

Integrative Ideas for the Process-Oriented Psychotherapist



Q. She says she wants to set limits better with her friends.

A. Listening for verbs is often useful when you are wondering what processes to work with. Note that “wanting-to-set” and “setting” are not the same thing. This woman’s process may be about *not-doing* as opposed to *doing*.

Often, when a person believes he wants to do something he is not-doing and can’t figure out why he is not-doing it, he is disconnected to the fifty plus percent of himself who *wants* to be *not-doing* that thing.

There’s a good chance that right now, she doesn’t *want-to* set limits; that she only *wants* to want-to set limits.

Based on that idea, as soon as more than 51% of her *wants-to* set limits better, she will find herself in the act of limit setting, rather than *talking-about* limit setting.

This may all seem a bit picky, but a clear awareness of the separation of process and content is necessary for the therapist who is committed to noticing process and setting up enactments which might challenge people to encounter themselves. Some ideas—

□ Ask her to stand in the middle of the room and draw a circle around herself. (Use string, yarn, rope, belts, ribbon, whatever.) Ask her to declare as her limit, the circumference of the circle. In baby steps, attempt to overstep this limit. Invite her to connect with her internal experience as she declares her limit, defends it, gets overwhelmed, does not mean what she says, gives up, stands fast, or allows herself to be invaded.

□ Reverse roles. Stand inside the “my-limits” circle and model some options about how to maintain one’s limits when someone (her) tries to violate them.

Like what?

□ Rather than wait as she gets closer and closer, say, “No,” or “Step back,” early on.

☞ Put your hand up a la the traditional “stop” gesture.

☞ Look right in her eyes whenever you speak to her.

☞ Step forward and meet her at the circumference so your body blocks her moving forward any further.

☞ If all else fails, bend your knees, pick up the yarn, or whatever is making the limit-circle, and move it (and yourself) out of the room—altogether if you have to. Do whatever it takes to honor your limit that, “This is where *you* stop and *I* begin.”

Her limits are defined by her needs, beliefs, expectations, dependencies, and her perception of her emotional boundaries.

□ Encourage her towards taking responsibility. Invite her to explore the idea that *she* is in charge of her limits. If she sets limits for herself only, then *she’s* the only one who can violate them.

Say more about that.

Well, let’s say a client manages to bounce checks, forgets his credit card, and keeps promising to pay, but manages not to. You think to yourself, “This isn’t okay with me; I want it to stop.” You can handle it at least two different ways.

1) You tell him some version of, “My limit for *you* is that you can’t come to session anymore without paying.” The problem is that he *can* come to session unless you can find a way to physically restrain him, monitor his movements whenever he leaves his house, or generally keep a look-out of your office window whenever you are in the building.

or 2) You tell him some version of, “My limit for *myself* is that I will be unavailable to see you until you honor your part of our bargain.” In other words, “you might come to session, but I won’t be here.”

I think she doesn’t want other people to feel bad.

Some people think it is a gift of love to sacrifice themselves for others. I usually counter with a version of, “Let’s say you invite me to the beach and I don’t want to go but I say ‘okay,’ anyway. That’s me not telling the truth and placating. That’s me coming to the beach with an Eeyore attitude which, if spoken would sound something like this, ‘*Ohhkaay, I’ll go with you. Even though I don’t want to. I’ll bring my resentment. And my grey-colored glasses. Don’t worry about me. I’ll get along. (sigh).*’”

Does that sounds like a gift you’d like to receive? I didn’t think so. Or would you rather have me say something like, “*Thanks so much*

for inviting me. I really enjoy your company but this is not a good day for me. How about next week?”

That way, when I am with you at the beach, you know I really want to be there. And that *is* a gift to you.

□ Ask her to explore how she stops herself from setting limits.

□ Invite imagery work where limits are symbolized by a clear shield that protects her against all attack.

□ Invite regressive work to explore how she was taught that letting other people invade her limits was desirable.

□ Wonder if what she really wants is for other people (including you) to read her mind and intuitively know where her limits are without her having to do anything.

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Q. She is dying of a brain tumor. She claims her husband and friends make fun of her occasionally strange behavior. She has sanctions against feeling or expressing anger.

A. See if you can restate reflexively your description of her.

Uh... in other people, she sees the part of herself who fears and makes fun of strange behavior?

The reason I suggest a restated description is that one has to get out of the box, so to speak, to think in reflexive terms. This gives more ideas and often helps in solidifying a possible place to begin.

