

Clinical Considerations for Mental Health Professionals

Chapter One – The Engine of Emotion

My intention for including clinical considerations is to reaffirm the positive psychology perspective of mental health, i.e., that human beings are created with the innate potential for happiness and wellbeing. Furthermore, nature has designed us to instinctively move in the direction of health and healing throughout the course of our lives. It is my hope that, as mental health professionals, you will find Enlighten Up Your Day to be a practical and inspiring resource. Every chapter was developed out of my personal work with clients in various settings. As a therapist I strive to empower the client to access their untapped capacity for resiliency and emotional regulation. It is my view that our role as mental health professionals is to teach skills and provide feedback that enables the client to help themselves. Much like climbing a mountain, taking ownership for our mental health is a process that requires training, patience, and courage. Nonetheless, the higher we climb, the better the view.

John Brian Ford, LMFT

In the initial stage of therapy, and as part of the initial clinical assessment, I seek to empower the client by assuring them that it is they who chooses the direction of change. Furthermore, in order to maintain an evidenced-based approach, we agree upon measurable indicators that show they are continuing to move in their stated direction. Such indicators can be quantified by a reduction of anxiety or depression on a scale of zero to ten; the increase of feelings of self-worth across various settings; or the return to former activities that, in the past, resulted in feelings of happiness, etc. The rationale for the insistence of personal accountability is to reinforce the underlying premise, i.e., that our mental health is largely the result of our own internal and external attributions and actions. Thus, understanding the core concepts in Chapter One depends on a willingness to increase over time, ownership for one's emotions.

Ambivalence is not uncommon with clients who tend to externalize the locus of control for their feelings. In such cases I spend more time and multiple sessions pointing out the advantages of assuming emotional responsibility. If the client is not yet ready to embrace this perspective, I find it advisable to take a teacher-student didactic approach until a stronger therapeutic bond is established. It is paramount that the client understands that they are not failing at therapy or doing something wrong. The main consideration is, how does the client's ambivalence to assuming ownership for their emotions serve to protect them? Where is the hidden gem within the defense mechanism?

With regard to homework assignments, I suggest that they attempt to complete the worksheet, but I never insist. For those clients that enjoy the educational component, we will review the worksheets in session breaking it down paragraph by paragraph. To ensure that they understand



the practice piece I'll lead them through the beginning of the exercise. But it is important to the client's sense of autonomy that they never feel coerced or in any way put down.

An introduction to basic mindfulness meditation can be useful for anyone who has little experience with vipassana, i.e., Buddhist mindfulness meditation. Unlike Vedic forms of meditation that focus on spiritual union with the numen, Buddhist mindfulness meditation is purely practical in nature. The goal, in the beginning, is to increase the core sense of identity with the inner witness or observer who is the *subject* of meditation. It is the observer who is able to dispassionately perceive the various *objects* of the mind (thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, etc.) as they arise and pass away. This practice allows the client to begin to separate their sense of self from those patterns of thinking that are most linked to their suffering.

The overall goal in the first stage of therapy is to increase a client's sense of internal efficacy by teaching cognitive-behavioral coping skills. By doing so the client is better able to engage in the more challenging insight building work in the middle stage of therapy. In subsequent chapters the focus will include the raising of unconscious information into the conscious, Adult Ego state. The aim in doing so is to put this material into a meaningful context that affirms the positive nature of the human experience.

