

15 Edgar Cayce on Mental Health

WHAT IS THE EDGAR CAYCE APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH?

The Edgar Cayce approach offers a comprehensive resource on the prevention, causes, and treatment of mental illness. This body of information covers the full spectrum of mental health problems including depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, personality disorders, relationship difficulties, and childhood behavioral problems. This approach also covers developmental issues such as personal growth and the fulfillment of human potential.

Edgar Cayce provided this information from an altered state of consciousness similar to self-hypnosis. When an individual came to him for a “reading,” he entered into this altered state of consciousness, after a brief period of preparation, and then he would verbally describe the cause of the condition and suggest a treatment plan to restore health. Over 14,000 of these psychic discourses were stenographically transcribed, and they have been preserved in the archives of the Edgar Cayce Foundation in Virginia Beach, VA, where they are available for public use. These readings are the foundation of the approach described in this chapter.

In the readings, Cayce recommended a wide variety of modalities and techniques for the treatment of mental and emotional disorders, including physical, mental, and spiritual modalities. Although Cayce recommended a vast array of therapeutic techniques, he consistently maintained that treatments of any kind do not heal. They can only assist the body to heal itself. The therapies, then, were also suggested as preventive measures and for health maintenance for persons recovering from mental illness.

HOW IT BEGAN

Although Cayce (1877–1945) had no formal training either as a medical professional or a psychic diagnostician, he is widely regarded as the father of holistic medicine. Edgar Cayce's career as a medical intuitive began at the age of fifteen, when he spontaneously entered an altered state of consciousness and diagnosed an illness acquired as a result of an accident he suffered while playing baseball. He prescribed a treatment for himself that consisted of a poultice made up of simple, natural ingredients from his mother's kitchen. His parents followed his instructions to create the poultice and he recovered quickly. As he matured and became aware of his potential for helping others, he dedicated his life to alleviating suffering, especially in children. Over a period spanning five decades, Edgar Cayce gave thousands of readings to persons suffering from almost every type of disease. Hundreds of these readings were for persons suffering from mental illness in its myriad forms.

James C. Windsor (1969) and Charles T. Cayce (1978), grandson of Edgar Cayce, later focused on the mental health applications of the Cayce material. Their important work laid the foundation for further development of Edgar Cayce's approach and are highly recommended reading in this area.

HOW IT WORKS

Cayce's approach is a holistic one, in that it addresses the body, the mind, and the spirit. To address the physical pathology associated with mental illness, Cayce commonly prescribed chiropractic treatment, osteopathy, massage therapy, nutrition, exercise, herbal teas, hot packs, electrotherapy (including use of the radial appliance and the wet cell battery, described below), and hydrotherapy. Castor oil packs were recommended to improve assimilation of foods and elimination of wastes from the intestinal tract. For the mental aspects of the illness, he used "suggestive therapeutics" (a form of naturalistic hypnosis), behavior modeling, thought monitoring (mindfulness), visualization, bibliotherapy, and a cognitive restructuring exercise called the "ideals exercise." The spiritual dimension of the approach emphasized awakening the inner self, and included therapeutic milieu, companion therapy, prayer, meditation, color therapy, and music therapy. Following are examples of how these treatments might be applied for two specific types of mental illness.

The Treatment of Depression

Edgar Cayce consistently acknowledged the strong biological aspects of depression in his readings. He defined depression as a “lapse in nerve impulse,” a description strikingly similar to the modern medical view that links depression to a chemical imbalance in the nervous system.

Edgar Cayce noted numerous causes of depression. At a physical level, he stated that hereditary predisposition was sometimes a factor. Glandular imbalances (particularly involving the adrenal, thyroid, and pineal glands) were often cited as causes of depression. Injury to the spine was another common causal factor in cases of depression.

From a psychological perspective, depression can be caused by negative thought patterns such as self-condemnation. He often stated that “mind is the builder” and quoted the Biblical verse “as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Proverbs 23:7). Destructive thought patterns are sometimes associated with stressful life events and environmental influences (such as traumatic childhood experiences). Edgar Cayce frequently described the processes by which negative thought patterns are translated into nervous system pathology (hence the “lapse in nerve impulse” in cases of depression).

The spiritual aspects of depression relate to the purpose and meaning of life. Why are we here? What is life about? Edgar Cayce observed that spiritual malaise was often the source of depressive feelings. A lack of spiritual awareness and commitment to growth and development can contribute to depression.

