

**Q. I work with a group of teen boys. In order to facilitate the release of their hostilities, I occasionally let them yell at me and hit me with the bataca.**

**A.** I applaud you for being actively involved as you invite these young people to free up and get in touch with themselves. But I gotta tell ya, it's not okay with me that you put yourself in harm's way during a session.

When you allow people to assault you, even with the best of intentions, *even pretending*, you reinforce the dysfunctional myth (particularly with young people) that the only way to release hostilities is to hurt someone or something else

□ Wean both yourself and these boys away from abuse. Many possibilities lie between the simple experiencing of emotion and the physical expression of anger onto an organic being (who, in this case, is you).

☞ Instead of volunteering your body for abuse, instruct the boys to draw a body shape onto a large piece of paper. Features and clothing can be added onto this paper. Invite the boys to yell at the paper person. They can hit it with the bataca. Let 'em rip it up.

☞ Use objects as substitute aggression tools. There is an immediate and pleasurable reward in the sound that a tennis racket makes on a stuffed cotton pillow. It feels powerful, release energy, and nobody gets hurt.

☞ Throwing things at targets (as they, at the same time, focus on the experience of anger, annoyance, resentment, or whatever) is another way to invite the connecting of emotions with physical sensations.

☞ Encourage these boys to learn that the focus of their rage does not have to be present in order for them to resolve either their emotion or their issue.

☞ Once a person gets in touch with what it means to feel and release I-don't-like-it energy, invite the use of imagery as a way to connect with and release emotion. The planet can be exploded, bad-guy

people can be humiliated, confronted, or killed—all with no consequences and nothing with a nervous system gets hurt.

☞ Teach group stomping and noise making, rhythmic or not. For example, everyone stands and yells, "I'm angry" (stomp, grimace), "I'm angry" (stomp, grimace), "I'm angry (stomp...)"

☞ Use art, music or dance: "Show how you feel."

☞ *Very slow-motion* group fighting invites kids to connect with themselves as they act-out. (This also invites rolling on the floor laughing, so...)

☞ Enroll in an Aikido course. Use what you learn there to teach these boys how to step out of the way of aggression—out of love for themselves as opposed to fear-of, or anger-at, the Other Guy.

☞ Teach and practice meditation.

☞ Wean them away from the notion, "If I am angry, damage has to occur." Invite them to experiment with feeling their emotion and *not-doing* anything at all: no expression, no repression—only conscious awareness of their experience.

Invite these kids to learn the difference between self-control and repression. Encourage them to choose *not* to hurt people or things. That includes themselves. As long as an individual perceives the world in such a way that he experiences anger, have as your goal, that you promote the resolution of anger without abuse.

**The kids also like to have me join them in their acting out, calling names and...**

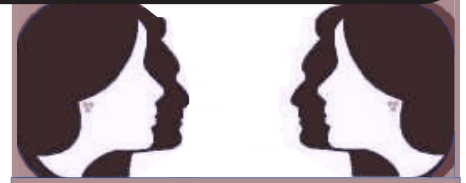
Once you have joined them, lead them.

□ Invite them to own both their emotions and their behavior.

☞ Weed out blaming from the communication repertoire. Substitute statements that take responsibility for emotions:

I'm really mad at you right now," instead of "You make me so mad," or "You're a dirty rat."

"When such and so happens, I get angry, and then I blame you," instead of "I'm really mad at you."



☞ In group, encourage the addition of compromise or solution to statements of displeasure:

"...and what I want you to (do, say, think, change, whatever) right now is..."

**Q. This family looks to me for direction. I need ideas.**

**A.** One place to look for ideas is in your personal psychotherapeutic theory. For example, what should happen in family counseling that usually does not happen at home?

**Clear communication.**

So set up a structure in session where the task is to communicate clearly.

□ Ask them what they want to work on during this session. Then, as they discuss what they want, intervene with communication suggestions, observations, and invitations to experiment with options.

☞ If they don't know what they want, invite them to explore how it is not to know what they want.

☞ Invite each of them to add after they speak, "Now that I've said that, one thing I notice about myself right now is..."

☞ Direct each to tell the other all the things they wanted that day and how they contributed to getting them or not.

☞ Direct each of the adults to tell where they first learned to look outside themselves for direction and how that has impacted their lives.

☞ Invite the parents to teach the children everything they know about looking inside for the answers.

☞ Invite each person to simply review their day. As they get comfortable with direct communication, add confessions and brags.

☞ Whatever structure you set up, remember that your structure is just a context within which their process can

be noticed and fiddled with. No matter what they do in session, encourage each of them to look at and connect with each other physically as they communicate.

