



Logotherapy: How to Find More Meaning in Your Life

Medically reviewed by [Scientific Advisory Board](#) — Written by [Emily Waters](#) on August 26, 2019

I recently re-read Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* and it prompted me to share his vision for what logotherapy is, and how it can help one to not just endure life's struggles and challenges on a daily basis, but how to effectively navigate life's hardships with vigor, alacrity and grace.

Viktor Frankl is the founder of logotherapy, a form of psychotherapy that he developed after surviving Nazi concentration camps in the 1940s. After his experience in the camps, he developed a theory that it is through a search for meaning and purpose in life that individuals can endure hardship and suffering. Today, logotherapy is recognized as one of the scientifically-based schools of psychotherapy by the American Medical Society, American Psychiatric Association, and the American Psychological Association.

ADVERTISEMENT

Viktor Frankl was born March 26, 1905 and died September 2, 1997, in Vienna, Austria. He was influenced during his early life by Sigmund Freud and Alfred Adler, and earned a medical degree from the University of Vienna Medical School in 1930. By the time of his death, his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, had been published in 24 languages.



BEZZY COMMUNITY

Meet Bezzzy for Depression, a community that cares

Find encouragement and support through 1-1 messaging and advice from others dealing with major depressive disorder.

FREE SIGN UP

Frankl believed that humans are motivated by something called a “will to meaning,” which equates to a desire to find meaning in life. He argued that life can have meaning even in the most miserable of circumstances, and that the motivation for living comes from finding that meaning. Taking it a step further, Frankl wrote: “Everything can be taken from a man but one thing, the last of the human freedoms, to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”

This opinion was based on his experiences of suffering, and his attitude of finding meaning through the suffering. In this way, Frankl believed that when we can no longer change a situation, we are forced to change ourselves. This is a very powerful message.

“Logos” is the Greek word for meaning, and logotherapy involves helping a patient find personal meaning in life. Frankl provided a brief overview of the theory in *Man’s Search for Meaning*. Frankl believed in three core properties on which his theory and therapy were based:

- Each person has a healthy core.
- One’s primary focus is to enlighten others to their own internal resources and provide them tools to use their inner core.
- Life offers purpose and meaning but does not promise fulfillment or happiness.

ADVERTISING

Going a step further, logotherapy proposes that meaning in life can be discovered in three distinct ways:

- By creating a work or doing a deed.
- By experiencing something or encountering someone.
- By the attitude that we take toward unavoidable suffering.

An example that is often given to explain the basic tenets of logotherapy is the story of Frankl meeting with an elderly general practitioner who was struggling to overcome depression after the loss of his wife. Frankl helped the elderly man to see that his purpose had been to spare his wife the pain of losing him first.

Logotherapy consists of six basic assumptions that overlap with the fundamental constructs and ways of seeking meaning listed above:

- **Body, Mind, and Spirit.** The human being is an entity that consists of a body (soma), mind (psyche), and spirit (noos). Frankl argued that we have a body and mind, but the spirit is what we are, or our essence. Frankl's theory was not based on religion or theology, but often had parallels to these.
- **Life Has Meaning in All Circumstances.** Frankl believed that life has meaning in all circumstances, even the most miserable ones. This means that even when situations seem objectively terrible, there is a higher level of order that involves meaning.
- **Humans Have a Will to Meaning.** Logotherapy proposes that humans have a will to meaning, which means that meaning is our primary motivation for living and acting, and allows us to endure pain and suffering. This is viewed as differing from the will to achieve power and pleasure.
- **Freedom to Find Meaning.** Frankl argued that in all circumstances, individuals have the freedom to access that will to find meaning. This is based on his experiences of pain and suffering and choosing his attitude in a situation that he could not change.
- **Meaning of the Moment.** The fifth assumption argues that for decisions to be meaningful, individuals must respond to the demands of daily life in ways that match the values of society or their own conscience.

- **Individuals Are Unique.** Frankl believed that every individual is unique and irreplaceable.

Frankl believed that it was possible to turn suffering into achievement and accomplishment. He viewed guilt as an opportunity to change oneself for the better, and life transitions as the chance to take responsible action. In this way, this psychotherapy was aimed at helping people to make better use of their “spiritual” resources to withstand adversity. In his books, he often used his own personal experiences to explain concepts to the reader.

It’s easy to see how some of the techniques of logotherapy overlap with newer forms of treatment such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT). In this way, logotherapy may be a complementary approach for these behavior and thought-based treatments.

ADVERTISEMENT

Frankl strongly believed in empirical research and encouraged it. A systematic review of research evidence pertaining to logotherapy conducted in 2016 found correlations pertaining to logotherapy in the following areas/conditions of life:

- Correlation between presence of meaning in life, search for meaning in life, and life satisfaction, happiness
- Lower meaning in life among patients with mental disorders
- Search for meaning and presence of meaning as a resilience factor
- Correlation between meaning in life and suicidal thoughts in cancer patients
- Effectiveness of a logotherapy program for early adolescents with cancer
- Effectiveness of logotherapy on depression in children
- Effectiveness of logotherapy in reducing job burnout, empty nest syndrome
- Correlation with marital satisfaction

Overall, and not surprisingly, there is evidence that meaning in life correlates with better mental health. It is suggested that this knowledge might be applied in areas such as phobias, pain and guilt, grief, as well as for disorders such as schizophrenia, depression, substance abuse, post-traumatic stress, and anxiety. Frankl believed that many illnesses or mental health issues are disguised “existential angst” and that people struggle with lack of meaning, which he referred to as the “existential vacuum.”

