

The Role of the Therapeutic Alliance in Psychotherapy Treatments: View from the Evidence



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What is most
important in
your life?

Outline

01

Foundations of
the Therapeutic
Alliance

02

Understanding
Alliance
Ruptures

03

Strategies for
Repairing
Alliance
Ruptures

04

Alliance
Focused
Training

05

Challenges and
Future
Directions

01

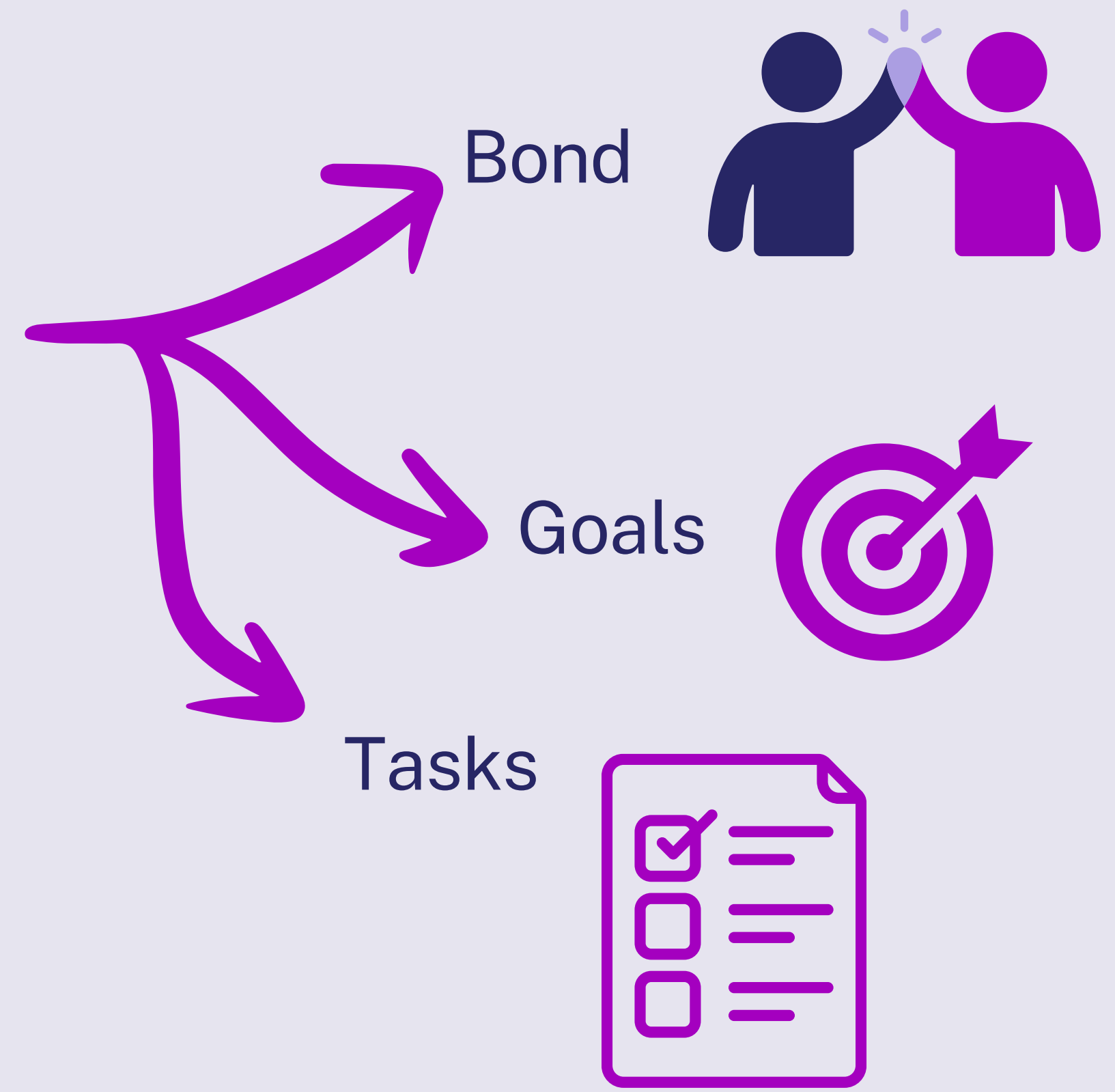
Foundations of the
Therapeutic Alliance

Therapeutic Alliance



= quality of collaborative relationship
between therapist and client

Tripartite Model
= Definition



Empirical Evidence: Meta-analyses by Flückiger et al., 2018 & 2020

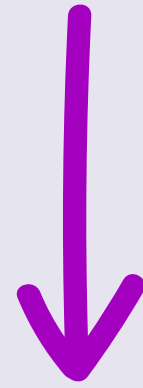


Alliance-outcome relationship



Alliance at baseline

(295 studies, 30,000 participants)

