

**Q. A man recovered a memory of being molested as a baby. Afterwards he wasn't sure the memory was real.**

**A.** Whether his memory is an actual experience or an imagined one, his responses to the memory are real. And it is these responses that color his decisions about who he is, how he is and the nature of his relationships to other people.

- Work with his memory as if it were real.
- Work with his memory as if it were not real, like a dream or imagery.

(later) **In the middle of a fantasy, he said, "I don't want to think about this."**

- Go with his process.
  - ☞ "Good idea. Turn off the thinking part of your brain. Just as you occasionally relax and watch the clouds pass by, see if you can passively watch the images passing by your mind, and perhaps the experiences passing through your body. (later) Stay where you are and find the words to what is happening right now."
- Go with his process.
  - ☞ "Good idea. Don't think about it. It'll go on without you. Let's talk about the weather...(time passes) Okay, what has been going on in the fantasy while we've been talking?...What's happening now?"

**What if he can't ever remember exactly what happened in his real life?**

Chances are good he will not. He can only recover the information he took in at the time it happened. If he was an infant at the time of the molest, he will have very little cognitive understanding of the events. If his eyes were closed or he was not looking, then he will have no visual images to remember.

And he may never remember who, exactly, molested him, because as an infant he may not have known in the first place. And if he was older, he will still only be able to recover what his child's brain made of the event at the time.

He will have retained kinesthetic/somatic memories however, such as his arms being restrained, pressure on his chest, a sense of being exposed, or his body being invaded. He will also have emotional memories such as trust turning into betrayal, a sense of alarm,

emotions shutting down, or the decision to abandon his body.

Many of these memories will not make rational sense to him. He can interpret these memories with his adult mind, but his interpretations may never be completely correct. The images, senses, and emotions which accompany his memory may or may not be based in reality but they contribute to his current outlook and attitude nevertheless. They are a large part of the discoloration that smokes up the looking glass through which he has perceived the universe since childhood.

Whether clearly remembered or only vaguely sensed, his memories are knocking on the door of his consciousness saying, "Let me back in. It's safe now to acknowledge, experience, and work what happened through to a different conclusion about Self. I'm tired of being locked up and expressing myself subversively. Let me live; then let me go."

Even if he was never anywhere close to being molested, his "memory" is a metaphor for something important to him, and can be used as such for psychotherapeutic work, whether it be through imagery, art, movement, story, somatic, symbolic, physical, emotional, or other experiential mode.

As always, invite him into the present and encourage him to fully connect with his experiences in the moment. Resolution comes from allowing whatever cognitive or kinesthetic experiences attend the memories even if he considers these experiences to be irrational. As he connects, a window of opportunity may open. At that point he can, if he wishes, begin to let go of old beliefs about himself, and step through the window into a different ending and a new, expanded, perception of himself and his relationship to both to himself and to others.

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**Q. A teen says his parents are Nazis.**

**A.** Maybe they are not-sees.

**He is an only child. The parents are very focused on him, wanting him to be different than he is.**

So they look and not-see who he is. Instead, they judge and criticize.

**Yes, when he ran away for a week, he complained that no one looked for him!**



Dear Reader,

For your consideration, I offer the following:

—That although perceptions and thinking may be distorted, dysfunctional, or survival-oriented and therefore ill-suited for civilized living in community, the basic purpose of every part of a person's personality and every action he takes, is for the perceived benefit of the organism and therefore is positive in intent.

—That no matter what a human being is doing, and no matter how irrational or dysfunctional he appears to the external observer, each person is inexorably moving toward the resolution of his developmental, existential, and traumatic issues.

Carol Nichols Hadlock

He sounds like an angry three-year-old: "Look at me! I am going to run far, far away. And when you find me, I will spit on you. Then you will see how powerful I am and maybe you will love me more."

**Interesting you should say that. His dad did chase him recently. And when the dad fell down, the kid spat on him!**

So one of this boy's long term tasks will be to work through his need to be seen by the not-sees. Your part in the healing is to look at him through unconditionally loving eyes. Eventually, he may introject that he is see-able and begin to see himself.

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**Q. A girl, nine, comes in and goes through my briefcase and purse. When I tell her no, she stops, but then does it again the next week. She was sexually molested and needs therapy ...I dunno, I get so bored with her. She also lies.**

**A.** Generally in human relationships, whoever complains he wants a certain situation to change, is the one who has to do something different.

In this case, *you* are the one who wants this girl to stop going through your things, so *you* are the one who has to find a way to invite that to happen.'

