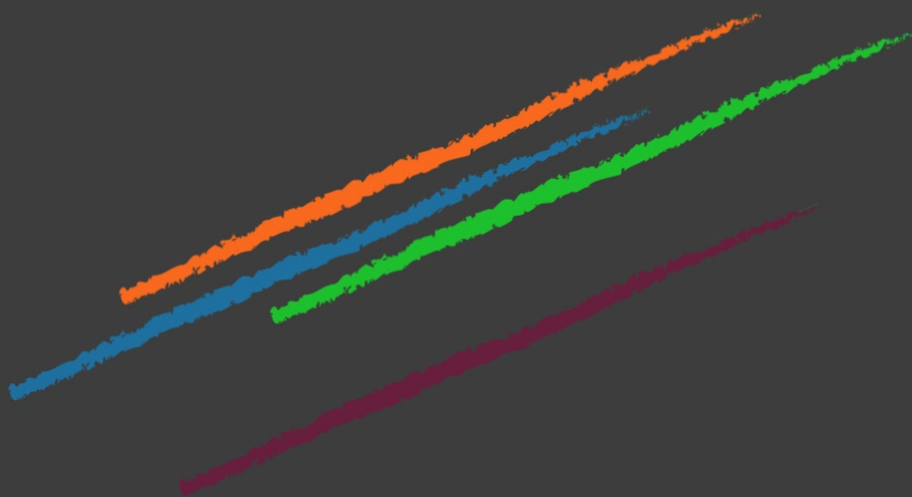


Psychotherapy Guidebook

# VECTOR THERAPY



John G. Howells

# **Vector Therapy**

**John G. Howells**

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# Vector Therapy

*John G. Howells*

## DEFINITION

A vector denotes a quantity that has direction. Force, including emotional force, is a quantity with direction and therefore can be represented by a vector.

Vector Therapy is a readjustment of the pattern of the emotional forces within the life space (environment) to bring improvement to the individual or family within the life space.

Vector Therapy is supported as a procedure by the observation that neurosis often spontaneously dissolves without psychotherapeutic intervention. Investigation revealed that this was due to a spontaneous readjustment of a field of forces to the advantage of the individual or the family. Vector Therapy seeks to direct a resolution by a skilled assessment of the forces, and by realigning these forces to the benefit of the individual or the family. Creativity through evolution is essentially a repatterning of phenomena in such a way as to allow a more harmonious patterning of the phenomena. Vector Therapy also relies upon our capacity to reshape patterns

of forces, but in a systematic, directed fashion.

Psychotherapy means treatment employing psychic or emotional influences, and thus Vector Therapy is a psychotherapeutic procedure. But the beneficial psychic influences operate outside the interview; the interview is employed to assess and guide the psychotherapy in progress outside the family.

## HISTORY

My (John G. Howells) twenty-five years of work with families at the Institute of Family Psychiatry, Ipswich, England, has brought to light cases in which the morbid process of neurosis was resolved or improved by extra-interview procedures complementary to, or divorced from, interview psychotherapy. Clinical work and research supported the hypothesis that therapeutic factors were at work outside the psychotherapeutic interview and efforts were made to identify these factors. Careful assessment supported the belief that the most significant pattern of forces is that within the family, although occasionally the pattern outside the family may also be powerful. It followed that when these forces were producing psychopathology, changing them would remove or attenuate the trauma. More emphasis was placed on the therapist's capacity for reshaping the pattern of forces in the life space of an individual or a family in a systematic and purposeful fashion. Having

arrived at a rational theory of Vector Therapy, its application in a systematic fashion developed into a useful and economical technique.

## TECHNIQUE

Faced with a disintegrated individual, reintegration is possible by mobilizing a set of influences in the present that may still nullify the effects of the previous adverse influence. This can be done (1) by the mobilization of intense, precise, beneficial emotional influences in the interview situation, under the direct control of a therapist, i.e., by interview psychotherapy; or (2) by mobilizing less intense emotional influences of a general nature known to be beneficial over a long period of time outside the interview, i.e., by Vector Therapy. Thus, for example, a child disintegrated by being deprived of the right kind of care is, instead of being subjected to psychotherapy, placed in a foster home selected for its ability to provide the right care. Reintegration comes from a new set of beneficial vectors able to act over a long period of time.

Vector Therapy can involve:

1. A change in the magnitude of the emotional force, e.g., father's aggression may be diminished.
2. A change in the direction of the emotional forces with no change in its magnitude, e.g., a father abuses the mother instead of the

child.

3. A change in the length of time during which the emotional force operates, e.g., father works away from home, spends less time at home and his aggression has less duration.
4. A change in the quality of the emotional force when one force replaces another, e.g., father is kind to his son instead of being aggressive.

## **APPLICATIONS**

The essential steps in application are:

1. Family diagnosis through family group interviews
2. To use family group diagnosis to clarify the pattern of forces at work in that family
3. To bring understanding of its set of forces to the family
4. To move the family to accomplishing a change in its adverse set of forces through a supportive relationship
5. To put the family in touch with community agencies that can help facilitate the change
6. To create community agencies geared to effect changes in family psychic patterns.



Vector Therapy can be used when there are few or no facilities for psychotherapy in the usual interview setting. This situation is common in many countries. Vector Therapy is effective when interview psychotherapy is unlikely to be effective, e.g., with a hard-core or problem family, or when the situation demands an urgent solution, as, for example, when a child at risk in his own home cannot wait for interview psychotherapy to change his mother's attitude and needs to be removed without delay to a safer milieu. Again, quicker results can be obtained by combining Vector Therapy and interview psychotherapy.