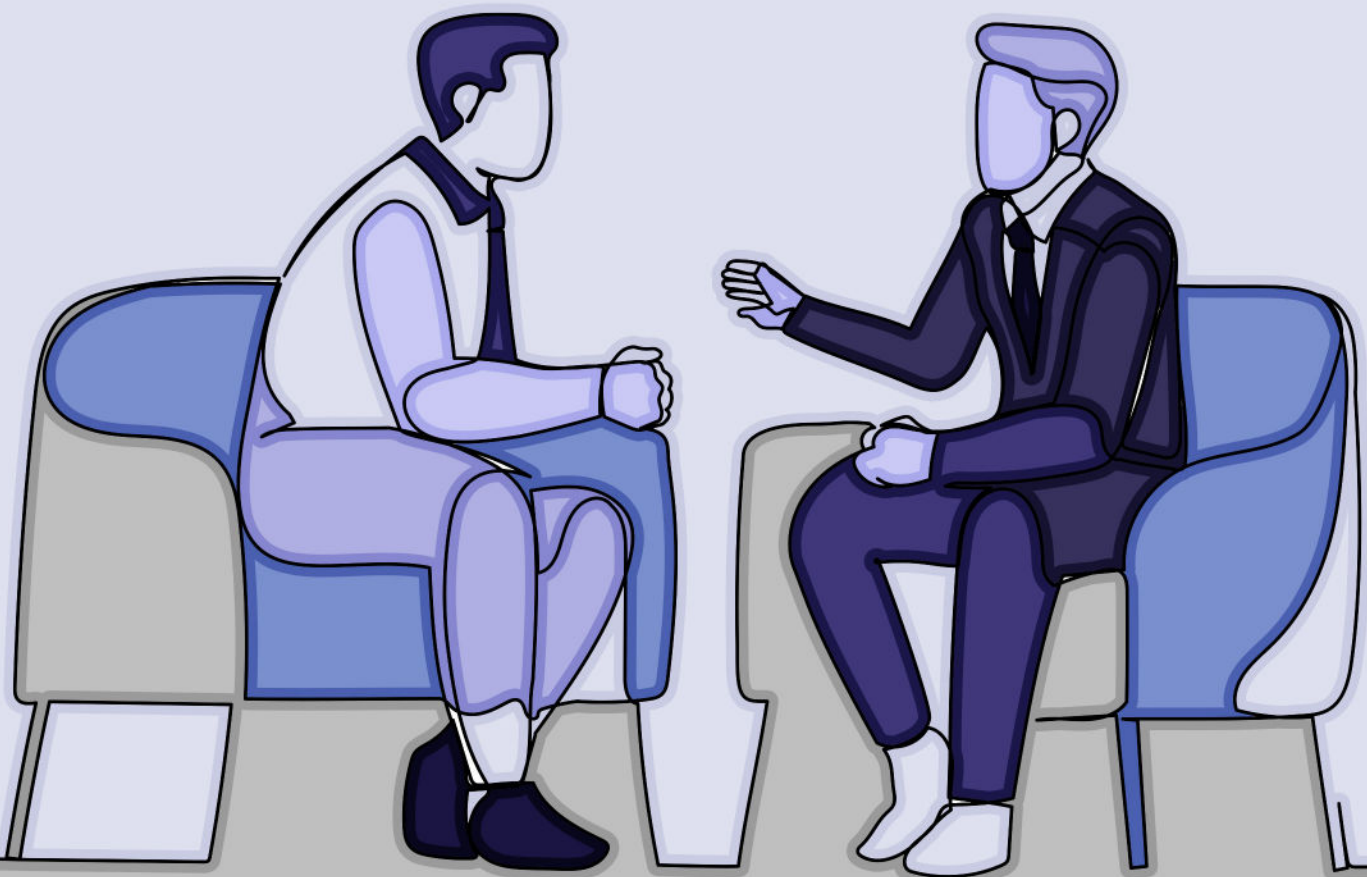


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## Holding or Hijacking: Navigating Therapist-Client Space

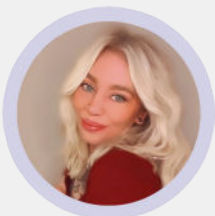




**In the delicate dance of therapy, ‘Holding or Hijacking: Navigating Therapist-Client Space’ serves as a crucial guide for therapists striving to maintain the right balance in their sessions. This resource delves into the concept of ‘holding space’ – a therapist’s ability to be present and supportive without judgment, allowing clients the freedom to express themselves fully.**

It acknowledges the challenge of constantly being this present, which can be both draining and demanding. On the flip side, it explores ‘hijacking space,’ where a therapist may unintentionally steer the conversation or project their own narratives and solutions, overshadowing the client’s voice.

