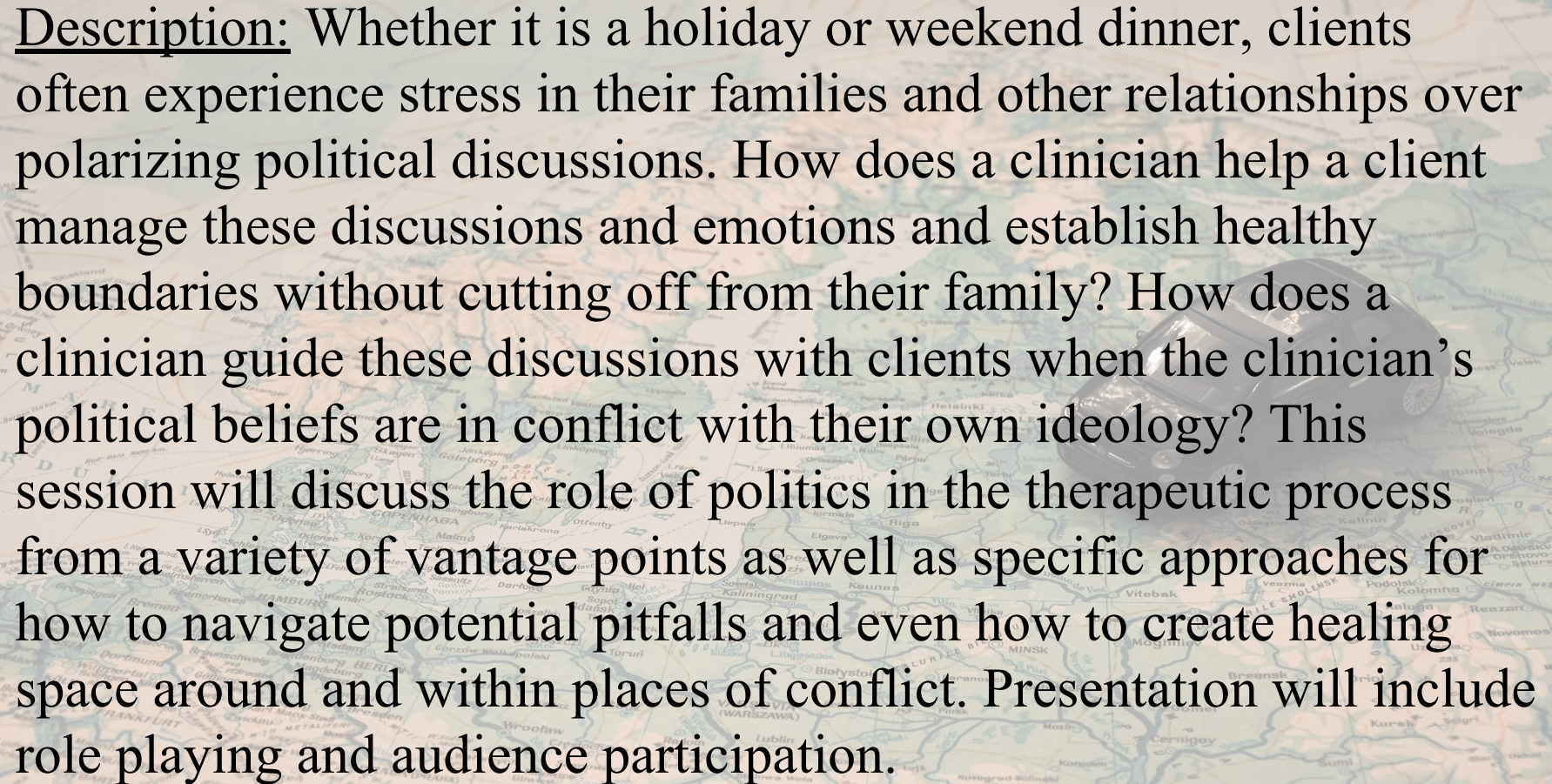


What About Uncle Bob?  
When Discussions in the  
Therapy Room Relate to  
Political Discussions at  
Home