☞ Invite them to listen for understanding rather than for an opportunity to solution-give, consciously connect with their internal experiences, share what is going on with them as they tell their story, and take responsibility for as many of their emotions, behaviors and responses as they are willing.

♩

**Q. She often stops herself by saying she might as well give up since she is not in charge.**

**A.** Invite awareness. Agree with her.

☐ Wonder what would happen if she gave up giving up. Suggest she find out, right now.

☐ Discuss, with her, the difference between giving-up and giving-in. I'm defining "giving up" as *appearing* to stop trying, but in fact holding onto to anger and frustration that she can't have what she wants, and "giving-in" as letting go of resistance to the existential truth that she is, in fact, not in charge.

☐ Propose that she actually give up and let *you* be "in charge." Then tell her what to do.

☞ Then invite fantasy, breath work, sandtray, chairwork, enactments, whatever your intuition fancies. Anytime she resists, wonder out loud if she would like to take charge again.

☐ If she is willing to give a try to whatever you suggest, go for the deepest intervention with which you are comfortable.

*"How long have you been trying to get other people to be responsible for your actions?"*

*"See how long you can pay attention to yourself and name out loud everything you notice, thoughts, body experiences, emotions, ..."*

## Creating Well-being by Elanah Kutik

It is curious how sometimes certain incidents will provoke great anger and reactivity within me while, other times, I can remain perfectly placid and unruffled. Today was one of those days.

I was driving to work and managed to incite the ire of the driver behind me. It happened as I was nearing an intersection and saw the light turn yellow. I hesitated briefly—in one of those momentary mental toss-ups that probably feel much longer than they actually are—trying to decide which would be riskier: to run a red light or to be forced to stop more quickly than felt comfortable.

I glanced in my rearview and judged that a short stop would put neither me nor the car behind me in danger, so I stepped on the brake. The stop didn't feel as abrupt as I had, in fact, imagined. I felt surprised, then, to hear a long, angry beep from the car behind me. The car continued to beep.

Looking in the mirror this time, I was treated to a rude gesture repeated over and over with force. Confusion hit me, then mild amusement. For the briefest moment, I recognized the delicious temptation to return the gesture or to turn around and blow kisses in a passive-aggressive act. I confess that I felt the faintest wisp of defensiveness blooming along with a bit of self-righteous blame: "How dare you get mad at me? I was only following the law! You couldn't have made

it through the intersection in time even if I went through it! If you're upset about my stopping suddenly, you were probably tailing my car too closely."

In less time than it takes to recount my thoughts here, I had already begun to find a state of greater balance. I suddenly noticed my defenses giving way to real empathy for the other driver, imagining her point of view and sending her compassion. I also noticed a willingness and ability to bring that same empathy to myself, finding a level of self-acceptance and confidence that has often been lacking in the past.

Sitting and waiting for the light to turn, I found myself playing out an imaginary dialogue between us where I openly listened to her express her viewpoint. At one point, I got a little stuck—feeling the old, familiar urge to explain myself, to say "okay, BUT..." I could feel the sticky residue of stubbornness holding me back, keeping me attached to my need to be right. So, I tried even harder to put myself in her shoes and to let her know, mentally, how it might have felt for me to be in her situation.

I was grateful for this exercise because it gave me the equanimity to withstand her hateful diatribe and continue sending out compassion as she pulled up alongside me at the next red light, spewing insults about me and my driving and shouting like a mad woman, complaining how everything in her car had gone flying. I sat calmly in

my seat, secure within myself, not from the standpoint of being personally right, but rather from a larger perspective that allowed for each of us to be right. Or, perhaps, rather to acknowledge that we simply came to different judgments about the same event; neither was right, neither was wrong.

On the remainder of my drive to work, I was aware of a powerful shift in me. I could receive another person's expression of rage without taking it on, without feeling responsible for it, and without feeling hurt or angered in turn. I could, more importantly, allow myself to feel empathy for someone else without abandoning myself. To be able to hold my own—especially in such a difficult and unpleasant situation—is what it means to be in well-being. I am coming to realize that I can create well-being for myself more and more by surrendering my desire to be right, which sometimes translates as the need to be better, smarter, faster, nicer, and so on.

What a different world it would be if we could take responsibility for our own feelings, allowing others to have theirs and not need to convert them to our point of view. It is our need to be right that keeps us feeling separate and gives birth to confrontation. And it is in the relinquishing of that stance where we can find true empathy for one another and, ultimately, feel abiding connection.

