

MARGO

Relevant Information for Therapists:

Margo is a 28 year old female who meets criteria for BPD, Major Depressive Disorder, and Anxiety Disorder, NOS. She is nearing completion of her Masters in Educational Psychology. She works part-time in a group home for mentally ill clients as she finishes her degree. She is married, and describes her husband as very supportive. Margo and her husband are very physically active, participating in a number of sports, including rowing, rollerblading, and softball.

Margo states that she has high expectations of herself, especially in terms of having and keeping friends. She feels that she should go out several times each week with friends, that she should be supportive of them, and that she should have a “large group” of friends. She has described becoming upset when she thinks about the friends she had in college, and how she has lost contact with most of them. She frequently feels hurt if friends are not as supportive of her as she has been of them. She prides herself on being a good, caring friend.

You have been working with Margo on an outpatient basis for about three months for help reducing her depression and interpersonal sensitivity. Margo also had a history of non-suicidal self-injurious behavior – something she found extremely helpful to help her quickly regulate her emotions. Prior to the start of treatment, she had been cutting (e.g., non-suicidal self-injurious behavior) an average of three times weekly. She agreed to stop self-harming behaviors and has made progress on this goal.

In the past several sessions, Margo has mentioned that her former best friend has been treating her “differently” in recent months. Margo described Patty’s behavior as “very evasive” with her. Margo has sensed that Patty has expanded her set of friends and has chosen to exclude Margo from this new group, including some their social gatherings.

TASK: At the start of today’s session, you learn that Margo has cut herself last night (Sunday). Because this is the highest order target for the session, you decide to do a chain analysis on the event. You will have 20 minutes to perform the chain analysis on Sunday’s episode of self-harm.

PROBLEM BEHAVIOR: (see below)

VULNERABILITY FACTORS:

- Excessive demands on her time – between school and part time job. She is in the midst of completing her master’s thesis and her advisor has been relatively unavailable to guide her. She had a meeting set up for last week which he had to cancel due to a scheduling conflict. Margo is quite anxious that she won’t get the help she needs to complete her first draft of her thesis that is due next month.
- Margo had a recent knee injury, so she has been unable to exercise as much as she’d like in the past three weeks.
- Lack of exercise has increased her irritability and sensitivity.

PROMPTING EVENT:

- Last night Margo and her husband (Larry) went out to dinner (to Salty’s in West Seattle) with Patty and her new boyfriend (Hank). While at dinner, the boyfriend mentioned spending time with Patty and some of her other friends, going to different events around the city. This confirmed Margo’s suspicions that Patty had been excluding her.

LINKS

- Margo felt “like I had been punched in the chest...I felt like I couldn’t breath. I am not sure if I was devastated or furious or both.” (SUDS around 85).
- She left the table and excused herself to use the bathroom – a skillful move on her part so that Patty would not see her cry.
- She was in the bathroom for about five minutes – first crying (but really softly so that other people couldn’t hear me), then trying to compose herself so that the others wouldn’t know what she had been doing (she splashed her face with water and reapplied some of her make up).
- While in the bathroom, she was thinking again and again about what Hank had said, about the other times she sensed that Patty was excluding her.
- I started feeling really awful about myself. Like “what’s wrong with me?” or something. Sort of thinking about the other friends I had made and lost over the years. Maybe I wasn’t hip enough for Patty and her new friends, not edgy enough. I’m not sure. (emotion: shame; while in bathroom, SUDS were around 80; eventually went down a bit after she cried to about 65).
- On her way back to the table, Margo ran into Patty who was on her way to the bathroom. Patty asked her if she was ok.
- Margo said she wasn’t okay and wanted to talk. The two friends went into the lounge area that was near the bathrooms and found a little quite table to sit in the back of the lounge.
- Margo confronted Patty about lying to her all along about different events she had excluded Margo from (there were two that Margo mentioned: 1) going to Cirque Du Soleil and 2) seeing The Women at the ACT theatre in downtown Seattle). (While Margo confronted Patty, she started crying and was then also having judgmental, self-critical thoughts about being too emotional and over-sensitive. She wanted to stop crying too because she felt like it gave Patty the “upper hand” – to let her hurt me again).

