Module 13, Lesson 2 Handout:

Tips for Effective Self-Disclosure

It's important to be mindful and intentional with what we share with others, especially with our clients. In the professional world, sharing personal views, experiences or information about yourself with clients is known as self-disclosure. There's a bit of an art to making self-disclosure work for you. Oversharing about yourself or dominating the conversation can work against you as a health professional and leave the client feeling misunderstood, unheard, or even downright uncomfortable (or possibly a little too comfortable!). On the other hand, effective use of self-disclosure can help build trust with your clients, help them feel understood and play a role in their success. Ultimately, you want to find a comfortable balance that lets clients know they can trust you, feel comfortable around you and count on you in supporting their health goals. Here's how to do it.

Tips for Effective Self-Disclosure.

1. **Know your motives.** Ask yourself if it will benefit your client to share and how. Does it really help your client to know that your parents also took you to Weight Watchers when you were 10? Is it in your client's best interest to share that you overcame binge eating? In some cases, it might be. The point is more to know exactly why you're going to share information about yourself before you do. You absolutely want to build trust and establish rapport and credibility, but be deliberate and mindful in your sharing.

2. **Be brief.** Do not dominate the conversation with the entire story behind what you are sharing. This is your client's time to be heard! Use disclosure to help your client feel understood on a deeper level, but refrain from dragging on with every single detail of what might have happened in your experience. You may have clients who start asking you questions, or who keep turning the conversation back on you. Oftentimes, this is to distract them from digging into the real reasons why they're there. If you feel that this is happening, politely call the client out. Do they keep asking about your own holiday vacation because they want to put off talking about their own? Use this as insight and turn it back on them!

3. **Stay professional.** Build a relationship with your clients, but know they are not your friends or colleagues. Sharing a few details about your personal life can make you seem like a more approachable, relatable person, but sharing too many personal details (think romantic or financial issues) crosses a professional line. Having a higher level of professionalism will only benefit your authority.

4. **Give your full attention** when your client is sharing with you. Practice active listening and remove any distractions (your phone, an open email account on a laptop etc.). Ask follow up questions to deepen your understanding and build trust and as we talked about in Level 1, ask open ended rather than yes/no questions to really get the client talking. Oftentimes you'll gain brand new insight and learn new information once a client gets talking.

5. **Don't overdo it.** A little sharing is meaningful, but too much is often overkill. Anecdotes and supported research sharing may be better ways to relate to your clients. It doesn't always have to be personal.

6. **Consider your social media accounts.** Is it helpful for your clients to see you cooking for your children? Or sharing yourself on vacation in a swimsuit? Sometimes your intentions can be misunderstood or even triggering to the population you are serving. Be mindful. Be deliberate and make sure your text supports the messaging behind your intentions in posting. Consider having separate accounts for your personal and professional lives if you don't already.

Putting it All Together

Your clients likely want to know more about you -- you have lots of knowledge and experience and they're calling on you to help them for a reason. But remember, these sessions aren't about *you*. The goal of any personal story or viewpoint you share should be to help guide the client to their insights. Be mindful of what you share, keep it brief, make sure it's in the client's best interest and stay professional. You want to build rapport and trust, but not take away the attention your client deserves.