

BRIEF THERAPY INSIDE OUT

WITH

Michael Yapko

Welcome to Brief Therapy Inside Out! We have been teaching courses in counseling theory and practice at Governors State University in Illinois for several years. Time and again, we have searched for ways to show students how various practitioners work. What if you know you can only work with this client for a brief time? What are some of the ways you can quickly develop rapport with a client? What does therapeutic hypnotherapy look like? Just what is EMDR anyway? Can you really do “brief” psychodynamic therapy?

We also wanted to share with our students the personhood of some of the leaders in our field. Not all students are motivated to or can afford to attend conferences and workshops where they can meet the leaders in our field. And, as practitioners ourselves, we know how difficult it is to find the time and resources to do this.

This series focuses on thirteen outstanding practitioners who share with us not only the skills and concepts of the brief therapy they have developed, but also tell us about themselves. Therefore, this project has been rewarding to us both personally and professionally. We hope you will share some of this with us as you view this video and follow the study guide.

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Michael Yapko, Ph.D. is the author of seven books as well as several articles and book chapters. He is a clinical psychologist and marriage and family therapist with a private practice in Salona Beach, California. Recognized for his work on treating depression with brief therapy, Yapko teaches and lectures internationally.

HOW TO USE THIS TAPE

This tape is divided into three segments. In the first segment (21 minutes), Jon Carlson and Diane Kjos interview Michael Yapko to gain an overview of his approach. The next segment is client session (37 minutes). The client is a volunteer who has not previously met with Yapko. Following this, Yapko, Carlson and Kjos review and discuss key points in the counseling session (41 minutes).

Each of the three segments have time markers so that you can quickly find your place. These time markers are designed to indicate both the segment of the tape and the minutes into that segment. You will note that, in the first segment, the time marker has one line, in the second there are two lines, and in the third, three lines. Thus the therapy session, which is the second segment, has time markers with two lines. This study guide contains a complete transcript of the therapy session with minute indicators so that you can quickly find a particular exchange.

For class or workshop application: You may wish to assign one or more readings prior to having the class view the video. We recommend the following sequence for a class or workshop:

1. Show the opening interview which covers key points concerning this approach to brief therapy and then discuss with the class things they might look for in the counseling session itself.
2. Depending on time available:
 1. Show the second segment without pause, asking participants to note the time markers of interventions they found particularly significant.
 1. Briefly discuss significant interventions and turning points in the session.

2. Highlight and discuss common or universal skills such as relationship building or challenging that are demonstrated in this session.
2. Show the second segment with pauses to highlight and discuss significant interventions and turning points in the session.
3. Show the third segment and note the segments of the therapy session that the discussants highlighted.
- 4.

The video series is also useful for personal skill building. For example, you might compare how different therapists build a therapeutic relationship with the client or close a session.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE SESSION WITH A (need a title here) ¹

MY1: [2-1] Hi. What is your name and what would you like help with?

CL1: Mike, and I've been carrying like a lot of emotional baggage for a long time, and it just seems to affect me you know like daily. You know, I can't seem to like break free of things you know. And it just seems like I have constant reminders of things that have happened in the past.

MY2: So when you say emotional baggage, what do you mean exactly?

CL2: [2-2] In what way you mean? Or where did it come from or . . .

MY3: All of the above.

CL3: Okay.

MY4: Readers Digest version.

CL4: [2-3] Well, a lot of it you know is from the last 34 years of my life. It just seems like one bad thing after another or you know a lot of it stems I think from my father, you know. Growing up was just seems like full of twists and turns you know. It was a lot of hitting, kicking, slapping, throwing down stairs, hit with bats, belts, boots. Verbally called probably like every name you could think of. You know past is probably running away, foster homes, is like the tip of it you know.

¹Xx—Yapko, CL—Client

MY5: And so with that kind of pretty nasty background, how does it effect the choices that you are making today?

CL5: It seems a lot of times that I second guess myself all the time, you know. I'm not really sure exactly which way to move without constantly replaying things in my head or you know it just seems like I'm kind of stuck in a gutter, you know, and can't get out. And so . . .

MY6: Stuck in terms of your ability to do what?

CL6: Function a lot of times. It seems like it weighs me down, and you know, I'm married and I have two children, and it seems to effect them also you know. Where there is an emotional distance a lot of times.

