

EXERCISE

3

Deepening Emotional Experience

Preparations for Exercise 3

1. Read the instructions in Chapter 2.
2. Download the Deliberate Practice Reaction Form and the Deliberate Practice Diary Form at <https://www.apa.org/pubs/books/deliberate-practice-psychodynamic-psychotherapy> (see the "Clinician and Practitioner Resources" tab; also available in Appendixes A and B, respectively).

Skill Description

Skill Difficulty Level: Intermediate

Of the seven strategies that distinguish manualized psychodynamic therapy from manualized cognitive behavior therapy, the first one mentioned is the analyst's focus on affect and expression of emotion (Blagys & Hilsenroth, 2000). Research indicates that the more patients become aware of and experience their emotions in therapy, the more their outcomes are improved (Furrow et al., 2012; Lane et al., 2015). And recent findings indicate that in psychodynamic therapy in particular, helping patients experience their feelings leads to their better functioning (H. Fisher et al., 2016). Therefore, the psychodynamic therapist must be an emotional detective/midwife/catalyst—capable of evoking and deepening emotion so that the patient's nascent emotions can be recognized, named, and understood and become gateways for change.

Empathic evocations are used to "bring experience to life through vivid imagery, elaborate description, analogy, or metaphor" (Goldman et al., 2021, p. 83). They help patients get in touch with the depth of their emotional experience—especially involving emotions that they avoid and that may be at the root of the patient's conflicts. In this way, patients can begin to appreciate the enormous way emotions are implicated in

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their sense of self, motivation, values, and capacities for relationships. Quite often therapists will use their voice and intonation to match emotions that are on the verge of awareness or expression (e.g., soft and slow to bring out sadness). Another technique involves therapists speaking as if they were the patient (e.g., using the first person "I"). In knowing which way to proceed, the therapist should be guided by what feels like the most poignant aspect of the patient's message, whether this is conveyed through the patient's words, face, body, or posture.

The trainee should improvise a response to each patient description following one or more of these skill options:

- **Option 1: Use vivid language and match your tone of voice and manner to the patient's underlying emotion.** This helps fan the patient's flickering emotional embers into flames visible to the patient and the therapist.
- **Option 2: Use an "I" statement spoken as if it is from the patient's point of view.** This shows the therapist's willingness to put themselves in the shoes of the patient and dramatically seeds an emotional tone.
- **Option 3: Use a metaphor or analogy.** As in poetic and dramatic speech, metaphors and analogies convey feelings with immediacy.

SKILL OPTIONS FOR EXERCISE 3

1. Use one or more of the following to intensify the most poignant feeling and meaning embedded within the patient's statement:
 - Option 1: Use vivid language and match your tone of voice and manner to the patient's underlying emotion.
 - Option 2: Use an "I" statement spoken as if it is from the patient's point of view.
 - Option 3: Use a metaphor or analogy.

Examples of the Therapist Deepening Emotional Experience

Example 1

PATIENT: [*angry*] I would like my mother to listen to me.

THERAPIST: You'd like to grab her by the shoulders and force her to listen! (Option 1)

Example 2

PATIENT: [*angry*] I would like my mother to listen to me.

THERAPIST: [*intensifying the patient's firm tone*] Mother, I need you to listen to me right now! (Options 1 and 2)

Example 3

PATIENT: [*angry*] I would like my mother to listen to me.

THERAPIST: Her listening to you would take 50 pounds off your shoulders. (Option 3)

INSTRUCTIONS FOR EXERCISE 3

Step 1: Role-Play and Feedback

- The patient says the first beginner patient statement. The therapist **improvises** a response based on the skill option.
- The trainer (or, if not available, the patient) provides **brief** feedback based on the skill option.
- The patient then repeats the same statement, and the therapist again improvises a response. The trainer (or patient) again provides brief feedback.

Step 2: Repeat

- Repeat Step 1 for all the statements **in the current difficulty level** (beginner, intermediate, or advanced).

Step 3: Assess and Adjust Difficulty

- The therapist completes the Deliberate Practice Reaction Form (see Appendix A) and decides whether to make the exercise easier or harder or to repeat the same difficulty level.

Step 4: Repeat for Approximately 15 Minutes

- Repeat Steps 1 to 3 for at least 15 minutes.
- The trainees then switch therapist and patient roles and start over.