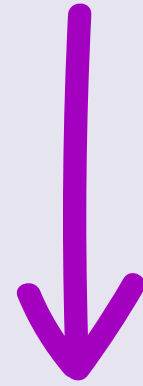


correlation of $r = .28$ with outcome
accounts for 8% of outcome variance

most robust predictor of psychotherapy outcome

Stronger early alliance


(17 studies, 5,350 participants)



lower symptom levels in earlier sessions
better treatment outcomes

Alliance across therapeutic modalities

Cognitive-
Behavioural



Psychodynamic



Humanistic &
Experiential



Systemic &
Family



Interpersonal





02

Understanding
Alliance Ruptures



Dr. Safran



Dr. Muran



Dr. Eubanks

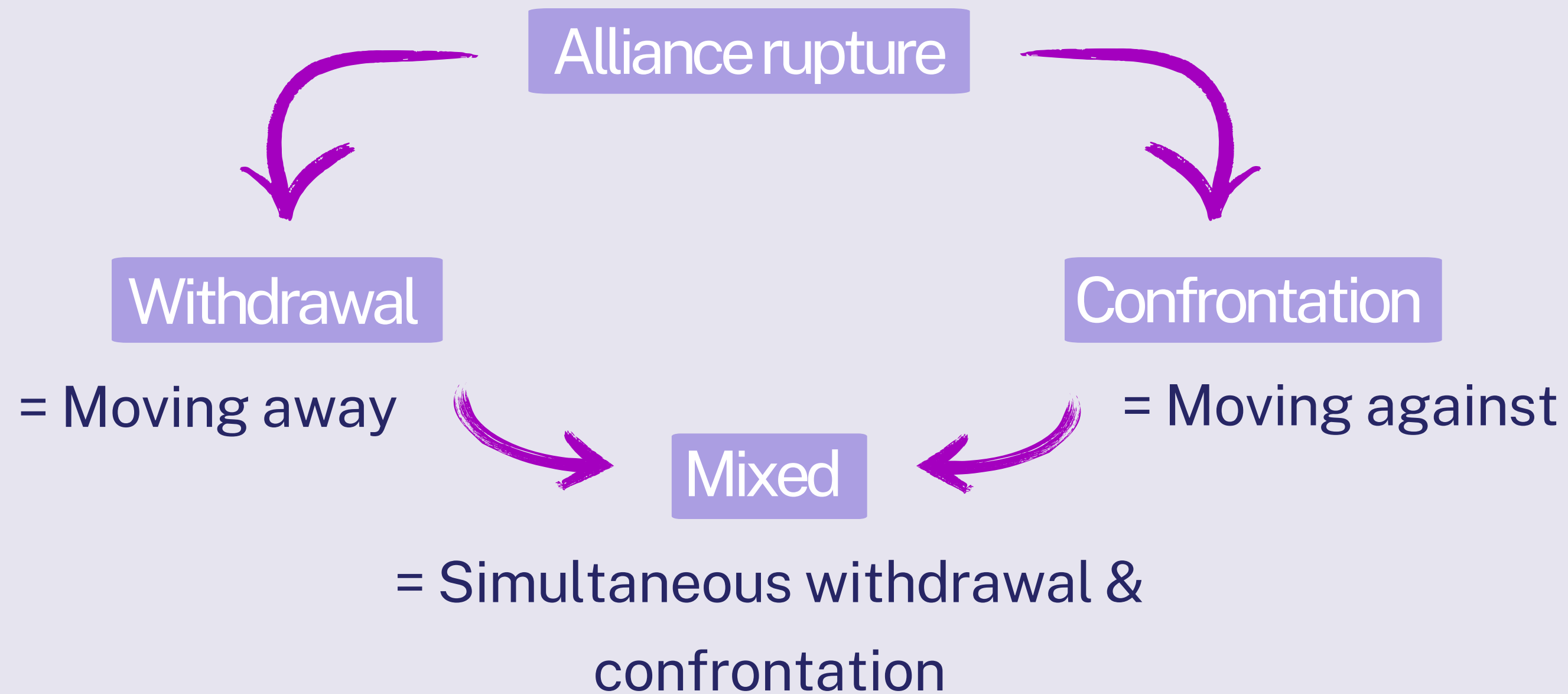
02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures

