



Integrative ideas for the process-oriented psychotherapist

Dear Reader,

Countertransference is the bane of our profession. I blab on and on about it to any intern who appears to be paying attention. Whether unconscious-of, or conscious-but-lost-in wanting/needing anything at all from the client, liking/disliking him, being attached to outcome, or getting involved in his system in any way, our countertransferences interfere with his psychotherapy and contribute to our burn-out. In that vein, I offer this suggestion:

To be fully available for clients, take responsibility for freeing yourself of primary needs. Before you go into session, see to it that you are:

watered
fed
slept
toileted
orgasmed
exercised
temperated
relationshipped
self-esteemmed
purposed
touched
connected to yourself
&
choosing to be here

Carol Nichols Hadlock, editor

Q. When doing process work, which process do I attend to?

A. Well, let's name some of the processes going on right now, here in this room:

questioning	answering
wondering	thinking
caring	learning
telling	drinking
scratching	laughing

Hundreds of processes are going on at any one time. Some processes are noticed by utilizing a metaphorical electron microscope. Other processes can be seen only with the naked eye. Still other processes need distance or a mental telescope to notice them.

There is no correct process to attend to. You might start by asking yourself, "What is happening right here, right now?" Either allow a picture to form in your mind or think of an action-verb in the present tense, i.e. an "ing" word. That's the process to start with. Then invite, notice, reflect, enact, wonder, share, guess, question, interpret, or intervene in anyway your professional experience guides you. Trust yourself. Let go of any investment that the process you picked is *the* important process. Focus instead on the client's response to your intervention. This response is the new here-and-now process. Now work with this *new* process in some way.

For example, a client is speaking about a friend, tapping his fingers and looking around the room.

You: (picking the first process you are aware of)
Keep tapping your fingers and put some words to the motion.

He: (sighs deeply and stops talking).

You: (abandoning your previous invitation and focusing on the current processes). Do that again. Sigh. Yes, like that. What are the words that go with the sigh?

(or) What else needs to stop, besides talking?

Sometimes I can't tell the difference between the process and the content.

I liken the word "*content*" (as opposed to *content*) to the word, "McGuffin." McGuffin is sometimes used in script-writing to describe the thing in the drama that all the characters in the story passionately care about, but about which mostly no one in the audience cares at all. For example, the characters are focused on getting the money or the prize, (the content) while the audience mostly cares about the relationships between the characters (the process). *Content* is similar to a McGuffin in that it both attracts

us and distracts us from what is unfolding around and underneath it. *Content* is usually the thing that's being talked about. *Process* is usually the answer to, "What's happening?" or "What's happening right now, here, in this room?"

One thing you might do is tell yourself not to bother with either one, but instead, to "work with the client's response." That way, you can say or do pretty much anything in session, then attend-to and work-with the person's reaction.

□ Beginning psychotherapists often say they get confused and can't enact the process. I usually reply, "No problem. Enact the content." For example, if your client says, "My friend and I argue a lot," you can skip wondering if he is a) telling the truth, b) trying to impress you, c) describing the problem, d) obscuring the problem, e) . . . whatever. Instead, you might say,

"Okay, I'll be you and you be your friend. Show me what happens."

By dramatizing (enacting) the content, the process will make itself clear as you fiddle with the enactment. Keep in mind there is no best response to work with. There is no perfect intervention to use. One pretty good guide is: If nothing else comes to mind, find a way to direct the client's attention back towards himself in the moment.

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Q. Sometimes I'll start an enactment and then forget the thought that propelled me to set it up in the first place. Or, I have no idea what to do with the enactment once it is set up. If I try to analyze or figure out what I am doing, I get even more stuck.

A. And the more often you forget your original thought, the more anxious you are that you might get stuck. And the more anxious you are that you might get stuck, the more stuck you get. Is that right?

Yes.

Just so. Fear is usually the greatest inhibitor of creativity. To reboot yourself back to a beginner's mind I suggest, for awhile anyway, you *pretend* that it doesn't matter if you make a mistake. *Pretend* that if you forget what you're doing, well, that's what's supposed to happen.

In session, try pretending that your subconscious is your friend. Pretend that your subconscious is not necessarily perfect or correct, but that it always has a positive intent. After a bit, if you pretend enough, you might begin to believe it. If you cannot pretend,

then act *as if* it is true. While you are at it, consider the possibility that the reason you occasionally “forget the thought,” is that your subconscious lets this happen on purpose as a guide for you to not have an agenda and to stay out of the client’s system. Recall that the objective of any enactment is to invite the *other person* (as opposed to yourself) to become aware of his process. Your job is to issue the invitation, not to be invested in the outcome. The initial invitation is similar to turning the key in a car’s ignition. It’s a way to get things started, but has little to do with the trip.

It’s difficult to have the words for “I am stuck,” I’m analyzing,” etc. right there in the session.

