



ADVANCED INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES: HANDLING SENSITIVE ISSUES WITH CHILD CLIENTS

Boundary Issues In Representing Children

Transference and counter-transference are subjective factors including feelings, expectations and assumptions developed through our own life experiences, but not necessarily reflective of current reality, which we unconsciously project onto others in our interactions. These feelings may be negative or positive, threatening or idealized and are liable to intensify with anxiety, need, stress, performance concerns, etc.

Ignoring transference/counter-transference issues may result in misreading cues/reactions, failing to effectively engage clients and explore important background information, skewing facts to fit preconceived perceptions and expectations, overstepping professional boundaries, and/or becoming overwhelmed by the job, experiencing secondary trauma and burn-out.

Transference = what clients bring to relationships; how they view you

- These responses are not based on who you are or how you act, but rather upon their prior experiences with authority figures or others with whom, in your clients' eyes, you appear to share common traits (e.g. race, gender, physical appearance, position, etc.).
- It is important to learn how the person views his/her situation and your role in it. (Transference may be more related to the situation than the characteristics of the person.)
- It may be helpful to acknowledge the client's past experiences with people in his/her life who were similarly situated.

Counter-transference = what we bring to relationships based our background and values; how we view the client and react to the client's "transference"

- As an attorney, social worker, paralegal or investigator, you need to be sensitive to your own issues, beliefs and bias and to anticipate areas which might present problems for you.
- Since we were all children and members of families, it is very easy to make assumptions about what a "normal" family should look and act like. We need to be vigilant about projecting our experiences onto our clients and expecting them to want similar things.
- Continually ask yourself, "What assumptions am I making?"
- Monitor the manner in which you characterize and describe your client, his/her situation and her family. Flag and review statements that include "...always, often are...."

- Be alert to information that tends to confirm your assumptions as accurate.
- Be skeptical; ask yourself follow-up questions when you arrive at conclusions.

Warning signs of counter-transference:

- Responding in an irrational or unusual manner
- Feeling the need to give your home telephone number or take child to your home
- Sharing excessive personal information or linking to your personal web-pages
- Wanting to be liked
- Acting out dislikes
- Acting out positive feelings
- Seeing yourself as the most significant person in the child's life; wanting to "save" the child