

Autonomy - Individuation

Socio-emotional development level equivalent to 18-36 months of age

Adapting Therapeutic Approaches and Environments

Interacting with Clients

- Take account of clients' individual needs when determining the frequency, duration and form of one-on-one contact
- It is very important to clients at this developmental level to assert their independence, but they also need the reassurance of attachment figures
- Be there for clients when they need you – particularly to comfort and reassure them when they are tense or upset – but bear in mind that they have a strong need for autonomy, so wait for them to initiate contact rather than forcing it on them or "running after them"

Adjusting Settings and Demands to the Needs of Clients

- Allow clients to take care of their personal hygiene as much as possible to give them a sense of independence, but be ready to offer support and intervene when necessary
- Supervise clients' access to articles of consumption (food, beverages, personal care products etc.) and potentially dangerous technical equipment (e.g. refrigerator, electrical appliances)
- Provide clients with a space of their own that they can retreat to
- Interaction with peers should be supervised
- When communicating with clients, refer to the immediate situation, use short sentences and be as specific as possible; avoid moralizing and abstraction
- Most clients at this developmental level require one-on-one attention at least occasionally, so occupational therapy groups are generally more suitable than employment in so-called sheltered workshops or social enterprises

Therapeutic Approaches

- Clients at this level of development can recognize basic emotions in others, so leading by example often works well
- Reinforce desired behaviour promptly by offering clients items and/or activities they find interesting or pleasurable as a reward
- Clients at this stage can benefit from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (e.g. simple token plans)
- Allow clients to make mistakes as long as they do not endanger themselves or others
- Dealing with challenging behaviour:
 - Ask clients to describe their feelings
 - Suggest a brief time-out
 - Model and reinforce desired behaviour

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- Dealing with potentially harmful behaviour:
 - Remove clients from the situation
 - Impose a time-out and re-establish contact once clients have calmed down

Avoid

- Depriving clients of contact for more than brief periods of time; experience has shown that a time-out of 30 minutes is generally sufficient for them to calm down, while more than half an hour can actually be counterproductive
- Insufficient supervision and structure
- Expressing negative emotions when initiating contact with clients
- Moralizing
- Too many and/or too complex rules
- Depriving clients of their transitional/comfort objects
- Setting behavioural therapy goals over extended time periods (contingency training)