

## Integrative Ideas for the Process-Oriented Psychotherapist

**Q. I have a decision to make. I ...**

**A.** Now tell the whole story again, and this time, stay in your body.

**(Connects with self, listens to self, makes clear decision.) How did you know I wasn't in my body?**

I pay attention to demeanor and behavior changes. Also there are small changes in coloring, muscle movement, facial expression, posture, tonality, general tenseness, incongruous emotion, and externally focused words when someone is "out of their body."

Anytime you want to make a guess about what is going on for a client, imagine what you would be thinking, doing, or feeling if you had his tone, facial expression, or body posture. Whatever you decide your underlying message might be, guess that it belongs to him too. Your guess will never be exactly right. However, humans are more the same than different, so you will probably be in the ballpark most of the time. Work with the response to your guess, whatever it is. Remember, too that it is okay to be wrong. In fact, it may be desirable. Here's an example:

Thpst: (takes a guess at what client means)

Clnt: No, that's not right.

Thpst: (gleefully thinking a version of, "Oh goody.") Oh, okay. So say what *is* right.

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**Q. Among other things, his father fondled him from the age of five years old or so. He was told he was being "checked." He has a hard time with the idea that he was molested, maybe. What do you think?**

**A.** I think it doesn't matter if he thinks of himself as "molested" or not. You might ask him if he thinks if "checking" would be okay if it happened to *his* children.

**Okay, I'll do that. I'm certain he'll say no. So why would he be so reluctant to name what happened "molested?"**

Let's see—embarrassment, shame, not wanting to see oneself as a victim, the primal need to protect one's parents no matter what they do, disbelief that children are sexual,... I imagine you'll think of other reasons, too.

All human children are sexual. Each child matures into adult sexuality at his own pace. As his experiments allow him to expand his

levels of sexual awareness, there seems to be a sort of imprinting which occurs in the sexualization process. When a child is taken advantage of (exposed to someone else's learning curve) and or thrust into sexual situations for which he is not ready, negative imprinting often takes place.

As an adult, the molested or sexually abused person frequently finds that in order to become sexually aroused, the same ingredients need to be recreated that were in the molest/abuse situation: having no control, sneaking, hyper-focus on body parts, display, humiliation, violence, body wastes, pain, fear, anger, assault, exploitation, etc.

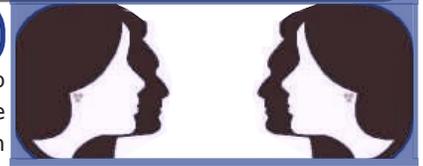
Molested boys in our culture often enter adulthood thinking they were lucky to be sexualized early—that somehow, early sexual behavior means they are "really sexy guys."

Even people in the know often think of molest as mostly happening to girls and as mostly perpetrated only by the funny uncle, randy grandfather, father with issues, older sibling, stranger in the park, sex offender down the street, and the like. Unfortunately, that is untrue.

Some folks also get the idea that a behavior isn't a sexual molest unless it involves the invasion of body cavities. Sexual molest is so much more than that. It involves exploitative behavior from a more experienced Other who pressures a child to become sexual at a pace other than Nature's prescribed sexual unfolding program *for that child*. Left on their own, there are few humans who wouldn't eventually "unfold" sexually. Really, no human child needs anyone's help.

In my opinion, any type of touching, looking, spying, teasing, belittling, or bullying within *someone else's* sexual milieu is a molest. Being assaulted or seeing other children assaulted without clothes on, having parents inappropriately involved in one's bathroom activities, and being inappropriately fondled in the name of good parenting are all molestations and sexual abuses. Exposure to sexual materials & behavior ("I was just trying to educate him") is also a molest activity.

And it isn't only men who are perpetrators. Mothers, grandmothers, aunts, baby-sitters, neighbors, etc. all do their part to contribute to what is a pandemic of trauma, passed from one generation to the next.



Let go of this man needing to define what happened to him as a molest. Treat it like any other incident from the past that needs exploring.

Invite him to explore his sexuality.

**He says his wife is not very responsive to him.**

He may have picked her for her unresponsiveness. On the other hand it is possible that he wants behavior from her that she has been unable to give, behavior that mirrors the molest. If this is true and since there is more to him sexually than a molest victim, invite him to explore how else he can be aroused and how he can take responsibility for making that happen.

Wonder out loud how, in the sexual arena of the marriage, he and his partner act out the perpetrator and victim roles.

Wonder, too, how the role of rescuer-who-doesn't-rescue is acted out. In the original molest, this is often a family member who colludes indirectly by managing *not* to notice what is going on. The victim usually protects this person from taking or being given any of the responsibility. In this man's family of origin, that rescuer-who-doesn't-rescue role was possibly played by the mother.