Alliance rupture

= deterioration of the alliance



02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures



02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures

Confrontation markers:



Complaining about/criticizing (other, activities, interventions, parameters, progress)



02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures

Confrontation markers:

- ↳ Complaining about/criticizing (other, activities, interventions, parameters, progress)
- ↳ Pushing back (rejecting other's ideas, defending self, hostile denial)



02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures

Confrontation markers:

- ↳ Complaining about/criticizing (other, activities, interventions, parameters, progress)
- ↳ Pushing back (rejecting other's ideas, defending self, hostile denial)
- ↳ Controlling/pressuring other (overly directive, pushes ideas on other, does not give other space)



02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures

Withdrawal markers:



Shutting down (avoidant denial, minimal response, gives up)



02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures

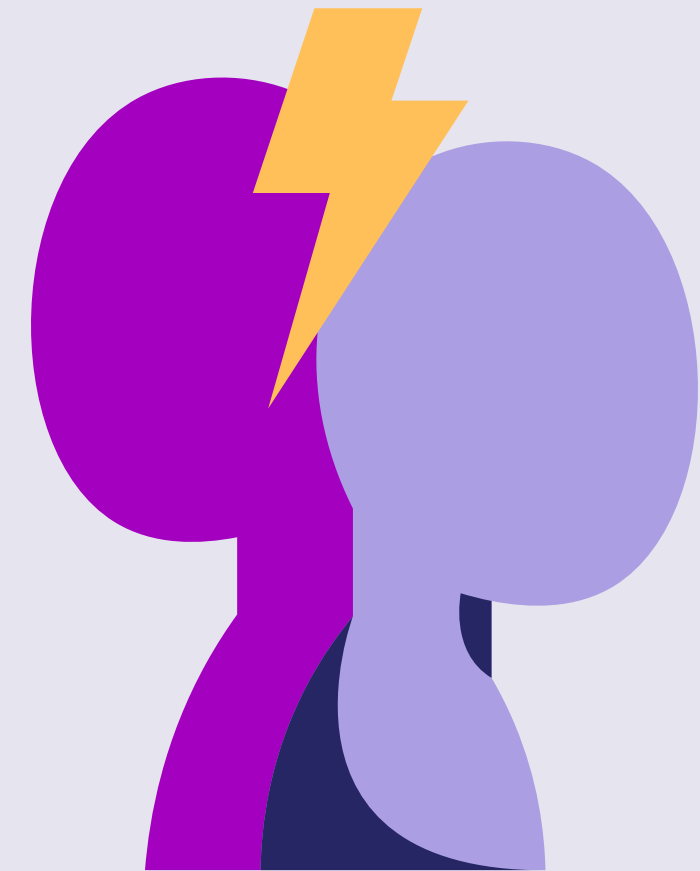
Withdrawal markers:



Shutting down (avoidant denial, minimal response, gives up)



Avoiding (abstract communication, avoidant storytelling, topic shift)



02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures

Withdrawal markers:

- ↳ **Shutting down** (avoidant denial, minimal response, gives up)
- ↳ **Avoiding** (abstract communication, avoidant storytelling, topic shift)
- ↳ **Masking aspects of their experience** (deferential/appeasing, content/affect split)





