

Clinician Signaling Checklist

For Values-Based Ruptures, Ethical Dilemmas, and Difficult Conversations

Before Session: Self-Assessment

Based on RO-DBT's model, threat cues often produce defensive signaling, while safety cues enhance openness, receptivity, and social connection.

Neuroception Check - What cues am I experiencing right now?

- ☐ Safety
- ☐ Novelty
- ☐ Reward
- ☐ Threat
- ☐ Overwhelm

What is activating me?

- ☐ Political disagreement
- ☐ Cultural difference
- ☐ Religious difference
- ☐ Identity issue
- ☐ Ethical concern
- ☐ Fear of causing harm
- ☐ Fear of being judged
- ☐ Other: _____

If I am activated:

- ☐ I recognize that my neuroception may not be objective.
- ☐ I am willing to consider that I may be missing information.
- ☐ I can distinguish disagreement from danger.

During Session: Social Safety Signals

Face

Safety Signals

- ☐ Facial muscles relaxed
- ☐ Warm, responsive facial expression
- ☐ Natural emotional expression
- ☐ Closed-mouth cooperative smile available when appropriate
- ☐ Eyebrows mobile and expressive

Threat Signals

- ☐ Jaw clenched
- ☐ Face frozen or "professionalized"
- ☐ Stony expression
- ☐ Smirking
- ☐ Eye rolling
- ☐ Micro-expressions of disgust
- ☐ Excessive seriousness

Eye Contact

Safety Signals

- ☐ Comfortable eye contact
- ☐ Looking toward the client when listening
- ☐ Soft gaze
- ☐ Curious attention

Threat Signals

- ☐ Staring
- ☐ Looking away repeatedly
- ☐ Looking down excessively
- ☐ Visibly withdrawing attention

Voice

Safety Signals

- ☐ Warm tone
- ☐ Flexible inflection
- ☐ Appropriate pacing
- ☐ Conversational rhythm

Threat Signals

- ☐ Monotone
- ☐ Sharp tone
- ☐ Rapid correction
- ☐ Interrupting
- ☐ Lecture mode

Body Posture**Safety Signals**

- ☐ Leaning back or open posture
- ☐ Relaxed shoulders
- ☐ Open hands
- ☐ Expansive but not dominating gestures

Threat Signals

- ☐ Arms crossed
- ☐ Tight gestures
- ☐ Pointing fingers
- ☐ Leaning forward aggressively
- ☐ Rigid posture

Flexible Mind Check

When I notice disagreement, can I honestly answer "yes" to the following?

- ☐ I am more interested in understanding than persuading.
- ☐ I can tolerate uncertainty.
- ☐ I am willing to discover that my first interpretation is incomplete.
- ☐ I am not assuming bad intent.
- ☐ I am distinguishing my values from professional responsibilities.
- ☐ I can identify at least one strength in the other position or experience.

Post Session: Reflection

Self-Enquiry Prompts

When emotionally activated, ask yourself:

- ☐ What am I defending?
- ☐ What feels threatened?
- ☐ What assumptions am I making?
- ☐ What information might I be overlooking?
- ☐ If another therapist disagreed with me, what might they see?
- ☐ Am I reacting to the client or to what the client represents?
- ☐ What would radical openness look like right now?

Cultural and Values Humility Check

Before challenging a client's viewpoint:

- ☐ Have I explored the meaning behind the belief?
- ☐ Have I explored cultural context?
- ☐ Have I explored family/community context?
- ☐ Have I explored spiritual or religious context?
- ☐ Have I differentiated harm from difference?
- ☐ Have I considered my own cultural assumptions?

Rupture Warning Signs

The following may indicate a values-based rupture is occurring:

Therapist Signs

- ☐ Increased urge to persuade
- ☐ Internal moralizing
- ☐ Reduced empathy
- ☐ Reduced curiosity
- ☐ Feeling "obviously right"
- ☐ Fantasizing about referral
- ☐ Feeling personally offended

Client Signs

- ☐ Becomes quiet
- ☐ Withdraws
- ☐ Becomes defensive
- ☐ Stops elaborating
- ☐ Increased appeasement
- ☐ Challenges therapist neutrality
- ☐ Questions therapist acceptance

Social Safety Repair Strategies

If rupture is detected:

- ☐ Slow breathing
- ☐ Relax facial muscles
- ☐ Open posture
- ☐ Use Big Three + 1:
 - Lean back
 - Slow deep breath
 - Closed-mouth smile
 - Eyebrow wag
- ☐ Drink or chew something
- ☐ Lovingkindness meditation

Value-Inclusive Practice Reflection

Did I:

- ☐ Create enough safety for disagreement?
- ☐ Communicate respect without necessarily agreeing?
- ☐ Remain open to learning?
- ☐ Monitor my signaling as carefully as my words?
- ☐ Distinguish advocacy from certainty?
- ☐ Model radical openness?

Final Question

If this session were video recorded without sound, would my nonverbal behavior communicate curiosity, dignity, and openness—or judgment, certainty, and threat?