

Respond When Therapy Misses the Mark

Clinical practice and supervision | Clinicians | 10 to 15 minutes

Invite feedback and respond to a therapy rupture with accountability and choice.

Use when a client says the work felt unhelpful, invalidating, or misattuned, or when you notice a possible change in engagement. Ask about the client's experience without requiring them to reassure you or accept your explanation.

Open the conversation

Clinician: "I noticed I moved quickly into problem solving. I wonder how that landed for you." If the client says, "You did not listen," respond: "Thank you for telling me. What did I miss or move past?" Allow time for the answer.

Acknowledge your part

Clinician: "I interrupted before I understood what you needed. I can see how that made this feel less useful." Be specific about your action. Avoid adding a defensive explanation or asking the client to confirm that you meant well.

Negotiate the next step

Clinician: "Would it help to return to that moment, change the focus, or discuss a different approach?" If the client does not know: "We can slow down. You do not have to solve this for me." If they request a change of clinician, discuss options respectfully.

Check whether the repair fits

Clinician: "What should I do differently next time, and how can we notice if this happens again?" Ask again later rather than treating one conversation as proof that the rupture is resolved. Seek supervision when the pattern continues.

My specific contribution and the change to follow up