

## *System for Observing Family Therapy Alliances*

### SOFTA-o (client)

**DIRECTIONS:** Please read the definition of each of the following four constructs. Then, on the coding pages, identify the family members to be rated in the top row. As you observe the session, mark each behavior that occurs in the appropriate column. At the conclusion of the session, use these marks to make a judgment about each family member's alliance on Engagement, Emotional Connection, and Safety. Rate the entire family system on Shared Sense of Purpose. Use the guidelines in the training manual to go from check marks to ratings. Note that items in italics reflect a lack of engagement, poor emotional connection, a lack of a shared sense of purpose, and a lack of safety.

Use the following ordinal scale:

-3 = extremely problematic

-2 = moderately problematic

-1 = somewhat problematic

0 = unremarkable or neutral

+1 = somewhat strong

+2 = moderately strong

+3 = extremely strong

<p><b>ENGAGEMENT IN THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS:</b>  the client viewing treatment as meaningful; a sense of being involved in therapy and working together with the therapist, that therapeutic goals and tasks in therapy can be discussed and negotiated with the therapist, that taking the process seriously is important, that change is possible</p>	<p><b>SAFETY WITHIN THE THERAPEUTIC SYSTEM</b>  the client viewing therapy as a place to take risks, be open, flexible; a sense of comfort and an expectation that new experiences and learning will take place, that good can come from being in therapy, that conflict within the family can be handled without harm, that one need not be defensive</p>
<p><b>EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO THE THERAPIST:</b>  the client viewing the therapist as an important person in her/his life, almost like a family member; a sense that the relationship is based on affiliation, trust, caring, and concern; that the therapist genuinely cares and “is there” for the client, that he/she is on the same wavelength with the therapist (e.g., similar life perspectives, values), that the therapist’s wisdom and expertise are valuable</p>	<p><b>SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE WITHIN THE FAMILY:</b>  family members seeing themselves as working collaboratively to improve family relations and achieve common family goals; a sense of solidarity in relation to the therapy (“we’re in this together”); that they value their time with each other in therapy; essentially, a felt unity within the family in relation to therapy</p>

*FAMILY MEMBER*

***ENGAGEMENT IN THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS:***

Client indicates agreement with the therapist's goals

Client describes or discusses a plan for improving  
the situation

Client introduces a problem for discussion

Client agrees to do homework assignments

Client indicates having done homework or seeing it  
as useful

Client expresses optimism or indicates that a  
positive change has taken place

Client complies with therapist's request for  
an enactment

Client leans forward

Client mentions the treatment, the therapeutic process,  
or a specific session

Client expresses feeling "stuck," questions the value  
*of therapy, or states that therapy is not / has not  
been helpful*

*Client shows indifference about the tasks or process  
of therapy (e.g., paying lip service, "I don't know,"  
tuning out)*

**Rate Engagement in the Process**

**-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3**

**for each family member:**

\_\_\_\_\_

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***SAFETY WITHIN THE THERAPEUTIC SYSTEM:***

Client implies or states that therapy is a safe place	_____	_____	_____	_____
Client varies his/her emotional tone during the session	_____	_____	_____	_____
Client shows vulnerability (e.g., discusses painful feelings, cries)	_____	_____	_____	_____
Client has an open upper body posture	_____	_____	_____	_____
Client reveals a secret or something that other family members didn't know	_____	_____	_____	_____
Client encourages another family member to "open up" or to tell the truth	_____	_____	_____	_____
Client directly asks other family members for feedback about his/her behavior or about herself/himself as a person	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Client expresses anxiety nonverbally (e.g., taps or shakes)</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Client protects self in nonverbal manner (e.g., crosses arms over chest, doesn't take off jacket or put down purse, sits far away from group, etc.)</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Client refuses or is reluctant to respond when directly addressed by another family member</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Client responds defensively to another family member</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Client makes an uneasy/anxious reference to the camera, observation, supervisor, or research procedures</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____

**Rate Safety within the Therapeutic System**                      **-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3**

**for each family member:** \_\_\_\_\_  
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**SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE WITHIN THE FAMILY:**

Family members offer to compromise	_____	_____	_____	_____
Family members share a joke or a lighthearted moment with each other	_____	_____	_____	_____
Family members ask each other for their perspective	_____	_____	_____	_____
Family members validate each other's point of view	_____	_____	_____	_____
Family members mirror each other's body posture	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Family members avoid eye contact with each other</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Family members blame each other</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Family members devalue each other's opinions or perspective</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Family members try to align with the therapist against each other</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Client makes hostile or sarcastic comments to family members</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____
<i>Family members disagree with each other about the value, purpose, goals, or tasks of therapy or about who should be included in the sessions</i>	_____	_____	_____	_____

**Rate Shared Sense of Purpose within the Family**                      **-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3**

**for the family as a whole:**

\_\_\_\_\_

## *System for Observing Family Therapy Alliances*

### **SOFTA-o (therapist)**

**DIRECTIONS:** Please read the definition of each of the following four constructs. As you observe the session, mark each behavior as it occurs. At the conclusion of the session, use these marks to make a judgment about the therapist's contribution to Engagement, Emotional Connection, Safety, and the family's Shared Sense of Purpose. Use the guidelines in the training manual to go from check marks to ratings. Note that items in italics reflect negative contributions to engagement, emotional connection, a shared sense of purpose, and safety.

