

Basic IPT competences

Knowledge of basic principles, rationale and strategies of IPT

Knowledge of the principles and rationale of and for IPT

An ability to draw on knowledge that IPT is a time-limited, focused psychotherapy aimed at reducing symptoms and improving social adjustment and interpersonal functioning

An ability to draw on knowledge that the client's social and interpersonal context are assumed to contribute to the onset of and/or maintenance of symptoms

An ability to draw on knowledge that IPT is rooted in a medical model of psychiatric illness in the context of which the therapist:

can reframe the client's experiences as an illness that is treatable, and hence mobilize hope that the therapy will help

can reduce the client's self-blaming attributions

An ability to draw on knowledge that IPT focuses primarily on current interpersonal functioning and life circumstances rather than longstanding conflicts or problems originating in childhood

Knowledge of strategies employed in IPT

An ability to draw on knowledge that the core IPT model conceptualises relationship problems within four specific interpersonal problem areas (grief, role disputes, role transitions and interpersonal deficits/sensitivities) that provide the focus of the therapy

An ability to draw on knowledge that the selected focal area informs the strategies and goals of the therapy

An ability to draw on knowledge that the focus is on a primary interpersonal area of difficulty that is identified as being related to the onset and/or maintenance of the symptoms:

an ability to draw on knowledge that while the therapist obtains and makes use of an understanding of the client's history of past relationships and distal life events to arrive at a formulation, sessions are focused on the recent past (i.e. typically, but not exclusively, on the previous week's events)

An ability to draw on knowledge that IPT is conceptualized as consisting of three phases (initial, middle and termination), each with its own distinctive strategies and objectives:

an ability to draw on knowledge that while IPT is a strategic, focused approach, in the middle phase the therapist may adopt a more 'fluid' approach in order to help the client explore their interpersonal experiences and associated feelings

An ability to draw on knowledge that the focus of the therapy is on interpersonal interactions (and hence not, for example, on dreams, cognitions or homework)

An ability to draw on knowledge that the fixed time-limit helps the therapist to maintain an active, here-and-now, focused stance which (in turn) conveys to the client the importance of working hard towards interpersonal change during this time frame

An ability to draw on knowledge that while the positive working alliance between client and therapist is used to mobilize change, exploration of the therapeutic relationship is not the focus of the therapy

Ability to maintain a focus on the interpersonal context of the symptoms

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that IPT distinguishes itself from other psychotherapies at the level of its clearly specified and interpersonally focused strategies

An ability to draw on knowledge that the primary focus of IPT is to help the client identify, and learn how to manage, interpersonal problems connected with the onset and maintenance of symptoms

An ability to draw on knowledge that a core strategy in all three phases of IPT involves systematically monitoring and linking symptoms to interpersonal difficulties, and vice versa so as to help the client to understand...

that there is a reciprocal interaction between symptoms and life events

that symptomatic improvement is facilitated through improvements in interpersonal functioning, and vice versa

Application

Ability to maintain the focus of interventions on the reciprocal relationship between symptoms and interpersonal events

An ability to use the report of symptomatic changes as a cue for exploring their interpersonal triggers

An ability to use the report of a difficult interpersonal event(s) as a cue for exploring its impact on symptoms

An ability to help the client to identify and understand the reciprocal relationship between symptoms and interpersonal events:

an ability to systematically highlight and reinforce these connections through the use of clarifying statements/ questions and summaries at the end of sessions

Ability to engage the client in reviewing their symptoms

An ability, *in every session*, to help the client report on and evaluate their symptomatic state

An ability to engage the client in using standardised symptom measures and self monitoring to track symptomatic and interpersonal functioning throughout the therapy, and to assess outcome

Ability to implement IPT in a manner consonant with its supportive and active therapeutic stance

An ability to establish and maintain a supportive, empathic stance by:	
	validating the client's experience
	praising the client's achievements/strengths where appropriate
	communicating with the client in a direct manner
	explicitly inviting feedback from the client about their experience of the therapy and of the therapist
An ability to explore and resolve any disruptions to the therapeutic alliance through:	
	openly inviting the client to discuss any concerns they may have about the relationship with the therapist
	responding non-defensively to the client's negative experience of the therapist
	openly considering the respective contributions of the therapist and the client to the difficulty
	helping the client to identify communication failures that result in behaviours that may impede progress (e.g. missing sessions, prolonged silences)
An ability to maintain an active stance through helping the client:	
	to identify a specified interpersonal problem
	to discuss material relevant to the agreed focus
	to work towards interpersonal change
An ability to balance taking on an 'expert role' so as to instill confidence that the client's difficulties can be worked on and engaging the client as an active participant in the therapy:	
	an ability to maintain a positive, problem solving attitude in the face of interpersonal difficulties to support the client's confidence in their ability to resolve these

