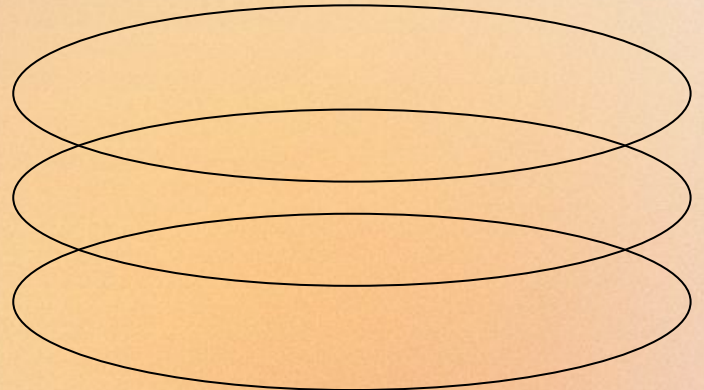


The Art of Assessment: Integrating Evidence and Intuition

Presented by Ashley Esry, LCSW, LCAS





Welcome!

My name is Ashley Esry, LCSW, LCAS (she/her) and I'm looking forward to speaking with you today! I have been teaching with CE Training Workshops for over two years and have a private practice based out of North Carolina.

I work with adults recovering from trauma, attachment wounds and mood disorders. My main trainings include IFS, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, and EMDR.

Introduce Yourself!

- Where are you joining from?
- What type of setting do you work in?
- What inspired you to take this webinar?
- What are you hoping to take away from this webinar?

Objectives

#1

Define the role of
assessment and its
importance in
therapy

#2

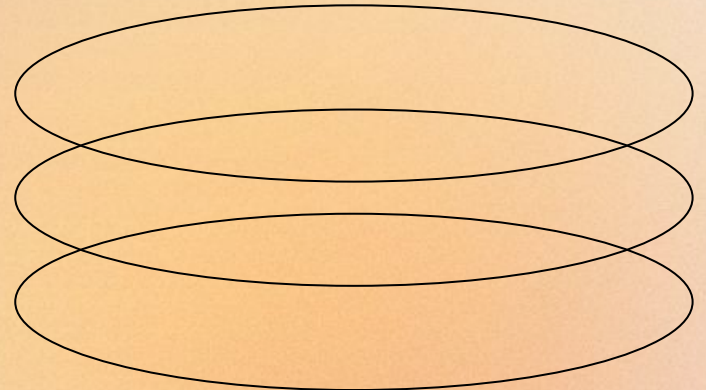
Identify different types
of assessments

#3

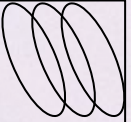
Implement
interventions and
skills for effective
assessments

March 7, 2025

Defining Assessment and its Importance



Defining Assessment



- Definition: Assessment is the systematic process of gathering information about a client to understand their needs, strengths, and challenges.
- Includes interviews, standardized tests, observations, and self-report measures.
- Used for diagnosis, treatment planning, and progress tracking.

Defining Assessment



- The initial assessment establishes a baseline for treatment and identifies the specific needs of the client. It typically includes standardized tests and interviews.
- Ongoing assessments are conducted to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments to the treatment plan.

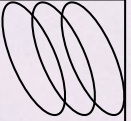
Importance of Assessing

- Helps therapists make informed decisions about treatment approaches.
- Provides baseline data to measure client progress over time and create goals



- Enhances communication between therapists, clients, and other professionals (Kazdin, 2017)

Importance of Assessing



- Assessment helps in establishing the baseline mental health conditions, allowing for accurate measurement of progress over time.
- Effective assessment identifies underlying issues that may not be immediately apparent (ie. addiction, compulsive behaviors, medical concerns, etc).
- Assessing client needs facilitates individualized care planning, enhancing the efficacy of treatment strategies.



peacock **H O U S E** MD

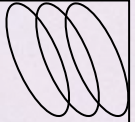
Discussion!

What did Dr. House mean when he says “Of course [I took a history]. But all that told us is what they said happened”?

How does the doctors’ failure to inspect the patient’s leg relate to mental health assessments?