Boredom and anger are twins, so I'm guessing you are angry with her.

**Yeah, I suppose so. She is so intrusive.**

If you were the mother of a two-year-old, raising your child with the goal of high self-esteem, you would not blame your child for touching your things. Ideally, you would take responsibility, and move the stuff out of the way. Do the same here.

**But she's not two. She should be able to control herself.**

And apparently she cannot. That "should" of yours takes you out of neutrality and interferes with your ability to intervene.

Take responsibility. Mean it when you say your stuff is off limits. If she is unable to impose an internal boundary around your things, then it is up to you to impose an external one.

Put your personal articles in some other room.

She will probably try to get you mad in another way, but you might have better luck staying separate if her behavior does not involve objects which you consider to be an extension of your person.

Hold to your limits. This provides the child something safe (you) against which to rage about the fact that limits exist.

Child: Where are your purse and briefcase?

You: I didn't bring them today. I'm not happy if people go through my things when I don't want them to.

Child: That's not fair...(stomps around, blames you, throws things, etc.)

You: (after a bit) I did bring something you *can* go through, however. Whenever you are done with what you are doing (yelling, throwing, stomping, whatever), I'd really like to share them with you. You needn't hurry; I can wait. (Once she's calmed a bit, you allow her to open a container of things she hasn't seen before).

Use your anger as an intervention.

☞ *"I'm really mad right now. I'm going to take a few minutes to recover. Let's see. I'll sit down here and feel my anger. Hmm. I feel it in my shoulders and in my face muscles. So what I'm doing right now is imagining the anger as a poison leaving my body. I'm wondering if you'd like to do this with me."*

Distract.

☞ *Hmm. I have an idea. Use the doll house (sand tray, these puppets, the white board, etc.) to show me something about yourself I don't know."*

☞ *Let's make a collage of all the things you like. Here are some magazines. You cut and paste; I will watch.*

Another idea is to ignore the behavior you perceive as negative. The first moment she resorts to doing something you've asked her not to do, look the other way, get interested in something on the other side of the room, start drawing, singing to yourself, or whatever. The moment she stops the undesired behavior, turn, look, smile, and say something like, "Oh, I'm so glad you're available now. Let's go do...(something together). As best you can, don't give any attention to, or even make mention of, the undesirable behavior (barring of course, behavior which might lead to physical danger.)

What do you think she wants?

**Attention.**

I agree. Perhaps the only sure fire way she knows to get attention is

through negativity. Her unconscious self-talk may go something like, "If you are mad at me, then you think I'm important enough to be aware of me. And if you are aware of me, I know I'm alive."

If it is attention she wants, then attend to her.

When she is in session, pay total attention to her. Our loud, notice everything she does. Occasionally guess at her emotions in relationship to you. Leave out all your interpretations about her symbolism.

☞ *"I notice you're walking over to the desk. My guess is you're looking for my briefcase. Now you're wondering where it is." (She eyeballs you and based on her face and body posture, you make a guess at her message). "You like it when I notice you." (She walks over to the doll house). "Now you're going over to the doll house. Now you're taking the doll with the blue shirt and walking it over to the doll in the yellow dress. And now..."*

Notice my description of the doll (or other object) is gender-free. Even though you may guess that the first was a father doll and the second was a victim doll, do the best you can to leave out your interpretations of her inner symbols unless she tells you explicitly what they are. It will get easier with practice. If you do guess incorrectly, pay attention. She will let you know.

**What about the lying?**

Play lying-on-purpose games with her.

☞ *"This is a lying-on-purpose game. I'll tell a lie and then I'll tell the truth. Okay here goes. Here's the lie. I see a big green frog in that chair over there. Here's the truth. (Introspects) Hmm. I have a little headache right now. Okay, your turn. Which are you going to tell first, the truth or the lie?"*

The purpose of lying games is *not* to get her to think that lying is wrong or that truth-telling is right. Instead, lying games invite her to know the difference between the two. They also give her practice discovering where in her body the truth is, should she ever decide to tell it.

Most people who lie, invented lying as a survival technique, as perceived by the infant or child-mind that had developed, so far, by that time. They lie either to protect someone else or to protect themselves from someone else. Either way it is an act of love for self.

Okay, now ask me, "What about when you get, 'so bored.'"

**Okay, what about my boredom?**

(laughing) Thanks. I was hoping you'd ask that. When I'm bored,

it's usually because I'm making myself do something or be somewhere I don't really want to do or be, all the while looking externally for someone (or something) to blame, since as long as that other person or that other thing is "boring," I don't have to take responsibility for my self-abusive behavior.

