

# Communicating with Clients with Personality Disorders

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# Learning Objectives

1. Know key differences between personality disorder and mental illness
2. Know how to recognize maladaptive personality traits
3. Know techniques for communicating with clients with personality disorders

# Case Example

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# Personality Disorders

- An enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture...is inflexible and pervasive across a broad range of personal and social situations....stable and long lasting...and not the consequence of mental disorder, medical illness, or substance abuse.
- Affect cognition, emotion, interpersonal functioning and impulse control.
- Many times do not lead to finding of incompetence to stand trial!

# Personality Disorders

Personality disorders are grouped in “clusters”

- Cluster A = odd, eccentric
- Cluster B = dramatic, emotional, erratic
- Cluster C = anxious, fearful

Maladaptive interactions are to be expected

Certain communication styles can be effective in interactions with these clients

# Cluster A Personality Disorders

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# Cluster A Personality Disorders

- Paranoid Personality Disorder
- Schizoid Personality Disorder
- Schizotypal Personality Disorder

# Cluster A Personality Disorders

Uncomfortable in interpersonal situations

Emotionally distant

Difficult to engage

Isolative



# Cluster A Personality Disorders

Typical engagement strategies will likely fail!

Adopt a professional stance

Provide clear explanations

Avoid direct challenge to paranoid/suspicious ideas

Tolerate odd beliefs

# Cluster B Personality Disorders

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## Cluster B Personality Disorders

- Antisocial Personality Disorder
- Borderline Personality Disorder
- Histrionic Personality Disorder
- Narcissistic Personality Disorder

# Cluster B Personality Disorders

Most challenging!

Will push professional boundaries

Interpersonally inappropriate

Attention-seeking, demanding, manipulative, emotionally unstable

Seek to be center of attention (histrionic), grandiose and aloof (narcissistic)

Self-focused with lack of empathy

# Cluster B Personality Disorders

Typical engagement strategies will likely fail!

Communicate clearly, in a nonpunitive manner

Emphasize facts, objective issues

Set limits, tactful negotiation is helpful

Validate concerns

Expect outbursts (especially borderline)

Channel patient's strengths (narcissistic)

# Cluster C Personality Disorders

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## Cluster C Personality Disorders

- Avoidant Personality Disorder
- Dependent Personality Disorder
- Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder

# Cluster C Personality Disorders

Anxious

Needy, clingy, desire to be taken care of

Low self-esteem

Fear of rejection or loss of control



# Cluster C Personality Disorders

Typical engagement strategies will likely fail!

Provide reassurance

Do not overemphasize uncertainty

Schedule regular check-ins

Set limits on availability

Quiz = Personality or Illness?

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# Case Examples

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# Conclusions:

1. There are key differences between personality disorders and mental illnesses
2. Maladaptive personality traits lead to interpersonal difficulties
3. Expect communication difficulties
4. Use techniques to communicate as effectively as possible with clients with personality disorders