Since this woman is dying, my guess is she probably does not have enough time to own all her projections, work through all the blocks to them, connect with them, experience her grief, resolve all her issues, and integrate the resolutions into her life.

□ So as an alternative to the step by step working through of her issues, use imagery to invite her directly into enlightenment. You can also do this with people whose death is not so imminent.

☞ Create an imagery where she enlarges herself in spirit and wisdom. For example, she might imagine herself as bigger than the person making fun of her, bigger than the room they are in, bigger than the town, bigger than the state, bigger than the planet, bigger than the solar system,... as big as she needs to be to separate herself from that squeaky organism down there making fun-of-her noises. Once she perceives herself as expanded, invite her to consider that the makers-of-fun are basically terrified and using their hostility to provide an illusion of protection.

□ Another imagery is to enlarge herself just enough to embrace the person who is being hostile. This imagery is one she can practice in public when she is actually with friends and family. Once she perceives herself as bigger than both the other person and their hostility, they will seem less dangerous and she will not be so reactive.



Q. In family session, the eleven-year-old made a phallic symbol out of clay. I didn't mention it because I didn't want to put the focus of this blaming family onto her.

A. To deny, not-notice, or ignore is to co-behave and reinforce. Being afraid to call attention to how they emotionally abuse one of the children co-behaves the blaming style and encourages the behavior to continue outside of session. Invite this family's focus on their process.

□ Pay attention to what they are not paying attention to. Notice that out-loud.

You: Susie, I have a guess you think we should be talking more about another subject, is that right?

Susie: (Shrugs and is silent.)

You: (to the parents) Susie has made an interesting symbol out of clay. It looks a somewhat like a penis to me. Mom and Dad, what do you think she might be trying to communicate?

☞ If they begin to blame the girl, stop them. "I notice the family focus is back on one of the kids again. Let's experiment with putting the focus on you parents instead. What do you notice about yourselves right now?"

☞ Ask the parents how they brought up difficult subjects in their family of origin.

☞ Ask each person in the family what subject they think the family has been avoiding.

□ Put the focus of blame on you. Tell the family you need to take a minute for yourself. Get out of your chair, then turn around and talk to yourself in the empty chair. Tell yourself you have not been doing your job, that you have been not-seeing and avoiding. Dialogue with yourself until you are ready to put the focus of attention back on them.

"I've avoided mentioning certain things in here, mostly because I've not trusted myself to work with the results. I'm feeling more confident right now, so I'm going to change that. One thing I notice right now (about your family's system) is ..."

☞ *"What's it like for you when I acknowledge that I'm the problem in here?"*

□ See the girl individually. Get out the sandtray, the art materials, the magazines & scissors, and the clay for making more sculpts. Wonder out loud about anything you see that triggers your child abuse antenna.

☞ Ask her directly if she is being inappropriately touched by anyone or touched at all by anyone whom she would rather not be.

□ See the parents alone as a couple. Initiate a conversation about talking with one's own children about sexuality.

Using Metaphors

by Amanda Morgan

MM is "very" 14. By that, I mean her entire universe consists of her friends, her friends' friends, and her friends' friends' friends. While she was speaking (for the 90th time, at least) of her former best friend's new and cool behavior that leaves MM feeling like an outsider, I began imagining MM and her former best friend as having once been skipping in step, arm in arm down a familiar path, when suddenly, the friend saw shiny new people off road and abandoned MM for the new pod of 9th grade girls.

I shared my image and then said, "I wonder if it's like 'Brittany' has suddenly gone off on a new adventure and you're left standing there, like, 'Hey! Where did everybody go!'" She didn't light

up. In fact, she kept right on talking as though I hadn't spoken at all. I let it go and continued to listen to and be open with my inner imagery.

As she continued on about this group and that group of high school girls on the lawn at lunch, I suddenly saw something like a solar system. It wasn't clear, and I knew that forcing it would ruin it, so I let it go. Then she mentioned something about how hard it is to be friends with some girls who are friends with other girls she no longer wants to be friends with. I saw series of concentric circles: like a solar system again, but I wasn't sure. I handed her a pen and paper and told her to draw her name in a circle in the center of the page. Around it, draw circles with friends'

names in them: the closer the circle, the closer the friend. Without prompting, she narrated her process as she drew.

When she felt finished, she looked down, held her picture out at arm's length, cocked her head, and said, "Hm. It looks like a solar system." For the first time, I felt connected to this girl with whom I've struggled not to drown in boredom. I said, "Notice how Brittany is out where Pluto is and she used to be there, where Mercury is." "Yeah!" she said, and I saw a light go on. "And now 'Courtney' is my Mercury!" I told her, "Yes, and if you're the center, you can't be an outsider!" Was this wisdom for MM, or for myself? I love the way this work happens.

