Building up the working alliance with radicalized offenders

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What is the ‘working alliance’

- It is a collaborative relationship between the client and the professional developed during the in-session interactions.

  - It is a transaction between the client and the professional
  - It involves negotiations
  - It starts at the beginning of the relationship and continue until the end

The elements of the working alliance – Bordin, 1979

- There are three elements essential to the working alliance:
  - Agreement on the goals
    - Responds to the question of ‘why are we here?’
    - Explain the roles and agree on the purpose of the interaction
  - Collaboration on tasks
    - Involve the client in selecting the objectives and how they can be reached
    - Create ‘togetherness’
  - The bond
    - An emotional tie
    - It involves liking, respect and (genuine) concern

How to build strong WA?

- Major concern for researchers and clinicians
- Some had developed concrete strategies that can be used at the beginning of the relationship work.
- Newman (1997):

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  – Speak directly, simply, in everyday language and honestly.
  – Ask about the patient’s thoughts and feelings about being in therapy.
  – Focus on the patient’s distress.
  – Acknowledge the patient’s ambivalence.
  – Explore the purpose and goals of treatment.
  – Discuss the issue of confidentiality.
  – Avoid judgemental comments.
  – Appeal to the patient’s sense of positive self-esteem.
  – Acknowledge that therapy is difficult.
  – Ask open-ended questions, and then be a good listener.

- Developed for addiction but easily adaptable for correctional work.

A knowledge builder

How to build strong WA? Trotter (2006)

- Four crucial strategies:
  - Role clarification
  - Empathy
  - Optimism
  - Humour
  - Self-disclosure

1. Role clarification

- Also known as 'socializing in the role' or 'goals and conditions'
- In other words – 'why are we here?' and 'what can we achieve?'
- It means clarifying with the client what are the aims and objectives, the activities and the mutual expectations
- Crucialy important at the beginning of the relationship but also later on
- What does it mean in practice:
  - Clarifying the dual role of the correctional officer – care and control
  - Defining exactly what is negotiable and what is not (e.g. the frequency of the meetings can be set by the court but when they should take place can be negotiated)
  - Clarifying the limits of confidentiality – depending on the national legislation or agency policy – who has access to the file? When the client needs to agree?
  - Clarify the difference between casework and case-management – what services will be provided by the CO and what services will be provided by others? How the coordination will take place?
  - Define and discuss the client's expectations – correct missconceptions and show interest in other issues associated to preventing reoffending
  - Clarifying the limits of the relationship – make clear to the client the the CO is a 'professional friend' not a 'buddy' – Avoid ambivalence!!
  - Clarify the organizational expectsations – the 'house rules' such as: the dress code, the accetable delays etc.

2. Empathy

- Consists in understanding and **reflecting back** the client’s feelings and thoughts
- Usually reflecting back is very superficial and ineffective – e.g. ‘Yes, I understand you’
- There are five levels of competencies in expressing empathy
- As tis skill is critical for many other strategies, it will be treated separately in the next class.

3. Optimism

- There is no change if there is no optimism and hope

Client:
- Self-efficacy is crucial
- ‘Hope Factor’ is essential in achieving success

Role of staff:
- To inspire ’hope’
- To generate and support self-belief that change is possible

How?
- By showing confidence in the intervention efficacy
- Telling stories about other clients or people who succeeded
- Emphasise the client’s strengths – stress the positive
- Give rewards for small progress

ATTENTION!!
Avoid being over-optimistic or ignore the difficulties. Stay credible!!

4. Humour

- Can play multiple functions:
  - Humanize the interaction
  - Diffuse tension
  - Reframe the context
  - Gives the impression that the client is treated as a person

- Should be used naturally, in the context – DO NOT FORCE IT!!

- It should not humiliate the client

- It should not be based on jokes or anecdotes

5. Self-disclosure

- Helps the client feel like a person and supports reciprocity
- Shows the client the the CO is involved personally in the relationship
- Used with moderation, at the right time and with certain clients – can lead to trust and closeness.

- It means sharing information about yourself with the client
- It can be:
  - Professional self-disclosure
  - Personal self-disclosure – the CO struggles with the same problems in the past – 'I have been unemployed for a few months and I remember how I felt …'

- Pay attention to the cultural context – IS IT ACCEPTABLE IN YOUR CULTURE TO SPEAK ABOUT YOURSELF TO PEOPLE OUTSIDE THE FAMILY?
- Use with moderation !!

5. Self-disclosure – practice advice

- *Use self-disclosure when trust is already developed at a reasonable level. Premature self-disclosure may be threatening to clients and lead to emotional retreat.*

- *Do not share intimate or too-personal information about yourself or your family.*

- *Do not use self-disclosure in excess. The focus should be on the client, not on the worker.*

- *Do not share your own problems excessively. The client may start wonder how someone who cannot solve his own problems could help him.*

First interview

- It should be dedicated to building up a WA
- Not always possible – due to institutional requirements, legal expectations, time restrains etc.
- The first impression always counts but it is not an impression cast in stone – sometimes the quality of WA it very different in 9 months time
- Important to use as many strategies as possible from those described in the previous slides
- Every session should have beginning, middle and an end:
  - Beginning – light converstation, check urgent issues
  - Middle – covers the objectives mutually agreed with the client – e.g. to clarify the roles and any other issues related to supervision
  - Ending – check if all well understoo, summarizes the session, set homework, if need be

How to adapt these general considerations to extreme others – radicalized offenders?

- in-depths interview with 8 front line practitioners from Sweden, US, France, Spain, Germany and Netherlands

- 2 women and 6 men
- Prison work mainly
- Very experienced – 5-20 years experience
- Three of them worked with more than 200 VEOs

Findings:

How are VEOs?

- violent extremist offenders constitute a very heterogenic group;
- their behavior can be driven by ideology, or identity issues or search for belonging;
- they can be socially outcaste;
- they can be highly or poorly educated and so on.

- Based on their previous experience, the participants pictured the ideal type of VEO client as:
  - young, between 18-30 years old,
  - with different educational background (usually below the average level),
  - with shallow religious knowledge,
  - with little achievements in life,
  - coming from families where the father figure was mostly absent.
- What most of the clients share is the deep distrust and open hostility towards the state and state authorities.
- Paranoid attitudes and psychiatric difficulties add sometimes to the profile of this client group.

How to do the relationship work?

- Before the meeting
  - Prepare the meeting
  - Get as much information as possible about the client
  - See what other institutions can share with you
- During the first interview
  - Aim: to ‘get to know the client’ and develop WA
  - Start with a brief presentation of yourself and your role – ‘my focus is welbeing’
  - Be transparent and honest
  - Pay attention to power imbalance – maximise choices
  - Give client some degree of control
  - Find some common ground
  - Use self-disclosure
  - Show concern – ‘it is always about the person’
  - Develop emotional and social competency
  - Provide practical help ‘even little help can help a lot’
  - Listen Listen and Listen

When do we have enough relationship to move on?

- Different answers
- Sometimes after 20-30 sessions
- When the client is related and comfortable talking to the CO
- Less lies
- More open postures
- More ‘change talk’
- Client starts talking about his new life – anxiety regarding post-release, relations with family etc.

The don’ts

- Do not speak about the terrorist activity during the first sessions
- Do not use confrontation
- Do not speak about the client’s religion
- Avoid taking notes

Conclusion

'It depends on how the client responds, and the mood, and the atmosphere, and the music …' (EJ2)