Awareness





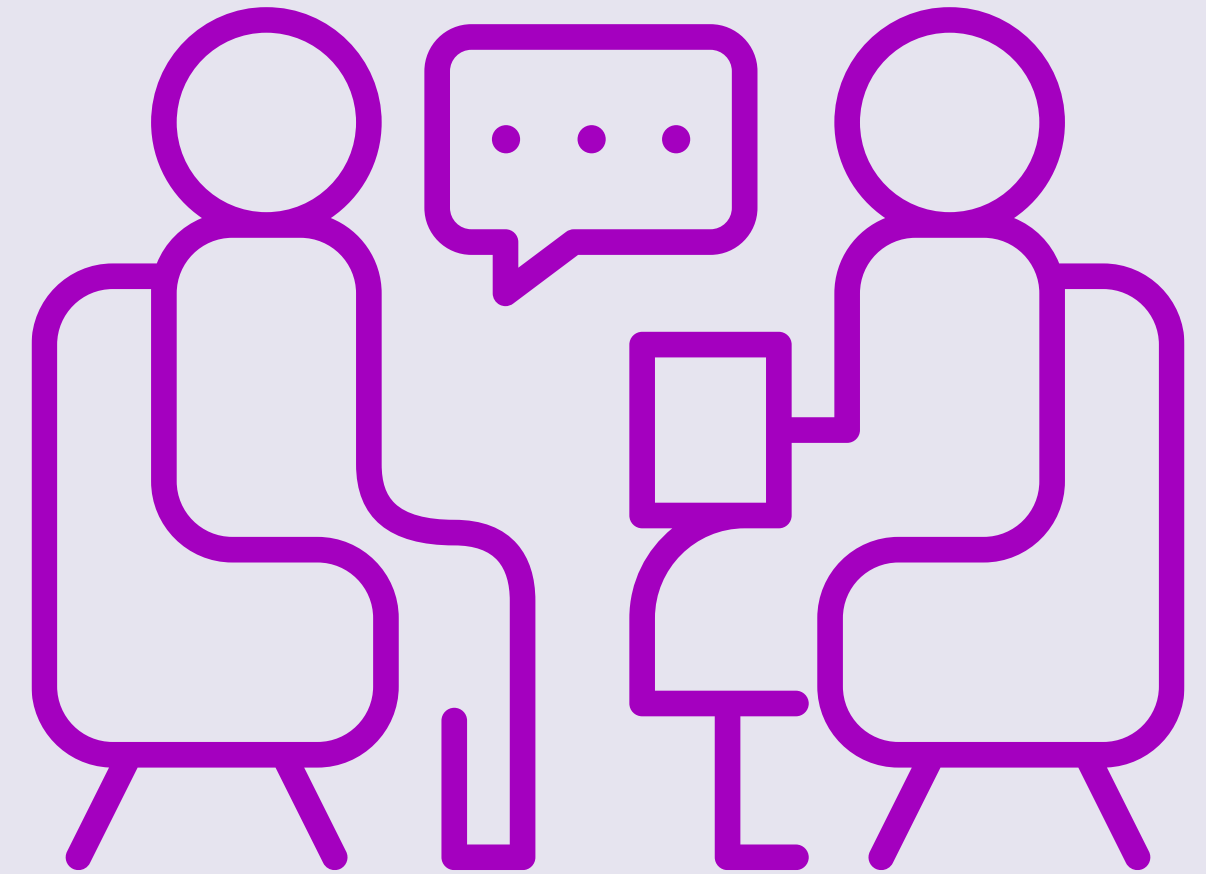
How often do
ruptures occur
in therapy
sessions?

02. Understanding Alliance Ruptures

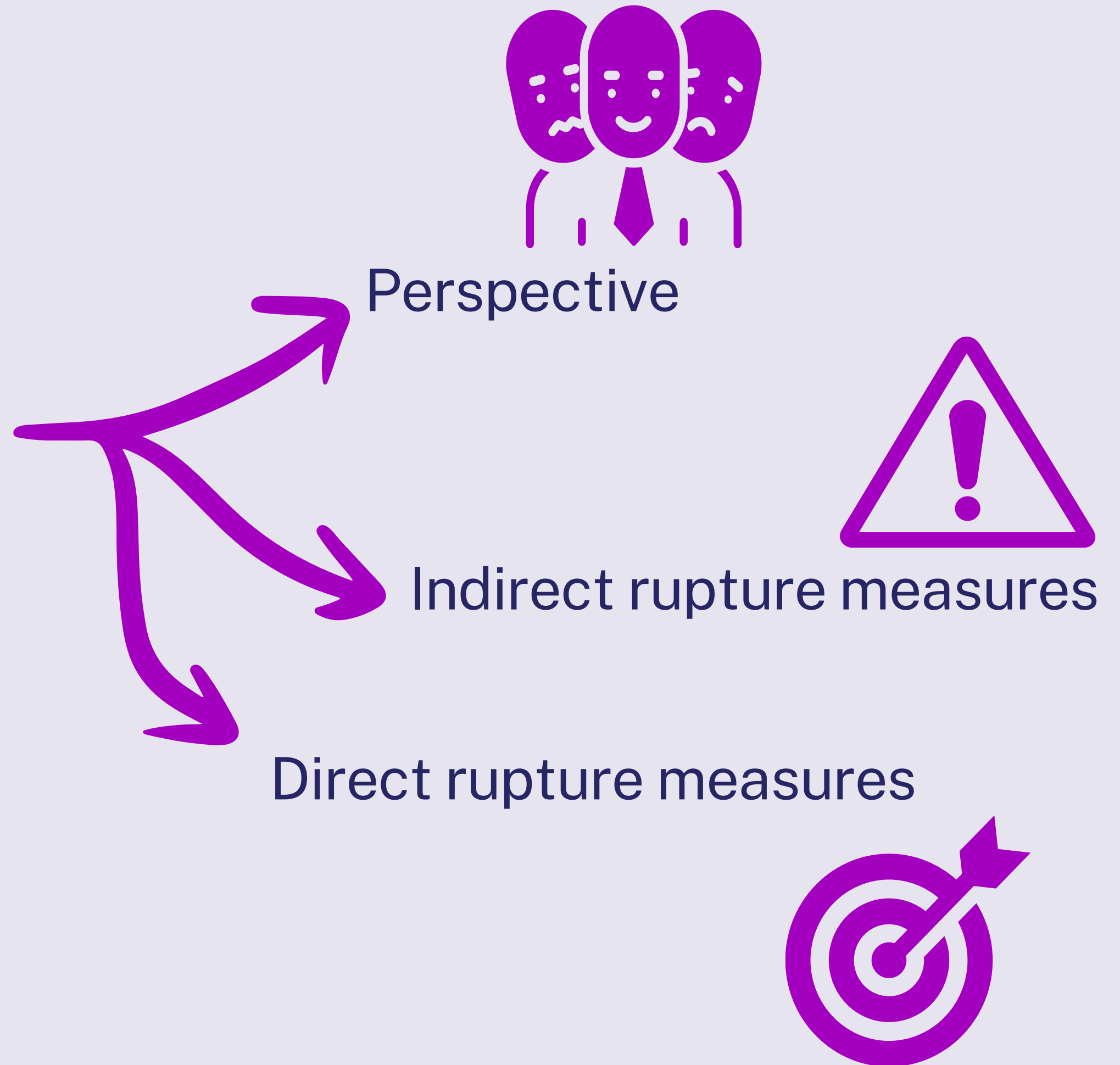
Significance of Ruptures in Psychotherapy

