

Meeting Intense Feelings With Choice

Emotion regulation | Clinicians | 5 to 10 minutes

Offer validation and collaborative choices during an emotionally intense moment.

Use this dialogue when a client becomes upset during a manageable discussion and remains able to participate. Slow the interaction, validate what is present, and offer choices. Shift to assessment or crisis procedures when the situation requires them.

Name without deciding for them

Clinician: "I notice your voice changed and you have gone quiet. What are you noticing?"

Client: "I am angry." Clinician: "Something here matters a lot. Do you want me to listen, help us slow down, or ask a question?" Avoid assuming the emotion from appearance alone.

Validate and explore the need

If the client says, "You are not hearing me," respond: "I may have missed something. What would you want me to understand?" Reflect their meaning. Then ask, "What feels most needed right now: clarification, a boundary, a break, or something else?"

Choose the next action together

Clinician: "Would it help to try one small pause and then decide what comes next?" If they decline: "We can stay with talking or stop the exercise." If they agree, offer an external anchor or quiet moment. Afterwards ask, "Did that help, make things harder, or do neither?"

What the client needed and what we changed in response

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