

# THE NEXUS OF GRACE

When you don't know what to do

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# When you don't know what to do

(Thériault & Gazzola, 2010)

*"Maybe I'm completely incompetent and that's why I don't see any movement in what's happening. So there's that kind of lack of movement in general and then there's just like moments within a session where I think "I don't know where to go, I have no idea what to do...""*

(p. 238)





*“Feelings of self-doubt and insecurity about one’s effectiveness are frequently reported by mental health professionals, regardless of their experience level”*

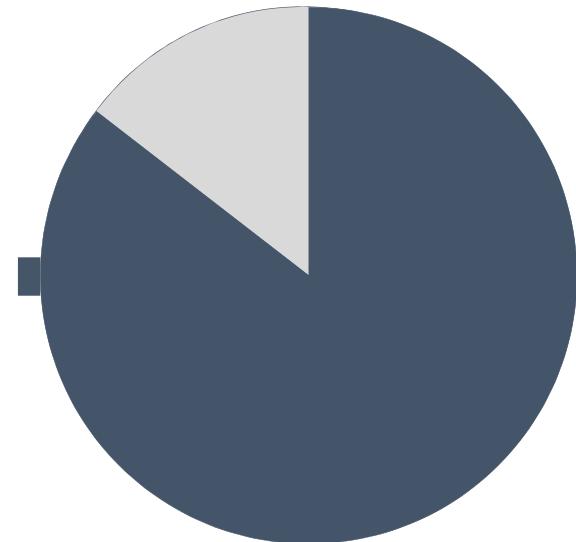
(Thériault, Gazzola, & Richardson, 2009, p. 105)

# Don't know what to do?

(Mahoney 1997; Orlinsky et al. 1999)



42%



83.2%

*So what can you do?*

*Change the way you look at it*



I'm awesome!



I'm incompetent



I'm awesome!

## Dunning-Kruger Effect

(Dunning, 2011)

*"In essence, we proposed that when it came to judgments of performance based on knowledge, poor performers would face a double burden. First, deficits in their expertise would lead them to make many mistakes. Second, those exact same deficits would lead them to be unable to recognize when they were making mistakes and when other people were choosing more wisely... This double-curse arises because, in many life domains, the act of evaluating the correctness of one's response draws upon the exact same expertise that is necessary in choosing the correct response in the first place."*

(p. 260-261)



I'm awesome!

## Dunning-Kruger Effect

(Dunning, 2011)

*“Those who are incompetent, for lack of a better term...have little insight into their incompetence”*

(p. 260)



*"These smug pilots have lost touch with regular passengers like us.  
Who thinks I should fly the plane?"*

