

Addressing Psychotherapy Dropout: Strategies for Engaging Clients and Improving Outcomes

Premature termination is a significant problem in psychotherapy, with deleterious impacts on both clients and therapists. For example, research shows that clients who prematurely terminate show poorer treatment outcomes, are less likely to make lasting changes in their symptoms, and are more likely to over-utilize the health care system. Research also shows that when clients end treatment prematurely, their therapists often experience a sense of failure with the loss. Additionally, repeated dropout by clients can lead to experiences of demoralization and burnout in their providers. Current estimates indicate that approximately 1 in 5 clients will drop out of psychotherapy and/or counseling prematurely. Although these numbers may differ depending on the setting and client type, almost all therapists will experience premature termination at some point in their practice.

The purpose of this workshop is provide strategies and approaches that therapists can use to reduce premature termination in their practice. This workshop will begin with a discussion of what premature termination is and why some clients choose to end treatment prematurely. It will then cover the latest research on the frequency of premature termination and client, therapist, treatment, and

Target Audience
Psychologists Social Workers Counselors
Therapists Psychiatrists Nurses
Course level: Intermediate

Learning Objectives

At the end of this seminar, participants will be able to:

1. Define premature termination in psychotherapy and articulate a conceptual model for why it occurs.
2. Identify the frequency of premature termination in psychotherapy based on the latest empirical research.
3. Recognize at least two impacts of premature termination on both clients and therapists
4. Report at least five client, provider, setting, and treatment risk factors for premature termination.
5. Identify 8 strategies for reducing premature termination and explain how they can be applied in clinical practice.

Seminar Schedule

Typically begins at 11:00 AM and ends at 2:15 PM Eastern time. There is one 15 minute break. However, check the webinar schedule.

Outline

Begin 11 AM ET

Part 1: Understanding Premature Termination in Psychotherapy

The Problem of Premature Termination

Defining the Construct

Frequency

Risk Factors for Premature Termination

Client

Provider

Setting

Treatment

Why premature termination occur

II. Part 2: Strategies for Reducing Premature Termination in therapy

Providing role induction

Break 12:30-12:45 PM ET

Incorporating preferences into the treatment decision-making process

Planning for appropriate termination

Providing education about patterns of change in therapy

Strengthening hope

Enhancing motivation for treatment

Fostering the therapeutic alliance

Assessing and discussing treatment progress

Additional strategies

End 2:15 PM ET

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Continuing Education Credit

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The Presenter

Joshua K. Swift, Ph.D. is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology at Idaho State University and a licensed psychologist in Idaho. At Idaho State University he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses on the practice of psychotherapy, ethics, and supervision. Dr. Swift is an internationally recognized psychotherapy process and outcome researcher, particularly for his work on premature termination in psychotherapy and the integration of client preferences into treatment. He has an American Psychological Association published book on Premature Termination, over 50 peer-reviewed journal articles, and has presented his research across the globe. He has also been recognized with several local, national, and international research and teaching awards.

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This seminar has been reviewed and approved by Keith Hannan, Ph.D., Phil Rich, LICSW, Daphne Fatter, Ph.D., and Loreen Yearick, MSN, RN. This approval expires on March 1, 2025.

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