**Oh dear. I'll have to think about that.**

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**Q. He doesn't trust himself to go to a store because he's concerned he will steal stuff again. He has his sister shop for him. I've been encouraging him to do some y'know, what's-going-on-in-the-moment work: chairwork, sandtray, any number of things. He works best in imagery. I'm not sure where to go, now.**

**A.** The first thing I think of is this: Follow his lead, trust yourself, and keep doing what you're doing.

The second thing I think of is this: A part of him is hiding and might venture out of it's hidey-hole if you invite it. I'm guessing it's the part who loves to steal stuff—loves, loves, super-loves stealing stuff.

Think of all the possible rewards that stealing might bring to this man's life: adventure, excitement, biochemical reward, mystery, victory, celebration, success, and best of all, the possibility of filling up the seemingly bottomless pit of starvation for acknowledgment or perhaps self-worth that exists in the center of this man's persona.

☐ Invite the part of this man who *does* want to steal stuff into the room, here and now.

☞ "I'd like to talk with the part of you who encourages you to steal stuff."

☐ Engage in conversation with the part-that-steals.

☞ "Hi, how are you doing?...What is it you want?...What is it you need?...How can I be of service?...How old were you when you came on board?...What's the easiest way to sabotage this guy? It's okay to say it out loud; he's probably not listening, anyway."

☞ Invite the part who doesn't trust himself to enter into an ongoing dialogue with the part who steals stuff.

☞ Invite the two parts to consider a) they both want the best for the person

they are part of, and b) even though they disagree about how to attain that goal, they are, after all, on the same team.

**...most people choose life partners in whom, at an unconscious level, they see the ingredients necessary for them to move toward, and possibly work through, many of their personal issues.**

☞ Invite your client to notice and begin regularly perceiving himself as *more* than the part who wants to steal. Invite him to access the inner executive part of him—the part with a working frontal lobe—who observes and takes the future into consideration before taking action.

☐ Wonder to yourself, "At what age is this undesirable behavior completely normal?"

**Stealing?**

Well, taking whatever you want, when you want it, when you see it, right now, with no concept of something not belonging to you.

**Infancy to two, two and a half and under, for sure.**

Okay. So imagine that this part of him is just that, a part with unmet toddler needs. Imagine that this man has a part of him who is stuck being an unwanted and bedraggled toddler: wandering through life sucking his thumb, with tears and snot running down his face onto his mud-splattered T-shirt and poopy diapers.

This toddler part of him is starving—not for food, but for attention, protection, and the necessities of community existence.

I doubt that shunning, hatred, or the plotting of his demise will feed the Hungry Inner Toddler, nurture him, or invite him to grow beyond being two years old. Locking him into closet won't shut him down, either. He is a part of the whole personality and will be as alive as the person in whom he resides. And even though he's only two, he's also human and will do his best to seep out under the closet door whenever the "person in charge" isn't paying attention.

Stealing, his baby mammel-mind tells him, is a way to get his immediate needs met. "Oh! I see. I want. (Feed me) Gimme! Gimme now!"

**So how can you work with that?**

Well *you* can't work with it, but you can invite the client to. The big secret is, an internal toddler is just that—a toddler. Toddler needs are simple. This one already

gets enough food, water, and shelter. What he needs includes, among other things, loving eyes, loving hands, acknowledgment of existence, admiration, attention, empathy, connection, validation, experience in relationship, and protection from his own barbarism.

☐ Invite these activities in session. One way to do that might be to invite the client to work in a medium in which he is comfortable. I think you said earlier that imagery is a good match for this guy. So,

☞ "Close your eyes and imagine (whatever)...What do you notice?...and what's happening right now?"

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**Q. They say they like each other but got in the habit of fighting all the time.**

**A.** It has been my observation that most people choose life partners in whom, at an unconscious level, they see the ingredients necessary for them to move toward, and possibly work through, many of their personal issues.

Your observation has given you a partial solution already. At least one of them has to remember that s/he likes their partner, that the fighting is only a habit, and that the relationship is more important than the thing they are fighting over.

☐ During the therapy session, set up structures wherein they disagree about something—anything. Invite each person to practice keeping themselves separate—not taking their partner's negativity personally.

☞ As they "argue," direct them to introspect and to notice their physiological responses.

☞ Suggest each partner practice transcending their annoyance by plugging into the frame of, "Oh, that's right; I remember now—I choose this relationship. This person is having a problem right now, and although it's difficult, I do best when I remember that their problem is not about me!"