"Lie down on the floor. Make fists, kick your feet, and yell, "NO," over and over again."

"Lie down. Get comfortable. Breathe on purpose. In your nose, out your mouth. Yes, like that. That light-headed feeling is oxygen suffusing your body. Whatever you're doing, let yourself do it more. Stay with it as long as you can. I am right here next to you..."

□ Anytime she wants to give up, ask her, "Who's in charge of giving up?"

"Who's in charge of being in charge?"

♩

**Q. A fifteen-year-old perpetrator feels finished with the work around his molest of his younger sister but in all this time he has never admitted that he molested his brother too. He now wants family sessions. Should we (I and the sibs' therapists) wait until he 'fesses up before arranging family sessions?**

**A.** When the victims are ready to confront their molester, that will be the time to arrange a group session. They will be ready when they can say some version of, "You did such and so and what I want is for you to take responsibility," without being abusive to their abuser. Any confrontations about the extent of the molests will happen at that time.

Once he has been re-accused, this boy will have something to work on in his individual sessions. He can explore his embarrassment at having lied to you, his denial, and his distrust of you.

In the meantime, do not participate in a re-enactment of the abuse by being the victim. You are the victim if you see only his positive side, not-remember that he is regularly lying to you, or seduce yourself into thinking that he has nothing to work on just because he says so.

**He's court ordered to counseling so he's stuck coming, but he thinks he's done, so what should we work on?**

□ Put the responsibility on him to decide.

"As long as you have to be here, what do you want to get for yourself today?"

"Okay, let's do a family session right now. Imagine your family is in these empty chairs. Who is sitting in this chair? Who's in this one? So what do you want to say to each one? Now go sit

in each chair and speak from the point of view of the person you have assigned to that chair."

Even if there is no specified subject during a session, he is still working. Since he is withholding part of himself from you, he is transferred onto you and is certainly working on Something Important.

**I think he wants to impress me and that's why he is not copping to the other molests.**

For adolescents or adults, our puritanical culture makes it difficult to admit to bisexuality. If he is in the developmental stage where he wants you to think he is great, he will not confess to anything that might disturb his fantasy of your image of him. The content of the sessions does not matter. He is working on his self-esteem.

□ Be clear about your recommendation of who goes to which sessions. Set clear limits around which kinds of sessions in which you are available to participate. Hold to those limits.

□ Again, do not reinforce abusive patterns. As with any human being, reward positive behavior and ignore the negative.

♣ If he wants you to be impressed, then make being impressed an intervention. Be impressed only by introspection, truth-telling, forthrightness, intimacy, simplicity, and connection to Self in the moment. Have no response to other behaviors. Pay attention to his responses.

□ Consider that not-mentioning the second molest, co-behaves this boy's denial system.

□ One idea is to be direct; tell your truth.

"I realize you feel done with therapy and I want you to know I don't agree. One of the things I suspect you may not be finished with is your relationship with your brother."

♣ What's your response to that?

♣ Let's work on it right now."

♣ What's it like when I don't agree with you?

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**Q. A man began to tell me about his sexual fantasies. I was uncomfortable and stopped him. The next weeks were taken up with how angry he was with me.**

**A.** In session, taking care of yourself includes protecting yourself *before* you

get angry, before you feel out of control, before somebody steps over your limits, and before you are internally invited to abuse either yourself or the other person.

Your first priority is to take care of yourself, as you have done. Trust yourself and continue on as you are doing.

It does not matter that you are countertransferred. If you are unwilling to work with him around sexual issues, then don't. If he is willing to continue therapy within those limits, he can explore his issues on a stage other than a sexual one.

Chances are this man's work will be much more about boundaries, and about his anger that he cannot control you, than it will be about sex.

**But these were sexual fantasies about Me.**

□ So tell your truth, set firm limits for yourself, and stick to them.

"I understand you don't like it when I impose limits on what you talk about. I feel manipulated and aggressed-on when you get detailed in your sexual fantasies of me. At this point I am unable to stay in positive regard when you do that. And that's not how I want to be when I'm with you."

If you decide you want to find a way to continue with this person, I invite you to find a way to change your perception of your discomfort.

Think of your discomfort as an inner clue to work with his attempted seduction. Consider the possibility that he may be imagining the only way to get you to choose him is to be sexual with you. Or he may be imagining that the only way to drive you away is to be sexual with you. Either way, that piece of the work is about intimacy, anger, and fear (his, not yours).

And in your personal therapeutic work, I suggest you experiment with ways you might begin transcending your discomfort with whatever someone else thinks or fantasizes about you.

