

Working with Scapegoated Clients

Practice Guide

Overview

Scapegoated clients present with unique challenges including chronic self-doubt, difficulty trusting helpers, and deeply internalized shame. This guide addresses common pitfalls and effective approaches.

Common Pitfalls

- **Requiring proof:** Asking for evidence reinforces the gaslighting they've experienced
- **Both-sidesing:** "Every family has issues" minimizes real abuse
- **Pushing reconciliation:** Premature forgiveness work retraumatizes
- **Pathologizing the client:** They've been told they're the problem their whole life
- **Underestimating family system:** Family may try to undermine your work

Effective Approaches

- **Validate first:** "What you're describing is real and it's not okay."
- **Educate about dynamics:** Naming patterns reduces shame
- **Expect testing:** They may test whether you'll turn on them too
- **Move slowly:** Trust takes longer for people who've been betrayed by family
- **Support boundaries:** Even when family escalates in response

Reframing Statements

Instead of: "What's your part in this?"

Try: "You've been assigned blame that wasn't yours to carry."

Instead of: "Have you tried talking to them?"

Try: "What's happened in the past when you've tried to address things directly?"

Progress Markers

- Reduced automatic self-blame
- Ability to identify manipulation when it happens
- Boundaries maintained despite family pressure
- Decreased need for external validation of reality
- Grief work about the family they deserved but didn't get