Goals of an Assessment

1. Understand the Client's Story
2. Identify Needs and Prioritize Concerns
3. Gather Information for Diagnosis and Treatment Planning
4. Build a Collaborative Relationship
5. Assess Strengths, Resources, and Resilience
6. Lay the Foundation for Ongoing Work



Benefits of Effective Assessment

- Increases therapy efficiency by tailoring interventions to individual needs.
- Improves client self-awareness and engagement in treatment.
- Reduces bias by incorporating standardized measures (Garb, 1998).
- Enhances diagnostic accuracy, improving treatment success rates (Hunsley & Mash, 2007).
- Identifies underlying conditions that may otherwise go unnoticed, improving intervention strategies (Youngstrom et al., 2017).
- Effective assessments lead to higher therapeutic success by aligning client and therapist goals, which reduces dropout rates (Norcross & Wampold, 2018).

When to Assess



Intake

Conduct a comprehensive assessment during the initial intake session to gather essential background information, understand client concerns, and set the foundation for treatment.



Ongoing

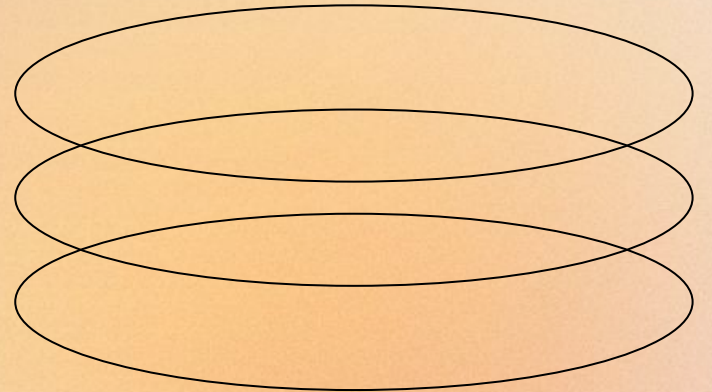
Regularly assess client progress and adapt treatment plans as necessary, ensuring interventions remain relevant and effective over time.



Discharge

At discharge, evaluate the overall progress and outcomes achieved, and schedule follow-up assessments to monitor long-term success and address any emerging issues.

Identifying Types of Assessments



Types of Assessments

Formal vs. Informal

Formal assessments follow standardized procedures and scoring, while informal assessments are more flexible and observational.

Structured vs. Unstructured

Structured assessments have specific questions and formats, whereas unstructured assessments allow for open-ended responses and greater spontaneity.

Self-report vs. Clinician-administered

Self-report assessments rely on individuals to provide their own information, while clinician-administered assessments involve trained professionals conducting evaluations.

Types of Assessments

- **Clinical Interviews** – Structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (First et al., 2015)
- **Self-Report Questionnaires** – Beck Depression Inventory, GAD-7, PHQ-9 (Spitzer et al., 2006)
- **Behavioral Observations** – Noting nonverbal cues, patterns, and interactions
- **Projective Tests** – Rorschach Inkblot Test, Thematic Apperception Test (Lilienfeld et al., 2000)
- **Neuropsychological Tests** – WAIS, Wisconsin Card Sorting Test (Lezak et al., 2012)

Gesundheitsfragebogen für Patienten (PHQ-9)

Wie oft trüben Sie sich im Verlauf der letzten 2 Wochen durch die folgenden Beschwerden/Menschenmäßig?	Überhaupt nicht	Am meisten ein oder zwei Tage	Allein ein oder mehr als die Hälfte der Tage	Beinahe alle Tage
Keine Interesse oder Freude an Ihren Tätigkeiten	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interessiertheit, Schwermut oder Hoffungslosigkeit	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schwierigkeiten ein- oder durchzuschlafen oder vermehrte Schlaf	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Müdigkeit oder Gefühl, keine Energie zu haben	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Verminderter Appetit oder übermäßiges Gewicht zu- oder abnehmen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sichere Meinung von sich selbst, Gefühl, ein Versager zu sein oder die Familie zu beschämen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Schwierigkeiten, sich auf etwas zu konzentrieren, z.B. beim Zeitunglesen oder Fernsehen	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wären Ihre Bewegungen oder Ihre Sprache so verlangsamt, dass es auch anderen auffallen würde? Oder wären Sie im Gegenteil „überaktiv“ oder nervös und hätten dadurch einen raschen Wechsel der Stimmung?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Gedanken, dass Sie lieber tot wären oder sich Leid zufügen möchten	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