So how can one apply the principles of logotherapy to improve your everyday life?

- **Create something.** Just as Frankl suggested, creating something (e.g., art) gives you a sense of purpose, which can add meaning to your life.
- **Develop relationships.** The supportive nature of spending time with others will help you to develop more of a sense of meaning in your life.
- **Find purpose in pain.** If you are going through something bad, try to find a purpose in it. Even if this is a bit of mental trickery, it will help to see you through. For example, if a family member is going through medical treatments for a disease, view your purpose as being there to support that person.
- **Understand that life is not fair.** There is nobody keeping score, and you will not necessarily be dealt a fair deck. However, life can always have meaning, even in the worst of situations.
- **Freedom to find meaning.** Remember that you are always free to make meaning out of your life situation. Nobody can take that away from you.
- **Focus on others.** Try to focus outside of yourself to get through feeling stuck about a situation.
- **Accept the worst.** When you go out seeking the worse, it reduces the power that it has over you.

While concepts of logotherapy continue to be studied to this day, you aren't likely to hear of people receiving this type of treatment directly. Rather, the components of logotherapy are more likely to be intertwined with other therapies or treatments. If you feel like stress is taking over your life, and you grapple with how to incorporate more meaning into your life, explore his work further, and consequently you will learn how to better manage its effects, while finding comfort in surprisingly simple routines.

Last medically reviewed on August 26, 2019

 [4 sources](#)

- Frankl, Viktor. *Man's Search for Meaning*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959.
- Frankl Viktor. *The Will to Meaning: Foundations and Applications of Logotherapy*. New York, NY: Penguin, 1988
- Thir M, Batthyany A. The State of Empirical Research on Logotherapy and Existential Analysis. In: *Logotherapy and Existential Analysis: Proceedings of the Viktor Frankl Institute Vienna, Volume 1*. 2016: pp.53-74.



V FEEDBACK:




- Viktor Frankl Institute of Logotherapy. .
[Logotherapy](#)

READ THIS NEXT

What Is an Overactive Imagination? Plus Coping Tips

Medically reviewed by [Danielle Wade, LCSW](#)

People with an overactive imagination have vivid fantasies that can impact their mental health in various ways.

READ MORE [#59657](#);

The Mental Health Impacts of Cyberbullying and How to Cope

Cyberbullying can affect a person's mental health and lead to additional psychological stress. If you experience cyberbullying you're not alone, help...

READ MORE [#59657](#);

Trauma Dumping: Why Considering the Impact of Oversharing Matters

Medically reviewed by [Jennifer Litner, LMFT, CST](#)

Emotional or trauma dumping may be harmful to those around you. Here are examples of trauma dumping, the difference with venting, and how to stop it.

READ MORE [#59657](#);

30 Healing Quotes on Forgiving Yourself (Uplifting Quotes)

Medically reviewed by [Matthew Boland, PhD](#)

A journey of self-forgiveness lets you step into the future without the past holding you back. You're not alone. Here are 30 quotes that may help.

READ MORE [#59657](#);

Finding Yourself: How to Develop a Strong Sense of Self

Medically reviewed by [Joslyn Jelinek, LCSW](#)

Developing a sense of self can help you find your place in the world. Here's what that means.

READ MORE [#59657](#);

Understanding Dispositional Mindfulness

Mindfulness carries many benefits. You may be able to achieve trait mindfulness to cope with daily stressors after consistently practicing mindfulness...

READ MORE [#59657](#);

Can Swimming Help with Depression and Anxiety?

Medically reviewed by [Karin Gepp, PsyD](#)

I've always known that I climb out of any pool a lot happier than when I dove in. Yes, I know any kind of ae

READ MORE [#59657](#);

How To Stop Feeling Insecure

Medically reviewed by [Karin Gepp, PsyD](#)

Here are the signs of insecurity and how to cope with feeling insecure so you can overcome your fears.

READ MORE [#59657;](#)

Sibling Grief: Losing A Sister

Sibling relationships can be strong bonds. Losing a sibling, particularly a sister, can be difficult. Seeking support from family, friends, or a...

READ MORE [#59657;](#)

How to Identify and Overcome Your Mental Barriers

Medically reviewed by [N. Simay Gökbayrak, PhD](#)

Mental barriers are beliefs that hold you back. We look at how they can affect you, plus tips for overcoming them.

READ MORE [#59657;](#)

v [#59655;](#) z [#59658;](#)

Join over 225,000 Subscribers to Our Weekly Newsletter

The PsychCentral newsletter has tips, stories & resources that are all about your mental health and well-being.



SIGN UP

Your [privacy](#) is important to us

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

[Privacy policy](#)

[Privacy Settings](#)

[Advertising Policy](#)

[Medical Affairs](#)

[Content Integrity](#)

[Newsletter](#)

[Find a Therapist](#)

[Do Not Sell My Info](#)

© 2005-2022 Psych Central a Red Ventures Company. All rights reserved. Our website services, content, and products are for informational purposes only. Psych Central does not provide medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. [See additional information.](#)

[About](#) | [Careers](#) | [Advertise with us](#)

OUR BRANDS [Healthline](#) [Medical News Today](#) [Greatist](#) [Psych Central](#)