☐ Direct them to invent a game using found objects around the therapy room (or to solve any small problem).

☞ Once they are done, ask each of them what they liked and didn't like about *how* they worked together (or not). If they both liked what happened, move on and

invite them to explore how they might handle issues at home in the same way.

☞ If either one did not like what happened, ask each of them what they (not the Other Guy) might do differently next time. Once they work that out, invite them to repeat the activity and take their own advice. Then, as above, invite them to explore how they might handle issues at home in the same way.

☐ Work with them individually around childhood issues relative to arguing and intimacy.

☞ Ask each partner who it is in their family of origin they are reminded of, when the partner is angry or picking a fight. Invite each to explore any unresolved issues they have with the original family member mentioned.

☞ Invite each of them to explore the part of themselves represented by their partner, especially when during an altercation.

☐ Give them (or let them choose) topics to argue about.

☞ Best vacation place; how to celebrate an upcoming holiday, how the furniture in the therapy room would best be arranged, etc.

☞ Teach them to negotiate until they have achieved a win-win ending.

☐ Teach them ways to be intimate in ways other than sexual or argumentative. Suggest introspection and truth-in-the-moment. Practice in session

☐ Psycho-education—Show them how to look for the positive intent underneath whatever words, tone or facial movements their partner makes. Direct them to practice that with each other in session.

Couples whose relationships seem to work well follow several unwritten rules, almost unconsciously. One of those rules is some version of, "We seem to take turns losing it. Somehow we have this unspoken agreement that only one of us loses it at a time."

☐ Invite them to explore how each might commit to choosing the long-term positive consequences of a loving relationship over the short-term biochemical benefits of winning a fight.

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**Q. I'm seeing this family. What do you do if people refuse or resist your idea for an enactment?**

**A.** Whether your intervention is to ask a question, suggest an enactment, validate or reframe a point of view, interpret behavior, set up a structure, wonder about something, or simply sit there watching, when you don't know what to do, it's often because you are too close to the thing you are looking at.

☐ Back up. Attend-to and work-with the client's response.

**...when you don't know what to do, it's often because you are too close to the thing you are looking at.**

**What response?**

Instead of addressing "what they say," pay attention to actions, behaviors, emotions, attitudes, tones, inflections, underlying intentions.

☐ Try to keep in mind that when a client is resistant, it usually is not *you* they are resisting. Really, they hardly know you. In session, remember that you are often a stand-in for someone else. And in family work, start by guessing that the "someone else" is usually another member of the family system.

☞ Client: No, I don't want to do that

Therapist: Okay. So tell me what you *do* want to do.

☞ Client: I don't want to do that.

Therapist: All right. Who else (in or out of the room) needs to hear you say that? Tell them now.

**Well, in this case, the Dad's first response was, "That's not a good idea."**

Lots of processes might be involved here including refusal, disagreement, resistance, "You're not the boss of me," and perhaps even an attempt at intimidation. What's your first guess?

**Fear, I guess.**

☐ Okay. So, work with the response of fear.

☞ "Possibly so. What is your concern? (What is it that you fear right now?)"

**Like he thought I was attacking, or something.**

☐ Well, one idea is to stand up as you say some version of, "So Dad, I invite you to stand up for minute with me...I'm wanting to make a sculpt of what just happened."

☞ Then you suggest that Dad stand solidly and put his hand out toward you as if he were saying, "No!" and really meant it. Then you pick up any fairly large object in the room and hold it as if you were threatening him. Then, while both of you are holding still in your physical positions, you say,

☞ "Okay, this stance is how I picture what YOU thought just happened.

☞ (Some discussion and/or activity may ensue.)

☞ Eventually you say, "Now I'd like to show My version of what we did."

You put some small objects on a book or other flat surface and offer it as if it were a tray full of desserts, politely saying, "These are some of the things I have to offer. Which ones would you like?"

**Going back to you asking him what he is afraid of, what if he says, "I'm not afraid of anything."**

Well, what is underneath that response?

**Could be a lot of things—denial, anger, protecting his family, even fear of admitting fear, I guess.**

So choose one of those, and work with that.

**How do you know which one to choose?**

You don't. Not only that, but your cognitive mind might tell you one thing and your free-floating, non-cognitive brain might give you an image or a physical sensation that tells you another. In session, baring physical danger, I suggest you begin by going with the non-cognitive part, every time.

**How about, "Stand up and make a family circle. Make sure I can't get inside."**

I like that. And it's a lot simpler than what I suggested.

