Shall We Dance? Embracing and Managing Countertransference within the Milieu

Rice Child + Family Center
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Children’s Home + Aid

- **MISSION**
  - To give children help, hope and opportunity.

- **VISION**
  - To build a better life for children, youth and families.

- **SERVICES**: adoption services, child + family counseling, early childhood care and education, foster care, intact family services, parent support, residential services, youth services.
Rice Child + Family Center

Our clients:

Ages 6-16 years old

• 88% have experienced physical abuse, sexual abuse, and/or neglect;
• 75% have experienced at least one psychiatric hospitalization;
• 50% have been through six failed foster placements; and
• 20% have been in ten or more failed placements.
Our Team:

- Director, program manager, clinical supervisor, transitions coordinator/supervisor to case managers, 5 unit supervisors, 5 therapists, 5 case managers. Each unit has a *triad*: 1) unit supervisor; 2) case manager; and 3) therapist
- 64 *residential counselors*
- Administrative assistants
- Nurses, psychiatrists, pediatrician
- Volunteers, tutors, mentors
We will:

1) Define the WHAT of transference/countertransference

2) Discuss WHY we need to manage countertransference within our milieus

3) Discuss and identify WHEN, WHERE, HOW to manage countertransference
Transference/Countertransference Dance
Transference \(\leftrightarrow\) Countertransference

- The interaction of past relationships and experiences in the present between our clients and ourselves
- Relational framework; exist together
- Can provide deeper understanding about our clients and ourselves
- Needs to be managed
Transference

Transferring

relationships

experiences

CLIENT
Countertransference

STAFF

Transferring

relationships

experiences
Countertransference

- Residential staff transferring client, coworkers, system

- Countertransferring
  1. Past relationships (caregiver)
  2. Past positive and negative experiences

- Also occurs within a wide range of relational contexts:
  - Organization, clients supervisors, colleagues, coworkers
Life Train

- Past Attachments
- Life Events
- Trauma
- Loss
Why talk about countertransference?

• “We need to be careful not to get caught up in a re-enactment to that point that we literally take on and act out a negative role, to some degree, it is inevitable that we do get ‘caught up.’ This is due to the unconscious and powerful process at work. The important thing is that we maintain the capacity to observe ourselves and reflect on the positions we find ourselves in. . . . Barton, S., Gonzalez, R., & Tomlinson, P. (2012).”
Example of a Countertransference Dance

Perpetrator

Victim

Rescuer
Experiential
Notice any.

- Feelings of guilt
- Rescue fantasies
- Rage
- Hatred
- Hopelessness
- Helplessness
- Anxiety
- Terror
“Presence is vital to our clinical work. Nothing substitutes for presence.” ~Daniel Siegel
Building Skills within our Milieus

- **Mindfulness**— being fully present in the moment. Right here, right now. To be open and aware without judgment.
- **Metacognition**— active control over the process of thinking. The thinking about your thinking. The knowing about knowing.
- **Tracking**— involves communicating what we are experiencing, moment by moment. Tuning into our internal world (within what is happening around us). Sensory experience + observation.
- **Mindsight**— process that enables us to 1) **monitor** and 2) **modify** the flow of energy within the triangle of well-being.
Current Interventions/Modalities

- Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI)
- Structured Psychotherapy for Adolescents Responding to Chronic Stress (SPARCS)
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)

- Promote:
  - Self-Awareness
  - Mindfulness
  - Reflection
  - Present moment tracking, thinking
Tripod to *Mindsight*

- Openness
- Observation
- Objectivity
Triception
The Triangle of Well-Being

• One aspect of Mindsight
• Integration of:
  1) Brain: the flow of energy and information
  2) Mind: where energy and info is monitored and modified
  3) Relationships: how these aspects are communicated within relationship(s)
The Case of James

I’m noticing that... . . .

NO. NO. NO. NO
(Insert some cuss words)
NO!
When we manage countertransference

We:

• Manage our own reactions
• Create experiences that are rooted in the here-and-now (rather than the past).
• Decrease potential for reenactments
• Increase intention
• Create new experiences of relationship
RAIN

• Recognize

• Allow

• Investigate inner experience

• Non-identification (Natural Awareness)
RAIN Practice
WHEN and WHERE

- **Trainings**— introduce terms in initial/ongoing trainings
- **Supervision**
- **Triad Meetings**— unit supervisor, case manager, therapist
- **Report**
- **Team Meetings**
- **Informal moments**
Resources for Cultivating Skills

• Websites with books, podcasts, meditations:
  www.tarabrach.com
  www.jackkornfield.com
  www.jonkabat-zinn.com

• Yoga
• Martial Arts
References


