

## *Build a therapeutic alliance*

### Transcript

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The importance of rapport and the therapeutic alliance extends across general practice. This forms the foundation for ongoing continuity of care and is particularly important for our patients who use alcohol and other drugs. A passionate and warm approach has been shown to improve the therapeutic alliance, and increases the success of behavioural change more broadly.

Human beings respond with more enthusiasm when we foster their sense of hope and confidence. Medicine can be hierarchical and there are many different types of consulting styles. Some patients may benefit from a more direct style however for those patients and particularly those that use alcohol and other drugs, this style may risk being perceived as authoritarian or even punitive. Some reasons for this are the moral judgements made by society and medical community that contributes towards stigma and feeling judged.

Studies have shown that the average person with an alcohol use disorder delays seeking treatment for up to 18 years with stigma directly contributing to this delay. Another factor is the increased rate of trauma in people that use alcohol and other drugs. General practitioners on average see a higher proportion of people who experience trauma, PTSD, complex PTSD and people with personality disorders. We know that in some settings such as specialist alcohol and other drug services trauma was ubiquitous. The power dynamic within a clinical setting can be overwhelming for patients, so safe spaces, a stable therapeutic alliance and boundary setting gives patients a consistent clinical environment where they can work towards changing their behaviours to be in more alignment with their values and beliefs.

It follows that trauma informed care is an essential part of this. You don't need to be an expert, but to be a trauma informed GP will help to prevent further harm and provide a safe space for the patient as well as the GP. Being trauma informed helps us to identify certain challenging behaviours when they arise, as well as when a patient has been triggered. Being triggered is when a person moves into a sympathetic nervous system response, so that's fight, flight, fright and freeze. Creating a consistent rapport and a safe space for patients allows you both to pragmatically work through problem list and develop strategies, which is hampered if the patient is on high alert or triggered.

One of the strengths of general practice is the ability to see a patient over time and to develop a sense of safety, consistency and trust. So, I hope that's helpful in understanding some of the reasons that underpin the importance of rapport for patients that use alcohol and other drugs.