Invite him, also, to explore the template of the Perpetrator-Victim-Rescuer triangle and how it plays a part in his everyday, other-than-sexual life.

Suggest he explore his anger: anger in general, anger at his parents and other family members, anger at himself, frustrations, and I-don't-like-'ums from his childhood. His relationship with his father's lack of sexual boundaries may surface.

□ Invite him to explore his fears, anxieties, and concerns. Start with everyday adult anxieties and wonder how old he was when those fears began.

**He often says he feels sad about stuff.**

□ Invite him to open up to his sadness, connect to and experience the felt sensations associated with it, allow it, follow it, then find out where it takes him.

☞ While he's doing that, suggest he remember that there is more to him than his sadness. He can *experience* his sadness and be *curious* about it at the same time.

**Do you mean his depression?**

Not necessarily. He might need to open up to that too, but right now I'm suggesting you focus on the emotion at hand.

□ Invite him to explore how he might be responsive to *himself*, as opposed to looking to his wife for responsiveness.

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**Q. He is court-ordered to therapy. There will be a month when he isn't seeing anybody. I'm thinking of letting the social worker know that he isn't coming anymore.**

**A.** How come?

**Well, otherwise I feel like I'm not being responsible.**

Tattling is being over-enmeshed. When the social worker wants to know about this person's attendance, you will receive a letter requesting information. After making sure you have a current release of information from the client, reply with the truth. The social worker or the judge will decide whether a "month short" complies with legal stipulations or not.

**I don't feel comfortable tattling, but I don't want to jeopardize my standing with the social service system.**

If you do not like to tattle, then don't. Consider staying out of the system all together unless you are being paid to be an advocate for or against the court system.

**But if he's mandated, then he needs to come in.**

What is this "needs" part? If he does not want to come and if there are no immediate consequences from the court system when he does not, why should he?

**Well, there may be consequences later.**

Let's hope so. Learning that the court means business might be something important for this man to learn. If you rescue him, he may not learn it this time and will have to arrange another, perhaps even less attractive lesson for himself, later.

**But he needs therapy.**

Possibly so, but it is not up to you to determine what another adult needs or does not need. And it's not your business to get what he needs for him. Your job is to invite him to be conscious of his life-journey, not to direct it for him.

**Well, I want him to participate in his therapy. He is damaging his children.**

Most probably. Do you realize that you are counter-transferred?

**Wanting him to be treated is being countertransferred?**

Yes. Let him be the one who wants or doesn't want treatment.

Anytime you think you know what someone else needs, you are countertransferred. In this case, you are coming from both a one-up position (parental) and a one-down position (child). You have decided you know what is best for this person (parental), and at the same time you look externally for approval from the court (childlike). If you would like not to be so involved in this man's system, start by wanting something regarding his treatment that you can actually *get*, independent of anyone else. The best example I can think of, is to want something from *yourself*.

**Like I said, I want to feel like I'm being responsible.**

So in what other ways, besides micro-managing, might you meet your I'm-being-responsible needs.

**I guess I could ask the social worker if she wants to be informed.**

I like that. And here's another idea:

□ Tell your client your concerns and inclinations. And ask him to introspect and connect with his experience as you tell him.

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**Q. You suggested that even saying, "How are you today" at the beginning of a session can be countertransference. What do you mean?**

**A.** If you can say, "How are you today," without wanting, needing, or expecting an answer and, at the same time, you are paying attention to and available to work with his response, then you are *not* countertransferred. Your "question" is not a demand for information. Rather, it is an invitation into the psychotherapy, an invitation for the client to introspect in the here-and-now.

"How are you—I am fine" exchanges are ways we relate with each other socially. "I recognize you" is usually followed by some version of "I recognize and acknowledge you, too." We use these social conventions to allay our fears during beginnings, endings, and silent stretches. Psychotherapy sessions can have many of these uncomfortable, often anxiety producing moments.

Many mental health workers have what I call a form of agoraphobia, i.e. a fear of that empty space at the beginning of a session. The therapist feels compelled to fill it with something. Anything. I say wait. Get back into your own body. Be mindful and breathe through that upwelling of desire-to-speak. That empty space at the beginning of session is not *your* empty space. It is *his* empty space. Let *him* fill it.

Everything a person does in session has something to do with his therapy. And unless he is distracted, the first words out of a person's mouth often foreshadow that day's work. So by filling up the first moments with her need to socialize or assuage her anxiety, the psychotherapist's countertransference (her belief that she knows what he should be talking added to her need that he answer her question) may interfere with the natural flow of the client's psychological work. In many instances, questions such as "How're you doing?" and "So how did the homework go?" can be perceived as demands that the client speak to the therapist "right now." The client may already be working on something else.