Explore opening up to your fears of sexuality so that, in session at least, you can provide a container of positive regard for his.

Remember that all parts of any fantasy are projections of lost, disowned, forgotten about, or thrown away parts of the fantasizer's own personality. His version of you has absolutely nothing to do with you. He may *think* he knows you, but he doesn't know *you*. His version of you in his

fantasy may have your face on it, at least this week, but it isn't you. If you can keep that perspective, this type of work won't be so uncomfortable.

☐ An idea from Freud that might help you with this particular individual is to position your chair in back of him, so that he cannot see you and has only himself to look at. There are any number of people who are unwilling or unable to introspect if another person is in view. Their need to guard themselves or their sensitivity to visual input seems, to them, too great to overcome.

☐ Some people are more easily able to focus inwardly if they close their eyes while they work.

☐ Work with a sexual fantasy the same as you would work with any other fantasy. Keep focusing attention on the here and now by inviting the person to introspect.

☐ While working with any fantasy, dream, story, artistic endeavor, etc. it is useful to:

☞ Encourage (both in your mind and in the client's mind) a separation between, for example, the person's actual wife and the "wife in the dream," yourself as the therapist and "the therapist in the drawing," the George in the therapy room and the George in the photograph, etc. As you direct the various conversations, using phrases such as those can help *you*, at least, stay out of the client's distorted system.

☞ Keep inviting him to introspect (all the while not needing him to introspect, of course). Once he is introspecting, it will be easier for you to keep in mind that the "you," both in the seduction and in the fantasy, is only a prop and has nothing to do with you, the person.

☐ Instead of encouraging conversation with *you*, invite the conversations to be between the fantasizer and his various

fantasies. Direct clients to *talk-to* as opposed to *tell-about*.

☞ "So be the voice of the \_(fill in the blank)\_ in your fantasy. What does \_(fill in the blank)\_ have to say to you right now?...And what's your first response to that?...Well tell that to \_(fill in the blank)\_."

☞ "So now be the \_(another part of the fantasy)\_ . Let him/her/them/it say its message to you."

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### **Q. You're always saying, don't listen to the content. How can you not?**

**A.** When you first start driving a car, if you focus your gaze close to the car, you will steer crookedly down the road and not see anything but what is directly in front of you. Until, that is, you crash into something because you weren't able to anticipate what was coming.

A good driving instructor will suggest, instead, that you look as far ahead of you as you can and aim in that direction. By saying this, he does not mean that you should focus *only* on "as far ahead of you as you can."

An experienced driver learns to aim far ahead and, at the same time, widen his perspective to include everything in front of him and most everything on either side. To do this, he has to widen (or soften) his gaze just a little as opposed to focusing hard on just one area.

As the light from everything in front of him enters his eyes, his focus flits from the behavior of the cars ahead, to the horizon, to the dashboard, and so on. While his eyes are doing all the flitting, his brain is filtering the incoming information. It's job, (and what this brain is good at) is to alert him to changes, things that are "different," anomalies, and anything that might be important for his safety.

The paradox is that the smaller the area upon which you are focused, the less information you have about everything else.

Like wise, in session, I suggest you not focus so hard on what you see or on what you hear. Light waves will enter your eyes;

sound waves will enter your ears. Instead of sharpening your vision or your hearing, soften your vision and soften your ears. Your brain will sort all the incoming information. Then the master psychotherapist lurking about in your subconscious will share what it deems is most likely to benefit you.

Next time you drive a car, notice that your brain usually communicates with you in biochemicals, electricity, pictures, memories, felt sensations in your body, etc. For example if there is danger, your brain doesn't say the word, "Stop!" it injects your bloodstream with adrenaline and lets you decide what to do with it. In milliseconds you are clear that some sort of action on your part is appropriate.

Similarly, in session, as you allow your visual focus to soften a bit, or use your 'Aikido ears,' as you pay attention to the pictures in your head, the song traveling from one ear to the other, the memory that pops up, or any other of your somatic activities, an idea suddenly morphs forward into your awareness. Use it.

To be the best therapist you can be, start today to trust yourself totally. Your intellect (conscious mind) seeks to interpret the world rationally and does so with half (perhaps less) of your brain. Your intuition (subconscious) relies not on words, intellect, or rationality. It communicates with you through metaphors, the proprioceptive system, images, music, art, emotions, body experiences, etc.

You have two observing brains. (I suspect that instead of being one thing, each actually consists of a rather large and vociferous committee.) Neither is perfect; both are educable. Both make mistakes from time to time; neither will lie to you.

