

WHAT IS PSYCHOANALYSIS?

Psychoanalysis is a theory of the mind & a method of helping people in mental distress. It is based on a very simple idea:

HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

is determined by

UNCONSCIOUS MOTIVATIONS

that are the products of

CHILDHOOD ENCOUNTERS

with

LOVE, LOSS, SEXUALITY & DEATH

KEY TERMS

THE UNCONSCIOUS

Freud proposed the existence of a dynamic unconscious, containing ideas that have been repressed, and which the mind actively struggles to keep at bay.

Freud discovered the return of these ideas in disguised forms such as slips of the tongue, little mistakes, the words we find ourselves using, and dreams.

We think we are in control of our lives, but in Freud's view, it's the unconscious that controls us!

THE OEDIPUS COMPLEX

Freud uncovered complex emotional attitudes towards parents and siblings in his patients, leading him to view childhood as a time of intense feelings of love, hatred, envy and fear, culminating in a crisis that he called the 'Oedipus complex'.

The crisis may be resolved through repression, but is never extinguished: it lays down the template for how we relate to others throughout our lives.

SEXUALITY

One of Freud's most surprising findings was the significance of sexuality as a driving force in his patients' lives. He noticed that sexuality was connected not only to pleasure, but also to anxiety.

But Freud's account of sexuality was very different to traditional definitions. He discovered components of sexuality throughout the body, and traced it back to much earlier in childhood than it was commonly thought to emerge. A baby's first experience of satisfaction, he observed, is at its mother's breast.

THE ID, EGO & SUPEREGO

For Freud, the mind is in a constant state of conflict with itself. In his most famous account, he divided the mind into three parts: the id, the ego and the superego.

The id is the realm of appetites, wants and passions that do not take 'no' for an answer. The superego is connected to morality and social norms, built out of identifications with one's parents, and can be extremely cruel. The ego faces the task of finding a balance between the demands of the id and the superego. That's why the ego is the seat of the 'defence mechanisms' – there are so many dangers to avoid!