

Achieve Positive Therapy Outcomes with Affect Regulation Therapy

“A.R.T. can be used by the experienced clinician to support this initial delicate phase of rapport building, introducing, contracting and then starting a psychotherapy process”

A.R.T. is a psychotherapy intervention that is consistently effective at lowering stress levels and raising mood in a client-friendly way.

Here is how it can support you, the clinician, in your practice

When clients present for psychotherapy they are propelled by a state of psychological discomfort, which may have a variety of causes, commonly difficulties with relationships and latent immaturities.

At time of presentation, the client's stress levels are usually high. In a general clinical psychology practice, clients may commonly present for treatment with symptoms of stress, depression and anxiety that can range from mild, moderate to severe. Without this type of psychological discomfort, clients wouldn't arrive for help.

Clients expect assistance from the psychologist to relieve their pain and, at this point, the client wants to know 'Can you help me, do you understand what my problem is and how long will it take to fix it?'

The psychologist is immediately faced with a number of urgent tasks at the first interview. He or she must form a working alliance and positive rapport, or positive transference, with the client and establish a relationship of trust with the client, a goodness of fit to work together. The psychologist must also communicate how therapy works, what goals can be worked on, the context or interpretation of the client's problem and approximately within what time frame the client can expect what type of result.

This is known to be a delicate period when the contract can easily be derailed and the working relationship lost. However once these tasks are under the belt, both client and psychologist can be more confident, comfortable and relaxed about their joint project, because they have established a mutual trust relationship with a mutual positive expectation of a good result. They have made a commitment to work together, hopefully based on mutually realistic expectations.

A.R.T. can be used by the experienced clinician to support this initial, delicate phase of rapport building, introducing, and contracting, and then starting a psychotherapy process.

A.R.T. is a client-friendly model and supports your relationship with your client in many ways. The clinician can use A.R.T. for this purpose in the following ways:

- Helping your client right away
- Talking so your client understands you
- Reducing 'pressure to perform' on your client
- Good results and clinician confidence
- Contracting for brief therapy
- Offering short- or long-term therapy

Helping your client right away

It is important that the client feels that he or she got help in the first session. A.R.T. can support this goal by being used as a very brief five to 15 minute intervention in the first, second or third interview, to immediately and observably lower the client's stress level. Generally this will elicit a comment by the client such as 'Now I feel really relaxed'. This observable shift or change in tension level raises client confidence in the likelihood of future positive therapy outcomes.

This brief intervention, together with the supportive interview and debriefing nature of the first and second interview, will often result in an immediate, significantly reduced score on depression, anxiety and stress scales. This positive result obviously elevates client commitment and can lower overall dropout rates in a practice.

Talking so your client understands you

A.R.T. uses a model of stress and resilience and psychological growth that the average client easily relates to and immediately understands. For this reason it is very common for clients to ask for a copy of the stages of the stress chart and to take home a copy of the client manual to read. This 'easy to comprehend' psychological model, and the supporting education and information tools, further cements the therapist and client relationship, again increasing client commitment to therapy.

Reducing 'pressure to perform' on your client

A.R.T. is easy to use for the client and offers positive, observable results with little effort on the client's part. By reducing the pressure on the client to perform difficult self-regulating tasks, resistance is reduced. The focus in each session is on reducing stress states and on activities, which naturally raise relaxation and euthymic states. This process has a pleasurable element to it and raises client compliance and commitment.

Good results and clinician confidence

In an unselected and diagnostically varied group of 20 clients attending a clinic, A.R.T. has been shown to reduce depression, anxiety and stress rates by 44 percent within five visits. This good result supports client motivation. It also means the clinician can be confident about short-term improvements in mood, specifically depression rates, and can convey this confidence to the client.

Contracting for brief therapy

Setting a contract for a fixed number of sessions to achieve a specific result, using a specific model of growth and development, enhances client confidence in the clinician and in the therapy, again building client commitment.

Offering short- and/or long-term therapy

A.R.T. offers both a brief therapy and a long-term psychotherapy model, so it can meet varied client needs. Motivated, high functioning professionals, who actively seek ongoing, in-depth and broader personal development with a stress reduction element, frequently use the long-term model. Clinicians servicing this group will find A.R.T. most useful.

Get help with difficult cases

A.R.T. can effectively trigger, accelerate and fast track personality development. When a therapist requires faster, broader or deeper personality growth for a client stuck in impasse, A.R.T. can be used as a temporary adjunct therapy delivered by a second therapist. The significant shift induced by A.R.T. will provide the primary therapist with more material to work with.

Clinician can use it with any model of therapy

Most clinicians have their preferred model of therapy such as CBT or psychodynamic psychotherapy. In addition, they need basic psychotherapy skills and also specific skill sets to treat certain disorders. A.R.T. can be used to support any other therapy model or can be used as an intervention in its own right. It has application for management of most mental health disorders.

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