

# Secure Relating

Finding the FLEXIBLE balance between autonomy and connection. We can meet our clients from authentic care and compassion while at the same time respecting our clients' agency and their own practice of self-care (compassionate neutrality).

We are honoring our client's organismic capacity for change with the right, secure holding environment.



# The 50/50 Split

50% connected to myself and 50% connected to my client

Know when I am out of this split and how to get back.

# What is taking you away from being present and receptive with your clients?

If we not aware of the unconscious, emotional reactions we are having with our clients, it can interfere with the therapeutic process.

## **Common Countertransference Dynamics**

Steer away from relational and emotional and go cognitive/psycho ed.

Need my client to need to me (be indispensable).

Be overly pleasing and accommodating to be liked.

Pressure ourselves to “fix” our clients- problems to be solved.

Avoiding conflict with our clients

Want to be idealized and admired.

# Pillar I Clarifying the therapeutic contract

“What do you truly want for yourself with our time together?” The intention is driven by the client.

It's easy to get lost in content without any direction. Clients can feel misunderstood or fundamentally missed (a common wound) when the therapist is driving the intention. You may have an idea, but the **client is the ultimate expert of their inner world.**

Contract (“drawing together”) is the organizing thread of the process (our north star). It helps shape and organize the exploration.

**Therapist takes less responsibility and works less. Holds more presence.**

We are asking our clients to connect to themselves (to their hearts) to name their intention. This can feel threatening. It may take time to establish a contract.

**This is the first step in supporting our clients' agency.**



# Pillar I Clarifying the therapeutic contract

## Sample Contracts

Connecting to my body and feelings as they are.

Having more depth in my relationships (loneliness and disconnection).

Getting my needs met in relationship- experiencing pleasure & fulfillment.

Being open to vulnerability and healthy dependency.

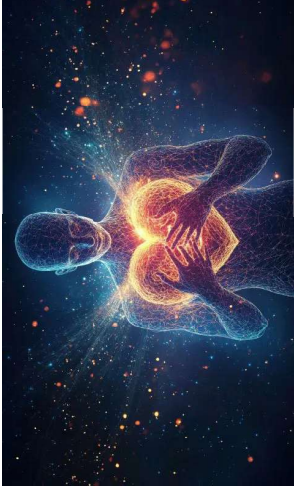
Living authentically, trusting my instincts, setting boundaries and limits, take my place, feeling confident in myself.

Being open-hearted, have flexibility, playfulness, spontaneity.

Working through depression, PTSD, panic, anxiety.

## Pillar I Clarifying the therapeutic contract

What is your true heart's desire for our time together? What would be the optimal outcome of our session, even if it's not realistic? The client went to great lengths to see you! "Why did you reach out to me and **why now**?"



Contracting helps safeguards against the possibility of counter transference and reenactment. And opens up the possibility for client to feel seen and to have consent and agency (unavailable in childhood).

Bringing more attention and curiosity to the client's inner landscape. "What do you want for yourself in light of what we are talking about?"

**Shifting from behavioral goals to invitations for internal exploration:** "If you were able to stand up for yourself, what would that give you?" "If you had a fulfilling and healthy relationship, how would that feel or what would you experience?"

## Pillar I Clarifying the therapeutic contract

The contract is a great tool (intervention) to shine the light on or mirror back how the client's behavior is inconsistent with their therapeutic intention:

“I wonder how avoiding your partner fits with your wish for greater intimacy?” “You say that you want to live with more autonomy and I hear you ask me for advice.” “I hear that you want to be at peace with yourself and you spend hours each day on social media.”

Gentle confrontation without pathologizing and shaming.

We don't take sides or give advice- doing so would objectify and infantilize our clients. A woman is uncertain whether to stay or leave her intimate partner. We explore the dilemma (“should I stay or should I go?”) so client can come to her own knowing.



## Pillar II Asking Exploratory Questions

Once the contract is set, it is time to begin the exploration. “I would be happy to explore what is getting in the way (obstacles) of what you want for yourself.”

Be curious about the client’s inner world; **how they relate** to their life experience. Inquiry based, process-oriented, driven by curiosity.

Experiencing genuine interest often was not available as children. Recognize our client as a separate person, perhaps experienced for the first time by our clients.

Able to connect with their agency when we lead with curiosity and inquiry and not prescription.

**We track moment by moment (shine the light) what is emerging and unfolding in real time.**



## Pillar II Asking Exploratory Questions - Languaging

And what happens now when you say those words to your parents?

What is it like not to put so much pressure on yourself?

And what happens if you give yourself permission to feel that?

How do you experience the words, “it’s not fair”?