☞ Invite them to practice such conversations in the session.

"Imagine the eleven-year-old you used to be, sitting in this chair. What is the first thing about sexuality you wish someone had told you? Okay, now practice telling that to your daughter."

To deny, not-notice, or ignore is to co-behave and reinforce.

"Do you mean that sometimes you feel trapped because everyone expects you to use the same words as they do?"

"Do you mean that sometimes you argue when you're scared?"

Q. The father is very intellectual and a little thought-disordered. He takes a long time to get to the point. The family reaches frustration and burn-out fairly quickly. I'm not sure what to do, so I did nothing.

A. Many people are slightly to moderately thought-disordered but clear enough to function within normal parameters most of the time. Working with such a person takes patience and love. Avoid being judgmental. Remind yourself that you are working with someone who has a disability.

From what I observe, in family session the problem seems to escalate whenever he feels unsafe.

Let's assume for now, that your guess is close to being factual: that when he is afraid, this man's brain-to-mouth mechanism shifts into full-speed-ahead. As terror is approached, his communication network breaks down altogether. As he perceives safety instead of disapproval, he slows down verbally and is more able to move from thought to thought in a logical manner.

The father knows there is a problem. You do not have to pretend you don't notice. You do not have to pretend you understand what he is saying when you do not.

☐ Be a role model for this family. When you do not understand, say so with an attitude of respect. Rather than attempting to show him that what he is doing wrong, arguing with his logic, or trying to convince him to own that he isn't making sense, take responsibility for your part of the confusion.

"I'm having a problem. I'm confused and I need to slow down... Let's see, (introspects, takes responsibility and tells the truth). I guess what I need to do is to start over. Tell me again what it is you want."

☐ Structure your requests for clarification in the form of, "Do-you-mean's."

☐ Concrete enactments are useful to help yourself and others understand. Invite him to draw pictures, make diagrams, or use objects in the room to clarify.

☐ Frequently sum up what you guess is his current point. Ask him if that is correct.

☐ Be as concrete as you can. Do not expect *him* to be concrete. Stay connected to yourself and use I-messages whenever possible.

☐ Remain neutral. Chances are this man is supersensitive and able to detect even the smallest nuance of judgment in your countenance. As you model these things, the family will be learning how to do them too.

☐ In front of the father, matter-of-factly discuss with the family how you are able to keep from being frustrated and burned-out when the father is talking. Let them know how you let go of your expectations that he will take the direct route in getting his point across. Tell them how you figured out that if you hang in there with him long enough, he will usually come through. Tell them how you continuously remind yourself that the relationship is more important than the content of the discussion.

Ultimately, to resolve family dysfunction, individual family members will need to accept this man, this father, this husband, whom they love. By the way, am I correct that they care for him?

Yes.

Well then, their job is to choose him just the way he is.

My guess is that the mother could use a few sessions to express her frustrations and perhaps decide if she wants this relationship to continue or not. Kids usually follow the lead of their parents. As their mother learns how to let go of wanting their father to be different, possibly take responsibility for her responses to his long-windedness (as opposed to blaming him for her frustration) and begin to do a better job of taking care of herself, the atmosphere in the house will improve. As she treats

... the relationship is more important than the content of the discussion.

both herself and her husband with respect, the kids will follow suit. Family members can finesse how they communicate with each other, but if you are correct in your assessment, the father's disability is not likely to go away any time soon.

Q. This person needs to accept that change has happened.

A. Notice how your language reflects your possible countertransference.

Contrary to popular opinion (as they say), not every person *needs* to accept change. This particular person may *choose* to accept change, *you* may choose to accept change, but lots of people live their whole lives in denial and would claim that they get along just fine.

More accurate language might be, "I'm going to invite this person to accept that change has happened." This is setting an agenda for *yourself*. You can accomplish the task of "inviting" independently from the invitee's behavior.

Okay, how do I invite this person to accept that change has happened?

Whenever there is a change, there is often a corresponding grief about the death of the Old Way. This occurs even though the Old Way was unwanted or disliked.

☐ Depending on her style, make comments that reflect reality as you understand it.

"Yes, Cal is dead and you miss him."

"Yes. You thought you would be in that job forever. You thought you had something you could count on and it hasn't work out that way."

☐ Suggest a therapeutic burial. The thing they wish to let go of may be a person, relationship, fantasy, belief, or job. It may

be an object, emotion, addiction, or attitude.