Certainly, even in those first few seconds, the client's psyche knows more about what is most likely to move him towards resolution than you or I do.

Should you feel compelled to speak in the awkward time before a client begins his work, or if he should fall silent during the session, try an experiment:

□ Don't speak. Experience one of your own psychological edges. Stay in your body and breathe through the discomfort. You are not a bottomless pit; it will not last forever. Notice yourself but focus outward. Be available to respond to the other person's process rather than introducing your own. If the client indicates he is uncomfortable with the silence, use it in the work.

☞ Wait for the client to begin the session.

### What if they just sit there?

The have begun the session, but not by using words. Pay attention. *Something* will change. You may hear them sigh, or notice them moving restlessly in the chair. You may observe facial changes. Intuitive guesses may cross your mind. Interpret any change in their behavior or demeanor to be their psyche, speaking directly to you. Even silence can be explored.

Thpst: (sitting with an open heart, comfortable with Self, and available)

Clnt: (uncomfortable with the silence, suddenly looks at you quizzically)

You: (making a guess) I'm imagining you'd like me to start this session, is that true?

Clnt: (nods head)

Thpst: (Perceiving permission to start the session any way she chooses)

Okay. So...

### So what might I say if they start out with, "How are you?"

□ Use their question as an intervention and direct the focus back on them.

Clnt: How are you?

You: (briefly introspecting and choosing a response either from the list below or her own repertoire:)

"Right now I'm appreciating that you care. What's going on with you?"

"Make a statement out of that."

"My guess is you're not in your body right now. Is that true?"

"Notice what happens for you when I don't answer that question."

"Where is your attention right now?"

"On a scale of zero to ten, how frightened are you right now?"

"Ask yourself that question. Answer it out loud."

"Who, in your outside of session life, do you wish would care a little more about how you are?"

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**Q. This person is Very Angry. He also has a gun collection. I have told him my fears around that and requested that he let someone else care for the guns until the recent crisis in his life has passed. Am I doing enough?**

**A.** Let's see. You have been re-evaluating the likelihood of his violence each time you see him and have every intention of complying with your legal mandate in this state. You have been sharing your concerns with him and making direct requests. All well and good. Yet, from my point of view, the fact that you are worrying about his lethality and have brought it up in supervision indicates that no, you are not doing enough.

**He refuses to get rid of the guns. He has many excuses. My sense is he is able to contain his anger and won't really harm anybody, but my concern has tweaked his alarm. And now he is scared.**

□ His connection with the emotion of fear may predict his safety. Continue to do what you are doing—assess and share your assessments.

□ Suggest he keep all his guns. Instead, suggest he round up every bullet and cartridge available to him and give them to a friend until the life crisis is over.

### I like that. What if he won't get rid of ammunition?

Since your evaluation is that this man is safe enough to treat, then work with the refusal as you would any ordinary resistance.

He: No, I don't want to do that.

You: Say that again, and see if you can connect with the part of you who is really serious around that "No." Be curious about your experience.

(or) You: Who else do you want to say those words to? (Here's an empty chair. Tell that person now.)

□ The process of you making a request and his refusing it is an enactment. Use it as you would a sculpt. Replay both the requesting and the refusing part. Direct him to attend to his experiences.

☞ Switch roles. Invite him to take over and explore both the requesting and the refusing.

### Well, he'll just go home and decide not to.

□ When he returns, invite him to use imagery to recall and explore the nuances of his experience as he walked in his house, considered your request to get rid of his guns and decided not to disarm himself.

□ Ask to have a conversation, not with the rational part of him which he normally brings to session, but with the part of him who is irrational sometimes and who would love the chance to use the guns.

□ Invite an imagery where he explores what it's like to *be* a gun of his.

□ Invite him to recall a moment before this recent crisis in his life. Ask him to notice what it's like to be him, pre-crisis. Invite him to fast forward in his mind to the very beginning of the crisis.

☞ Suggest he use this imagery to get in touch with his fears and what, exactly, he was afraid of. You might treat this imagery as you would a dream: invite him to explore alternative actions he might have made or might make in future and/or similar situations.

**Q. She called me from home and said she was having a mini-anxiety attack. I wasn't sure what to do over the phone.**

**A.** Humans experience anxiety "attacks" when they are hyperfocused on the future as opposed to the here-and-now.

One way to intervene in a crisis is to invite the person to materialize out of their dissociative state back into the present.

□ Stay in the present moment and doggedly invite her to be here-now too, first with you and then with herself.