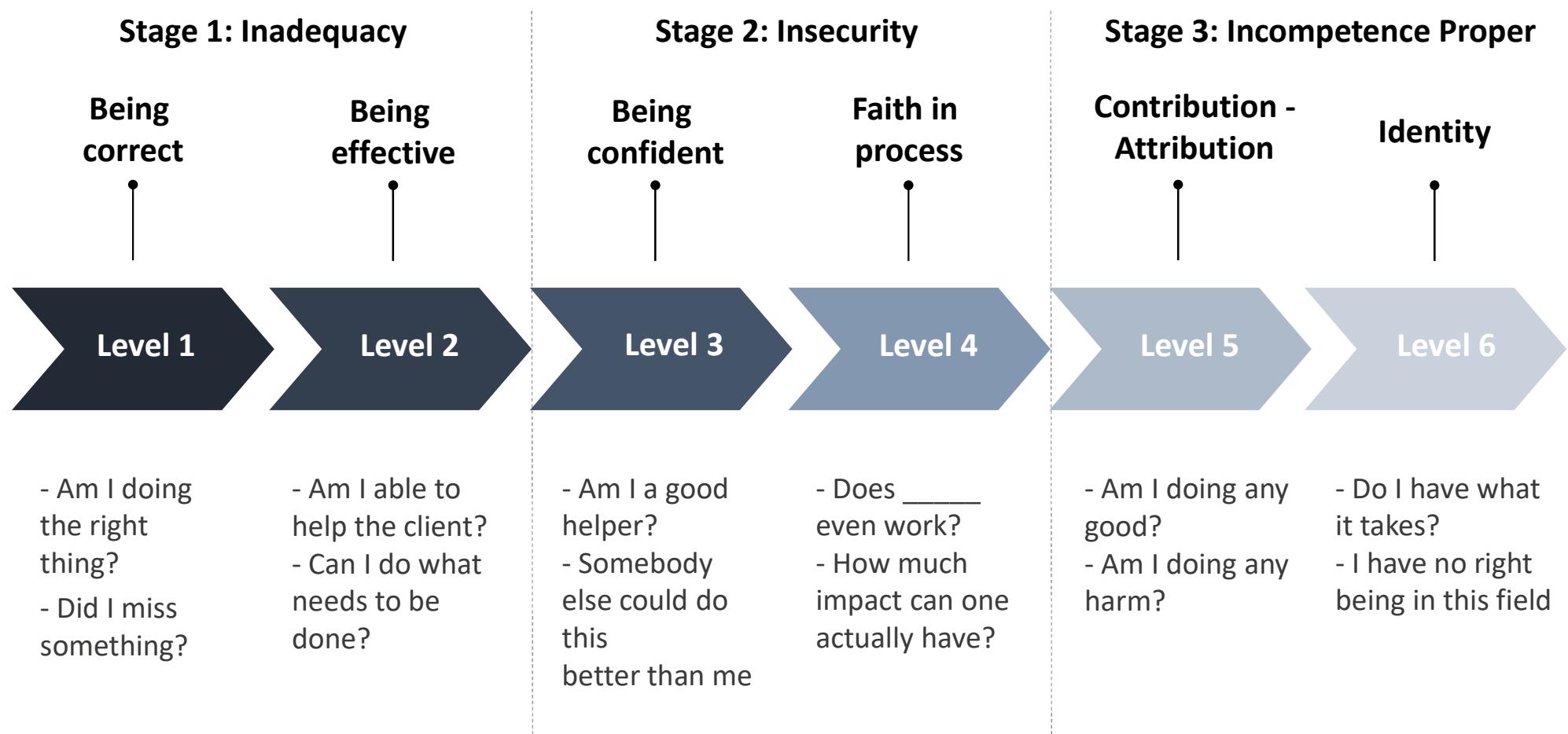
SINGLE  
 TAKEN  
 WHO CARES?  
I'M AWESOME



I'm incompetent

# Continuum of self-doubt

(Thériault & Gazzola, 2005)



# Impacts of self-doubt

(Thériault & Gazzola, 2010)

