

The Righting Reflex

When the desire to help a client creates a barrier to change

What is the Righting Reflex?

"The desire to fix what seems wrong with people and to set them promptly on a better course, relying in particular on directing"

~Miller & Rollnick

...but I want to help them change!

The desire to help is not wrong. The challenge is that the righting reflex assumes a client has no ambivalence; and ambivalence is an ordinary part of the change process.

The EXPERT Trap

- Fertile ground for the righting reflex to sprout.
- Sets up the implicit expectation you have the solution
- Risks lowering client engagement and communicating the practitioner is the one in charge.

How do I know if I am using the righting reflex?

When trying to support clients with change, do you ever feel the need to:

Find the proper arguments

Just ask the right question

Give the critical information (or provide evidence/research)

Pursue correct logic to help the person see and change

Provoke the decisive emotions

**If you find yourself trying to support client change by feeling the need to do any of the above, you may be falling into the righting reflex

Note: use caution when in the process of Planning... the righting reflex can show up as "Let me tell you what to do".

THE "R" PRINCIPLE: Resist the Righting Reflex

- This can be very difficult to let go of!
- Requires a certain tolerance for uncertainty (a hallmark of skillful focusing in MI)
- Need an unhurried and uncluttered state of mind
- Allow clients space to explore, while providing gentle guidance
- Listen/elicit change talk

Tools to use:

★★★★★ OARS

★★★★★ E-P-E

★★★★★ Reflective listening

★★★★★ Evoking process

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