### On Becoming a Psychotherapist

#### In session...

Being just a little confused and not-knowing frees you up to make guesses and wonder from an authentic place. You'll also be able to create a learning environment as opposed to a teaching environment.

That's where the "teacher" has no agenda as to the outcome, and does not worry about whether her guesses are right or wrong.



☞ Since she perceives herself as under attack, tell her to take the phone into the bedroom, get into the bed, crawl under the covers, hide, and tell you when she's done all that.

☞ Once she feels safer, tell her to make a quick excursion outside of the covers, jump up and down, flail her arms, or perhaps hit the bed with a pillow and scream as you have practiced in session.

Instruct her then to jump back into bed and reconnect with you on the phone. After completing this

protection-expression cycle several times, she may have connected with her anger enough to dilute some of her fear.

☐ Next time she comes to session, you can invite her to explore and practice the anti-anxiety method of your choice. Here's one:

You: On a scale of zero to ten, how scared are you right now?

Clnt: Oh,... One. Zero.

You: What might happen here in session so that you would feel a little more scared?

Clnt: I dunno.

You: (pushing an empty chair closer to her) Here's ... (scary person or situation). Zero to ten, how scared are you now?

Clnt: Five, six.

You: Okay. Take this tennis racket and beat the heck out of that futon over there.

Clnt: (does it)

You: Zero to ten, how scared are you now?

Clnt: Three.

You: Are you enjoying being scared?

Clnt: No, I don't like it.

You: Okay. This time, when you whack the futon, see if you can feel annoyed that you're still scared.

Clnt: (does it)

You: Zero to ten, how scared are you now?

Clnt: Close to zero.

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**Q. I am terminating as leader of an ongoing teen group. I am thinking about telling the kids they can call me if they need to, after I am gone.**

**A.** By encouraging group members to call you should they need to, you subtly suggest that out of all the people they know, you are The One to call when they need assistance.

Begin immediately to work through your countertransference issues around endings and other people thinking of you as wise. Saying goodbye and letting go is a daily part of this profession.

☐ During group, take time to fully terminate with each individual in the group. Outline progress made, and make guesses

as to the direction their continuing work might involve. Assist them to say their feelings towards you, themselves, and the group.

☞ Formally hand over control to the new group leader. If that person is not available to participate in this ritual, do it with an empty chair representing the new facilitator. Introduce each member to this empty chair.

☞ Initiate roleplays where the teens are in need of assistance. Brainstorm and experiment with ways they can help or support one other, or get appropriate adult intervention.

These teens do not need you to continue to care about them. They need to be cared about certainly, but primarily they need to care about themselves. If they are inclined, they will take the positive regard you have already given them, introject it, and use it to reinforce their positive self esteem.

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**Q. I want an idea for addressing a family with a teen inclined to running away.**

**A.** Enact the problem; fiddle with the enactment.

☐ Ask everybody to stand up. Direct the teen to stand in-between the parents, while the parents hold onto, touch, or otherwise connect with each other. Comment, both on the type of connection and on the distance the parents put between themselves. Work with their willingness or reluctance not only to engage with each other but also to do what you suggest.

☐ Direct the teen to enact running away. Encourage him to get creative.

☞ Invite the family to notice the following: how easy or hard it is to leave or break out of this family, how much space within the family circle there is for the teen, how determined the parents are to hang onto or control him, how attached the parents are to each other, that the teen may be too old, too big or no longer physically controllable, parental comfort or discomfort when the teen is between them, how comfortable or uncomfortable the parents are when the teen is gone, who gives up or lets go first, how they relate when the leaving is over, the internal experience of each adult once parenting is no longer their major role, what has to happen in order that the teen *wants* to stay, and what it is in the family system that inclines the teen to run in the first place.

☞ As always, encourage each person to connect with and share their experience as the process unfolds.

In sculpts, call attention to how some teens withdraw or feign disinterest until the parents get distracted. They then find it an easy matter to disengage from the parental circle. Other teens invite confrontation. They often appear to be asking someone to care enough about them to make them stay. Parents may display how they do not mean what they say. Patterns of abuse may be closer to the surface.

☞ An interesting variation is to direct the teen to break into, instead of breaking away from, his parent's relationship circle.

☞ Invite each of the parents to take over the teen role in the sculpt and show how they separated from their family of origin.

☞ Rather than focus on where the teen is running from, invite him to explore and articulate what it is he is running to.

Any time you hear about running away behavior, crank up your abuse antennae.

☐ See the teen individually at least once. Ask directly about physical punishment and sexual molestation.

