

Specific Humanistic Psychological Therapies competences

Approaches to work with emotions and emotional meaning

Ability to help clients to access and express emotions

An ability to identify the ways in which clients manage and process their emotions, including the ability to recognise when clients are finding it difficult to access these

An ability to help clients experience feelings which may be out of current awareness, e.g.

by helping clients focus their attention inwards in order to become more aware of their feelings

by helping clients find ways of describing emotions which seem difficult to access

by listening empathically for feelings that are implicit and not yet fully in awareness

by focusing the client's attention on bodily sensations

by making empathic conjectures about feelings that have not yet been expressed

An ability to judge when it is appropriate to help clients reduce the extent to which they avoid experiencing underlying feelings

An ability to use methods that help clients increase contact with avoided emotion e.g.:

by helping clients explore what might be making it difficult for them to acknowledge and/or experience feelings

by identifying moments when clients seem to be having difficulty acknowledging and/or experiencing underlying feelings and drawing their attention to this

by helping clients explore the ways in which they avoid acknowledging and/or experiencing underlying feelings, and possible factors that may influence this e.g.:

previous negative experiences of expressing emotions to others

cultural and family attitudes to the expression of emotion

An ability to help clients achieve a level of emotional arousal that is optimal for exploring their feelings, e.g.:

helping clients who are overwhelmed by feelings e.g. by offering a calming and containing presence, containing imagery, or help to self-soothe

enabling clients who are out of touch with their feelings to increase emotional contact, for example by:

helping them review current concerns and focus on the most significant

helping them bring to mind and discuss previous episodes when they experienced heightened emotion

the therapist using vivid imagery or language aimed at promoting feelings in the client

suggesting active methods that promote emotional expression (e.g. encouraging clients to repeat a phrase more forcefully)

An ability to help the client differentiate between feelings that are appropriate to (and hence useful for) dealing with a current situation and those that are less helpful to them, for example,
because they are emotional responses relating to previous experiences rather than the present context
because they are reactions to other, more fundamental, emotions

Ability to help clients articulate emotions

An ability to help the client clarify and find appropriate words to describe their emotions
An ability to help the client verbalise the key concerns, meanings and memories which emerge out of emotional arousal
An ability to help the client identify and verbalise the wishes, needs, behaviours and goals associated with feelings and emotions (i.e. the “action tendency” inherent in emotions)
An ability to suggest imagery and metaphor to help the client become more aware of and to articulate the meaning of their experiences
An ability to work with images or metaphors in a way that is helpful to clients:
by communicating in a manner that helps clients focus on their experiencing
by checking the “fit” of images or metaphors with the client’s experience
by working with the client to elaborate the image or metaphor

Ability to help clients reflect on and develop emotional meanings

An ability to help clients explore their implicit central assumptions about self, others and the world
An ability to help clients adapt central assumptions in the light of experience
An ability to help the client explore alternative ways of understanding their emotional difficulties and the ways in which they experience themselves and others
An ability to help clients explore and evaluate new perspectives on their experiences in order for them to:
develop alternative ways of understanding their experiences
revise their views of themselves
develop new narratives relating to themselves and their world
An ability to help the client develop metaphors for themselves that fit with their newly-emerging experience
An ability to help the client reflect on any new meanings that emerge:
to check the accuracy of meanings against experience
to assess the implications of the new meanings
to re-examine behaviour and where appropriate consider alternative forms of action
An ability to help clients evaluate new perspectives in terms of their social context, personal values and goals in life

Ability to help clients make sense of experiences that are confusing and distressing

