Reconciliation in clinical work

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Reconciliation

• may be defined as the restoration of trust in an interpersonal relationship
Trust

• Entails two components:
  • A belief that the other has good intentions
  • A belief that the other has sufficient competence
Reconciliation

• Is a major interpersonal achievement
• Presupposes a prior rupture or break in a relationship
• The break is usually due to harmful actions
• One or both parties felt hurt, diminished or wronged by the other
Vindication

• A process of restoring a sense of one’s own worth after being hurt

• Two contrasting methods
  • By diminishing the worth of the other e.g. retaliation, revenge
  • By enhancing the worth of the self e.g. competence, forgiveness
Revenge

• The seeking of satisfaction by attempting to harm the other (or associated others) as a retaliatory measure for a perceived injury

• Actions taken in revenge tend to lead to further retaliation resulting in cycles of violence
Forgiveness

• A process that enables us to manage resentment and anger in the wake of being wronged
• Improves the likelihood of reconciliation
• May be unilateral or interactional
• May be implicit or explicit
Multiple victims

Primary victims
– The persons directly violated or offended

Secondary victims
– Family members and friends deeply hurt by the harm directed toward the primary victims

Tertiary victims
– Members of the same community or ethnic group as the primary victims
Multiple perpetrators

Primary perpetrators
   – The persons who engage in practices of violence, exploitation, intimidation, or other injustices

Secondary perpetrators
   – Persons who are complicit

Tertiary perpetrators
   – Persons who collude
Magnitude gap

• An episode of interpersonal conflict usually entails destructive and hurtful behaviours perpetrated by both parties

• Thus, each party may be both victim and perpetrator

• However, the nature and degree of damage inflicted on each party differs
Credibility gap

• Following an interpersonal transgression, there is often a `credibility gap´ regarding the `offenses´ that were committed.

• This gap is created by self-serving perceptual distortions on the part of both victims and perpetrators.

• The gap is maintained or exacerbated by interpersonal patterns of maximizing and minimizing.
Facilitating Reconciliation

- Prepare parties (separately if indicated)
- Create conditions for a safe meeting
- Enable communication and understanding
- Open space for apology and forgiveness
- Identify impasses and propose alternatives
Steps to reconcile

- Express a desire for a positive outcome
- Appreciate the other’s participation
- Admit feelings of vulnerability (if safe)
- Acknowledge that real differences exist
- Apologize for overstatements or mistakes
- Acknowledge own anger and defensiveness
- Acknowledge underlying fear or hurt
Steps to reconcile (continued)

- Conduct a negative enquiry
  - Ask about the other’s experience of one’s own mistakes
  - Listen actively
  - Try to empathize
  - Acknowledge and accept the other’s feelings
  - Apologize for the unintended effects of one’s own behaviour
Steps to reconcile (continued)

- Try to enter into the experience of the other
- Clarify the different positions and their underlying assumptions and values
- Relinquish unimportant and/or untenable positions
- Ask for and/or accept forgiveness
- Search for new frames of reference that can encompass remaining differences
Forgiveness

- A willingness to abandon resentment and retribution while fostering compassion, empathy, generosity, and love
- A readiness to offer the offender a fresh start
- Must be offered freely
- External pressure to forgive can perpetrate further trauma
Forgiveness (social exchange theory view)

- When one person harms or transgresses another, whether intentionally or not, the event effectively creates an interpersonal "debt".
- Forgiveness essentially involves cancelling this "debt" by the person who has been wronged.
Steps to granting forgiveness

• Recognize and acknowledge that one has been hurt
• Identify one’s strong feelings about being wronged
• Let go of desires and/or needs that may never be fulfilled as a result of the offense
• Entertain a shift in one’s perspective on the offender

(continued…)
Steps to forgiveness (continued)

• Separate the offender from the offense

• Develop some empathy and compassion for the offender without condoning the offense

• Construct a new understanding of the situation, of oneself, and of the offender

• (optional) Express forgiveness explicitly
Barriers to Forgiveness

- Victim-based
- Perpetrator-based
Barriers to Forgiveness
(victim-based)

• Overwhelming negative emotions
• Fear that the transgression will be repeated
• Assumption that one needs to forget
• Fear of appearing weak
• Belief that justice will not be served by forgiving
• Lack of awareness of benefits to self

(cont..)
Barriers to Forgiveness
(*victim-based cont...*)

- Belief that one deserved to be abused
- Danger of betraying third parties
- Loss of benefits of victim status
  - Right to criticize
  - Right to retaliate
  - Right to seek compensation
  - Right to hold a moral advantage
Barriers to Forgiveness (perpetrator-based)

• Continuing abuse/injustice
• Lack of regret or remorse in the perpetrator
• Absence of acknowledgement of the harm done
• Lack of explicit or genuine apology
• Lack of restitution or restorative action
Barriers to Apology

- Perpetrator-based
- Victim-based
Barriers to Apology (perpetrator-based)

- Lack of awareness of the harm done
- Inability to separate good intentions from bad effects
- Disagreement with the charges
- Fear of punishment and/or humiliation
- Fear of costs for restitution
- Propensity to project blame on others
Barriers to Apology
*(victim-based)*

- Lack of awareness of harm to self
- Lack of contact with perpetrator due to safety needs of victim
- Lack of feedback to the perpetrator
- Desire to protect the perpetrator and/or the relationship
- Propensity to blame self
Tangles of Shame and Guilt

• Two major sources:
  – External (mostly shame)
    • Specific shaming actions by others
    • Judgmental cultural beliefs/values
  – Internal (mostly guilt)
    • Own `wrong´ or harmful acts
    • Own acts of omission
Deconstructing Shame

- Acknowledge the injustices perpetrated against the self
- Identify one’s own acts of resistance
- Honour the self for resisting
- Identify the self as a survivor

(continued…)
Deconstructing Shame (continued)

- Mobilize feelings of outrage
- Openly disclose the injustices
- Hold perpetrators accountable
- Seek restorative action
- Open space for dialogue and possible apology
- Consider forgiveness
Deconstructing Guilt

• Identify and acknowledge having made mistakes
• Express regret and remorse
• Offer genuine apologies
• Take restorative action
• Seek forgiveness and reconciliation
• Share one’s learning with others
Deconstructing Tertiary Guilt

• Identify one’s connection with the primary perpetrators
• Acknowledge the mistakes that were made and/or are being made
• Adopt a stance of active protest against the injustice
• Express regret and remorse for mistakes
• Take some restorative action