



# Helping Supervisees Work with Highly Complex Clients Using Respect-Focused Therapy

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# Goals for this session:

- Address fears and biases supervisees may have in working with difficult clients without judgment.
- Provide tools to assist supervisees in recognizing the emotional or value based responses of clients, which are separate from their own.
- Empower supervisees to experience their clients as whole persons beyond their diagnoses or behaviors.
- Provide skills to supervisees to empower clients to break through self-defeating behaviors and hopeless ideation to more fully respect themselves in a redefined positive identity.

# **In this session, we will:**

- Identify highly complex clients and related challenging behaviors.
- Understand RFT and how it can be used effectively with highly complex clients.
- Review case studies and role-play to better understand how to use these concepts.

# Identify highly complex clients:

- Chemical dependency and dual diagnoses;
- severe mental illness;
- complex or multiple traumas or loss;
- coexisting disabilities or chronic health issues;
- limited resources or support;
- or any combination of the above.

# Identify challenging behaviors:

- Aggressive or passive aggressive
- Defensive
- Hopelessness
- Isolating
- Resistance to treatment.

# What is Respect-Focused Therapy?

[Respect-Focused Therapy \(RFT\)](#) is a foundation on which all modalities and techniques used in therapy can be strongly grounded, in order to produce sound, effective outcomes.

This approach offers clients the opportunity to gain experiential understanding of being respected, possibly for the first time, from the therapeutic relationship and then be able to heal old wounds by creating more respect for self and others in the therapeutic process.

# Main Principles

- Focus on therapeutic relationship – deeper and genuine within the context of therapy. Seeks symmetry and I-Thou like connection.
- Provides a process that allows clients to experientially incorporate respect into their daily life experiences.
- Has multicultural understanding and sensitivity.

# Operational Definition of Respect

- Respect isn't simply about reflexive, polite responses to social circumstances nor is it hierarchal in nature.
- Respect pays full attention to who the other person really is. The etymology of the word respect is “respectare”, or “respicere”, meaning to “look again,” to reconsider.
- Respect is deeply genuine and symmetrical.



# Primary Supporting Constructs

- Carl Roger's Client-Centered Therapy
- Martin Buber's I and Thou
- Brene Brown – Vulnerability and shame
- Laura Brown – Feminist Therapy
- Susan Johnson – Attachment Theory
- Virginia Satir and Carl Whitaker – Family Systems

# The Therapeutic Relationship

- Will provide an experience of respect for the client that builds a pathway and stronger base of respect for self & others.
- Maintains awareness of own bias & willingness to suspend them in the therapeutic relationship.
- Recognition of power in the relationship, seeking balance and symmetry.

# The Therapeutic Process

- Provides some guidelines for the narrative of therapy to stay focused on the nurturing of genuine respect.
- Helps direct the narrative, encourages clients to explore and engage in self-awareness of what respect feels like, gently aids that awareness move in the direction of heightened respect for themselves and others.

# Using RFT with Highly Complex Clients

- First, it builds rapport through establishing an atmosphere of fundamental and completely genuine respect for who this person is and the life experience they bring with them, breaking down some walls of resistance and defensive posturing.
- From there, opportunity exists to allow for greater self-respect and acceptance to form and with that create stronger pathways for the ability to engage in more respectful and meaningful reciprocating interactions.