



Being an Ally: Forming a therapeutic alliance

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Jackson, MS

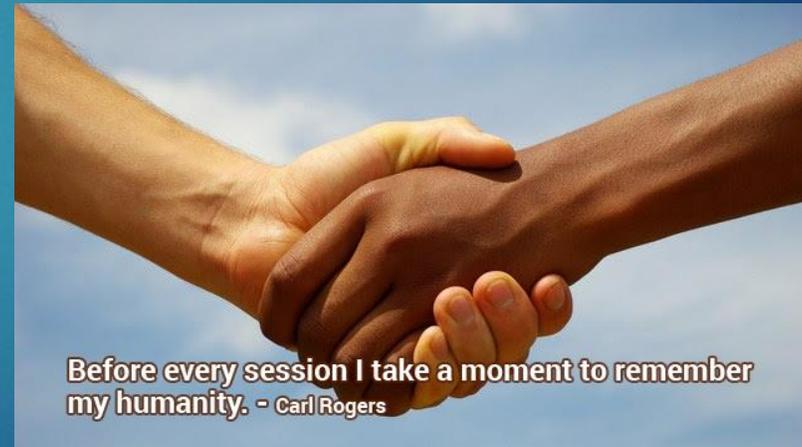
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- ▶ Most trauma happens in the context of intimate human relationships. It makes sense then that human relationships are key to their healing processes. Techniques alone will not work to change behaviors that are part of clients' coping strategies. We must first (and throughout our work) provide relationships based on trust in which we can work with clients to learn what they need and help them to develop safe strategies to achieve their goals. Therapeutic alliance has been viewed as a critical component of effective treatment for traumatized children, adolescents, and adults. Helpers learn that in demonstrating growth promoting relationships in their interactions with clients and with colleagues, they foster hope, and can more effectively help clients repair their disrupted ability to connect in nurturing ways. This relational framework empowers both client and caregiver and without a therapeutic alliance, techniques will not work. A stable connection between caring adults and children is the key helping clients build resiliency and reach their highest potential.

Learning objectives

- 1) Learn the definition of therapeutic alliance and describe how to incorporate this concept into daily practices.*
- 2) Explain concept of a RICH relationship and be able to cite at least 2 examples of how to build a RICH relationship with clients and coworkers.*
- 3) Discuss how trauma occurs within an unhealthy relationship and how repair within a healthy relationship builds resiliency.*

What is a therapeutic alliance?

- ▶ The positive connection between the treater and the client
- ▶ Emphasizes that the client has been hurt within relationships and they will be healed by relationships
- ▶ Takes time to develop



