

**Q.** She recently announced that an uncle molested her when she was a child. Her father made an appointment wanting me to convince him that his daughter is telling the truth.

**A.** First of all, it sounds as if this father is way too comfortable with the use of an outside party to referee family confrontations. Whether this triangulated style of communication was a contribution to the girl's molest or not, if you participate in it, you will be contributing to the continuation of one of this family's dysfunctions.

I suggest you steadfastly invite direct communication between one family member and another, even in the most benign of conversations.

Dad: (to you) Convince me that Sally isn't lying.

You: So what you're saying is that you don't trust Sally to tell the truth.

Dad: Yes, I guess so.

You: Tell Sally that.

Dad: (does it)

You: So, Sally. What's your response. Tell Dad.

Or, the not-so benign of conversations.

Dad: My brother was a good kid. He would never do anything like that. I guess I do remember the time he... (did something bad), but I can't believe he would hurt Sally.

You: Tell Sally that.

or,

You: Your brother is sitting in that empty chair right there. Tell him what you just told me.

Secondly, that she was molested is not a for-sure fact. You were not there at the time the molests did or did not occur, so even though you believe her, you do not know *for sure* what happened.

Happily, your job is not to play detective; your job is to be this family's therapist. Stay neutral. Whether this girl was molested or not, should change neither your relationship with family members, nor your choice of therapeutic interventions.

In your recent work with this girl, you've used her perceptions, emotions, and reality to represent, at the very least, metaphors for whatever she remembers happening. So, no matter how distorted her father thinks her recollections might be, continue to treat both the recollections and the father's dismay with respect.

Thirdly, this father may be in shock over the death of his belief that his family of origin was free of abuse. Very few humans enjoy abrupt changes to their reality, particularly regarding people or issues they're attached to, or love. Encourage good communication between him and himself as well as between him and his daughter.

□ When the father comes into session, validate his shock and fear.

□ Assist him to ask his daughter all those embarrassing, sexually specific questions he had hoped to avoid by talking to you.

□ Refer all questions about the molest back to the daughter.

**Q.** To punish them, the father makes his kids put their nose in a circle he draws on the wall.

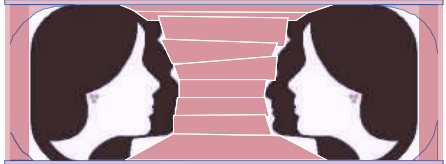
**Q.** That seems OK to me.

**Q.** That seems abusive to me.

**A.** On one end of the continuum, this particular scenario could describe a father using the circle as a sort of time-out, a substitute for, "Go to your room while I collect my wits." On the other end of the continuum, this scenario could easily describe a father who wants to humiliate, victimize, and embarrass his children.

Therapist perception of child abuse spans the spectrum from noticing it everywhere, to wearing view-limiting blinders, to denying it altogether. Your response to a scenario such as this will be colored by your personal life experiences.

In your professional capacity, adopt the ethical stance of always having your abuse antennae operating. At the same time, be aware of abuse prejudice, whether pro or con. Collect information as treatment continues and be available for the possibility that abuse exists.



Dear Reader,

From my perspective, the Inner Child of many adults sits in his/her crib, spending much of his/her adult life waiting for Perfect Primary Nurturer to appear.

About half of these inner children wait and hope, and believe, and hope some more, that if he or she waits long enough, is good enough, or is *enough* enough, Perfect Primary Nurturer will finally materialize and do the job that should have been done in the beginning: cherishing, caregiving, acknowledging, approving, respecting, and protecting.

The other half of these folks have an inner child who is also waiting, but on the off-chance a Loving Nurturer should actually come forward and attempt to give love or approval, this inner child's behavior will reveal that his/her sole purpose for staying in the crib all these years has been to accost Perfect Primary Nurturer, beat her up and utterly reject her, because she is not needed anymore. So there!

All members of these two groups appear to go through much of their life with a damaged love-receiver. They carry around a metaphorical empty cup (of varying sizes), asking and expecting that it be filled up by external sources. Each cup is labeled with some version of, "Needs I Refuse or am Unable to Meet by Myself."

Members of the first group carry a cup with a hole in the bottom. Sometimes the hole is as big as the bottom of the cup. Sometimes the hole is pinprick-sized so their cup empties slowly and often goes unnoticed. The cups of the second group have lids on the top. Some of these lids are easily removed; some of the lids have holes in them. Many are glued shut.

Either way it seems to me that, *without intervention*, it's pretty much guaranteed that the person involved will not be able to do what he or she craves most of all—to maintain functional, "filled up" relationships with other adult human beings.

