Don’t Be Boring
Connecting Effectively with People in Early Recovery

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Dual Diagnosis is a demanding field, in no small part because the population is often surly and distractible.

What’s their problem?
• They’re fogged up and sleepy
• They’re defensive and angry
• You’re boring

They’re fogged up and sleepy

• A desensitized reward pathway
  • True or false: The more rewarding something is, the more likely you are to do that behavior?
  • Remember that this isn’t new—they have been using for a period of time, and developed a “new normal.”
  • What does that mean for their experience with us?

The way you feel influences the way you think!

Feel
• Nothing is fun to me anymore
• The only thing that I feel is my drug
• Baseline emotions are overwhelming
• Lack of distress tolerance that lead to use in the first place

Think
• This isn’t worth it.
• I’m just an addict, what’s the point?
• I can’t do this!
• I used to avoid this—RUUUN!!!
They’re defensive and angry: Building Relationships with Trauma Survivors

Most people are never explicitly taught how to have healthy relationships.

A lot of what we do is re-parenting.
We model and encourage healthy connections.

Which is weird and scary for a lot of our patients.

Trauma is overly-effective learning

• A lifetime of poisonous and corrosive relationships give people good reasons to reject new attachments.

• You might be the first healthy person to like them. And they have no idea what to do with that.

BUT WAIT! There’s more!!!

• The way you THINK influences the way you FEEL

• Automatic thoughts—AKA learned perception.

• This is a Bio-psycho feedback loop.
  • We are fighting against this feedback loop. We can influence how they are thinking, and thus how they feel about the information presented.
Emotions make things real for us!

- We can logically know something, but we tend to believe how we feel about something.

- A good example:
  - You're having a bad day,........

Don’t work harder than they are

Remember, their B+ looks a lot different than your B+.

Some days a person's best effort may involve a lot of screaming and crying. That does not change the fact that it's their best effort.

Mix clinical judgement and compassion to set realistic expectations.

Carry the relationship

- Patience will mark you as a useful resource.
- Speak explicitly about emotions. Think and react out loud.
- Use your emotional boundaries to protect both of you.
Hold the lines for them:
- Privacy vs Secrecy
- Just because you thought it doesn’t mean you have to say it.
- You never have to justify yourself.
- “No” is a complete sentence.

Modelling healthy boundaries in real-time

The goal is to be able to stand next to someone while they cry.

“Shrink the bubble”

Your humanity makes you a good counselor.
Your resilience makes you a safe counselor.

Love and Logic: Empower and Protect

- Educational Psychology gives us the scaffolding to encourage critical, individualized, self-empowered thinking while still working within rules and expectations.
- Built for children, works on everybody.
BE WRONG PUBLICLY AND FEARLESSLY AND OFTEN

I mean. Calm down. Don’t be terrible on purpose.

• Model the power in admitting mistakes.
• Absorb criticism with grace.
• Make it look easy to be reasonable, inspire people to try it themselves.

Enforce Healthy Boundaries

• Consistent transparency (practice admitting mistakes here) (practice acknowledging successes here)
• Frequent reminders: “We have a professional relationship.” “I see how hard you’re working.”
• Be honest without making your feelings their problem (be cautious of caretakers)

Self-Disclosure: Risky Business, Big Payoff
Deserve the attention you have earned.

You’ve made it clear you’re both knowledgeable and safe. Now what?

You’re boring.

Would you rather listen to a droning lecture about how you’ve ruined your life, or flirt with the person sitting next to you?

…and you call yourself a professional

You Don’t Have To Be Boring

• Use your flexible-yet-strong boundaries to get people’s attention
• Get people just turned-on enough to remember what they learned.
• Be prepared to manage the energy you produce.
Know the Room. Control the Room.

Firm boundaries make safety. Pushing boundaries makes memories.

All that trust you built. Use it now. All those brain chemicals that make people antsy. Use them now.

Put your fearlessness to the test.

Get ready to try some of this stuff out on yourself.

Would you like to play a game?

• Roll with resistance, maintain momentum
• Pushing buttons and stretching boundaries gets attention, activates brains and bodies, and makes points more accessible.
Yeah, but did you die though?

When you accidentally say you want to kill yourself in front of all your coworkers

• You learned from that!
• You were successfully funny and interesting!

Handouts handouts handouts!

• Not everyone is a strong reader
• Something they made, wrote or drew will hold more emotion than a photocopy.
• Walk out of every group with something in your hand!

It’s ok if this isn’t your jam.

You don’t have to be a center-ring circus attraction to get people to pay attention to you.
Organize your ideas

Educational psychology gives us the mechanism for assessing our communication:
• What is the message?
• How is it transmitted?
• How was it received?

The fact remains: Emotional leverage will make your message last longer and retain clarity in the minds of your patients.

You’re Welcome.
• “Tattoo Mike” Swenson, LADC
• Grady
• Black Belt in CBT
• Moms dig him
• Grady Arch, LPCC
• BDE & DBT
• Queer AF
• Moms like her better than Mike