

**Workshop Manual**

# **Effective Techniques for Dealing with Highly Resistant Clients**

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## Conventional Definitions of Resistance

- "Any client behavior that exhibits a reluctance, on the part of the client, to participate in the tasks of therapy as set forward by the therapist,"
- "...any behavior that indicates covert or overt opposition to the therapist, the counseling process, or the therapist's agenda," (Bischoff & Tracey, 1995, p. 488).

## Alternative Perspectives: The Social Interaction Theorists

Resistance occurs as a result of a "...negative interpersonal dynamic between the therapist and the client" (Otani, 1989, p. 459).

"Resistance is defined as psychological forces aroused in the client that restrain acceptance of influence (acceptance of the counselor's suggestion) and are generated by the way the suggestion is stated and by the characteristics of the counselor stating it" (Strong and Matross, 1973, p. 26).

## Resistance and Influence: Breaking the Negative Cycle

A general hierarchical list of the least forceful to most forceful methods to influence:

least forceful	completely non-directive
	indirectly suggest
	directly suggest
	provide advice/educate
	confront
most forceful	punitive force

Resistance is created when the method of delivering influence is \_\_\_\_\_ with the clients' current propensity to accept the manner in which the influence is delivered.

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# General Principles for Managing Resistance

**Do the Unexpected** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Slow the Pace** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Focus on Details** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Seek Emotionally Compelling Reasons for Change** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Maintain an Attitude of Naïve Puzzlement** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Treat Clients' Resistance with Respect** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Establish Mutually Agree Upon Goals** \_\_\_\_\_

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**Conclusion** \_\_\_\_\_

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**All a client has to do to thwart your efforts is** \_\_\_\_\_.

Adapted from King, 1992

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# Managing "I Don't Know" Responses

## Responding to "I Don't Know"

The key to responding to "I don't know" is to respond to the \_\_\_\_\_ behind the response. Examples of responses that interpret "I don't know" at face value include:

"At this moment, you are really stumped as you search for an answer."

"You really cannot think of a possible approach that you can take that appears better than what you are doing."

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If client has stated "I don't know" in order to avoid revealing some threatening reality about him/herself, simply empathize about your suspicion:

"It is difficult and scary to actually say aloud the truth about..."

"You are really uncomfortable facing this aspect of your life."

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If you suspect the "I don't know" is a peacekeeping deflection, then respond similarly with an understanding of this perspective.

"You are concerned that if you provide the answer it will cause a lot of controversy and conflict among your family."

"You are reluctant to tell me the answer because you worry about how I might take it."

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## How to Avoid "I Don't Know" Responses

1. Simply omit the question altogether. Instead, respond with the empathic statement.

**Example:** "I sense that you are stuck as to what to do, you have no idea how to begin doing something about your problems, and you are really searching for some new approach that might work."

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## Inquire of a Wise Friend

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## The Classic Pretend Technique

"Pretend you weren't confused, what would you be saying if you knew what you wanted."

"Make up an answer."

"Guess what you think you might say if you did know."

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# NOTES

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## References

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## Effective Techniques for Dealing with Highly Resistant Clients 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.

Clifton W. Mitchell, Ph.D.

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The methods I've used from this book have greatly improved my success in gaining cooperation and participation during counseling sessions. It's also relieved a lot of stress. In this book you will find a new way of viewing resistance...it is a special form of communication from the client, and when handled skillfully, it can actually be used to move therapy forward. Responding to the resistance to change is also viewed as the heart of all therapy because without it people wouldn't be in therapy in the first place. This book cuts to the chase by bypassing elaborate theory to get right to case examples that illustrate the methods and techniques described. The metaphors and excerpted quotes promote the quick understanding of the material even further. At first glance it may appear to be just a book of techniques, but it is actually a complete approach to therapy and is built on the foundation of Rogers' Person-Centered Therapy. This book also makes an excellent compliment to Miller and Rollnick's Motivational Interviewing. **D. Kirkham "Mind Explorer"**, July, 2007

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