*Carol Nichols Hadlock*

**Q. My group members say I am angry when I am not.**

**Q.** Stay in neutrality. Get some distance. One way to stay separate is to chant silently to yourself, "Whatever someone else says about me, it is not about *me*. Even when it is true."

**I don't understand.**

In or out of session, no matter what words are being said about you, they may be true or possibly true-ish about you, but for certain, the words are mainly about the person who is saying them. For example, if I say, "I know you are scared," my underlying message is some version of, "I know what scared is and I'm using my perception of you to contact it. I'd rather pay attention to you than to myself, so I'm projecting my 'scare' onto you and assuming I'm correct."

We can only talk about things we know and the only thing we're even close to knowing anything about *for sure*, is ourselves. So you see, the kids in the neighborhood were right along—it takes one to know one.

In session, one way not to personalize incoming opinions is to put your attention on the client's process instead of on your own. The client's perspective is the *client's* perspective and has nothing to do with you. By taking their perspective personally and then denying or defending it, you invite the client's attention to move away from themselves, and out of their work.

After each group is over, take the time to introspect, determine your anger/pain status, and decide what to do about it, then. During the group, keep your focus on the process of the members.

To the best of your ability, say what is true for you, then invite the client's attention back to herself.

☞ "Well, I don't feel angry right now. What's it like for you when you think I'm angry?"

☞ "Well, I do feel angry right now. What's it like for you when you know I'm angry?"

Direct their attention, not to whether you are mad but to their response to your perceived anger.

☞ "If you were to pay attention to yourself right now, what would you notice?"

☞ "Show me how angry *you* are right now."

☞ "Usually when I suspect that someone else is angry, I feel fear right here (touches her diaphragm). What is *your* process when you suspect someone is angry?"

Rather than defend yourself, invite them to pay attention to how they take care of themselves around your perceived anger.

☞ "I'm guessing you do not feel safe right now. Is that true?"

☞ "And what do you need to do to take care of yourself when you perceive me as angry?"

Act out being more angry. Invite them to use your anger to practice staying uninvolved with another person's anger without feeling abused or being abusive back.

In order to devise an verbal intervention when your behavior or emotional state is focused on, take a moment and wonder to yourself what the other person is saying about himself underneath his words. For example, what might the phrase, "You're angry, aren't you?" be covering up?

**"I'm scared and I'm not feeling safe right now."**

Exactly. Or maybe, "I don't want to pay attention to myself right now, so I'm going to focus on you." There are many possibilities. Whatever you guess will probably be in the ballpark.

So make the best guess you can and respond as if your guess was the thing that was actually said.

☞ "You seem able to guess what other people are feeling. Use that same skill to articulate what *you* are feeling right this moment."

When you are accused of being (whatever) in the group, all group members who were raised by emotionally disabled parents will look to you for a Reality Check. "I'm checking out my sanity right now," is their silent message, "Please, tell us the truth."

☞ "You know, other people in here have thought I was angry too. Either I'm too scared to notice, too defended to admit, or I'm really not angry. I actually don't know right now."

**How else could you respond to that?**

Well, in a pinch you could always say,

"Yes, I've been directed by my supervisor to act this way on purpose. I'm trying to learn not to take things personally and focus people's attention back on them. What goes on for *you* when you sense that I am angry?"

**Sometimes they tell me I'm mad and then they laugh.**

Again, think about the underlying message. Their intent of their laughter might span a spectrum including, "I am angry at you and I want to punish you by embarrassing you in public," to "I laugh to cover up my fear of my own repressed rage," to "The idea of being angry and being free enough to acknowledge it to others is exceedingly delightful.

Another thought is that whatever the person is saying, they are not able to directly tell you what they mean. So,

Invite each of the group members to communicate more clearly.

☞ "My guess is you're trying to make me feel bad right now. Is that true?"

☞ If the answer is yes, then direct them to tell you, "I am angry with you because...and I want you to feel as bad as I do."

☞ If the answer is no, then work with each person until he is able to make a sentence that more accurately articulates what his actual message is.

☞ Wonder out loud who, in their family of origin, made fun of other people when they were angry.



**Q. She said what she wanted from him right now was, "Well he could spend more time at the house with the family and me."**

**A.** A lot of couples' work is really grief work—that is, letting go of the fantasy that the other person will ever be the way you hoped they would be. This man might be able to "spend more time at the house" in the future, but he cannot do that right now, right here in the session.

Ask her what she wants him to do right here in this room, right now, in this moment.