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### **Q. How do you respond to a client's general questionings?**

**A.** Anyway you want to: be serious, get creative, lie, tell the truth, whatever. Work with the responses.

☐ Answer simply and directly, then invite the client's attention back on himself.

*"Well yes, sometimes I do. What do you notice about yourself as you hear that?"*

*"I have no idea. What's your response?"*


*"Absolutely not. How is that for you?"*

☐ Respond to the process.

*"What you want from me makes sense. I'm wondering what you want from yourself right now?"*

On Becoming a Psychotherapist  
**In session...**

Recognize that, from your client's perspective, the moment he steps across the threshold of your office door, you are in a re-enactment of some unresolved part of your client's life. Wonder what part of his drama he is projecting onto you, right now.  
And how about right now? And now?...



The illustration shows a black silhouette of a person running to the right, carrying a basket of flowers. The scene is framed by a decorative border of small pink flowers and green grass at the bottom.

"I hear what you want; what is it you need?"

"I'm guessing you want some approval from me right now. Is that true?"

"Now ask that question to the part of you who already knows the answer."

Deflect the question

"If you totally trusted Yourself right now, what would Your answer be?"

**What if they ask you a direct question?**

Either answer it, then put the attention back on them.

"Forty two, as far as I know. "What's Your answer to that?"

Or do *not* answer it, then put the attention back on them.

"What would the perfect answer be?"

"I'm not going to answer that. Describe what it's like for you when I don't do what you want."

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**Q. I provide temporary counseling at a school and...**

**Q. One administrator will actually walk into a student's counseling session to tell me what she wants.**

**Q. I have a hard time saying no when asked to spend extra time at the school.**

**Q. The vice principal wants me to see only children with disciplinary problems. I don't want to.**

**Q. One teacher will try being a therapist with me, asking me how I feel, etc.**

**Q. The children were at assembly. None were unavailable. The administration didn't even bother to tell me.**

**Q. The principal was annoyed when I would not violate confidentiality.**

**Q. The teacher gossips about the child and wants me to reciprocate.**

**A.** So here's the bad news. The person who wants something to change is the person who has to do something different.

In a school environment, it is easy to slide back into the "I'm one-down; the other-guy is the authority" relationship of childhood. It is also easy to intimidate yourself and to forget that you are an adult and a professional member of the staff. As a rather tall child or as an adult, in any group, you will, over time, get treated only as respectfully as you treat yourself.

You may find it helpful to rehearse, in advance, a number of mentally healthy responses to potential communication hazards. Then within a frame of love for yourself and respect for the other guy—

- Find the positive intent and/or validate/join their point of view
- Take responsibility for your part of the problem
- Take responsibility for your part of the solution.
- If you can, end by putting the attention back on them

"Ms. Administrator, I'm sure you have something important to tell me, but we're in the middle of a session right now. I'll be

available to talk with you at two o'clock. Where shall I meet with you?"

"I understand you'd like me to be here until five o'clock, but I have a prior commitment (to my integrity) and I'm not available after four."

"The children you send me certainly need to be in counseling, Mr. Vice Principal. I'll see each of them one time, of course, but after that, counseling works best for children who want to be there."

"Thanks for taking an interest, Mrs. T. but I'm uncomfortable being that personal. I'm going to stop now. See you next Tuesday."

**So here's the bad news. The person who wants something to change is the person who has to do something different.**

"I'm not happy when I get here and all the children are unavailable. From now on, I'll try to call ahead and check before I come. What might you be willing to do?"

"I imagine you're annoyed when the information you want isn't forthcoming. I guess I didn't make it clear that, unless there is danger, I don't talk about the children with anyone without written permission from the parents."

"I appreciate your caring about this child. What ideas have you come up with? Oh, well, let me know if his behavior improves. I need to go back to work now. Bye."

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**Q. He won't talk or share very much. He likes games, so I guess I should bring a board game into session.**

**A.** If you want to use a board game, do so because it celebrates your creativity and competency rather than because it is another manipulation in your drive to get him to talk and share.

Another idea is to make up a game. Ideally, the game you create will mirror his process in some way. For example, it might parallel the process going on between the two of you or it perhaps parallel his process relative to his outside-of-therapy life.

Use any objects found in your office. Marbles, dominoes, sandtray objects, erasers, plastic army men, even whatever he has in his pockets can all be used effectively. At first, make up any old rules. Feel free to change them as you go along in order to make them fit.

**I keep trying different ways to connect. Whenever I ask, he won't talk about his issues.**

Mirror that process. Devise a game where you try to connect with him and he has to make sure you do not.

