

Three Applications of Therapeutic Apologies

Each of these will be covered in detail in the workshop.

1) A TA from parent to child (of any age) or between partners when the relationship is strained or in need of strengthening.

Just like close relationships buffer against illness, unexpressed resentment and “unforgiveness” of what was painful in the past - regardless of its perceived validity - can have negative consequences on one’s physical and mental health and is worthy of attention.

2) A TA from parent to child (of any age) when the child is struggling with a mental health issue and is weighed down by shame or self-blame.

Shame and self-blame in those struggling with mental health issues can be debilitating. Those who blame themselves for their mental health issues are also less likely to accept help or seek treatment. Self-blame can become so acute that some clients choose to withdraw from treatment or alienate themselves in order to lessen the burden they believe they place on friends and family. Using a specifically constructed TA, caregivers can share this burden with their loved one. Doing so provides their loved one with relief from feeling broken and ashamed for what they feel they are “putting their family through”, including an increase in feelings of worthiness and openness to receiving support/treatment.

3) A TA involving an in-office, empty-chair technique to support the release of parent self-blame.

Most parents and caregivers with a loved one struggling with medical, behavioral, or emotional issues carry within them a powerful narrative of self-blame. It is a phenomenon observed across the age span and across settings, from the neonatal intensive care to sectors across the mental health system. Parental self-blame is related to a host of negative outcomes such as lower levels of self-esteem and resilience and poorer health outcomes. It predicts low levels of caregiver empowerment and higher rates of accommodating and enabling behaviors. For these reasons, it can be very powerful to engage parents in moving from self-blame to self-forgiveness in an active manner.

The workshop presenter will introduce the theory at the foundation of these interventions, including the practical steps to enact them in session. Opportunities for practice will also be provided.