Invite resolving dialogues between the person and the thing-that-died (the thing that is-no-more):

"I appreciate/resent) that you ___."

"I (do/don't) take responsibility for ___."

"I'm glad/regret that I lived/was in your life/knew you/..."

"I love you."

"Goodbye."

☞ Often, a deceased child, parent, partner, friend, pet, or other loved one,

when asked to speak, will end with some version of, "Thank you so much for loving me. However you've hung onto me long enough. I want you to let me go so I can move on."

☞ When the person is ready for completion, you might create a way to simulate a burial. In an office, an imaginary or representative object can be put under some pillows, or covered with a blanket or coat or paper. A picture of it can be drawn on paper. Outside, one can burn it and scatter the ashes. Be prepared to go along with or invent or any ritual the person wants to take part in. They can verbalize any leftover summation and then symbolically let go. This may take several therapy sessions to complete.

☞ Sometimes a "Goodbye" is followed by a "Hello." This is particularly true when the relationship between the client and some part of himself from childhood has changed, or become more functional. First the burial, then the birthday party.

☞ As one of the final steps, I often suggest that the client visualize the-thing-which-needs-grieving and then allow it to slowly recede from view until it disappears.

Don't you mean the thing-which-is-dead?

That-which-needs-grieving isn't necessarily something that used to be animate and is now dead. Over the course of our lives, we love and lose many things: loved ones, our youth, hopes and dreams, our view of ourselves, status, objects, beliefs, abilities, what-could-have-been,... It is an unending list. When we grieve, we are often grieving more for the loss of relationship, than the thing-that-is-no-more. The resolution of grieving isn't to forget that-which-we-loved. The resolution of grieving is the creation of a new relationship with that-which-we-loved. Things can disappear. That-I-loved something can be carried with us for the rest of our lives.

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Q. How would you go about a therapeutic burial around the subject of alcoholism?

A. If sobriety is still in the experimental stage, then the work is about, "I'm *thinking* of saying goodbye, but I'm not quite ready yet," or "Part of me still wants

you (the addiction) and another part of me hates you and wants you to go away."

☐ If a decision to actually end the use of a substance has not only been made, but implemented, then the work may with the death of the addiction or, more often, with the death of an easy method of medicating some life-stress, neurosis, or other unresolved issue.

☞ A first task might be to decide exactly what is being grieved: the death of the alcoholism, the loss of the bottle, or the end of the emotional numbing. Identifying the thing-that-is-no-more may be a major piece of the work and change names several times.

☞ Invite him to choose an object which represents the alcoholism (or whatever). Set up a dialogue between the person and the alcoholism. Alcoholism may say, "Gee I don't want to go. I've had a really good time. It's been fun being drunk and high." And the client may respond, "Yeah, I understand and I've really enjoyed you, but the down side is too great, and it's time to let you go."

☞ Encourage the dialogue to continue until both sides agree on a conclusion. The ideal ending is an authentic agreement between the personality parts. Sometimes the part-who-has-control of his elbow and his grasping muscles finally says, "Well, I know you don't want to go, but goodbye I'm cutting the cord." And sometimes, the alcoholism's defense system is stronger than the person's desire for health.

☞ Do your best to have no investment in the outcome of these inner struggles. Keep inviting his awareness not only of his ongoing inner conversations, but also of his emotional, intellectual, and somatic responses to these conversations.

Some folks will go through the motions of introspection and connection many times before they feel safe enough to connect fully with their inner experience and tell themselves the whole truth and nothing but the truth in session.

How would you know if they were finished with the issue? How would you know to suggest they do it a second time or not?

You cannot know. You can only guess. When a piece of work is complete, the client may report grief and/or a felt sense of change. Without his direct input, your

only tools are your mirroring neurons, your ten* senses, and all those intuitive messages your brain offers you.

☐ Do the best you can *not* to have an agenda about whether or not a person continues a piece of work from session to session. If the previous work needs to be continued or redone, he will find a way to bring it to your attention when he is ready. Keep your antennae polished.

☞ He may tell you directly, "Remember what we did last time? Well,..."

☞ Or he may let you know indirectly, saying something that triggers the idea of a burial in your mind, perhaps talking about rituals, darkness, or things that go under (buried) or into other things.

☞ Begin each session with a totally neutral mindset. Trust yourself completely. Pay attention to the person's process. He will let you know what he needs you to do.

One guy said he felt afraid when he thought about burying his addiction.

☐ Validate his self-awareness. Wonder out loud what he wants to do now.