**What are abuse antennas?**

Abuse antennas are those little niggles that creep up the back of your head, wave in the air, and signal your adrenal glands to tweak your nervous system and dilate your pupils. When it comes to children, they put you on yellow-alert for signs of child abuse or neglect.

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## *Propose—Counterpropose* By Don Hadlock

<p>Step 1. Agreeing Couple agrees—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To do this exercise.</li> <li>To put a time limit on this exercise.</li> <li>Not to go on with the next step until they have successfully completed the current one.</li> <li>To honor any agreement they make.</li> <li>On how both will know if this process has been a success.</li> <li>On when to do an evaluation.</li> </ul> <p>Step 2. Defining Couple defines the issue—</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Until both agree and can state it to one another congruently.</li> <li>If both cannot agree on the definition of the issue, they agree to keep talking until they do (or therapist may suggest they try the Brainstorming structure—see July 2010 issue of Interact).</li> </ul> <p>Step 3. Proposing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A proposal can be anything with a win-win aspect to it. (No “I win—you lose today; tomorrow you win—I lose.”)</li> <li>A proposal has only “wants” (no “don’t wants”).</li> <li>No commenting, discussion, explanations, justifications, question-asking, or time-outs.</li> </ul> <p>Step 4. Counterpropose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No vetoes or “no’s” allowed in this structure. Each person either accepts the partner’s proposal or makes a counterproposal.</li> <li>Each keeps the parts of the proposal that are a win for them and deletes what is not okay.</li> <li>Each adds what is missing for them. “My counterproposal is... I agree to (this part of your proposal), and I</li> </ul>	<p>adjust your proposal to include...(what is missing for me.)”</p> <p>Re-Proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make it fun. Be creative. Spice it up.</li> <li>No discussion, explanation, justification, or question asking.</li> <li>Cannot repeat a previously rejected proposal.</li> </ul> <p>Re-Counterproposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be creative.</li> <li>Cannot repeat a previous proposal.</li> <li>No discussion, explanation, justification, or question asking.</li> <li>If no agreement occurs, return to Re-proposal.</li> <li>When both agree, move on to Step 5</li> </ul> <p>Step 5. Agreement occurs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Each states the agreement to the other until there is no dispute.</li> <li>They may have to change topics. If so, get more specific.</li> <li>If they cannot agree, they might return to Step 3 (proposing) or the therapist can propose that they quit for now and come back to it later (specify when).</li> </ul> <p>Step 7. They keep the agreement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Until it no longer applies.</li> <li>Until they do this exercise again and come to a new agreement.</li> </ul> <p>Step 6. They evaluate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If either has not kept their agreement, consider suspending this exercise. Instead, invite them to explore their issues around keeping and honoring commitments to Self and Other.</li> </ul> <p>[For 2 CEUs, try this method with a couple in session and write up your response. For details, email interact@processes.org]</p>
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**Q. Give me an example how a couple might work out a disagreement after they learn Don’s propose-counterpropose method?** (see above)

**A.** The fictitious couple below has a serious commitment to *not*-argue.

He: I propose we don’t go to your mother’s this weekend.

She: I counterpropose that I go to my mother’s this weekend and you stay home.

He: I agree and I propose that you don’t leave until after the yardwork is done.

She: I counterpropose that I leave early in the morning and come back by 4 p.m. and help with the yardwork then.

He: Okay, I agree that you go to your mother’s; I don’t go, and you do your share of yardwork when you return at 4 p.m. And I propose that I do my share in the morning.

She: Okay, and I propose that you come out and talk with me while I’m working in the yard.

He: I counterpropose that mostly I listen instead of talk and also I propose that I stop at 5 p.m. whether you’re done or not.

She: Okay and I propose that when you stop at 5, you order take-out and then go get it and we’ll eat when I’m done.

He: Okay.

**Q. I tried doing chair work with someone today. I think I got over-involved and maybe talked too much. I don’t really get it about chair work.**

**A.** Let’s see if I can show you: Say a sentence about yourself.

You: (from chair#1): Uh, I am sitting in this chair.

Me: Alright. (Gets up; pulls over an empty chair) Switch chairs.

You: (changes to chair#2)

Me: Now be the opposite of whatever was in that other chair.

You: from ch#2 (thinks...looks at ch#1)

Me: Say whatever occurs to you.

You: from ch#2: (speaking to ch#1) So?

Me: Switch chairs.

You: (looks at me)

Me: What’s your response?

You: from ch#1: Well, I am... just sitting here in this chair. (laughs nervously)

I don’t want to get deep right now. (stands up and switches chairs by herself, then laughs some more)

Me: (waits)

You: from ch#2 (to me): Okay, cool. I understand.