Ability to engage the client in IPT

Application

Ability to develop a therapeutic alliance

An ability to communicate with the client in a direct manner that acknowledges the client's experience

An ability to respond to the client's presenting problems in a curious, non-judgmental manner by:

asking clarifying questions so as to understand the client's perspective without making assumptions

communicating empathic understanding in response to the client's narrative

An ability to identify opportunities for both empathizing with the client's predicament(s) and for noting their strengths through affirming and encouraging statements

An ability to 'normalise' the client's experiences and/or emotional responses, particularly in relation to knowledge about the presenting problem (e.g. 'many people who are depressed feel like withdrawing from others')

Ability to help the client to understand the rationale for IPT

An ability to provide the client with information about the nature of their presenting problem, and of the proposed therapy and its focus

An ability to link the rationale to the client's idiosyncratic experiences and symptom profile

An ability to work with the client to agree a contract that clearly specifies the duration of the therapy, its focus and the expectations of the therapist and client

An ability to encourage the client to discuss their reactions to the proposed therapy and focus

Ability to reframe the client's presenting problems as an illness

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that IPT is rooted in a medical model of psychiatric illness
An ability to draw on knowledge that it is assumed that sharing the diagnosis with the client is therapeutically beneficial
An ability to draw on knowledge that one of the strategies in the initial phase involves:
diagnosing the presenting problem, using a medical model
providing initial symptom relief through support, psycho-education and (from the outset) actively engaging the client in working on their problems

Application

Ability to undertake a detailed assessment of the client's symptomatic profile

An ability to assess the client's symptoms, with particular attention to their onset, duration and severity
An ability to explore the time line of symptom development and its interpersonal context:
an ability to use the review of symptom development to introduce the client to the interpersonal emphasis of the therapy
An ability to convey to the client that the symptoms fit a recognized clinical syndrome

Ability to assign the 'sick role'

An ability to share the diagnosis with the client in an explicit and collaborative manner
Ability to explain the diagnosis and to link it to the client's current interpersonal context
An ability to use the diagnosis to:
reduce self-blaming attributions (i.e. through 'blaming the illness or current life circumstances)
mobilise hope about recovery (e.g. "we know that many people who are depressed benefit from psychotherapy")
An ability to encourage the client to take responsibility for working towards change whilst also temporarily relieving them of demanding social obligations through making use of their support networks
An ability to identify when relevant members of the network need to be directly involved in understanding the client's difficulties and in supporting the therapy (e.g. by inviting them to attend a session/carer group)

Ability to identify an interpersonal problem area that will provide the focus for the middle phase of the therapy

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that a core strategy in the initial phase of IPT is a detailed and systematic review of the client’s interpersonal context (i.e. the ‘interpersonal inventory’):	
	knowledge that this review is used to identify in detail the availability, acceptability and quality of the client’s current social supports and significant relationships, and their current life circumstances
	knowledge that the ‘interpersonal inventory’ concentrates primarily, but not exclusively, on the client’s present life and relationships
An ability to draw on knowledge that the ‘interpersonal inventory’ is the basis for formulating the client’s difficulties and identifying the interpersonal problem area(s) that will provide the focus for the middle phase of IPT	

Application

Ability to review significant social and intimate relationships (i.e. carry out the ‘interpersonal inventory’) and identify their contribution to the onset and maintenance of symptoms

Ability to assess the client’s current interpersonal functioning and life circumstances by:	
	engaging them in a detailed review of current and past significant relationships, and of salient life events
	considering areas of omission from their descriptions of their relationships (e.g. a pervasive absence of conflict)
	using observations of the client’s ways of relating within the session to help understand their interpersonal style
In relation to each significant relationship, an ability to focus on the quality and patterning of the relationship by:	
	eliciting a detailed account of the frequency of contact, activities shared and the kind of support available
	engaging the client in adopting an evaluative stance when exploring the relationship
	identifying the client’s implicit role expectations of self and other
	helping the client to identify what they might like to change in a given relationship

Ability to agree a primary focal area that is emotionally resonant for the client and is linked to the onset and/or maintenance of the symptoms

An ability to make use of the interpersonal inventory to identify which interpersonal difficulties are linked with the current symptoms:
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an ability to help the client to feel understood by summarising the salient interpersonal events (and their response(s) to these events) linked to the onset/maintenance of symptoms
--

an ability to explicitly connect the proposed focal area(s) to the onset/maintenance of symptoms
--

An ability to tentatively share with the client a formulation and focal area that links the diagnosis to the client's current life circumstances and interpersonal context
--