☐ Invite him to explore his concerns. Invite him to explore how his concerns stop him from moving on. Invite him to explore how stopping himself from moving on is positive in intent. (It protects him.)

☐ Invite him to pretend he *isn't* afraid.

"This piece of paper is your alcoholism. Tell you what, take this paper and then, oh, (picks any old thing in the room) just stick it under those magazines there as if you were burying it."

What if he balks?

☐ Attend to his balking process.

"Tell me directly, 'I don't want to do that.'"

Well what if he says he doesn't want to do that and instead he wants to keep it (his alcoholism).

If he is listening to himself, he may connect with his truth, that he is not ready to give up his alcoholism.

What if he puts the paper half in and half out?

☐ Again, notice his "putting" process. Guess that he is half in and half out of alcoholism.

** There are at least ten senses including: sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, pressure, hot/cold, pain, kinesthesia, and proprioception.*

Or "Still nipping, eh?"

Exactly! Watch and listen to everything. Be available to see and hear the whole picture.

What if he puts it under there with no thought or connection?

Not-thinking and not-being-connected are okay too. He has gone through the motions once, if only in make-believe. But, the roof did not fall in and you did not judge or analyze him. His body will retain a memory of that. Maybe another time he will do it again and mean it a little more. Maybe not. In fact, he may act it out fifty, a hundred times before he perceives it is safe to connect with the emotions involved. A well-defended person is not going to give up anything easily or right away.

□ You can teach therapeutic burial with relatively minor and seemingly silly things first. You could use, for example, the end of the day, a broken shoelace, or an old death-that-is-no-longer-an-issue. If the person can connect to the finality, they may experience a little sadness. Say they threw an old pair of shoes away or stopped smoking twenty-five years ago. They can use a therapeutic burial to learn how to connect with and experience their grief around the thing-that-does-not-matter-any-more. When a something that *does* matter comes to their attention, they will have some experience of what to expect from themselves and from you. They may not be as afraid to grieve and let go.



Q. How about a therapeutic burial for abortions?

A. Absolutely. There is usually a good deal of preliminary work before a burial alone leads to resolution. However, you can begin with the suggestion of a burial immediately if you give up your agenda that a burial happen. Then follow the person's process into the underlying work or wherever else his psyche takes him.

You mean like grief?

Possibly.

Well it happened years ago when this woman was younger.

To survive the existential onslaught of adolescence, sensitive young people often find a way to numb themselves towards certain bothersome realities. Then, as they mature, many adults who participated in what they thought were guilt-free or forgotten-about abortions during their teens and early twenties develop a sense of solemnity about their decisions. Suppressed or repressed feelings come to consciousness or are subconsciously expressed in ways that cause the person pain or dysfunction.

Grief, guilt, anger, fear, sadness or rage that such decisions exist in the first place, the taking of responsibility for the decision, acceptance, letting go, and self-forgiveness—all must be acknowledged, confronted, and embraced to resolution.

□ Invite a conversation between the client and the unborn infant. As usual, ask the client to talk to the infant in that empty chair over there and tell the truth. Then ask the client to sit in the empty chair, "be" the infant, and respond. In my experience, the conversation may take awhile and will end with the unborn saying with some version of "I understand your dilemma. I'm sad not to be born. But it's okay and I forgive you." Unborn babies are amazingly compassionate.

□ You don't have to use empty chairs. You can invite that same conversation between the two through imagery, art, movement, song, poetry, storytelling, sandtray, whatever nonverbal mode in which you feel most comfortable working and to which the client is able to respond.



Q. Her child had a nightmare about killing himself and had trouble waking up afterward. She did a good job of crisis intervention but is scared now and doesn't know what to do.

A. Crisis intervention is mostly about inviting the person-in-crisis into the present moment. This mother does that naturally, so invite her to learn how to do dreamwork with her child.

□ Invite her into a roleplay of the incident. She takes the part of her son; you take the part of the concerned mother. (Or you can just be yourself. I can't see that it matters.)

☞ She (as her son) tells you the dream.

It won't be the exact dream her son had.

Of course not, and that doesn't matter. What she's learning here is how to work with *any* dream, i.e. Dream Class 1A.

☞ Invite her (portraying her son) to re-picture the dream in her mind and then imagine a different ending. If the second ending isn't to her liking, suggest she keep re-imagining it until she arranges an ending she's happy with.

☞ If she is unable to create an acceptable (to her) ending, volunteer your own version. Get creative. Propose plots that are implausible, impossible, silly, or heroic, even plots that disobey the laws of physics. Anything goes. Remember, Superman (or Super Baby) can rescue anyone, at any time, any where.