□ One idea is to leave the room (in your mind) for a second or two, wander into an imaginary consultation group, and wonder how you might describe what’s happening in the therapy session right now. This gets you into an observer position. Once connected to your Inner Observer, your cognitive mind is more likely to come back on line. Once you have the words to describe yourself, you can, if you choose, use them in the session as an intervention.

“I’m really stuck right now and I have no idea where to go with this. If you were me, what would you suggest at this point?”

“I forget where I was going.” (This is where you sit still and shut up).

“Sometimes I start something, forget what it is, and then have no idea what I’m doing. What’s your reaction when I get lost like that?”

□ In general, when you get an idea for an enactment, plan for the first five seconds, only. After that, all bets are off. Set it up, let go of it, see what happens, and be prepared for it to go in any direction the client takes it.

□ As he speaks, make a mental picture of what the person is saying or doing. Notice all the objects in your picture. Assume that although every object, verb, adjective, and adverb in your picture represents what’s going on with you, it *also* might have something to do with the person who is speaking.

□ Get in the habit of listening to what is being said around or underneath the content. Wonder what the person wants right now, here, either from himself or from you.

□ Get some distance. Step back and notice what is happening as opposed to what is being talked about. Choose an action verb or find a way to create in the room a representation of the picture in your head.

□ Get in the habit of noticing the relationships between the speaker and the subjects of his sentences.

□ Stay aware of your body. Breathe. Clear your mind and stay connected to yourself. Allow your brain to feed you ideas. If nothing comes forward, be quiet. Do nothing.

□ If an idea comes as a picture, memory, thought, emotion, body sensation, or words, trust it. Find a way to use it as an intervention in some way.

□ For general purpose use and for when you have a temporarily brain-cloud, memorize a repertoire of generic invitations such as:

- “Notice something about yourself right now.”
- “What is your experience in this moment?”
- “What do you hope for by saying that?”
- “What is it you fear/need/want right now?”
- “Find another way to express that.”
- “Say the words that go with that.”
- “Do that more. Exaggerate that.”
- “Say (do) the opposite.”
- “Show me.”



Q. When she remembered . . . , I got a figurine and did an enactment for that. Then she said . . . , so I set up some balls and pillows and did an enactment of that. How could I set up an enactment for . . . ?

A. Enactments often include the use of objects, but the essence of an enactment has nothing to do with *stuff*, and they do not always need to be “set up.” The lovely thing about an enactment is that it is an experiential way to invite process into awareness. The concrete nature of a physical metaphor can present options which might otherwise remain quite obscure. Remember, too, that a person’s process is being enacted from the moment

On Building a Private Practice: Just a Little Story About Bobby

Bobby wasn’t sure what he wanted to do, so he went into the kitchen where his mother was working. He watched a moment, then wondered out loud if he could have something to eat. His mother gave him a plate of ginger cookies and a glass of milk. He took them outside and sat on the front porch. He found it pleasant to sit in the afternoon sun, nibbling on a cookie and listening to the sounds of his mother moving around in the house. He looked down the street interested that someone he knew might come by and visit.

As Bobby ate his cookies, Johnny was walking towards Bobby’s house, enjoying the sounds his feet made as they crunched and swooshed the leaves on the sidewalk. He noticed Bobby and the plate of cookies, but he didn’t know Bobby very well and wasn’t sure if Bobby liked him. He thought about what it would be like if he walked up to Bobby and started to talk. He imagined that Bobby might not offer him any cookies and he could feel how uncomfortable he would be if he had to ask Bobby to give him some. And what if Bobby said, “No?” Or worse, what if Bobby didn’t want to share but let him have some cookies anyway? Johnny felt awful just thinking about it. So as he was moving past Bobby’s porch he said, “Hi Bobby” and sort of hoped Bobby would invite him to stay and eat cookies and play. But though Bobby smiled and looked friendly, all he said back was, “Hi Johnny.” Johnny smiled back and walked on home, feeling vaguely empty. He went into his room and played with his dog and his trucks and waited for dinner.

Bobby was still on the porch munching cookies when he noticed Richie walking by. Richie knew Bobby a little and he noticed the cookies right away. “Hi Bobby, can I have some of your cookies,” he grinned as he walked up the path to the porch. “Sure”, said Bobby, “just a minute.” Bobby went inside to get some more cookies for Richie. Bobby’s mother poured another glass of milk to go with them.

Bobby and Richie sat on the porch in the afternoon sun enjoying the ginger cookies and listening to the sounds of the neighborhood and of Bobby’s mother moving around in the house. After a little while, they began to play in the yard, wrestling and laughing and throwing leaves on one another.