Emily Stone, PhD, LMFT-S

Susan Perkins, PhD, LMFT-S

Sarah Causey, MAMFT

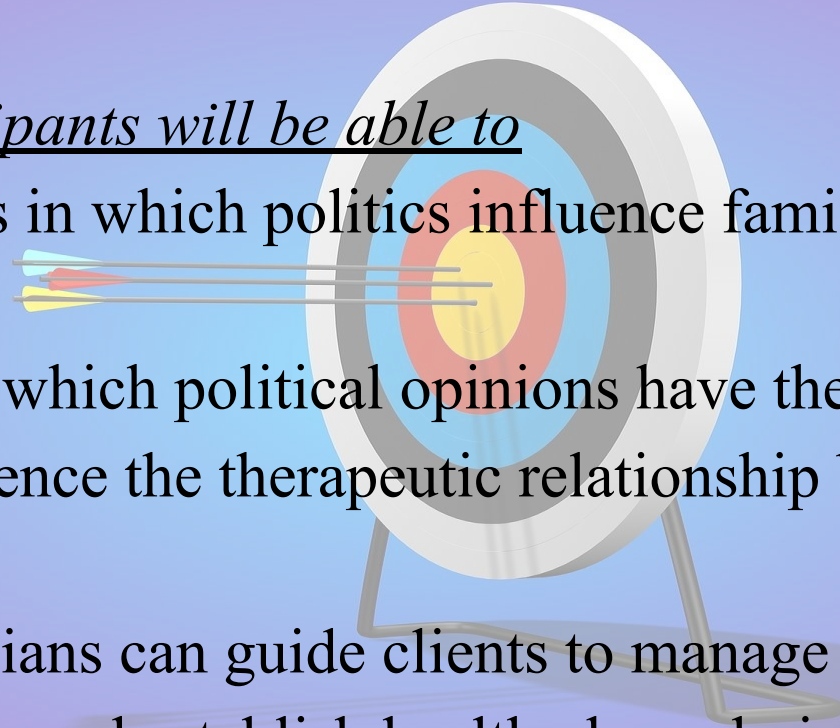
The background of the slide is a light-colored map of Europe. A magnifying glass is positioned over the Eastern European region, specifically focusing on areas like Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic states. The text is overlaid on this map.

Description: Whether it is a holiday or weekend dinner, clients often experience stress in their families and other relationships over polarizing political discussions. How does a clinician help a client manage these discussions and emotions and establish healthy boundaries without cutting off from their family? How does a clinician guide these discussions with clients when the clinician's political beliefs are in conflict with their own ideology? This session will discuss the role of politics in the therapeutic process from a variety of vantage points as well as specific approaches for how to navigate potential pitfalls and even how to create healing space around and within places of conflict. Presentation will include role playing and audience participation.

# Goals/Objectives

Goals/objectives: *Participants will be able to*

1. .... identify scenarios in which politics influence families and other relationships.
2. .... describe cases in which political opinions have the potential to infiltrate and influence the therapeutic relationship between client and therapist.
3. .... name ways clinicians can guide clients to manage these discussions, emotions and establish healthy boundaries without cutting off from their family.



# Introductions

Emily Stone, PhD, LMFT-S

Susan Perkins, PhD, LMFT-S

Sarah Causey, MAMFT



Marriage and  
Family Therapy

Is it ok to talk about politics with your clients?

**VOTE**

**YES**  **NO**



# Politics and Therapy

**56%** of therapists reported discussing politics with clients.

**44%** reported not discussing politics.

“We are political animals. Everything we are and do takes place within a political framework. It is impossible to divorce this from the inner world of either our patients or ourselves.”

*-Clinical Counseling in Context (1999)*

How has the current political climate made this conversation pertinent to our work as clinicians?



# Vignette

“Elle” is a 24 year old Caucasian female who is recently married. She sought out therapy for symptoms with anxiety, depression, and OCD. Elle also believes she suffers from PTSD due to sexual trauma suffered in childhood and young adulthood.

Elle describes her family as “very strict” with religious and political rules and expectations. In fact, she reports that the family even has rules about how many children a family should have and about where the family should live. She also reports attending a very strict religiously affiliated university to complete her bachelor’s degree. During this time, she was sexually assaulted by her college boyfriend, the son of one of the leaders in the church. Elle describes going forward to report the assault as one of the scariest things she has ever done. She felt it necessary due to the position of power the son had. Elle shares her disappointment about how she was told, after reporting, that “he didn’t mean it” or “boys will be boys” attitude. Elle reports experiencing deep feelings of shame and loneliness from the incident. She never shared the incident with her family.

Elle chose a partner with the same religious affiliation as to follow the “rules”. Once she was married, she began to discuss the assault with her husband, as it affected her physical ability to participate in intercourse. Upon suggestion from her husband, Elle sought therapy. After a few sessions, Elle shares she feels alone in discussing the assault with her family. With the political climate of the presidential election, her parents, siblings, and other extended family share passionate opinions on the ‘victims’ the news media covers. Elle describes feeling alone in these instances and that these conversations further perpetuates the shame and anxiety with which she already struggles. She often is triggered during family dinners and situations where the topic is discussed, particularly when a family member aligns with the “perpetrator” in the news. Suddenly she feels re-victimized not only by her original perpetrator, but now also by her family.

