

5 TIPS FOR DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN THE CLINIC.

When communicating effectively, the practitioner is building a relationship with their client – and this is vital for a good therapeutic (or personal!) relationship. But what happens when you're having difficult conversations with your clients? Or when the client you're speaking with, is difficult? These conversations create discomfort, and often, instinctively, they are avoided by the practitioner or they are minimised with the practitioner not expressing their true thoughts about the situation. Here are 5 tips to help with difficult conversations.

1. Help the client feel heard

A breakdown in communication often occurs when the client doesn't feel heard. Some subtle phrases to prevent communication from breaking down, include "I hear what you're saying", "I acknowledge this is difficult for you" or "Can you help me to understand?"

2. Ask open ended questions

This builds rapport and encourages your client to share their thoughts about their current situation. Asking, "How do you feel?" is an important question, but clinicians don't often ask this question. Often they're afraid of the client's answer, and in particular, a potentially emotional response. However, without emotion and discomfort, clients are less likely to consider change. Whatever your clients reasons are, it's important to ask the question and to acknowledge, validate and reflect what your client is saying.

3. Avoid telling people what they *should* be doing

No one likes to be told what to do. Instead, try saying, "I recommend", or "I suggest". Reframing "should" to "could" is also useful. Asking, "What *could* you try?" or "How *could* you improve this?" is an effective way to engage with your client in a positive way.

4. Come from a place of openness and curiosity

This approach focuses on problem solving without judgement, and can help you explore with the client how they could move forward. It requires patience and trust that the client will find the solutions that will work for them. This can be challenging, but reflect on your role as the practitioner and whether you want to be right, or whether you want to support your client to make the decision that makes them happy and is right for them.

5. Use assertive communication

Assertive communication focuses on using "I" statements, such as, "I feel... I encourage... I believe...". This language is preferred over "you" statements because it encourages the practitioner to take responsibility for how **they** think and feel, rather than blaming the client for their current situation. "You" statements can come across as aggressive and accusatory.