Practical Applications to Enhance Motivation in the Treatment of Adolescents with Selective Mutism

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Outline

- Motivation as a necessary treatment factor
- Challenges in motivating adolescents
- Building pre-treatment motivation
  - Parent collaboration
  - Prep sessions
- Building motivation into treatment
- Q and A

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Motivation: A critical but overlooked factor

- Willingness/motivation to engage in treatment may be as important to treatment success as ability to use treatment skills

- Impact of low motivation:
  - Poor therapeutic alliance → low engagement
  - Can hamper learning, skill acquisition, and application of skills outside of therapy

- Unique developmental characteristics of adolescents can make them particularly difficult to engage

Lepper, Sethi, Dialdin, & Drake, 1997; Weisz, 1997; Weisz & Hawley, 2002; Willner, 2006
Adolescent Resistance

- Desire to function autonomously
  - Resistant to decision by others for them to get help
  - Drive to solve problems themselves (but often unable to)

- Reduced capacity for self-reflection
  - Might not experience their problem as needing treatment
  - Minimize negative consequence of anxiety
  - May be afraid to give up maladaptive coping strategies

- Stigma (particularly with SM due to low prevalence)

Bedrosian, 1981; McAdam, 1986; Rubenstein, 2003, Stallard, 2009; Weisz & Hawley, 2002
Pretreatment Preparation
Parent Collaboration

- Identify impairments meaningful to the **teen**, not parent

- Identify all the ways in which parents are enabling

- If there is a high degree of enabling and the teen has no motivation → parent training first
  - Reduce reinforcing accommodations
  - Shift attention
  - Make it less comfortable

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Pre-Treatment Prep Sessions

- **High baseline anxiety**
  - Across multiple variables (new location, new person, new structure)
  - Probably catastrophizing

- **Prep sessions**
  - Brief video sessions with parent and teen (lower pressure)
  - Minimize uncertainty by breaking down the multiple unknowns
  - Teen told in advance by parents about no expectation to speak in first session
Example Prep Session

- Introduction (includes normalizing)
- Validate resistance
- Brief psychoeducation (depersonalize “teens” instead of “you”)
  - Anxiety and avoidance
  - SM interference
- Instill hope
- Explain process and collaboration
- Go over interest sheet (rapport-building)
- Take first step toward verbalizing
Building Motivation into Treatment
Collaborative Goal-Setting

- General skills
  - Provide information and menu of options
  - Emphasize personal choice and responsibility
  - Focus on *their* behaviors and goals

- Allow them to have input into exposures conducted within and between sessions

- Imagining the future

- Highlight discrepancy between values/goals and current status
Treatment Activities

- **Warm-up**
  - Start of each session - therapy perceived as fun
  - Use their favorite games/activities

- **Hierarchy**
  - Already generated list of varied situations
  - Individually tailored to distinct challenges/impairments

- **Cognitive restructuring**
  - Already generated list of maladaptive thoughts and corresponding coping thoughts
  - Push them beyond that if capable and more motivated

- **Homework assignment**
  - Based on their determined order on the hierarchy
  - Provide options
Make a check in the boxes next to the thoughts that you identify with

- don't hear me?

- They're going to
  - Everyone's attention
  - embarrass myself

- to my friends
Peers

- Peer “assessment” across classes
- Involve teachers and parents
- Challenge cognitions
- Message to peers not to react

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Q & A TIME
Thank You!

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