

Chapter 13

WHAT IS ADVENTURE THERAPY?

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INTRODUCTION

Adventure therapy is a new type of therapy that is different from all traditional therapies based on the healing power of nature. Experiencing corresponds to active learning with all senses. Adventure therapy aims at permanent behavioral changes and psycho-social attainments. For this purpose, in addition to visual and auditory stimuli, more behavioral learning forms such as movement and touch are included in the therapy (1).

Adventure therapy is defined as the canonical use of adventure experiences conducted generally in natural settings that enable the practitioner to take clients into action at cognitive, sensory and behavioral levels. It focuses on a wide variety of populations, particularly delinquent children, adolescents with low self-esteem and self-harming behaviors, substance users, cancer patients (receiving outpatient treatment), people with excessive weight control and impulsivity, families with communication disorders, individuals with disabilities and adults under psychiatric treatment (2). Since each individual of these groups has different needs, the effects of adventure therapy may vary (3).

In this therapy model, the main objective is to free the clients to see their full potential and to strengthen their self, because the innate powers of clients may be lost or undiscovered for various reasons. With therapeutic meetings with clients, it is aimed to protect and regain their social health, as well as to increase their psychological well-being and coping capacity (4).

The aim of this study is to review the literature on adventure therapy, which has limited number of studies in our country and to remind that this type of therapy may be used as an additional equipment by clinicians.

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DEFINITION AND HISTORY OF ADVENTURE THERAPY

“Therapeutic adventure”, “wildness therapy”, “adventure-based therapy” and “adventure-based counseling” are the concepts used for adventure therapy in the literature (1). Adventure therapy is based on the “Outward Bound” model developed by Kurt Hahn in England. This term, whose lexical meaning is “leaving the safe harbor for the unknown”, refers to combining and developing physical and emotional abilities to cope with stressful events (5).

Adventure therapy has been used in camps and scouting groups since the 1800s. It has gone through many stages until it reached the shape used today. It was included in the basic psycho-social support programs in the USA in 1950 and has been used as a psychological treatment and intervention method since that date (1).

According to Pryor (2005), more than 800 outdoor applications with approximately 700 field personnel and 15,000 participants have been carried out in Australia after the 1950s. In order for such initiatives to continue, they have been financed by private institutions and the state, in addition to charitable donations and corporate sponsorships (6,7)

An international partnership of ideas has been tried to be established on important issues such as what adventure therapy is, how to determine its boundaries, professional and ethical standards and specialty standards. Accordingly, the First International Adventure Therapy Conference was held in Australia in July 1997. One year after the conference, the book titled “Exploring the Boundaries of Adventure Therapy: International Perspectives” was published as an educational document (8).

FEATURES, PURPOSES AND USES OF ADVENTURE THERAPY

As mentioned above, adventure therapy is defined in alternative ways. It is possible to define adventure therapy as a method in which adventure-based activities are used in natural environments by psychotherapists for the cognitive, emotional and behavioral treatment of clients (3). It is also defined as the use of traditional therapy methods for therapeutic purposes in natural environments (9).

In adventure therapy, which is based on experiential learning (10), group therapy and individual psychotherapy sessions are used together as part of the general therapeutic environment (1). The direct participation of the client in adventure activities is an element that contributes to the realization of the therapeutic process (11).

Adventure therapy activities may take the form of horseback riding, hiking, canoeing, swimming and cooperative games. Cables, obstacles, ropes, trees, climbing gear and logs may be used as auxiliary materials in these activities.

Reducing the pace of everyday life; deepening the influence of the sense organs; initiating an internal dialogue to find out what factors affect, repulse or annoy the individual; initiating a dialogue with external nature; focusing on body and nature awareness exercises caring the deep (based on clinical diagnosis), internal rhythm, breathing rhythm, rhythm and breathing in nature are among the primary goals of therapy (12).

The way adventure therapy works may vary according to the clients and the style of the professionals. According to the learning by experience model, experience reflection is divided into stages in the form of process and application. If the process will be conducted with non-adult groups, parents are contacted first. In the preliminary evaluation, information is given and the framework of the application is drawn. therapeutic group discussions and the use of metaphors take place within the determined average time. In this process, the targets are reviewed and the follow-up period is defined (7).

Apart from the activities and practices conducted during the therapy, being in nature, group processes, metaphor studies and reflection experiences are the elements that benefit the participants in this therapeutic process. Nature develops personal perspective and encourages independence, confidence, openness and spontaneous bonding skills. Being in a group reinforces the sense of belonging, raises self-esteem and supports the individual socially. Interdependence, self-concealment and emotional sharing create a sense of trust among group members (2).

In non-school natural environments such as the sea, river, mountain and forest, students receive an education that focuses on overcoming difficulties and supports learning by living in the light of certain values such as respect for differences, selectivity, truthfulness and honesty (3). Wildlife therapy, similar to adventure therapy, may be applied to many clients who have been exposed to violence, from veteran soldiers to family members. Adolescents with many diseases ranging from developmental disorders to mood disorders are the group that most frequently apply to therapy. During the treatment process, which varies between 7 days and 60 days, the clients meet their own needs and take an active role (1).

The therapy process enables clients to face their daily life problems positively. It is recommended that groups of 6 to 14 people be heterogeneous. As with other group therapies, group dynamics are important. It is important for group members to support each other, provide feedback, collaborate in any challenge, solve problems creatively, and trust each other. Therefore, the feature of the process is another important aspect of therapy.

