

The Trauma Therapist Project

Ten Questions for Trauma Therapists to ask themselves

- 1. What can I do that will allow me to best prepare for the client I am about to see?** For some clients we may want to prepare for a session a specific way (eg by taking a walk, or relaxing), for others we might best prepare by doing something else (eg focusing on the previous session's themes or tangents, reading a relevant article, book, or getting supervision). Have we considered these possibilities?
- 2. Am I able, and willing, to hear what my client might share?** This work can be quite challenging and the stories we often hear can be difficult to stomach, even for the most experienced. How can we prepare ourselves? Have we prepared ourselves? And how can we care for ourselves when such experiences arise?
- 3. Am I willing to allow myself to be guided by where my client is leading me?** Allowance such as this requires presence, confidence in oneself and one's abilities, and a knowing in the strength and trust of the clinical relationship.
- 4. Do I have a preconceived agenda for the client sitting before me?** It is often easy to slip into a preconceived idea of a direction a particular session or client should go. Yet it is often this belief which forces us to rigidly implement certain interventions which may perfectly suit our purpose, yet may not be in the client's best interest. How aware of this are we?
- 5. Do I have colleagues who can support me?** If you've been listening to The Trauma Therapist Podcast then you know that most every master trauma therapist recommends having a support network and not going it alone! This is crucial.
- 6. How much am I invested in being right or in proving a point or in using a particular intervention?** I think this is something many of us have experienced. However our need to firmly structure the session, shift or guide the client without their consent, or employ a specific intervention at whatever cost, can often do more harm than good, and is often an indicator that we are not listening as well as we should.
- 7. Whose issues are being worked on in the session? Our's or the client's?** This is something Linda Curran talks about on the Podcast. Are you willing to do the work on yourself? Have you ever been in your own therapy? Have you explored and

discovered your blind spots, challenges, and your ability to hear the stories your clients may share?

8. Is my client able and willing to reflect on their somatic experience? a. This is a significant topic, especially within the realm of trauma. As Bessel van der Kolk says, For individuals who have been traumatized, oftentimes the body becomes the enemy. Therefore, much of the treatment revolves around helping the client learn to befriend their bodies. If the client is able to reflect on their somatic experience (eg sit in awareness of how they're feeling), then am I creating safe opportunities for them to practice this in session with the goal of helping them to know and feel that the danger has passed? b. If our client is unable to reflect on their somatic experience, then am I aware of the reason?

9. Am I aware of the signs which indicate my client is becoming activated in session? (eg heart pounding, foot tapping, hand wringing, face becoming flushed). Is my client aware of these signs? Is this something we can discuss and thereby use to create further rapport (eg by instilling trust, stabilization and safety?)
a. And have I created a safetyplan with my client in the event that they do become activated in session?

10. Do I find myself talking because I am too uncomfortable with silence and/or fearful that it might be perceived as though I don't know what I am doing? This is a good question, and I think a common thought for many of us. Yet there is strength in silence, and for what it creates in the session, for example, an allowance for thoughts and feelings to arise; for tension to rear itself; and for time to think and respond.