Me: Switch chairs.

You: (returns to ch#1)

Me: What just happened?

You: I could feel the difference. There were two distinctly different part of me, energetically and cognitively. One had a sort of ‘So what?’ mindset, and the other one got that if she stayed in that chair, she was gonna cry. (laughs)

Me: So,...is there more? Are you done?

You: Yeah, for now.

Me: Make an “I-sentence” out of that.

You: Uh. I don’t want to cry right now?

Me: I don’t know. Do you?

You: Yes. I don’t want to cry.

Me: Okay. Let’s go back to discussing the therapist’s role.

In the beginning of that little piece, notice I didn’t wait to hear what the content was. As soon as I heard an “I statement” from you (I am sitting in this chair; I understand), I invited you to switch chairs immediately, rather than clarify what you said so that I might understand.

And at the very end, I might have invited another polarity. Something like—

*“Okay. So now let the part of you speak who Does want to cry.”*

**I see. So, with my client, she never really got to anything 'cause I kept interjecting stuff and asking questions?**

Possibly. What *is* true is that a few minutes ago, when you were a client, the work got deeper really fast. And I didn't have a clue what you were talking about.

**Right. (sighs) I can't think why I didn't do just a straight switch chairs, switch chairs, switch chairs.**

Well, I'm hoping that as you do more polarity work using yourself as a guinea pig, you'll begin to understand that chairwork is simply another way of inviting the client to somatically experience different parts of himself as opposed to being up in his head figuring out who's who.

**Yeah, I guess most of the time the client'll do that cognitive investigating afterward, with or without me.**

Yes and there's plenty of room in the therapy relationship for the therapist to encourage the integration of experiential learning into the logical, analytical mind.

**Q. He is working through his anger at his father's abuse and betrayal. I took a month's vacation and then was late for our next appointment. When I called and apologized, he said he forgot too. The next week I forgot the appointment entirely. The week after that he was twenty minutes late, told me it was too late to get started, and that he was taking a couple of weeks off. I can't believe I missed those appointments.**

**A.** What a wonderful enactment! You have been role playing this man's betrayal scene where you play the part of the dad. What a great intervention.

**Yeah but it was not planned.**

Okay, you can beat yourself up later. In the meantime, try to understand that what you did mirrored what his father did. How he responded to you is how he learned to take care of himself around his father.

- Invite him to have the experience of responding to you in a different way. Name what you did, take total responsibility for it, and help him tell you what he needs to say to his father.

*"It looks like I did the part of your father here. In a way, I betrayed you. I made an appointment; I didn't show. I said I was sorry, then immediately forgot the next appointment. Perhaps we can use all that to explore your relationship with your Dad."*

**Well I told him I was sorry.**

"I'm sorry," is probably what his father said, too! Apologizing certainly doesn't hurt, but it doesn't change anything. The challenge here is to use what you have done as an intervention.

- Share your process and then focus on his. Use your mistakes to encourage him to connect with all those betrayed-by-father responses. Then use your ability to take responsibility for your deeds and motivations to invite a different ending to this all too familiar transaction.

*"Tell me how angry you are. Tell me you don't like it, that it was inexcusable and you want me not to do that again."*

*"Let's do another experiment. I'll say how sorry I am and you*

*get up and leave the room. Pay attention to your emotional responses as you do (or don't)."*

**I wasn't feeling confident to do all that because I was feeling guilty.**

Well, you *were* guilty. However, just because you are guilty doesn't mean you need to be ashamed.

**They're sorta the same.**

Well, I perceive a difference. I think there is such a thing as healthy guilt, and I define healthy guilt this way: "I did that thing. I violated my own belief in some way. My emotional response is unpleasant enough that I will make every effort not to do that thing again. I define the thing-I-did as bad, but *I* am still okay."

Unhealthy guilt or shame, on the other hand, comes from opinions and beliefs incorporated from outside ourselves: "*They* think, not only were my actions bad, but that *I* am bad. They must be right; therefore, *I am* bad."

I say balderdash! Healthy guilt can guide you as you learn to honor your own value system. Stay conscious, take responsibility for your mistakes, and use your guilt to guide you toward being a competent therapist.

- Use your honest guilt as an enactment. Take responsibility, tell the truth, then put the focus of attention back on the client.

*"I really messed up. If I had it to do over again, I would have paid more attention to our appointment agreements. I feel guilty; I am guilty. I'd like to apologize, and I won't let it happen again... So what's your response to that?"*

- By the way, many psychotherapists have a rule that when a client doesn't cancel beforehand and doesn't come to session, they charge the client for the session. You might consider making a supplemental rule for yourself: "When *I* don't show up without canceling first, I give the client a free session."

