

Seminar Manual

Effective Techniques for Dealing with Highly Resistance Clients[©]

**Innovative Ideas and Approaches to
Prevent, Avoid, and Resolve
Therapeutic Resistance**

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Understanding and Conceptualizing Resistance

Conventional Definitions

- "Any client behavior that exhibits a reluctance, on the part of the client, to participate in the tasks of therapy as set forward by the therapist,"
- "...any behavior that indicates covert or overt opposition to the therapist, the counseling process, or the therapist's agenda," (Bischoff & Tracey, 1995, p. 488).

Alternative Perspectives: The Social Interaction Theorists

Resistance occurs as a result of a "...negative interpersonal dynamic between the therapist and the client" (Otani, 1989, p. 459).

"Resistance is defined as psychological forces aroused in the client that restrain acceptance of influence (acceptance of the counselor's suggestion) and are generated by the way the suggestion is stated and by the characteristics of the counselor stating it" (Strong and Matross, 1973, p. 26).

Read through the statements below and notice how resistance is defined around therapist behavior and not as something that resides within clients. As you read, perhaps you will become aware of your own reticence toward what is being suggested. Are you resisting or are these ideas stated in a way that is hard to accept at this moment?

- Resistance occurs when the counselor fails to recognize that *all clients* are ambivalent about change.
- Resistance sometimes occurs when the counselor wants more for clients than clients want for themselves.
- Resistance is a result of the therapist being too intent on his/her own agenda.
- Resistance = counselor expectations.
- Resistance occurs when the counselor starts solving the client's problems.
- Resistance occurs when the therapist is going too fast.
- Resistance occurs when the counselor does not know what to do.
- Resistance occurs when the counselor asks the wrong question or makes a poorly worded, unacceptable statement. To the client your statement was unfathomable and unrealizable.
- Resistance is "...anything the client does that makes the therapist feel inadequate" (Pipes & Davenport, 1990).
- Resistance occurs when the counselor fails to cooperate with the client.
- Whenever you feel that your client is being resistant, you also must be resisting your client's position. From this perspective, *you* are being resistant. When considered in this context, resistance is a *counselor problem*.

When you closely examine personal struggles, you discover that resistance is a natural, necessary part of every client's problems. It is neither good nor bad, and the knowledgeable counselor neither abandons, rescues, nor attacks the client because of his/her resistance. *Resistance is the problem at hand. And, you cannot push or verbally bludgeon your client into genuine change.*

Resistance and Influence: Breaking the Negative Cycle

A general hierarchical list of the least forceful to most forceful methods to influence:

least forceful	completely non-directive
	indirectly suggest
	directly suggest
	provide advice/educate
	confront
most forceful	punitive force

Resistance is created when the method of influence is _____ with the clients' current propensity to accept the manner in which the influence is delivered.

The Positive Side of Resistance

Common Errors That Create and Foster Resistance

Your Client is Not Making Progress Toward What?

Why Most People Come to Therapy?

The Essential Ingredient Necessary Before We Help Anyone

The Perils of Assuming a Knowing Attitude

Rogers is Still Right and Why People Change

Timing is Everything and "Baby Steps" are Not a Joke

Accepting the Invitation to Take the Pain

Failure to Recognize and Respond to Clients' Stage of Change

1. Precontemplation: _____

2. Contemplation: _____

3. Preparation: _____

4. Action: _____

5. Maintenance: _____

Therapeutic Tip: Before each session, review the stage of change in which you assess your client to be and acquire a mindset going into each session to respond accordingly.

General Principles for Dealing with Resistance

Basic Principle #1: Do the Unexpected _____

Basic Principle #2: Slow the Pace, Focus on Details, Process Feelings & Meaning

Basic Principle #3: Treat Clients' Resistance with Respect _____

Basic Principle #4: Maintain an Attitude of Naïve Puzzlement

Basic Principle #5: Never Label Clients with Terms That Imply Resistance

Basic Principle #6: Focus Where Clients are Stuck _____

Basic Principle #7: Frame All Desires in the Positive _____

Basic Principle #8: If They Are Not Confused, Confuse Them _____

Basic Principle #9: Resist the Urge to Confront Initially _____

All a client has to do to thwart your efforts is _____.

Adapted from King, 1992

Managing "I Don't Know" Responses

Responding to "I Don't Know"

The key to responding to "I don't know" is to respond to the _____ behind the response. Examples of responses that interpret "I don't know" at face value include:

"At this moment, you are really stumped as you search for an answer."

"You really cannot think of a possible approach that you can take that appears better than what you are doing."

If client has stated "I don't know" in order to avoid revealing some threatening reality about him/herself, simply empathize about your suspicion:

"It is difficult and scary to actually say aloud the truth about..."

"You are really uncomfortable facing this aspect of your life."

If you suspect the "I don't know" is a peacekeeping deflection, then respond similarly with an understanding of this perspective.

"You are concerned that if you provide the answer it will cause a lot of controversy and conflict among your family."

"You are reluctant to tell me the answer because you worry about how I might take it."

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How to Avoid "I Don't Know" Responses

1. Simply omit the question altogether. Instead, respond with the empathic statement.

Example: "I sense that you are stuck as to what to do, you have no idea how to begin doing something about your problems, and you are really searching for some new approach that might work."

2. Change your question or statement to something *less* threatening.

Example: Rather than asking, "What should you have said to your spouse?" Say instead, "That must have felt very demeaning to have that said to you, tell me what you *wish* you would have done."

Inquire of a Wise Friend

The Classic Pretend Technique

"Pretend you weren't confused, what would you be saying if you knew what you wanted."

"Make up an answer."

"Guess what you think you might say if you did know."

NOTES

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