➔ **Now it's your turn! Follow Steps 1 and 2 from the exercise instructions.**

Remember: The goal of the role-play is for trainees to practice improvising responses to the patient statements in a manner that (a) uses the skill option and (b) feels authentic for the trainee. **Example therapist responses for each patient statement are provided at the end of this exercise. Trainees should attempt to improvise their own responses before reading the example responses.**

BEGINNER-LEVEL PATIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 3	
Beginner Patient Statement 1	
[Anxious]	My boss called on me in the middle of the meeting, and I got so anxious I couldn't speak and everyone just stared at me.
Beginner Patient Statement 2	
[Matter-of-fact]	My grown children went away and left me alone, and I've been alone all weekend. So that's all that's been happening.
Beginner Patient Statement 3	
[Mournful]	And back when I was in school, none of the girls seemed to like me. I don't know why.
Beginner Patient Statement 4	
[Angry, clenched jaw]	And, in the meeting, no one acknowledged my observations.
Beginner Patient Statement 5	
[Exasperated]	The other speaker droned on and on, limiting my time to speak.

 **Assess and adjust the difficulty before moving to the next difficulty level (see Step 3 in the exercise instructions).**

INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL PATIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 3***Intermediate Patient Statement 1***

[Ashamed] When I was a kid, my mother told me not to dwell on my sad feelings; I should be thankful for what I have.

Intermediate Patient Statement 2

[Sad] My grown children act like they don't really need me; and that's OK with me because I have plenty of other people in my life.

Intermediate Patient Statement 3

[Confused] I drive for 2 hours to see my partner every weekend. Once in a while, it would be nice for them to come and see me.

Intermediate Patient Statement 4

[Voice quivering] If my daughter were to move away, I don't know what I would do.

Intermediate Patient Statement 5

[Tearful] I just feel so upset; I can't stop crying!



Assess and adjust the difficulty before moving to the next difficulty level (see Step 3 in the exercise instructions).

ADVANCED-LEVEL PATIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 3

Advanced Patient Statement 1

[Matter-of-fact] My doctor sent me here because they think I'm depressed. I don't know how they got that idea. Everything in my life is going very well.

Advanced Patient Statement 2

[Flat affect] It's hard to say my stepfather made me have sex, but it came down to that.

Advanced Patient Statement 3

[Indignant] People call me "Professor," not "Mr.," if you don't mind.

Advanced Patient Statement 4

[Tearing up] I'm sorry about having to use so many of your Kleenex today.

Advanced Patient Statement 5

[Irritated] My partner was picking me up from school where I teach. I was talking to some of my students when my partner pulled up and yelled at me to hurry up.



Assess and adjust the difficulty here (see Step 3 in the exercise instructions). If appropriate, follow the instructions to make the exercise even more challenging (see Appendix A).

Example Therapist Responses: Deepening Emotional Experience

Remember: Trainees should attempt to improvise their own responses before reading the example responses. **Do not read the following responses verbatim unless you are having trouble coming up with your own responses!**

EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO BEGINNER-LEVEL PATIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 3
Example Response to Beginner Patient Statement 1
It's like all of a sudden everyone was looking at me and I just wanted to crawl into a hole. (Options 2 and 3)
Example Response to Beginner Patient Statement 2
So they went away and left you all alone, like you didn't matter. That sounds really painful. (Option 1)
Example Response to Beginner Patient Statement 3
Sounds like that is still sad for you to think about all these years later. (Option 1)
Example Response to Beginner Patient Statement 4
From the look on your face now, you could have spit fire. (Option 3)
Example Response to Beginner Patient Statement 5
It must have felt like torture, waiting for your turn to speak. (Options 1 and 3)

EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO INTERMEDIATE-LEVEL PATIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 3	
Example Response to Intermediate Patient Statement 1	
	So no matter what you are feeling now as an adult, you hear your mother's voice ringing in your ears, "Don't feel; be thankful!" (Options 1 and 3)
Example Response to Intermediate Patient Statement 2	
	I hear you say it's OK not to have your children be part of your life, yet your voice sounds quite sad as you say it. (Option 1)
Example Response to Intermediate Patient Statement 3	
	I drive to see my partner every weekend. Just once I'd like them to make the effort to come see me! (Options 1 and 2)
Example Response to Intermediate Patient Statement 4	
	That would feel like being set adrift in a small boat in the middle of the ocean. (Option 3)
Example Response to Intermediate Patient Statement 5	
	If those tears could talk, what would they say? (Options 1 and 3)

**EXAMPLE RESPONSES TO ADVANCED-LEVEL
PATIENT STATEMENTS FOR EXERCISE 3**

Example Response to Advanced Patient Statement 1

I really don't know why I am here. My life is going really well. (Option 2)

Example Response to Advanced Patient Statement 2

Oh, my goodness. It's even hard to talk about, let alone have any feelings about! (Option 1)

Example Response to Advanced Patient Statement 3

I don't want to have my status diminished and I won't tolerate that from you. (Option 2)

Example Response to Advanced Patient Statement 4

You feel you need to apologize to me, your therapist, for showing your true feelings?
(Option 1)

Example Response to Advanced Patient Statement 5

Did you want to disappear or disappear your partner? (Option 3)