

THE ESSENTIALS OF EFFECTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY: WHAT WE KNOW WORKS

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ISSUE IMPORTANCE

Understanding the essential pieces to effective treatment is beneficial for new and seasoned counselors alike. In each session and with each client, mental health providers work to do many things at once: build rapport, practice active listening, navigate triggers and distractions for themselves and clients, create an environment of safety, provide support and regulation, monitor time, and more. Deepen the so-called "basics" and take small, impactful actions to increase successful outcomes.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Research has shown that **how a client feels** in your presence is what they recall.

A therapist's job is to **meet the client where they are**—not force them out of their comfort zone.

Effective ways to skillfully listen and build rapport with clients are **culturally bound**.



QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT TREATMENT EFFECTIVENESS

How does the client feel?

- Does the client feel that we...
 - care enough?
 - listen enough?
 - are trustworthy enough?
 - are competent enough to do the work with them?

Are we helping them?

- Is the treatment plan being accomplished?
- Is our approach/technique working for the client's abilities and readiness?
- Are they transferring their healing and learning outside of sessions?
- Are others in their life noticing?



BUILDING RAPPORT

Lean into a client's strengths, likes, and learning style.

Listen actively & use sensitive, respectful language.

Work on your own biases & moments of judgment.

Be honest about the strengths and limits of your practice.

Build referral resources for other areas of expertise.



ESSENTIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Open-Ended Questions:

O

Explore, clarify, and gain understanding of a client's world, experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and hopes for the future.

"Tell me more about..."
"What comes to mind..."

Affirming:

A

Build rapport, demonstrate empathy, foster self-efficacy, and affirm a client's strengths and/or abilities.

"You're really trying to..."
"It seems you're good at..."

Reflective Listening:

R

Reflect back a client's words, emotions, and/or behaviors as you listen and witness them in session.

"You seem sad when..."
"I heard you say..."

Summarizing:

S

Facilitate progression through the session. Check for understanding of goals, plans, and preferences.

"Let's go over..."
"Last time we talked..."



STATES OF THE NERVOUS SYSTEM AND HOW TO RECOGNIZE THEM

DORSAL VAGAL, "FREEZE"

Hypo-arousal indicators: "I can't," Dulled or numb emotions & sensations, shut-down, passivity, disconnection, not present, no energy, no movement

SYMPATHETIC, "FIGHT OR FLIGHT"

Hyper-arousal indicators: "I can," Hyper-vigilance, anxiety, worrying, impulsivity, racing thoughts, anger/rage, reactivity, tension, defensiveness, lying, feeling unsafe

VENTRAL VAGAL, "SAFE AND SOCIAL"

Optimal arousal indicators: "I am," Openness, curiosity, comfort, awareness, tolerance in the present moment, think and feel, empathy, feeling safe, adaptability

More CONNECTION & HEALING Less

Tools for Regulation and Shifting State:

- Connecting to senses
- Shifting posture
- Focusing on breath or guided breath practice
- Spontaneous or guided movement
- Releasing (muscles, breath, emotions)
- Applying pressure
- Cognitive re-framing
- Speeding up
- Slowing down

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