A few blocks down, Johnny grew tired of playing with his trucks. He went into his backyard and began to throw a stick for his dog to catch. He wished he had someone else to play with but he didn’t know how to make that happen. So he stayed in the yard, throwing the stick, feeling a little sad and lonely and not understanding why.



she walks in the room. How she enters the room, how she sits down, where she puts her focus, her internal experience, what she says, the topic she chooses, and the tone of her voice are all holograms, all representations of herself in every aspect of her life. Similarly, how she relates to you is also an enactment of an issue she is working on. And this between-the-two-of-you enactment is happening every moment of the session, whether you notice it or not.

Everything you do in session is an intervention, and all your interventions are enactments. For example, as you reflectively listen you are also in a roleplay (an enactment) of how the person listens, or does not listen, to herself.

A memory is an enactment too, a re-creation in imagery, of a past event. Inviting this woman to connect with her experience while she remembers something is inviting a re-enactment of how she related to that event. She will also be enacting how she responds to people who invite her to do something.

If you choose to work with enactments that are more structured, then get out the bears and chairs. That's fine with me. But remember that the point of all your interventions is to invite the client to attend to and connect with her process as it manifests (enacts) itself in this moment.

And once she is connected to and experiencing herself, step back, occasionally invite her deeper, but generally stay out of her way. If you constantly present her with yet another ball, another pillow, another empty chair, you may be inviting her out of the deeper work.

Some people don't need you to invite them to do very much at all. A therapeutically available client with high intentionality can move into her experience and, with minimal encouragement from the therapist (perhaps a few sentences total, all session), do a piece of work to resolution by herself.

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Q. She wants to know whether to leave her partner or not. I don't know what to tell her.

A. You can tell her whatever you like, as long as you don't have an opinion. That way, whatever you tell her will be an intervention, not an intrusion.

□ Whatever you say first, invite her response.

"Let me think. Hmmn. Definitely leave your partner. In fact, you should probably not go home tonight. Don't bother saying anything, either. Just check into a hotel. You can get your things later. What's your response to that?"

□ Then tell her the opposite and invite her response.

"On second thought, you should stick with your

partner. You will probably never find anybody else better, anyway. What's your response to that?"

Hold the perception that whatever she says and the opposite of what she says, are both true.

□ When she says she wants to leave him, wonder why she's still with him and say,

"And now speak with the voice of the part of you that Doesn't want to leave him."

Sometimes the "opposite" or polarity isn't what you think it is. In this case, the polarity might not be that she doesn't want to leave her partner, but instead that she wants her partner to do the leaving. Y'never know.

"And now speak with the voice of the part of you who is the opposite (has another point of view, disagrees with that . . .)"

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Q. Her life is in turmoil. Her children do this; her parents do that. Her career is a mess. It seems like she needs help and advice more than therapy.

A. Possibly so. If your preferred mode of assistance is service, then by all means trust yourself and advise as needed. However, if you choose to be a psychotherapist, the person she needs help and advice from, is... (guess who?) Herself! As you describe the situation, her children, her parents, and her career are all content. Each is both a stage on which she acts out her life drama, and a prop in her play.

Since two of her current processes are 1) creating a mess and 2) not-taking advice, you might suggest

"Let's explore how you manage Not to take the advice given to you by . . . (parents, co-workers, advice columnists, television shows, friends, neighbors, employers, career counselors, religious leaders, etc.)"

"About the messes in your life, let's assume that any human in your position might have done the same thing. Given that they might have played a small part in the making of that mess, what might that part be?"

Imagine that this woman is doing her best to teach herself something. Neither of us knows what the "something" is. Outside of session, both of us are clear we wouldn't choose to go about learning whatever her lesson is in quite the same miserable way. In session however, if we can come from the perspective that she (and every person) is resolutely moving in a positive direction, then it is much easier to accept that creating messes and turmoil is exactly what this woman needs to be doing.

Countertransference occurs when we want our client to be different because our reactions to him are uncomfortable. Co-behaving is when we try to comfort or fix our client's uncomfortable experience because when he feels more comfortable, we will be less uncomfortable in response. Therefore, co-behaving the client is a way we medicate our own discomfort. I don't know about you, but I can't think how that's a good psychotherapeutic choice.

Don Hadlock

"Close your eyes. Imagine that your life is even messier. . . What is different? . . . What would you have to do to make that happen?"

"Now imagine that your life is much less messy . . . What is different? . . . What would one have to do to make That happen?"

□ Your job is to trust her completely and invite her to attend to herself, her process, and her experience as she experiments with a) doing what she is doing, more, b) doing what she is doing, less, and c) staying exactly the same.

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Q. What if someone wants to know how he is progressing?

A. If he simply wants your professional viewpoint, schedule an evaluation session. An evaluation session is not an ordinary therapeutic session, although it can be very therapeutic. It is a time for both of you to summarize resolved and unresolved issues, therapeutic goals, and your guesses as to the course the therapy will take if it continues. More clear about his own goals, he might appreciate the ground he has covered and renew his contract with himself.