Use the following ordinal scale:

**-3 = extremely problematic**

**-2 = moderately problematic**

**-1 = somewhat problematic**

**0 = unremarkable or neutral**

**+1 = somewhat strong**

**+2 = moderately strong**

**+3 = extremely strong**

<p><b>ENGAGEMENT IN THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS:</b>  the client viewing treatment as meaningful; a sense of being involved in therapy and working together with the therapist, that therapeutic goals and tasks in therapy can be discussed and negotiated with the therapist, that taking the process seriously is important, that change is possible</p>	<p><b>SAFETY WITHIN THE THERAPEUTIC SYSTEM</b>  the client viewing therapy as a place to take risks, be open, flexible; a sense of comfort and an expectation that new experiences and learning will take place, that good can come from being in therapy, that conflict within the family can be handled without harm, that one need not be defensive</p>
<p><b>EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO THE THERAPIST:</b>  the client viewing the therapist as an important person in her/his life, almost like a family member; a sense that the relationship is based on affiliation, trust, caring, and concern; that the therapist genuinely cares and “is there” for the client, that he/she is on the same wavelength with the therapist (e.g., similar life perspectives, values), that the therapist’s wisdom and expertise are valuable</p>	<p><b>SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE WITHIN THE FAMILY:</b>  family members seeing themselves as working collaboratively to improve family relations and achieve common family goals; a sense of solidarity in relation to the therapy (“we’re in this together”); that they value their time with each other in therapy; essentially, a felt unity within the family in relation to therapy</p>

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO ENGAGEMENT IN THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS:**

Therapist explains how therapy works. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist ask client(s) what they want to talk about in the session. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist encourages client(s) to articulate their goals for therapy. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist asks client(s) whether they are willing to do a specific in-session task (e.g., enactment). \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist asks client(s) whether they are willing to follow a specific suggestion or do a specific homework assignment. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist asks client(s) about the impact or value of a prior homework assignment. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist expresses optimism or notes that a positive change has taken place or can take place. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist pulls in quiet client(s) (e.g., by deliberately leaning forward, calling them by name, addressing them specifically). \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist asks if the client(s) have any questions. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist praises client motivation for engagement or change. \_\_\_\_\_

*Therapist defines therapeutic goals or imposes tasks or procedures without asking the client(s) for their collaboration.* \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Therapist argues with the client(s) about the nature, purpose, or value of therapy.* \_\_\_\_\_

*Therapist shames or criticizes how clients did (or did not do) a prior homework assignment.* \_\_\_\_\_

**Rate therapist contribution to Engagement:    -3    -2    -1    0    +1    +2    +3**

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***THERAPIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO SAFETY WITHIN THE THERAPEUTIC SYSTEM:***

\*Therapist acknowledges that therapy involves taking risks  
or discussing private matters. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist provides structure and guidelines for safety  
and confidentiality. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist invites discussion about intimidating elements in the  
therapeutic context (e.g., recording equipment, reports to third  
parties, treatment team observation,  
one-way mirror, research, etc.). \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist helps clients to talk truthfully and  
nondefensively with each other. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist attempts to contain, control, or manage  
overt hostility between clients. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist actively protects one family member  
from another (e.g., from blame, hostility,  
or emotional intrusiveness). \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist changes the topic to something pleasurable  
or non-anxiety arousing (e.g., small talk about  
the weather, room decor, TV shows, etc.)  
when there seems to be tension or anxiety. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist asks one client (or a subgroup of clients) to leave  
the room in order to see one client alone for a  
portion of the session. \_\_\_\_\_

*Therapist allows family conflict to escalate to verbal abuse,  
threats, or intimidation.* \_\_\_\_\_

*Therapist does not attend to overt expressions of client  
vulnerability (e.g., crying, defensiveness).* \_\_\_\_\_

**Rate therapist contribution to Safety:            -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3**

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***THERAPIST CONTRIBUTIONS TO A SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE WITHIN THE FAMILY:***

\*Therapist encourages clients to  
compromise with each other. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist encourages clients to ask each  
other for their perspective. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist praises clients for respecting each  
other's point of view. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist emphasizes commonalities among clients'  
perspectives on the problem or solution. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist draws attention to clients' shared values,  
experiences, needs, or feelings. \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist encourages clients to show caring, concern,  
or support for each other. \_\_\_\_\_

\*Therapist encourages client(s) to ask each  
other for feedback. \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Therapist fails to intervene when family members argue  
with each other about the goals, value, or  
need for therapy.* \_\_\_\_\_

*\*Therapist fails to address one client's stated concerns  
by only discussing another client's concerns.* \_\_\_\_\_

**Rate therapist contribution to Shared Purpose:    -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3**

\_\_\_\_\_

*\*indicates a similar item in the client version*



Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Raters: \_\_\_\_\_

Tape #: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Member Engagement	Rater #1	Rater#2	Rater #3	Rater #4	CONSENSUS
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Safety					
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Emotional Connection					
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Shared Sense of Purpose					
Entire Family	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

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Comments/Concerns:

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