Techniques such as individual psychotherapy, group psychotherapy, diary writing, reflection, modelling, self-disclosure, and metaphorical processing may be used in the process (13). The use of metaphors in adventure therapy is important because with the help of metaphors, clients associate their expectations about therapy with real life (14). For this reason, beyond climbing walls or surviving in the wild, adventure therapy is a process that allows individuals to overcome real-life walls or survive the difficulties they experience. In other words, what happens in nature is a metaphorical situation related to real life (1).

In adventure therapy, clients integrate with the natural environment. The activities performed during the therapy process are real and information is collected about what is happening at that moment. It is predicted that the dysfunctional behaviors of the clients may change with the practices carried out in this way (15).

Adventure therapy increases clients' self-awareness. It enables them to increase their responsibilities both to themselves and to their environment. It also helps clients develop a more positive sense of self by allowing them to achieve tangible results for success and to correct their negative sense of self.

Another benefit of adventure therapy is that it enables clients to see their weaknesses, strengths and limitations more realistically. In this way, it helps them develop healthy decision-making skills. Adventure therapy improves the self-confidence of clients and enables them to see the uncertainty in their lives no longer as a threat but as a challenge to be overcome (1).

STUDIES ON ADVENTURE THERAPY

In studies related to adventure therapy, prevention, early intervention, treatment and care issues are focused on. A study consisting of 31 people with an average age of 40.3 examined stress and coping skills in adults. Perceived stress scale, coping skills use scale and working unity inventory were applied in the study. Within the scope of the study, sessions lasting between 30 minutes and 90

minutes were held for 3 months. While determining the 25 activities included in the therapy, the strengths and abilities of the clients were taken into account. As a result of the therapy, a significant decrease in the stress levels of the participants and an increase in their capacity to cope with stress were observed. In addition, it was concluded that the participants started to establish stronger bonds with their advisors (16).

In a meta-analysis including 197 studies, improvements were observed in the anxiety, depression, emotional balance, self-control and sensitivity of the clients after the therapy (17). Studies have proved that adventure therapy helps participants develop autonomy; affects psychosocial well-being positively; improves coping styles and contributes to cooperative learning.

When adventure therapy was used together with cognitive behavioral therapy, it was observed to be useful in reducing emotional and behavioral problems. It was also determined that it helped adolescents with weight problems to lose weight (18) and reduced the desire for alcohol and substance use in veterans with alcohol and substance use disorders (19).

Cason (1993), in his meta-analysis study on the overall effect of adventure therapy with adolescents (based on 43 studies and 235 effect sizes), came to the conclusion that the average intervention effect size is moderate. He found an increase of 12.2% as a result of participation in an adolescent with an average effect size (20).

In a study that investigated the long-term effects of adventure therapy, it was found that the positive effect of adventure therapy continued 6 months and 18 months after the intervention (21). In studies conducted with adolescents suffering from cancer, it was observed that participants had an increase in optimism scales and an improvement in their personal strengths (22). In a meta-analysis involving children and young adults with cancer, 7 studies were evaluated. In this study, it was determined that adventure therapy has a positive effect on the physical activity, fatigue, psychological distress and quality of life of cancer patients (23).

DIFFERENCES AND ADVANTAGES OF ADVENTURE THERAPY FROM OTHER THERAPIES

The distinguishing characteristic of adventure therapy is that it may be applied with any theory and therapy orientation. Adventure therapy may

be carried out independently or together with multi-model approaches that combine other methods and practices (1). For this reason, apart from the psychodynamic approach, the cognitive behavioral approach, the humanist/interpersonal approach or the system approach may be used together with adventure therapy (3).

There are examples of cognitive behavioral adventure therapy and Adlerian adventure therapy in the literature (24,25). What is important here is the necessity of combining the assumptions of adventure therapy with different approaches.

Another curious feature about adventure therapy is whether adventure therapy is different from other nature programs. In this context, the term “adventure” is only a means rather than an end in adventure therapy (1). The use of adventure as a therapeutic tool sets therapy apart from other non-therapeutic outdoor programs.

Another distinctive point is that adventure therapy aims to heal and change clients. Other outdoor programs do not have therapeutic healing. For this reason, some researchers suggest that the word adventure may lead to conceptual failure. Instead, they emphasize that the concept of activity-based psychotherapy should be used (26).

LIMITATIONS OF ADVENTURE THERAPY

The lack of a defined standard program or research methods for adventure therapy is the most frequently expressed criticism of therapy (27). This makes it difficult to compare research results with each other. Another criticism of therapy is that the chosen activities may be physically risky (14).

In this method, it is difficult to determine how the change occurs within the group. It may also be challenging to measure which client is expected to change and the time of change or recovery. Characteristics such as poor control, inadequate sample selection, inadequate follow-up, short treatment and poor theoretical structure are other criticisms of adventure therapy (28).

CONCLUSION

In adventure therapy, the information obtained through experiences is metaphorically transferred by the client to his own life. In this way, the client gains self-confidence and does not perceive the problems in his life as a threat. This model focuses on the development of client characters in the natural

environment. The development of leadership skills, social responsibility tasks and interpersonal relationships are other important objectives. The expected outcomes of adventure therapy are that clients learn how to use their internal survival skills as well as their individual development.

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