**She'd say, "Oh I don't know. There's nothing he can do I guess. (sigh)." I have a hard time thinking of something**

**positive to say. I don't want to lecture and say something like, "Well, with that attitude, I imagine 'nothing' is probably what you will continue to get."**

- One idea is to rephrase your invitation.
  - ☞ "Think of something you'd like him to do or to say right now. It doesn't have to be realistic. Assume you might not get what you want. Just name something that's true for you here in this room."

People often focus on a perception that is either black or white. Their partner is doing what they want, or the situation is intolerable. Often, they are not ready to let go of long held anger that the partner is not the way they wanted him/her to be in the first place. And they want that partner to change immediately and be different in the future forever. Also, this woman may have very few skills for telling her partner what he might do to elicit a more positive response from her, right now or in the future.

- Encourage her to articulate what she wants in the moment by suggesting possibilities. Start with something easy.

☞ "So Jan, try these words, 'Bob, I'd like you to change chairs with me.'"

The exploration of her fear of asking, her anger at his response (no matter what he does), his response (cooperative or not), and all the shenanigans of both their unconscious thoughts and conscious emotions could easily keep this couple busy for the rest of the session.

Some other ideas:

☞ "Tell him, 'Bob, what I want you to do is to listen to what I say, understand it completely, agree with all of it, and then tell me you are enthusiastic about changing your behavior.'"

☞ "Tell him, 'Right now I want you to hold my hand, look me in the eye and promise me that you will never do that again as long as I live.'"

☞ "Tell him, 'Right now I want you to listen and not argue with me. When I am done and before you say what you think, I want you to ask me questions until I am satisfied that you understand my point of view completely.'"

Invite her to change the words so they are true for her. She may not get exactly what she wants as a result, but in naming the whole embarrassing truth, she lightens the mood, takes responsibility, and increases the possibility that she might actually get some of what she wants.

**What if she really doesn't know what she wants?**

- Again, make guesses for her. It is often easier to correct other people's mistakes than it is to create something of our own.

☞ "'So tell Bob, 'I actually don't know what I want. I'm going to sit here and just be silent until I connect with myself enough to figure it out.'"

☞ Take what she said she wanted and turn it around. For example, she said she wanted him to spend time with her. So direct her to spend time with *him*, right now.

Substitution often gives the necessary distance one might need to work out a solution to what feels like an impossible situation.

- What might another person (your sister, your best friend, your favorite celeb) in your situation say they want right now?"  
♩

**Q. To a sixteen-year-old, her molester is no big deal. "It's over," she says. "He's been punished."**

**A.** Most 16-year-olds are uncomfortable about feelings; denial of trauma seems natural. I like using hyperbole with clients, so ideas you might consider include,

- Invite her to restate her first statement as, "I am no big deal" while she pays attention to her body's response.

□ Direct her to tell her internal child, as represented by a doll or other object, "It's no big deal that you got molested."

□ Suggest she tell her molester, represented by an empty chair, "It's no big deal that you molested me. It was okay. I'm not affected by it. In fact, I think you should go out and do it to more girls."

□ Direct her to talk to her imaginary future daughter (the one sitting in that empty chair over there) and tell her it's no big deal to be molested and that she doesn't really have to worry about protecting herself from it happening to her.

□ Direct her to tell this daughter that it is no big deal to do bad things to other people, as long as you get punished.

□ Reach for her purse (or other container) and dump the contents out. When she gets upset, go stand in the corner for a few seconds and then come out and say, "Okay, it's all over now, I've been punished. And anyway, your purse is no big deal." Work with her response.

□ Wonder out loud which part of her she is trying to convince.

Another thing to consider, of course, is that the incident does not, in fact, feel like a big deal to her.

□ Tell her as far as you are concerned, the big deal is not about her molester or even about sex. It is about her being important enough to protect herself next time somebody tries to take advantage of her. Let her that know you think she is a big deal even if she does not.

**When you say "direct her" to do something, you don't mean insist, or anything, do you?**

No. There really is no word in English that means to 'invite without attachment to the outcome.' Anytime you intervene, do so without needing your intervention to be acknowledged, let alone used for exploration. Always work with the person's response to your idea.

**So let me see if I've got this right. You mean if I "direct" her to do something and she looks uncertain and hesitates doing it, I should forget about what I suggested and invite her to notice her uncertainty and hesitation instead. Is that right? (big smile)**

Hey! You've been paying attention.  
♩

**Q. I'm not sure what to offer a man who wants to know whether or not to interview for a new job. He is a bit like me, wanting to change his career but reluctant.**

**A.** So what do you need when you are in that place?

**(thinks) Hmmn... Someone to tell me I'm okay just the way I am. That it's okay if I interview and it's okay if I don't. And that it's okay if I don't get the job. That at least I tried.**

Sometimes supervision is so easy.  
♩

**A lot of couples' work is really grief work, that is, letting go of the fantasy that the other person will ever be the way you hoped they would be.**

**Q. She gets down when she's mad. So when she calls me on the phone and says she's very depressed, what do I do?**

**A.** Invite her to accelerate her depression.

- Tell her to get even more depressed, give up completely, and whine as she asks you what to do.

