

## Blame in Psychotherapy

When a psychotherapist first meets someone wanting to start therapy, one of the things we think about with them is their attitude to blame. If they have a strong tendency to want to blame others entirely for their situation and their feelings, we would begin to question whether they can use psychoanalytic psychotherapy.

### Why should this be? What is problematic about blame?

It is often said that we live in a blame culture, and these days, in news reports, questions about responsibility and blame come very quickly after descriptions of any trauma. It is as if the pain of the trauma is too much to bear, so we cast around for someone to be angry with, to attack, rather than stay with the hurt and fear evoked in us when we hear of, or experience, the trauma. It also reduces feelings of guilt and shame – if I can blame someone else for the bad thing that has happened, I won't have to deal with the feelings – of guilt or shame, anxiety or helplessness - that I might feel.

The trouble with this attitude is that it leaves the person weakened internally for two reasons. Firstly, they cannot develop their capacity to tolerate, to understand and to work through the feelings that they have inside. If they could do this, they would emerge with a stronger, more integrated personality. Secondly, blaming another keeps them attached to the other to whom they ascribe responsibility. This in turn makes it very difficult to move on from the situation. Tragedies such as *Romeo and Juliet* are so powerful because we can see the utterly destructive results of maintaining the desire for blame and revenge – pursuing blame ended tragically in this particular story with the death of three people, including the couple whose pairing might have healed a rift that had echoed down generations of two families. Much harder than blaming, but ultimately so much more creative, is developing the capacity for forgiveness, and being willing to take responsibility for our own experience and our own feelings.

One of the accusations levelled at psychotherapy is that people are encouraged to blame their parents for their emotional difficulties. Also, a fear some people experience is that they will be blamed by the therapist for their 'inadequacies'. It would certainly not be our intention that either of these things would happen.

Our hope is that in the work an individual will be able to use the respectful, neutral, thoughtful stance of the therapist to move on from blame, whether of another or of themselves, towards a tolerance and understanding of their internal world, which may include very painful states of mind. This in turn will lead to a greater acceptance of both themselves and others, and release energy which can be used to live a more creative life.