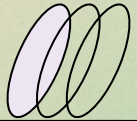
Gesamtsumme: _____ 4 Punkte bis 27 Punkte

Weder eines oder mehrere dieser Probleme bei Ihnen vorliegen, geben Sie bitte an, wie sehr diese Probleme zu Ihnen anzuhören haben, Ihre Arbeit zu erschweren, Ihren Haushalt zu regeln oder mit anderen Menschen zurecht zu kommen:

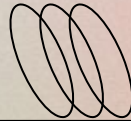
Überhaupt nicht
einschwerig
Relativ stark
einschwerig
Sehr stark
einschwerig

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Types of Assessments



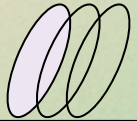
Pros



Cons

- **Clinical Interviews:**
 - **Pros:** Flexible, allows for deep exploration, can clarify ambiguous responses
 - **Cons:** Time-consuming, potential interviewer bias, relies on client honesty
- **Self-Report Questionnaires:**
 - **Pros:** Standardized, cost-effective, quick to administer
 - **Cons:** Subject to social desirability bias, may not capture nuances, literacy-dependent
- **Behavioral Observations:**
 - **Pros:** Provides real-time data, captures nonverbal cues, useful for children
 - **Cons:** Observer bias possible, requires significant training, may not reflect internal experiences

Types of Assessments



Pros



Cons

- **Projective Tests:**

- **Pros:** Can uncover unconscious issues, allows for free expression, useful for resistant clients
- **Cons:** Low reliability and validity, difficult to interpret, time-intensive

- **Neuropsychological Tests:**

- **Pros:** Highly reliable for cognitive and neurological issues, standardized, provides objective data
- **Cons:** Expensive, requires specialized training, lengthy administration time

Standardized Assessments



Definition & Importance

Standardized assessments are tests that are administered and scored in a consistent manner. They provide a reliable framework for comparing performance across different individuals.

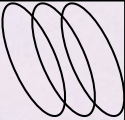
Psychometrically Validated Tools

Tools such as the Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) and MMPI-2 are rigorously tested for reliability and validity, ensuring accuracy in psychological evaluation.

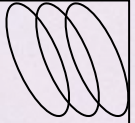
Ensuring Reliability and Validity

The use of standardized assessments enhances the credibility of psychological findings, adhering to guidelines established by the American Psychological Association.

Standardized Assessments



- **Mini Mental Status Exam (MMSE):** Quick cognitive screening tool
- **Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9):** Screens for depression severity
- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7):** Assesses anxiety symptoms
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Questionnaire:** Evaluates trauma history
- **Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale (C-SSRS):** Suicide risk screening tool
- **Substance Use Screening (CAGE, AUDIT, DAST-10):** Assesses alcohol and drug use
- **Trauma Symptom Inventory (TSI-2):** Measures trauma-related symptoms

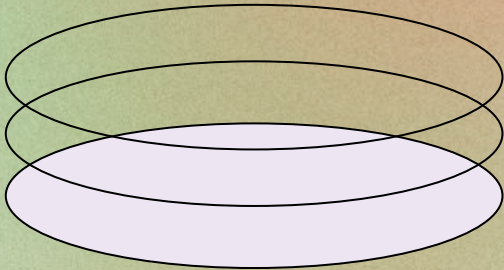


90791 Assessment Code

- **Definition:** A psychiatric diagnostic evaluation without medical services.
- **Requirements for Billing:**
 - Client's presenting problem and history
 - Mental status exam
 - Clinical impressions and diagnosis (if applicable)
 - Treatment recommendations
 - Risk assessment (e.g., suicidality, homicidality)
 - Assessment tools used and their results
 - Plan for follow-up and referrals if needed
- **Used For:** Initial diagnostic interviews to establish a treatment plan

Biopsychosocial Assessment

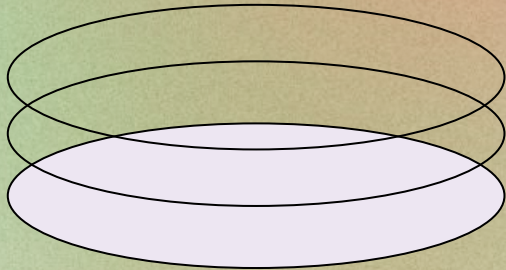
- **Definition:** A comprehensive assessment that examines biological, psychological, and social factors influencing mental health.
- **Components:**
 - Biological: Medical history, genetics, substance use
 - Psychological: Cognitive functioning, emotional state, coping mechanisms
 - Social: Family dynamics, relationships, socioeconomic status
- **Importance:** Provides a holistic understanding of the client's situation and informs treatment planning.



Informal Assessments



- Unstructured methods providing qualitative insights are essential in understanding client experiences.
- Examples include client interviews and behavioral observations.
- These approaches are particularly useful for building rapport and uncovering hidden issues that may not surface in formal assessments (Miller et al., 2015).



Choosing the Right Assessment Approach

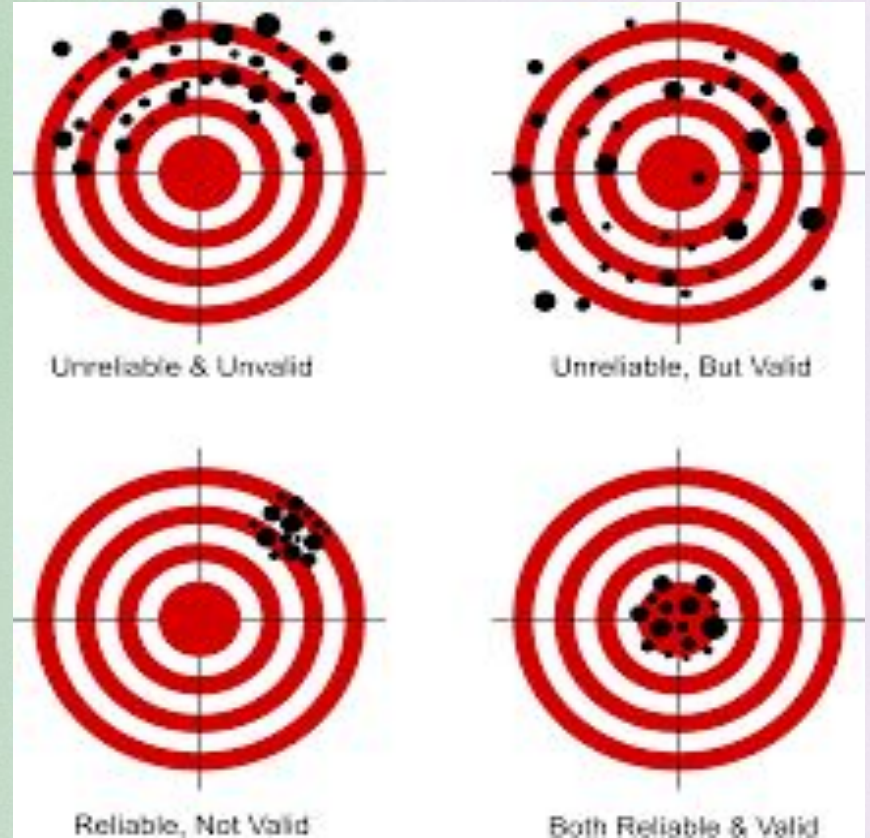


- **Consider the Client's Presenting Issue** – Depression vs. anxiety vs. trauma (Blais & Baer, 2009)
- **Standardized vs. Informal Methods** – Balancing structured tools with clinical judgment
- **Cultural Sensitivity in Selection** – Ensuring assessments are appropriate for diverse populations (Sue et al., 2009)
- **Validity & Reliability** – Understanding psychometric properties (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955)
- **Feasibility & Accessibility** – Time constraints, client literacy, and availability of resources

Understanding Reliability & Validity

Reliability refers to the consistency of assessment results across different instances.

Validity assesses whether the test measures what it intends to measure effectively.



Special Considerations in Assessment



Trauma-Informed Approach

Utilizing trauma-informed principles helps in understanding clients' backgrounds, fostering a safe environment for open communication during assessments.

Culturally-Informed Approach

Incorporating cultural context is crucial to ensure assessments are fair and relevant. Awareness of cultural differences can enhance the accuracy of evaluations.

Special Considerations - Trauma

Safety First — Set the stage:

- "Let me know if anything feels too much and we can pause."
- Explain the process upfront: What will be asked, why, and what's optional

Empowerment and Choice - Remind clients they are in control

- "You don't have to answer anything that feels uncomfortable."
- Offer alternatives: "You can tell me as much or as little as you want."



Special Considerations - Trauma

Language Matters - Use neutral, non-judgmental wording:

- Instead of "Tell me about your trauma" → "Can you share anything that feels important about your experiences?"
- Avoid overly clinical or cold terms

Watch for Signs of Distress

- Sudden silence, shutting down, fidgeting, tearfulness
- Ask gently: "I'm noticing you got quiet — is this okay to keep talking about?"



EDX

UUT

Discussion!

What are your takeaways from this video?

How does taking a culturally-informed approach affect assessments and patient care?

Special Considerations - Populations

Children and Adolescents

- Use developmentally appropriate language
- Incorporate creative tools: drawing, play, storytelling
- Shorter, more focused questions — avoid long, complex prompts
- Engage caregivers when appropriate, but respect child's voice



Neurodivergent Clients (e.g., Autism, ADHD)

- Give clear, concrete questions — avoid vague or abstract wording
- Allow processing time: silence is okay!
- Offer visual aids or written options if verbal is hard
- Normalize differences: "Everyone experiences things differently, I want to understand your way."

Special Considerations - Populations

Clients with Limited Language Proficiency

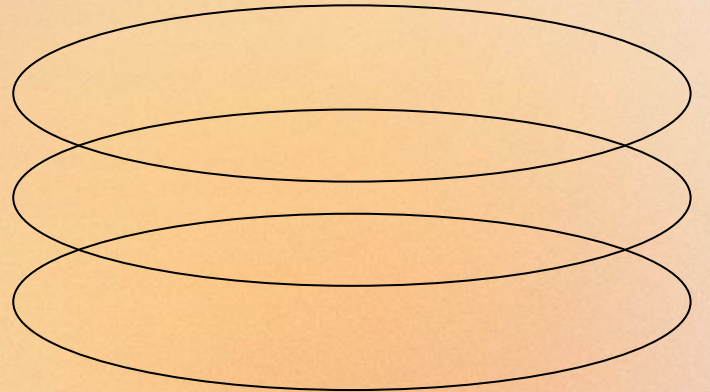
- Simplify language; avoid jargon
- Use interpreters trained in mental health when needed
- Check for understanding: "Does that question make sense? Want me to rephrase?"

Highly Distressed or Traumatized Clients

- Go slow — don't rush to "hard topics"
- Normalize taking breaks: "We can pause anytime."
- Start with less invasive, more relational questions to build trust

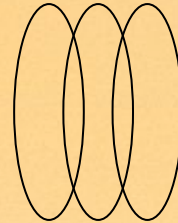


Building Assessment Skills



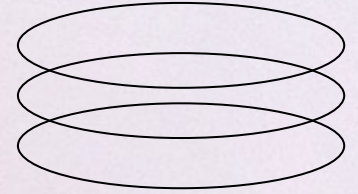
Orienting Clients

- Provide clear instructions for finding the building, if steps are required, restrooms, and exits.
- Introduce key staff members who will be involved in the assessment process if applicable.
- Explain the assessment process, including the purpose, duration, and what clients can expect.
- Address any client questions or concerns to ensure they feel comfortable and informed about the process.