This tool offers a structured approach to self-awareness, with pre- and post-session reflective questions designed to help therapists recognize their current state and readiness to hold space effectively. It recognizes that maintaining this balance is a skill that requires constant attention and adjustment. The guide provides practical strategies for therapists to recognize when they are at risk of hijacking conversations and how to adjust their approach, ensuring they remain effective and empathetic conduits for their clients’ journeys.



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Dani Allen is the Clinical Outreach and Development Manager for [Belongly](#). At [Belongly](#) she is responsible for engaging in outreach and marketing efforts to establish collaborative alliances with mental health practitioners who can gain value from the Belongly community while supporting clinical referrals for therapists and facilitating networking connections. She offers specialized knowledge on mental health subjects and the requirements of therapists and creates valuable downloadable content and resources for existing and prospective members of the [Belongly Community](#).

# Recognizing Dynamics in Therapeutic Spaces

Understanding and distinguishing between holding and hijacking space is crucial. It requires continuous self-reflection and a commitment to prioritize the client's needs and experiences within the therapeutic relationship.

## Holding Space

Holding space in therapy is a multifaceted concept that encompasses the therapist's ability to create a safe, open, and empathetic environment where clients feel fully supported in exploring their feelings and thoughts. It involves several key elements:

- **Empathetic Presence:** This is the foundation of holding space. It means being fully present with the client, both physically and emotionally. It's about listening deeply, without judgment, and showing genuine care and understanding for the client's experience.
- **Active Listening:** More than just hearing words, active listening involves engaging with the client's story, asking thoughtful questions, and reflecting back what you've heard to ensure understanding. It's about making the client feel truly heard and validated.
- **Emotional Safety:** Ensuring the client feels safe to express even the most vulnerable parts of themselves. This involves maintaining confidentiality, showing respect for their emotions, and avoiding any form of judgment or criticism.
- **Patience and Silence:** Sometimes, the most powerful thing a therapist can do is simply be silent. Allowing space for silence gives clients time to process their thoughts and feelings and can often lead to important insights and breakthroughs.
- **Non-Directiveness:** While therapists may guide a session, holding space requires letting the client lead the way in terms of the topics and depth of the conversation. It's about following the client's pace and agenda.
- **Validation and Acknowledgment:** Validating the client's experiences and feelings, showing them that what they are going through is acknowledged and understood.

## Hijacking Space

Hijacking space in therapy refers to situations where the therapist, perhaps inadvertently, takes control of the session in a way that limits the client's ability to fully express themselves. This can take various forms:

- **Over-Talking or Interrupting:** Dominating the conversation, not giving the client enough time to speak, or frequently interrupting them
- **Imposing Views or Solutions:** Offering advice, solutions, or opinions too quickly or without soliciting the client's input. It can also mean steering the conversation towards what the therapist thinks is important rather than what the client wants to discuss.
- **Projecting Personal Experiences or Biases:** Allowing personal experiences, beliefs, or biases to influence the direction of the session or the therapist's responses to the client.
- **Promoting an Unsafe Space:** Making judgments, showing a lack of respect, or not maintaining proper boundaries, which can all contribute to a client feeling unsafe or misunderstood.
- **Failing to Recognize and Address Countertransference:** When a therapist's own emotional responses to a client interfere with their objectivity, it can lead to hijacking the therapeutic space.
- **Lack of Active Listening:** Not fully engaging with or understanding what the client is communicating, leading to misinterpretation or dismissal of their concerns.

# Pre-Session Reflection Questions for Therapists

These questions are designed to help you engage in a self-reflective process, preparing to create a supportive and effective therapeutic environment for your clients.

