4.3. Ability to foster and maintain a good therapeutic relationship and to grasp the service user's perspective and 'world view'

Work in children/young people's services almost always incudes work with family/carers, both as part of an integrated intervention or in the form of a parallel treatment. As such, each person is potentially the 'service user' referred to in this set of competences.

Understanding the concept of the therapeutic relationship

- An ability to draw on knowledge that a therapeutic relationship is usually seen as having three components:
  - the relationship or bond between practitioner and service user
  - consensus between practitioner and service user regarding the techniques/methods employed in an intervention
  - consensus between practitioner and service user regarding the goals of an intervention
- An ability to draw on knowledge that all three components contribute to the maintenance of the therapeutic relationship

Knowledge of practitioner factors associated with building a positive therapeutic relationship

- An ability to draw on knowledge of practitioner factors that increase the probability of forming a positive therapeutic relationship:
  - being flexible and allowing the service user to discuss issues that 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
  - being consistent
  - being able to 'be oneself'
- Knowledge of practitioner factors that reduce the probability of forming a positive therapeutic relationship:
  - being rigid
  - being critical
  - being distant
  - being aloof
  - being distracted
  - making inappropriate use of silence

Knowledge of service user factors associated with building the relationship

- An ability to draw on knowledge of service user factors that affect the probability of forming a positive relationship e.g.:
  - interpersonal issues (e.g. assuming the practitioner will not believe their perspective on events)
  - involuntary presentation (e.g. sectioned under the Mental Health Act, or attending a session because of external pressures)
  - issues related to substance misuse
  - service-related issues (e.g. previous negative experiences of services)
  - 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 a young person from maintaining contact with services, or peers who stigmatise them for having an intervention)

Capacity to develop the therapeutic relationship to support an intervention

- An ability to listen to the service user's concerns in a non-judgmental, supportive and sensitive way, and that conveys acceptance when the service user describes their experiences and beliefs
- An ability to validate the service user's concerns and experiences
- An ability to ensure that the service user understands why the intervention is being offered
- An ability to gauge whether the service user understands why they are having the intervention, whether they have questions about it or are sceptical, and to respond to any concerns openly and non-defensively in order to resolve any ambiguities
- An ability to help the service user express any concerns or doubts they have about the planned intervention and/or the practitioner, especially where this relates to mistrust or scepticism
- An ability to help the service user form and articulate their goals for the intervention, and to gauge the degree of congruence in the aims of the service user and practitioner

Capacity to grasp the service user's perspective and 'world view'

- An ability to grasp the ways in that the service user characteristically understands themselves and the world around them
- An ability to hold the service user's world view in mind throughout the course of an intervention and to convey this understanding through interactions with the service user, in a way that allows them to correct any misapprehensions
- An ability to establish the service user's point of view by exploring their position in an open and accepting way, taking their concerns at face value and suspending any disbelief
- An ability to hold the service user's perspective in mind while gathering all relevant information in a sensitive way

- An ability to hold the service user's world view in mind, while retaining an independent perspective and guarding against collusion with the service user

Capacity to maintain the therapeutic relationship

Capacity to recognise and to address threats to the relationship

- An ability to recognise when strains in the relationship threaten the progress of an intervention
- An ability to use appropriate interventions in response to disagreements about tasks and goals, and:
  - to check that the service user understands the rationale for the intervention and to review this with them and/or clarify any misunderstandings
  - to judge when it is best to refocus on tasks and goals seen as relevant or manageable by the service user (rather than keep exploring issues that lead to disagreement)
- An ability to deploy appropriate interventions in response to strains in the bond between practitioner and service user, e.g.:
  - for the practitioner to give and ask for feedback about what is happening in the here-and-now interaction, in a way that invites exploration with the service user
  - for the practitioner to acknowledge and accept responsibility for their contribution to any strains in the therapeutic relationship
  - where the service user recognises and acknowledges that the therapeutic relationship is under strain, an ability (when appropriate) to help them make links between the 'rupture' and how they usually relate to others
  - to allow the service user to express any negative feelings about the therapeutic relationship
  - to help the service user explore any fears they have about expressing negative feelings about the therapeutic relationship