

The Four Agreements for Mental Health Clinicians

The Four Agreements are a powerful code of conduct that can free you to create the life of your dreams, through forming a more positive belief system. The Four Agreements are brought forward in the best-selling book by don Miguel Ruiz. Following is my interpretation of how these agreements can be applied successfully in your work with patients with severe emotional disorders, including Borderline Personality Disorder. I have used them in my own practice with amazing results.

Agreement #1: Always be impeccable with your word.

This agreement means, always use your word in the direction of positive good for yourself or others. Regardless of how "burned out" you may be feeling, do not disparage your patients or your own work. Be honest about your anger and other feelings, but impeccably speak of the ability of the patient to heal and to transform. Use your word to encourage, motivate, nurture, and to guide the patient into ever-increasing self-reliance, at all times.

Agreement #2: Don't take anything personally.

This agreement means, nothing the patient does has anything to do with you, ever! If you feel personally "triggered" by your patient's statements or behavior, take this as an opportunity to heal your own wounds. Practice detachment with compassion for all of your patient's personal choices. Vigilance in keeping this agreement assures that you are free from being motivated by personal psychological issues, as you work with your patients. Keeping this agreement also makes it much easier to set limits and to provide a consistent therapeutic structure for your patients.

Agreement #3: Don't make assumptions.

This agreement means "drop your clinical filters and see the patient as she is - you can always pick them back up later if you want to." Your clinical knowledge and skills are valuable, but they work best in support of your natural gifts. When clinical skills are reduced to assumptions, they mask your natural ability and greatly diminish the effectiveness of treatment. Through keeping this agreement, your natural intuitive and empathic ability will lead your treatment approach with greater strength. You will begin to see the patient more on her own terms. You'll begin to ask more questions (and better questions) to clarify what this particular patient really means. You will not become "stressed out," by trying to figure out what the patient needs. You will discover that it is far easier to respond empathically and effectively, when you are free from the distortions caused by your usual assumptions.

Agreement #4: Always do your best.

This agreement means, don't give yourself a hard time if you fall short on keeping agreements 1-3. Know that your best is always enough. Through accepting your best effort, you will be in a better position to accept the best effort of the patient. This agreement requires a certain type of "faith," surrender to acceptance of the present moment, knowing that the treatment is unfolding as it should. If your approach isn't working, change it. Use everything that transpires as a perfect opportunity for your professional growth and your patient's healing.