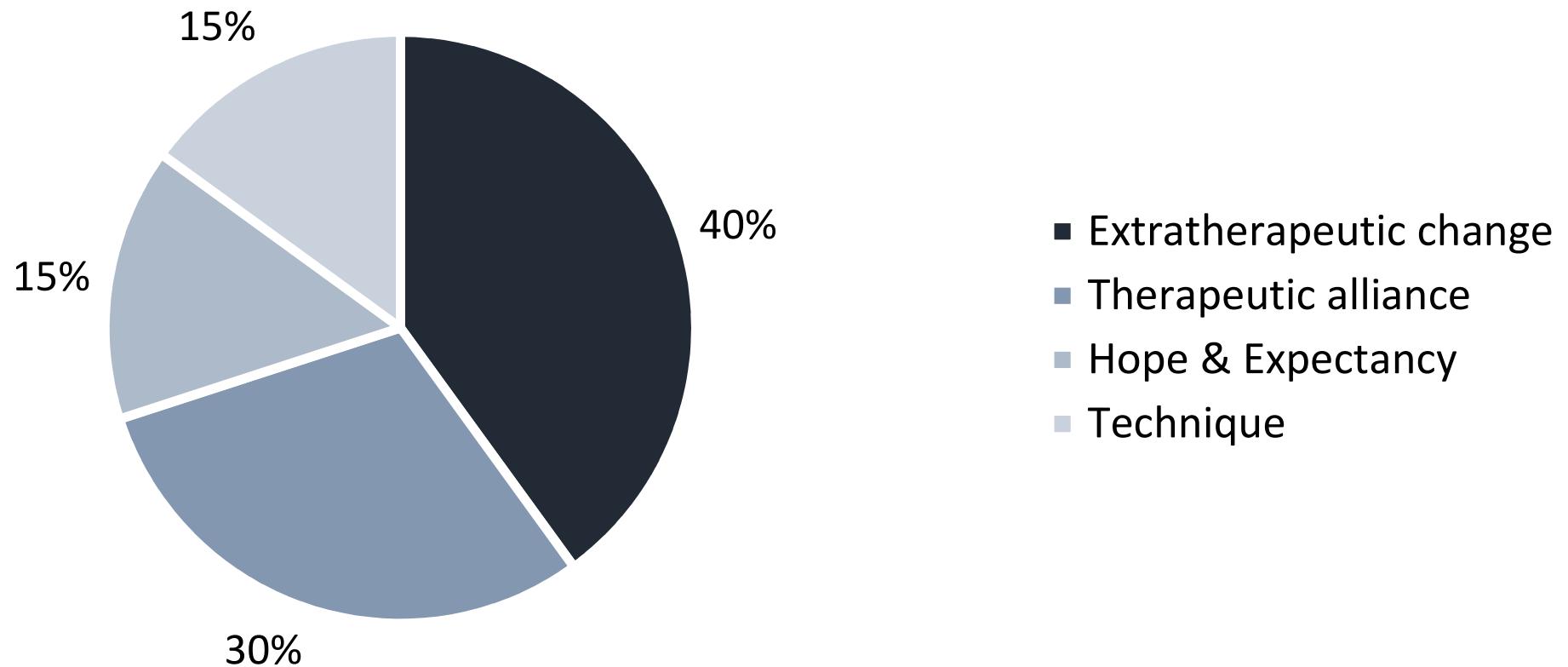
- Ruptures to therapeutic alliance
- Disengagement and withdrawal
- Premature exit from profession
- Increase in personal problems
- Early or delayed termination
- Increased risk of burnout
- Untimely interpretations
- Increased stress



*Change your approach*

# Sources of change in psychotherapy

(Lambert, 1992)



# How to deal with feelings of incompetence

(Thériault, Gazzola, & Richardson, 2009)

*“Counsellors realized that FOI (feelings of incompetence) were reduced when they focused on the relationship with the client rather than on techniques or on themselves. Indeed, a strong relationship seemed to protect the therapist against FOI. Counsellors also emphasized that when they focused on the process, they were able to avoid questioning and doubting every intervention”* (p. 113)

# Doing



# Being



# Being

- Compassionate
- Accepting
- Welcoming
- Supportive
- Respectful
- Present
- Empathic



(Benner, 2002; Bugental, 1987; Nouwen, 1972, 1975, 1981, 2004; Nouwen, McNeill, & Morrison, 2005; Rogers, 1957, 1961, 1980; Vanier, 1989; Yalom, 2002)



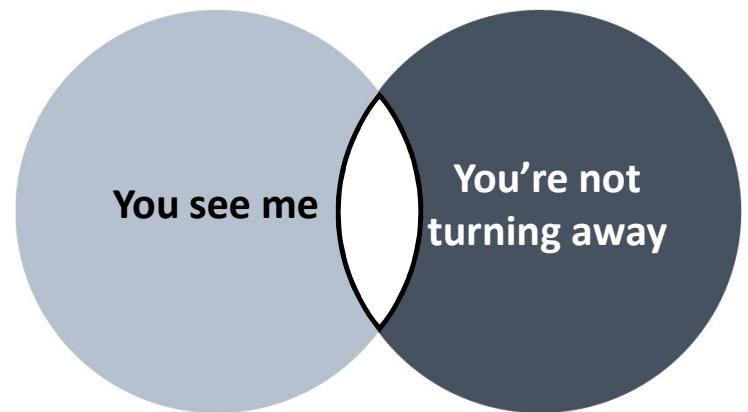
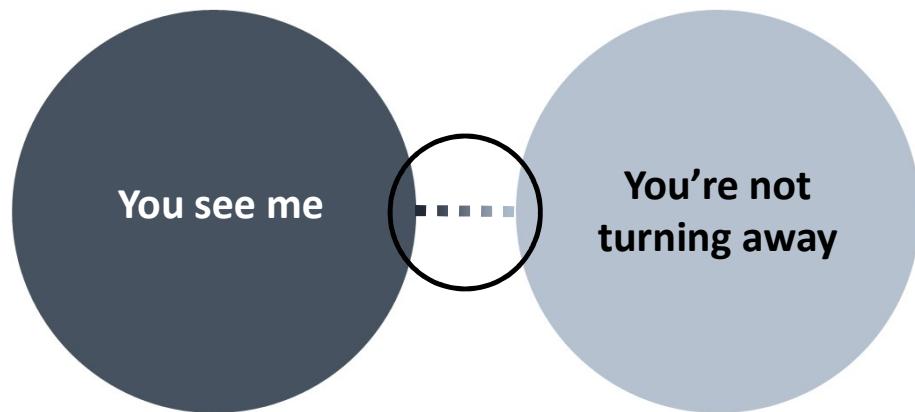
grace



