

## Study Guide – 7 – Challenging clients, self disclosure and professionalism

This call will look at a number of reasons why we might need to challenge our clients, how to do that professionally and how to recognise when self disclosure as a form of challenge may be appropriate.

Challenging your clients appropriately is a skill that largely depends on your intuition: you have to feel when it is right to use some of the strategies I'm about to outline. However, I will give you some of the cues that you are looking for and what those cues indicate in a client, in terms of where they're stuck and why they are possibly resisting therapy at that moment.

We will be looking at Counselling Skills stage 2 and the use of unfocussed listening, along with some of the transference work you've already done.

### The Resistant Client

Some clients, though they want relief from their mental or emotional distress, are very difficult to work with and appear to be resisting your best efforts at helping them. Many of these clients have developed very well honed defences designed, unconsciously of course but specifically, to stop anyone getting in there and reminding them of how bad they feel. Typically, a client may adopt a number of defence strategies as I outline below. Many of these come from a Freudian model but are in my opinion, a fair estimation of what may be happening.

### Projection as a defence mechanism

You can get an idea of this kind of 'projecting' client by using your 'unfocussed listening' skills and hearing the general timbre of their talking:

- Do they spend a lot of time complaining?
- Do they come across as a victim – ie: it's all happening TO them?
- Do they fixate on one or another person and blame them for everything that happens to them?

What do you do when they blame you? How do you feel?

### Repression

This kind of client is unconscious or unaware of where their problem lies. They have pushed their pain out of their conscious mind and into a repressed part of their bodies. Typically you may find clients who have chosen this defence mechanism to deal with their challenges who tend to have physical problems. Such as IBS, ME, Crohns or some such other condition which can be non specific, and largely untreatable by conventional means.

Using your unfocussed listening skills you may identify a client who has repressed memories as follows:

- Do they spend a lot of time complaining about their physical health?
- Do they avoid talking about their childhood or one of their parents?
- Do they keep insisting they had a perfectly good childhood?
- Do they keep blaming current day circumstances for their condition?

<b>What do you do when you keep meeting this kind of resistance? How do you feel?</b>

### Reaction Formation

Another defence strategy allows the individual to replace a perceived dangerous thought or feeling with the exact opposite. They may do this because they feel they owe something to someone and the debt is never paid off. This may allow them to tolerate behaviours and then to never express their true feelings about something. In order to stay 'accepted' they need to have the opposite feeling to the one they have generated.

Clients who have developed this style of defence mechanism will be as follows:

- People who despite all their descriptions of an aggressive or inconsiderate partner will insist they love them deeply.
- People whose parent has abused them but who they say they feel great empathy for.

<b>What do you do when you meet this kind of client? How do you feel?</b>

### Regression

Regression is a defence strategy that causes the individual to behave like a child when under stress of some description. That means you'll notice a lot of childlike behaviours, words or expressions in your clients demeanor. You may notice from your unfocussed listening skill that the client's body language is appealing, small like a child, and that their language is generally poor.

Clients who have developed this style of defence you will recognise by the following:

- They have the it's not fair feel about them – what I call bottom lip out!
- They convey a lot of childhood fears of what would happen if.
- They may know something consciously, but if you listen carefully they're still responding from their childhood fears.
- They are people who are afraid to act in the here and now and live for the what ifs in life.

<b>What do you do with this kind of client? How do you feel?</b>

### **Rationalisation**

One of the most challenging defence mechanisms in some intelligent or intellectual clients is that of rationalisation. Sometimes, if recent life events have brought intolerable feelings to the surface, you may find they're not difficult to locate. However, rationalisation is used to make sense and to contain some of the pain and move it into our heads. Rationalisation may cause your clients to suffer with IBS or stomach problems as they suppress their feelings for a more logical, ethical or socially well considered stance.

People who rationalise are usually:

- Those who have no obvious reason for distress but who may have been brought up in a culture which was fairly restricted: perhaps there was little love, or their fears as a child were downplayed, rationalised or ridiculed.
- Those who fear humiliation and have learned how to offer measured and calm explanations with some authority as to what has happened.
- Those who can think of no good reason why something has happened and have managed to logically process their distress so as to contain it.

<b>What do you do with this kind of client? How do you feel?</b>

There are various others which I will share with you on a future teleseminar. For now, I'll show you how to deal with each of these styles of defence strategy and how to challenge your client to get them where they say they want to be. Part of the discussion around this kind of challenging is looking at what it means to be professional.

### **Being professional**

Is being professional about looking the part? Having the right qualifications? Saying the right things? Adhering to professional ethics? Yes. It is. And it's so much more. Taking up residence in your own life means dealing with your own fears of failure and knowing how to manage them in your therapy context.

Write down a list of what you think being professional is for you?


When you've admired a colleague, trainer, or someone else who was 'professional' in your life, how have they left you feeling?


What did they do to cause you to feel this?


What is the message to you?


