

Overcoming Hopelessness

Working with Low- and No-Motivation Clients

PETER FRAENKEL

One of the greatest challenges a therapist can face is when a client feels hopeless about the possibility of change. But whether this sense is due to doubts about therapy or the intransigent nature of their struggles, current research challenges the widespread assumption that clients must be strongly motivated in order to change. The Creative Relational Movement (CRM) approach is a set of ideas and practices that stimulate clients to engage in therapy, even when their motivation is low. You'll discover:

- How to apply the five principles of CRM with "last chance" couples as well as with clients suffering from depression, anxiety, and substance abuse
- How to use the integrative Therapeutic Palette approach to help clients engage in their treatment, even when they may not see the point
- Specific mindfulness practices that facilitate immediate psychophysiological change
- How to offer "experiments in possibility," even if they feel unnatural or even irrational at first

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Learning Objectives:

1. Appraise the five principles of the Creative Relational Movement approach to change to improve client outcomes.
2. Evaluate the integrative Therapeutic Palette approach to inform treatment interventions.
3. Assess specific mindfulness practices that facilitate immediate psychophysiological change.
4. Determine how to engage clients to use “experiments in possibility” in sessions and as between-session activities, even when these activities feel unnatural at first.

Outline:

How to apply the four principles of CRM with “last chance” couples as well as with clients suffering from depression, anxiety, and substance abuse

1. The psychological and relational sources of hopelessness will be described, with case examples
2. The research indicating that high motivation is not necessary for change to begin will be summarized
3. The importance of sharing a theory of change with clients, that contrasts with their existing “theory” that change is impossible, will be discussed
4. The five principles of the CRM will be discussed:
 - a. Principle One: Insight does not automatically lead to new action
 - b. Principle Two: Sustained daily motivation is not necessary for change
 - c. Principle Three: Change feels initially artificial and irrational
 - d. Principle Four: The importance of clients conducting nonbinding “creative experiments with possibility” – actions, which constitute “meaning in motion”, that evade clients’ constraining beliefs about the hopelessness of their situation and condition, and that help them step away and out from these beliefs and make meaningful positive discoveries about themselves and their lives’ potential
 - e. Principle Five: The need to link change efforts to specific times of the day and week.
5. Drawing from Heidegger’s phenomenological philosophy of being and the subsequent developments in existential psychology and psychotherapy, the theory supporting the need for “experiments with possibility” will be described

6. Strategies (including issues of timing) for introducing these five principles with persons suffering from depression, substance abuse, and last chance couples will be described and illustrated, with case examples
- How to use the integrative Therapeutic Palette approach to help clients engage in their treatment, even when they may not see the point
 1. The Therapeutic Palette integrative approach to systemic therapy – especially the three “primary colors” or main organizing principles of integrative therapy -- will be described as a guide to choice points in terms of which theories and associated techniques to use at any one time
 2. The research on “client readiness” and therapist “responsiveness” will be described, and the social and perceptual psychology concept (and research) on “affordances” – openings and opportunities for a person to interact with their environment – will be described as it relates to the therapist’s opportunities for introducing interventions in the therapeutic system
 - Specific mindfulness practices that facilitate immediate psychophysiological change
 1. The research on the effectiveness of mindfulness practices will be summarized, and the manner in which mindfulness practices directly affect the autonomic nervous system (ANS) and reduce fight-or-flight sympathetic arousal will be described
 2. Mindful breathing, walking, eating, and drumming will be demonstrated and participants will try all these forms of mindfulness practice
 3. Five Qi Gong moves (Qi Gong is an ancient Chinese form of internal martial arts) will be demonstrated and participants will try these moves
 4. The method of introducing the rationale for mindfulness practices to clients will be described
 - How to offer “experiments in possibility,” even if they feel unnatural or even irrational at first
 1. The method of introducing the practice of “experiments in possibility” to clients and supporting their efforts to engage in these experiments will be described
 2. Participants will have an opportunity to present brief vignettes about individuals or couples they’ve seen in therapy who have experienced hopelessness and the presenter will provide suggestions as to how to help those clients engage in new action despite low or no motivation

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