MY7: [2-4] How does, how do those kinds of past experiences become a basis for emotional distance in your own family?

CL7: Because it seems whether I talk to people or things, you know, a lot of times there could be facial expressions that people make or smells or just anything, and it seems like pictures click when that happens, and somebody may say something, whatever, and then for a long time after I get home I may just be in another world, you know, just thinking.

MY8: Stewing about it, thinking about it?

CL8: A little of both, you know. And then always thinking, you know, well maybe I should have done this better, different.

MY9: Right. And so when you say those kinds of things to yourself, then what happens?

CL9: I seem to get caught up in it, you know.

MY10: Do you always have that kind of running commentary going on through your mind, that kind of evaluation about yourself, that kind of assessment about how you are doing and what you said and what you did?

CL10: Yes.

MY11: And do you always pay attention to it?

CL11: [2-5] A lot of times. I shouldn't say 100% of the time, but yeah, a lot of the times I do.

MY12: How do you know whether it's worth listening to?

CL12: I don't.

MY13: Have you ever had the experience of discovering that some of the things that run through your mind aren't particularly helpful to you, and you don't really need to focus on them?

CL13: Yeah, there have been times that I think that you know it's just what somebody had said or something just doesn't amount to a whole lot, you know.

MY14: And then you let it go?

CL14: [2-6] Yeah, sometimes I do, but it just seems like words can hurt worse than punches you know.

MY15: Okay. But if I criticize you, how do you know whether to pay attention to it? How do you know whether to listen to it? How do you know whether to take it seriously or whether to dismiss it?

CL15: I seem to take a lot of things seriously. It could be just joking or whatever, but I take it serious.

MY16: Okay. But the question I'm really asking is how do you know whether you should take it seriously? You are telling me that you do take it seriously, but I'm asking a question of how do you know whether you should?

CL16: I don't.

MY17: [2-7] It seems to me that that would be a really valuable thing for you to be able to have, some internal mechanism that helps you decide whether or not it is worth paying attention to. And one of the things, I don't know if you ever talk to other people about the inner voices that they have inside their own heads where they replay bad things that have happened and the self criticisms that they generate and all the junk that goes on up there, but if you were to do what I do which is when I have hundreds of people in a room and I ask them who among you has good self esteem, hands go up, not many, but some hands go up. And then I will ask them do you have an inner critic? Do you have a voice inside your head that criticizes you and says rotten things to you and puts you down and says mean and horrible things to you? And every single one says yes. And I ask them well if you have a voice that says rotten things to you, how can you have good self esteem, and the interesting reply, it's always a little bit different, but the common bottom line is they don't

listen to it. And when I ask them how do you now listen to it, that's when I start learning all kinds of different strategies. One person will say well [2-8] I picture it as being on a volume control knob, and I just turn the volume down. Somebody else said I picture it as a barking dog tied to a tree, and I just keep walking. Somebody else says you know I have another voice on my shoulder that says good things to me. But the interesting thing is that every single person has that inner critic, that critical voice. It's just a question of whether they listen to it or not. Now to me that was a very, very powerful learning from being around and asking those kinds of questions of literally thousands of people. But you will notice in the question that I ask you, do you have some mechanism whereby you don't have to listen to it, where you decide it's not offering me anything valuable here. All it is doing is keeping me stuck in the u said. Without that kind of mechanism, you are always going to be stuck listening to it. And when is it ever going to say anything to you other than negative stuff.

CL17: Right.

MY18: [2-9] It's not as if it is every going to say to you, gee Mike. You're great. Gee Mike you're wonderful. Aren't you the best. Aren't you lucky to be who you are. You know. That's not what people who feel good about themselves do. So you know in a way I'm kind of giving you a target to aim for that A, having the ability to develop a mechanism for not listening to it when you know that it is taking you some place that you really don't want to go because when are you ever going to escape all the triggers? When are you going to escape the sounds, the smells, the images? You could be watching a television show. You could be watching a movie. You can, I mean the triggers are always going to be out there. We are not going to be able to change the external world. But what goes on inside your mind is eminently negotiable.

CL18: Okay.

MY19: So now, have you ever evaluated the value of the things that you tell yourself? Has it ever been an option for you, in other words, not to pay attention to it?

CL19: [2-10] I try to, but a lot of times I you know seem to remember, and it always comes back.