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**Q. The mother kept interrupting the boy and telling him he was wrong. When I said I wanted to hear his side of the story, she told me, "No. This is between him and me. I want to set him straight."**

**A.** So who was in control of the session? **She was, no question.**

Each time you do not intervene, the boy

observes yet another reinforcement of his perception that it is hopeless to be assertive with his mother.

I'm guessing that any time you allow her to control the session, you are playing a part in the family's dysfunctional drama. You play the role of the person who knows something is wrong but is unwilling or unable to do anything but watch helplessly as the plot unfolds.

□ "I'm going to invite a change to our arrangement. Since this does not seem to be working for you, Mom, you stay here. And Son, you wait outside in the waiting room. There are some books you can read in there. Later we'll switch. You and I can talk at that time."

☞ "Okay Mom, tell the story." Then you listen for understanding and perhaps even take notes. Frequently check-in with Mom by telling her what you've just heard and asking her if you have understood, left anything out, or maybe have missed something. When Mom is satisfied that you have "got it," then you can decide how you want to hear what the boy has to say.

□ "I have a rule for myself in session that I forgot to tell you about." Then make up a structure that interrupts the interrupting.

☞ For example, whenever someone is talking they get to talk until you understand completely.

□ "Okay, so one rule in this family is, Mom's version of a story is the right one. Is that correct? Okay. What's another rule?"

□ "So Mom, do you always take this good care of yourself, saying no and letting people know your limits? How did you learn to do that?"

□ "One of the things I notice about this family is that it is okay to interrupt. I've been interrupting you off and on all session. What is it like for you when I do that?"

□ Work with the part of the mother who needs to set others straight. Wonder out loud about how she was set straight when she was a child.

☞ Wonder who was not "set straight" in her family of origin.

☞ Wonder what the opposite of "set straight" is. Invite the mother to explore how the boy got that way.

□ Get some distance from this pair and ask yourself, "What's going on here?"

### I'd guess she's afraid.

□ "What is it you're afraid your son might say or do, if he tells his side of the story?"

□ "What might happen if he doesn't get set straight?"

Keep reminding yourself that there is no perfect thing to do. Any intervention will automatically be a change in the dynamics.



**Q.** The woman lies to her husband when they are in session together. She told me just the opposite when we worked alone. I'm astounded.

**A.** Many family therapists make it clear in the beginning of therapy that they will not be the keeper of family secrets. Since you did not do that, you are ethically bound to maintain this woman's confidentiality.

In session, your astoundedness takes your attention off the client, and puts it on yourself. To move beyond your amazement

that your expectations of this woman's integrity are not met, put this couple into a larger frame—remember that both secrets and lies are content.

Forget the lies and work with how these two people are with one another. Ask yourself what they do while the lies are being told?

### She gets bigger; he gets smaller.

□ Accelerate their bigger-smaller process and invite them to be more aware of their size changes.

☞ Interrupt often, and wonder what is going on.

☞ "I notice when Sam slumped down in the chair, Ann sat up straighter. What do you suppose is going on? So Sam, get even smaller and Ann, get even bigger...Now see if you exaggerate your physical positions. Let's find out what happens when you both go to extremes."

When you see this woman individually, access the part of you who can maintain a nonjudgmental attitude. That's the part of you who knows that if you completely understood all her needs and her perhaps irrational perception of the world, you, too, might conclude that lying is a perfectly reasonable and obvious response, under the circumstances.

□ Ask her who she used to protect by lying when she was a child.

□ Invite her to explore her need not to tell her partner her truth—from her hopes, to her fears and concerns



**Q.** Since his emotionally abusive father left, a fifteen-year-old is adrift, depressed, and seldom goes to school. He has musical talent and begs his mother to buy him some drums. What do you think about buying the drums on the condition that he go to school or maybe getting him to participate in their purchase?

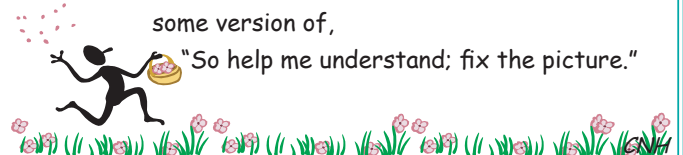
**A.** In the long run, everybody usually loses in the power struggle over school issues. Self-esteem is seldom raised in the process. Assist these folks to negotiate rather than playing let's-make-a-deal where everyone loses. If this boy is as depressed as you perceive, he needs something positive and self-esteem building in his life. Here is one positive scenario:

The mother purchases a drum pad and drumsticks and gives them to the boy. She tells him, "Okay, now you have the basics. If you want any additional things such as lessons, you can get a part-time job and we will go halfzies." (His

### On Becoming a Psychotherapist

#### In session...

Practice thinking and working in metaphors. Rather than speak to the content, offer an image or create a physical metaphor. Then say some version of, "Is this a picture of what you mean?" If the client responds in the negative, then you get to say, some version of,



"So help me understand; fix the picture."