Before every session I take a moment to remember my humanity. - Carl Rogers

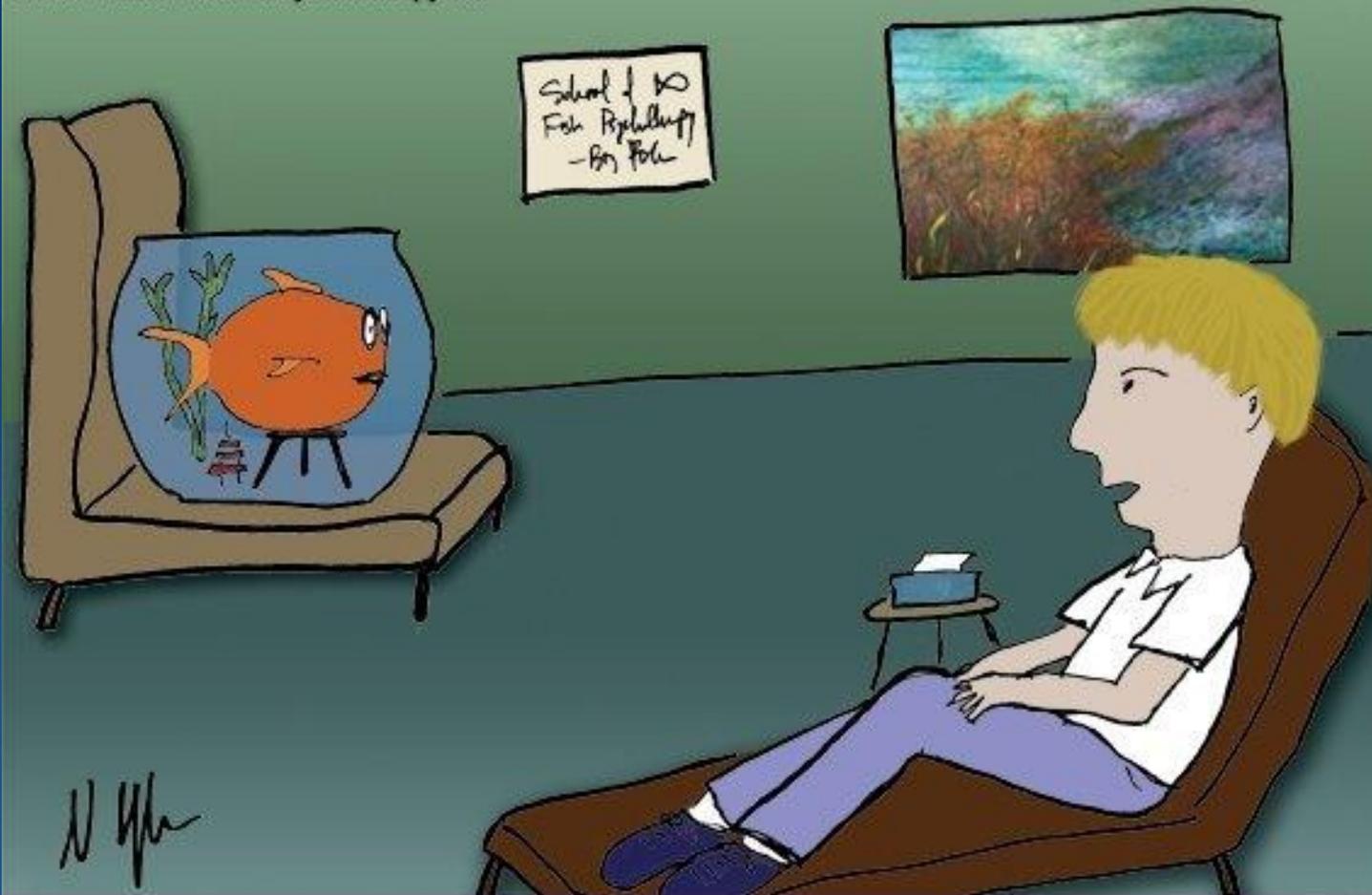


Why is it important?

- ▶ Re-sculpts brains pathways
- ▶ Decreases client's sense of isolation
- ▶ Teaches that breaks in relationships are inevitable, but those breaks can be repaired
- ▶ Gives hope that the present can differ from the past
- ▶ Techniques are good, but they will not work unless the client and treater have an alliance
- ▶ **Best predictor of treatment outcome**

From the client's perspective

- ▶ It is trust between client and therapist that allows him/her to work together effectively.
- ▶ It's what helps the client believe that his/her therapist is trustworthy and has his/her best interest at heart
- ▶ Client and therapist will work together productively
- ▶ Therapist is there to help him/her, no matter how hard the going gets



“You don’t say much, but I’m told it’s the therapeutic relationship that counts.”

Daily practices

- ▶ Let your client know you are interested in him/her and in what is troubling them.
 - ▶ Be genuine
 - ▶ Be attentive; Listen
 - ▶ Ask relevant questions
- ▶ Let your client know you have a sense of how difficult or sad or painful his/her problem is.
 - ▶ Be aware of your facial expressions & body language
 - ▶ Make empathic remarks
 - ▶ Do not be afraid to show some feelings
- ▶ Let your client see that you understand something about the trouble that brought him/her to therapy.
 - ▶ Understand the nature of the problem and the issues involved & communicate that understanding clearly to client

R.I.C.H. relationship

- ▶ Respect
- ▶ Information
- ▶ Connection
- ▶ Hope

Building RICH relationships with clients & coworkers

- ▶ Respect
 - ▶ Validate their experience
 - ▶ Be mindful of tone of voice, posture, eye contact
 - ▶ Listen
- ▶ Information
 - ▶ Let them know what is happening
 - ▶ Be specific about intentions, what you need from them, what will happen next
 - ▶ Offer choices and ideas for self-soothing



▶ Connection

- ▶ Get to know their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses
- ▶ Little things matter
- ▶ Be willing to be vulnerable

▶ Hope

- ▶ Together they can get through this
- ▶ Remind them of their previous successes
- ▶ Never give up

What does a therapeutic alliance have to do with trauma informed care?

- ▶ Trauma usually occurs within the context of a relationship
- ▶ That relationship is usually unhealthy
- ▶ Healing has to occur within the context of a healthy relationship
- ▶ It contradicts traumatized client's basic assumptions about relationships
- ▶ “Resilience rests, fundamentally on relationships.” *Luthar, 2006*

Why is it important to develop resilience?

- ▶ People who respond to hardships and stress with resilience are:
 - ▶ Happier in their relationships
 - ▶ Much less likely to suffer from depression
 - ▶ More successful at school and work
 - ▶ Healthier and live longer

How does a therapeutic alliance build resiliency?

- ▶ Repair within a healthy relationship teaches the client
 - ▶ Not all relationships are bad
 - ▶ Positive qualities to look for in a person
 - ▶ How to decipher between good and bad relationships
- ▶ Best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships and
 - ▶ Teaches the client relationship skills
 - ▶ Builds the clients confidence
- ▶ **Being resilient does not mean that a person will not experience difficulty or distress. It means that the next time it happens, he or she has developed a process for adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, stress, etc.**

How do you know how you are doing?

- ▶ Many formal assessment tools available
 - ▶ Working Alliance Inventory (WAI)
 - ▶ Helping Alliance Questionnaire (HAq-II)
 - ▶ Empathic Resonance scale (ER)
 - ▶ Therapeutic Alliance Scale for Children
- ▶ Or keep it simple. Ask your clients:
 - ▶ Do you feel comfortable talking to your therapist?
 - ▶ Are you able to talk freely in sessions?
 - ▶ Do you feel relieved after you've been to therapy?
 - ▶ Do you want to come back?
 - ▶ Do you feel like you and your therapist work on your problems together?
 - ▶ Do you feel like your therapist is trying to understand and is on your side?

Remember

- ▶ We must take care of ourselves and own needs in order to be able to provide support to our clients.

AND

- ▶ Only when we have taken care of our own needs can we be fully present and available to support our clients.

“When we help children build resilience, it is like providing an umbrella in a storm. It may not stop the rain, but it will protect them from its effects.”



Resources

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- ▶ Hawley, K. M., & Weisz, J. R. (2005). Youth versus parent working alliance in usual clinical care: Distinctive associations with retention, satisfaction and treatment outcome. *Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 34, 117–128.
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