

## Clinical Considerations for Mental Health Professionals

### Chapter Ten – Self-fulness

*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*

I have found that clients can struggle when it comes to acting in their own self-interest. They report feelings of shame and guilt at the very idea of denying someone's request for help. Never mind that the request might create an unreasonable burden for the client. To do anything other than comply can trigger a client's distorted belief that selfishness is in their nature.

Often clients frame their only option as a choice between acting selfishly and selflessly. The concept of *integrating* the best of both positions to generate a third option – that of self-fulness – has never been presented to them. At best they struggle to find a midpoint between selfish and selfless. This is to say, they settle for an uncomfortable compromise between their values and their feelings. It is for this reason that I introduce the concept of self-fulness as a term to represent the healthy, integrated Adult Ego perspective.

The illustration provided in the exploration exercise in chapter ten helps elucidate this point. The illustration can be thought of as a modified Venn Diagram. But instead of the integration point being conceptualized as the overlap between the two extremes, the polar opposite positions are connected by a line that represents shades of grey. The midpoint of the line represents compromise which is the third position between selfish and selfless. Outside of the line I offer the 'fourth position,' that of self-fulness. The goal is to help the client understand this somewhat abstract idea with the help of this visual model.

Once I'm confident that the client has a good understanding of the model I prompt them with a series of questions designed to build insight. The first series of questions looks at what the client identifies as being good about being selfish and selfless. For example, the client may identify being able to deny an unreasonable demand as something good about being selfish. They may cite being helpful and compassionate as positive traits associated with being selfless. At this point I encourage them to bring these traits from either position into the self-full circle. "When I'm being self-full I can offer a reasonable amount of help while including my needs. I was able to tell my friend that I wasn't available to help him move last weekend, but I can help him this weekend to finish unpacking."

The next series of questions are in the form of a writing assignment in the exploration exercise. The client imagines how they might react in the same hypothetical situation but from the three self-positions. "If I was acting selfishly I would" . . . and so on. In this way the client can take their time to reflect and then share in session about their insights.

I make it a practice to wait until the client has been introduced to the Compassion Triangle before delving too deeply into the subject of self-fullness. At this point the client has been thoroughly grounded in the three ego states from Chapter Two of *Enlighten Up Your Day*. They have had time to integrate the tools and insights learned earlier in treatment such as Chapter One – The Engine of Emotion, and Chapter Seven – Thriving.

The importance of making mental health a priority is a cornerstone of wellbeing. However obvious this concept seems on the surface, there are many who find the actual practice difficult. Trying to impose this concept prematurely might make the client feel as if they are failing in therapy. When the client has a firm foundation in various coping and thriving practices I then introduce the idea of self-fullness.