

Ability to foster and maintain a good therapeutic alliance, and to grasp the client's perspective and 'world view'

Understanding the concept of the therapeutic alliance

An ability to draw on knowledge that the therapeutic alliance is usually seen as having three components:

the relationship or bond between therapist and client

consensus between therapist and client regarding the techniques/methods employed in the therapy

consensus between therapist and client regarding the goals of therapy

An ability to draw on knowledge that all three components contribute to the maintenance of the alliance

Knowledge of therapist factors associated with the alliance

An ability to draw on knowledge of therapist factors which increase the probability of forming a positive alliance:

being flexible and allowing the client to discuss issues which are important to them

being respectful

being warm, friendly and affirming

being open

being alert and active

being able to show honesty through self-reflection

being trustworthy

Knowledge of therapist factors which reduce the probability of forming a positive alliance:

being rigid

being critical

being distant

being aloof

being distracted

making inappropriate use of silence

Knowledge of client factors associated with the alliance

An ability to draw on knowledge of client factors which affect the probability of forming a positive alliance e.g.:

symptomatic issues (e.g. assuming that the therapist will disbelieve the client's perspective on events)

involuntary presentation (e.g. sectioned under the Mental Health Act, or attending because of external pressures)

issues related to substance misuse

service issues (e.g. previous negative experiences)

cultural factors (e.g. cultural expectations about who should be involved in any intervention).

influence of family and peers (e.g. families who encourage or discourage the client from maintaining contact with services, or peers who stigmatise the client for being in receipt of an intervention)

Capacity to develop the alliance

An ability to listen to the client's concerns in a manner which is non-judgmental, supportive and sensitive, and which conveys an accepting attitude when the client describes their experiences and beliefs
An ability to validate the client's concerns and experiences
An ability to ensure that the client is clear about the rationale for the intervention being offered
An ability to gauge whether the client understands the rationale for the intervention, has questions about it, or is skeptical about the rationale, and to respond to these concerns openly and non-defensively in order to resolve any ambiguities
An ability to help the client express any concerns or doubts they have about the therapy and/or the therapist, especially where this relates to mistrust or skepticism
An ability to help the client form and articulate their goals for the therapy, and to gauge the degree of congruence in the aims of the client and therapist

Capacity to grasp the client's perspective and 'world view'

An ability to apprehend the ways in which the client characteristically understands themselves and the world around them
An ability to hold the client's world view in mind throughout the course of therapy and to convey this understanding through interactions with the client, in a manner that allows the client to correct any misapprehensions
An ability to establish the client's point of view by exploring their position in an open and accepting manner, taking their concerns at face value and suspending any tendency to disbelief.
An ability to hold the client's perspective in mind whilst gathering all relevant information in a sensitive manner
An ability to hold the client's world view in mind, while retaining an independent perspective and guarding against collusion with the client

Capacity to maintain the alliance

Capacity to recognise and to address threats to the therapeutic alliance ("alliance ruptures")

An ability to recognise when strains in the alliance threaten the progress of therapy
An ability to deploy appropriate interventions in response to disagreements about tasks and goals:
An ability to check that the client is clear about the rationale for treatment and to review this with them and/or clarify any misunderstandings
An ability to help clients understand the rationale for treatment through using/drawing attention to concrete examples in the session
An ability to judge when it is best to refocus on tasks and goals which are seen as relevant or manageable by the client (rather than explore factors which are giving rise to disagreement over these factors)
An ability to deploy appropriate interventions in response to strains in the bond between therapist and client:
An ability for the therapist to give and ask for feedback about what is happening in the here-and-now interaction, in a manner which invites exploration with the client
An ability for the therapist to acknowledge and accept their responsibility for their contribution to any strains in the alliance

Where the client recognises and acknowledges that the alliance is under strain, an ability (when appropriate) to help the client make links between the rupture and their usual style of relating to others

An ability to allow the client to assert any negative feelings about the relationship between the therapist and themselves
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An ability to help the client explore any fears they have about expressing negative feelings about the relationship between the therapist and themselves
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Sources:

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