**Q. Her anxiety gets in the way of her work. I'm not sure what to do.**

**A.** If she is afraid, then there is danger. In session, the danger is either coming from you or from her. Check yourself out and determine if the danger is coming from you.

**What do you mean?**

Are you sitting in any judgment at all when you are with her? Do you want her to be different than she is? Do you think *you* know what *she* should do? Are you scared for yourself when you are with her? Once you are clear that any danger in the room is not about you nor is it coming from you, you'll be freed up to invite her to explore how she is a danger to herself.

- Teach her to protect herself from you.

**Didn't we already decide that I'm not the danger?**

Sure. But she doesn't know that. How about teaching her to protect herself should she ever even *think* you want her to do something she doesn't want to do.

*"Knowing you can take care of yourself helps a lot to alleviate anxiety. Let's practice how you can take care of yourself in session. I'll tell you to do (something you know she doesn't want to do) and you practice saying, 'No, I'm not going to do that.'"*

# Images in my Head

by Amanda Morgan

17-year-old D hates his father's Crocs (garden shoes), denim jacket, and his car. He hates the way his dad talks, hates that he's found Jesus and plays bells at church; in fact, D hates everything his dad says and does. And D hates his dad's fiancée.

D and I have just completed our fourth session, and I have been silently collecting instances in which he has communicated his paradox: he wants his dad to hang out with him, do things with him, talk to him, and he wants dad to leave him the hell alone.

Today, when D said, almost in the same breath, that he can't wait to move out so he never has to see his dad again and that he wishes his dad would take him to Europe this summer, I said, "It sounds like you're really stuck. You want your dad in your life, but not the way he is."

"Exactly," said D.

"It's like you're really hungry, but you just don't like the food on your plate."

"Uhhh...I guess so." He looked at me like I was weird.

"It's normal for people to want to redecorate their parents, D. Without taking anything away from your dad, is there anything you could add to him to make him more tolerable?"

"Uh, well, I'd change his car."

"Without taking anything away from.."

"Oh, right. Well, he could get a new car in addition to the one he has."

"Okay," I give in. This kid is smart. I am floundering. "Anything else?"

"Well, I'd make him talk more, like about the family. I'd want to know what was going on more in our family. And I'd like to know about his days. When I ask, he doesn't say anything. The only time he talks to me is when he's telling me to do something."

"What's it like when he's telling you what to do?" I have no idea what I'm doing or where I'm going anymore. I breathe. Maybe it'll be OK. I'm just exploring with

a fellow traveler.

"I get mad. It's like he doesn't trust me."

"Was there a time when he trusted you?"

"Yeah, before M came along. He used to be more relaxed. Now he just wants to impress her, and he wants me to do it too. I don't care about her."

It did not take long before D took the conversation where it needed to go, all on his own. M is back in the spotlight. I follow D. "You don't care about impressing M."

"Nope. She's lame."

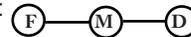
"But you want to please your dad."

"Right."

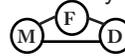
At that moment, an image popped into my mind, and it looked like this:

In D's mind, M stood between father and son.

I wondered how we could rearrange the image to look like this:



I placed a pillow in a chair facing D. "This is your dad," I said. What do you really want to say to him? If you could tell him anything, I mean."



D looked at me and said, "That I'd want him to be the way he used to be."

"OK, good, you can tell me that, but I already know. Just imagine that's your dad, and try telling him what you told me. See how it feels."

D looked at the pillow and told it he wanted it to be the way it used to be.

I put another chair between D and his dad, put a pillow on it, and introduced D to M. "Now here's M. What do you want to say to her?"

D snuffed. I don't want to say anything to her."

"Tell her that," I said.

"I don't want to say anything to you," he said with rising intonation as though asking a question. Was he seeking my approval? Did he intend the question for M because really, he's not certain that he has nothing to say to her?

"Are you sure?" I check.

"Well," he tells M, "I just want you to go away."

"What would happen if she went away?"

"I could see my dad again."

"Well, the truth is they are getting married in 3 weeks. Is there another way you can reach your dad?"

D looked confused. "What do you mean?"

"Your dad is still right here." I pointed to the pillow behind M.

"Yeah, but M is in the way."

I was unsure if I should make a suggestion or just stay with D until he figured out his own way. After watching D look stuck and confused a bit, I finally suggested: "Well, you could find a way to see your dad better."

D moved over on the couch.

"What just happened?"

"I moved over."

"Was it easy?"

"I guess."

"What's it like from there?"

"I can see my dad better."

"What happened to M?" I asked.

"She's not right in front of me."