“job” could be defined as getting passing grades.) Then she takes excellent care of herself around noise.

She makes sure he has a sound-proofed place to practice. She has a ready-to-go policy on amplifiers before he buys one. The drums are never used as consequences. He is allowed to use them to express himself just because he is a kid and because every kid should have something he likes and is good at.

**But he will eventually have to go to juvenile hall and fail if he doesn't attend school.**

The consequences for his school behavior are between him and the school district. Your task is to invite him to connect with himself as he contemplates the F's on his report card and again, perhaps, as he contemplates what he is going to tell the judge.

**His mother insists he needs to attend school because it is the only place he socializes.**

Then to take care of herself, the mother's first task is to explore the educational options—with the boy if he is willing, or without him if he is not. There are usually special programs within the public school system. Since money is not a problem for this family, there are also alternative schools, traveling schools, a private tutor or other special programs.

If she decides to be in charge of and set limits around school attendance, then she must take responsibility and be prepared to hold to them.

Those “limits” I speak of are for the mother, not the boy. If she decides that the boy must go to school as long as he lives in her house, then either she or someone she hires will have to take him to school in the morning and pick him up in the afternoon. His attendance in all classes will have to be checked every day. He can get all F's while he is there, but he has to go until he is either eighteen, graduates, takes the GED, or achieves some other parental goal.

Keep in mind that a parent can, with effort like this, make a child's body go to school, but no one can make him learn anything or make his heart want to be there. As an alternative, perhaps this mother can use all that energy to explore other ways to increase his socialization skills.

In the meantime, use the relationship between the two of you as an enactment where the boy can practice interacting personally with someone who accepts him as is.



**Q. A teen rape victim hasn't told her parents yet. She told some of her girlfriends and now the whole school is calling her a whore. At her school, I can only see her for six times. What are the chances she will tell her parents so that she can be seen regularly? This girl needs to get into treatment and I want that to happen.**

**A.** Her parents will soon find out either as a direct result of the whole school knowing or when a social worker or police officer visits the girl after your child abuse report.

If by some chance the parents do not find out, tell the girl your concerns. Tell her rape is not something that can be dealt with in six sessions and that if left unresolved, it may color every relationship she will have for the rest of her life.

Tell her that you want her to find a way to ask her parents if she can be in therapy. She can spend her sessions experimenting with different approaches.

Let go of wanting her to get into treatment. Notice she is pretty good at letting other people create uproar for her. Have confidence that she will find a way to get herself seen.

Decide that being raped is plenty enough to justify violating her confidentiality. Then call her parents.

Decide that by gossiping about herself to her friends, she is a danger to herself. Use that rationale to violate her confidentiality. Then call her parents.

Whatever you do, support her and honor yourself by letting her know your concerns each time you see her.

Once her parents are informed, she may get into treatment or she may not. If not, then things will not work out the way you want them. However, if her short experience in therapy with you is positive, then even if her parents say no to treatment now, when she is a little older, she may decide to seek treatment at that time.



**Q. A young boy talks about having recently seen his mother, who left the family years ago. How do I deal with his fantasy in session?**

**A.** Whether the mother exists in a corporeal body or in his imagination, the mother in his head is only his perception of her. Whether she is real or not, the therapy will be around how he responds to her and how he thinks of himself as a result of her perceived affection and regard (or lack of them). To facilitate his therapy, you do not need to know if the mother actually exists, and you may never find out for certain.

**My fear is that I would be encouraging his sense of loss by encouraging him to tell his stories.**

Encourage him instead, to *connect* with his sense of loss so that he can work through it and eventually let it go.

Perhaps he is attempting to work through his grief about his mother. And that is why his unconscious mind brings the subject up.

“Is that your real mom or your imaginary mom you are remembering?”

“You seem sad right now. Is that true? ...Imagine your mother is here right now. What would you like to say to her?...Say it now.”

“Let's do an imagery with your mother in it. Close your eyes. Imagine you see your mother. What is she doing right now? ...What would you like to happen in this imagery?...Okay, let that happen.”

**He calls the social worker, “Daddy”.**

Make an intervention out of that, too.

