Honouring the Past, Transforming the Future

Ruptures & Repair:
Using relationship breakdowns as opportunities

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What is a "Rupture"?

- A rupture is any tension or conflict that results in:
  - A loss of connection
  - A break or loss of trust
  - Emotional disengagement
- A rupture can be caused by various factors, including:
  - A loss of empathy / compassion
  - A loss of emotional attunement
  - A loss of attention or listening
  - A misunderstanding, misinterpretation or misperception
  - A lack of clarity
  - A mismatch of expectations
  - All of the above

Rupture subtypes

- Confrontational
  - Anger
  - Accusation or Blame
  - Heated disconnection ("this isn't working" "you don't understand")

- Withdrawal
  - Quiet or shutdown
  - Avoidance or non-attendance
  - Self-blame or shame reaction

"We have probably done whatever problematic thing we're being accused of, or some part of it"

~ Marsha Linehan ~

(DBT Team Agreements)

We are human…

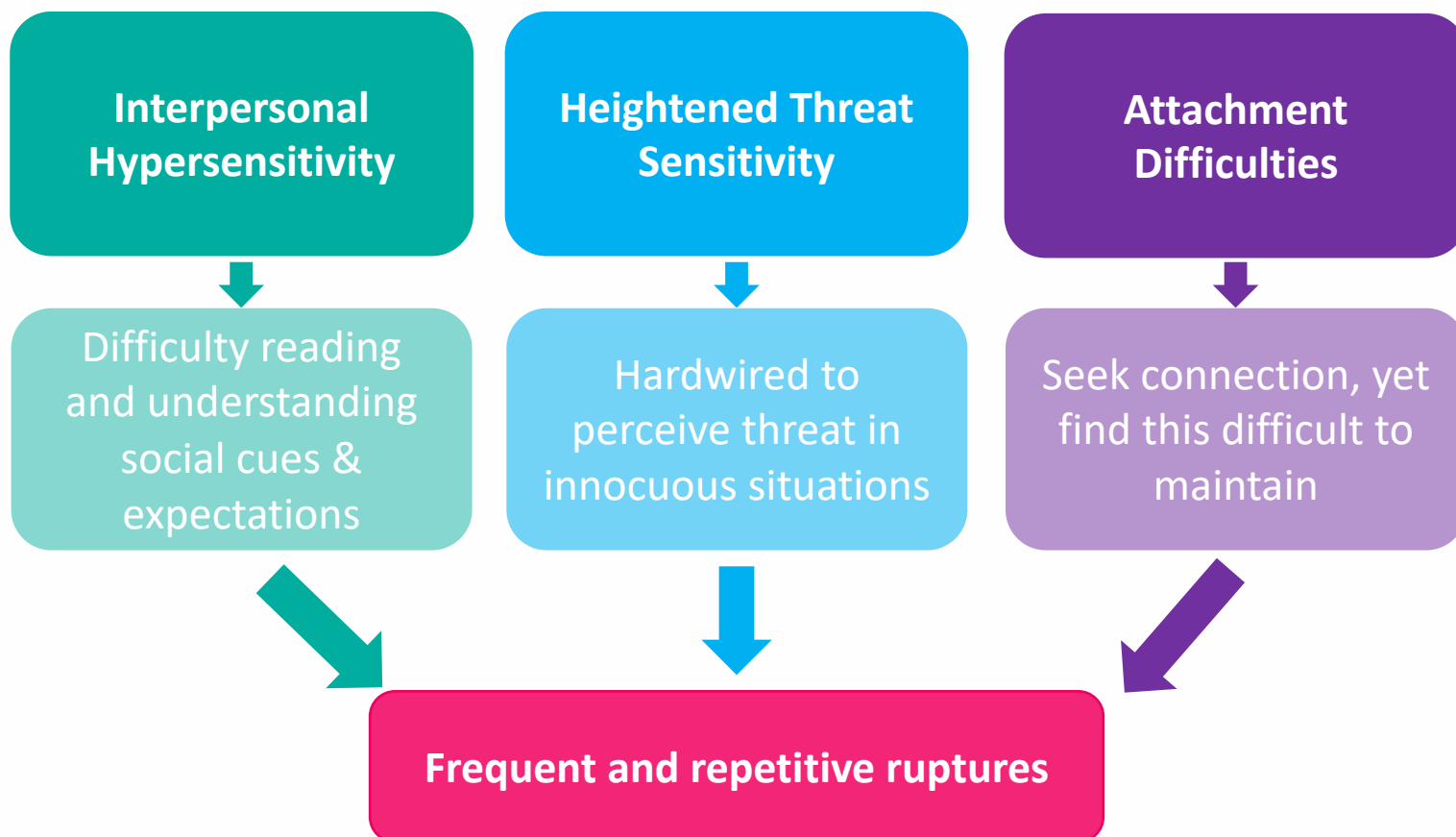RUPTURES

DISAGREEMENTS

@LindsayBraman

& MISUNDERSTANDINGS

ARE NORMAL IN THERAPY. IT'S A PLACE TO SEE, PRACTICE, & PARTICIPATE IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN REAL TIME.

Why ruptures can be frequent

Interpersonal Hypersensitivity	Heightened Threat Sensitivity	Attachment Difficulties
Difficulty reading and understanding social cues & expectations	Hardwired to perceive threat in innocuous situations	Seek connection, yet find this difficult to maintain

Frequent and repetitive ruptures

Ruptures create opportunities

- Repairing ruptures create essential opportunities for social development, when attended to in a thoughtful and validating way.

- For some, this may be the first time someone has owned their part in a rupture and apologised!

- Helps to role model connection and reconnection.

- Helps to rebuild and deepen trust, authenticity, vulnerability and strengthen a **real relationship between equals**, which is essential to the work.

- Provides corrective social learning.

Essential ingredients to repair

- Let go of defensiveness

- Pay attention to the connection (or disconnection)

- Take responsibility for your part in the rupture

- Be willing to apologise

- Collaboratively develop a way forward

- Accept inevitability of future ruptures

"The process of repair is rarely a straightforward one, which can make complete resolution of a rupture difficult to determine."
(Hestbæk et al; Mentalizing patient experiences)

The ruptures that destroy therapy

Example One:

Setting: Group therapy

Context: Significant life stressor for client and community

Rupture: Perception of relating another person's stressor as equal in measure to the current life stressor she was experiencing: seen as "trivialising" her experience.

Repair: Firstly apologised! Acknowledged what I'd said and validated how it may have come across as exactly how she experienced it. Also acknowledged that wasn't the intention.