But what about the suicidal part? How do I help the mother with that?

Two things come to mind:

- In metaphorical work, "death" often means "change." And while change usually connotes the end of *something*, it doesn't necessarily mean the end of *life*.
- The cool thing about imagery/fantasy work, is that if one dies, one can come alive again with pretty much no effort at all.


□ Should the mother convey her concern about her son acting out his dream in reality, then invite her to work with that.

☞ While she's imagining it is *her* dream, encourage her to allow the dream's natural conclusion even if it unfolds into suicide. She can draw on her own inner suicidal part to finish

on becoming a Psychotherapist

In session...

To increase the quality of your work, have as your personal goal to invite the client into an experience of himself in the here-and-now. Remember, it doesn't matter if the client takes your invitation or not, it only matters that you make it.



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the scenario. Then as before, on subsequent re-fantasizings, direct her to end the dream in other ways, perhaps by fighting back or protecting herself.

☞ Keep in mind, she is practicing something she can do with her son in the middle of the night.

What do you mean by her "inner suicidal part?"

Consider a suicidal scale from zero to ten. Certainly any person stands between zero and one, that bleak morning when he finds himself depressed and a little sorry he woke up at all.

The scores inches up a little higher, every time this person smokes a cigarette, or drives too fast. And higher still whenever he drives too close to the car in front of him, especially at high speed. And nearly everyone has moments of "Y'know, as long as I wouldn't feel any pain or be scared, it would be okay with me if I were no longer on the planet right now."

☐ Be a psychological researcher; use yourself as a guinea-pig. Ask yourself from time to time where you stand right this second on a suicidal scale from zero to ten.

Well, I'm afraid the boy could really kill himself. Perhaps he is schizophrenic.

One scary dream isn't enough to offer a diagnosis of any kind. On the other hand, I support you trusting yourself. Share your concern with the mother and, if she concurs, suggest she find a way to get the boy evaluated. Whether schizophrenic, suicidal, normally neurotic, or simply confronting everyday life changes, he will most likely have scary dreams occasionally. Assuming this bad dream is just a bad dream, the mother can use this opportunity to teach her son how to work with his dreams and possibly resolve some of the issues they represent.

Both mother and son can be invited to regard every dream, every night of their lives, as a gift from their subconscious to their conscious mind.

What do I do if the mother doesn't want to do the dreamwork with her son?

You might ask to work with the boy individually.

- ☐ Get out the sand tray and the art supplies.
 - ☞ Invite him to draw, sculpt, show the dream (or anything else he feels like). Work with his picture more or less like you would work with a dream.
 - ☞ Invite him to tell the story of the picture he has drawn, sculpted, cut out & pasted,...
 - ☞ Invite every object in his picture to talk—to the other objects, to the boy, to you,...
 - ☞ Invite him to re-arrange the objects and perhaps tell you why this new arrangement is better, worse, possible, impossible, more scary,...

Q. When I intervene, she says she's "tired."

A. Possibilities that come to mind right now include:

- ☐ Agree that she is too tired to work today. Suggest that she pay for this session and then relax for the rest of the hour.
- ☐ Suggest she lie down on the floor and focus on the parts of her body that are the most tired. Encourage her to surrender to and explore that tiredness at a deep level.

- ☐ Guide her on a fantasy where she takes a vacation.
- ☐ Tell her, "Go ahead. Go to sleep. I'll keep watch." If she is anxious or sleep-disturbed, she may actually get a deep (albeit short) restful sleep in this safe environment.
- ☐ "Okay, close your eyes. Imagine you are in your bed, comfortable, and warm. Imagine that you are now asleep. Imagine that you are having a dream. Take me with you as you dream it. What's happening right now?"
- ☐ Invite her to explore how she keeps herself tired.
- ☐ She may be depressed, even suicidal. Invite her to introspect and move into her experience.
- ☐ "I'm tired of..." is often an adult substitute for, "I'm angry about..." or "I don't want to feel my sadness." Get out a tennis racket. Direct her to beat the stuffing out of that pillow over there.
- ☐ Ask her what the opposite of tired is, and use her answer to create an enactment.
- ☐ The subconscious is a wondrous, sometimes sneaky thing. Tires often need air—try breathwork with this woman.
- ☐ Tired is also tire-d. Ask her how she lets herself get run over. Or wonder what happened when she first went flat.

Q. An overweight teenaged male is socially and emotionally about nine years old. I saw him for awhile earlier in the year. Then he was school phobic. He recently returned to school. Now there are problems again.