An ability to recognise and to help clients reflect on reactions that they experience as problematic and/or incongruent (e.g. when they over- or under-react to an situation, or react in ways which they describe as being out of character)

an ability to help the client describe both their emotional reactions and the external situation, in ways that encourage the client:
--

to identify how they were feeling before they encountered the situation

to re-imagine the situation

to identify the moment when the reaction was triggered
--

to explore their reaction to the situation
--

to make links between their reactions and the way they construed the situation
--

to develop new ways of understanding the situation and their responses to it
--

Ability to make use of methods that encourage active expression

An ability to recognise when clients are having difficulty in expressing opposing or unresolved emotional reactions, and appear ready to work actively on this, e.g.
--

the client is experiencing a distressing level of conflict between opposing wishes/desires or between aspects of the self, ("conflict split")

the client tends to inhibit their current feelings and as a consequence is finding it hard to act/ make decisions ("self-interruption")

the client is feeling lingering, unresolved hurt or resentment toward a significant other ("unfinished business")

An ability to structure and facilitate a "dialogue" between two conflicting aspects of the client's experience (e.g. using two-chair work) in order to help the client to:
--

identify and label the two aspects of the self
--

give equal value and attention to each aspect of the self

increase the contact or interaction between the two aspects

help the client differentiate underlying feelings and attitudes

enter into a process of negotiation, understanding and compromise between the two aspects of self

An ability to structure and facilitate a "dialogue" between those aspects of the person which are contributing to "self-interruption" (e.g. using two-chair work) in order to help the client:
--

identify, explore and express both the emotion that is seeking expression and aspects of the self which interrupt that expression

identify creative, metaphoric ways of enacting the interruption of the emotion that seeks expression
--

find appropriate ways of expressing or acting upon the inhibited emotion
--

An ability to structure and facilitate a "dialogue" with the imagined presence of a significant other (e.g. using empty chair work) in order to help the client to:

evoke the presence of the significant other

achieve sufficient emotional arousal so that they can access their key implicit or unexpressed feelings and attitudes

express and validate unmet needs

explore or enact the imagined perspective of the significant other
--

resolve "unfinished business" by reflecting on emerging alternative views of self and other, and on how to address any remaining unmet needs
--

Approaches to working with relationships

Ability to maintain a client-centred stance

Knowledge of the rationale for maintaining a client-centred stance

An ability to draw on knowledge that the rationale for the therapist to maintain a client-centred stance is provided by the concept of the “actualising tendency”:	
	the assumption that people are motivated towards self-maintenance, psychological growth and development, and the realisation of their potential, conceptualised as:
	an innate force for growth and self-healing that is continuously active in all people, although its functioning may not be immediately apparent
	a force which promotes a process of development in each individual client that is uniquely suited to them and their circumstances and so does not have a predictable trajectory
An ability to draw on knowledge that the experience of safety and absence of threat in the therapeutic relationship is assumed to be fundamental to the process of becoming more open to experience	
An ability to draw on knowledge that clients are assumed to be highly sensitive to variations in a therapist’s capacity to demonstrate fundamental acceptance, and that this may impact on the process of therapy	
An ability to draw on knowledge that symptoms of psychological distress may at times be a signal for growth, in as far as they represent the attempts of the actualising tendency to integrate experience	

Ability to maintain a client-centred stance

An ability to integrate empathy, authenticity, and a fundamental attitude of acceptance into a coherent and consistent way of relating towards the client:	
	a capacity to maintain this way of being in the therapeutic relationship, so as to facilitate the development of a deep state of contact and engagement with the client
An ability to communicate a fundamental receptiveness to the client’s experience through empathic responses which accurately convey an understanding of their experience in the “here and now”	
An ability to entrust the client with the therapeutic process by:	
	consistently allowing the client to determine the direction and pace of the therapeutic process
	setting aside any impulse to manipulate or control the therapeutic process
	accepting the client’s capacity to find their own way forward
An ability to maintain a consistently empathic, accepting and receptive attitude to the client when:	
	the client experiences intense and powerful emotions
	the meaning of the client’s communication is puzzling, confusing or unclear

An ability for the therapist to be aware of their personal feelings or professional judgments about the client and/or the process of therapy
a capacity for the therapist to ensure that their own feelings or judgments do not interfere with their ability to respond to the client in an open and fully accepting manner