Result: It took time... repair was not just in the moment but in the aftermath of changing examples and upping the validation that was needed.

The ruptures that destroy therapy

Example Two:

Setting: Group therapy

Context: One participant became accusatory towards others

Rupture: Participants felt attacked and unsafe, feeling that the facilitators had not adequately protected them.

Repair: Removed the aggressive participant and made a plan to work on this before they returned to group. Repaired and co-regulated with the group and called to follow up.

Result: The follow up showed intentionality and commitment to their relational safety and was reportedly the difference between participants returning or not returning to group.

The ruptures that destroy therapy

Example Three:

Setting: Individual session

Context: Client overheard staff member speaking about them.

Rupture: What they overheard was pejorative and they felt they were disliked. I became the representative of the organisation they held this view of them and therefore the one misrepresenting them.

Repair: BIG VALIDATION with apology and acknowledgement that no-one deserves to be spoken about like that.

Result: Supported client to write in a complaint and have this attended to in a formal and professional way. Client was surprised at non-defensiveness and respect / trust increased.

The ruptures that could go unnoticed

Example One:

Setting: Weekly sessions

Context: Client would become quiet and look away.

Rupture: Felt misunderstood by a response and this led to a thought "no-one understands me because I am abnormal"

Repair: Paused in session and asked "what just happened?" and reflected back the change that was observed. Client was able to name the misattunement/misinterpretation to collaboratively work through how we can manage this.

Result: Able to get to a deeper level of understanding and client was able to experience someone taking the time to understand rather than disengaging and quitting therapy.

The ruptures that could go unnoticed

Example Two:

Setting: Weekly sessions

Context: Challenging client and session ended uncomfortably.

Rupture: Had missed a vital moment for something to be validated before moving towards problem solving. Client felt judged as a result.

Repair: Reflected on this and started the next session with "I feel like I really missed the mark last week".

Result: Client felt validated by this and was grateful that therapist had thought about it (and them) between sessions. They were able to clarify that there had been a big realisation in the previous session and we could validate how hard this was.

The goal is not to avoid ruptures

The goal is to learn to repair ruptures.

Every time a rupture is repaired, trust is built.

Trust builds relational safety, where we can be authentic.

Eastern Health

References

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