

Stages of Cure in Transactional Analysis

Eric Berne is the originator of Transactional Analysis (TA). Berne's Stages of Cure are four progressive levels of psychological improvement that clients can achieve from psychotherapy: social control, symptomatic relief, transference cure and script cure. Each stage represents a genuine improvement, but the later stages involve deeper and more lasting personality change.

Social Control

The client gains control over problematic behaviours.

The client manages behaviour in social settings using their rational Adult ego state.

They choose how to act instead of reacting automatically from old habits.

The client manages and controls behaviours in daily life.

Internal conflicts and life script remain largely unchanged, but day-to-day functioning improves.

Symptomatic Relief

In the Symptomatic Relief stage, the individual moves beyond just managing external behaviour to finding internal relief from psychological distress.

The person's Adult ego state aligns with the therapist to analyse the internal conflict.

The Adult begins to separate itself from negative Parental programming or Child fears.

The client feels less internal stress, anxiety or pain.

Emotional distress and symptoms (such as anxiety or depression) are reduced.

The client experiences relief from presenting issues.

However, the underlying script and personality patterns are still present, so symptoms may return under stress.

Transference Cure

The therapeutic relationship becomes the main source of change.

The client transfers their childhood feelings and expectations of their parents onto the therapist.

The client experiences the therapist as a supportive parental figure.

The client internalises the therapist's supportive messages and functions better.

Improvement depends partly on the therapist, so it may not yet be fully independent or permanent.

Script Cure

Script cure is the final and highest stage of psychological recovery.

The client's own Adult ego state takes over, freeing them from their life script¹, and they independently choose how to live in the present.

They drop their old script and make new independent choices.

This is considered the deepest and most lasting level of cure, where old dysfunctional patterns are replaced by new, self-directed ways of living.

The client achieves greater autonomy.

¹ A life script is the unconscious life plan we form in childhood from the messages we received from our parents and caregivers.

The Three Pillars of Autonomy

Awareness

The ability to see, hear and feel the world directly.

Knowing what is happening in the here and now.

Not filtering reality through old beliefs or childhood programming.

Spontaneity

Expressing true feelings and desires without constraint.

Stepping out of rigid, repetitive behavioural patterns.

Choosing how to respond appropriately from a range of options.

Intimacy

Connecting with others in an open, honest way.

Interacting without hidden agendas or ulterior motives.

Authentic game-free relationships.

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