□ If he finds that movement toward a clear goal gives him permission to do more of his work, put the question back to him and encourage him to track his own progress toward his objectives.

□ If the question comes in the middle of his work or is part of a larger pattern to avoid his work, his request puts you in the position of a deity who knows more about his internal progress than he does. In answering, you are participating in and reinforcing his looking to externals for validation.

He often asks me, "How'm I doing?"

□ Pay attention to process.

"Wonderful. What happens for you when I say that?"

"Terrible. What's your experience when I say that?"

"I dunno. How'm I doing?"

Big Enough

by Don Hadlock

Sitting in her chair, she is teary-eyed.

I ask, "What are you experiencing right now?"

"I am sad," she says.

"View the sadness as important guidance." I reply, "Listen to it."

"It's about all the pain in the world," she replies.

I invite her to remember an earlier time when she felt sad about the condition of the world.

She tells me of a time she was nine, sitting on a big rock, feeling the exact same way.

"Imagine you are there right now," I tell her. "Be nine years old, sitting on that big rock . . . Find out what the rock has to say about the sadness you are experiencing."

"It says not to worry. That everything is working out as it needs to," she says.

"What is your response to that?" I ask.

"A part of me already knew that," she replies.

I invite her to find a way to choose the rock, to own that the rock is a part of herself, and to find a place in her physical being where it can abide and she can be conscious of it being there. She is silent as she does this and then reports a calmness surrounding her grief. "Maybe I can have both the calmness and the sadness," she muses.

After a few more moments, she looks up and expresses a feeling of joy. Then, smiling broadly and no longer nine years old, she stands up and states, "I am big enough to be both."

☐ Vacate your chair and invite him to sit in "the therapist's chair." Direct him to evaluate himself.

☐ Wonder out loud who taught him to look externally for approval.

☐ Wonder who you represent. Most likely it is the one who knows how I'm doing.

Well, some clients demand feedback.

"Demand," not "feedback," is the operative process here. Deal therapeutically with the issue of demand (control).

☐ Direct him to be even more demanding with you. Little by little, give him something to represent everything he wants. Keep it up until there is nothing left in the room to give him.

Him: I want a million dollars.

You: Okay. (pours a small basket of poker chips into his lap.) Here you go. How's that?

Him: Two tickets to Tahiti.

You: Okay, (gives him two pieces of something that represent tickets) What's happening now?

Him: More

You: (gives him a pillow, stuffed animal, or . . .) What do you notice now?

☐ Refuse him everything he wants. Direct him to focus on his responses.

☐ Invite him to yell, "yes," or "Give me what I want" over and over as loud as he can while you respond with, "No." Then switch: you yell Yes, and he does the No part.

☐ Encourage him to act out extremes of demand and rage until he is regressed, having a temper

tantrum, and yelling some version of, "I want what I want and I want it right now."

☐ Assist introspection and connection with his anger, disappointment, and grief when he does not get what he wants.

☐ Encourage awareness of how he uses your refusal to reinforce his low self-esteem.

☐ Invite exploration of expectations and how those expectations interfere with positive relationships.

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Q. He works hard, acts like he goes through an impasse and appears to leave session resolved. The next week he returns unchanged, as dysfunctional as ever.

A. Indeed, some people seem committed to their dysfunction. Someday there may be a DSM diagnosis of "commitment to misery." You are probably aware that sometimes a person can intellectually *know* a thing is true, but doesn't really believe it, completely and in a deep way.

Well, even if *you* don't believe it, I invite you to "know" that the universe is unfolding as it should. To enjoy yourself and thrive in this profession, find and access the expanded Dalai Lama part of yourself who has complete faith in everyone's innate desire to work through their issues or not, in their own way, and in their own time. Give up on the possibility of fixing this man. Let go of hoping he will work things out sometime before he dies. Or not. Breathe, connect to yourself, find that inner flicker of unconditional positive regard, be aware of his process, stay out of his system, and keep inviting him to put his attention back onto himself.

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Q. I keep having an agenda for people. Deep down I want them to get better. Say some stuff that will convince me to stop it.

A. I find that amusing. You are asking me to do the very thing you think *you* shouldn't do. There is nothing I or anyone can say that will change your inner should/want system until you are ready.

I suggest you try trusting yourself. Honor your agenda-having part.

☐ Do an experiment. For a few weeks, purposefully and consciously attempt to make your clients get better. Try really hard.

My guess is that when you get tired of doing all the work and taking responsibility for someone else's behavior, you will want something *else* for yourself. Even if you don't, you will be in control of your agenda-having rather than your agenda-having being in control of you.

What do you mean, want something else for myself?