**She'd just laugh.**

See, she feels better already.

- Invite her to accelerate her anger.
  - ☞ Tell her to put the phone down and go beat on the bed with a pillow, a tennis racket, or whatever is handy.

**What if she says it'll bother the kids.**

- Suggest she announce to the kids beforehand, "I'm depressed and I'm going to beat on the bed with a pillow so I can feel better; nobody is going to get hurt."

**What if she says the kids are scared.**

- Tell her to invite the kids to have a turn at beating on the bed, too. When she has done that and comes back, tell her to hang up the phone, then reward everybody with hugs and a walk to the park or some other special treat.

☞ Invite her to bring her kids in for a family session. Provide safety, something to hit, and something to hit with. Encourage each person to show the others how angry they are. Encourage each family member to take responsibility for their own emotions: "I am angry" as opposed to "You are the problem."

☞ Teach them that anger is an emotion quite separate from rude or violent behavior.

☞ Suggest they formulate family phrases that mean, "I'm upset and I'm getting depressed. I'm gonna go beat on the bed and see if that helps any. I'll need a hug afterward. Will you be available?" Invite them to use session time to practice.

- Don't forget to charge her for the phone call.

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**Q. She said, "I don't want to look at that (issue) today." I was torn between saying okay or continuing to push a little. What do you think?**

**A.** Do both, and work with the responses. If you push, push yourself, not her. Have no agenda that she look at anything.

Instead, have the agenda for yourself that you attend to her process and invite her to pay attention to it, too.

- If not-doing is what she usually does, then say, "Just to be different, imagine not-wanting to look and then looking anyway. What would you see?"

□ On the other hand, if she usually comes from a victim stance, then her saying, "No" to you, is an important event since she is not-doing what she usually does. Again, jettison all your plans. Focus on and work with the process in front of you.

☞ Invite her to notice that she did not placate you. Ask her how else she could take care of herself right now.

- Give her an object to represent the issue. Suggest she tell it she does not want to look at it today and then ceremoniously put it away and out of sight.

- Other ideas:

"What do you want to look at today?"

"What else don't you want to look at?"

"Who else do you want to say that to?"

"I agree. Let's not look. I invite you feel it (sing it, dance it, draw it, sculpt it out of play dough...) instead."

"No problem. Here's the sandtray."

"Okay. Close your eyes. Breathe. What do you notice about yourself right now? (Let an image come forward in your mind).

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**Q. Sometimes when I ask her to try something in session, she refuses by getting silent. She doesn't appear to go away, she just buttons her lip.**

**A.** Encourage her to do more of what she is doing.

- In your mind, reframe her silence as an effective way to say, "No."

□ Become silent yourself. Name your own process as it progresses.

"I notice you are silent now. I'm not sure what to do, and I want to make sure I don't impose myself on you. Hmmn, I guess what I'm going to do is be silent too...at least for a little while."

- Invite her to tell you she doesn't have to do what she doesn't want to do.

*"Practice saying to me, 'No Sylvia, I don't have to do what you want....I don't want to do what you want....I'm not going to do what you want.'"*

**In session, at any given time, the relative age level of your client is fluid and may shift to different places on the prebirth-puberty-adult spectrum. Intervention ideas will often come to mind if you ask yourself, "how old this person is right now?"**

This gives her communication options other than the passive resistant shutting-down behavior.

- Once she is able to tell you, "No," perhaps she can experiment saying, "No," to other people in her

past or present life who (in her mind) you represent.

- Invite her to experiment.

*"I'm going to ask you to do some other things you don't want to do right now. As I do, pay attention to how you respond to me. Okay here goes. I'd like you to dust those bookshelves. What happens inside you when I say that?"*

- Ask her what is the best thing for you to do next time that silent thing happens. Let go of needing her to give a cogent answer.

□ Tell her you need her help. Ask her what she needs from you when you have overstepped her limits and invited her to do something she doesn't want to do. Practice her ideas in session.

- Stop asking her to "try" things. Offer non-verbal opportunities like sandtray, art activities, or games.

Once you have given up your agenda of getting her to be different (in this case, not to be silent), you can focus on being the most competent therapist you can be. Sometimes that takes a great deal of creativity and good humor.