An ability to actively engage the client in responding to the proposed formulation and focus:

where the client disagrees with the proposed focus of the work, an ability to openly discuss misunderstandings or different perceptions of the problem, and to work with the client in order to agree how to proceed
--

where there are several potential foci, an ability to engage the client in identifying the most pressing concern that has the greatest impact on their interpersonal functioning and symptoms

an ability to recognise when the proposed focus or IPT is not viable
--

Ability to identify and set goals

An ability to work with the client to identify and agree realistic therapeutic goals, in the light of:
--

the severity and/or chronicity of their presenting problems

their interpersonal resources

the time-limited nature of the therapy
--

Ability to maintain a systematic focus on an IPT interpersonal problem area(s) linked with the onset of symptoms

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that each of the four focal areas (role transitions, role disputes, grief and interpersonal sensitivity/deficits) specifies the strategies required to help the client to resolve the identified interpersonal problems

An ability to draw on knowledge that while IPT usually priorities one primary focal area, it is possible to work on (at most) two related focal areas

An ability to draw on knowledge that throughout all the focal areas the therapist helps the client to make use of their interpersonal resources to manage their symptoms and to support change
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Application

General

An ability to maintain the focus on the agreed interpersonal problem(s) and goals

An ability to help the client to stay focused on the agreed problem area, for example:
--

by systematically making explicit links to the focus when intervening

by sensitively redirecting the client if the client introduces information that is extraneous to the agreed focus

by summarising at the end of each session what has been covered to reinforce thematic continuity
--

An ability to help the client to make use of their interpersonal network to support the work of the agreed focal area

An ability to help the client to identify the interpersonal resources that may be drawn on and/or developed to help them to manage or reduce the impact of their difficulties:
--

an ability to make use of the 'interpersonal inventory' to keep in mind the relationships that are available to the client
--

an ability to help the client to distinguish the different kinds of support they need (e.g. emotional, practical) so that they can make more discriminate and effective use of their interpersonal network
--

Focal area specific competences

An ability to help resolve interpersonal difficulties and relieve symptoms by implementing strategies appropriate to the focal area:

Role Transitions

An ability to help the client to relate their symptoms to a recent life change that has necessitated a role transition	
An ability to help the client to explore the feelings and meanings associated with the role that had to be relinquished, so as facilitate a realistic appraisal of what has been lost:	
	an ability to help the client to identify which aspect(s) of the transition they find most problematic (e.g. letting go of the old role or adapting to the new role)
	an ability to help the client mourn the loss of the old role and to relinquish it
An ability to help the client to explore the feelings and meanings about the new role they now have to adjust to, and the opportunities it may provide	
	an ability to identify and engage the client in developing the skills and supports required to adjust to the new role

Role Disputes

An ability to help the client relate their symptoms to a current covert or overt dispute with a significant other	
An ability to help the client to identify:	
	the nature and stage of the dispute (impasse, renegotiation, dissolution)
	the non-reciprocal role expectations that maintain the dispute
	recurring problematic communication patterns, so as to increase awareness of these and help the client to develop more effective ways of communicating
An ability to use communication analysis systematically so as to help the client become aware of how they communicate and to identify what they might do differently	
An ability to engage the other party involved in the dispute in joining the client for one or two sessions so as to:	
	directly observe the interpersonal dynamics so as to better understand what changes might be required
	help the other party to understand the client's current problems and engage them in supporting the therapy
An ability to help the client to consider the possibilities for change on both sides, including unsatisfying behaviour patterns and expectations,	

Grief

An ability to help the client to relate their symptoms to the death of a significant other	
An ability to help the client to reconstruct the sequence and consequence of events prior to, during and after the death	
An ability to facilitate an affective exploration of the relationship with the deceased:	
	an ability to help the client to identify and accept more ambivalent feelings towards the deceased
An ability to help the client to (re)establish interests and relationships in their current life	

Interpersonal Deficits/Sensitivities

An ability to help the client to relate their symptoms to problems of social isolation or unfulfilling/impoverished relationships
An ability to identify and specify a particular interpersonal deficit/sensitivity that will provide the focus for therapy
An ability to help the client reconstruct past relationships as the basis for exploring repetitive or parallel problems in these relationships
An ability to help the client to consider their own expectations and needs in relationships and those of the other party
An ability to help the client to reduce their isolation by identifying and implementing strategies/skills for developing and/or maintaining relationships
An ability to use the immediacy of the therapeutic relationship to draw attention to, and understand, the problematic interpersonal pattern/sensitivity that is the focus of the work:
an ability to use the therapeutic relationship as an opportunity for:
safely providing constructive feedback to the client
supporting experimenting with new ways of communicating
helping the client to see parallels with relationships outside of the therapy

