Use of Self in Therapy

Erri Hewitt, PhD
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erri.hewitt@uwmf.wisc.edu
Disclosures

I have no actual or potential conflicts of interest in relation to this program/presentation.
Learning Objectives

• Review research on the use of self in therapy.

• Learn effective ways to use aspects of yourself in therapy.

• Recognize when using aspect of yourself in therapy may NOT be effective.

• Explore additional resources about the therapy relationship and treatment outcomes.
Research Review

- Research on the use of self in therapy has focused on the relationship between the therapist and client.

- Relationship factors are as or more important in therapy outcomes than the particular treatment method used.

- APA taskforce on Evidence-Based Relationships and Responsiveness reviewed 16 meta-analyses on aspects of the therapy relationship examined links between various relationship factors and therapy outcomes.

Research Review

Conclusions of the Task Force on Evidence-Based Therapy Relationships

• The therapy relationship makes substantial and consistent contributions to psychotherapy outcome independent of the specific type of treatment.

• The therapy relationship accounts for why patients improve (or fail to improve) at least as much as the particular treatment method.

• Practice and treatment guidelines should explicitly address therapist behaviors and qualities that promote a facilitative therapy relationship.

https://societyforpsychotherapy.org/evidence-based-therapy-relationships/
Research Review

Conclusions of the Task Force on Evidence-Based Therapy Relationships

• Efforts to promulgate best practices or evidence-based practices (EBPs) without including the relationship are seriously incomplete and potentially misleading.

• Adapting or tailoring the therapy relationship to specific patient characteristics (in addition to diagnosis) enhances the effectiveness of treatment.

• The therapy relationship acts in concert with treatment methods, patient characteristics, and practitioner qualities in determining effectiveness; a comprehensive understanding of effective (and ineffective) psychotherapy will consider all of these determinants and their optimal combinations.

https://societyforpsychotherapy.org/evidence-based-therapy-relationships/
Relationship factors with the strongest evidence for influencing therapy outcomes are:

- **Therapy alliance (individual, child, family)**
- **Mutuality and collaboration**
- Goal consensus
- Cohesion in group therapy
- **Empathy**
- Collecting and delivering client feedback
- **Positive regard/Affirmation**

*** Demonstrably effective
Research Review

Relationship factors with the strongest evidence for influencing therapy outcomes are:

- Congruence/genuineness **
- The real relationship **
- Emotional expression **
- Cultivating positive expectations **
- Promoting treatment credibility
- Managing countertransference **
- Repairing alliance ruptures **
- Self-disclosure and immediacy *

** Probably effective
* Promising but not yet sufficiently researched
Therapy Alliance

• Building an effective working relationship with your client or clients.
• Defined by the strength of the relationship.
• Applicable in individual adult psychotherapy, youth psychotherapy, and in couple and family therapy.

HOW TO DO IT:
1. Warmly collaborate on goals (disagreement may be a way to strengthen the alliance)
2. Identify roles in the therapy relationship
3. Respond to client’s readiness for change
4. Check in with the client about how the relationship feels

Collaboration

• Working together to define and actualize therapy goals, including the direction the therapy is taking.
• Being "On the same page."

HOW TO DO IT:
1. Agree on goals before treating problems
2. Seek client input on treatment plans
3. Set homework goals together, start small
4. Use SMART goals (Specific, measurable, Achievable, Realistic, time sensitive)

Empathy

- Sensitive understanding of the client’s feelings and struggles.
- Seeing client’s issues from their point of view.

**HOW TO DO IT:**

1. Empathic therapists do simply not parrot clients’ words back, instead, they work understand their clients’ goals, their experiences in the session, and their unspoken nuances and implications.

2. Use Linehan’s 6 levels of validation

3. Continually adjust your assumptions about what clients are experiencing.

4. Offer empathy with humility, check to see if you have heard your client accurately, and be open to changing your understanding of what your client is experiencing.

5. Empathy will probably not prove effective unless it is grounded in authentic caring for the client.

Positive Regard/Affirmation

• Supporting clients regardless of their behavior, attitudes, or emotions.
  – Support does NOT equal agreement or approval.

