

Establishing and Maintaining a Therapeutic Alliance with Substance Abuse Patients: A Cognitive Therapy Approach

By Cory F. Newman

Self-Check Exercise

While reading this article, think of yourself and your clients. How would you rate your interactions with them? What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Check the items accordingly. There is also a space to jot down any notes to yourself if a specific client or a client interview comes to mind.

After rating yourself, acknowledge your strengths, and then try changing some of your weaknesses to strengths next time you interact with one of your clients. Be innovative! Try different ways to be the best communicator with every client interaction.

II. ESTABLISHING RAPPORT AT THE OUTSET OF TREATMENT

The following are some common methods by which therapists can connect with their substance-abusing patients as treatment begins:

1. Speak directly, simply, and honestly.

Strength Weakness Notes:

2. Ask about the patient's thoughts and feelings about being in therapy.

Strength Weakness Notes:

3. Focus on the patient's distress.

Strength Weakness Notes:

4. Acknowledge the patient's ambivalence.

Strength Weakness Notes:

5. Explore the purpose and goals of treatment.

Strength Weakness Notes:

6. Discuss the issue of confidentiality.

Strength Weakness Notes:

7. Avoid judgmental comments.

Strength Weakness Notes:

8. Appeal to the patient's areas of positive self-esteem.

Strength Weakness Notes:

9. Acknowledge that therapy is difficult.

Strength Weakness Notes:

10. Ask open-ended questions, then be a good listener.

Strength Weakness Notes:

III. MAINTAINING A POSITIVE ALLIANCE OVER THE COURSE OF TREATMENT

The following are some general principles that therapists can employ throughout treatment to preserve a productive and healthy therapeutic alliance.

1. Ask patients for feedback about every session.

Strength Weakness Notes:

2. Be attentive. Remember details about the patients from session to session.

Strength Weakness Notes:

3. Use imagery and metaphors that the patients will find personally relevant.

Strength Weakness Notes:

4. Be consistent, dependable, and available.

Strength Weakness Notes:

5. Be trustworthy, even when the patient is not.

Strength Weakness Notes:

6. Remain calm and cool in session, even if the patient is not.

Strength Weakness Notes:

7. Be confident, but be humble.

Strength Weakness Notes:

8. Set limits in a respectful manner.

Strength Weakness Notes:

IV. THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP AND THE CASE FORMULATION

The following are some general guides for using the case conceptualization in the service of improving the therapeutic relationship.

1. Strive to understand the pain and fear behind the patient's hostility and resistance.

Strength Weakness Notes:

2. Explore the meaning and function of the patient's seemingly oppositional or self-defeating actions.

Strength Weakness Notes:

3. Assess the patient's beliefs about therapy.

Strength Weakness Notes:

4. Assess your own beliefs about the patient.

Strength Weakness Notes:

5. Collaboratively utilize unpleasant feelings in the therapeutic relationship as grist for the mill.

Strength Weakness Notes: