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## Building mutual trust in psychotherapy



It may or may not be hard for you to trust a psychologist or other health care professional. Whatever the case, effective therapy depends on building teamwork through mutual trust and respect. Experiencing abuse or neglect early in life makes it hard to trust anyone, and hard to even feel safe.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is largely about losing whatever sense of safety in the world you have, following trauma. In the Veteran's Administration hospital system in California, where I did my internship, combat is the best known cause of PTSD. Here in Wisconsin, the most common cause of PTSD is motor vehicle accidents. But it can be shocking to find clients who had never felt safe and couldn't imagine feeling safe due to childhood abuse and neglect. The most important parenting jobs are to offer unconditional love and acceptance, comfort and protection. Without these basics, people grow up feeling worthless, angry and afraid.

Most clients when asked will say they feel safe in a therapist's office. This is often an effort to be a good, cooperative client. People who have experienced early abuse and neglect seldom feel safe until they address the issue honestly. Some aspects of how people feel in a therapist's office can be addressed. Things like the lighting being too bright or too dark. Is the therapist too close or too far away? Too much eye contact or not enough? One of my clients had been abused by family loudly calling attention to her appearance with ridicule so that she wanted to be invisible. Another had been molested by an uncle sneaking into her bedroom in darkness and she wanted the therapy room to be bright. When doing hypnosis, it's traditional to expect the clients to close their eyes. This may be impossible for someone who has been abused, so a therapist might suggest that the client keep his or her eyes open and unfocused.

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Another aspect of trust lies in questions about who this therapist is, what his/her personal and professional experience is, and will he/she understand my background and needs? When I came back to Wisconsin from Montana, I was a community psychologist serving all ages in a rural county. My first patient was a welder whose house had just burned down. His clothes showed evidence of the fire. He wanted to know what made me think I could understand a working stiff like him. So I let him know my dad was a factory worker with a sixth-grade education and mom had a 10th-grade education and stayed at home. As a psychologist, I’m okay with answering reasonable questions if it helps establish trust.

Speaking of questions, therapists ask a lot of those, especially in the first session. If there are questions you aren’t ready to deal with yet, let your therapist know. Your therapist might talk a bit about the methods he or she uses in that first session, but there might not be time for a lot of detail. Your therapist should be able to offer a variety of approaches, such as CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing), EFT Emotional Freedom Technique), energy psychology, existential psychology or hypnosis so that together you can select the best approach.

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*Dr. Phyllis Kasper has expertise in anxiety disorders, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, peak achievement, biofeedback, hypnosis, EMDR, cultural diversity and pain management. She can help you use personal empowerment to unleash your best you! Call her at 920.693.2250. Visit <http://evolveability.com> for a free download of a hypnosis sample. Dr. Kasper is available at Healthy Connections, 510 E. Wisconsin Ave. in Appleton, 920-257-4601.*