Cayce believed that regardless of the cause(s) of the depressive symptoms, the nervous system is usually involved, so physical therapies such as spinal adjustment, exercise (outdoors in the open), and hydrotherapy (the therapeutic use of water such as steam baths, colonics, etc.) were common recommendations given by Edgar Cayce. He recommended the use of a device called the radial appliance, which operates somewhat like a magnet, redistributing and equalizing the body’s own energy, resulting in improved sleep and relaxation.

At the mental level, Cayce suggested various techniques including positive affirmations, bibliotherapy (inspirational reading material), and meditation. From a spiritual perspective, individuals were told to find a purpose in life. He described a technique called the “ideals exercise,” in which an individual focuses on the purpose of life and the importance of integrating a spiritual ideal with the mental and physical aspects of living. Also, individuals were encouraged to be of service to others.

Naturally, this holistic approach has to be adapted to the individual. For high functioning persons with mild depression, the treatment is largely a matter of self-care. Other than bodywork (e.g., spinal adjustments and massage) and hydrotherapy, most of the work is done by the individual. For severe depression, more support by health care professionals is required. A residential program such as a clinic may be helpful.

The Treatment of Schizophrenia

As with depression, Edgar Cayce was decades ahead of modern medical science in recognizing the strong biological aspects of schizophrenia. He provided graphic descriptions of the nervous system pathology in this illness. He listed the various causal factors including genetic predisposition, physical insult to the nervous system, biochemical imbalances (often involving the glands), and the role of stress in precipitating psychotic episodes. As with depression, he recommended a holistic therapeutic approach including physical, mental, and spiritual modalities. However, due to the severity of the illness, the role of the health care provider shifted to a more team-oriented model. Edgar Cayce made frequent referrals to the Still-Hildreth Osteopathic Sanitarium in Macon, Missouri (no longer in existence). At this institution, individuals were treated with dignity and respect (in contrast to the state hospitals of that era). They received the full range of treatments including spinal adjustments, hydrotherapy, electrotherapy, diet, and psychosocial rehabilitation.

Edgar Cayce's recommendations for electrotherapy were particularly noteworthy. While recognizing the degeneration of brain nerve tissue in schizophrenia, he stated that the nervous system could be regenerated through the application of electrotherapy. Most often, he prescribed the use of a simple chemical battery (the "wet cell battery"); it produces a very minute direct current and, combined with various medicinal solutions, would he said, stimulate nerve tissue.

In some instances, if families were unable to send their relatives to Still-Hildreth, Edgar Cayce provided recommendations for home treatment. In a couple of exemplary instances, families were able to bring the individuals home from the mental institution, provide the treatments, and gain excellent results with the assistance of their local health care professionals (Smith, 1991).

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

The health concepts advocated by Edgar Cayce have been researched in a

variety of ways, directly and indirectly. For example, the Still-Hildreth Osteopathic Sanitarium (to which Edgar Cayce made frequent referrals in cases of major mental illness) reported very impressive results on the treatment of schizophrenia in an extensive research project involving 860 subjects. Sixty-eight percent of patients admitted within the first six months of the illness were treated and assessed as recovered. The reported recovery rate for people with schizophrenia for over two years was twenty percent (Hildreth, 1938).

Contemporary research has focused on some of the specific therapeutic techniques recommended by Edgar Cayce. Grady (1988) reported an increase in the level of certain hormones and neurotransmitters (chemical messengers of the nervous system) in subjects using the radial appliance (also referred to as the “impedance device”). In a double-blind study of the radial appliance, McMillin and Richards (1995) reported a tendency for improvement of circulation in subjects using the appliance.

Cayce and Thurston (1974) studied Edgar Cayce’s recommendations for treating children with behavioral problems. They found that a combination of massage, castor oil packs, and pre-sleep suggestions were helpful in decreasing problems such as fighting, poor sleep, anxiety, etc.

Pecci (1972) reported notable improvement in a study of sixteen children with hyperactive behaviors and seizure problems. Castor oil packs were the primary therapeutic intervention.

The Meridian Institute is a research group dedicated to the scientific study of Edgar Cayce’s approach to healing. Research reports are provided free to anyone requesting them. Although the primary research focus is currently on medical disorders, mental and emotional symptoms are often present and are measured in the research protocol.

