing as a chemical imbalance over which the client has no control. The brain is not defective. Its chemistry is normal for the behaviors a client chooses.

- What Glasser considered actual mental illness are conditions such as Alzheimers, head trauma, Autism, Down’s Syndrome, etc.
Differences, cont’d

- Semantics- I have depression or I’m depressed becomes I’m depressing (gerund) or I’m choosing to depress.
  - The use of nouns and adjectives makes it logical for a client to believe that they can do nothing for themselves.
  - The use of verbs, the client is not the victim of a mental illness; he/she is the beneficiary of their own good choices or the victim or their own bad choices.

- Taught as a part of the counseling process.

- Empowering- If I’m choosing all that I do, I can choose to do something better.

- Client is held responsible for making better choices and is seen as capable of doing so.
Glasser’s argument against psychiatry

Psychiatrists have moved away from being providers of traditional psychotherapy:

1. It’s too long and too expensive
2. They don’t make as much money doing it (volume)
3. There’s more money to be made via prescriptions (one drug doesn’t work, try another, then another…)

“Diagnosing these choices (to depress, etc.) as mental illness and treating them with drugs is a relief to all involved- the patient, psychiatrist, insurance carrier and drug company- a four party marriage made in heave. The human desire to escape responsibility for what we choose to do is alive and well in all parties to this process”.
Basic Tenants of Choice Theory

1. All we do is behave.

2. Almost all behavior is chosen.

3. We are driven by our genes to satisfy five basic needs: survival, love and belonging, power, freedom and fun.

In practice, the most important need is love and belonging, as closeness and connectedness with the people we care about is a requisite for satisfying all of the needs.

In order to be truly happy, we learn to control our thoughts and actions in a way that satisfies our own needs but does not deprive anyone else the chance to satisfy theirs.
Ten Axioms of Choice Theory

▪ The only person whose behavior we can control is our own.
▪ All we can give another person is information.
▪ All long-lasting psychological problems are relationship problems.
▪ The problem relationship is always part of our present life.
▪ What happened in the past has everything to do with who we are today, but we can only satisfy our basic needs right now (in the present) and plan to continue satisfying them in the future.
Ten Axioms, Cont’d

- We can only satisfy our needs by satisfying the pictures in our Quality World.

- All we do is behave.

- All behavior is Total Behavior and is made up of four components: acting, thinking, feeling and physiology.

- All Total Behavior is chosen, but we only have direct control over the acting and thinking components. We can only control our feelings and physiology indirectly through how we choose to act and think.

- All Total Behavior is designated by verbs and named by the part that is the most recognizable.
Five basic needs

These provide the foundation for all motivation:

- Survival
- Love and Belonging
- Power and Competence
- Fun
- Freedom and Autonomy

All behavior represents the individual’s constant attempt to satisfy one or more of our five basic needs.
Begun in our memory shortly after birth and continues to be created and recreated throughout life, is made up of a small group of specific pictures that portray the ways we think are most important to us and will best satisfy one of more of our basic needs.

What the pictures portray fall into three categories:

1. The people we most want to be with.
2. The things we most want to own or experience.
3. The ideas or systems of belief that govern our behavior.

Whether anyone agrees with us or not, we define reality in the way that works best for ourselves. We choose to behave in the way that we feel gives us the most control over our lives.
Understanding External Control Psychology

- Operational Premise- Punish the people who are doing wrong, so they will do what we say is right; then reward them, so they will keep doing what we want them to do.
- Attempts to force someone to do what they may or may not want to do.
- Results in person believing that other people can actually make them feel the way they feel or do the things they do.
- Outcome- loss of the personal freedom we all need and want.
Examples of External Control in action

- He made me mad.
- She hurt my feelings.
- They were out to get me.
- Everyone else was doing it.
- I can’t help it; it’s just the way I am.
- I wouldn’t have acted the way I did if she hadn’t done what she did.
- I have to drink to deal with my kids.
- The teacher flunked me.
Cont’d

- I had a headache and couldn’t think clearly.
- She should have made sure I was listening when she told me that.
- She won’t let me leave.
- I didn’t get hired because I’m ______ (race, gender, age, etc.)
- Well, that’s a stupid rule anyways.
- My parents were alcoholics.
- I didn’t have a choice.
Why use External Control?

- You wanted someone else to do what he or she refused to do.
- Someone was trying to make you do something you didn’t want to do.
- Both you and someone else were trying to make each other do what neither wanted to do.
- You were trying to force yourself to do something you found very painful or even impossible to do.
How we divide the world-

- Two groups:

1. Those we try to own - spouses/partners, children, students and employees
2. Those we don’t try to own - friends, acquaintances, bosses, strangers

Why do we keep trying to make other people do what they don’t want to do, when most of the time, we have so little success in this effort?
Using External Control via the Disconnecting Habits

- Being critical
- Blaming
- Complaining
- Nagging
- Threatening
- Punishing
- Bribing
In contrast to the Connecting Habits….

- Being critical
- Blaming
- Complaining
- Nagging
- Threatening
- Punishing
- Bribing
- Listening
- Supporting
- Encouraging
- Respecting
- Trusting
- Accepting
- Negotiating
Choice Theory in Action

- Understanding what’s in the client’s Quality World.
- Examining the present relationship that is unsatisfying.
- Changing the language used to describe how a client feels and why they do what they do.
- Being ever mindful of the choices that are being made.
- Asking “will what I’m about to do bring me closer to the people I wish to be close to or will it move us further apart?”
- Understanding the harmful effects of External Control on relationships.
Choice Theory in Action, cont’d

- Teaches the client to take responsibility for their actions, thoughts and feelings.

- Helps clients improve relationships in their lives by teaching them to learn what is in the other person’s Quality World then making an effort to support it.

- Assists clients with understanding the need for happy, supportive people in their Quality World.

- Emphasizes what clients can do to help themselves and to improve the present relationship that is the problem. Sticks to what he/she can do.

- Helps clients make specific, workable plans to reconnect with the people they need, and then follow through on what was planned by helping them evaluate their progress.
Resources

- Choice Theory: A New Psychology of Personal Freedom by William Glasser, M.D.

- Counseling with Choice Theory by William Glasser, M.D.

- www.wglasser.com
Questions, Comments, Concerns?

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