



# Ninja Therapist Training for The Helping Professionals

Assael Romanelli, MSW, MFT, PhD.

Dr. Assael Romanelli is a clinical social worker, licensed couple and family therapist and supervisor, as well as an international lecturer and trainer. He is a seasoned theater improvisation performer and teacher and served as the artistic director of The Or Chozer Playback Theatre company for over a decade. Dr. Romanelli has been training helping professionals (therapists, teachers, clergy, educators, administrators) for over 20 years. Assael Dedicated his PhD research to shape his inter-disciplinary approach to therapy which is called The Ninja Therapist.

His vision is to change the world through the helping professions. He envisions a new generation of vital, awake, bold, playful, creative and professional therapists, who can provide a holistic service to the 21<sup>st</sup> century clients.

Dr. Romanelli is the co-director with his wife Galit of OWNURSH!T which aims to fix the world (Tikkun Olam), one couple at a time. Over the past two decades, Assael has worked with hundreds of individuals, couples, families, and organizations all over the world, helping them feel free in their relationships. Assael publishes content regularly on his popular blog on Psychology Today, as well as OWNURSH!T Podcast and YouTube channel.

Dr. Romanelli brings his interdisciplinary, original and synergistic combination of the worlds of therapy, arts and education to deliver a holistic experience of **head** (theory), **heart** (feeling) and **hand** (practical skills).

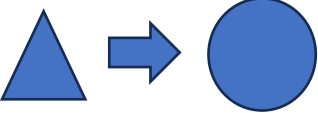
All his trainings include handouts, training videos and articles, to help participants integrate and embody the learnings post-training.

The trainings are modular and vary between an 1.5 hour lecture and an experiential multi-day training.

\*Some of the session titles are hyperlinked to a short video or article expanding on the topic.

The topics are categorized as follows: **1. Clinical Models and Approaches**, **2. Masterclasses in the Art of Psychotherapy**, **3. Innovative Interventions for Common Dynamics**, and **4. Ninja Toolbox for Daring Clinicians**.

## 1. Clinical Models and Approaches

Clinical Model / Approach	Description
<b>The OWNURSH!T clinical relationship model.</b>	We will learn the interdisciplinary model we use to help clinicians create visceral, empowering relationships. The model includes: Play, Let it Land, Say The Thing and Own Your Shadow.
<b>The Ninja Therapist:</b> Improvisation skills for the (daring) clinician	This workshop presents an original typology of improvisational skills/ tendencies that has been taught to therapists for several years, enabling them to improve their improvisatory skills and increase co-creation, vitality and play in their psychotherapeutic work. <b>Here is an introductory article about this technique, aimed at improvisers.</b>
<b>The Circle of Differentiation:</b> from Victim Triangle to Circle of Differentiation.  	A new model to work with aggressive, abusive or harsh interpersonal dynamics. Many couples find themselves in the difficult dynamic called The Victim Triangle. In this triangle, partners, family members, and therapists, move between the roles of victim, aggressor and savior. This dynamic erodes the intimacy, partnership and agency in the family. In this training, we'll learn our alternative model, The Circle of Differentiation, which promotes agency, interdependence and clear communication.
<b>I'mprovisation</b> -What is "Healing" About Improv?	It includes micro and macro personal and relational growth processes in the improvisational encounter. In this interactive lecture, we: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Learn the different definitions and conceptualizations</b> of the improvisational encounter.</li> <li>➤ <b>Discuss how the improvised moment</b> affects the inter-subjective field and enables personal and relational development.</li> </ul> Participants will have an opportunity to reflect upon their own understanding and use of improvisation skills in order to facilitate growth.
<b>The Systemic Hero's Journey</b>	Change is not easy. Many couples and families find it hard to manifest long-term systemic change. In this training we learn the integrated systemic-family systems-Joseph Campbell model that can serve as a roadmap for lasting



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	intra and interpersonal change. We explore using the Hero's journey on our own life to feel the full visceral effect of the model.
<b>Reality Check: The Art of Couple Intake</b>	In recent years I've developed a unique, efficient and surprising structure to reflect to couples their relational dance through a series of structured questions. In this session, participants experience part of the intake viscerally, reflecting on their own relationships or clients.

