

Running head: DIS-EASE FREE

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First Session Exercise

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For all ages. Can be used with individuals, families, and groups.

In order to begin the therapeutic relationship, what can be helpful is discovering the image clients have of what is going to happen in therapy. Helping clients identify their intentions right up can be the essential elements in treatment planning and goal setting.

Introduction:

The first session is view as high impact time and may be the only encounter you have with this person. Once you introduce yourself by stating your name and title (if you are agency based so they know you are a social worker, doctor, nurse, etc.) find out their name, age, and how they got referred to you.

Ask the client if they have ever been to a health care professional (like yourself) before. This helps establish dialogue and rapport with you as an educator and collector of information. Sometimes clients don't understand what health care

professionals in your capacity do which can help demystify and clarify myths they have about your role with them.

Once this is done, ask the client if they found this professional, or therapy, etc. helpful. The focus at this point is for the therapist to pay attention to what client reports as helpful and do more of this, what they report as not helpful pay attention and make sure you do not repeat this. You might even tell the client this is why you are asking this question, which again is working on establishing the therapeutic relationship.

For clients who have never been to a health care professional in your capacity, tell the client that people who seek out or are brought to the attention of health care professionals are experiencing their life being out of balance. There is something bringing them to you that requires attention. You might ask what is bringing them to you now as opposed to two weeks ago, one month, etc.

Tell the client this imbalance in is due to an imbalance that is occurring in either the mind (beliefs held creating emotional suffering), body (there is a physical symptom creating distress), and/or spiritually (there is some questions about faith). You continue to tell the client that when the person does not know what to do to bring the "dis-ease" into balance, it is at this point that people reach out to some authority

(therapist, doctor, etc.) to determine how to put what seems to be out of order into balance.

While you are doing this you hand the client a clip board or a pad of paper and a pen (this arouses curiosity). At this point you ask them if they have any questions. After they do and you answer or they say no, you tell them you would like to ask them a question. Ask them if this is OK with them (establish the yes set).

Your only request of them is that until the exercise is finished you are asking them not to speak or ask questions (tell them to keep breathing because they are usually paying so close attention to their every word they stop breathing!). They will have this opportunity when the exercise is finished. Tell them you are going to ask them a question and they are going to respond by writing down the answer. Writing down the answer makes the invisible visible. You want to see (literally) what is on their mind. If you are seeing a couple, family, or conducting a group, give everyone a pad and pen to complete the exercise (this prevents individuals from copying, or changing their answer based on what someone else answers). Plain white paper and colored pens is preferred to open the door to the clients creativity and imagination (keep the experience fun and curious).

Ask the client(s) if they are ready (they will nod, establishing the yes set again). Tell the client(s) you are going

to ask them one question and you would like them to write down one or three answers in response to the question you ask. That's right, one or three not two. Tell them what you are interested in is the first thought that comes to mind in how to answer the question. To help them understand, tell them the answer can be in the form of the thought, word, or phrase and can be as silly or as serious as they like---don't limit the answer.

Ask them if they have any questions before you begin. Tell them if they are not sure how to answer the question, to look up at you and give you a confusing look and you will ask the question in another way. Then ask are you ready (getting to the yes set again)? The question is, you tell them is: What do you want? If they try to talk at this point simply put your finger over your mouth (SHHHHHHHH!) and ask them to please write down their answer or answers and look up at you when your done.

If the client looks up at you and gives you "the confused look" simply say (while they still are not talking) you came here today because you either want or need something. Then repeat--- what do you want?

Your job as the therapist is to wait patiently (sit still do not distract, talk, or engage the client) until they look up at you letting you know they are finished. When the client, family, group are all looking up at you, ask how many they wrote. If someone reports two ask them to write one more (this also may

give you some information about this client such as having trouble understanding or following directions, refusing to cooperate, challenge rules directions, etc.

Then ask the client(s) to sign their name, and put the date at the top. Congratulations. You have just created the treatment plan, established and created by the client. Have the client read to you what they wrote and tell them this is what you are going to focus on in their work with you. What makes this exercise quite helpful and useful is you have just completed several tasks at once. You now know what the client wants (treatment contract), you found out if you client can follow directions (cognitive abilities), a mini mental status was done (is the client oriented to date, time, and place), and you know if your client can read and write. Also since this was created by the client---this was individualized to the clients wants and needs. Your job as the therapist is to pay attention to what the client wants or needs and stay there!

References

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