When what you want is that somebody else change, then that somebody else is in charge of you getting what you want. You enabled that person to be in charge, by getting it into your head that if he doesn't change, you are responsible. Your sense of competency is temporarily in his hands. He is not only in charge of whether he changes or not, but he is also in charge of your perceived success. During the moments that someone else is in charge of how you experience yourself, you are in a dependent position relative to that person. When your professional satisfaction is dependent upon whether or not someone else makes the changes you think they should make, ah, what power they have. All they have to do is remain resistant to your ideas and you are doomed to feel bad. I recommend that you want yourself to change so you can have some control over your success rate.

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Q. Sometimes I'm scared when I'm with this person. It's easy to succumb to that fear, then shut down and do minimal therapy. It's hard to push forward.

A. And if you're scared, assume there is danger. Of course, it's most likely that the danger is coming from you, not from her.

What do you mean?

Repeat after me and see if this makes sense to you. "Around this woman, sometimes I am a danger to myself. I shut myself down and do minimal therapy."

(Repeats) Yeah, I guess that's true. But I'm still scared.

You bet. And again, if you are scared, assume there is danger. So protect yourself. You'll notice I'm not asking you what it is she does that scares you, because whatever it is, I suspect that shutting down is exactly the right thing for you to do. The trick is to stay conscious while you protect yourself and, at the same time, be aware that most everything that happens in session has something to do with the client's work.

□ Your "Self" is the most reliable tool you have in session. Your felt sense is often the way your subconscious mirrors the process of the client. In this case, you might guess that she too, is shut down and minimally responding to the world. If that is your guess, find away to use it.

"What is it you fear right now?"

"I notice I feel scared right now. The fear centers right uh . . . here (touches body). Where in your body do You experience fear this moment?"

"Who else shuts down when you want them to hear you?"

"I notice I'm shutting down. I have a guess that you're a bit shut down too. Is that true? Let's both breathe deeply for a minute or two and see what happens."

□ Explore how you move through your fear. As you experiment with the articulation of how you are doing it, ideas will come to you regarding ways to invite her to do the same.

Accessing my anger is what I do to get through my fear. It empowers me.

And her anger may empower her. Share with her what you are doing.

"I'm going to whack this futon a couple of times . . . There, I feel better. Now you try it."

Wouldn't that be taking time away from the client?

No more than shutting down and doing "minimal therapy." Any time your emotions, thoughts, or physical needs distract your attention away from the client's process, either take your body with you when you leave the room, or keep your whole self in the room and use your distraction as a part of the work. As you transcend your shame and embarrassment about being imperfect, you will find your imperfections to be quite useful in your work.

How?

Name the problem, own it, fix it or let it go, then put the attention back on the client. This is great modeling.

What do you mean by "own it"? What if she is yelling at me or something?

Well, it depends on how you define the problem. If you say, "my problem is you are yelling at me," that makes the other person the problem. If you can say something like, "My problem is I get scared and then I shut down when I hear loud voices," now you are owning the problem as yours.

Well how would you fix it? Other than getting the yelling person to leave or stop yelling.

□ If the problem is *your* problem, then the fix is for *you* to take action, as opposed to waiting for other guy to do something. Some possibilities:

"Sometimes I shut down when someone yells at me. So, I'm going to leave now (in a minute) and take a break (leave the building, consult with my supervisor, call the police, terminate our session). I'll be back in five minutes (tomorrow, next week). I'll be more available then."

□ As you are able to transcend your fear and stress, or put it aside for a few moments, you might come up with some other ideas.

"I'm going to sit here a minute, breathe, and just let my shut-down experience be okay."

"I'm going to yell back. Let's see who can yell the loudest."

"Yell that again, even louder. Who else do you want to yell that to?"

"Yelling is so someone will hear you. What part of You isn't listening?"

"Sometimes I don't do well with yelling. Actually it's okay with me that you yell, but it's not okay that I be in the same room with you while you do it. So what I'm going right now is . . ."



Q. When a client says how great I am, sometimes part of me enjoys taking credit even though I know they are responsible for their own healing.

A. Of course; you're a normal human. However when you claim as true, the things he likes about you, then it seems only fair that you claim as true, the things he does not. I suggest: instead of taking on *anything* someone else believes about you, take credit for what you actually do:

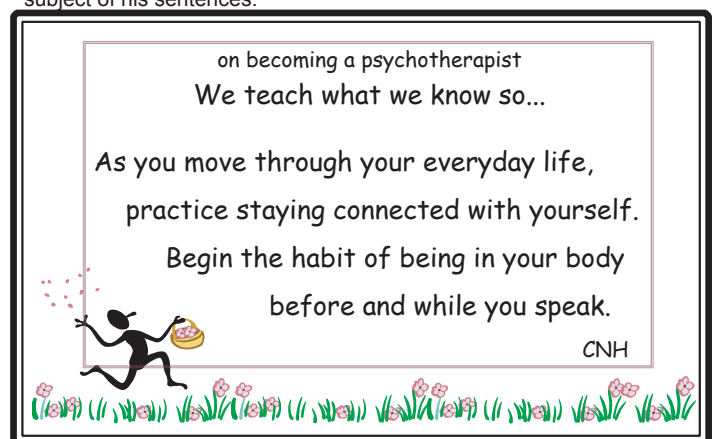
- You provide an environment of unconditional positive regard.
- You provide a safe nonjudgmental place for the exploration of both known and unknown parts of Self.
- You do not fear other people's issues, and you do not let yourself be abused by their dysfunctions.
- You do not let your own issues get in the way of other people's work.
- You are available to re-parent and to make available for introjection more positive perceptions of Self.
- You invite mental health without agendas or investment.