- Role play an entire conversation while she watches. Speak for both of you. Get out of your chair, step in back of or to the side of her chair, speak for her, then get back in your chair and speak for yourself.

As her: I'm not going to tell you what you want to hear. In fact I'm not going to say anything. I don't have to talk if I don't want to. I feel discounted and angry. So I'm going to withdraw.

As you: I like it when you tell me what you don't like, and where your limits

are. I don't have a problem with you being angry with me. I understand. I don't like it when I don't get what I want either. It's okay with me that you are going to be silent for awhile. I'm okay with you being just the way you are. I'll entertain myself until you're ready to connect again.

As you role-play out both sides of the conversation, she gets to be a silent learner while you validate her chosen method of communication.

□ Use the silent time to tell a story.

*"I had a friend once who ..."*

*"This reminds me of ..."*

□ Make up anything that is even marginally parallel to the issue at hand or the process between you. Story metaphors are useful ways to bridge over into visualization work.

In session, at any given time, the relative age level of a client is fluid and may shift to different places on the prebirth-puberty-adult spectrum. Intervention ideas will often come to mind when you ask yourself, "how old this person is right now?"

□ The way you describe her, she may be about three to four years old, possibly younger. Grab a teddy bear, or a pillow, and perhaps a "blankie" (a coat will do). Give her the bear, lay the blanket over her, tuck in it a little bit, and say something like,

*"How's that. I wonder if you're feeling a little safer now."*

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**Q. It was a chaotic session. The problem child was relatively quiet but the mom couldn't stop telling the younger boy to stop messing with stuff. I didn't know what to do.**

**A.** What stopped you from intervening in the chaos?

**I wanted to do the right thing.**

Wanting to do the right thing presupposes a) that a "right thing" exists and b) that you had an investment in the outcome. Perhaps you wanted these people to like you, or to think you are more than, or better than you are. Maybe you hoped they would appreciate your professional competency, perceive you as their personal savior or, at the very least, return for more sessions and pay for them.

**Probably all of the above.**

When you believe you shouldn't do anything until you discover exactly what the right thing to do is, the fantasy that a right thing exists can stop you from doing anything at all. And by doing nothing, you reinforce whatever dysfunction is going on. Stay out of their system *and* intervene professionally.

□ Assuming you are not abusive, anything you do will be just fine, as long as you are okay with the results, (to which you are going to pay attention and then invite Mom to explore.)

♣ "Mom, I notice you tell Son to stop messing with stuff even when I've said it's okay. What is your concern?"

♣ "Hmnm, (gathers up a number of objects) Hey Son, come on over here, with us, and mess with *this* stuff. Mom, breathe while he makes a mess over here. Practice relaxing and letting go.

♣ Join Johnny in his play and give him lots of positive attention. "Hey Johnny, can I play too?...Oh, that's very interesting..."

♣ C'mon Mom, let's all play with these toys...

♣ "Mom, I notice that you *refrained* from telling Son to stop after I said it was okay, just now. What's the difference between now and when I said it was okay, before?"

□ Here's a technique with which I have had excellent results when a restless child is in the room with other family members. I invite the child to sit close by me, preferably in the same chair. I get his verbal assent that I touch him and where. Then I keep my hand on his upper back, or perhaps a shoulder, pretty much the whole time the parents are talking. I include him whenever I can. Occasionally I will ask him if I can speak for him, and will he please let me know whenever I say something that isn't quite right. Experiment. Trust yourself. There is no right thing to do.

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**Q. If one member of a couple has a secret, what do you do?**

**A.** Nothing different. Work with their process. They probably have lots of secrets between them.

□ If something comes up in session that reminds you of secrets, introduce some object that is handy there in the room. "This represents all the stuff you guys aren't telling each other." Leave it there between them the whole time they are in the room. Don't refer to it again until they do. Next session, should something come up that reminds you of secrets, go get the same object, and without saying a word, place it in between them again.

**What about the lying? I'm not sure I want to work with a lie hanging over the session.**

Arrange both your life and your psyche so that if a lie is hanging over anybody, it is hanging over the person who told it. Get out from underneath.

□ Schedule a time to meet privately with the secret holder. Suggest he or she come in individually for awhile to practice how to bring the secret out in the open.

□ Announce that your treatment plan involves working with each partner individually for awhile. Then, in the individual sessions, "forget" that they know each other. Each time one of them mentions their spouse, remember that the "spouse in the speaker's mind" is only a projection, not the real person.

Chances are, they have told each other lots of lies. What makes this one so special to you is that you are intertwining your values in their relationship?