MY20: It will. But now the question is how do you respond to it when you have the memories or when you

have the images. When you have a memory come up of something bad that's happened to you, you can either focus on it or not. I would like to hear about the times that you do either. Tell me about the times that you do focus on it and what happens, and tell me about the times that you don't focus on it and tell me what happens.

CL20: [2-11] The times I focus on bad things I just guess my escape from it you know is I just feel it build up you know. And a lot of times are work or something I just have to get out of there real quick, and I just seem to cry for a long time you know. And that's probably how I just try to vent it out you know. The good times, when people say things, you know, I guess there are a lot of times you try to prove them wrong you know. And I know that a lot of times you know when people say things, that I guess it just, it seems to just you know like a magnet or something, stick on you, you know, and it's hard to get away from it, but a lot of times I just try to tell myself like no Mike. That's not true. And so it's hard you know, I mean it's not easy to just say ah forget it. It's not right you know.

MY21: [2-12] It isn't easy. But it is a skill worth developing because you will have how many things thrown at you for the rest of your life, and the idea is to get good at being able to dodge them and weave around them and not take them in. Not be the magnet for these things sticking on you. And you know there are a lot of different ways of accomplishing that. Have you done any kind of focusing work, hypnotic work, relaxation work, imagery work ever?

CL21: No.

MY22: Now that would be a very interesting way for you to get absorbed in a different style of thought about these kinds of things, and if you are actually open to doing that kind of a session, I would love to do that with you.

CL22: Okay.

MY23: Feel okay about doing that?

CL23: Yeah.

MY24: Okay. What I am going to do is just talk about some different ideas, different possibilities. There

really isn't anything that you have to do. But what I hope will happen is that as you are listening to me and you start to get more absorbed in the things that I am talking about, that it will start to open up some different possibilities for you, different ways of responding, because as I said, it's not the world that is going to change. [2-13] It's going to be your internal experience, how you respond to these things.

CL24: Okay.

MY25: So if you feel okay about doing that, then I would say just sit back in the chair, get yourself comfortable, and let me introduce the idea of focusing to you, alright? If you are comfortable with the way that you are sitting that's fine. What I would suggest you do is that you let your eyes close, take in a few deep breaths, and just orient yourself for a couple of minutes to the notion of absorbing yourself and a different way of thinking about your own experience. You probably haven't thought about it this way before, but when you get absorbed in the past, the negative feelings of things that have gone on, you can get so absorbed in it that you really don't see other ways of thinking, other ways of feeling. [2-14] But one of the things that's potentially valuable about taking a few minutes to just sit quietly the way you are now is that it gives you the freedom to explore other parts of yourself. You know you are much, much more than your past Mike. And that phrase of being much more than your past is going to surface at different times, in different places. [2-15] But when I encourage you to start thinking a little different about yourself and your experience, and to go exploring within yourself, there are strengths that you have that you've used to cope, that you've used to build a different life for yourself, being married, having your own family. Things that you have clearly left behind. And in this kind of an experience where I invite you to step outside your usual experience of yourself, there are several things that can be especially important. One is for you to know that your internal experience is changeable. [2-16] And of course you will notice that first in superficial ways. Breathing slowing down, muscles getting more relaxed, mind wandering less and less, and then little by little as the momentum builds, when you start to discover in yourself places and things that feel good to you. Situations even memories that you have forgotten about of things that were quite nice. The good people along the way. People that went

out of their way to do something nice for you. Small things that you'd forgotten about. And little by little the reality of what I mean when I say that you are more than your past and start to drift in your awareness. [2-17] You have goals, ways that you want the future to be different than the past. Ways that you want to be able to connect with your wife, your kids. Ways that you want to evolve friendships with people, and all the while knowing that it's the things that you say to yourself through your thoughts that make all the difference in how you feel. And certainly you know that your mind is capable of generating lots of different things. Audio clips and video clips from different life experiences. [2-18] But it is so interesting when you are in a more comfortable state of mind to realize that those are things that can just drift past and never really stick to you. Things that can just float by that you never latch on to or give time to. And when I said everyone has the voices, what's interesting is how they can grow quiet, how they can become easy to ignore. [2-19] How other aspects of your experience can take over. There are already things that you've done Mike that you wouldn't have predicted from your past. And it's easy to appreciate that on impersonal levels as well as personal ones. One hundred years ago nobody would have predicted space shuttles and space stations. Things change. One hundred years ago no one would have predicted paved roads everywhere in this country or flying around the world in a matter of hours. [2-20] And of course what I am really saying is for you to use your past to predict the future becomes more and more difficult as you begin to fill your future with more things that remind you that you are more than that. [2-21] And it's literally as if a wall is built between what you are experiencing now and what you will experience tomorrow and what you experienced before. And whether you use the actual image of a wall to separate past from present, pre, or whether you use some other divider, all I know is the things that have gone before have increasingly less and less influence on the choices that you make today, tomorrow, all of your tomorrows. I want you to notice your breathing has slowed Mike. Muscle tone is more relaxed. [2-22] To get absorbed in a comfortable way. To know that you can go inside yourself and find good experiences. Simple pleasures of the look on your child's face when you do something funny and unexpected. The simple things that remind you of the extraordinary range of feelings you are capable of, perceptions you are capable of. Understandings that you are capable of. [2-23] And to