"Okay here are the rules. I try to lob these little wads of paper in between any space you make with your fingers. You try to keep me out."

If you start to win, remind him of the rules.

"Hey, close that goal up, I'm not supposed to be able to connect with you yet."

At first, be against one another, later reverse the process: He tries to connect and you do not let him. Later still, devise a way for you both to be on the same team with a common goal. Wonder out loud which way is the most fun, frustrating or familiar to him.

Another idea is for you to stop needing him to do or share anything.

With this boy, as well as any client, your first job (as I define it) is to provide a container of absolute positive regard.

That's an environment whereby you regard him with trust and delight.

In your mind, re-define "not talking or sharing very much" as the perfect thing for him to be doing at this point in his development.

Find a way to let it be okay that he doesn't want to talk.

☞ Provide paper and markers. Perhaps both of you might draw, scribble, or whatever else the markers want to do with the paper.

☞ Introduce the type of sandtray that doesn't include having a tray, or sand, or figurines: Take a large piece of paper, the desktop, or a space on the rug marked off with some string, then add whatever is in this boy's pocket at the time—et voilà, a sandtray.

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**Q. I can't decide whether to see the kid alone or in family therapy. He says he wants help alone and that's what the family wants too. However, I'd like to invite them all in to look at some family patterns.**

**A.** Trust yourself. Invite them all in and invite the boy in by himself.

In a family session, tell them your 'druthers and let go of any attachment to getting what you want.

*"Jimmy says he wants help alone and I understand that's what the family wants too. However, I would like to invite you all in to look at some family patterns."*

If the family has the money, time, and interest, they will comply with your wishes. If not, the worst that will happen is you will not get what you want.

Either way, be prepared not to get exactly what you want.

Do not violate yourself and agree to do something you are unwilling to do, but do leave wide enough parameters in what you want so that you can be negotiable. As long as the treatment plan stays within your belief system, you will be honoring yourself.

Remember that during the negotiating process, the family will be learning (by

your model) to propose, counter-propose, and still remain friends even when a person does not get exactly what they wanted in the first place.

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**Q. Four out of the fifteen people in my group behave inappropriately and act out. They're all adults, too!**

**A.** If group members are determined to sabotage or break up the group, you cannot expect to do the kinds of things you would do with cooperative folks. There is no way the group can work if the group is not a safe place to be.

So your first task in any group is to set parameters for safety. Sometimes honoring one's limits is all the group leader can do in session. That should keep you quite busy. Anything else you manage to accomplish is nice, but extra.

Engage group members in solving the problem. All are part of the system, even the ones who are not actively antagonistic.

**They want to do as little as they can do.**

And then blame you when the group is not a positive experience?

**Yes.**

Go along with the process.

*"So to begin our work today, I'm going suggest a number of different things. Here are your two instructions. 1. Whatever I suggest, a least two of you guys have to argue with it. Who volunteers. Okay, you and you. Now 2. Uh...(looks around and points to someone). You make sure nobody does what I suggest, okay? Here we go. My first suggestion is (whatever)..."*

*...Wait a minute, two of you are supposed to argue with me. What's going on? And (speaking to the person you pointed out a minute ago) that guy over there actually started to do what I asked. You're supposed to stop him. C'mon you guys. Cooperate. Okay let's try it again.*

**What about when some people really want to work but you have to spend your time dealing with the acting-out contingent?**

Just as in a family session where there is an acting-out subsystem, the work is about how the others can take care

of themselves around the distracting behavior.

One way is to stop everything and give the needy people total attention until they get Enough.

Other techniques include modeling self-care or, within the limits of safety, ignoring negative behavior, and attending only to the positive.

☞ Sometimes the only way is to eliminate the acting-out people from the environment. In a group, that translates to insisting that certain members not attend.

**Well, I am real irritable. I just don't have the mental energy to deal with their constant testing. Actually, I have the techniques but I don't want to.**

Unexpressed anger is exhausting. An irritated leader who is overwhelmed or is to the point where she is depressed and does not care, is not setting limits for safety, or anything else.

Stop whatever it is you are doing in group and do something else.

Set limits for yourself and keep them.

Refuse entry of any more people into the group until you gain session control.

Stop wanting them to be different.

Get somebody else to do the group.

**They act like little kids and I get angry when their behavior disrupts whatever activity the group is doing.**

Let go of needing certain activities to be accomplished during the session. Work with the group's process.

Think of the disruption as the activity.

☞ Use their response to the disruption as an intervention.