REAL PEOPLE AND THE EDGAR CAYCE APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH

Following is a description of two cases of major mental illness treated by Edgar Cayce himself (Smith, 1991).



The first individual had been a postal worker who became mentally ill and was a patient at the Rockland State Hospital in Orangeburg, New

York. Edgar Cayce's reading for this man stated that he had injured his spine when he slipped and fell on ice while doing his job. As was typical for such cases, Edgar Cayce recommended spinal adjustments and the wet cell battery. The treatments were given as recommended by Edgar Cayce and the man recovered without further hospitalizations or relapse.



The second case cited was a young artist who was physically assaulted and subsequently confined in a mental asylum on Ward's Island in New York. She was psychotic (out of touch with reality) and exhibited the mood swings typical of manic-depressive disorder. As with the previous case, Edgar Cayce described the incident that produced the injury and recommended spinal adjustments and the wet cell battery. Also, in this particular case, noting the psychological damage resulting from the attack which produced the illness, he recommended a change of environment (therapeutic milieu) and companion therapy until she was able to take care of herself. This woman received the treatments advised by Edgar Cayce and was cured of her mental illness.



Contemporary application of Edgar Cayce's approach has also produced positive outcomes. An example is the case of J. K., a middle-aged woman suffering from severe anxiety and suicidal depression. J. K. was recently divorced, struggling financially, and suffering significant gastrointestinal symptoms. She was referred to a medical doctor for an antidepressant medication to address the severe depression. Although she was hesitant to take the medication, she was reminded that it was a temporary measure to help her immediate crisis. This is an example of complementary medicine, as practiced by Edgar Cayce. When people were in crisis, he would utilize whatever therapies were helpful in getting the person stabilized and then pursue a more natural course of healing.

J. K. participated in weekly counseling sessions for about three months to address her attitudes about herself and life. She was able to accept herself and become more empowered by using her will to choose

the attitude and behaviors that she wanted to express, rather than feeling victimized.

She was referred to a chiropractor experienced with Cayce's approach. He diagnosed and treated problems with her spine that were contributing to her anxiety and gastrointestinal symptoms. She began using herbal teas (yellow saffron and slippery elm bark) and castor oil packs, therapies recommended by Cayce to heal the gut.

The gastrointestinal connection is often significant in cases involving depression and/or anxiety. As Cayce noted, the abdomen contains its own nervous system and brain, called the enteric nervous system, that "sends and receives impulses, records experiences and responds to emotions. Its nerve cells are bathed and influenced by the same neurotransmitters. The gut can upset the brain just as the brain can upset the gut" (Blakeslee, 1996) This is one of the hottest areas of modern medical research and yet one more example of how the information provided by Edgar Cayce was (and still is in many respects) on the leading edge of medical research and application.

The pattern of healing for J. K. was typical in many ways. Within six to eight weeks she no longer was anxious and depressed. The gastrointestinal symptoms had been eliminated. She went back to school and became a professional massage therapist. She has followed the Edgar Cayce approach for maintaining health and has not had significant emotional symptoms since her recovery (over five years).



As a final example, the case of P. H. illustrates the application of the Edgar Cayce approach for a person suffering from severe and persistent mental illness. P. H. had been in the public mental health system for over fifteen years with multiple and lengthy hospitalizations in psychiatric institutions. At various times she had been diagnosed as having schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and schizoaffective disorder. She had used the full range of medications and psychiatric rehabilitation procedures typically prescribed for such disorders.

When P. H. came to me for counseling and consulting, she had been involved in an Edgar Cayce study group for several months and was receiving

significant support there. The members of the study group (aware of the importance of a healthy spine) recommended that she receive chiropractic treatment, and she did. I provided counseling and consulted with her on the use of the wet cell battery. Within a year of the onset of this treatment regimen, she had obtained a full-time job and gotten married. After four years, she is still married and working. She has not received further psychiatric treatment. Under the supervision of her psychiatrist, she was able gradually to decrease and eventually eliminate psychiatric medications. P. H. reported to me that she believes the wet cell battery and spinal adjustments made a significant contribution to her recovery.



WHAT TO EXPECT

As is evident from the above discussion, there is considerable variability in the application of the Edgar Cayce approach. Depending on the severity of the condition, this approach can vary from being highly self-care-oriented to the involvement of a team of health care professionals.