*“The thing we want most in life is to be seen for who we truly are, and the thing we fear most in life is to be seen for who we truly are. I think that’s the nexus of grace, this terrifying moment of “oh I’m seen, and they’re not turning away.” And I think that experience is so fundamentally freeing and transformative. I think that’s grace.”*

(Bill)

# The nexus of grace



*“...God is a God-with-us, a God who came to share our lives in solidarity. It does not mean that God solves our problems, shows us the way out of our confusion, or offers answers for our many questions. God might do all of that, but the solidarity of God consists in the fact that God is willing to enter with us into our problems, confusions, and questions.”*

(Nouwen, McNeill, & Morrison, 2005, p. 12)

*The nexus of grace*

*Practice grace*

*Adopt a posture of grace*

*Remember God's grace*

*When you don't know what to do:  
Practice grace*

*“In our world in which so many religious convictions, ideologies and life styles come into increasing contact with each other, it is more important than ever to realize that it belongs to the essence of a Christian spirituality to receive our fellow human beings into our world without imposing our religious viewpoint, ideology or way of doing things on them as a condition for love, friendship and care”*

(Nouwen, 1975, p. 98)



## Practice grace: Unconditional love

### Compassion

- *“Here [in the life of Jesus] we see what compassion means. It is not a bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged positions; it is not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below; it is not a gesture of sympathy or pity for those who fail to make it in the upward pull. On the contrary, compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there. God’s compassion is total, absolute, unconditional, without reservation”* (Nouwen, McNeill, & Morrison, 2005, p. 25)

# Practice grace: Unconditional love

## Compassion

- Involves a challenge to:
  - “*Go where it hurts, to enter into places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish.*”
  - “*Cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears.*”
  - “*Be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless.*”
  - “*Full immersion in the condition of being human.*” (Nouwen et al., 2005, p. 3-4)

# Practice grace: Unconditional love

## Acceptance

- “Compassion can never coexist with judgment because judgment creates the distance, the distinction, which prevents us from really being with the other” (Nouwen, 1981, p. 35)
- Involves:
  - Entering a client’s world without prejudice (Rogers, 1980)
  - “If they are to refind hope, marginal people have to feel loved and accepted...they need people who will listen to them, with all their wounds and needs...this demands time and patience...they need to sense that they are not being judged, but really understood” (Vanier, 1989, p. 275)

# Practice grace: Unconditional friendship

## Welcoming

- “*To welcome is one of the signs of true human and Christian maturity... It is to give space to someone in one's heart, space for that person to be and to grow; space where the person knows that he or she is accepted just as they are, with their wounds and their gifts.*” (Vanier, 1989, p. 265)
- Involves:
  - “*It is an attitude; it is the constant openness of the heart; it is saying to people every morning and at every moment, ‘come in’*” (Vanier, 1989, p. 267)
  - “*To be open to reality as it is, with the least possible filtering*” (Vanier, 1989, p. 265)

