

Separate Facts From Clinical Hypotheses

Clinical practice and supervision | Clinicians | 10 to 15 minutes

Organize available information while making uncertainty and alternative explanations visible.

A formulation is a working explanation that guides inquiry and care. Use this page to distinguish what the client reports, what you directly observed, and what you are considering. Revise the explanation as new information becomes available.

Name the information source

Write "client reports," "partner reports with consent," or "observed in session" where appropriate. Describe behavior before assigning meaning. Silence, for example, could reflect uncertainty, processing time, fear, fatigue, or several other experiences.

Consider context and alternatives

Include strengths, supports, cultural meaning, health, environment, and current demands. Identify what supports each hypothesis and what would challenge it. Do not present a compelling story as established history.

Use the formulation collaboratively

Ask whether the explanation fits the client's experience and what it misses. Choose a question, assessment, consultation, or intervention that could clarify the picture. Note the limits of the information available today.

Reported information and its source

Direct observations without interpretation

Working hypotheses and plausible alternatives

Missing information and the next step to clarify it