## 2. Masterclasses in The Art of Psychotherapy

Masterclass	Description
<b>The Art of The Double</b>	Doubles are an action method that can be applied in various clinical setting. Doubles allow clinicians to raise the heat, clarify, simplify, challenge and increase empathy. In this training, we explore and play with different types of doubles in order to raise our therapeutic impact.
<b>The Art of Clinical Conflict</b>	Every therapeutic process aims for change. That's why we will experience conflict and tension in every therapy. A therapist who is not familiar and comfortable with the art of conflict, won't be able to work with aggression, anger, disappointment and ruptures in the room. In this training we will explore different concept and practical techniques that will help us not only survive ruptures, but to use them as a tool for personal and relational growth.
<b>The Art of Into-Me-See (Intimacy):</b> How to communicate authentically	Many times, clients communicate in ineffective or distancing communication. In this workshop, participants learn concepts and techniques taken from the world of couples therapy, NLP (Neuro Linguistic Programming) and theater improvisation which will help create more meaningful moments, deeper rapport and a grounded sense of self.
<b>The Art of The Clinical Chair</b>	An empty chair is a psycho-dramatic technique with many applications for clinical work regarding internal or external parts or people. In this training we play and explore different ways to use the empty chair technique to help with self-confrontation, exploration, and growth.
<b>The Art of Clinical Status</b>	Status in an improvisation concept that relates to power and domination. We all have a preferred way to bring ourselves in relationships: either high status/one up, or low status/one down. Clinicians and clients meet and work through an implicit dance between high and low status. This training will help clinicians become aware of their default status and learn creative ways to expand their status repertoire to be choreograph a fresh and empowering relational dance.
<b>The Art of E-motion:</b> Expanding Emotional Range in Therapy	Many clients live within a narrow or rigid emotional range. They often come to therapy in order to feel more. In this training, we learn an original typology and creative techniques



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	to help our clients to expand their emotional range, both to being able to hold the more difficult feelings of despair and sadness, as well as the more elusive joy and silliness.
<b>The Art of The Third in Relationships</b>	Every couple has to deal with external people or activities that draw energy outside of the dyad. That external force is called a 'third.' Most couples don't know how to positively use the third in order to empower and deepen their relationship. In this training we learn how to identify and properly harness the energizing power of the third to help couples develop and expand.
<b>The Art of Listening: Touching the Heart of The Story</b>	Therapy is based on listening to our clients stories. But are we really listening to the heart of their story? In this training we learn experientially about the three layers in every story (facts, feelings, and archetypal). We explore how to hear the more universal themes in stories while experimenting with sharing deeper dimensions of our stories. Communicating in the archetypal levels will help deepen empathy, connection and movement.
<b>Embracing Errors: Transforming Mistakes into Therapeutic Interventions</b>	"If you are not failing, you are not learning." Most clinicians have been socialized to not make mistakes in therapy (see empathic failure). Yet research has shown that the most effective therapies are full of ruptures and repairs. In this activity, we learn the importance of failing on a visceral level using concepts and techniques from the improv world. We play and experiment with mistakes and failures in ways that will start to retrain our brain to enjoy mistakes as a byproduct of play, exploration and growth.
<b>Fueling The Flame: The Art of The Love Tank</b>	We all have a love tank, preferably full. But, when it's empty, we not only feel unloved, but we lose our generosity, patience and good will toward our partner. Couples in therapy usually suffer from empty love tanks. But how do you fill your partner's love tank? In this experiential session, we will experiment with the synergistic integration of the five love languages, with Gottman theory and NLP sensory preferences, in order to offer creative and effective interventions for the couples we work with.
<b>Word Weaving: Harnessing Linguistic Interventions for Therapeutic</b>	In psychotherapy, our main tool are words. The Ninja Therapist enjoys a tool box of quick and handy verbal techniques that can help raise the heat and shift clients' perspectives quickly. These include: It's not that important to me, talking in numbers, the word "also", blocking "I don't understand/know", Present



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<b>Transformation.</b>	tense communication, cynicism and more. In this training, we experiment with some of these verbal interventions in creatives ways.
<b>Charting Connections:</b> Navigating Family Dynamics with the Family Maps	Understanding family dynamics is a complex task. A family map is an efficient, creative and non-verbal technique that will help clinician and family see different explicit and implicit dynamics, roles and tensions in order help the family change and evolve. In this training we experientially learn this technique through mapping out our own families.