**I feel like I'm co-behaving a deception.**


On Becoming a Psychotherapist  
**We teach what we know so...**

Do try this at home:

One effective way to modify any human's behavior is to frequently reward positive behavior and, other than imminent physical danger, mostly ignore negative behavior. Try it first with a child you love.

Then with another adult.

Later, when you are more comfortable noticing positive things, consider trying it on yourself.



□ As a matter of course, you might begin by inviting all couples to tell their partner everything they have withheld from one another since way back at the beginning of their relationship, perhaps with their first meeting or first date.

☞ Do not expect any couple to actually do it, however. Work with their resistance to your suggestion.

Unfortunately, when one disapproves of someone else's behaviors, that judgment is expressed in attitude, tone, muscle movements, looks, body posture, and choice of words. So if, in fact, this couple falls outside your value system, remember that you are not obligated to treat them and I suggest you decide whether you are willing to continue working with them or not.

If you are unable to maintain a relatively consistent container of positive regard around this couple, it's my opinion that this couple is outside your scope of practice. If so, assist them to find themselves a counselor who is either more able to operate comfortably with secrets or who (now that I think about it) has a hard and fast policy of announcing to every new couple that he absolutely will (or will not) maintain confidentiality between them while they are in treatment with him.

**Well, it's really hard not to think about the secret. It seems like it comes up all the time and I can't mention it. I'm having a difficult time with the whole thing.**

Your first obligation is to take care of yourself and to honor your concerns. As long as you are bound by confidentiality not to tattle and you see no way out of this triangle, then the way to keep your emotional responses out of their system may be to terminate the couple's work immediately.

**So what do I say, "Your husband has just told me a huge secret which has made it impossible to continue with couple's work but I can't tell you what it is?"**

□ Well, that's one truth. I suggest you take responsibility for both the problem and for the solution.

☞ "I need to terminate our couples' work prematurely. I have a personal problem that is interfering with these sessions...No, it's personal and I'm not willing to discuss it. Here are three referrals to qualified counselors."

As always, invite the client's attention back on themselves.

☞ "My guess is you're shocked and feeling a little abandoned. Pay attention to your felt senses right now. What's going on with you right now, here in the room?"

☞ Then work as you usually do. Listen for understanding. Join what you can. And stay resolute in your decision.

**But, my reason for stopping is *not* personal. It's about them and their secret.**

Actually, your reason for thinking about stopping has nothing to do with them. It's about your discomfort with *your relationship* with their secret.

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**Q. My supervisor at another agency insists that all three of us individual therapists be family therapists during all the family sessions. I find it very difficult. If I'm an advocate for the family, I can not always be there for the twelve-year-old boy who is also my individual client.**

**Q.** Interesting. First of all let's see, three family members makes seven subsystems plus three therapists jockeying for position make seven more subsystems plus the additional relationships of six individuals in dyads and triads makes...Hmmm. The mind boggles. Let's move on.

As a therapist, be an advocate neither for the child nor for the family. Be an advocate for the therapy. The twelve-year-old boy is your individual client. Attend to his relationships within the family system.

□ At the beginning of the next family session, announce to all that you will be doing something different. Explain that you are going to be the boy's coach. Say that you will be suggesting things for him to say or do, and will be talking in his ear a lot. Then move behind the boy and wait until you perceive he has a need for input.

**What usually happens is while the mother talks and talks, the boy wants attention, gets ignored, and acts out.**

□ Invite him to discover other ways to meet his needs.  
Family: (Mother is talking and the boy is getting antsy.)

You: (speaking quietly to the boy) Come over here by your mom. Sit down beside her in this chair. Without disturbing her, gently take her arm and drape it over you so you can sit close, with her arm around you while she talks...Yes, like that.

**He'd like that. The other major problem is that his sister gets verbally abusive and then he strikes back.**

□ Protect him, not only from his sister but from his impulse to hit her.

☞ Within the family frame, demonstrate healthy alternative behavior.

Family: (The sister is being verbally abusive and nobody is stopping her.)

You: (The family and the sister continue what they're doing while you talk to the boy.) Turn away from your sister. Face me. What's going on for you?

Him: I wanna pound her.

You: Okay. Close your eyes. Imagine yourself pounding her. Stay with it until you're finished. Are you done? Good. It's okay to be mad; it's not okay to pound real people. Now tell your mom, "I really have a problem when sister calls me names like that. What I'd like is for you to back me up when I ask her to stop."

□ Assist the boy to confront his sister. Suggest they role-play her being abusive and him not taking it personally.

□ Pay attention to his process within the family system; encourage his mental health. With luck and time he will introject your input and develop a repertoire of healthy communication skills.

Should you be the only therapist in the room and hence the family therapist, you could intervene with the whole family as your focus.