“I often want somebody to be my mommy or my daddy too, so I understand. What would you say to your real dad if he were here?”

**What if he says no, the social worker is the daddy.**

“Oh, so you have a social worker daddy too. Imagine he is in this chair...What is he like?...What would you say to him right now?...Imagine your other daddy in that chair over there. What

is he like?...What would you say to him?.. Tell them both what you want them to know about you."

□ Use puppets, sand tray items, two chairs, or whatever, to facilitate a back and forth conversation between the two daddy's, or between the boy and whichever daddy he prefers to talk to.

**But isn't that just reinforcing irrational thinking? I heard that's not a good idea.**

Irrational thinking can be worked with. I suggest you neither fear, judge, discourage, nor encourage it. Be available to work with whatever the client brings to the session. Since this boy is only four years old, I would begin by assuming his fantasies are presents to him from his unconscious mind. "Here, kid. Let's find or imagine substitutes to stand-in for the parental objects you should have had. Introject the caring attitude shown you by the social worker and the woman you "see" now and then. Use that caring to perceive yourself as worthy, attended-to, and safe."

If this boy were past puberty, I'm guessing many people in our profession might support your concern. I do not.

Bottom line, you have to trust yourself. But since you are asking me, I suggest you begin at the low end of the very wide spectrum that runs from "everything's probably fine" all the way to "holy bananas, he's schizophrenic; this is a disaster."

♩

**Q. I can hold unconditional positive regard for the client, but I feel embarrassed when I make a mistake.**

**Q. I get flustered that I made a mistake and then get embarrassed that I'm flustered. Like the other day a client asked me what was wrong and I said something like, "oh nothing" and just blew it off.**

**A.** Given that the psychotherapeutic relationship is, underneath the content and activities of the therapy session, the re-dramatization of the Parent-Child relationship, I offer you the following:

Mommy does not have to be perfect. When Mommy is imperfect and refuses to admit it, the kids go crazy. When Mommy is imperfect and admits it, the kids may be angry at her and want her to be

different, but they *don't* go crazy.

Substitute any words of your choice for "Mommy," as long as the person in the Mommy-position is in a solid one-up one-down position relative to the kids. You can substitute any words of your choice for "perfect," also.

**Like when somebody's father is abusive or an alcoholic and insists he never gets mad when he drinks?**

Yes. A young child is wired, I suspect, to expect his parents to make sense of things on this planet. If the father in your scenario routinely insists that no alcohol nor violence takes place, the child assumes that someone must be interpreting incorrectly or seeing things that aren't there, i.e. crazy. It can't be his parents (because, after all, they are gods and he is dependent upon them).

Therefore the only rational conclusion (from the perception of the child) is that *he* must be the crazy person whose perceptions can't be trusted.

**When Mommy is imperfect and admits it, the kids may be angry at her and want her to be different, but they *don't* go crazy**

If denial is the pattern in this family for most of their uncomfortable issues, thirty years later this "child" may appear in your office still in doubt about what's what, or perhaps shut off from most of his inner perceptions.

Being imperfect in session can turn out to be quite therapeutic, especially when "mommy" (that's you) admits it. For example, whenever anyone is embarrassed, most people's mirroring neurons, somatically "know" the other person is uncomfortable, even if the "knowing" is subconscious.

Let's say your client grew up in a home where adults routinely denied what appeared (to the child) to be facts. In session, when the therapist doesn't own up to her mistakes, she is offering the same environment in which the client grew up in the first place. Now why should he get in his car, travel across town, and pay money just to re-live the same old pattern.

**So I should just say, "I'm embarrassed?"**

If you can find the words that fit for you, then something like that, certainly. Sometimes, when we're off-center and flooded with emotion, our internal

dictionary can't find itself, and we have to splutter out an explanation as best we can. Later, when we're calmer and can put a cogent sentence together, we can return to the incident and confirm what happened. And here's where the therapeutic part comes in. Whenever someone in the one-up position authentically validates the perception of the perceiver, the inner child of that person has an opportunity to heal a little.

Imagine the difference between what you might experience if someone for whom you have high regard gets embarrassed about something they did, tries to hide their reaction and, when you ask about it, says some version of ,

a) "(cough, cough) Oh, no. Nothing happened. I just find it incredibly hot in here."

b) "(sighs, introspects, and laughs at self) Well sometimes when I'm not perfect, I get embarrassed and try to cover it up...And now I'm embarrassed to admit that out loud

(breathes and lets go).

What's it like when your therapist admits not only to making a mistake but then trying to dodge admitting it?