Percentage (%) of therapy sessions where ruptures occur:

- 19-42 % according to patients
- 43-56 % according to therapists
- 26-100 % according to observers



Differences



Empirical Evidence: Studies by Babl et al., 2023 and Coutinho et al., 2014



Working Alliance Inventory (fewer ruptures)

vs.

Rupture Resolution Rating System (more ruptures)

Empirical Evidence: Meta-analysis by Babl et al., 2025



Rupture-outcome relationship

More (intense) rupture associated with worse outcome

Effect size of $r = .19$

03

Managing and
Repairing Alliance
Ruptures

03. Managing & Repairing Alliance Ruptures



1. (Discussing) changing task or goal

2. Illustrating task or providing a rationale

3. Redirecting or refocusing to task or presence

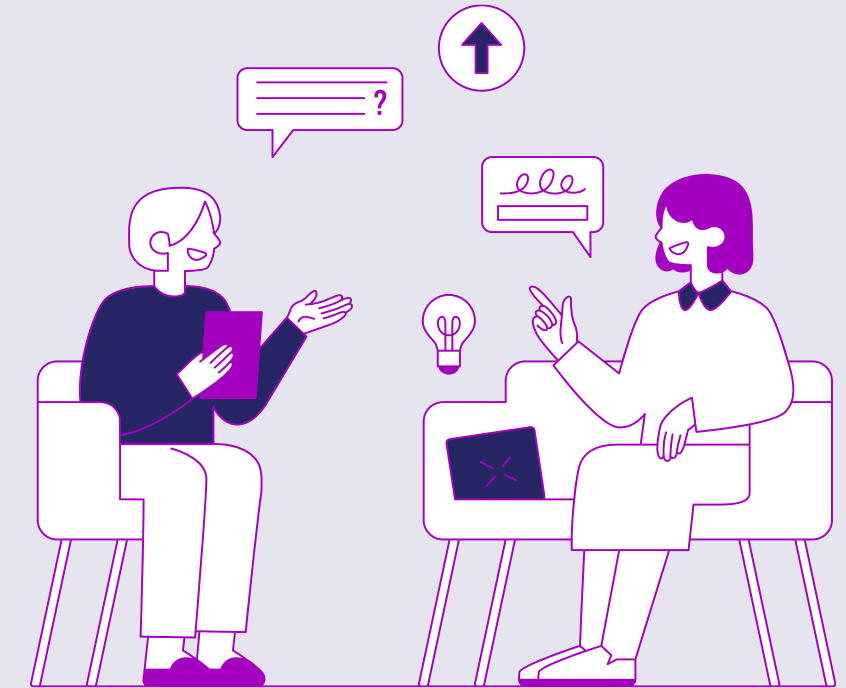
4. Acknowledging contribution to a rupture