slowly but steadily build a wall around what was in order to create an endless array of possibilities for what can be. And in the same way that I say you are more than your past, I also want to remind you the future hasn't happened yet. Now you noticed some shifts even in the way your body feels. And perhaps in your thoughts and perceptions as well. [2-24] I really won't know until you are describing those understandings to me in a little while. But here is an experience that you allowed because you trusted yourself in this very new situation with me who you've never met before. You trusted yourself to deal with whatever I might say or do. You trusted yourself to deal with the spontaneity, the unexpected, and that's an important thing Mike. [2-25] Because there doesn't have to be trust out in the world or predictability out in the world or even safety out in the world. There only has to be your internal awareness that you can deal with it. As someone wise once said, that the best way to predict the future is to create it. And with every interaction that you have with your own family, the one that you've created, you have an opportunity to do things better. [2-26] You have an opportunity to discover what is right about you. And so at this point take a moment just to review different things that I said. Your reactions. The things that you can take with you once, that you can really use. [2-27] And if you find yourself remembering that there are a lot of different ways of responding to voices from the past, from turning down the volume button, to picturing a barking dog tied to a tree just walking right past it or the every popular therapist response - thanks for sharing. Or any options that you generate that make it abundantly clear - You don't have to listen to what isn't useful. Take whatever time you want to Mike to process your thoughts, feelings, or reactions. Take a moment to consolidate, absorb the deeper implications, and then when you feel like you are ready to and want to, you can start the process of reorienting yourself, reconnecting with this environment and me, letting your eyes open whenever you are ready. [2-28] Take your time. [PAUSE] Hi. How are you doing?

CL25: Good.

MY26: Want to tell me about it?

CL26: I saw a lot of things. That I'm capable of feelings, that I've used talents that I thought I didn't have but I have.

MY27: Were you thinking of specific examples during that time? Or just a general awareness?

CL27: Just general, yeah.

MY28: And how did that feel?

CL28: It felt good.

MY29: Did it?

CL29: [2-29] Yeah. It felt real good.

MY30: Good.

CL30: Almost like I could imagine like a little, like a wilted flower, but I could imagine even though things have got me down, that I am capable of standing up. The other thing that I realized was that I am limiting myself to everything whether it's work or you know I also notice that I processed real quick just different things that people have said in the past, but they aren't true. [2-30] I also like saw my children you know, and I just realized that you know I have a terrific influence over them. Whether it's positive or negative, I have that influence over them.

MY31: It's great that you realize that.

CL31: And the thing that distance wise I kind of really focused on that for a minute, and I'm living in the past. I'm not living in the present. And so I'm not accepting things for what they are. I've already got them doomed before they start.

MY32: Very important realization.

CL32: And I understood about the walls, you know. It's almost like doors and windows. I'm allowing whether it's emotions but I pictured water coming in through windows and doors.

MY33: That's a great image.

CL33: [2-31] And so I'm the one that has to close these windows and doors. And you know, the other thing I saw was like I pictured when you are cold you get a blanket. And it was real interesting. And I also realized that I can be whoever I want to be. Or do whatever I want to do, you know.

MY34: There will always be people who tell you you can't.

CL34: Yeah.

MY35: What are you going to do?

CL35: Well, what I realized or had thought about was when I was talking about different abilities and things like I'm capable of making things happen on my own.

MY36: Yeah.

