How Individuals Resist Change in a system

-Terms in helping understand resistance as it relates to individuals within systems

**Resistance**, according to traditional interpretation, is an individual or client’s inability or unwillingness to accept reality and/or truth and move toward adjusting behavior away from the negative and to the positive. My definition of resistance is not all-inclusive but does encompass many other reasons for resistance the reader may contemplate.

**System**-the environment in which the client and change agent operate

**Client**-the person who is being acted upon in some direct or indirect method by the change agent for a specific purpose

**Change agent**-the person and/or organization which is instrumental in acting upon the client and who is generally the recipient of resistance.

**Transference**-a client’s outward and expressive attitude toward the change agent which can be harmful or non-harmful to the change agent, but which is manifested from the client’s past.

**Counter Transference**- the change agent’s inability to control the impulse to reflect onto the client his or her own past or personal attitudes

**Role**- the change agent and client’s distinct responsibilities defined

The change agent/client relationship has inherently some aspect of the work that can and does manifest resistance. Whether the change agent/client relationship is within the social work framework, resistance can and often becomes a part of the dynamics. Social Work, where the agency is the change agent and the employees are its agents, is thought of by many to be an oppressive, non helping agency. As a result, clients are initially apprehensive when receiving services. This apprehension is a **passive** form of **resistance**. **Active resistance** takes hold when clients believe they are treated unfairly, become an involuntary part of a child-maltreatment investigation, become involved in child support collections and then act out negatively in response to the involvement.
Application of understanding

-The necessity for Change Agents to understand their role in resistance
-The necessity for Change Agents to understand the client’s role in resistance

Change agents understanding their role in resistance are closer to diffusing resistance. Change agents who do not understand their role or deny their role contributes to resistance in the client. The change agent role is always a helping role. The change agent needs to understand his or her own past and present personal circumstances to the degree that the past and present circumstances do not overflow into the change agent/client relationship. Counter transference is the result and the effects can be that the role definition between client and change agent is blurred and frustration in working toward whatever the goal was is imminent as well as the real possibility of the client having an elevated lack of trust in the change agent. This lack of trust is resistance. Similarly, the client who has past or present issues is more than likely going to vent impressions of the past or present onto the change agent in a way comfortable to the client. The change agent is expected to be able to recognize and deal with this.

Resistance on a practical level within a system can show itself in the following fictitious scenario:

A 40 year old unemployed Hispanic dad is divorced, has not held a steady job for over 10 years, is addicted to alcohol, receives public assistance and has 2 children ages 5 and 9 (custody with this man can be assumed). The local social service agency receives a report that the 5 year old was found by neighbors wandering about 2 blocks away at 10:30pm. The neighbors only noticed this because the 10 year old went out looking for her brother. The police came to the man’s residence and after several failed attempts to get the man to wake up decide to go into the house following the children. The police found a half empty bottle of vodka in the man’s hand as he was passed out on the couch. The children were placed at the local shelter and now a social worker has been assigned to work on the issues associated with this case.

Since any number of social work methods of working out these circumstances apply, this debrief on the scenario will point out at least one form of resistance to expect from individuals within the family system who now is working within the social service system.
-10 year old; anger or apathy-promiscuous behavior, drug and or alcohol use or experimentation
-5 year old, eagerness to please (not overt resistance, but a hindrance to help the child with life long issues)
-40 year old dad denial, anger, deflection, guilt, rage, bizarre behaviors, apathy

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