

Mindfulness, Compassion, and the Therapist

John Briere, Ph.D.
 Department of Psychiatry and the Behavioral Sciences
 Psychological Trauma Program
 Keck School of Medicine
 University of Southern California

www.johnbriere.com

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

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”

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”

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

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*

References

- Briere, J., & Scott, C. (2012). *Principles of trauma therapy: A guide to symptoms, evaluation, and treatment, 2nd edition.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Briere, J. (in progress). Pain and suffering: A synthesis of Buddhist and Western approaches to trauma. In V. Follette, J. Briere, J. Hopper, D. Rozelle, & D. Rome, D. *Contemplative methods in trauma treatment: Integrating mindfulness and other approaches.* NY: Guilford.
- Germer, C.K., & Siegel, R.D. (2012). *Compassion and wisdom in psychotherapy.* NY: Guilford
- Kornfield, J. (2008). *The wise heart: A guide to the universal teachings of Buddhist psychology.* NY: Bantam.
