

System for Observing Family Therapy Alliances
SOFTA-o (therapist's contributions)
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.
3. At the conclusion of the session, revise all the alliance indicators by reading again all the questions about the therapist's behaviors in the session. Use that information to make a judgment about the therapist's contribution to Engagement, Emotional Connection, Safety, and Shared Sense of Purpose. (Note that items in **italics** reflect negative contributions)
4. At least you have a very good proficiency in the SOFTA, we recommend you to work with only tow dimensions in the same session. You could, for example, observe only contributions for Safety and Emotional Connection in the first session, and Engagement plus Shared Sense of Purpose in a subsequent 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 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

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO THE THERAPIST: 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	ENGAGEMENT IN THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS: 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
SAFETY WITHIN THE THERAPEUTIC SYSTEM: 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	SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE WITHIN THE FAMILY: 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

EMOTIONAL CONNECTION TO THE THERAPIST	ENGAGEMENT IN THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS
Does the therapist in this session...	Does the therapist in this session...
share a lighthearted moment or joke with the client(s)?	explain how therapy works?
express confidence, trust , or belief in the client(s)?	ask client(s) what they want to talk about in the session?
disclose some fact about his or her personal life ?	encourage client(s) to articulate their goals for therapy ?
express interest in the client(s) apart from the therapeutic discussion at hand?	ask client(s) if they are willing to do a specific in-session task (e.g., enactment)?
(verbally or nonverbally) express caring or touches client(s) affectionately yet appropriately (e.g., hand shake, pat on head...)?	ask client(s) whether they are willing to follow a specific suggestion or do a specific homework assignment ?
disclose his or her personal reactions or feelings toward the client(s) or the situation?	ask client(s) about the impact or value of a prior homework assignment?
remark on or describes how his or her values or experiences are similar to the clients'?	express optimism or notes that a positive change has taken place or can take place?
(verbally or nonverbally) express empathy for the clients' struggle? (e.g., "I know this is hard," "I feel your pain,"...)	pull in quiet client(s) ?(by deliberately leaning forward, calling them by name, addressing them specifically...)
reassure or normalizes a client's emotional vulnerability? (e.g., crying, hurt feelings)	ask if the client(s) have any questions ?
have hostile, sarcastic, or critical interactions with the client?	praise client motivation for engagement or change?
not respond to clients' expressions of personal interest or caring for him or her?	define therapeutic goals or imposes tasks or procedures without asking the client(s) for their collaboration?
	argue with the client(s) about the nature, purpose, or value of therapy?
	shame or criticizes how clients did (or did not do) a prior homework assignment?
Therapist contribution to Emotional Connection:	Therapist contribution to Engagement:
-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3	-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3

SHARED SENSE OF PURPOSE WITHIN THE FAMILY	SAFETY WITHIN THE THERAPEUTIC SYSTEM
Does the therapist in this session...	Does the therapist in this session...
encourage clients to compromise with each other?	provide structure and guidelines for safety and confidentiality?
encourage clients to ask each other for their perspective ?	actively protect one family member from another? (e.g., from blame, hostility, or emotional intrusiveness).
praise clients for respecting each other's point of view?	acknowledge that therapy involves taking risks or discussing private matters?
emphasize commonalities among clients' perspectives on the problem or solution?	attempt to contain, control, or manage overt hostility between clients?
draw attention to clients' shared values, experiences, needs , or feelings?	invite discussion about intimidating elements in the therapeutic context? (e.g., recording equipment, reports to third parties, treatment team observation, one-way mirror, research, etc.)
encourage clients to show caring, concern, or support for each other?	help clients to talk truthfully and non-defensively with each other?
encourage client(s) to ask each other for feedback ?	change 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?
fail to intervene when family members argue with each other about the goals, value, or need for therapy?	ask one client (or a subgroup of clients) to leave the room in order to see one client alone for a portion of the session?.
fail to address one client's stated concerns by only discussing another client's concerns?	allow family conflict to escalate to verbal abuse, threats, or intimidation?
Rate Safety	
-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3	-3 -2 -1 0 +1 +2 +3