Celebrate and take responsibility for the gifts you give your clients through psychotherapy. Do not wait until some other person appreciates these things about you before you appreciate them in yourself. Find a way not to personalize how someone else feels about you. In this case, the word "great" describes only the intensity of this man's emotional involvement in his therapy. He is just doing his job, which is to be transferred onto you.

When we feel a countertransference tug and temporarily bask in the idea that we may be great because someone else thinks so, we are in touch with one of our own issues.

As soon as you become conscious of the over-involvement, silently acknowledge to yourself, "I'm personalizing right now as well as being grandiose and dependent; what I need to do is . . . (whatever it is that solidifies your boundaries or transcends your immediate emotions)" and then put the focus of your attention back on the client's process.

Even when you are not conscious of your internal response, get in the habit of putting your attention back on the other person's process. In this case, encourage this man to communicate both his appreciations and resentments even more directly. Invite him also, to take ownership of and responsibility for his emotions and thoughts. Invite him to make himself the subject of his sentences.



□ Listen for the I-statement underneath his words. Invite him to own his responses and say what he really means:

I appreciate you so much. I love, respect, romanticize you.
I see my own greatness in you. I am jealous.

As you suggest phrases for him to try on, let go of expecting that anything you think of will be useful to him or that he will participate in finding an I-statement at all. He may not want or be ready to take responsibility for his response to you.

□ Respond as if the I-message had actually been said. Model acceptance.

"Thank you. I like being appreciated."

□ Make a best guess about the underlying message and share it.

"My guess is you're feeling appreciation right now. Is that true? Okay, try telling that to me, directly."

□ Whatever your intervention, when you are done put the focus back on the other person.

"How does your appreciation manifest itself as a felt sense right now?"

"What is something you appreciate about yourself?"

"Who else do you need to say an appreciation to? Imagine them in this empty chair. Tell them now."

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Q. He does not want to talk about the past. He wants only to concentrate on the present and on the future.

A. Remember that the past is represented in the present. How-he-was will be mirrored by how-he-is. Remember, in his mind, you are in an dramatization (a re-enactment) of one of his relationships just by being in the room. One up - one down, doctor-patient, parent-infant, authority-underling, therapist-client, teacher-student, bully-victim, etc. There are many possibilities. You are only a prop in his play. One of the things he can do in psychotherapy is work out with you that which he needed to work out with the person(s) you represent (whoever that is).

□ While he concentrates on the present and future, you concentrate on the transference, the relationship between the two of you in the present. He may think of the present as today, out there. When you think of the present, think of this moment, in here.

□ Direct your interventions to inviting his awareness of his process in the moment.

□ When he is not focused on his relationship with you or someone else, direct him to be aware of his relationship with himself.

"What is your response to what you just said?"

□ Something I'd be tempted to say is,

"Okay, we won't talk about the past but before we get started on the present, could you tell me what it is specifically in the past that you don't want to talk about? Just so I'll know to avoid it."

□ Facilitate work in metaphors, dreams, imagery, art, stories, even movies. You do not have to know the specific content and he does not have to be aware that the "past" will show up whether he wants it to or not.

Movies?

□ Sure. Use them just like dreams. Tell the story. Tell the story as if it is happening now. Have him speak for each of the characters and major objects. Have the characters and objects communicate with each other. Invite multiple or more satisfying endings. His psyche will do the rest of the work.

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Experiential Sand Tray Therapy

Part 1
by Cindy Gum

Experiential Sand Tray Therapy (ESTT) is about empowerment. The sand tray is a tool, a wonderful tool, for self discovery and for unlocking the treasures and guidance hidden within ourselves.

Your clients become the explorers and journeyers into the vast resources of their own inner experience and landscape. Your job is to accompany them with safety, respect, and acceptance. As therapists, we are not the experts in this interiority; our clients are. Our role is to be as fully present as possible while using our own intuitive curiosity to help them expand their awareness and perspective.

The expanded perspective and awareness of a problem or situation, as seen through a sand tray of their own creation, offers our clients an opportunity to create change in their lives. It also becomes a stimulus for personal growth. Since new options emerge from their own experience and understanding, clients are empowered to take responsibility and consider change.