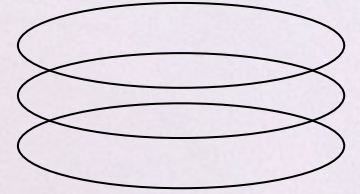


Informed Consent

- Informed consent is a legal requirement to ensure clients understand the nature and scope of therapy before it begins.
- It provides clients with vital information about their rights, the therapeutic process, potential risks, and alternative treatments.
- Ethically, informed consent empowers clients to make autonomous decisions regarding their mental health care.
- The process includes discussing confidentiality, session limits, and the therapist's qualifications.
- Informed consent fosters trust between the therapist and client.



Informed Consent



- Ensure the client understands their right to withdraw consent at any time without penalty.
- Discuss confidentiality boundaries and circumstances under which information may be disclosed.
- Obtain written consent from the client, confirming their understanding and agreement to proceed.
- Regularly reaffirm consent throughout the therapeutic relationship as therapy progresses.



Discussion!

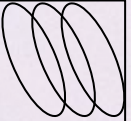
What did the therapist do well?

What would you change or add when introducing an assessment?

Building Rapport

- Active Listening and Empathy
- Reflective Statements and Validation
- Matching Body Language and Tone
- Showing genuine curiosity and interest in the client's experiences
- Avoiding judgmental or dismissive reactions
- Using humor appropriately to create a sense of ease
- Offering choices when possible to empower the client
- Recognizing and validating emotions without rushing to problem-solving





Overcoming Client Resistance

Understanding Resistance

Identifying sources of client resistance, such as fear of judgment or lack of trust in the assessment process, can help tailor interventions.

Framing Assessments Positively

Presenting assessments as opportunities for growth and collaboration rather than evaluations can reduce anxiety and encourage participation.

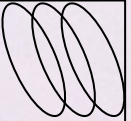
Collaborative Strategies

Involving clients in the assessment process through discussions and feedback fosters a sense of ownership and can diminish resistance.

Overcoming Client Resistance

- Normalizing assessment as a collaborative process
- Addressing skepticism and fears
- Acknowledging past negative experiences with assessments
- Being transparent about the purpose and benefits of assessment
- Giving clients a sense of control over the process
- Allowing space for questions and clarifications
- Reassuring confidentiality and non-judgmental approach





Overcoming Client Resistance

- **Express Empathy** – Use reflective listening and validation
- **Develop Discrepancy** – Highlight the gap between current behaviors and desired goals
- **Roll with Resistance** – Avoid direct confrontation; reframe resistance as ambivalence
- **Support Self-Efficacy** – Reinforce the client's ability to make positive changes
- **Ask Open-Ended Questions** – Encourage deeper self-reflection
- **Use Affirmations** – Reinforce strengths and past successes
- **Summarize Regularly** – Ensure understanding and clarify concerns
- **Elicit Change Talk** – Encourage discussions about potential changes and their benefits



Discussion!

What did the therapist do well?

How did the therapist roll with resistance?

What might you do differently in this assessment with this client?

Managing Emotional Reactions

Normalize and Validate Emotions

- "It's totally okay to feel emotional — this is hard stuff to talk about."
- "Many people feel overwhelmed when going over these kinds of questions."

Pause and Check In

- "Would it help to take a moment?"
- "Do you want to continue, take a break, or shift topics for now?"

Grounding Techniques (Quick Tools)

- Take deep breaths together
- Offer a sip of water, adjust posture, feet on ground
- Orienting to room: "Can you look around and name 3 things you see?"

Managing Emotional Reactions

Managing Your Own Reaction (Therapist Self-Regulation)

- Notice your body: *Am I holding tension?*
- Breathe and slow your speech
- Acknowledge internally without reacting outwardly: "I'm noticing I'm feeling ____"



Plan for Follow-Up

- If emotional material comes up: "We can pick this up in future sessions at a pace that feels right."
- Safety check: Assess for immediate needs if strong distress emerges

Making Formal Assessments Conversational

- **Set the Stage** - "Some of these questions might sound formal, but they're just tools to help me understand how you're doing. Feel free to explain in your own words."
- **Use Natural Transitions** - Instead of reading items verbatim, **introduce clusters** of questions (e.g., "Let's talk a bit about sleep...").
- **Normalize the Questions** - "Many people have felt this way before, so if anything sounds familiar, that's totally okay to share."
- **Reflect and Paraphrase** - After an answer: "So it sounds like... Is that right?"
- **Check In on Comfort** - "Are these questions making sense? Is there anything you'd like to add in your own words?"