# Practice grace: Unconditional friendship

## Support

- “Friends show their love in an endless variety of ways. Undergirding these, however, is a central desire for the blessing of the other person. Friends long for each other’s well-being and do whatever they can to support it.”  
(Benner, 2002, p. 67)
- Involves:
  - Wanting for the other to become all they can be  
(Benner, 2002)
  - “...communicating love through a critical balance of support and confrontation. Confrontation without support will never be experienced as love. But support without confrontation will always remain an insipid form of love.”  
(Benner, 2002, p. 71)

## Practice grace: Unconditional care

### Respect

- “*The precondition of dialogue is respect. Nothing helps me do this more than seeing the other person through the eyes of Christ. For when I see them through the eyes of Christ, I see their worth and dignity.*” (Benner, 2002, p. 56)
- Involves:
  - Creating “*an atmosphere which simply demonstrates ‘I care’; not ‘I care for you if you behave thus and so’*” (Rogers, 1961, p. 283)
  - “*Honoring and affirming this uniqueness. It means abandoning efforts to make her more like me. At core it means prizing her uniqueness by nurturing and supporting it*” (Benner, 2002, p. 187)

# Practice grace: Unconditional care

## Presence

- “*Presence is a name for the quality of being in a situation or relationship in which one intends at a deep level to participate as fully as she is able.*” (Bugental, 1987, p. 27)
- Involves:
  - Accessibility & Expressiveness (Bugental, 1987)
  - “*Setting aside my own interests and preoccupations*” (Benner, 2002, p. 50)
  - “*Resisting the impulse to solve problems or fix things that appear broken*” (Benner, 2002, p. 50)
  - “*...being willing to be touched by him or her. If I genuinely bring myself to a relationship, I must be prepared to be changed by it. Anything less than this means that I am not really present.*” (Benner, 2002, p. 52)

*When you don't know what to do:  
Adopt a posture of grace*

*“If there is any posture that disturbs a suffering man or woman, it is aloofness.”*

(Nouwen, 1972, p. 71)

*“...it seems necessary to re-establish the basic principle that no one can help anyone without becoming involved, without entering with his whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded or even destroyed in the process...that starts with the willingness to cry with those who cry, laugh with those who laugh, and to make one’s own painful and joyful experiences available as sources of clarification and understanding.”*

(Nouwen, 1972, p. 72)

## A posture of grace

*“When do we receive real comfort and consolation? Is it when someone teaches us how to think or act? Is it when we receive advice about where to go or what to do? Is it when we hear words of reassurance and hope? Sometimes, perhaps. But what really counts is that in moments of pain and suffering someone stays with us. More important than any particular action or word of advice is the simple presence of someone who cares.”*