03. Managing & Repairing Alliance Ruptures



1. Exploring the rupture
2. Disclosing internal experience
3. Linking rupture to interpersonal patterns
4. Acknowledging contribution to a rupture

03. Managing & Repairing Alliance Ruptures



1. Meta-communication



Communicating about the communication process that is unfolding can help you guide through expressive repair

04

Alliance Focused
Training

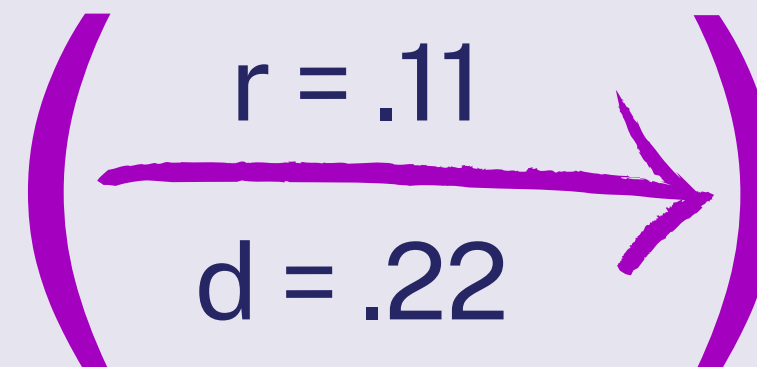
Meta-analysis on Alliance-Focused Training

Eubanks et al., 2018



Effect of formal Alliance-Focused Training for therapists on patient outcomes ?

Rupture-Resolution Training



Patient outcome

Welcome to Online Alliance-Focused Training (AFT)

The therapeutic alliance is one of the most robust predictors of psychotherapy outcome, including decreases in symptoms and dropout rates. The alliance is typically characterized by rupture and repair episodes. Online Alliance-Focused Training (AFT) aims at building and maintaining a strong therapeutic alliance via training therapists to (a) recognize ruptures and (b) flexibly respond to ruptures with rupture repair strategies.

Introduction



[click here to start](#)

Confrontation Ruptures



[click here to start](#)

Withdrawal Ruptures



[click here to start](#)

Mixed Ruptures



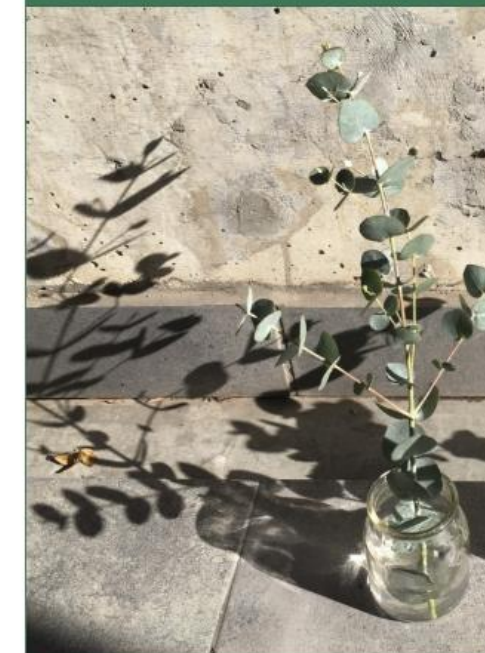
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Immediate Resolutions



[click here to start](#)

Expressive Resolutions



[click here to start](#)

Introduction

▼ Theory

General Introduction

Therapeutic Alliance

Ruptures

Resolutions

Alliance Focused Training

Rupture Resolution Rating System (3RS)

Recap

> Examples

> Prompts

Watch the video and answer the questions below



What is the main goal of Alliance-Focused Training?

Improve didactic ability

Improve ability to be mindful

Improve experiential ability

Improve ability to recognize and
negotiate alliance ruptures

next

Introduction

> Theory

▼ Examples

Example 1

Example 2

Example 3

Example 4

Example 5

Example 6

Example 7

Example 8

Example 9

Example 10

> Prompts

Watch the video and answer the questions below



What did you notice in the video?