**I just don't have the energy.**

Before the next session, try going into the room alone. Recall who attends and where they usually sit. Recall your experience of frustration when you are in the group. Move around from one imaginary person to the other and either literally or in your imagination, yell at 'em, beat 'em up kill 'em, whatever. Hit pillows; tear each imaginary person each limb from limb or whatever satisfies your inner hunter-gatherer troglodyte. You might also want to connect with your anger at the more passive members of the group for not helping you with the ones who act out.

Whatever anger you connect with and release will give you much needed energy and will usually propel you into a more available emotionally positive space.

You'd be surprised how easy it is to talk to or deal with a person whom you've just beheaded.

#### **I like that.**

Another idea, and as a role model for non-abusive anger, take time to release your anger in group.

*"I'm annoyed and I'm going to take three minutes to stomp around the room, be unreasonable and say everything I'm mad at. Who will time me? Okay, here I go..."*

Then find a way to access and express your anger in a safe and non-abusive way. When the time is up, if you are not done say, "Well, I'm not done yet; I need a couple more minutes."

When you are finished, take a moment to connect with yourself and say, "Okay, I'm done. So now what do you all want to do with the rest of this hour?"

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#### **Q. The parents won't come to session without the kids. I am out of ideas for working with the whole family.**

**A.** One thing you might do is give up the idea that you have to have ideas. Another thing you might do is trust that your own process in session almost always has something to do with the client's work.

In this case, perhaps you are out of ideas for working with the whole family because the "whole family" is not who needs to be worked with. Get smaller. How about starting by focusing attention on the parents' system?

#### **The parents want only to talk about their girls.**

Direct the girls to sit on the sidelines. They can mess around the with art supplies or sandtray toys. You can attend to how the parents are with one another as they talk about how awful their girls are. Invite the parents to take responsibility for their perceptions of their daughters' behaviors.

When one of the adults says something like, "Jane makes me so mad. She is rude and doesn't care about anybody but herself," encourage that person to, "say that again" while taking ownership of the problem: "When Jane leaves her clothes on the floor *again*, I feel discouraged and overwhelmed. Then I have a hard time seeing her in a positive light."

#### **Should I just send the girls out of the room?**

My guess is that the girls are already aware of the content of their parents' discussions, at least on an intellectual level. As your attention is paid to family process and as you invite the parents to take as much ownership as they are willing, the girls will be listening. If so, they will become aware, over time, that they are not the only problem in this family. Once the girls begin to understand they are not the only bad-guys, they will find something to do in the room while their parents talk with you. They'll absorb what they need to and not-notice the rest.

As the parents' work progresses, and from time to time, and as the girls are willing, I suggest you use them as props in whatever communication options the parents are experimenting with.

It is possible that as the parents become more conscious, one or both of the adults might suggest the girls be excluded.

#### **I don't understand. Why would they want to get the girls out of the room if they were more conscious.**

Your description of this couple as wanting "only to talk about the girls," immediately alerted my inner suspicion antenna. My first guess is that the parents want the girls in the room so they can tattle on them, hoping that you, a "professional," will agree with them—public embarrassment being a form of punishment.

If so, then should the parents eventually wish the girls *not* to be in the room, it is possible that the adults are beginning to understand that the girls aren't the only ones whose behaviors are making family life harder than it needs to be.

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#### **Q. When a client gives me a gift, I just say thanks and put it on the shelf.**

#### **Q. Well, I think gifts are bribes. I don't accept gifts. In the past I've given them back.**

**A.** I have no problem with either of those behaviors. But before you take any action,

I suggest you find a way to use all gifts in the client's work.

*"What is the relationship between this gift and the issue you've been working on?"*

*"How are you the same as this gift?"*

*"What are the words this gift represents?"*

*"Thank you so much. I appreciate this. What do you notice about yourself as I tell you that?"*

*"Thanks a lot. What happens (throwing it in the trash can) when I don't appreciate your effort? Who else treats your gifts of love that way?"*

*"What could I say or do right now that would be the perfect response?"*

Keeping a gift or giving it back is not the issue. Acting from integrity is what is important. Receive the gift warmly, use it as an intervention, and/or give it back with an explanation of your ethics.

Exhibit a positive role model, either in how to receive or in how to honor one's value system and say, "No."