### 3. Innovative Interventions for Common Dynamics

Session	Description
<b>The Art of The Crucible</b>	Fights and conflicts are an integral part of any relationship. Conflict is a tool for personal and relational growth. Many clients don't know how to fight or avoid it altogether. In this training we will learn concepts and techniques from the world of couple therapy together with Dan Wile's model for the generative fight. We will learn how to help our clients leverage the heat toward growth.
<b>Currency of Connection: Exploring Money in Relationships</b>	Money is a sensitive and explosive topic for many couples. When there is an income gap between partners, this creates a hurtful implicit power dynamic. In this workshop we'll learn brave and creative ways to help couples talk, soften and open the financial dimension of their marriage toward new possibilities.
<b>Mystery Men: Working With Men and Covert Male Depression</b>	Often times in therapy, men behave in a stoic, sarcastic, even aggressive manner. In individual therapy, this difficulty is sometimes interpreted as 'resistance' which can lead to stagnation and termination of therapy. In couples therapy, this challenge can lead to a unconscious coalition of the therapist with the female partner. Yet underneath this rough exterior there is an array of other challenges, traumas and underlying issues. In this session we'll address mainly the topic of the under-diagnosed phenomenon of the covert male depression, as first described by Terrance Real. Practical techniques and interventions will be given on how to enlist, evoke and deepen emotional presence and emotion with male clients. We will discuss different ways in which therapist of both genders can lean into the male psyche.
<b>Upstairs and Downstairs Parents</b>	Being a parent is hard. An egalitarian, effective co-parenting is every harder. Many parents find themselves in the hierarchical dynamic of the upstairs and downstairs parent. The upstairs parent is the less involved, usually more playful, parent. The downstairs parent (often the woman in heterosexual relationships) is the main parent, in charge of the daily chores and responsibilities, while often feeling burnt out and bitter. This workshop will help clinicians learn how to identify and soften this dynamic toward a more collaborative co-parenting dynamic.
<b>Untangling Triangles: Navigating Triangulation in</b>	When a couple can't contain their tensions, they will unconsciously involve a third party to stabilize their system. That third can be a child, friend, relative, or even a therapist.



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Therapy	This process is called triangulation and it occurs in every couple. Rigid triangulation is a lose-lose endeavor that leads to coalitions, loneliness and prevents personal and relational growth. In this workshop, we'll learn how to identify and soften triangulations with our clients, including how to un-triangulate ourselves in the clinical encounter.
<b>Cracking The Code:</b> Navigating Inter-gender Communication in Therapy	Men and women experience the world and communicate differently. These gaps often lead to misunderstanding, ruptures and conflicts in the therapy room. Through simple and proven exercises derived from the worlds of socio-linguistics and couples therapy, we will learn and practice how to communicate better with women and men in the clinic (and in life).

## 4. Ninja Toolbox for Daring Clinicians

Session	Description
<b>Pushing the story forward:</b> How to advance therapy in moments of impasse or confusion?	Oftentimes clinicians reach an impasse, get flustered with resistance or just are lost. What can help in these moments is a "leap to freedom" by the clinician. This training focuses on using "heat", improv techniques, and here-and-now immediacy skills in order to improve alliance skills together with a deeper understanding of the therapeutic benefits of ruptures and repairs.
<b>Three types of Thinking:</b> Releasing our intuition in the therapy room	Many clinicians lean more on their intellect than their intuition in therapy. But our intuitive thinking is one of our biggest gifts in clinical work. Leaning into theory and knowledge from the theatrical improvisation world, we will experience the different types of thinking. We will learn how to foster intuitive thinking that will help us create healing now moments in therapy.
<b>Accepting and blocking offers:</b> How do "bids" work in the clinical encounter?	Every encounter between clinician and client is full of relational offers, which are either accepted or blocked. The pattern of accepting and blocking offers will determine how the session will evolve. In this improv training will help clinicians experience firsthand the basic components and rhythm of the art of collaborative play.
<b>Emotional bids:</b> Accepting and blocking in interpersonal encounters	In every communication there are two channels: the explicit and implicit. Many clients react to the explicit channel and ignore the underlying emotional bid. In this session we will experiment with Gottman's concepts of emotional bids, the underlying emotional offers people do every day and learn improvisatory ways to work with them.
<b>Dynamic Duos:</b> Unleashing Creative Systemic Couple Interventions	Why do most couples find it hard to change their dance despite their best efforts? Because they don't think systemically and don't recognize their secondary gains and losses. In this training we'll learn concepts from systemic thinking and how we can help our clients recognize their blind spots. We will use our own relationships as the playground to explore and internalize these concepts.
<b>The Tierce Braid of Relationships:</b> Lovers, Friends and Partners	In every marriage, there are in fact three different, interdependent relationships, with particular and different characteristics: Lovers, Friends and Partners. In this workshop, we will learn the unique characteristics of each relationship, how they each impact a marriage and how to strengthen them.
<b>The Three "Amigos" That End Relationships:</b>	Over the years, I've noticed three main reasons that lead couples to divorce (or therapy): Boredom, change and thirds.



