

*System for Observing Family Therapy Alliances*  
SOFTA-o (Clients + Therapist)  
www.softa-soatif.net

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Please read first the definition of each of the four SOFTA dimensions.
2. As you observe the session, we recommend you to do a mark on the coding tables whenever you detect the occurrence of a behavioral indicator. Use the “Who?” column to record the family member linked to the observed behavior.
3. At the conclusion of the session, revise all the alliance indicators by reading again all the questions about the clients’ and therapist’s behaviors in the session. Use that information to make a judgment about family member’s alliance on Engagement, Emotional Connection, Safety, and for the whole family Shared Sense of Purpose. Similarly, use the detected behavioral indicators to make a judgment about the therapist’s contribution to each of the four dimension. (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)
4. At least you have a very good proficiency in the SOFTA, we recommend you to work with only one or tow dimensions in the same session. You could, for example, observe only Safety in the first session and Engagement plus Emotional connection in a subsequent session, and Shared Purpose in a later session.
5. Consult the SOFTA Manual for any doubt about the indicators or the guidelines to do the ratings. Remember these basic guidelines:
  - a. when only positive behaviors are observed, the score must be between +1 and +3
  - b. when only negative behaviors are observed, the score must be between -1 and -3
  - c. when a client (or the therapist) exhibits both positive and negative behaviors, you should consider ratings between -1 and +1
  - d. the absence of alliance-related behaviors results in a rating of 0, which means that the alliance dimension is neutral or unremarkable.
6. Have always present the meaning of the rating scale:

*+3 = extremely strong*  
*+2 = moderately strong*  
*+1 = somewhat strong*  
*0 = unremarkable or neutral*  
*-1 = somewhat problematic*  
*-2 = moderately problematic*  
*-3 = extremely problematic*

*Definitions of the SOFTA dimensions*

<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>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>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>

## Engagement in the Process

Do the clients in this session...	Who? (family members)	Does the therapist in this session...
indicate <b>agreement with</b> the therapist's <b>goals</b> ?		explain <b>how therapy works</b> ?
describe or discusses a <b>plan for improving</b> the situation?		ask client(s) <b>what they want to talk about</b> in the session?
<b>introduce a problem</b> for discussion?		encourage client(s) to articulate <b>their goals for therapy</b> ?
<b>agree to do homework</b> assignments?		ask client(s) <b>if they are willing to do</b> a specific <b>in-session</b> task (e.g., enactment)?
indicate <b>having done homework</b> or seeing it as useful?		ask client(s) whether they are <b>willing to follow</b> a specific suggestion or do a specific <b>homework</b> assignment?
express <b>optimism</b> or indicates that a <b>positive change</b> has taken place?		<b>ask client(s) about the impact or value</b> of a prior homework assignment?
comply with therapist's request for an <b>enactment</b> ?		<b>express optimism</b> or notes that a positive change has taken place or can take place?
<b>mention the treatment</b> , the therapeutic process, or a specific session?		<b>pull in quiet</b> client(s) ?(by deliberately leaning forward, calling them by name, addressing them specifically...)
lean forward (expressing special <b>attention or interest</b> )?		ask if the client(s) have <b>any questions</b> ?
<i>express <b>feeling "stuck,"</b> questions the value of therapy, or states that therapy is not / has not been helpful?</i>		<b>praise client motivation</b> for engagement or change?
<i>show <b>indifference about the tasks or process</b> of therapy? (e.g., paying lip service, "I don't know," tuning out)</i>		<i>define therapeutic goals or <b>imposes tasks or procedures</b> without asking the client(s) for their collaboration?</i>
		<b>argue with the client(s)</b> about the nature, purpose, or value of therapy?
		<b>shame or criticizes how clients did</b> (or did not do) a prior homework assignment?
<b>Rate Clients' Engagement in the Process</b> -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3		<b>Rate therapist contribution to Engagement:</b> -3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3

