

Therapeutic Impossibility:
When Trauma Survivors Systematically Dismantle Therapy
Video Course
Dr Frank Anderson

Video Course
CPD hours: 6



Online video access remains available for 1 year or 3 years from the date you receive the video course, depending on the ticket type.

Many trauma survivors carry protective responses so strong that the idea of letting someone in feels impossible. **These are the clients who might suddenly cancel sessions after a period of progress, lash out when emotional closeness increases, or emotionally shut down the moment deeper material surfaces.** At times, these responses unfold with such precision and speed that therapists are left stunned, watching the therapeutic relationship unravel in minutes.

As clinicians, these moments can feel like therapy itself has been derailed—no matter how skilled we are. But what's really happening?

Extreme protectors are not pathology.

They are survival strategies developed to keep a client safe from the overwhelming pain of their past. **When they appear hostile, rejecting, or manipulative, it's not sabotage—it's protection rehearsed over years, often with devastating consistency.**

When misunderstood or confronted head-on, these protectors can block access to the very experiences that need tending. But when we recognise their purpose and learn to work with them, they become the doorway to lasting therapeutic connection and transformation. The very forces that dismantle therapy can, paradoxically, become the keys that unlock it.

Why This Work Matters

Extreme protectors show up in many forms: dissociation, hostility, perfectionism, avoidance, self-criticism, or even compulsive behaviours. They can surface suddenly, escalate quickly, and leave therapists activated and questioning their own competence. They may attack the therapist's methods one moment, plead desperately for help the next, and disappear without warning—patterns that can exhaust even seasoned clinicians.



For many clients, these protective parts were forged in environments where vulnerability was dangerous. As a result, the nervous system has learned to equate closeness—even with a caring therapist—as a threat. Without a framework for recognising and engaging these responses, the therapeutic process can stall, rupture, or come to a complete halt. The cycle can repeat across multiple therapies, leaving clients labelled “resistant” or “untreatable,” and therapists doubting their clinical skill.

But it doesn’t have to.

What You’ll Learn

In this two-part training, Dr Frank Anderson will show you how to move past these stuck points by building trust with the protective system rather than reacting to it or pushing against it.

Drawing on decades of clinical experience and the latest neuroscience, Frank will teach you how to:

- Identify the protective strategies that most often interfere with therapeutic progress, including dissociation, emotional numbing, anger, avoidance, perfectionism, and self-criticism.
- Recognise the **subtle cues that signal when ordinary resistance is shifting into extreme protection**—moments when therapy itself is about to be dismantled.
- Understand how and why these responses form in the nervous system, especially when early experiences made vulnerability unsafe.
- Appreciate how “helping relationship trauma” can prime the nervous system to interpret care as coercion and empathy as betrayal.
- Differentiate protective behaviours from more surface-level resistance so you can address what’s really happening in the client’s inner world.
- **Engage protectors with curiosity and compassion instead of confrontation, interpretation, or premature attempts at emotional processing.**
- Respond skillfully when protectors appear reactive, hostile, or rejecting—without personalising the response or abandoning the therapeutic frame.
- Build trust over time so that deeper emotional material can emerge without retraumatisation or shutdown.
- Develop internal resources to withstand the intensity of therapeutic attacks without losing connection or confidence.

Frank’s Approach

Frank’s approach is simple but not easy:

- **He doesn’t try to bypass or overpower protective responses.**
- He doesn’t pathologise them or treat them as obstacles.
- He meets them with respect, clarity, and an understanding of the survival function they serve.

This stance turns the fiercest protector into a potential collaborator—transforming what once felt like therapeutic impossibility into a workable alliance.

Why This Training is Different

Frank Anderson brings a rare combination of clinical mastery, warmth, and neuroscience expertise. His approach will help you:

- Move beyond impasses that leave you and your clients feeling stuck.



- Maintain connection when protectors show up as anger, avoidance, or withdrawal.
- Repair therapeutic ruptures without retraumatizing the client or overstepping their protective system.
- Reframe protective behaviours as pathways into the client's inner world rather than obstacles to treatment.

What once looked like systematic sabotage becomes intelligible survival logic—and with that shift, new therapeutic possibilities open.

Who Should Attend

This training is for clinicians who:

- Work with clients whose defensive responses seem to stop therapy in its tracks.
- **Encounter sudden shutdowns, cancellations, or ruptures when emotional closeness increases.**
- Have clients who oscillate between seeking connection and rejecting it.
- Want practical, evidence-based strategies for navigating these challenges while maintaining therapeutic momentum.
- Are ready to reframe their most discouraging therapeutic ruptures as opportunities for breakthrough.

Spaces are limited and Frank's trainings consistently sell out. Early registration is strongly recommended.

"Extreme protectors aren't trying to sabotage therapy—they're trying to survive what they perceive as therapeutic threat. Our job isn't to defeat them—it's to convince them we're not the enemy."
— Dr Frank Anderson

About the speaker

Frank Anderson, MD, is a Harvard-trained psychiatrist and internationally recognised trauma specialist whose work bridges neuroscience, psychotherapy, and personal healing. He is the author of the clinical guide *Transcending Trauma* and the memoir *To Be Loved*, both of which have inspired and educated audiences worldwide.

With more than two decades of clinical experience, Frank has illuminated how trauma shapes the brain, emotions, and relationships—and how that imprint can be transformed with compassion and connection. Known for his warmth, vulnerability, and depth of insight, he brings a rare integration of science and humanity to his teaching and writing.

A longtime contributor to the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model and former lead trainer with the IFS Institute, Frank has trained thousands of clinicians globally. His work continues to resonate across cultures for its unique blend of scientific grounding and emotional truth.

© nscience UK, 2025 / 26

There is no known commercial support for this program

For more information on how to access webinar joining links, handouts and video recordings please visit <https://www.nscience.uk/faqs/>

Questions and requests for information: cpd@nscience.world

If you have a disability, please contact us in advance of the course so we can accommodate your needs:



nscience

world class training for therapists

cpd@nscience.world

UK/Europe: +44(0)2070961722