Common Pitfalls in Assessments

Leading or Suggestive Questioning

Using leading questions can bias the responses and limit the accuracy of the assessment. It's crucial to ask open-ended questions that allow clients to express their thoughts freely.

Over-reliance on a Single Assessment Tool

Relying solely on one tool can lead to incomplete evaluations. A comprehensive approach using multiple tools provides a more rounded understanding of the client's needs.

Cultural and Contextual Influences

Neglecting cultural and contextual factors can skew assessment results. It is essential to consider these influences to ensure assessments are relevant and effective.



Discussion!

What did the therapist do well?

Why is it important to specify language?

What might you do differently in this assessment with this client?

Ending Assessments

- **Signal the End** - "We're getting close to the end of our time today..." "Before we finish, I want to check in on a few more things..."
- **Summarize** - "From what you've shared, it sounds like you're dealing with..." "You've shared a lot today — thank you for being open."
- **Normalize Vulnerability** - "I know this can feel like a lot to talk about — it's completely okay to feel that way." "Is there something you can do to decompress after this?"
- **Offer Space for Final Questions** - "Is there anything I didn't ask about that feels important for me to know?" "Any questions or concerns about what we talked about?"
- **Clarify Next Steps** - Confirm / collaborate on goals, set up next appointment / make appropriate referral / let them know when you'll reach back out.

Documenting Assessments

Balance Detail and Brevity

- Focus on **relevant** information for diagnosis, treatment planning, and risk assessment
- Avoid unnecessary or excessive detail — prioritize what's clinically important

Use Client's Own Words When Appropriate

- Quote directly for key insights:

Avoid Judgmental or Pathologizing Language

- Say: "Client reports difficulty managing anger."
- Avoid: "Client is angry and aggressive."

Document Strengths and Coping

- Not just problems: "Client identifies music as a calming strategy."

Record Observations, Not Just Reports

- Appearance, affect, behavior during assessment: "Client appeared tearful and spoke softly when discussing family."

Address Safety Issues Clearly

- Document any risk and action taken: "This clinician performed a suicide risk assessment. Client expressed passive suicidal ideation without plan, means, or intent. Safety plan reviewed."

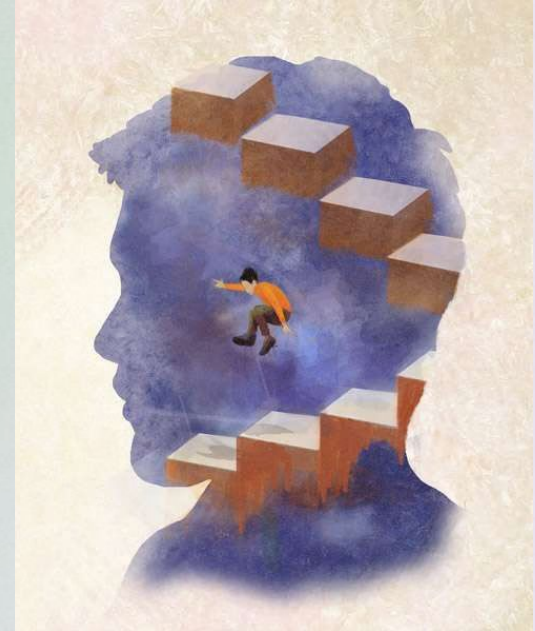
Reflect Cultural Considerations

- Note cultural context shaping client's experience: "Client described family expectations influenced by cultural background."

Intuition with Evidence

Why Intuition Matters

- Fills gaps that standardized tools may not capture.
- Helps read between the lines of client responses.
- Supports understanding of non-verbal cues, tone, and hesitations.
- Builds deeper connection and empathy with clients.



Intuition with Evidence



Using Intuition Responsibility

- Stay self-aware: Notice when intuition arises — is it informed by experience or bias?
- Check assumptions: *"I'm noticing I'm thinking _____. Let me ask more to check that."*
- Pair intuition with client feedback: Use reflective listening to confirm insights.
- Document observations: Clearly separate intuitive impressions from objective data.