## Emotional Connection with the therapist

Do the clients in this session...	Who? (family members)	Does the therapist in this session...
share a <b>lighthearted moment</b> or joke with the therapist?		share a <b>lighthearted moment</b> or joke with the client(s)?
<b>verbalize trust</b> in the therapist?		<b>express confidence, trust,</b> or belief in the client(s)?
express interest in the therapist's <b>personal life</b> ?		disclose some fact about his or her <b>personal life</b> ?
indicate <b>feeling understood</b> or accepted by the therapist?		express <b>interest in the client(s)</b> apart from the therapeutic discussion at hand?
express <b>physical affection</b> or caring for the therapist?		<b>express caring</b> or touches client(s) affectionately yet appropriately (e.g., hand shake, pat on head...)?
mirror the therapist's <b>body posture</b> ?		<b>disclose his or her personal reactions</b> or feelings toward the client(s) or the situation?
<i>avoid eye contact with the therapist?</i>		remark on or describes how his or her <b>values or experiences</b> are similar to the clients'?
<i>refuse or is reluctant to respond to the therapist?</i>		(verbally or nonverbally) <b>express empathy</b> for the clients' struggle? (e.g., "I know this is hard," "I feel your pain,"...)
<i>have hostile or sarcastic interactions with the therapist?</i>		<b>reassure or normalizes</b> a client's emotional vulnerability? (e.g., crying, hurt feelings)
<i>comment on the therapist's incompetence or inadequacy?</i>		<i>have hostile, sarcastic, or critical interactions with the client?</i>
		<i>not respond to clients' expressions of personal interest or caring for him or her?</i>
<b>Rate Emotional Connection with the Therapist</b>		<b>Rate therapist contribution to Emotional Connection:</b>
-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3		-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3

### Safety Within the Therapeutic System

Do the client in this session...	Who? (family members)	Does the therapist in this session...
imply or state that therapy is a <b>safe place</b> ?		provide <b>structure and guidelines for safety</b> and confidentiality?
vary his/ <b>her emotional tone</b> during the session?		actively <b>protect one family member</b> from another? (e.g., from blame, hostility, or emotional intrusiveness).
shows <b>vulnerability</b> ? (e.g., discusses painful feelings, cries)		acknowledge that <b>therapy involves taking risks</b> or discussing private matters?
have an <b>open upper body posture</b> ?		attempt to <b>contain, control, or manage overt hostility</b> between clients?
<b>reveal a secret</b> or something that other family members didn't know?		invite <b>discussion about intimidating elements</b> in the therapeutic context? (e.g., recording equipment, reports to third parties, treatment team observation, one-way mirror, research, etc.)
<b>encourage</b> another family member to <b>"open up"</b> or to tell the truth?		<b>help clients to talk truthfully</b> and non-defensively with each other?
directly asks other family members for <b>feedback about his/her behavior</b> or about herself/himself as a person?		<b>change the topic to something pleasurable</b> or non-anxiety arousing (e.g., small talk about the weather, room decor, TV shows, etc.) when there seems to be tension or anxiety?
<b>express anxiety nonverbally</b> (e.g., taps or shakes)?		ask one client (or a subgroup of clients) to <b>leave the room</b> in order to see one client alone for a portion of the session?.
<b>protect self</b> in nonverbal manner? (e.g., crosses arms over chest, doesn't take off jacket or put down purse, sits far away from group, etc.)		<b>allow family conflict to escalate</b> to verbal abuse, threats, or intimidation?
<b>refuse or is reluctant to respond</b> when directly addressed by another family member?		<b>not attend to overt expressions</b> of client vulnerability (e.g., crying, defensiveness)?
<b>respond defensively</b> to another family member?		
make an <b>uneasy/anxious reference</b> to the camera, observation, supervisor, or research procedures?		
<b>Rate Safety</b>		<b>Rate therapist contribution to Safety</b>
-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3		-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3

## Shared Sense of Purpose within The Family

Do the family members in this session...	Who? (family members)	Does the therapist in this session...
offer to <b>compromise</b> ?		<b>encourage clients to compromise</b> with each other?
<b>share a joke</b> or a lighthearted moment with each other?		encourage clients to <b>ask each other for their perspective</b> ?
ask each other for <b>their perspective</b> ?		<b>praise clients for respecting</b> each other's point of view?
<b>validate</b> each other's point of view?		<b>emphasize commonalities</b> among clients' perspectives on the problem or solution?
<b>mirror</b> each other's body posture?		draw attention to <b>clients' shared values, experiences, needs,</b> or feelings?
<b>avoid eye contact</b> with each other?		encourage clients to show <b>caring, concern, or support</b> for each other?
<b>blame</b> each other?		encourage client(s) to <b>ask each other for feedback</b> ?
<b>devalue</b> each other's opinions or perspective?		<b>fail to intervene when family members argue</b> with each other about the goals, value, or need for therapy?
try to <b>align with the therapist against</b> each other?		<b>fail to address one client's stated concerns</b> by only discussing another client's concerns?
make <b>hostile or sarcastic</b> comments to family members?		
<b>disagree</b> with each other about the <b>value, purpose, goals, or tasks</b> of therapy or about who should be included in the sessions?		
<b>Rate Safety</b>		<b>Rate therapist contribution to Safety</b>
-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3		-3   -2   -1   0   +1   +2   +3