

The Obstacles to Teaching Existential Therapy - abstract

This workshop invites participants to discuss and explore the challenges and questions we, as co-directors of the Centre for Existential Practice (Australia), often encounter when teaching the existential and phenomenological approach. Unlike psychology, existential therapy is rooted in philosophy, which many students find both intriguing and ambiguous as a therapeutic method.

While some students embrace existential and phenomenological concepts with ease, others find them at odds with their prior training. In Australia, where formal psychotherapy training programs are dwindling, most practitioners complete a Bachelor's or Master's in Counselling and Psychotherapy. These programs often emphasise solution-focused counselling skills, problem solving and more deterministic approaches.

Even the global landscape of professional development offerings is predominantly theme-based, focused on knowledge building and centred around theoretical frameworks.

This workshop aims to examine the unique obstacles and barriers to teaching existential and phenomenological theory and practice, particularly for both novice students and experienced practitioners. Key challenges include navigating obscure philosophical language, the absence of a structured framework, the emphasis on sitting with unknowing and uncertainty without seeking immediate solutions, and the lack of developmental theory or interpretative hypotheses about the client's world.

The session will encourage participants to brainstorm and share innovative approaches to teaching this nuanced and open-ended therapeutic modality, fostering fresh perspectives and strategies for making these concepts accessible and applicable.

Alison Strasser *DProf (Psychotherapy & Counselling), MA, BA Hons*

Alison is a practising psychotherapist, coach and supervisor. She is also an educator with a passion for imparting how existential themes can be integrated into every therapeutic approach. She was instrumental in creating the existential curriculum for many counselling and psychotherapy trainings in Australia and founded Centre for Existential Practice in 2008. Her doctorate focused on the process of supervision, work that led to a framework for supervisor training, now a major component of CEP's annual program. Alison co-authored *Time-Limited Existential Therapy* with her father, Freddie Strasser and she has recently published a revised edition.

Adam McLean *DProf (Psychotherapy & Counselling), M Counselling, Grad Dip Psych/Couns, BCHC, BN*

Adam is a clinical psychotherapist, supervisor, educator and trainer with over 30 years experience and a continuing interest in the human capacity for opening up to the possibilities in life. He is recognised as a leading group therapist and supervisor and provides training in both areas. Adam's doctorate focused on what it takes to elevate group leader technique to the art of group leader presence, work that now

informs CEP's group leadership course as part of their suite of specialist offerings. Adam has a thriving private practice, he became a Director of CEP in 2012 and is helping to shape the organisation's overall direction.