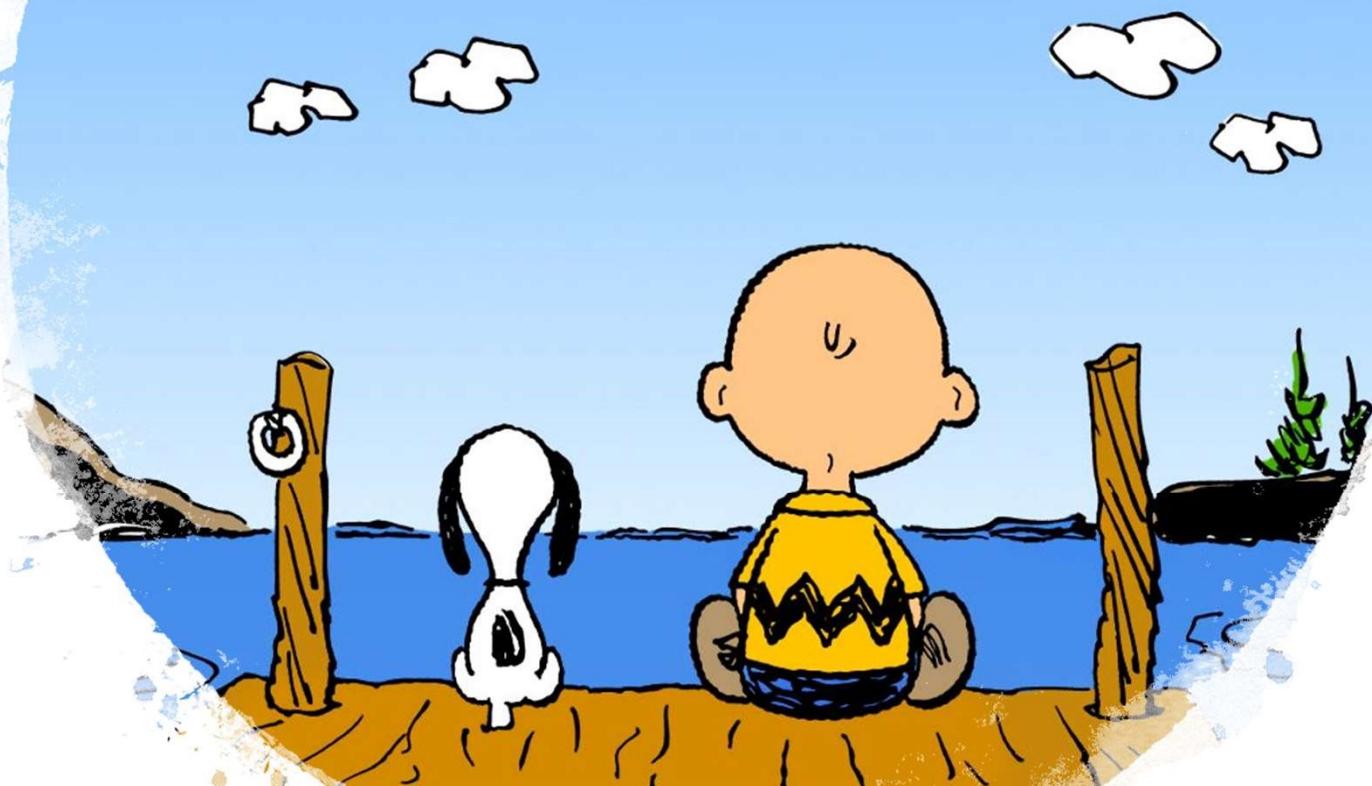
(Nouwen et al., 2005, p. 11)

## A posture of grace

*“...God is a God-with-us, a God who came to share our lives in solidarity. It does not mean that God solves our problems, shows us the way out of our confusion, or offers answers for our many questions. God might do all of that, but the solidarity of God consists in the fact that God is willing to enter with us into our problems, confusions, and questions.”*

(Nouwen et al., 2005, p. 12)

**A posture of grace**



*When you don't know what to do:  
Remember God's grace*

*“I’m never alone in a therapy session. I know that the Holy Spirit is with me...and I know that I’m not here holding this alone.”*

*“I think that, somehow, God is working through me.”*

*“I feel that I’m very dependent on wisdom from the Spirit. Very open to guidance and inspiration. I’m trusting in that to enhance my skills and my approach.”*

*“...if I didn’t have this perspective, there’s no way I would be as compassionate as I am because it doesn’t come from me.”*

*“I want people to know they’re loved and precious and of great value.”*

*“I come to my meeting with this client from a Christian perspective...they are a child of God who is loved by God.”*

*“I think each one of us is a child of God. And as children of God, we are incredibly loved by God. And we’re all precious and valuable.”*

*“It doesn’t matter who you are, you are important because you are made in the image of God.”*

*“...just to be seen and acknowledged as a person, and to be invited to spend time together seems really important to people. It has to do with their dignity as human beings and as their wholeness as a child of God.”*

*“The way I look at it is that it takes some of the pressure off me, feeling that it’s up to me to help this person do whatever it is that the person needs to do. I think God can do things that I will never even know. And I kind of like it that way.”*

*“...it’s God who’s responsible for what’s happening in this relationship.”*

*“It’s not my job to fix people. I have to be present with you for an hour and then I’m going to give you back to God who is ultimately in control, whether you believe it or not.*

# **Remember God's grace**

*God is present*

*God is at work*

*God is for the client*

*God is for you*

*“These are ideals, and I don’t  
always hit them. But then,  
having that grace-filled  
experience allows me to get  
back up and do it again.”*



*“...when we honestly ask ourselves which persons in our lives mean the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not-knowing, not-curing, not-healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is the friend who cares.”*

(Nouwen, 2004, p. 38)

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