

Supportive-Expressive Therapy

This section describes the knowledge and skills required to carry out supportive-expressive therapy.

It is not a 'stand-alone' description of technique, and should be read as part of the psychoanalytic/ psychodynamic competence framework.

Effective delivery of this approach depends on the integration of this competence list with the knowledge and skills set out in the other domains of the psychoanalytic/ psychodynamic competence framework.

Sources:

Luborsky, L. (1984). *Principles of psychoanalytic psychotherapy: A manual for supportive-expressive treatment*. Basic Books

Book, H. (1998). *How to Practice Brief Psychodynamic Psychotherapy: the CCRT Method*. APA

Knowledge

Knowledge of the principal aims and strategies of SE therapy

An ability to draw on knowledge that SE therapy:
aims to enhance the client's sense of mastery in relation to ongoing interpersonal problems and hence primarily targets symptom relief and only limited characterological change:
that the focus of SE therapy is on core problematic relationship patterns, which are conceptualised using the Core Conflictual Relationship Theme (CCRT) method
that the CCRT refers to the central, repetitive relational pattern that informs the individual's experience of, and behaviour in, their relationships:
that there are different levels of CCRT (i.e. more 'primary' relational patterns vs patterns that are closer to consciousness)
that symptoms are understood as "costly" coping strategies arising in the context of relational difficulties (i.e. symptoms are attempts at coping with an underlying CCRT)
that the CCRT method involves identifying what the client characteristically hopes for from a relationship (their 'needs' or 'wishes'), their sense of the actual or anticipated response to these needs/wishes ("response of the other") and the client's usual reaction to these responses ("responses of the self"):
knowledge that the client's anticipated "response of the other" is shaped by their early interpersonal experiences
knowledge that the expectations of how others will behave towards the self are projected onto current relationships, including the one with the therapist

that the CCRT describes a circumscribed, and central interpersonal pattern which reflects the client's idiosyncratic conflict between wishes, response from others and responses of the self
that the CCRT addresses two types of conflicts:
a conflict between the client's wishes in a relationship and their experience of the relationship
a conflict between what the client consciously wishes for and what they may unconsciously seek out in their relationships
that the therapy typically focuses on one or more facets of the CCRT and the symptoms connected to it, depending on the length of the therapy
that the therapy includes both "expressive" and "supportive" interventions, and hence:
draws on the core principles of analytic/dynamic therapy, most notably through the use made of the transference relationship and through non-directive, interpretative techniques (i.e. "expressive" techniques)
explicitly employs supportive techniques

Engagement

An ability to establish and maintain an engaged, respectful and empathic attitude
An ability to help the client describe their difficulties and identify what they want to change
An ability to introduce the client to the treatment process and its frame through:
attentive listening and picking up on interpersonal themes to indicate from the outset the relational focus of the therapy
providing brief information about what is expected of the client (e.g. that the client should try to say what they are thinking) and of the therapist

Assessment, formulation of the CCRT and goal setting

An ability to focus on developing and exploring "relationship episodes" (i.e. the client's narratives about relationships (either real or imagined)),
An ability to help the client explicitly articulate the feelings and thoughts associated with specific relationship episodes so as to identify any elements of the CCRT that are in conflict:
an ability to identify conscious and unconscious wishes that undermine development (e.g. an unconscious wish to maintain dependency) and those which are adaptive (e.g. for greater independence)
An ability to review several relationship episodes in order to identify an overarching theme that will comprise the CCRT and become the focus of the therapy
An ability to share the CCRT formulation with the client, illustrating its pervasiveness in the client's life with reference to the relationship episodes that have been explored (including any transference themes that may already have emerged) and to the presenting symptoms
An ability to share the CCRT formulation with the client and to be receptive to, and explore, their response to this formulation
An ability to jointly agree working on a facet of the CCRT (or several facets, depending on the length of the therapy) that is perceived to be accurate and meaningful to the client

Interventions

Supportive techniques

An ability to facilitate the development of a therapeutic alliance through:
maintaining an engaged, active and realistically optimistic attitude that conveys support for the client's development and therapeutic goals
communicating respect for, and acceptance of, the client
using collaborative language (e.g. "We are now working on this together")
communicating recognition of the client's progress, where appropriate
An ability to support the client's use of defences and of their social networks/activities so as to help the client to function in their day-to-day life

Expressive techniques

Focus of interpretations

An ability to make use of techniques such as clarification, confrontation and interpretation to address:
the aspect of the main relationship theme that is closest to the client's current awareness
where appropriate, the link between the relationship theme and the client's symptoms
An ability to maintain an active focus on eliciting relationship episodes and working through the CCRT
An ability to redirect the focus back to the CCRT when there is a divergence from it:
where the client repeatedly diverges from the agreed focus, an ability to explore any resistance to maintaining this focus

Process of interpretation

An ability to base interpretations on the central relationship themes which emerge from client's descriptions of relationship episodes
An ability to work collaboratively with the client to facilitate their involvement in the process of self-understanding
An ability to listen without intervening prematurely so as to allow the client to elaborate their narrative
An ability to be open to new evidence that might emerge in any session while keeping in mind (and pursuing) the identified CCRT
An ability to use the client's response to an interpretation to guide subsequent interventions

Working in the transference

An ability to help the client work through the CCRT by exploring the connections between current concerns and past interpersonal experiences across three interpersonal domains:
the therapeutic relationship
current relationships
past relationships

An ability to recognise and draw to the client's attention any enactment of a CCRT in the transference, with the aim of helping them understand the CCRT that is being worked on in the therapy:
an ability to identify the trigger for within session shifts in the client's state of mind or behaviour that signal the possibility of an enactment
an ability to monitor countertransference
where appropriate, an ability to recognise and acknowledge the therapist's contribution to the client's response
An ability to identify and explore the client's interpersonal behaviours that undermine the agreed therapeutic aims

Working with the ending of therapy

An ability to prepare the client for ending through identifying and exploring with the client, as appropriate at any point in the therapy, any conscious and unconscious anxieties related to ending/separations:
an ability to help the client discuss concerns about ending
In the final phase of therapy:
an ability to keep the focus of exploration on termination
an ability to help the client make connections between the ending of the therapy and the reactivation of the CCRT

Metacompetences

An ability to assess and maintain an appropriate, client specific, balance between expressive and supportive techniques at any given point in time during the therapy
An ability to apply the model flexibly and responsively to the client's particular needs and goals