

Fine Tuning

Our Work as Counsellors

*Small
adjustments
can make
a profound
difference*

Reflecting on enhancing the relational and practical skills that deepen good therapeutic work

“The core conditions of congruence, acceptance and empathy are simple to state, much more difficult to describe and infinitely challenging to practise.”

Brian Thorne (Emeritus Professor of Counselling at the University of East Anglia) was born on May 25, 1937





The Relationship is the Therapy



How can I give unconditional positive regard to a client I actually dislike??

What happens when my empathy disappears down the plughole??

How can I be congruent when I haven't a clue what's going on??

THINGS I STRUGGLE WITH

EMPATHY

- I disagree with them
- They make me anxious
- I'm bored
- They trigger fear in me
- I want to rescue them
- I feel angry with them
- Other:

UPR

- My beliefs and values are very different from theirs
- I don't like what they tell me about their behaviour
- I think they are making the wrong choices
- I just don't like them
- I just don't think they can change
- Other:

CONGRUENCE

- There's a lot I want to say, but it will upset them
- I think they'll be angry with me
- I don't know how to say it
- I hide behind my professional role – I'm not there to 'fix' them
- I was taught that a counsellor shouldn't self-disclose
- Other:

Giving ourselves an MOT & Service!



MAINTENANCE:

What am I already doing well that needs maintaining?



OBSERVATION:

What habits, blind spots and little bits of therapeutic wear-and-tear have crept in?



TUNE-UP:

What small adjustments could make my practice even better?



- ☐ Notice
- ☐ Attune
- ☐ Reflect
- ☐ Adjust



Role Play or
Real Play??



FINE TUNING

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M.O.T. AND SERVICE



MIRRORS

What am I seeing / not seeing?



STEERING

Who is actually at the wheel in the session?



ENGINE

What drives my interventions?



TYRES

Am I grounded and in good contact?



WARNING LIGHTS

What tells me I'm losing attunement?



BRAKES

Can I stop myself intervening?



BATTERY

What needs changing?
Do I need a break / sabbatical / therapy?



SERVICE HISTORY

Am I getting what I need from Supervision?



ROADWORTHINESS

Am I still practising in the way I believe I practise?



*Small adjustments
make a big difference* ♥

Fine Tuning Micro Skills

		Yes, I do this!	I need to do this more	I don't really do this
HIGH LEVEL SKILL	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE			
Micro-processing	Noticing tiny shifts, eg posture, breathing, facial expression, gaze, voice, pace, energy. Being curious about their meaning rather than assuming we know.			
Holding Silence	Being able to remain present without rushing to fill a silence. Being able to distinguish between reflective silence and an uncomfortable one. Being confident in checking the meaning for the client.			
Making Space	Resisting the urge to fill, fix or lead. Allowing enough space for the client's own process to emerge.			
Attunement	Staying sensitively alongside the client's emotional pace and intensity. Mirroring and balancing. Following the client's agenda rather than pulling them towards ours.			
Clean Language	Staying close to the client's actual words, images and metaphors, rather than interpreting them, or subtly replacing them with our own.			
Tracking	Listening not only to what the client is talking about, but noticing <i>how</i> they are experiencing it as they talk about it.			
Hearing the Unsaid	Being sensitive to omissions, hesitations, changes of subject, unfinished sentences and things that are on the edge of awareness. Not forcing them into the open, but offering the client the chance to say more.			
Working with Immediacy	Recognising when something happening between us and the client in the room may be significant, and having the courage to explore it sensitively.			
Therapeutic Pacing	Knowing when to stay, when to deepen, when to move on and when to leave something alone. <i>Not every door that opens needs to be walked through.</i>			
Tentative Language	Offering perceptions lightly: "I wonder..." "I noticed..." "I may have this wrong..." , leaving the client genuinely free to correct our understanding.			
Tolerating Not Knowing	Resisting formulating an interpretation or explanation. Being able to remain genuinely curious when we don't know what something means.			

HIGH LEVEL SKILL	WHAT IT MEANS IN PRACTICE			
Noticing our own process	Being aware of our own bodily sensations, emotions, assumptions and reactions. Distinguishing between <i>something is happening between us</i> and <i>this belongs to me</i> .			
Relational Courage	Being willing, when therapeutically appropriate, to name something difficult. A rupture... distance... irritation... misunderstanding... avoidance... a change in the relationship			
Repairing Rupture	Recognising when we have misunderstood, mistimed or simply got something wrong. Being able to own it without defensiveness.			
Restraint	Recognising that we <i>could</i> interpret, challenge, disclose, ask another question or offer an intervention, <i>and choosing not to</i> .			
Remembering and Connecting	Holding important threads from previous sessions and recognising connections without turning therapy in to an exercise showing how clever we are.			
Using challenge relationally	Being able to notice discrepancy or incongruence and gently bringing it into awareness, without making the client feel corrected, shamed or argued with.			
Working at the Edge	Sensing where the client is just beginning to become aware of something and accompanying there without dragging them beyond what they are ready to face.			
Knowing when to get out of the way	Recognising those moments when the client's own process has taken over and almost anything we say will interrupt it.			

Your Workshop Challenge!