



# Introduction

Young people need benign but sure guidance from intelligent, caring, and sensitive adults. Parents, teachers, coaches, and others who interact with adolescents provide a network of care and structure for most of our teens most of the time. However, in our rapidly changing, fragmented, high-pressure society, mixed messages are often sent to teenagers with respect to values, choices, and life directions.

As I write this, our country is in a muddle. We are in either a recession or a depression, depending on how these terms are defined; we are involved in military activities all over the globe, and our forces are stretched thin; the job market continues to be weak, particularly so for young people; the outlook for our health care system and social security is uncertain; we have lost the war on drugs; a high school education seems to be virtually meaningless; community colleges and state universities are full, and classes are closed to many would-be students; and more and more young people are either not moving out or are moving back into their parents' homes. Growing up in the middle of this mess, adolescents are going through their own critically important developmental years. They are aware that they face an uncertain future.

In adolescence, the individual is transitioning from the relatively protected realm of childhood to the more demanding, confusing, and, yes, scary world of young adulthood. Many life problems must be met and resolved. It is a wonder that anyone wants to grow up and leave childhood. Doubtless many young people would elect the Peter Pan, childhood forever approach if they could. But they can't. Everyone grows older, though they may not necessarily become more mature.

Sometimes the confusions and problems go beyond the helping skills of the various adults and peers around the young person. At times, the young person may see no way out of his or her current predicament—and no viable choices for the future. It is no surprise, then, that emotional problems arise. When this happens, a trained therapist may be the young person's best hope.

This book is about psychotherapy with adolescents. It deals with considerations relating to general planning, diagnostic work, resistance, and other difficulties with the adolescent client, as well as with specific techniques that may be employed in outpatient psychotherapy with teenagers. The intended audience is primarily graduate students in training to become psychotherapists. Experienced therapists also may want to use this book to provide an overview of issues in therapy with this group and in techniques they may not have used in a while or have heard of but not yet tried (e.g., "priming the pump" reinforcement, indirect modeling, informal desensitization; use of video games, etc.).

It is assumed that readers are beginners in the field of adolescent therapy and desire to learn the procedures of "doing therapy" with this age group. It is also assumed that these prospective psychotherapists will have had or soon will be taking a full course in the ethics involved in doing therapy, as well as in the laws governing this field in their state. This book does not cover the different state laws and, although a discussion of confidentiality and dual relationships is provided, this book is no substitute for an in-depth immersion in these and other critical areas.

Therapists in training should move slowly through this book, absorbing the material in full and thus gaining a broad-based picture of what it is like to do therapy with an adolescent client. The structure and confidence gained in even indirectly following these ideas is usually considerable, and doing so may heighten the prospective therapist's therapeutic effectiveness.

The fledgling therapist will need to know how to work with the many problems involved in growing up. These problems are, of course,

experienced by all teens to some extent but are experienced by some in so serious a manner that their developmental trajectory, the path that leads toward growing up, is seriously warped or arrested. The patient population under consideration is nonspecialized and presents the vast range of problems that beset adolescents in various daily life circumstances. Specifically, therapists will see adolescent clients manifesting problems such as these, among others:

- ▶ Confusions and conflicts stemming from divorce
- ▶ The emotional aftermath of learning disabilities and underachievement
- ▶ Alienation and loneliness
- ▶ Anxiety, ranging from a generalized kind (free floating) to more specific avoidances severe enough to be termed phobias
- ▶ Complications and confusions arising from sex, drugs, and peer pressure
- ▶ Issues relating to parental noninvolvement
- ▶ Low self-esteem and suicidal ideation
- ▶ Fear of leaving childhood and growing up
- ▶ Dependency–independency issues

This book offers constructive suggestions for working with any and all of this array of problems. The good adolescent therapist will tend to be a generalist. He or she should be able to reach into the bin of available evidence-based therapies and bring out those that fit the client's needs.

Quality therapists are much needed in our society. The continued development of strong training programs is critically important. Thus, it is incumbent upon older and more experienced therapists to assist in the development of new therapists. Those of us whose life's work has been the "doing" of psychotherapy with children and adolescents need to step up and share our experiences with therapists just coming into the field. After several decades of doing therapy with adolescents and their families, it is time for me to close the consultation room and pass the office key to the new therapists now coming on line. My purpose here is to attempt to share what I have learned about working in therapy with that most difficult population—the adolescent.