

# The West Coast Trauma Project

## New Trauma Therapist Cheat Sheet

*a selection of 3 fundamental skills for new trauma therapists*

### Baselines:

Establishing *baselines* with your client is crucial. Why? Because it allows you to gauge several things:

1. First, it allows you to take an immediate *temperature*, as it were, of how your client is doing
2. it allows you as a therapist to assess your client's level of awareness and mindfulness
3. It helps to build rapport
4. It invites the client to cultivate mindfulness
5. It also presents an opportunity to ask your client how they might decrease their elevated level, for example: *What would need to happen for you to come down to a 3, or 4? And, What things, people, places (etc) increase your level?*

**Try it:** Pretty soon after your client has settled into the session, ask them where they are at on a 0 to 10 scale (of anxiety, for example) with 10 being the worst they've ever experienced.

### Agenda:

Our *agenda* is the plan we feel compelled to implement, whether subconsciously or not, for our clients. We all want the best for our clients, that's not the issue.

However, it is necessary that we monitor our *feeling or need* to implement an *agenda*—our *agenda*—at the expense of what is truly appropriate and healthy for our client.

**Try it:** Ask yourself, *To what degree am I aware of my intentions?* For example: *Why do I feel it's so important that my client stop \_\_\_\_\_?* (fill in the blank with a particular coping skill: smoking, for example).

Or, *Why do I feel the need at this moment to ask my client to share their traumatic experience? Are they safely prepared to do this, and how do I know this?*

We have to be mindful of feeling the need to change or fix things for our own reasons, rather than for the health of our client.

### Authenticity:

I love this one! Why? Because it's vital to the work we do, it seems so simple, and yet it's actually something that often takes some time to cultivate.

Why is that? Because as Laurence Heller, PhD puts it: *We're human. And we have our own fears and biases that often creep into the therapy room.*

So, what are some ways we can cultivate authenticity?

1. by getting into our own therapy or inner work and exploration
2. by getting great consultation
3. by developing a clinical self-awareness whereby we are frequently checking ourselves, our motives, our agendas

**Try it:** Before your next session, hang up your *clinical hat*, (try it!) be your true self to your client rather than an *idea* or image of what a therapist is or should be. See what happens.