Immediate repair strategy

Confrontation rupture

Expressive repair strategy

Withdrawal rupture

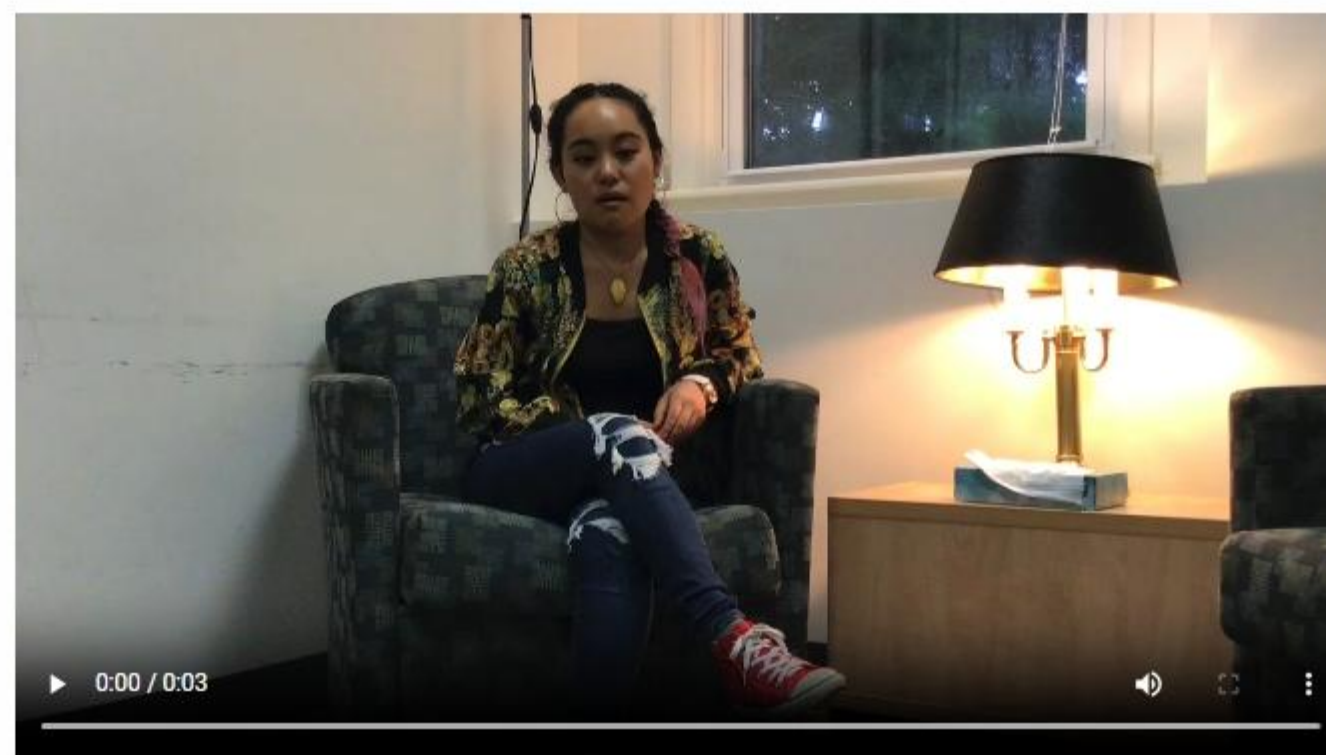
Mixed rupture

None is Correct

next

Confrontation Ruptures

- > Theory
- > Examples
- ▼ Prompts
 - Prompt 1
 - Prompt 2
 - Prompt 3
 - Prompt 4
 - Prompt 5
 - Prompt 6
 - Prompt 7
 - Prompt 8
 - Prompt 9
 - Prompt 10