After the college assault, Elle began to realize she felt differently than her family members about those who take advantage of victims, particularly men in power. She feels very strongly about not voting or supporting those in office who have been accused of any type of abuse. Her family does not share or support her in this shift and Elle feels more and more like an outsider.



# Most Frequently Introduced Issues by Clients

1. Gender issues for women.
2. Economic issues.
3. Violence in society.
4. Racial or ethnic issues.
5. International politics.

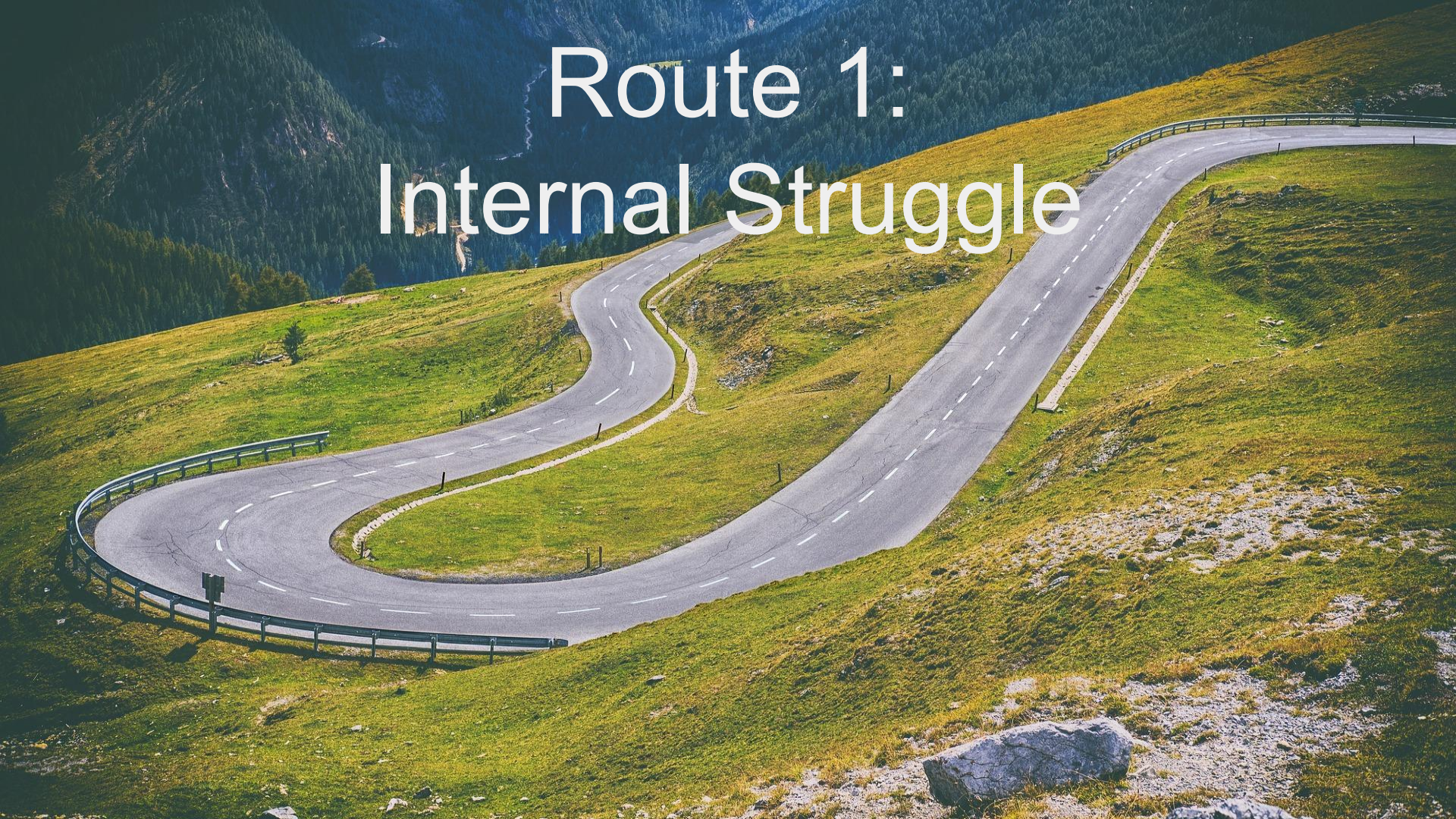


## Routes of Arrival: How Does Politics Show up in the Therapy Room?

Challenges for clients (and therapists) around political ideas show up in therapy through various avenues.

