

“Stay Calm” Checklist: How to Keep Your Cool When a Client is Resistant

This checklist provides practical strategies to help clinicians maintain emotional regulation and professionalism when working with resistant clients.

Section 1: Recognizing Personal Triggers

Before addressing client resistance, reflect on your own emotional state.

- ☐ I notice when my frustration level starts rising.
- ☐ I can identify specific client behaviors that trigger my frustration.
- ☐ I recognize when I am feeling defensive or taking resistance personally.
- ☐ I pause before reacting emotionally to client resistance.
- ☐ I can separate my emotions from the client’s response.

Reflection Questions:

What emotions do you notice when working with resistant clients?

What patterns do you see in your own reactions?

Section 2: Grounding Techniques in the Moment Use these techniques to regulate emotions and maintain professionalism when facing resistance.

- **Take a Breath:** Pause and inhale deeply before responding.
- **Slow the Pace:** Lower your voice, slow your speech, and control your tone.
- **Maintain Neutral Body Language:** Keep an open posture and relaxed facial expression.
- **Validate the Client’s Feelings:** Acknowledge their concerns without agreeing or disagreeing.
- **Use Reflection Statements:** Repeat their concerns to show understanding (e.g., “It sounds like you’re frustrated with this process”).

- **Shift the Focus to Collaboration:** Ask, “How can we work together to address this?”
- **Avoid Power Struggles:** Do not engage in arguing or forcing compliance.
- **Use a Time-Out if Necessary:** Suggest pausing the conversation and revisiting it later.

Reflection Questions:

Which of these techniques do you already use?

Which ones could you incorporate more often?

Section 3: Strategies for Managing Long-Term Resistance When resistance becomes an ongoing pattern, try these approaches:

- **Reframe Resistance as a Form of Engagement** – It shows the client is still participating in some way.
- **Explore the Function of Resistance** – Ask, “What purpose does this resistance serve for the client?”
- **Use Motivational Interviewing** – Shift from confrontation to guiding exploration.
- **Give Choices** – Allow the client to have a sense of control.
- **Identify Strengths** – Highlight progress and reinforce small wins.
- **Use Humor When Appropriate** – Light humor can defuse tension and build rapport.
- **Seek Consultation** – Discuss difficult cases with a supervisor or peer for fresh perspectives.



Final Reflection & Action Plan

1. What immediate strategy will you implement in your next resistant client interaction?

2. How will you improve your emotional regulation techniques?

3. What support (supervision, peer discussion, personal reflection) would help strengthen your approach?

Reminder: Client resistance is not a reflection of your skills or effectiveness. It is part of the therapeutic process, and your ability to stay calm and adapt your approach will strengthen rapport and promote client engagement.