A. Imagine how scared, angry and sad this boy must be. Overweight, immature boys have a particularly hard time of it, I'm guessing. Children are often merciless to peers who do not fit into the norm. At the very least, the other students may manifest their disapproval by shunning him.

- ☐ Direct his parents to adjunct the psychotherapy with regular visits to a physical health professional with whom the boy feels comfortable, first an M.D. and later a nutritionist perhaps, or a personal trainer.
- ☐ Set up roleplayed school situations. Encourage him to brainstorm and practice responses to both negative and positive treatment by peers.
- ☐ Practice the difference between assertive and aggressive behaviors: How-to-take-care-of-yourself vs. basic socializing, "Hi my name is Bobby, what's yours?"
- ☐ Encourage him first to talk-about and then to reconnect with previous school experiences. Work with these remembered experiences as if they were fantasies or dreams. Encourage him to relive them and be in his body as they unfold. Invite him to create and experiment with new endings.

Because he is an adolescent, the sadness of his situation may elude him. Instead, he may substitute fear, anger, denial, social withdrawal, or self-abandonment. Of the bunch, encourage anger. Expressed without violence, anger can be empowering. Once anger is accessed, fear and grief may more comfortably emerge. And the habit of depression is not reinforced.

- ☐ Invite him to work on the issues common to his fear of school, overeating, under-activity, and immaturity. As an extension of the work with school experiences, invite him also to connect with and begin to resolve earlier associated trauma.

□ Invite him to practice the difficult-for-most-of-us skill of not-personalizing.

☞ Direct him to imagine he has a personal shield that protects him from other people's emotional violations as well as from their physical attacks.

□ Consider starting a group for shy and/or immature kids at the school.

Q. I tried propose-counterpropose with a couple. Maybe they chose too difficult a topic, but they had the hardest time defining the issue. We never got past that.

A. Yes. Sometimes, just defining the issue more or less solves the issue. That may be because they weren't talking about the same issue in the first place.

- You might start by inviting the couple to practice on something easy, perhaps even silly. Choose something that neither of them care about, such as rearranging the furniture in the therapy room, or making up a simple game. Alternatively, you could run through the exercise with one of the couple, and then with the other.
- Go through the entire format plus the evaluation.
- Then you might invite them to practice again on something that is personal but not particularly contentious.
- After they get more proficient in proposing, and find out that it can be fun, that may be the time to invite them to consider a topic that is problematic for them.
- Keep in mind that these rules aren't so much for clients as they are guidelines and focus points for the therapist.

As you teach this technique to couples, I suggest you emphasize the idea that the object is to find a solution to a disagreement about which both people end up being content—a true win-win.

In the columns to your right, Don Hadlock offers an alternative to the propose-counterpropose system featured in the previous issue of Interact—

<http://www.processes.org/interact.php>

Some couples are more successful with one intervention than the other. Therapists and facilitators are encouraged to use their creativity with and within either of the two structures.

Brainstorming, Vetoing, & Soapboxing

by Don Hadlock

Step 1. Agreeing

Couple agrees:

- To do this exercise.
- To put a time limit on this exercise.
- Not to go on with the next step until they have successfully completed the current one.
- To honor any agreement they make.
- On a method of evaluation—
- How both will know if this process has been a success.
- On when to do the evaluation.

Step 2. Defining

Couple defines the issue:

- Until both agree and can state the issue to one another congruently.
- If both cannot agree on the definition of the issue, they keep talking until they do.

Step 3. Brainstorming

Couple makes a list of possible solutions.

- Each person gets creative. Anything goes at this point. Okay to exaggerate.
- No commenting, discussion, explanations, justifications, question-asking, or time-outs.
- If couple is not successful at brainstorming solutions, they return to defining the issue, Step 2
- Once the list of solutions is made, they go on to vetoing, Step 4

Step 4. Vetoing

Either person can veto any offered idea on the possible-solution list.

- No commenting, discussion, explanations, justifications, question-asking, or time-outs.
- When each of them has at least one non-vetoed proposal still on the list, they move on to soapboxing, Step 5.
- When either does not have at least one non-vetoed proposal on the list, they return to Step 3, brainstorming,

Step 5. Soapboxing

- Partner #1 chooses one of his/her ideas which was not eliminated in the veto. He/she takes 2 minutes to advocate that idea and 2 minutes to criticize it. Partner #2 listens only.
- Partner #2 chooses one of his/her ideas which was not eliminated in the veto. He/she takes 2 minutes to advocate that idea and 2 minutes to criticize it. Partner #1 listens only.
- No commenting, discussion, explanations, justifications, question-asking, or time-outs.
- Couple continues soapboxing until both are done.