1. The client's own internal struggles over changing ideologies.
2. The client's external struggles with how their political beliefs differ from loved ones.
3. How political decisions being made are impacting their own lives and personal well-being.

# Route 1: Internal Struggle



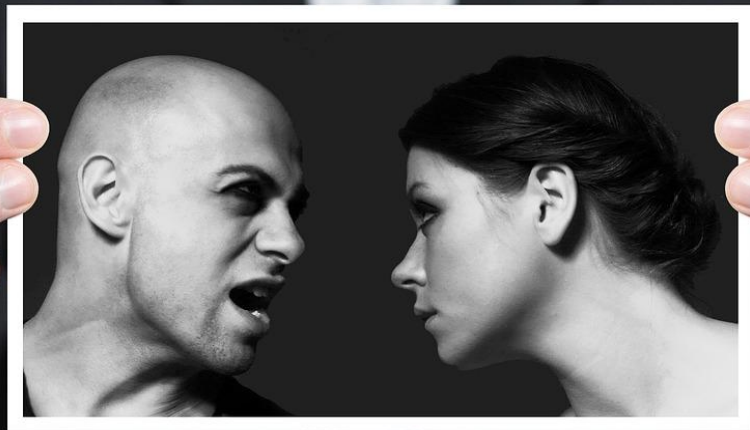


# Internal Struggle: *Awareness & Strategies*

- Orientation ---> Disorientation--->Reorientation (Brueggemann)
- Creating space for “Stage 4” faith (Fowler) and “Disorientation”.
- Making room for questions, doubt, and inserting hope.

An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the upper left, a white house with a grey roof is surrounded by trees and a low wall. A road intersection is visible in the center, with a small figure of a cyclist on the road. The surrounding fields are green with yellow wildflowers. The text 'Route 2: Conflict with Loved Ones' is overlaid in white on the right side of the image.

# Route 2: Conflict with Loved Ones



An aerial photograph of a rural landscape. In the center, a white house with a grey roof is surrounded by green trees. A road intersection is visible, with a road running from the top right towards the center, and another road running from the bottom left towards the center. The surrounding area is filled with green fields and some yellow wildflowers. The overall scene is bright and clear.

## When Uncle Bob and I Disagree: *Awareness & Strategies*

- Helping clients navigate relationships in the midst of Disorientation AND Re-orientation.
- Maintaining relationships...and creating new ones...in “Stage 4” and “Stage 5” faith.
- Helping clients grieve the potential and actual relational losses.



# Dr. Hardy's VCR

## Foundations

**Strengths Based:** “The strategy domain of the VCR trains the eye to search for the ‘redeemable’ contained within a given behavior or interaction prior to searching for or focusing on the reprehensible” (pg. 1).

**Expansive and Inclusive:** It EXPANDS rather than reduces. The purpose is not to tell people what to think or not think, but to challenge them to EXPAND their awareness. And, we expand ours at the same time.

# Dr. Ken Hardy's VCR

**Validate-** understanding the speaker's point of view. Express respect for positive qualities and strengths. Highlight the good within what the person said or a valuable component of the message.

**Challenge-** question or confront. When possible, build on the positive validation in the confrontation. ("Invitation to explore")

**Request-** ask the person to reconsider the position or recommend a specific change. This is the corrective opportunity.



# Route 3: Personal Impact of Policies



A photograph of a railway track stretching into the distance. In the foreground, there are metal structures, possibly part of a signal or crossing. To the right, a signal post with a white diamond-shaped sign is visible. In the background, there are green trees, a building with a red roof, and a solar panel array on a roof.

## When Decisions Are Personal: *Awareness & Strategies*

- Some political decision will be painfully personal for them.
- Creating spaces for pain, loss, grief, and hope.
- Therapy: the birthplace of healing and activism.

