

# LET'S TALK ABOUT...

## → *The Therapeutic Relationship*

There are five major elements in a therapeutic relationship.

1. It's client/patient-centered
2. It's a fiduciary relationship, a position of trust where money and confidentiality are involved
3. It's structured
4. It's a safe environment
5. The roles are clear

### **Client-Centered**

The therapeutic relationship is a very special kind of relationship and is often referred to as client centered. Client-centered means that every action that the practitioner takes is in the service of the client's needs and not the practitioner's needs. Trouble often begins when the practitioner takes an action just because they feel like it and not because it is therapeutically necessary.

Client-centered also means that the client has a voice in the process and must agree to the course of treatment for it to proceed. In a client-centered relationship, the client has the right to expect that the practitioner always acts in the client's best interest. When this occurs, the client feels safe and attended. The client-centered relationship considers the client as a partner who shares decision-making power.

In *The Power of Touch*, Phyllis K. Davis, Ph.D., describes a list of the characteristics

of an “effective practitioner” that includes being motivated by the needs of the client. She emphasizes that creating a space for a supportive and nurturing environment begins with the practitioner’s commitment to personal and professional excellence.

In this environment, overall health improves and enables everyone the practitioner touches to make a fuller connection with their lives.

## **Fiduciary Relationship**

All healthcare practitioners have a fiduciary relationship with their clients. Fiduciary is a term that’s applied to a professional in whom a client places his trust. The client is putting their well-being in the hands of the practitioner, and there’s an implicit contract that the practitioner places the client’s interests above and before the practitioner’s.

Protecting and maintaining the boundaries of professional relationships is the professional's responsibility, even if the client requests or instructs the professional to behave otherwise. The practitioner/client relationship and the treatment choices must be continually monitored.

Also, because somatic practitioners are in positions of power relative to their clients, the law holds them to a higher standard of behavior than in business relationships with a lower level of a power differential.

## **Structured**

Other elements of the therapeutic relationship include limited and structured time spent together. The client comes for a session each month or some other time interval for a specific type of treatment. Within a prescribed time frame, certain

expected activities occur. Each person has a clearly defined role in these interactions. The client comes for help, and the practitioner is there to help the client.

## **Safe Environment**

The client has the right to expect that the emotional and physical environment is safe and does not include inappropriate personal comments or sexual advances.

## **Clear Roles**

In a therapeutic relationship, the roles are clear. The client comes for a service or help of some kind. The client communicates what they would like and places themselves in a vulnerable position. The therapist's role is to provide a service to the client in a safe environment.