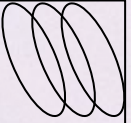
Intuition with Evidence

Balancing Intuition with Evidence

- Start with structured, validated tools to guide assessment.
- Use intuition to explore nuances or when something "feels off."
- Circle back to tools to confirm or clarify impressions.
- Integrate: Blend data + client voice + clinical judgment for a fuller picture.



Intuition is a clinical skill — use it as a compass, not a map.



Therapist Self-Assessment for Growth

Evaluating Assessment Practices

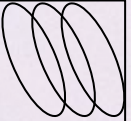
Therapists should regularly reflect on their assessment methods to identify strengths and weaknesses. This process aids in refining techniques and enhancing client outcomes.

Identifying Improvement Areas

Recognizing personal biases and limitations is crucial for growth. Implementing feedback from peers can highlight areas for development in assessment accuracy.

Continued Education

Engaging in workshops and training on new assessment methodologies fosters ongoing professional growth and ensures that therapists stay updated with best practices.



Therapist Self-Assessment for Growth

Self Awareness

Am I noticing any assumptions or judgments?

What is my gut feeling, and what is it based on— clinical experience or personal bias?

How might my own mood or state be influencing this session?

Client-Centered Focus

Have I given space for the client to express things in their own words?

Have I clarified any ambiguous answers instead of assuming?

Does my body language and tone encourage openness?

Balancing Tools & Intuition

Have I used evidence-based questions or tools to guide the process?

Where has my intuition added something, and have I checked it with the client?

How do I balance sticking to the assessment and allowing space for conversation?

Evidence-based tools

+

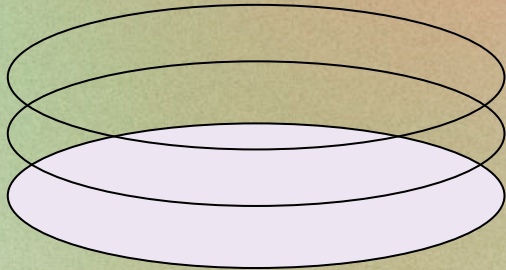
Clinical intuition

+

Ongoing self-reflection

=

Effective assessment



Next Steps

What new assessments, tools, or strategies would you like to implement?



Thank you

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Videos

Dr. House - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyjLQG6np6U>

Culturally Informed Ted Talk - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VrYmQDiunSc>

Good Will Hunting - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZtiZBt9BLnw&t=191s>

What About Bob - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bYO-mm_MvM

Additional Resources

- **APA PsycTests**
Comprehensive database of psychological tests and assessments.
<https://www.apa.org/pubs/databases/psyctests>
- **Mental Health America Screening Tools**
Free, public-facing screening tools for various mental health concerns.
<https://screening.mhanational.org/screening-tools/>
- **SAMHSA-HRSA Center for Integrated Health Solutions (CIHS) – Screening Tools**
A collection of evidence-based screening tools, including for integrated care settings.
<https://www.integration.samhsa.gov/clinical-practice/screening-tools>
- **National Center for PTSD – Assessment Instruments**
Validated assessments for PTSD and trauma-related symptoms.
<https://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/assessment/overview/index.asp>
- *Clinical Interviewing* by John Sommers-Flanagan & Rita Sommers-Flanagan
- *The Therapeutic Assessment* by Stephen Finn
- *DSM-5-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders)* by American Psychiatric Association
- <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheets/assessment>
- *The Gift of Therapy* by Irvin Yalom
- *On Being a Therapist* by Jeffrey Kottler
- *The Mindful Therapist* by Daniel Siegel
- Clinical Supervision with a focus on reflective practice and exploring therapist intuition.
- Peer Consultation Groups for discussing real cases and intuitive impressions.
- Mindfulness and body-based practices to strengthen awareness of clinical cues and personal reactions.
- **National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) – Assessment Tools**
<https://www.nctsn.org/resources/clinical-assessments>
- **Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) – APA** - Structured tool for understanding cultural influences on mental health.