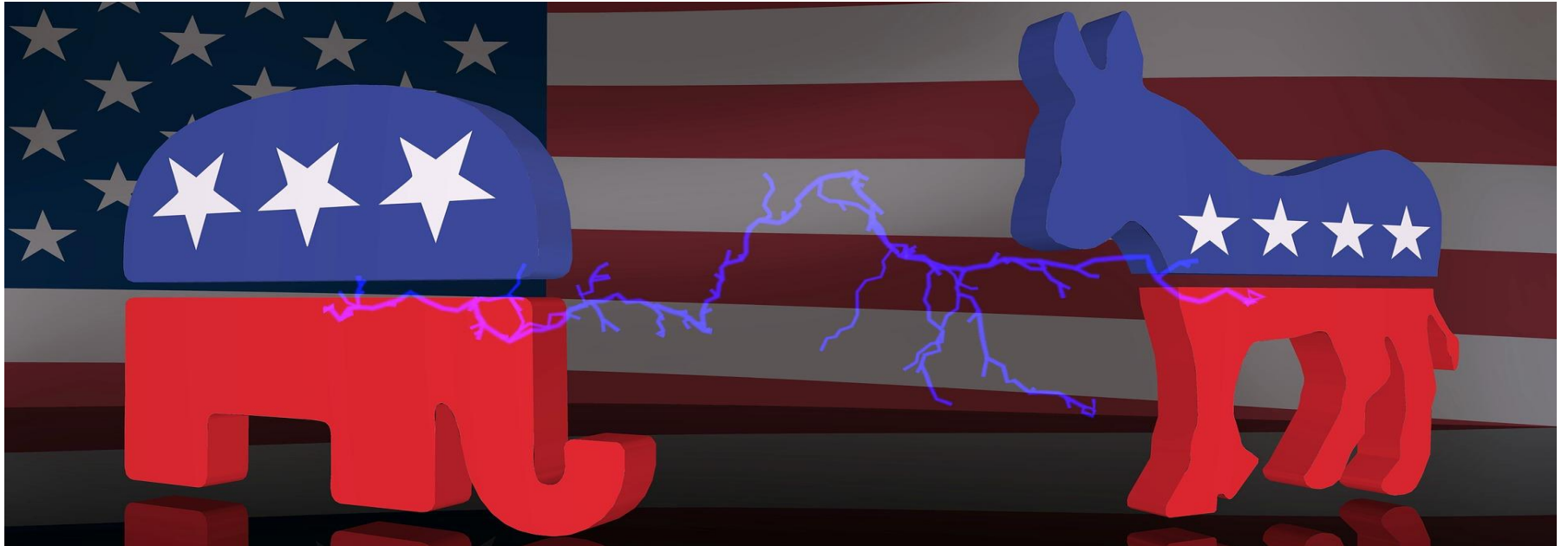
What do you think?

How is therapy itself a political act?



# Politics and Countertransference

When your client presents political ideas that are in stark contrast to your own, how do you manage your countertransference?



# References

Brueggemann, W. (1985). *The message of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing.

Fowler, J. (1995). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. New York: Harper.

Hardy, K. V. (2017) Essential skills for mastering context talk in supervision. In K. V. Hardy & T. Bobes (Eds.), *Promoting cultural sensitivity in supervision: A manual for practitioners*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Lees, J. (Ed.). (1999). *Clinical counselling in context: An introduction*. New York, NY: Routledge. Retrieved online at: [https://books.google.com/books?id=HJDsAgAAQBAJ&pg=PR1&lpg=PR1&dq=Clinical+Counselling+in+Context:+An+Introduction&source=bl&ots=HTVB4Tn8ff&sig=VJNrAGJ6\\_zaqCv4svD0LMT\\_76aM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjp4c300oHeAhVRt1MKHS-oBfQQ6AEwA3oECAsQAQ#v=onepage&q=Clinical%20Counselling%20in%20Context%3A%20An%20Introduction&f=false](https://books.google.com/books?id=HJDsAgAAQBAJ&pg=PR1&lpg=PR1&dq=Clinical+Counselling+in+Context:+An+Introduction&source=bl&ots=HTVB4Tn8ff&sig=VJNrAGJ6_zaqCv4svD0LMT_76aM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjp4c300oHeAhVRt1MKHS-oBfQQ6AEwA3oECAsQAQ#v=onepage&q=Clinical%20Counselling%20in%20Context%3A%20An%20Introduction&f=false)

Pictures from pixabay.com



## **Organizations, Conferences, Groups and Websites for Stage 4 Faith**

Why Christian

<https://whychristian.net/>

Evolving Faith

<https://www.evolvingfaithconference.com/>

Pete Enns

<https://peteenns.com/>

Rachel Held Evans

<https://rachelheldevans.com/>

Rob Bell

<https://robbell.com/>

Wild Goose Festival

<http://wildgoosefestival.org/>

The Liturgists

<http://www.theliturgists.com/>

Sarah Bessey

<http://sarahbessey.com/>