Ability to work with the immediate therapeutic relationship

Knowledge of developmental theory & relational processes

An ability to draw on knowledge that the meaning which emerges from the therapeutic relationship will be intersubjective in nature:
shared meanings co-constructed by therapist and client in their interactions with each other
An ability to draw on developmental theories in order to understand their impact on the development of the client's relationships, and the relationship between the client and therapist:
an ability to draw on knowledge that experience of the self develops in and through relationships, and that this is a reciprocal and iterative process that has implications for the therapeutic relationship, in that:
the therapeutic relationship will reflect the relationship histories of both the client and the therapist
the explicit (e.g. conscious) and implicit (e.g. unconscious) meanings which shape the client's and therapist's perceptions of their world will be enacted and played out with and between them
An ability to draw on knowledge that the client may be troubled by feelings and experiences other than those that they explicitly report
an ability to draw on knowledge that a client's explicit (manifest) communications may contain an implicit (latent) meaning
An ability to draw on knowledge of the ways in which past events can be re-experienced in the present:
that clients can re-experience emotions and behave in ways associated with past events without their being explicitly aware that this is the case (e.g. through the operation of transference, emotion schemes or 'life-scripts')
that the client's pattern of relating to the therapist may be rooted in their past, and that the therapist can be drawn into (and become part of) this pattern (e.g. through the operation of projection or projective identification)
An ability to draw on knowledge that in addition to attending to the client's overt communications it can be helpful for therapists to make use of their immediate emotional and embodied reactions to the client
An ability to draw on knowledge of the ways in which the therapist can make use of their immediate emotional responses (e.g. their countertransference reactions):
as the basis for exploration and empathic enquiry (rather than interpretation), and leading to the co-creation of understanding between therapist and client

Working with relational processes

An ability to attend to the process as well as the content of the client's communications	
	an ability to note and reflect upon ways in which the client manages feelings which are implied but unexpressed, as conveyed both verbally and non-verbally and by other means (e.g. through 'embodied' communication)
	an ability to attend to the feelings, thoughts and processes that are evoked in the therapist so as to reflect on what the client may be communicating or expressing indirectly
	an ability to make use of the experience and observation of the client's ways of relating within the session as a basis for exploring the client's "internal world" of relationships
An ability to help the client identify and understand problematic recurring patterns in their relationships, particularly by observing and exploring the ways in which these evolve intersubjectively in the relationship with the therapist	
An ability to identify intra- and interpersonal obstacles to the awareness and expression of particular feelings by:	
	encouraging the client to maintain contact with current feelings towards the therapist as they emerge in the session and helping the client articulate what they are experiencing
	trying to understand and explore the client's communications where these are unclear or ambiguous, maintaining this (for example) by:
	sensitive and collaborative exploration of the client's feelings
	containing the therapist's own feelings of anxiety (e.g. about not suggesting immediate ideas, or about being perceived as incompetent if not acting immediately)
An ability to allow the therapist's own subjective associations and ideas to form in response to the client's communications, and to be open to exploring these with the client through a process of empathic enquiry	
An ability for the therapist to monitor their own reactions/responses to the client in order to determine:	
	the extent to which these are influenced by their own (personal) issues
	the ways in which these reactions/responses might be impacting on the work (both positively and negatively)
An ability to discuss with the client the implicit or explicit assumptions that they (and the therapist) might be making about cultural issues that could be influencing the relationship between them (e.g. race, culture, religion, age, gender and sexual orientation)	
An ability to identify and work with ruptures or impasses in the therapeutic relationship, and to make use of these ¹ :	
	as opportunities for expanding the client's subjective experience
	to help to resolve relational difficulties arising from the client's past experiences

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¹ A fuller description of the process of the formation and maintenance of the therapeutic alliance is contained in the generic competence (ability to foster and maintain a therapeutic alliance)