

Tips for Working with the Gifted



Don't be intimidated.

You don't have to be smarter than your client to help them. That's not what they need from you. They sought out your expertise, compassion, and experience.



Be prepared to explain why.

Gifted people want to understand what's happening and what you're doing together. This may be a big challenge because after we've been working for a while we can forget why we do what we do: we just know that it works. Dig deep and remember, and then tell them.



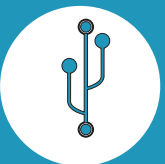
Earn their respect.

A very common gifted characteristic is having no respect for positional authority. In other words, just because you're the therapist doesn't mean they trust you or believe you know what you're doing. Don't take it personally!



Learn from them.

You don't have to know everything your client knows, and they don't know everything you know. (Gifted people don't know everything!) Be curious about what they know, so they'll be interested in what you know.



Use metaphors.

Gifted people love metaphors and see connections between everything. Metaphors can be a great way of helping them understand what's happening in therapy and in their life. If possible, use their metaphors or ask them to come up with a metaphor for their experience, and don't be afraid to offer your own.



Engage in their ways of knowing.

Some gifted people are highly logical, some are highly intuitive, some are highly spiritual, and others have a mix of ways of knowing what they know. Respect what they know and how they know it, even if it doesn't make complete sense to you.



Anti-intellectualism is a thing.

Believe your clients when they say they've had to hide their intelligence, that people think they are too much (too driven, too sensitive, too busy...), or that people don't like them for being smart. Don't believe that the answer is to change those things about your client. At the same time, don't believe that it doesn't matter.



Focus on process, not content.

This is one of the hardest to do! Gifted people can talk you in circles and you can completely lose track of the intervention you were attempting. The content may be very interesting or compelling, so beware of being distracted.



Don't overdiagnose.

Educate yourself about common gifted characteristics that sometimes look like symptoms, and resist the urge to diagnose every possible disorder. Identify the main problem and use a diagnosis and treatment plan that targets it. Again, beware of becoming distracted by symptoms or changes in presentation.