□ Invite a role-play. Direct the mother to make some sort of positive physical contact with the sister such as holding her or

stroking her in some way. Once that is happening, direct the girl to call the boy a name again. If she does it, assist the mother to stop her daughter, look in her eyes, and make some definitive statement about how she would like the girl to find another way to express herself.

☞ Ask the girl to do it again, several times, because her mother is learning another way to respond to her, and she needs lots of practice.

☞ Assist the girl to tell the truth about *herself*, not the truth about other people. Truths about her brother and her mother sound like, "You never make him behave." Truths about herself would sound like, "I'm jealous and angry and I want as much attention as my brother gets."

♪

**Q. A teenager was referred to me by his teacher because of something he wrote in a class paper. "I don't want to talk about it right now," he said. Then he crossed his arms and waited for me to do something.**

**A.** How he is (relative to his life) in this room is how he is (relative to his life) outside of this room.

☐ Attend to and work with his process.

You: My guess is you are unavailable for assistance and are waiting for me to do something. Is that true?

Him: (No verbal response)

You: I wonder if you are doing the same thing about the problem you were sent here for. Y'know, like right now—you being unavailable and waiting for the other guy (me) to do something.

**Finally he said, "What I want is to get out of here." I said, "Why are you staying?" He said, "You mean I can go?"**

Again, how he *is* in this room, is how he *is* outside of this room.

☐ Attend to and work with his process all the way out the door.

Him: You mean I can go?

You: Of course you *can* go. There may be some negative consequences you won't like very much, but you are certainly *able* to go. I wonder if the solution to the problem you came in here for is available in the same way. Y'know—right before your eyes, but you just don't know it exists, yet.

♪

**Q. I feel weird when people who have terminated, call me to say things are going well for them. I want to ask them if they're trying to get free phone therapy. I'd like some guidelines on how to handle that.**

**A.** So you're saying you think they want something but are not telling you what it is, and that you are resentful, but are not telling them how you feel. Is that right?

**(laughs) Oh-oh, I think I know where this is going.**

It sure is easy to become part of a dysfunctional system, isn't it? Be aware that your resentment is not at the other person, it's at yourself because you are..., I don't know, not taking care of yourself is my guess.

**Yah. And I have trouble, sometimes, saying negative stuff in a nice way.**

Well, join the club. Practicing helps. Practice with people who feel affection toward you and of whom you are not afraid. Telling the truth, and taking responsibility for what you want have in common that each involves a certain amount of perceived risk taking. In the beginning, each is a bit scary. But after awhile, both are addictive. (Big secret—you feel high afterwards and, in session, you get to role model intimacy at the same time.)

☐ So trust your instincts and take responsibility *before* you get annoyed.

*"I'm glad things are going well for you. My sense is that you want something by calling me. Is that true?"*

*"Well thank you so much for calling. I like being appreciated. I sincerely hope your life continues in this positive direction. I do need to stop now. Goodbye."*

☐ Should the conversation veer toward "free phone therapy," take care of yourself before you get annoyed. You might memorize and practice something like,

*"Oh, before we go any further, I don't want to give you the wrong impression. I'm not available to talk at any length right now. How about you write all this down and mail it to me. Then, if you'd like, you can make an appointment to come in and we'll talk about it."*

Keep in mind that you can't set a limit for the Other Guy. If you were to say to someone, "You cannot call me and talk a more than 5 minutes about how things

are going for you," well, I guess you could *tell* someone that, but how would you ever enforce it? You'd have to man your phone 24 hours a day, and every time she called, you'd have to yell at her, hang up immediately, or hire someone else to monitor your phone. Forever!

On the other hand, it's very easy to set a limit for yourself. For example, "Iris can call whenever she wants, and she can talk as long as she wants. It's just that whenever she does that, I won't be on the other end of the line. I will have hung up at the 5 minute mark (or whatever your limit is).

By the way, you *can*, but you don't *have* to, tell the other person what your limit is for yourself. It's *you* whom you need to tell. And as you begin, you most likely need to remind yourself early and often.

♪

**Q. A client has a number of small phobias. Any ideas?**

**A.** One woman was terrified of freeway exits. She felt as if the road was going to lift off the earth, fold back onto her, and swallow her up.

In session she worked in imagery. At first she was an observer and watched as everything happened to her. Later on, she participated in the first person and allowed herself to experience being swallowed up.

As she did so, the car went off the road, turned over, and crushed her to death. Once she was completely dead, she was (in imagery) able to drive the car around the exit again with much less terror than before. Introduced into her ensuing imageries was a Protecting Self holding a baseball bat who sat on the front fender of the car as the Driver part of her drove the car around the exit. As the road started to lift off the earth, the part of her on the fender would beat back the road with the baseball bat, yelling at the road to stay down where it belonged. These fantasies were immensely satisfying to her.

