

# Essential Psychodynamic Psychotherapy: An Acquired Art

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## Chapter 6 – Creating Space

We do sacred work. It is no less than that.

How do we find the place from which listening deeply occurs? What does that space look like and feel like within and outside, and how do we optimize the chance that moments of meeting will occur?

- *The image of an innermost sanctuary.*

That sacred, uncluttered space was to be the place where the holy meetings between God and human beings was to occur.

The art of listening deeply requires space, within and without. Space uncluttered by ordinary social rituals.

- *Space big enough and still enough to hold the aloneness of the one, in the presence of the other.*

These holiest of meetings, between the unthought, unspoken parts of the one and the listening stillness of the other, these require the disciplined space of potential – *potential space*.

*“Immensity is within ourselves...Immensity is the movement of motionless man. It is on eof the dynamic characteristics of quiet daydreaming.”* - Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

Depth work takes place in this space of immensity – in the space where the aloneness of the one can meet with itself and come to know itself in the presence of another.

- *We collect ourselves inside for the encountering of another person in a kind of raw, unadorned form.*

The space of listening deeply requires the unwrapping of ourselves as therapists – a kind of shedding of the normal cocoon of protection that is our ordinary second skin – a making room for the full force of the other.

## Starting Moments

Our moments of beginning must convey, *“This is a different space. In this space, there will be more room for you than you’ve become accustomed to. In this space, I will wait – we will wait – to encounter you on your terms.”*

We have the space of our own receptivities available. We offer a simple openness and a curiosity of spirit.

We don’t know what will happen here, what will emerge from this person and in this relational field.

There is a recognition that for this person, some things may emerge in these moments of meeting that will be daunting or difficult.

## Setting The Tone

Our job at the outset is to make a place where anxiety can live in plain sight. Over time, we make a space where a whole range of hidden feelings can live in plain sight.

We provide an unspoken honoring of the anxiety involved in starting a process, in entering a therapeutic encounter, for both client and therapist.

- *This is practiced and disciplined ‘blank space’ that is entirely the therapist’s responsibility to create.*

We as therapists can choose to fill up the space of initial anxiety, but in doing so, we have committed an act of robbery – having robbed the patient of his or her way to find themselves in our presence and their own, and to start the voyage of their own journey.

This is not a *rule* of doing the work, but it is a *tool* of doing the work.

## The Room

Meeting, seating, and greeting matter. The room and seating is set up in a particular way. This is a claiming of your space.

The physical space between chairs is important. It should be enough to allow their aloneness in your presence.

## First Remarks

It is important to allow the patient to start the session, however they can, with whatever awkwardness or lostness this evokes.

The start of a session is a signature moment, and it should be signed in the patient's own hand.

The patient begins a relationship with you that is destined to be the same as and as *different* from all other relationships they've ever had.

### **The Space of Quiet**

- *Quietude is the coin of the realm in the beginning.*

Quiet is the chrysalis from which something of new form will slowly emerge. Sitting quietly with a patient allows us to feel their somatic energy, to experience the psychic pulls that they exert on us.

It allows for us to begin the process of losing ourselves in their presence (and they in ours), of yielding to the reveries and thoughts their presence evokes in our internal theatre.

There are huge upsides for the therapeutic process where there is space from the beginning.

We are immersed in a field of psychic particles that each person emits. We feel their particular anxiety and their particular way of being with, or positioning the other, around that anxiety.

We register their presence in our own bodies – often quite subtly – and feel different energies from the different people we meet in this way.

But the art lies in creating and allowing a space for this; a space quiet enough for us to detect the barely detectable signals of the patient's inner world.