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Boredom, Change and Thirds	These are natural, unavoidable processes in every marriage. In this workshop, we'll dive into each of the amigos and learn how to help couples work collaboratively to leverage the three amigos toward growth and vitality.
<b>Power Dynamics in Partnerships:</b> Deciphering Relational Hierarchy	Every couple that solidifies their relationship will eventually create a semi-conscious, implicit relational hierarchical power dynamic. This ranking prevents couples from experiencing deep empathy and vulnerability. In this workshop, we'll unpack this phenomenon and learn creative ways to help couples shift into relational equilibrium.
<b>Trauma Mind:</b> The Mental State That Ruins Relationships	We all have three brains that work together seamlessly. Under threat or pressure, we tend to lose our prefrontal cortex and revert to early survival defense mechanisms. I call this state Trauma Mind. Both clinicians and clients will inevitably fall into Trauma mind in therapy sessions. In this training, we will experientially learn to identify and get out of Trauma mind, both in ourselves and in our clients.
<b>Unblocking Love:</b> The holy trinity of blocking	Partners have many ways to block intimacy. The most common ways partners block their lovers' input is with insult, surprise and disappointment. In this training we will learn how to recognize these blocks and minimize their impact for a more vital, exciting and empathic dialogue.
<b>Family Scripts:</b> Can The Apple Fall Far From The Tree?	Each generation is just a variation of the previous generation. Strengths, resources, wisdom, as well as traumas, limiting beliefs and anxiety are passed down from generation to generation. These "gifts" are transferred through inter-generational scripts. In this training we will learn the theory and practice of the different inter-generational transmission of scripts so clients will be able to shift and expand their beliefs and behaviors.
<b>Core Beliefs:</b> The Hammer You Hold in Your Hand	We all have core beliefs about ourselves and the world (for example, I'm damaged goods, the world is a dangerous place, kids are a burden, anger is bad). These beliefs were adopted early in our lives and all originally served and protected us. Over the years, some might have become limiting and constraining throughout the years. In this training we will explore how to unearth these core beliefs, how they were adopted, how they serve us, and how to refresh them. Learning to work with core beliefs will offer new ways for clinicians to manifest deep change.
<b>The Spiral of Wanting</b>	Many partners avoid expressing their desires and wishes explicitly and instead use more fuzzy, indirect and maladaptive modes. In this training we will play with the spiral of wanting



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	<p>model that includes: expecting, demanding, asking and sharing. The spiral helps teach clients how to increase the chances of getting what they want in a more differentiated, worthy and generative ways.</p>
<p><b>Repairing Bonds:</b> Mastering the Art of Apology</p>	<p>Some partners over-apologize, and some under-apologize. Yet apologies can sometimes be a passive aggressive relational move. In this training we unpack and explore different ways to help our clients learn the art of the effective apology.</p>
<p><b>How to stop negative sentiment override in couples?</b></p>	<p>Oftentimes, couples who are in a negative dynamic for a long time develop automatic negative interpretations of the other. These interpretations get hardwired into the brain and become self-fulfilling prophecies. In this workshop we'll learn new and creative ways to rewire the brain and listen openly again.</p>