The psychological significance of home

For some, home is a sanctuary and a means to express ourselves, for others, it's a place of great change. Sarah Niblock, CEO of the UK Council for Psychotherapy, and therapist Hannah Sherbersky explore the multidimensional concept of home.

Examining our sense of home in the psychotherapeutic process can yield a deeper knowledge of ourselves.

Home holds many varied and complex meanings. Our sense of home can change dramatically throughout our lifetime, and we are seeing this magnified through the pandemic, with home taking on different meanings during this time of change.

The western perception of home is influenced by economic expectations, social mobility and individualism. It is a multidimensional concept. For many, home is where we define ourselves – who we believe ourselves to be. We use our homes to distinguish ourselves – an external and objective reflection of our internal and subjective lived experience – and thus our home becomes part of our identity.

Many of us see home as a comforting place to which we seek to return. It evokes feelings of security and safety, providing foundations for us to develop positive self-esteem. But this is not the case for everyone. Experience and history affect the way we view home. For some, it can bring up feelings of oppression and instability, for others it may be a place that isn’t always safe.

Psychotherapy can also help, providing a trusted environment in which to discuss things we may not feel able to share with anyone else. For those who haven’t lived in safe homes, the psychotherapeutic relationship can create a haven for open conversation. Exploring in therapy how home has shaped and influenced us can take us to a stage where transformation and healing is possible.

The podcast

The way we feel about home and where we belong is deeply rooted in our history and experiences. Sarah Niblock talks to family therapist Hannah Sherbersky about how therapy can help us understand how we develop our notions of home, and why more of us should seek to grasp the significance of our concept of home.

Has lockdown changed how you feel about home?

Prompts to help you examine your relationship with your home – and whether the pandemic has altered it

1. Safety versus confinement. Is your home a place of safety from the virus or do you feel trapped in it while in lockdown or working from home? Are you bored with being at home? If so, try changing the way the space looks to make it feel different.

2. Separation or intimacy? When significant life transitions, such as children leaving home, redundancy or divorce occur, difficulties can arise. Sometimes, we need help to adapt to these changes. The right support, from friends and family or organisations that offer help and advice on specific issues, can make a real difference.

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About the UKCP and how to find a therapist

The UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) is the leading research, innovation, educational and regulatory body working to advance psychotherapy for the benefit of all. Where a register of more than 8,000 individual members, who offer a range of therapy approaches, for couples, individuals, families and groups. We believe everyone has the right to access affordable therapies and we work on an NHS inpatient unit.

My psychotherapeutic work has also afforded me other opportunities. In 2019, I took part in the BBC Three documentary I Blame My Parents and I’ve recently contributed to a couples app, Paired.

If you feel unsafe, do not hesitate to seek help. There are organisations for people in your circumstances. If you are unsure where to start, visit gov.uk/report-domestic-abuse. If it’s an emergency or you’re in immediate danger, call 999.