

Overview

This standard is about engagement with clients as an ongoing process, as well as a significant feature of the early part of therapy. Developing 'systemic rapport' is an essential feature of a therapeutic environment for working with people in the room who may have differing ability, beliefs and communication styles. Building the therapeutic relationship in family and systemic therapy is a complex and multi-person task and this standard shows how the therapist is able to participate in the building of alliances and relationships in a way that is sensitive to all the clients he or she works with.

This standard describes therapeutic practice that has been shown to benefit families and other clients engaged in family and systemic therapy (see reference in the additional information section on page 6). To apply this standard, practitioners also need to take account of the multiple problems and complex co-morbidities that clients may bring to therapy. Family and systemic therapy should be offered as part of an explicit and structured approach agreed within the treatment team and with the client and the system.

Users of this standard will need to ensure that practice reflects up to date information and policies. This standard should be understood in the context of the Digest of National Occupational Standards for Psychological Therapies.

SFHPT27

Engage significant members of the client's system

Performance criteria

You must be able to:

- P1 meet the client and system using the most effective method to promote engagement
- P2 make connections with the significant members of the system by:
 - P2.1 attuning yourself to language and non-verbal behaviour which respects their cultural-social context
 - P2.2 ensuring that the individual and developmental needs and abilities of all relevant members of the system are taken into account
 - P2.3 even handedly enabling all members of the system present to be actively involved
 - P2.4 showing an interest in each individual and their respective communication style, preference and abilities
- P3 attend to the power differentials in the system and their impact on what can be said
- P4 maintain a therapeutic context which enables trust and space for all through negotiated rules and agreements
- P5 develop and maintain a therapeutic alliance with all relevant members of the system that is inclusive of differences between you and members of the system
- P6 join the client system in order to experience, understand and intervene in the interaction patterns
- P7 adopt an approach throughout therapy that:
 - P7.1 elicits feedback and questions from the client and system about your work and on tasks/events between sessions
 - P7.2 is 'not knowing' and curious, communicates to the client and system a genuine attempt to find out about their experiences, and shows their understanding of them
 - P7.3 demonstrates the ability to listen in an empathic, responsive, non-judgemental listening way which shows an openness to all possibilities
 - P7.4 gives sufficient time, attention and validation to more than one belief system and point of view within the session unless abusive power imbalances require challenging
- P8 match the clients' communication styles to form an alliance strong enough to tolerate an examination of different perspectives
- P9 evaluate and address any invitation or impulse to align with any member of the system for its effects on the work, therapeutic alliance and family relationships

SFHPT27

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Knowledge and understanding

You need to know and understand:

The therapeutic relationship

- K1 ethical, non-oppressive and anti-discriminatory practices
- K2 how to form and maintain collaborative relationships in age and culturally appropriate ways with everyone in the system
- K3 how to make use of self and relational reflexivity to enhance therapeutic relationships
- K4 the impact of personal and professional narratives on the therapeutic process

Systemic principles that inform the therapeutic approach

You need to know and understand:

- K5 the range of contexts in which the client needs to be viewed
- K6 how the contexts manifest and constitute the system of significance
- K7 the personal, family and cultural factors and interactions between those factors that shape the individual
- K8 ways in which people understand themselves and the world around them
- K9 the influence of power relationships and different socio-cultural contexts on the development of meaning, relationships and behaviour for the client and the therapist
- K10 the influence of varied individual accounts of the same event on relationships and understanding in the system
- K11 the influence of recursive cycles of feedback on systems and individuals' narratives, beliefs, emotions, feelings, actions, interactions and relationships

Culturally sensitive practice

You need to know and understand:

- K12 dominant and alternative constructions of identity
- K13 the character of your own cultural assumptions and habits
- K14 the significance of your own cultural assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes
- K15 how to explore differences across and within cultures
- K16 how to engage with the client where there is potential for distance due to different world views between you and the client
- K17 how to identify cultural themes and explore different meaning and perspectives within the client's cultural framework

Systemic approaches that enable therapeutic change

You need to know and understand:

- K18 how members of the system have, and can make use of, resources that can promote resilience and maintain change

SFHPT27

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- K19 methods of utilising the members of the system and the system as a whole as a resource for the promotion and maintenance of change
- K20 how the therapist, colleagues and the broader professional system interact with, and form part of, the system with which they are working
- K21 the role of historical and trans-generational factors, stressful life events and their impact on family functioning in the development and maintenance of psychological disturbance, health and recovery

Basic principles and rationale of systemic approaches

You need to know and understand:

- K22 various systemic models and other related concepts and their limitations
- K23 theories of systemic change and clients' theories of change
- K24 the assumptions contained in the various systemic models
- K25 how to develop an account of patterns in relationships in families and wider systems
- K26 family based attachment theories across the life cycle from a systemic perspective

Risk

You need to know and understand:

- K27 the assessment of risks to individuals and the risks they pose to others in a range of settings
- K28 current legislation and local guidelines and procedures about child and vulnerable adult safeguarding
- K29 the relevant professional systems of health care, social care, local authority and education applicable to safeguarding
- K30 how to balance the risk or safety and opportunity in therapeutic interventions
- K31 ethical issues of valid consent for all members of a system

Specific systemic techniques

You need to know and understand:

- K32 how to reframe problem descriptions and externalising problems
- K33 play and other creative verbal and nonverbal techniques for working with children
- K34 how and when to use enactment techniques
- K35 how and when to use problem solving techniques
- K36 how and when to adopt a challenging perspective

Development and health

You need to know and understand:

- K37 the physical, psychological, emotional and social development of a person through the life cycle
- K38 mental illness in all its acute, florid and less distinguishable forms as this affects family life

SFHPT27

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Additional Information

External links

This standard is derived from research reported in Roth, A., Pilling, S. and Stratton, P (2009) *The competences required to deliver effective Systemic Therapies* Centre for Outcomes Research & Effectiveness (CORE) University College London.

This standard has indicative links with the following dimension within the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework (October 2004):

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SFHPT27

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