

Planning for Termination of Treatment

Termination: The Ultimate Goal of Therapy

Termination can be viewed as a positive transition by many patients where they experience a sense of pride and accomplishment related to successful completion of treatment. However, some patients may feel a sense of loss. It is important to prepare patients for termination at the beginning of therapy and discuss different termination options.

Preparing for Termination

Preparing for termination is an essential component of treatment. In fact, discussion about the time-limited nature of psychotherapy and expectation of termination should be discussed at the onset of therapy. It is imperative that termination is discussed openly and as the conclusion of treatment nears, termination should become the focus of treatment. The following guidelines can help prepare patients for termination:

- Orient patients to the finite nature of psychotherapy
- Discuss and agree upon termination criteria
- Document termination criteria clearly in the treatment plan
- Use outcome measures to assess if termination criteria have been met

Patient Discussion and Collaboration

The following are several questions that you can explore collaboratively with your patients to assist with the termination process:

- What does the patient imagine it will be like for therapy to end?
- What skills has the patient gained/learned over the course of treatment?
- What resources will the patient use for support after therapy ends?
- What warning signs/symptoms will the patient look for to indicate he/she might need to return to treatment?

Options for Termination

Ideally, termination will occur when the treatment goals and objectives outlined in the treatment plan have been accomplished. Nevertheless, there is no “right” way to terminate treatment. The following are some common options for termination:

- **Set Termination Date:** When the patient is ready for termination, you and the patient can collaboratively determine the date for the last session.
- **Reduce Frequency:** Reducing the frequency of sessions may help ease the transition as the patient’s symptoms improve and they are approaching readiness for termination.
- **Offer Booster Sessions:** Some patients may benefit from booster sessions. Booster sessions serve as a “tune-up,” reinforcing gains made in treatment and promoting relapse prevention skills. In some cases, this can help patients stay on track and continue to use the skills they learned in therapy, thus maximizing therapeutic benefits. It is important to critically assess the necessity of booster sessions so that one does not reinforce an unnecessary dependence on therapy and prevent a successful termination.

