



## **Working With Clients Who Are Ambivalent About Change A Practical Skills Guide for Emerging Therapists**

Ambivalence is a natural part of human change, yet it often challenges emerging therapists' sense of effectiveness. When clients move forward and pull back simultaneously, therapists may feel stuck, impatient, or unsure how to proceed.

Ambivalence is not resistance. It is evidence that change matters.

### **Understanding Ambivalence at a Deeper Level**

Ambivalence reflects competing needs, fears, values, or loyalties. Clients may want relief while also fearing loss, identity shifts, or relational consequences. These conflicts often exist beneath conscious awareness and require patience to surface.

Rushing resolution can intensify fear rather than clarity.

### **Therapist Reactions to Ambivalence**

Emerging therapists may interpret ambivalence as a lack of motivation or commitment. This can trigger frustration or the urge to persuade. Noticing these reactions helps prevent subtle power struggles and preserves collaboration.

Ambivalence tests a therapist's tolerance for uncertainty.

### **Supporting Change Without Forcing It**

Effective work involves slowing down and helping clients articulate both sides of their ambivalence. Reflecting discrepancies gently supports insight without pressure. Clients are more likely to move toward change when they feel understood rather than directed.

Readiness cannot be rushed.

### **Ethical Practice With Ambivalence**

Ethical care respects client autonomy and avoids coercion. Ambivalence signals the need for pacing and collaboration. Supervision can help clarify whether interventions align with readiness.

## **Reflection Questions for Emerging Therapists**

How do I feel when progress feels slow  
What beliefs do I hold about motivation and change  
How can I support exploration without direction  
What does ethical patience look like here

## **Closing Thoughts**

Ambivalence is not an obstacle to overcome. It is a doorway into deeper understanding. When you stay with it, clients often find their own path forward.