Are there any words that go with your anger?

What’s the scariest thing about conflict with your best friend? What are you fearing right now? What are you saying about yourself?

So there’s some settling in the belly as you talk about that. How about taking some time with that?

What was it like to give yourself the space and time to be with the grief (agency)?

## Pillar II Asking Exploratory Questions

**Deconstruction of present experience:** Ask for recent examples when client felt anxious. Explore various levels of experience in the here and now.

**Contract: Being autonomous in intimate relationship.**

Recent example: Wanted to stand up to my husband regarding the way he parented our child. But felt fear and anxiety and shut down.

What are feeling right NOW?

What is your worst fear if you connected to your anger? Often fear of relational loss! Be like my raging, alcoholic father.

What are you noticing in your body?

What is it like to share it with me?

What would you say to a parent who parented their child in a similar fashion?  
Tell me the part that wants to stand up and the part that doesn't (core dilemma)

## Pillar II Asking Exploratory Questions

“Inquiry for the sake of inquiry.” **Have fun with this.** Don't need to get it right. Clients are bringing curiosity and reflection to the inner worlds (perhaps for the first time). Go slow.



Every emerging and unfolding moment can be subject of inquiry.

**Inquiry process, over time client does not take his thoughts and reactions as seriously, not presuming that what he is feeling is truth, recognizing we aren't defined by what we've taken ourselves to be and ultimately seeing ourselves less through survival styles and old identifications. Process of disidentification.**



Drive to Survive

Authentic Drive

In the exploration, eventually you will get to a **core dilemma**: “I want to connect, but I fear connection.” Be curious without taking sides. Exploratory vs. goal oriented.

It is a conflict/bind between what is real about us (authentic self) and that which we had to do to survive (adaptive Self).

Children rejected important developmental capacities in order to sustain attachment (earn love). That was ADAPTIVE! That made sense! **What a brilliant thing to do!** But that adaptation in childhood has persisted into adulthood in the form of anxiety, stress and depression.

### **Common adaptations**

Disconnected from body and feelings to manage overwhelm and stress

Gave up needs to caretake

Gave up autonomy and development of will

Overly pleasing and accommodating

Rejected playfulness, flexibility and spontaneity to perfect.

**Favorite Defenses-  
Projecting, Control,  
Blame, Addiction,  
shutting down, etc.**

**Attachment - Inhibitory-  
Shame/Anxiety**



The transformative  
power of moment by  
moment tracking!

Forms of Self-activation:

Primary Anger or Grief

Healthy Dependency

Boundaries

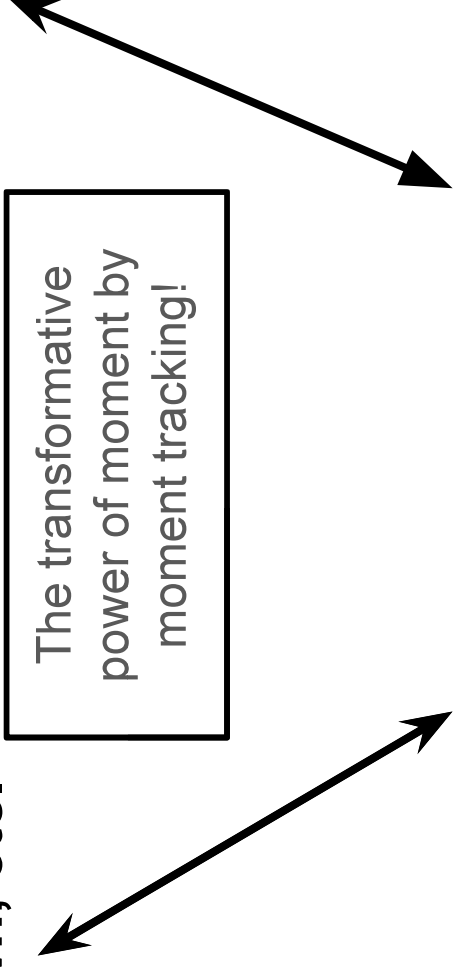
Open Heartedness

Fulfillment/pleasure

Vulnerability

Somatic Experience

Authentic expression



**Self Activation/Life Force  
Expression**

## Over coupling

Connecting with feelings and body = death, overwhelm, collapse, rage

Asking for my needs = Being “too much”, a “burden”, rejection and disappointment

Vulnerability = Betrayal, humiliation, loss of control

Autonomy = Relational loss, judgment

Open heart = broken heart, objectification.

## Extra Notes

Intersubjectivity is the opposite of objectification: Recognition of my humanity as the therapist, from which I can recognize the humanity in my client.