

Top 11 Insights Cult Survivors Wish Therapists Knew or...



"I was tired of paying my therapist to teach her about cults"

1

Understanding if client was born or raised in a cult or was recruited later

When someone is raised in a destructive group, they were often raised in authoritarianism, which often includes corporal punishment but always emphasizes obedience and not play and curiosity.

2

Unique Family Dynamics in Cults

Understand the distinct family dynamics for those born or raised in destructive groups. These dynamics are intrinsically linked to the cult experience and should be addressed accordingly. Many cults excommunicate or shun former members and try to pressure them to "repent" and rejoin. When people first leave, they might continue listening to cult propaganda or do cult rituals that will prolong their safe exit.

3

Understanding Loss and Mourning

Recognize that clients may be grieving the loss of their community and, in some cases, their family. This deep sense of loss is a critical aspect of their healing journey.

4

Individualized Recovery Approaches

Respect each client's unique path to recovery. Avoid imposing a standardized treatment method and be mindful that specific therapeutic tools might trigger trauma responses. For instance, DBT has a rule that can trigger former members because it mirrors "shunning" done in cults.

5

Not Blaming the Victim

Encourage a therapeutic approach that helps people realize they were deceived and manipulated. They didn't know what they didn't know about how destructive people and cults operate. Cults program members to always blame themselves for all problems.

6

Beyond Childhood & Personal Issues

A typical error is to jump to family-of-origin issues instead of focusing on the "here and now" and empowering their clients. Are they safe? Sleeping well? Eating, exercising? Do they have support? Emphasize that their involvement in a cult is not a reflection of unresolved childhood issues or personal deficiencies. Therapists should avoid over-focusing on family problems and instead address the trauma experienced within the cult.

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7

Diverse Reasons for Cult Involvement

Acknowledge that there is no single 'type' of person who joins a cult. Clients come from various backgrounds and have different reasons for their involvement, which need to be understood on an individual basis. There are many intelligent, educated people from stable families who get caught up in destructive relationships and groups.

8

Believe and Respect Their Stories

It's crucial to listen without disbelief or judgment. The experiences shared may be shocking, but they were the client's reality. Shaming them for their actions within the group is hurtful and wrong. Likewise, many clients carry false beliefs and memories about their family, and immediately believing and validating stories about abuse can cause harm. Likewise, encouraging a client to disconnect from everyone in their past can be very bad advice.

9

Addressing Abuse as a Norm:

Be aware that many clients may have experienced routine physical, sexual, and spiritual abuse. Recognizing this as a part of their past is vital in their healing process.

10

Facilitating an "Internal Locus of Control"

Rather than exerting your authority as an expert, encourage people to think for themselves. Encourage people to feel and express their feelings. Help them learn what is "normal" and "healthy." Never impose your beliefs, especially when it comes to religion. Assist clients to take time and learn and explore. Life is a journey, not a destination.

11

Creating a Safe Space for Healing

Above all, ensure that clients feel heard, understood, and safe. Help them recognize their uniqueness and interests. This foundation is essential for effective therapy.

As a clinician, it's crucial to familiarize yourself with issues of undue influence and its impact on cult survivors. Learn on your own time about the cult group your client has been in. Don't make the client pay to educate you. Get supervision or make a referral. Make the effort to get proper training from experienced professionals. This will better equip you to address the unique needs of this population in your therapeutic practice

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