She began to be able to employ them in the real world. Soon, she had a number of successful trips on real-life freeway exits, and began to positively reinforce herself about her ability to be in control.

Imagery work is often useful. In this case, the two psychological components of her phobia were out-of-control and fear-of loss. The client images the phobia-producing activity in detail and imagines exaggerating it to the extreme consequence. Usually the person will

die (in the fantasy), perhaps several times. Apparently, once the death-wish component of the psyche has been completely satisfied, the life-wish is able to come forward.

The next step is to gain back the illusion of control. Anger is useful. In imagery, this client learned to access her rage, then use imagined violence, to force the universe to behave as she wanted it to.

□ Another idea is to employ systematic desensitization. This behavioral intervention involves the person mastering the phobia-produced terror in small increments, first in fantasy and then in real life. Baby steps.

In a perfect world, with perfect psychotherapy, a phobia should disappear altogether. However, phobia is often a representative of underlying trauma. When one phobia is removed or diluted, the expression of fear transfers into another arena.

♩

**Q. She has stopped being abused by employers and sexual partners. She confronted her family and made many major life changes. Now, she is depressed. I did not expect this response.**

**A.** It's not unusual for there to be more to a person's dysfunction than their abuse. Although she has changed her life externally, her other internal work is still undone.

This woman has disobeyed her family rules and taken control of her life. She gave up her childhood illusions of security. Her family is angry with her, and has all but abandoned her. She is confronted with the existential fact that she is alone in the universe.

She understands that if she is going to have quality in her life, she has to take responsibility for generating that quality. So she feels angry, helpless, and overwhelmed. And, she defends against her overwhelmedness by being depressed. That all sounds pretty normal.

In session, continue to hold her in a environment of positive regard. With higher self-esteem and the support of psychotherapy, chances are good she will adjust to her life changes and move through her depression.

□ Invite her to explore the experiences against which the depression is a defense.

□ Invite her to explore how she depresses herself.

□ Invite her to explore the part of her who did not expect this response.

□ Invite her to explore the relationship between expectations and depression.

□ The word depression has a "press" part to work with. Wonder how this woman is pressing or pressuring herself these days.

□ Invite her to put abuse back into her life so she can stop being depressed.

□ A depression is also a sunken place. Invite her to fill the emptiness with something else.

□ Invite her to go on an imaginary archaeological dig. Suggest she take a shovel and discover what's underneath the depression (a.k.a whatever it is that the depression is suppressing.)

□ Wonder out loud what she is angry about.

♩

**Q. She is twelve. She won't cooperate at home and does the minimum she has to do in session, too. She is passive-aggressive. For example, I'll ask her to do a drawing or ask her a question, and she'll draw a stick figure or shrug. Her attitude is, "I don't want to do much, I'd rather sit home and watch T.V."**

**Q.** Angry pubescent twelve-year-old girls are supposed to be passive-aggressive, aren't they? It's probably a Law of Nature. The down side is, of course, that depressive behavior can become habitual.

Since you want this child to be different than she is, when she is with you, and the mother wants this child to be different than she is when she is with the mother, then there is no difference between the time the girl spends with you and the time she spends with her mother. It seems it would be less expensive for the mother for the girl to simply stay at home.

□ Begin immediately to provide a different environment, one where there are no expectations, no investments, no criticisms, no name-calls, and no disapprovals.

□ Tell her you have been her to be different and that you're not going to do that anymore.

Given that her parents insist she come to session, set some limits for yourself while she's there. How about telling yourself something like, "Barring physical harm, I'm going sit back and allow this girl to be herself and to do what she wants. She can be quiet, withdraw, be mad, talk with me, wander around the room, daydream bring a book, draw on the board, make collages, whatever she wants. Find the part of you who sees the miracle in her. Provide her with the amazing, healing experience of spending one hour a week where someone accepts her just the way she is.

□ Take responsibility for your invitations rather than demand responses from her. Even well-meaning questions like "How are you today?" can be perceived as a demand for a response. So when you do invite her to do something, invite indirectly, with no agenda, on your part, regarding the outcome of your invitation. "

*"I wonder what you'll draw today."*

**At the end of the month her parents are going to ask me what to do with her.**

□ Tell the girl about the upcoming phone call. Wonder if she can think of anything her parents could do to make it better at home. Invite her to tell you what she'd like you to say or do vis a vis the phone call, or her parents. She may only be able to tell you nonverbally, so have your receiver turned on.

♩

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