



Language and Connection in Psychotherapy: Words Matter

Mary E. Davis

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Language plays a major role in our daily lives. Humans are specialized to live in a social environment, and our brains are “designed” to manage interactions with others which are, for the most part, accomplished through words. Language allows us to function both cognitively and interpersonally, and without language there are constraints on our ability to interact with others.

Language also plays a major role in that specialized form of interpersonal interaction that we call psychotherapy or psychoanalysis. In that setting we use words to express and communicate meaning clearly, and through spoken language we help our patients to organize and modify their experiences of self and of the world, fostering adaptive change.

Like the air we breathe, when our language serves its function it is transparent to us. We notice it most when it fails. When it does fail its basic function, in life and in psychotherapy, it fails to reliably, effectively, and comfortably help us to connect with others, as we deal with the world around us. In *Language and Connection in Psychotherapy: Words Matter*, Dr. Mary Davis addresses the role of language in our lives, both internally, in creating psychic structure and regulating affect, and interpersonally, in facilitating relationships with the figures that have shaped our development and that inhabit our adult lives. Using clinical material to illustrate, Davis looks at the development of language and its role in creating our personalities, at the life events which can distort our use of language to interact with others, and the ways that language can lead to misunderstanding as well as to understanding.

Throughout, *Language and Connection in Psychotherapy: Words Matter* explores various facets of the ways in which words matter as well as the times when words are important but not sufficient to our ability to communicate interpersonally. Davis suggests that the psychotherapist is a master in bridging the gap between being and saying: she can be conceptualized as an “interpreter,” one who turns behavioral language into verbal language, action language into words, emotions into thoughts, who focuses and uses the capacity of words to help us connect both with our internal selves and with others.

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