

## Navigating Personality Dynamics in the Treatment of Complex Trauma Video Course

Kathy Steele  
Part of the "Clinical Pearls" Series

Video Course  
CPD hours: 3 / CE credits: 3

Price: £72



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**How do entrenched personality traits such as emotional volatility, excessive dependency, impulsivity, cognitive rigidity, and relational instability complicate trauma therapy?** How can clinicians navigate the complex interplay between these adaptations and the therapeutic process, while preserving a robust therapeutic alliance?

This advanced Clinical Pearls workshop, led by Kathy Steele, provides clinicians with a sophisticated framework for understanding the intricate relationship between personality traits, disorders, and trauma. These traits, far from being superficial symptoms, are deeply embedded survival strategies, often developed in response to prolonged relational trauma. However, these have the potential to obstruct trauma processing and destabilize the therapeutic alliance.

### Key Obstacles in Therapy

Personality traits are not merely residual effects of trauma; they are entrenched mechanisms of coping. Yet, these same traits can create significant therapeutic roadblocks, manifesting as client resistance, avoidance, or behaviors that challenge the therapist's capacity to maintain therapeutic boundaries. For instance, **clinicians may encounter clients oscillating between emotional extremes or misinterpreting the therapist's intentions due to profound distortions in self-perception.** This workshop will rigorously examine these dynamics, illustrating how to address them through carefully calibrated interventions that promote emotional containment and therapeutic progress.

### Specific Therapeutic Challenges

In this workshop, clinicians will learn to identify when behaviours such as entitlement, chronic interpersonal discord, and cognitive distortions undermine the therapeutic process. Practical interventions will be explored, such as establishing firm boundaries, employing techniques to manage emotional instability, and creating a



structured therapeutic framework that fosters safety. These approaches enable clinicians to navigate and modify these maladaptive patterns, ensuring the therapeutic alliance remains intact and progress is not thwarted.

### Learning to Address Complex Clinical Traits

Participants will learn the following advanced therapeutic skills:

- **Discern indicators of underlying personality disorders:** Beyond overt trauma symptoms, **clinicians will learn to detect five core components that signal the presence of a personality disorder—chronic emotional dysregulation and dysphoria, pervasive interpersonal conflict, distorted self-concept, cognitive distortions, and behavioural problems.** Clinicians will refine their capacity to differentiate these elements from trauma symptoms that require distinct therapeutic strategies.
- **Tailor interventions to address maladaptive behaviours:** Through exploration of behaviors such as emotional dysregulation, difficulties mentalizing, and interpersonal difficulties, clinicians will learn to prevent these behaviors from destabilizing the therapeutic relationship. Kathy will provide insights into therapeutic approaches that sustain progress even in the face of client resistance or avoidance.
- **Implement structured therapeutic environments:** Learn to employ structure, clear boundaries, and emotional containment to ensure a therapeutic space that supports trauma processing without overwhelming the client. Clinicians will acquire strategies to set and maintain appropriate boundaries, ensuring the therapy remains productive.
- **Use practical, grounded interventions:** Kathy Steele will guide participants through four core interventions designed to work with clients presenting with personality disorders. These include creating structured therapy environments, fostering emotional containment, utilizing grounding techniques, and setting boundaries that preserve the therapeutic process. Clinicians will gain hands-on experience with these interventions, ready for immediate application in clinical practice.

### Interactive Learning and Clinical Supervision

This workshop integrates theoretical insights with practical application. Kathy Steele will lead interactive components, including case studies, experiential exercises, and direct case consultations. Clinicians are invited to bring anonymized cases for supervision, where Kathy will offer targeted guidance on applying the workshop's principles in real-world clinical settings.

By the end of this advanced workshop, participants will not only have a comprehensive understanding of how personality traits and disorders complicate trauma therapy, but also leave with empirically grounded tools and therapeutic interventions to manage these complexities effectively. Kathy Steele's approach emphasizes both compassion and clinical rigor, empowering therapists to help clients navigate the profound challenges of trauma recovery.

### Learning Objectives:

- **Identify five core components that signal the presence of a personality disorder—chronic emotional dysregulation and dysphoria, pervasive interpersonal conflict, distorted self-concept, cognitive distortions, and behavioural problems.**
- **Implement structured therapeutic environments:** including structure, clear boundaries, and emotional containment to ensure a therapeutic space that supports trauma processing without overwhelming the client.
- **Use four practical, grounded interventions** designed to work with clients presenting with personality disorders.

### About the speaker



**Kathy Steele**, MN, CS has been treating complex trauma, dissociation, and attachment issues since 1985. She is in private practice with Metropolitan Psychotherapy Services and is Adjunct Faculty at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, US. Ms. Steele is a Past President and Fellow of the International Society for the Study of Trauma and Dissociation (ISSTD) and has also previously served on the Board of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS). She has been involved with developing treatment guidelines for Dissociative Disorders and well as for Complex Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. Ms. Steele has received a number of awards for her work, including the 2010 Lifetime Achievement Award from ISSTD, an Emory University Distinguished Alumni Award in 2006, and the 2011 Cornelia B. Wilbur Award for Outstanding Clinical Contributions. She is known for her humour, compassion, respect, and depth of knowledge as a clinician and teacher, and for her capacity to present complex issues in easily understood and clear ways using an integrative psychotherapy model that draws from both traditional and somatic approaches. She is sought as a consultant and supervisor, and as an international lecturer.

She has co-authored three books as part of the acclaimed Norton Series on Interpersonal Neurobiology: *The Haunted Self: Structural dissociation of the personality and chronic traumatization* (2006, Van der Hart, Nijenhuis, & Steele – W. W. Norton); *Coping with trauma-related dissociation: Skills training for patients and therapists* (2011, Boon, Steele, & Van der Hart – W. W. Norton); and most recently, *Treating trauma-related dissociation: A practical, integrative approach* (2017, Steele, Boon, & Van der Hart – W. W. Norton). She has also (co)authored numerous book chapters and journal articles.

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