

Helping Clients Prepare for Change

Exploring Ambivalence in Abuse Prevention



Safer Society Webinar • Lauren Garder, LPC-S

By the end of this hour

Participants will be able to...

01

Recognize ambivalence as something to approach with curiosity not certainty

02

Identify common thinking traps that inhibit help

03

Understand how to respond to clients in ways that grow accountability and soften minimizing

Throughline: People persuade themselves. Our job is to help the reasons for change stay loud.

Ambivalence can bring out the fixing reflex

The fixing reflex often starts from good intentions.

**Out of the rush of good we
desire for clients, we can
accidentally squelch the
process**

Why good helpers get stuck



Victim safety

We want the harm to stop.



Children

We want families protected.



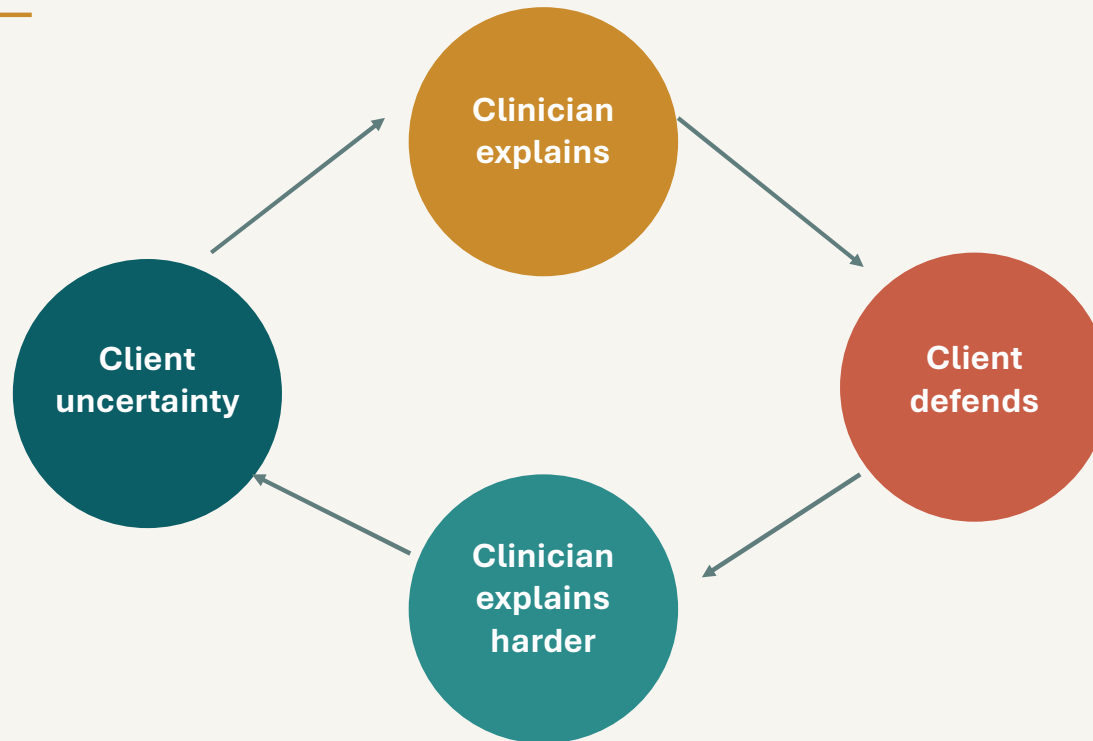
Client future

We can imagine a better life.

Good clinicians do not push because they do not care. They push because they care so much.

The fixing reflex

When our discomfort drives the intervention



The more we explain, the more they rehearse why change is not necessary, possible, or fair.

Certainty crowds curiosity

CERTAINTY

“I know what needs to happen.”



CURIOSITY

“I wonder what this means.”

Your first idea is a rough draft not a finished product!

Common thinking traps

The moves that feel helpful but often stifle change talk.

1

Treat behavior, not mindsets

Skills without mindset change can teach clients what to say to get through treatment, or check boxes instead of cultivate growth

3

Offer solutions that may not exist

“Get your family back” or “save the relationship” may be motivators, not realistic solutions

2

Convince, persuade, push

Arguing for change often leaves the client arguing for the status quo

4

Rush change

We ask clients to identify the problem, commit to change, and know how to change at the same time

Treating the wave, not the current

Behavior



identity

fear

shame

values

beliefs

New skills without mindset change can become better compliance, not deeper accountability.

Normalize ambivalence

The first change statement is rarely a lifetime commitment.

“I should go to the gym.”

1

There is a
problem

5

There are
reasons to
address the
problem

There are
ways to
address the
problem

Ambivalence is two sides of the same coin

Reasons to stay the same

control

familiar

avoid shame

protect identity

keep relationship

?

Reasons to change

kids

peace

freedom

self-respect

healthier relationships

Ambivalence is data

Hard conversations
Minimizing
Defending the status quo

Data to tell us what the behavior does for them, what values have influence

Values drive behavior, intentionally or not

Values being met

power

security

influence

Values being neglected

family

peace

connection

leadership

Change talk and sustain talk



Listen for accountability hiding inside minimizing, denying, and blaming.

Respond to the part you want more of

Reflect accountability, do not chase every minimization overtly

“I shouldn’t have yelled in front of the kids, but she knows how to push my buttons.”



Part of you recognizes that even if someone pushes your buttons, yelling in front of the kids was not okay.

“I know my kids were scared, but I wasn’t trying to hurt anybody.”



It really bothers you knowing your kids were frightened by what happened.

“I never meant for things to get that out of control.”



You took your behavior further than you wanted to, and that is weighing on you.

Example

“I know I should not have grabbed her phone, but she was lying to me and I needed to know what was going on.”

Do not lead with:

“You had no right to do that.”

“See, that is controlling behavior.”

“But you understand why that is abusive, right?”

Try reflecting:

“Part of you knows taking the phone crossed a line, and another part of you was trying to calm your fear that you were being lied to.”

Then elicit: “What do you make of that now?”

Ambivalence is not an obstacle, it's an on ramp

Questions