1. "Am I currently carrying any personal emotions or stressors that could impact my ability to be fully present in this session?"
2. "Have I received any recent feedback from clients indicating that I might be inadvertently hijacking the conversation?"
3. "Is there a specific behavior listed under 'hijacking space' that I need to be particularly mindful of today?"
4. "Do I have a plan in place for if I recognize that I'm unable to hold space effectively during the session?"
5. "How do I intend to check in with my client today regarding their sense of safety and comfort in our conversation?"
6. "Am I entering this session with any preconceived notions or biases about the client or their situation?"
7. "Have I set aside enough time to mentally prepare for this session, ensuring I can offer my full attention?"
8. "Is there a particular aspect of 'holding space' that I want to focus on or improve in today's session?"
9. "How can I encourage open and honest feedback from my client about their experience in therapy?"
10. "Do I feel emotionally and mentally equipped today to engage in deep, empathetic listening without judgment?"
11. "Have I reviewed the client's previous session notes to ensure continuity and understanding of their current needs?"
12. "Am I aware of any potential triggers or challenging topics that may arise in this session, and how do I plan to handle them?"

# Post-Session Reflection Questions for Therapists

These questions aim to foster a deep level of self-reflection and continuous professional development, ensuring that you remain attuned and responsive to your clients' needs and your own therapeutic approach.

1. "Did I allow the client to lead the conversation, or did I steer it based on my own assumptions or agenda?"
2. "Were there moments when I felt the urge to offer advice or solutions? How did I handle these impulses?"
3. "Did I maintain a non-judgmental and empathetic stance throughout the session?"
4. "How well did I manage to actively listen and validate the client's feelings and experiences?"
5. "Were there instances where I may have inadvertently projected my own experiences or biases?"
6. "Did I recognize any moments of emotional discomfort for myself, and how did it impact the session?"
7. "How comfortable and open did the client seem in sharing their thoughts and feelings?"
8. "What can I learn from this session about my strengths and areas for improvement in holding space?" "Did the client provide any direct or indirect feedback on their experience of the session?"
9. "How can I apply insights from this session to enhance future interactions with this client and others?"
10. "Were there any signs indicating that I might have 'hijacked' the conversation, even subtly?"
11. "If I struggled to hold space in this session, what specific actions can I take to improve for the next one?"

# Adjustment Strategies for Holding and Hijacking Space


Aimed at enhancing your therapeutic effectiveness, this segment helps you refine your space-holding skills, ensuring your clients feel heard and supported. It's about building stronger connections and making each session more impactful and transformative.

- **Mindfulness Practice:** Integrate mindfulness exercises into your daily routine to improve presence and attentiveness during sessions.
- **Professional Supervision:** Regularly engage in supervision to receive feedback on your therapeutic style, especially regarding how you manage the conversational space.
- **Reflective Journaling:** Maintain a journal to reflect on your sessions, noting instances where you successfully held space and moments where you might have hijacked it.
- **Client Feedback Mechanism:** Establish a comfortable way for clients to provide feedback about their experience in sessions, which can offer insights into how they perceive the space you hold.
- **Continuing Education:** Attend workshops or seminars focused on therapeutic communication and client-centered approaches to enhance your skills in holding space.
- **Peer Consultation Groups:** Participate in peer consultation groups to discuss and learn from shared experiences regarding holding and hijacking space.
- **Self-Care Routines:** Implement regular self-care routines to ensure you're mentally and emotionally prepared to fully engage with clients.


**Setting Intentions:** Before each session, take a moment to set clear intentions about holding space, reminding yourself of the importance of creating a safe, empathetic environment for your clients.

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**Client Clarity Compass:  
Navigating Ideal Clients & Turning Clients Away**



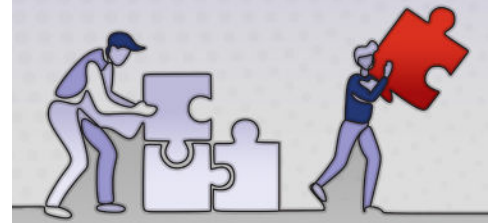
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**The Belongly Therapist's Guide to Beating Burnout**



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**Included In This Handbook:**  
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*Strategy Planning: Mapping the Optimal Compliance Route*

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**HIPAA 2023 Policy Change**

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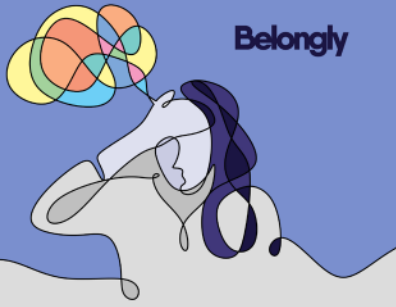
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A woman with blonde hair and glasses is sitting in a chair, looking down at a tablet device she is holding. She is wearing a striped shirt. The background shows a white shelving unit with various items, including books, a small house figurine, and a plant. The entire image has a blue tint.

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