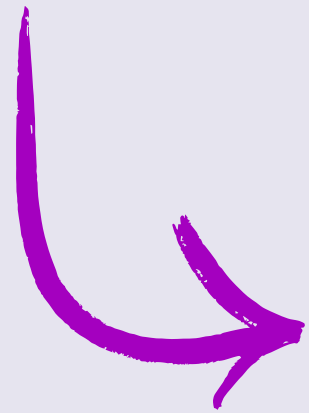
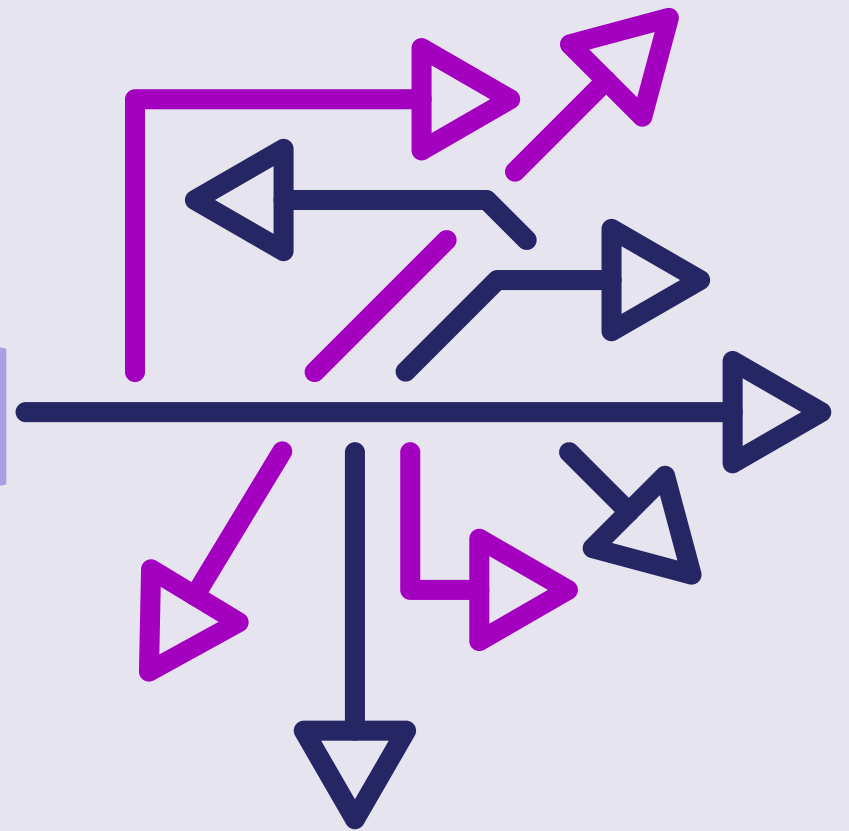


05

Challenges and
Future Directions

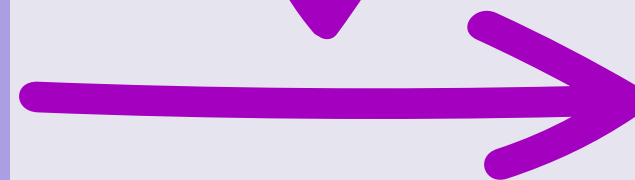
04. Challenges & Future Directions

Future Research Directions on Alliance Ruptures & Repair



Repair

Rupture



Alliance,
Outcome

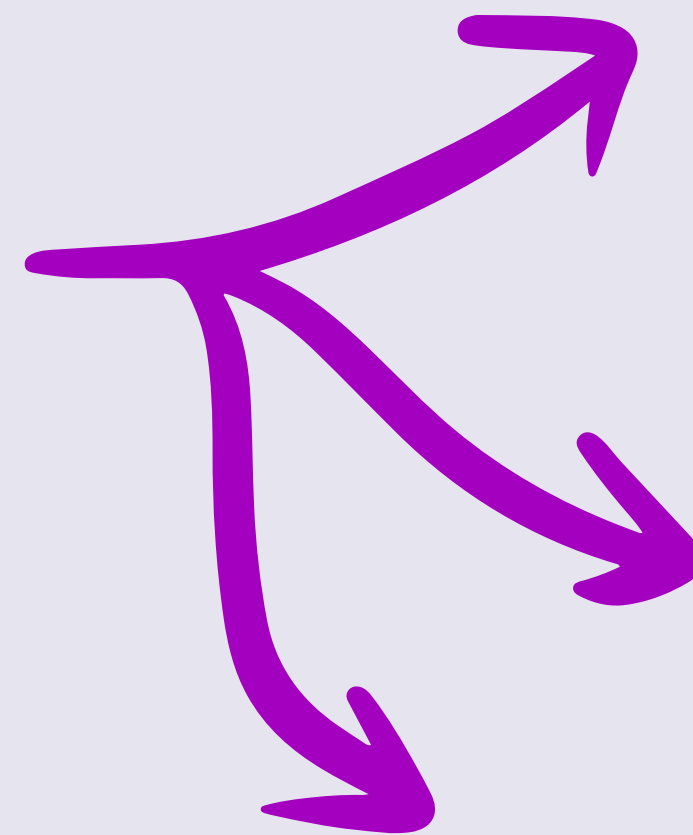


04. Challenges & Future Directions

Personality Disorders and Alliance Formation & Repair



Personality disorders



Difficulty mentalizing

Defensive interpersonal strategies

Therapist countertransference

Summary & Take-Home Message

- Be present
- Be curious
- Be relational
- Be transparent
- Be responsive



05. Questions and answers



Thank
you for
listening!



Panel Discussion