With ESTT, you can:

- Unleash your intuitive curiosity and creative "self" to interact with clients.
- See your clients actively engaged in doing their own work.
- Join your clients in a unique spirit of safety, trust and acceptance.
- Enlarge your own understanding of your clients' inner world and perspective.
- Have fun doing therapy again.

Trust and Intuitive Curiosity

One of the most important things I learned when I began working with the sand tray was that I needed a deep inner knowing and confidence that there were no "wrong" questions. As I began to trust my intuition and curiosity, I realized that whatever I asked the client would lead somewhere, and I did not need to know where. Nor did I need to know why or how. I didn't need to control. I only needed to stay present and be with my clients in their self-exploration. I became a fellow journeyer interested in learning their story, their losses, their perceptions and deceptions.

I first began working with volunteers because I wanted to be free and not attached to any outcome. I wanted to be able to follow my own natural instincts and curiosities, free to follow the client with my own inquisitive mind, and free to let go of the need to analyze or interpret. I call this "following the juice" of my own curiosity.

Because I was not attached to outcomes, I was able to let go and enter with clients what I call the Discovery Phase, the deepest and most magical part of the sand tray processing. I felt driven by my curiosity to help clients discover what the images they selected might be communicating to them. As I continued to listen to my curiosity and trust my own process, it became a dance.

It is important to have the belief that the images and the projections they hold might be reflecting back helpful information that has been out of cognitive awareness to the client. It is difficult to allow intuitive curiosity to unfold if you do not trust it, are not interested in being curious, or are not in the present moment. This style of working in the sand tray is suited to clinicians in service of discovering more about the subjective world within the client, according to the client, rather than according to their own diagnosis, interpretation, or analysis.

The Value of Self Reflection

I have struggled with my own use of self as a therapist. What is it I do well and what not so well? What is it I do in the sand tray? One of the things I believe I do well is to help clients self-reflect upon their lives; their stories.

For me, the most important dynamic of ESTT is that the sand tray action methods and dialogue techniques help clients self-reflect and make sense of their stories. Self-reflection offers a mirror to the deepest parts of the psyche, if we will invite it. It can show us our weaknesses and also our strengths. It can reveal our most cherished deceptions and pernicious projections.

As clients self-reflect, they can take responsibility for their part in the drama of their lives and for their beliefs and choices. In the sand tray, they can “see,” and sometimes let go of, what is not in their control.

Self-reflection is quite difficult when one is talking about oneself. It comes much more easily when one can step outside of oneself and look in. We can get Band-Aids from the external realm, but change occurs from the inside. I feel change is more likely to occur when a decision is made through self-reflection rather than as a result of analysis or interpretation by another. The ESTT process allows me to help my clients hold this inner “self” with tenderness, respect, and love. As healers and psychotherapists, we reflect this love and acceptance back to our clients. The hope is that these positive introjections gradually replace the negative ones.

Using the sand tray, I can help clients discover inner peace if I can help them see themselves as they truly are, as we all are, simple human beings with deep losses and a rainbow of life

experiences. My goal is to help them accept themselves and others, just as they are, and to not be afraid of change.

The sand tray provides a contained space within which the sand tray action methods and image dialogue help clients look within, while they remain safely on the outside of their stories. This makes it a very powerful tool for self reflection and self discovery.

The Stages of ESTT

An ESTT journey is any direct experience between a journeyer (your client), an image, and a tray of sand. Here are the stages of an ESTT intervention.

The Invitation: You invite the client to build within the safe containment of the sand tray. Sometimes there is no invitation other than “Show me your feelings about this difficulty,” or “Allow the deepest part of yourself to show us this problem.” When appropriate, your invitation might be more specific such as “Show me your dream in the sand tray.”

Building: The client uses the objects and images to build his/her tray. During this stage, I explain to the client that I am witnessing, not interpreting, as they place their images in the sand tray.

Identification of Feelings: Clients identify their feelings when they first look at the scene they have created in the sand tray. They use adjectives or descriptive words to describe their emotions at this point in the process.

Telling the Story: Clients tell their stories in whatever way works best for them.

Discovery and Experience: This is where the action and voice dialogue are used to discover the unseen. Following the juice, the therapist tunes into his/her own curiosity and intuition to help the client process at a very deep level.

Restructuring and Intention: This final stage gives clients an opportunity to change or modify the world as if they were the master of their own universe.



The Invitation

Invitations are a gentle way of letting clients know it's safe to begin to express themselves using the sand tray. There are various circumstances and reasons for inviting your client to do a tray. Generally you have a sense that this medium will help a particular client gain perspective on a problem or self-reflect. Whatever your reasons, you are generally the one to make the invitation.