Whatever the application, it is important to recognize that all healing comes from within. The best that a healer can do is to stimulate and encourage the healing process. In other words, the client/patient must accept responsibility for the healing process. Even in cases of severe disability (such as schizophrenia), the individual is encouraged to be as responsible as possible. If the person is so incoherent as to be irresponsible (e.g., acute psychosis), the persons providing treatment must accept the responsibility for the healing. A spiritual orientation by all persons involved is essential.

The time frame for healing varies depending on the condition. Mild depression and anxiety will often respond within a few weeks. More severe conditions (such as schizophrenia, manic-depressive illness, Alzheimer's disease, etc.) by their nature require long-term application involving months and even years of treatment. Childhood problems such as bed wetting, simple phobias (such as riding a school bus), and thumb sucking are often corrected within a few days or a couple of weeks.

Edgar Cayce utilized the full range of therapeutic options available during his life. Although the treatment recommendations were usually for relatively

cases he suggested surgery or very strong medications. In modern terminology, the Edgar Cayce approach is an excellent example of complementary medicine. Complementary medicine can be thought of as treatment “in addition to” standard medical practice. Complementary medicine emphasizes cooperation between health care professionals of conventional and alternative therapies. (Budd et al., 1990; LaValley and Verhoef, 1995).

The health care professionals who use the Edgar Cayce approach in their clinical practice will spend time talking with their clients about what is happening in the clients’ lives. They will listen closely to the choice of words and how they are spoken to get a sense of the mental and spiritual aspects of the presenting problem. Some practitioners follow Edgar Cayce’s example and enlist a medical intuitive to provide input into the therapeutic process. Practitioners often develop their own intuitive abilities to complement their medical training.

HOW TO FIND A PRACTITIONER

The Association for Research and Enlightenment (ARE) maintains a list of health care professionals who utilize the therapeutic principles and techniques recommended by Edgar Cayce. The ARE operates a substantial library, which is open to the public. This library contains all of the Edgar Cayce readings plus numerous books, and audio and video tapes on health related topics. The ARE also operates a bookstore.

Most of the practitioners utilizing the Cayce approach are chiropractors and massage therapists. Massage therapists can receive training in this approach at the Reilly School of Massage Therapy in Virginia Beach (which is associated with the ARE). Atlantic University in Virginia Beach (also associated with the ARE) offers holistic health classes with a strong emphasis on the Edgar Cayce approach. Otherwise, health care professionals educate themselves by studying the Cayce readings and numerous health books and resources available from the ARE. There is no certification process for persons applying this approach.

Practitioners vary in their knowledge of, and experience in, working with the Edgar Cayce approach. Health care practitioners who apply Cayce’s system of healing must study the Cayce readings and integrate that information into their clinical practice. They may have limited experience treating major mental illness. It is a good idea to do some background reading to familiarize yourself with Cayce’s approach to treating mental illness (see How to Learn More). This can help you to choose a practitioner as well as provide useful information for

the self-care aspects of the approach.

The ARE Clinic operates a limited residential program where individuals can receive the full range of therapies recommended in the Edgar Cayce readings.

RESOURCES

THE MERIDIAN INSTITUTE
1168 First Colonial Rd., Suite 12
Virginia Beach, VA 23458
Tel: (757) 496-6009

THE ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH
AND ENLIGHTENMENT
67th Street and Atlantic Ave.
Virginia Beach, VA 23458
Tel: (757) 428-3588

THE ASSOCIATION FOR RESEARCH
AND ENLIGHTMENT CLINIC
4018 N. 40TH ST.
Phoenix, AZ 85018
Tel: (602) 955-0551

HOW TO LEARN MORE

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David McMillin, M.A., is a mental health professional living in Virginia Beach, VA. Mr. McMillin received a B.A. in Psychology from Greenville College and an M.A. in Clinical Psychology from Sangamon State University in Springfield, IL. Mr. McMillin is a researcher with the Meridian Institute and a professor at Atlantic University where he created and taught a course entitled "Principles and Techniques of Energy Medicine." He is the author of six books addressing the treatment of mental illness from the perspective of the Edgar Cayce material. He co-authored a book with Douglas Richards entitled *The Radial Appliance and Wet Cell Battery* and wrote a treatment manual entitled *Principles and Techniques of Nerve Regeneration*. David McMillin lectures and provides workshops on his research and on the clinical application of the Edgar Cayce material.