

Neuroscience and Neurological Disorders

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Building and maintaining an alliance with a child patient

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Child therapists frequently inadequately appreciate certain aspects of a child's experience, ultimately undermining the therapy. Children have limited ability to protect themselves, and expect adults to take concrete actions to help them. They are repeatedly devastated when the adults they trusted fail them by refusing to believe them when they express suffering and pain. Children are extremely sensitive to invalidation, even when minor (that is, from the perspective of an adult). Actively validating the child's experience is crucial to building and maintaining a therapeutic relationship. Children have a right to adult assistance and protection; if the parents fail to provide this to the child, it is the moral

imperative of the child's therapist to step in and take actions to prevent the child, even from a parent. Being able to do so requires a thorough understanding of the situation. However, forcing a child to share memories and emotions they don't yet feel safe to share is experienced as invasive, and a betrayal of the trust the child places in the therapist. In the world of a child, trust once broken can never be recovered. Building and maintaining an alliance with a child patient is vital to the wellbeing of the child. Failure to do so destroys the therapeutic relationship.

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