Baby Steps to Begin

Inviting your client into the sand can feel uncertain. I suggest baby steps, and you can begin by not using the sand tray and simply ask your client to choose an image and hold it in their hand. Ask them to tell you about it and watch the story unfold.

This is how you might make this invitation: *“Choose an image that represents how you feel today.”*

“Choose a couple of images that represent your problem (or relationship).”

Entering the Sand

One way to begin acquainting clients with the possibility of using the sand tray is to simply ask them. Here are some of the phrases I use:

“Some people like to use the sand tray to explore their problem. . . would you like to give it a try?”

“Here’s a tool that can help you tell your story in a creative new way.”

“Would you like to explore your situation in a different way today?”

“Sometimes the sand tray can show you things words can not...”

“Sometimes the sand tray can show us what is out of your awareness.”

“Let’s have fun today and play in the sand.”

“Would you like to try something different?”

“Let’s go exploring.”

I also might use one of the following invitations:

“Show me how you feel today.”

“Show me the ‘parts’ of your personality (sub-personalities, sub-self etc.)”

“Show me how your past week has been.”

“Show me your problem in the sand tray.”

“Show me your relationship with (whomever/ whatever).”

“Show me your dream in the sand tray.”

“Let’s not set an intention today and invite the objects and images to lead the way.”

“Let’s see what your inner child would like to build today.”

The Invitation to Explore Trauma

When I know my client is dealing with a traumatic event, I use an invitation such as :

"Show me the (trauma, or the scene) as you remember it."

Sand tray is a powerful medium. It can go very deep, very quickly. As always when dealing with trauma, the work can be overwhelming to a client not prepared. Therefore I like to wait for a client to have used the sand tray at least once before exploring trauma. I make the invitation only after a client agrees that he/she is ready and willing to go more deeply into his/her trauma or loss. I tell my clients that their safety is important, and I encourage them to let me know at any time if they feel emotionally unable to continue. Occasionally we establish a signal which will allow them to verbally or non-verbally alert me if they are not feeling safe. Again, because the work can prove to be quite deep, such distancing can be very helpful, especially at first.

Guided Visualization or Meditation

While it is not always necessary or needed, a guided visualization/meditation can help clients enter their intuitive realm. You may have some clients who are unfamiliar with this technique and who may be uncomfortable with it. I often ask, "Some people feel more relaxed and receptive if we do a brief guided meditation. Would you like to give this a try?" If the client says no, I proceed without the guided meditation. Clients will enter the intuitive realm in ESTT regardless of whether you use this technique.

When clients are receptive, I simply say, "Close your eyes and notice your breath, observing its gentle rhythm and inviting the breath to guide you into your heart-that deepest place within you that knows what is in your highest and best interest." I invite them to consider asking this place within them to be their guide, along with the objects and images in the sand tray, to help them unfold their story, knowing and trusting that every feeling is welcomed with respect and acceptance.

The guided meditation can be a few moments, a few minutes, or longer. If you are doing a longer sand tray session and have the benefit of time, a longer guided meditation is very useful. I actually read my meditation to clients doing a longer session. I have found this helps me enter my own quiet, intuitive space along with my client.

I sometimes ring a soft gong or bell at the beginning and end of the guided meditation. This can be a gentle way of helping them enter and then exit the meditation.

As I close the meditation, I consistently invite my clients to "Let the images choose you. You will notice some want to jump right into your hand, while others ignore you, and some you will not want to pick up, but they insist, and you might pick them up anyway. The point is, to let them lead the way; they will show you where they want to be placed in your sand tray."

Building

You have now "set up" your client by introducing the sand tray materials first and then helping him/her relax and enter the intuitive world during the guided meditation. The client is now ready to begin building his/her sand world.

The most important thing I can tell clients before they build is this: "It is important to me that you know that I am not interpreting or analyzing what you are putting into the sand tray. I am not making a judgment about where or what is put into your sand world. I am going to be watching, and this is my way of joining you and being with you."

I then ask clients if they would like soft music as a background, and I may also suggest to the client that, "You will know when your sand tray is 'done', much like when you were a child and knew when your drawing was finished."

As I watch the client build, I am silently meditating myself. When I first began developing the ESTT method, I had no idea what I would be doing once I got into the sand. I would repeat phrases to myself, and sometimes still do, spiritual phrases or mantras that help me let go and just be in the present moment with my client.

Sometimes I imagine my client as a small child. I look at them as they build and shrink them in my imagination. That way I get a sense of the child within the client and how he or she might have been. Other times I imagine a soft light within them and link my own inner light with theirs, again in my imagination. I often ask for guidance. It is very important during this period to be in the present with them. This is a mirroring that many clients did not receive as children. No words are needed.

There is only one other thing for the therapist to do during the building phase. It is the task of non-judgmental observation of the client's process. These observations may, or may not be, of value at a later time.

... to be continued ...

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Teaching I messages-stumbling block #2

by Svetlana Kreimer