Ability to identify and explore difficulties in communication

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that throughout all the focal areas the therapist aims to help the client to identify and explore communication patterns so as to help them to communicate more effectively:

an ability to draw on knowledge that the technique of 'communication analysis' may be used to this end to help the client to focus in detail on a specific interaction

Application

Ability to identify and clarify negative and/or ineffective communication

An ability to sensitively draw the client's attention to overt and covert disputes/communication problem(s) as they arise in their relationships:

an ability to focus on the way the client communicates with others so as to help them to become aware of:

how they feel in the relationship

the implicit expectations they hold about their relationship with another person

how they may undermine the likelihood of gaining support

An ability to assess when the use of 'communication analysis' is indicated to identify and/or elaborate in more detail a specific communication problem/dispute

Ability to help the client develop communication skills

An ability to help the client to problem solve within their relationships:

an ability to help the client to reflect on how the other person(s) may experience their attempts to communicate

an ability to help the client to develop and express empathy for the other person's experience

An ability to help the client try out more direct and clear ways of communicating with others

An ability to selectively use the way the client communicates with the therapist to illustrate problematic communication patterns:

an ability to model effective communication through the therapist's response to difficulties in the therapeutic relationship, where appropriate

Ability to facilitate the expression and acceptance of a range of emotions

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that throughout the three phases of IPT a core strategy is the exploration of the client's emotional state
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Application

Ability to help the client to express, understand and manage their emotions

An ability to carefully track the client's emotional state during the session, and to communicate an understanding of this:

an ability to identify and respond to verbal and non-verbal cues from the client in order to help the client explore and understand their emotions
--

An ability to help the client to stay with, and explore, what they are <i>currently</i> feeling in order to:
--

recognise and accept their feelings

differentiate feelings from actions

identify the relationship between what they feel and how they behave in a relationship
--

An ability to help the client to explore and manage their painful emotional experiences both within and outside of the sessions:
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an ability to help the client to understand how the way in which they express or suppress affect may affect their interpersonal relationships

an ability to help the client to identify the interpersonal assumptions which underlie their emotional experience

an ability to help the client to consider delaying acting in response to painful emotions, including their expression, until the feeling has become less intense:

an ability to help them to discriminate when the expression of strong emotions is appropriate outside of the sessions and when it may undermine relationships

an ability to normalise negative emotions

Ability to encourage interpersonal change in-between sessions

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that IPT is a change-oriented therapy (i.e. it aims to help the client to change their interpersonal behaviour, not primarily to develop insight):

knowledge that the time-limit acts as a motivational force, activating the therapist and encouraging the client towards change but not towards adopting a therapist-directed course of action

An ability to draw on knowledge that while the therapist does not assign formal homework they nevertheless provide consistent encouragement to try out new ways of interacting with others

Application

An ability to focus on, and support, the client's attempts to change by helping them to:

identify for themselves the interpersonal implications of the focal problem

identify interpersonal resources that can support change

identify obstacles to change

appraise the consequences of change

An ability to balance the drive towards change with an awareness of, and a sensitivity to, the client's readiness for change (hence reducing the risk of either overwhelming the client or exposing them to failure):

an ability to identify verbal and non-verbal cues that may be indicative of this

an ability to help the client to identify manageable goals

an ability to keep in mind the need to focus on circumscribed treatment goals, given the time limit

An ability to make sparing use of more directive, behaviour change techniques to support the client's attempts to change

Ability to engage the client in preparing for ending

Knowledge

An ability to draw on knowledge that IPT is a time-limited therapy that explicitly conceptualises the ending of therapy, and separation from the therapist as a role transition, and hence focuses on:
--

exploring the client's experience of ending

helping the client to plan for the future post-therapy
--

Application

An ability to prepare the client for ending by explicitly referring to the time limited nature of the therapy at the outset and throughout the therapy
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An ability to facilitate the expression of feelings about ending the therapy by:
--

acknowledging ending as a time of potential grieving
--

normalizing feelings of apprehension or sadness

responding non-defensively to the client's expression of disappointment with the therapy
--

An ability to facilitate a realistic review of progress, underscoring both areas of interpersonal competence and of future vulnerability:

an ability to communicate praise for what has been accomplished and draw attention to the client's independent successes
--

an ability to anticipate and discuss potential future areas of difficulty and help the client to consider ways in which these could be handled given what they have learned

An ability to help the client consolidate their understanding of interpersonal problems as a potential sign of relapse and to understand how symptomatic changes may serve as 'markers' of current interpersonal problems:
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an ability to help the client to identify a relapse plan which draws on the support of other people

An ability to help the client engage significant others in preparing for ending and in planning for the future:

an ability to assess of the need for maintenance IPT and/or referral to other professional networks