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#### **Q. She doesn't think she is worth taking time for. Not even in therapy. She talks about everyone but herself.**

**A.** Patiently invite her to focus her attention back onto and into herself.

*What are you experiencing as you talk about this person?*

*"What do you want right now?"*

*(Pointing toward an empty chair) "Tell him (the person you were talking about) what you just told me."*

With these kinds of interventions, she has to introspect if only to find out that she does not want to answer your question or take your suggestion. And each time she introspects, she gets one microsecond of connection with her experience. After a few thousand nano-litres of awareness-of-self, with luck she might accumulate enough connection to enable her to be a fraction less fearful and a tad more able to attend to herself in the moment.

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In session, consider the idea that several things are happening at the same time. While you are attending to the client's issue, considering intervention options, and generally doing your job, there are several relationships in play: the client's relationship with his issues, the client's relationship with himself, and the client's relationship with who/how/what he perceives you to be.

The "you" he perceives is who he thinks you are, who he wants you to be, or maybe a part of himself he's not yet ready to take ownership. You are but a cast member of an inner theater production, of which he is the writer, director, and producer.

Some clients will perceive you differently each time they come to session; others will cast you in one and only one scene forever. You may be perceived as the authority figure, rescuer, judge, fixer-upper, general bad-guy, one-who-knows-more-than-I-do, primary object, the Enemy, one more person who will be unable to help me, or any of a thousand roles.

From your perspective you may be happy, satisfied, and feeling good about yourself, but if the client perceives you as angry-at-me, then "angry-at-me" is the color of the glasses through which he perceives your actions and responses.

Understand (in session) that you are a character in two dramatizations at once. On one level, the drama he acts out with you parallels his relationship either with another person, a life event, or a part of himself with whom he is unresolved.

On a deeper level, all the parts in which he casts you are projections of himself onto externals. The psychotherapist is an extremely handy external on whom to project.

You may be a temporary stand-in for one or more parts of himself from whom he has become separated. His long-term therapeutic task is to re-own these parts of himself, accept, take responsibility for, and even love all the dialogues, wars, and relationships between them.

From the moment he crosses the threshold of your office at the beginning of each session, be aware that in his subconscious mind, you are part of his drama whether you want to be or not.

As the client begins therapy, your task is to understand that none of this has anything to do with you and to aim for a perspective of neutrality.

When you are in neutrality, you are not judging, knowing more than, trying to fix, or wanting something from. You are clear that anything the client sees in you, blames you for, responds to you 'as if,' or suspects you of, is about *him*—one hundred percent. Use this awareness to keep your own neuroses in the background, your boundaries intact, and your brain available to create interventions which invite him to connect with himself. From time to time you will, of course, find yourself out of neutrality. One way to restore yourself to balance is to use your countertransference in the work.

Your first step is to become aware of your over involvement, and to name it to yourself, if you can.

The second is to be curious about it, as opposed to being ashamed.

The third is to understand that even though your annoyance, agenda, concern, need, or projection is part of your own internal life-drama, you also represent, in this moment, in this room, a part of his.

Since your psyche is one of your finest therapeutic tools, I suggest you consider the following paradigm: You have an internal wanna-be-the-most-competent-psychotherapist-I-can-be, whose job it is to send ideas to your brain in order to enhance and enrich the work.

Occasionally muted by the cacophony of your personal issues and unable to get a thought to you directly, this inner competent therapist goes around to one of the back doors in your mind and employs the intensity of one of your own neurosis in order to get your attention.

Using this concept, instead of getting lost in your own responses, you can wonder what your annoyance, agenda, concern, need, or projection represents to the client and what role it plays in his psyche. In other words, you can skip the part about "Oh my gosh, I'm so XYX right now. It's getting in the way— Oh, no. I'm really not a very good therapist." Instead, you get to think, "Oh, I'm XYZ right now. That's one of my issues, for sure, but maybe that's the way my psyche is telling me, 'Hey, that's his issue too!'"

You may not always guess correctly but since your psyche loves you and wants you to be the therapist you can be, you might not be on home plate, but you'll probably be in the ball park.

Paying attention to the interaction

between the two of you and staying in a curious mode, your own issues can take a back seat. Your professional persona can come forward and return to the task of creating invitations for the client to use to connect with himself if he chooses.

Another way to understand this concept is to imagine you are in two places at once. For example, suppose you are in session asking a question. In the few seconds it takes the other person to ponder your inquiry, imagine you are in the audience looking at a stage on which two people are sitting. One of them has just asked a question, and the second person is thinking about the answer.

As you expand your perceptual frame to notice, "Hey, that's me! I'm both on the stage asking the question, and off the stage watching myself ask the question. I'm in his play and in mine!"

At the moment of this awareness, you are, at the same time, in the client's system consciously and you have freed yourself from the system in order to notice process and come up with ideas about how to work with his next response.

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