6. Agreement occurs.

- If a solution agreeable to both parties occurs after the soapboxing, each states the agreement to the other until there is no dispute. Then move on to Step 7, keeping the agreement.
- If a solution agreeable to both parties does not occur after the soapboxing, either they return to defining/brainstorming or they move on to the propose-counterpropose model. The facilitator might suggest whichever method at which the couple might have the greater chance of succeeding.

7. They keep the agreement

- Until the agreement no longer applies, or...
- Until they do this exercise again and come to another agreement.

8. They evaluate.

- If either has not kept the agreement, consider suspending this exercise. Instead, invite them to explore their issues around keeping and honoring commitments to Self and Other.

[For 2 CEUs, try this method with a couple in session and write up your response. For details, email interact@processes.org]

Q. She left herself out of a family drawing. When I asked her about it, she was quiet the rest of the session. I let that be okay. Later, she reported to her mother in tears that I am angry at her, the session was a failure, and it was her fault.

A. What is your fear?

Well I don't understand how she could respond that way. I gave her positive regard, and she reacted negatively.

Let's see. You gave her positive regard and she used it to move closer to her psychological edge. What's the possibility that you did your job and that you are not responsible for other people's reactions to your interventions?

(sigh) So what do I do now?

□ One idea is to name your observations to her directly.

"Last time, when I asked you about the picture, you were quiet the rest of the session. My guess is that you thought I didn't like something you had done, is that true?"

□ Let it be okay with you when she shrugs her shoulders and does not answer.

□ Tell her your boundaries.

"Well I want you to know that everything you do in this room is okay with me, within the parameters of not hurting yourself, or me, or the furniture. You can be as quiet as you wish. This is your hour and you can use it however you want."

□ Let her know what to expect from you.

"By the way, if I am mad at someone, I will usually tell them. Otherwise, I am not angry. However, any time you think I might be annoyed at you, it's okay to ask me. Let's practice that now."

I asked her what she felt. Her response was, "nothing." I didn't know what to do then.

So, as I understand it, you let her be okay just the way she was. You said something like, "It's okay to be quiet and feel nothing. I'll be here while that happens. If something changes, you let me know."

Sorta. But only because I couldn't think of any other options.

Consider the possibility that you thought

of no other options because what you did was the exactly perfect thing to do.

Well, I want other options anyway.

Okay. One idea is to work with her response of "nothing."

□ Teenagers are usually comfortable with fantasy. If she responds to you verbally, follow her lead. If she does not, make something up. Let your intuition guide you and take her on a guided imagery.

☞ "Okay, close your eyes and picture the nothing. Imagine that you..."

□ "Draw a picture of the nothing."

□ "With your arms, show me how big the nothing is."

□ "I wonder what feeling you would be feeling if you were feeling Something."

□ "What's it like, feeling nothing?"

□ "Your feeling 'nothing' reminds me of another person I knew who felt nothing. What happened to her was... "

□ Here are scissors, glue, magazines. Let's see what happens when we don't think about what the final product will look like.

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Q. In training, because I am being watched, I worry about doing it right and being perfect. When I am seeing someone by myself, I am so much more empathic and free.

A. Videotape a session where you are neither behind the mirror nor being watched by someone else. Compare the tape with a training tape and notice any differences in pace, style or focus.

What you will probably discover is that you look generally the same in either kind of session and that what is different is your perception of yourself.

Chances are, when you feel watched, you give your power away to the watcher, assume a negative judgment and, at some level, agree with the negativity.

You project your Critical Self onto the watcher, and assume they are as aware of every little thing you do as you are.

The way you have described your session, you are outside your body observing a third watcher-person whose job it is to observe and then to judge you. Nobody seems to be observing the client.

To promote positive regard for your clients, start by having positive regard for your Self.

If you must give your power away, give your power away to yourself. Take over the role of Faithful Watcher.

During the moments it is not possible to be inside your body observing the client, be outside your body observing the system. Find a perspective that allows everything.

Contract with the Watcher to notice only positive things and ignore the negative. Over time, aim for feeling more cherished and less judged. This may free you up to be with your client the way you want to be.

Perhaps I need to change my definition of perfect.

Okay, try an experiment. Imagine for a moment that everything is perfect. Imagine that imperfection is perfect, too. Embrace

the possibility that the universe (which includes your therapeutic imperfection, your client, and you) is unfolding as it should. Hold that thought.

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