

# Mindfulness, Compassion, and the Therapist

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## The therapist and the therapeutic relationship

- Therapist characteristics and behaviors associated with positive therapeutic outcomes  
(Ah, Carl, we never knew ye)
  - Literature on the power of the therapeutic relationship
    - General versus specific factors
  - Empathy
    - Feeling of feelings
  - Attunement
    - Interconnectedness, attachment reinforcement
  - Nonjudgment and acceptance

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## Therapist mindfulness

- Capacity to focus unconstrained, nonjudgmental, here-and-now attention on the client
  - “Bare” attention to client and client’s experience
  - Freud’s “evenly hovering attention”
- Mindfulness of countertransference
  - Intrusion of client-triggered memories, associated thoughts, feelings, and cognitions
  - Metacognitive awareness: “Just thoughts,” “Just feelings”

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## Therapist mindfulness

- Mindfulness as antidote to vicarious traumatization
  - Sitting with the client's pain
  - Noncatastrophizing, nonidentifying
- Communication of pain and chaos as opportunity – “posttraumatic growth”
  - Nonpathologizes trauma, injury
  - Suggests that client is not a collection of wounds, but rather a person who is still growing and can hope
  - Reduces impacts on therapist because “it isn't bad”

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## Therapist compassion

- Non-egocentric caring and felt desire to relieve suffering
  - Pity as the “near enemy”
- Psychobiological impacts on client
 

Activates attachment circuitry:

  - results in release of reward-for-connection neurochemistry
  - down-regulates fear detection and fear response systems
  - decreases defensiveness and increases openness
  - Allows relational processing and counterconditions conditioned responses to relational memories

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## Developing compassion as therapist

- Permission to care versus training to be neutral
  - Why you got into this field in the first place
  - False attributions of naiveté, do-gooding, versus intelligent, boundary-aware appreciation of humanness and positive aspects of client
- The insights associated with *dependent arising*
- Meditation and mindfulness training
  - *Metta*

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References

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