CL36: And I've used that throughout my life but never took the time to think about it.

MY37: [2-32] But you know my point about people are going to tell you that you can't do what you want. I'm hoping your response will be some variation of thanks for sharing your own individual response that way but to not take it in because exactly what you are saying about you are the one who makes it happen. So you get to choose. You get to choose.

CL37: Right.

MY38: The fact that people throw stuff, so what.

CL38: But I have a choice to listen or not to listen. [2-33] And so I should, I need to take in the positive things and really process what people say in the sense like I can draw off of things like encouragement, but the funny thing is, and this is what I can't get over is like I never took not even five minutes to just relax. I kind of walk around stressed. I walk around, but for just I don't know if it was for a minute, two minutes, three minutes, whatever it was, but I actually felt ahhhhhhh.

MY39: I could even see it in your body as well as in your face.

CL39: Yeah.

MY40: See to me that's an important thing for you to be able to spend time with yourself in a way where you like what's in there. Where you can go inside and say there's good stuff in there.

CL40: Yeah.

MY41: I can run and play and do whatever I want inside my head, and it doesn't really matter what is going on externally at those times.

CL41: Right.

MY42: [2-34] And that's what's rejuvenating. That's what's replenishing. That's what highlights for you exactly what I meant at the end when I talked about the range of things that you are capable of. And when you've got this much range and just stay right in one narrow band, is certainly unnecessarily limiting. And you seem to get that.

CL42: What comes to mind is that I remember seeing on TV one time where somebody took a piece of paper and put a little dot and said what do you see, and you focused in on that little dot.

MY43: Yeah. So it is all about perception. And it seems like you got that. That's great. Is that the kind of experience, given that it was your first time with it and you did this well, something that you would be interested in pursuing?

CL43: Oh yes.

MY44: I think it would be a good skill, a really good skill for you to develop, and there are ways of doing that from perhaps the counselor that you are working with can pick up and do these kinds of things with you. But certainly there is a world full of tapes, relaxation tapes, visualization tapes, guided imagery tapes. [2-35] Those are great things, but more importantly developing the ability on your own. To be able to just sit down wherever you are whether it's at work or whatever. Or even when you come home stressed which is going to happen and you don't want to take it out on your family, so you go spend ten minutes calming yourself down where you can come back in and you feel great about being with them and it shows. And it shows. And those are the things where you highlight to yourself over and over again, I'm good. I can do these things. Reinforce for yourself that you are way past whatever was before. It's important.

CL44: Yeah.

MY45: That's good.

CL45: I feel real good.

MY46: Well that's good. That's good.

CL46: I do. I'm, I need to step outside of what I'm in.

MY47: [2-36] Always. Always. I mean to me one of the things that I hope will be a lasting thing from this

session is that anything that floats through your brain isn't worth air time until you decide it's worth air time. I mean your brain is capable of generating all kinds of junk. My brain is capable, I mean, the percentage of thoughts that I have that are actually worth paying attention to I would hate to put a number on it, but put it this way. There are a lot of things that go floating through my mind that just aren't worth paying attention to. And that's true for any human being. Not every thought is golden. Not every insight is meaningful. Not every perception is worth following up on. And for you who hasn't previously had a discrimination strategy, an ability to decide is this worth focusing on or isn't it, where it's just been automatic for you to take it in and respond to it, I imagine it's been very, very stressful trying to keep up with all that, sort it, and live with it.

CL47: It is.

MY48: [2-37] And what I'm hoping you now have as a choice is filtering out a whole bunch of stuff, spending time with yourself in a way that's comfortable, and just getting a charge out of the little things, the smiles, the touches, the sunsets, all the little things that make life good.

CL48: And it is good. You know. It is good because . . .

MY49: Overall.

CL49: Yeah. It is.

MY50: Overall. I mean there are crummy things that happen in life, but there are good things that happen too.

CL50: Yeah.

MY51: It sounds actually like you've got some good things going.

CL51: I do.

MY52: Yeah. It sounds it.

CL52: I do.

MY53: Enjoy it.

CL53: I will.

MY54: Very nice to meet you Mike.

CL54: You too.

MY55: Thanks.

MY56: Okay. You did great for the first time doing that sort of thing.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Books

Yapko, M. D. (1999). Hand-me-down blues: How to stop depression from spreading in families.

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Web Site

<http://www.yapko.com/>