"And how is that?"

"Good."

The session continued in this way until finally D moved his dad closer to the couch, facing him, and was able to say, "I wish you'd take me to Europe this summer."

In working this way, I find that I am much less self-conscious as a therapist. The "work" becomes "play," and clients are remarkably willing to play along. In manipulating things in space, thoughts become symbols and real experiences. D has made a successful connection with his "dad" in session today. My hope is that this will alleviate some of his fear (which is beneath the anger, I imagine) and that he'll find more ease in reaching out for his real father, even if in the tiniest of ways to begin with.

I hope, too, that D's dad takes him to Europe this summer.

□ Use the idea that protecting oneself physically can be a metaphor for protecting oneself emotional or psychologically.

☞ Hand her a pillow or stuffed animal to hide behind while she talks.

☞ Invite her to position herself in a corner of the room, surrounded by chairs, pillows, blankets, until she feels safe.

Encourage her to honor her fears and protect herself.

□ Invite her to feel her fear, more.

☞ Direct her to experiment by acknowledging, allowing, and following her felt-sensations while she is afraid. Ask her to describe them to you: electrical? liquid? waves? rainbows?...

□ Dialoguing with her fear is a way to invite a change in the relationship she has with her fear.

☞ *"Where in your body do you experience fear at this exact moment? Show me. (Draw it, point to it, sculpt it,...) If it could speak, what are the words? And your response?..."*

☞ *"This object (this imagery, this empty chair, this...) represents the part of you who is afraid (or something inside of you that you fear, or something outside of you that you fear.)" Let it tell you what it knows about itself, and what it hopes for."*

□ Encourage her *not* to abandon herself. *"If things get too intense, say so and we'll both stand up, walk around the room, and talk about the weather."*

*"If you get so scared you need to leave the room, take your body with you when you go."*

*"Vote with your feet. Get out of your chair and walk out that door. You can come back later if you want."*

### **She says she doesn't know if she should be afraid of the things she fears.**

I wonder who taught her not to trust herself. Whether she's neurotic or simply anxious about working therapeutically, start by encouraging her to feel what she feels.

□ Invite her toward creating a more functional relationship with her thoughts, sensations, and fantasies. The struggle to avoid fear creates more fear.

□ Validate and re-frame positively. Encourage her to think of her anxiety as a

friendly alarm system, and to trust herself completely. You might tell her,

☞ You might tell her, *"My supervisor says, 'if you hear the train coming, get off the tracks. Worry about whether the train was real or not, after it has passed.'"*

□ Have a conversation with the part of her who scares her as a way of communicating. Inquire as to why that part has to turn on the inner fire-alarm so often, as opposed to simply ringing a small bell.

☞ When you and the part-who-scares-her are done talking, say to that part, *"Now tell her what you just told me."*

□ Once she can protect herself *physically* in session, explore with her how she can protect herself *emotionally* in session.

□ Direct her to rank her fear from zero to ten, monitor it and every time it goes over a certain number, teach her to breathe through it until the fear is more manageable.

□ Work with her to express her anger. Biochemically, it is difficult for anger and fear to co-exist in the same body.

□ Once she can protect herself in session, invite her to explore how she can accomplish the same protection outside of session.

The more she perceives that safety is possible, the more interest she will have in protecting herself in or out of session.

Eventually she may give herself permission to open one of the doors in her subconscious behind which her monsters are hiding.

She can begin to confront how she terrorizes herself, how that benefits her, who taught her to do that in the first place, and how she might alter her relationship with the fact that she is an easily scared human living on a dangerous planet.

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**Q.** In family session, one of the girls said she was afraid of her father. The family ignored her. I got distracted and didn't think about it until afterwards. Now I'm concerned about child abuse.

**A.** Even if these parents never admit to past abuses, and even if you never acquire enough information to suspect abuse in the legal sense, their awareness of your resolve to protect children by officially reporting abuse if you *do* suspect it may, in itself, stop future abuse whether there is any going on now or not.

### **You mean, just because I will have brought the subject up, they'll be more aware?**

Quite possibly. Even though they signed an agreement-for-services information form, up front, it is useful to clearly restate your determination to comply with the law. That way it will be no surprise to them, when you report abusive activity should you suspect it.

□ At the beginning of the next session, repeat what you heard the girl say and explore it with the family. After everyone has distracted, denied, minimized, or been enthusiastically supportive, remind this family (in a loving, respectful manner) that you have a legal obligation to protect children by reporting suspected child abuse and that you regularly take time to make sure all your clients understand that.

□ Ask the parents who, in their respective families of origin, they had been afraid of when *they* were children.

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#### **INTERACT**

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