♩

**Q. He is dedicated to misery. He is also a constant complainer. He's entirely sick of himself and so am I.**

**A.** Your negative regard thrusts you into the middle of this person's dysfunctional system. Now, there are *two* people in the room who are sick of him. So, instead of offering him an environment which is different, you offer one that is simply a clone of the environment in which he walks around most of the time.

□ First, get out of his system. Find the place in yourself which can view the Other Guy as a basic miracle. Notice how, as soon as you reframe his complaining as something he needs to do, he's not so hard to be with.

□ If you are unsuccessful in reframing your relationship vis a vis this man and your misery interferes inside the session, then clear yourself by naming it out loud.

*"I notice when you complain sometimes, that I start feeling annoyed and then I start wanting you to come up with a solution."*

**And then what?**

□ In order to use the naming of your truth as a therapeutic intervention, when you are done, invite the client's attention back towards himself.

☞ "Do You ever feel annoyed at yourself?"

☞ "Where are you holding your annoyance in your body?"

☞ "Get a conversation going between the part of you who wants to come up with solutions and the part that sabotages solutions. What do you notice about the relationship between these two parts?"

### **What if I can't move to neutrality and my problem continues to interfere?**

□ Consider working with yourself right there in the session.

☞ After letting him know what you are about to do, engage in a dialogue between your two sides. Speak both from the part that is annoyed and from the part that is not so judgmental.

☞ Or, after letting him know what you are about to do, breathe and release your anger. Model how to access frustration kinesthetically. Hit a pillow a few times. Or simply make both hands into fists, grit your teeth and growl, "GRRRR..!" Then put words to your felt-sense of relief or whatever your experience is. This might give him permission to do the same kind of work. Immediately after you are done, of course, get yourself back into neutrality. And, as always, as soon as you are done using *your* self as an intervention, invite his attention back toward *his* Self.

### **Okay, so what are some other things I can do to help him get through this negativity?**

Oops, you are doing it again. You are thinking he needs help. Anytime you think he needs to be different, your negative regard invites him to stay stuck in his negativity. *He* is the person who has to want himself to be different if any change is to occur.

So instead of *helping*, find ways to invite him to discover how he manages *not to help* himself.

Let go of your perception that you know what this man should do. He may be comfortable with the amount of negativity he experiences.

He may keep himself just negative enough so it feels familiar and yet not so

miserable that he really wants to change his behavior.

□ Invite an experience where he might feel the full extent of his negativity, rather than you feel his negativity for him.

☞ "Complain more...even more. Whine a bit as you name all the things that are stupid and disturbing and... See how long the list of annoyances is. Now, say them all, one by one, and as you name them, use an "I-sentence"—"I hate that, and I Really Hate that. And That, particularly is Just Disgusting, and... See if you can feel the full extent of your misery as you name and talk about each thing on your list...You probably left out some things. Let's do it again.

☞ "Here's an old phone book. Rip out a couple of pages every time you think of something else you don't like."

☞ "Speak from the part of you who is Not sick of yourself."

□ Give yourself permission to allow him to be mad-at or complain-about you. Maintain the stance of Ideal Object; contain his anger with your love.\*

♩

### **Q. I've been gone for five weeks. Half my clients have found reasons not to return. Am I being punished?**

**A.** Possibly. The unconscious reasoning may be, "If mommy abandons me, I'll show her I don't even need her."

Therapeutic interruption can be unsettling for someone who is dependent or in the dependent stage of their therapy, as well as for anyone who is actively or regularly working deeply to resolve old issues. In the future,

□ Bring up the subject of your vacation early on, with all your clients. Some will re-experience their anger that mommy will not be there forever, or get touch with their old fears of being abandoned. Work with these responses.

□ Do a modified evaluation/termination session before any extended vacation. Take the time to articulate any unfinished business you perceive between the client and himself, and between the client and you. Invite him to do the same.

□ If someone does not appear to respond to the fact of your leaving, bring the subject up again. Some folks deny reality until the last minute and then freak out when confronted with the imminent truth.

□ To those who are working through abandonment issues you might say some version of,

"I do not plan to abandon you, I plan to continue to exist, and to continue to be your therapist when I get back."

□ Make a definite appointment for the future. The person may still call and cancel but you will not be communicating from that one-down stance of calling, telling them you have returned from vacation, and would they like to make another appointment, please.

□ Realize how long a five week interruption is to someone who has high intentionality about working through their issues. Arrange for an alternative back-up therapist to be available in your absence.

♩

**INTERACT Issue No. 18 July 2011**

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