Psychoanalytic psychotherapy with infants, children and young people

5) ABILITY TO WORK WITH TRANSFERENCE AND COUNTERTRANSFERENCE

1. Transference

1.1 Knowledge

1.1.1 Ability to draw on knowledge that the transference relationship provides a key source of information about the unconscious life of the patient

1.1.2 Ability to draw on knowledge that a transference interpretation makes explicit reference to the patient-therapist relationship so as to encourage reflection on the patient’s conscious and unconscious patterns of response, conflicts and defences

1.1.3 Ability to draw on knowledge that working in the transference relies primarily on understanding and interpreting the current relationship between patient and therapist (while holding the history in mind)

1.1.4 Ability to draw on knowledge that the transference can take many forms (e.g. positive, idealised, negative, sexualised, psychotic)

1.1.5 Ability to draw on knowledge that the reliability of the setting and the maintenance of an analytic stance encourage the development of the transference and enable it to be seen more clearly

1.1.6 Ability to draw on knowledge of the emotional impact of transference interpretations on the patient so that their use is calibrated in a manner that reflects the patient’s capacity to receive them

1.1.7 Ability to draw on knowledge that while the interpretation of transference to the therapist and setting is a key component of a psychoanalytic approach, the therapist also needs to acknowledge transference elements in other relationships and salient events in the patient’s life where appropriate

1.2 Application

1.2.1 Ability to facilitate the patient’s reflection on the therapeutic relationship, that is, to encourage the patient to become aware of and take an interest in:

- her/his feelings about, and perceptions of, the therapist
- how s/he thinks the therapist may feel or think about her/him

1.2.2 Ability to be sufficiently accepting of the patient’s view of the therapist to allow their experience of themselves in relation to the therapist to emerge in a session

1.2.3 Ability to maintain a focus on the transference relationship within a session and over time:

- Ability to help the patient to become aware of recurring patterns in her/his relationship with the therapist
- Ability to help the patient become aware of links and parallels between her/his subjective experience of others outside therapy, and their experience of the therapist
- Ability to re-establish a focus on the transference relationship when the patient or therapist (or both) are ‘pulled away’ from reflection on the here and now of the therapeutic relationship (for example, as a way of avoiding difficult or painful feelings or understanding)

1.2.4 Ability to help the patient manage the emotional impact of the transference relationship:
- Ability to help the patient manage both intensification and fluctuation in positive or negative feelings towards the therapist
- Ability to help the patient to understand the meaning of erotic feelings s/he may experience towards the therapist
- Ability to recognise the patient’s need to ‘test’ the relationship with the therapist in the transference, and to communicate this understanding to the patient

1.2.5 Ability to make use of the therapist’s experience of the transference in order to inform her/his understanding of:
- The patient’s patterns of relating and defences
- Deficits in the patient’s self or objects
- The patient’s capacity to make use of transference interpretations at any given time

2. Countertransference

2.1 Knowledge

2.1.1 Ability to draw on knowledge that countertransference reactions are variously determined by:
- The therapist’s ordinary emotional response to the patient’s experience
- The therapist’s own transference to the patient
- The patient’s projections onto the therapist
- The therapist’s own issues and lacunae

2.1.2 Ability to draw on knowledge that enactments (by patient, therapist or both) are inevitable in the course of treatment and require recovery and working through in order to understand their meaning and to regain a reflective stance

2.1.3 Ability to draw on knowledge of possible sources of countertransference in order to understand and manage the pull towards immediate action or enactment of particular roles with a patient

2.2 Application

2.2.1 Ability to make use of the therapist’s responses to the patient as a basis for understanding and interpretation:
- Ability to attend to the specific quality and sequence of feelings, thoughts, flow of associations and fantasies that are evoked in the therapist during interaction with the patient so as to formulate what the patient might be communicating indirectly
- Ability to be open to experiencing transitory identifications with the patient’s projections (e.g. of particular roles) through:
  - Accepting that the patient will view the therapist in a manner incongruent with the therapist’s own self-perception, so as to understand the meaning of this to the patient
  - Being receptive to the patient’s conscious and unconscious needs in relation to the therapist

2.2.2 Ability to appraise the relevance of the therapist’s own thinking about, and affective responses to, the patient and to use this as a basis for interpreting what the patient may be struggling with or struggling to communicate

2.2.3 Ability to reflect on the therapist’s involvement in the therapeutic process

- Ability for the therapist to reflect on her/his emotional reactions to the patient so as to maintain an ‘observing distance’ from the part of her/himself that is involved in the process
- Ability for the therapist to recognise erotic feelings towards the patient and to think through the meaning and implications for the therapist and for the relationship with the patient
- Ability for the therapist critically to consider the meaning of his/her emotional reactions to the patient so as to minimise the risk of unsubstantiated speculation or of misattributing to the patient feelings that belong to the therapist
  - Ability for the therapist to identify the need for further therapy and/or supervision