- Patty acknowledged that she had, but stated it was a “simple lapse of judgment” – it wasn’t her intent to EXCLUDE Margo. She had hoped that Patty would have simply apologized, but she didn’t. Instead, Patty said, “Margo, I think you’re making this into a bigger deal than it is. It wasn’t like I was saying, “Oh, let’s exclude Margo”. This hurt and enraged Margo even more. “I felt like I just wanted to hide at that moment, to evaporate. To just end this whole discussion. I’d wished I hadn’t even brought it up – now it’s like the cat was out of the bag. You know, maybe she was right, that I had completely blown this thing out of proportion.
- Margo felt frozen in her response to Patty. She eventually said, between the tears, I know what I know Patty. I know what I know”. She meant that she didn’t buy what Patty was telling her but she couldn’t think of what else to say in the moment. At this point, Margo was crying harder and working harder simultaneously to get herself to stop (at one point, I put my hand in my pocket and pinched myself really hard, but that didn’t work either).
- After about 10 minutes, Patty ended the exchange by saying that they should both go back to the table. She didn’t want to be away from her date anymore than she had and their “food had probably already been served”.
- Before Patty left, she said to Margo, “You’re my friend, Margo. I’d never mean to hurt you” in a simperly sweet voice, then patted Margo’s back. “I wanted to just puke at this point. (Emotion: disgust prompted by the voice tone). I felt like a pathetic invalid at this point (shame). I didn’t believe her at all. She just felt sorry for me.”
- After Patty left, Margo went back to the bathroom to attempt to compose herself, and again washed her face and reapplied her make up. Margo first noticed the urge to cut herself while she was in the bathroom. She thought about calling for coaching, but figured her therapist would not want a call at that time of night (8:30PM on Sunday night). She told herself instead that she just needed to get through the evening without making matters worse, and if she still felt this bad when she got home, she’s do it. The promise that she *could* cut if she still felt “bad” helped her feel better in the moment and able to return to the dinner.
- She then returned to the table. She remembers feeling really hurt, very angry, and really ashamed that she had “made this big scene” at dinner with Patty and her new boyfriend. (Shame was the emotion most noticeable – around 85 on 100 point scale; anger was also present, like a 95 when she thought about how Patty just dismissed it and didn’t seem particularly apologetic, but otherwise a 75).
- The food arrived shortly after she returned. Margo ate rather quietly and was more subdued. “I was just trying to get through the evening without making matters any worse than they already were”.
- Around 9:15PM, Margo initiated leaving, saying she had to get to work early the next day and had an assignment due for school she needed to finish up before morning. In an uncharacteristic manner, neither she nor Patty initiated giving the other a hug goodnight. Margo described: I was as gracious as I could be. I told her guy that it was good meeting him, shook his hand again, and waved to Patty. Patty waved back “and gave me this little look like, ‘are you going to be okay?’ UGH! I just wanted to vaporize her right there. I hate that look. People feeling sorry for me. (her SUDS went right up again to about 85 and remained this high throughout the car-ride home).
- As Margo and her husband drove home, Margo told him what had happened and that she feared she’d lose Patty, her last remaining college friend, over this exchange. She told him how Patty “poo-pooed” her concern, and wrote it off as “a error of judgment” and didn’t seem apologetic in the

slightest. She told him about how she cried in front of Patty and hated herself that she had “broken down that way in front of her”. She grew more and more angry as she thought about her friend trivialized the matter and ashamed of her behavior.

- Her husband realized that she was upset, and tried to comfort her. He pointed out that she and Patty have not been close for awhile, and that Margo had lots of other friends. Margo knew her husband was trying to help. She agreed (to some extent, she did agree, but it mattered to her that she not completely lose all her friends from college). The more her husband encouraged her to put it aside and move on, the more isolated and alone she felt with her feelings and unable to put it to rest.
- Once they reached their home, Margo told her husband to go on in the house. She needed a bit of time to cool off before she called it a night. She sat in the car and reviewed the events of the day, thinking about what had occurred, remembering the feeling she first had when she first realized Patty had been less than forthright with her. She replayed her conversation with Patty, feeling again the intense hurt and anger she had felt earlier in the restaurant that night. Distress was around 95.

PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

- Margo remembered the promise she had made to herself earlier in the night...about cutting to relieve the pain if it persisted. Her distress started coming down as she became fixated on cutting. She went into the kitchen, grabbed a glass water cup, then went outside again. She broke the glass, then proceeded to use a jagged edge of the glass to cut her right thigh (made two cuts, both on right upper thigh, cuts superficial, each about 5 inches long; took about one to two minutes total).

CONSEQUENCE

- She felt immediate relief after cutting – still angry, but with considerably more control. Her distress fell from a 95 to about a 35.
- In the morning as she considered what she had done, she felt ashamed that she had “caved in” and cut. She hated the idea that she would now also have to talk to her therapist about what had happened.

Instructions for Actors:

- 1) In response to how are you, use initial, “I’m doing okay.”
- 2) In response to “what happened” or “what’s going on” use initial VAGUE response: I’ve just really been having a hard time.
- 3) Stay vague and try to deliver one “nugget” at a time while balancing being realistic and genuine
- 4) Provide VAGUE initial reason for the cut: “I was feeling really bad and having a hard time”.
- 5) If T asks what skills you used to NOT cut, say you did pros/cons and talked to partner as a way to feel better.
- 6) Reason why C didn’t tell partner that C cut is b/c she didn’t want partner to feel concerned (once again) about her well-being.
- 7) If T asks what you could do in the future to avoid the cutting behavior say, “You know I had some homework to do. Maybe I could just throw myself into doing homework.”
- 8) As the client, you understand what chain analysis is, you have done them before, and you agree to the behavioral targets. This translates into offering no direct opposition to doing the chain. And if the therapist asks you if your “on board” to do the chain or do you know why we’re doing the chain, or any other questions along those lines, answer in the affirmative and be cooperative.
- 9) If T has not brought up cutting behavior after 10 minutes, then the actor needs to find a

reasonable way to bring it up.

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3.14.2008