HOW TO DO IT:

1. No research driven reason to avoid doing it. Do it and offer it often.
2. Keep in mind the function of your positive regard – may reinforce client behaviors.
3. Convey positive regard through multiple channels
4. Adjust it based on client characteristics
5. Make it a topic of supervision

Congruence/Genuineness

• Relating authentically to your clients without hiding behind a professional or personal façade.

HOW TO DO IT:

1. Acceptance of and receptivity to experiencing with the patient, as well as a willingness to use this information in discourse. The congruent therapist is responsible for his or her feelings and reactions and this “ownership of feelings is specified.”

2. Congruent responding may include moderated self-disclosure of personal information and life experiences. It could also entail articulation of thoughts and feelings, opinions, pointed questions, and feedback regarding patient behavior. Genuine responses are honest. Congruent responses are not disrespectful, overly intellectualized, or insincere, although they may involve irreverence.

3. Effective therapists will modify and tailor their congruence style according to client presentation.

Emotional Expression

• Sharing genuine emotions with your client or clients in ways that are appropriate to the framework of therapy.

HOW TO DO IT:

1. Find opportunities to facilitate client expression and processing of emotion in therapy rather than trying to control or discourage it.

2. Therapists can learn and practice emotion coaching, as opposed to emotion dismissing. Emotions need to be focused on, validated, and worked with directly in therapy to promote emotional change. See Gottman book in Resources section for ways to Emotion Coach.

3. Therapists can work toward fostering productive emotional experiences with clients that foster corrective emotional experiences.

Managing Countertransference

- Attending to and controlling your own emotions as they are stirred up in relation to your client or clients.

**HOW TO DO IT**

- Know yourself and your sensitive areas
- Continually work on your own health care – sleep, eat, exercise, and engage in therapy for yourself.
- Participate in supervision – new AND mid/advanced-career therapists
- Repair the relationship if you’ve acted out your counter-transference
- Engage in meditation/mindfulness practice – See the Secular Buddhism podcast – episode 71 – breaking the chain of reactivity for ways to manage emotional reactivity.

Self-Disclosure and Immediacy

• Using the immediate situation to invite your client or clients to examine what is happening in the therapy relationship.

• It may involve disclosing aspects of your emotions or personal life in ways that can feel risky and unfamiliar.

HOW TO DO IT:
• This area has just begun to have research into it.
• There is insufficient research to show what aspects of these things may and may not be helpful to therapeutic outcome.
• **Proceed with caution.**
When using aspects of yourself may NOT be effective

- Tailor treatment to client’s individual characteristics and current symptoms.
  - Cultural background
  - Religious and spiritual beliefs
  - Trauma history
    - SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach
- Personality/Personality Disorder(s)
- Current symptoms
Resources

• The 16 meta-analyses referenced are reported in the December 2018 issue of Psychotherapy, Vol. 55, No. 4.

• Society for the Advancement of Psychotherapy
  – https://societyforpsychotherapy.org/

• Resources on evidenced based therapy relationships
  – https://societyforpsychotherapy.org/evidence-based-therapy-relationships/

• Read a summary article on the therapy relationship and complete a CEU
  – The test fee is $25 for members; $35 for nonmembers
Resources

• Marsha Linehan’s Six Levels of Validation
  – Google this and you will find a variety of resources on it.

• The Heart of Parenting: Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child by John Gottman.
  – Book on Emotion Coaching and how to do it – designed for parents and kids but the concept of emotion coaching has similarities to ways therapist and help clients identify, label, and express their emotions.

• Secular Buddhism podcast – episode 71 – breaking the chain of reactivity
  – A way to use mindfulness techniques to decrease emotional reactivity to clients (countertransference)
Summary

• Relationship factors are as or more important in therapy outcomes than the particular treatment method used.

• There are a number of ways to use yourself effectively to enhance treatment outcomes:
  – Therapy alliance, collaboration, empathy, positive regard/affirmation, congruence/genuineness, emotional expression, and managing countertransference.

• Consider client characteristics and current symptoms when choosing how to or not to use aspects of yourself in therapy.

• Resources are ready for you to use RIGHT NOW to help you even more effectively use yourself in therapy.