10. Gaining and Maintaining Trust – Page Version

Introduction

Trust is very hard to gain and maintain and very easy to lose. This is particularly true when you’re working people who have been psychologically traumatized. As we will see in the course on psychology later in the series, loss of trust is one of the most typical reactions to traumatization. Everything that the caregiver does has to do with gaining and maintaining trust. All of the qualities that we discuss in this course are a part of that. Here, we highlight a few qualities that we haven’t yet mentioned. Another group of qualities involving trust has to do with ethics. We will deal with ethics in the next section.

The characteristics described in this section and the next form the foundation for a specific type of communication between the client and the caregiver. We will describe that in detail in the next course, namely that on communication.

As always, we ask you to carry out all of the activities given. As always, when writing things that can be viewed by other people, we remind you not to say anything that could reveal the identity of another person. That could be damaging and is unethical.

Honesty

It is very easy to tell a client something that he or she wants to hear. The caregiver who does that thinks that doing it will make life easier for both the client and the caregiver in the first instance. While this may calm the client for a while, it destroys the client’s trust in the caregiver the minute that the client discovers what is going on. In our view, it is far better for both the client and the caregiver to have the truth, however difficult that may be, out in the open. That makes it possible for both to deal with the real situation.

Activities

Describe a situation in which the client was not told the truth. What happened in the short term? What happened in the long term?

Describe a situation in which the client was told the truth, which was difficult. What happened in the short term? What happened in the long term?

Are there situations in which you should not be honest with a client?

Openness

Openness is similar to honesty but is not the same. It is possible to be honest but not open about what is happening or about what you think. Again, while this can lead to difficult sessions if the circumstances are challenging, being open assists in the relationship. With openness, everyone knows where he or she stands and can act accordingly. In our view, the short-term difficulties lead to long-term trust and a better relationship.

Activities

Describe a situation in which you were not open with a client, whether or not you were honest. What happened in the short-term and the long-term?

Describe a situation in which you were open with a client. What happened?

Are there situations in which you should not be open with a client?

Directness

Again, we find directness essential for a good relationship between the client and the caregiver. Going around things confuses the situation. This also may lead to the client, or, for that matter, the caregiver, being able to deny a specific situation, which is not good for either the client or the caregiver or anyone else concerned. Again, this is one of the elements of a style of communication that we think is important in working with traumatized clients.

Activities

Describe a situation in which you were not direct with a client. What happened?

Describe a situation in which you were direct with a client, even if the situation was difficult. What happened?

Are there situations in which you should not be direct with a client?

Keeping Promises

Keeping promises is one of the fundamental ways to keep and maintain trust. Not doing so destroys trust virtually immediately. This is true of the promises made by the caregiver to the client. It also is true of promises made by the client to the caregiver. Caregivers, and others, frequently promise clients things to calm them down or to give them hope. Those promises must be kept or must not be made at all. There are, of course, exceptions when circumstances arise where the caregiver cannot keep a promise and doesn’t know that when he or she makes the promise. It is then the responsibility of the caregiver to speak to the client about this in great detail and at length. Promises that the client makes to the caregiver that are not kept must be dealt with during one or more sessions. Discussion of these can lead to greater insight by the client. Here, we also include such seemingly trivial promises such as coming to sessions on time.

Activities

Describe a situation in which the caregiver made promises that he or she didn’t fulfill. What happened? What were the consequences for the relationship?

Describe a situation in which the client made promises that he or she did not fulfill. What happened? What were the consequences for the relationship? How did the caregiver deal with this?

Are there circumstances under which promises should not be fulfilled?

Humanity

We discussed the necessity for humanity and concern for the client at the beginning of this course. We repeat this point here as a basic element of gaining and maintaining trust. Without it, the client will not trust the caregiver.

Activities

Describe a situation in which there was little humanity shown to a client. How did that affect the trust between the caregiver and the client and the relationship in general?

Describe a situation in which humanity was shown toward the client. Again, how did that affect the trust between the caregiver and the client and the relationship in general?

Are there situations in which it is not necessary to show humanity toward the client?

Privacy and Ethics

Privacy of the client’s information and ethics in general are so important to gaining and maintaining trust that we have devoted the following section of this course to them.

Final Activities

What are your experiences with gaining and maintaining trust with clients? Describe positive and negative situations.

We have tried to be relatively inclusive in describing elements that contribute to trust. What have we left out? Do you think that we have included unnecessary things?

Final Remarks

Gaining and maintaining trust is a fundamental element in the relationship between the client and the caregiver. Once lost, trust is almost impossible to regain. The qualities that we have discussed here also form the basis for a type of communication that we find essential in working with clients.