



TRUST IS BUILT



by Carolyn Spring

‘Trust me,’ says the therapist.

And everything in me wants to curl up and away, disappear some place in my head, and never come back.

It is an understatement to say it, but those two words are a massive trigger.

Because ‘Trust me’ said several of my abusers. ‘Trust me’ is the implicit message, even if never spoken, by parents whose responsibility it was to protect me and yet who both facilitated and inflicted the abuse. ‘Trust me’ is easy to say and almost impossible for an abuse survivor to obey.

Every single therapist I have worked with has said these words at some point. Of course they have – it’s a normal, natural

thing to say. It slips out easily. It’s meant with the best of intentions – to be soothing, to be reassuring, to calm some fears that have slipped in from the past, and to say, ‘Hey, it’s okay. You’re in safe hands here. I’m not your abuser. I’m not your mother. I’m not going to hurt you. I’m here to help.’

They are good words to say, and helpful words to say. When they are shortened into ‘Trust me’, though, their meaning – their tone, their intention, their sincerity and lack of guile – can sometimes be lost in translation, simply because those two words together spark memories of moments right before the abuse and which our brains have logged as ‘Beware! You’re about to be hurt!’



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It's not even that I've ever wanted therapists to stop saying it. I have never wanted the therapists I've worked with to be afraid of unintentionally triggering me. The trigger itself is grist for the mill. It shows us what we have yet to process, what is still dissociated, what still holds way too much power in our lives. Without ever being triggered, we don't see the clues to what remains hidden. So do we see triggers as unwelcome intruders into the therapy room? Or do we see them as messengers guiding us to material that we weren't aware was there? Do we trust our brains to guide us towards healing?

The issue of trust underpins everything that happens in the therapy room. The very nature of the therapeutic relationship is predicated on trust: I will come, with all my hot, volatile, undignified mess and I will sit and expose it to another human being. Really?! It sounds like insanity! To sit in the room with another human being and reveal our soft underbelly is an act of tremendous trust. On the one hand, we rightly say that we struggle with trust, and yet on the other, every single week we sit in a chair and trust that we will not be rejected, mocked, humiliated or betrayed.

This is why the responsibility of the therapist is so great. This is why boundaries are so important. This is why professionalism is a must.

Trust isn't built by the big things. Certainly, though, it can be destroyed by the little things.

Trust is built on the therapist showing up, calm and grounded and centered, in the green zone, with their defences low and their attunement high.

Trust is built in holding hope for the client when hope has abandoned the client.

Trust is built in the details of the contracting, of sticking to what you've agreed, on clarifying what's become muddled.

Trust is built in saying you got it wrong.

Trust is built on being clear about who carries responsibility for what on either side of the therapeutic dyad.

Trust is built by doing everything in the client's best interests.

Trust is built in the therapist becoming neither rescuer nor persecutor, nor falling victim to the client's dissociation or rage.

Trust is built by holding firmly to boundaries.

Trust is built on allying with the client to reach their goals, not sowing secret agendas into the therapy, to influence them to become like you.



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Trust is built by good supervision silently keeping the space safe.

Trust is built through touch, and **trust is built** through not touching, and knowing the appropriateness of both.

Trust is built on seeing and hearing and feeling everything that the client brings, with true unconditional positive regard, not just the appearance of it.

Trust is built by the highest standards of confidentiality.

Trust is built by the rituals of hello and goodbye, of continuity and predictability, of private jokes and friendly jousting.

Trust is built by the therapy being about the client, not about the therapist.

Trust is built by continually learning more.

Trust is built on believing that the client is the expert on themselves and not imposing upon them a label, diagnosis, framework, or theoretical approach, but collaborating with them to find the right way forwards for them.

Trust is built by the room looking and sounding and smelling the same each week.

Trust is built on validating the client's experience of the world, of the therapy, of the therapist, of themselves, even when it's clouded by the filter of trauma, because it's still their experience.

Trust is built on the emotions that land in the therapist's eyes and face as a mirroring back to the client of their pain, their grief, their sadness, their rage.

Trust is built by the therapist knowing what they don't know.

Trust is built in the kindness and the gentleness and the softness, and **trust is built** in the challenge and the steadiness and the exhortation to courage.

Trust is built by the therapist's knowledge and power being used in service of the client, not as leverage over the client.

Trust is built by building trust a little at a time, time after time, and that trust not being broken.

Trust is built by the therapist having appropriate confidence in their own competence and character.

Trust is built in believing in the client when the client can't see what there is to believe in.



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Trust is built by always telling the truth.

Trust is built by feeling seen, and feeling heard, and feeling felt. By even entering therapy, I'm demonstrating trust in the therapist. That trust can grow - at times, too, it can shrink - but it's never static.

Trust is a dynamic quality that is proven and re proven and built and broken a hundred times in every session. By mistrusting, our brains are trying to protect us from being hurt like we were hurt as children: it's a smart move. We

need to be wary. We need to be wise. 'How can I trust you?' I want to cry, even though by doing so, I'm demonstrating trust that it's okay for me ask such a question.

What is trust built on for you?

As a client, how does a therapist win your trust?

As a therapist, how do you know when and how to trust your professional instinct, your gut feelings, your red flags, your emotions?

How is trust built when trauma has so eroded it? •

