



Dear Reader,

Years ago, it came about that I found myself in happy circumstances and had time in the mornings to notice the soaring treetops outside my bedroom window. For no particular reason, I consciously began to appreciate those trees as part of my morning ritual, all the while thinking I would surely miss them the next time I changed living situations. Much to my surprise, when I moved, I didn't miss those trees at all.

Somehow I had memorized the experience of my view out that window and in so doing, managed to internalize the majesty of those trees. I have them with me, still.

Over the next few years I often experimented with appreciation as a pastime, noticing that the more I appreciated someone or something, the less I missed him, her, them, or it, whenever Change (oh, bane of sleep) brought a disappearance into my life.

Eventually, I began to practice appreciation-on-purpose. Big things, small things, the fact that I am able to experience the emotion of appreciation etc., all are fodder for my pleasure. Even now, I wonder at the miracle that is my pair of hands as they type this article. What an amazing thing. And at *this* moment, on my computer screen at least, the color of this edition of Interact is beautiful beyond words, and at *this* moment . . . well, you get the idea.

My younger self would think the whole idea of conscious appreciation a silly waste of time. But the older woman I am becoming is more and more often looking out through grandparent eyes, amazed and awestruck by whatever is in my line of sight. Still a pastime, not yet a habit, remembering turns out to be the most difficult part of appreciating. Nevertheless, all I have to do is remember to appreciate and *something* will catch my attention.

These days, appreciation is a purely selfish behavior on my part. I do it because it feels good to be in my body in the here and now, it feels good to love indiscriminately, and it feels good to feel good.

Carol Nichols Hadlock

Integrative ideas for the process-oriented psychotherapist

Q. Sometimes I get frustrated trying to think of just the right gimmick that will work with this client.

A. Rather than trying to find a gimmick that will work to change him, keep in mind that whatever enactment, question, technique, interpretation, or therapeutic style you choose, the intervention itself is unimportant. Your task is to illuminate, then work with, his response. Use your frustration to assist you in intervening.

Wonder out loud who it is in this person's world that *you* are re-creating by trying to think of the "right" way to work with him. Possibly it is someone from his past who was frustrated and trying to think of just the exact right gimmick to get your client to be different than he was.

Notice out loud whenever this client frustrates himself by trying to think of just the right way to do something.

Wonder out loud, "*What's the right thing you can do, that will work with Me.*" I'm not certain what those words mean, either. The reason I suggest them is because they are the opposite of the words you used in your description and are therefore worth a try.

When we feel frustrated, it means we want something that we can't have. The word "invite," as I use it, means to offer an idea with no investment in the outcome.

- Encourage him to do more (with consciousness) of whatever it is he is doing.
- Offer an experience different from the one he usually provides for himself.
- Have no agenda that he use your offer to work deeply, shallowly, or at all.
- Remember that, in session, the client is always "working," that is, something psychotherapeutic is always going on, no matter what it seems like to the observer.
- Experience no positive judgment if your invitation is accepted.
- Feel no negative response should your invitation be declined.
- Over time, pay attention to which interventions move him deeper into his experience and let that guide you. Some people work most deeply in imagery, some embrace somatic invitations, while others find their "ah-Ha!" moments while drawing charts on the white board.

Adopt an attitude of experimentation, and "I-wonder-how-comes."

Choose language that invites a person to consider you as a person who is on their team instead of as 'the one who is trying to change me, help me, fix me.'

"*Let's explore out how that works,*" is a comfortable approach to a re-enactment of the person's system, invites both of you into your creative energy, and suggests nonjudgment and support.

♩

Q. I find it confusing to stay in the room with a particular client. His truth changes.

A. Make that a sentence about you, only.

(after a couple of tries) I want other people to be logical, and I confuse myself when they're not?

Makes sense to me.

Rather than commenting on the content, direct his attention to his experience. Invite him to introspect.

"Say that again. Pay attention to your internal experience as you say it." "*Now that you've said that, what's your response?"*

As *his* truth changes, tell *your* truth.

"I'm confused."

He storytells and has a million tangents.

Access your inner dim-witted self (yes, you have one; you know that you do) and every time you get confused, ask him to slow down and explain it again, possibly in a different way.

"I don't quite understand," (as you bring out the sandtray, art supplies, or found items in the room) . . . "*show me.*"

Invite him to notice his experience while he is telling the story. That includes both the pictures that are going on in his head and what his body is doing while he is talking.

Explore with him (or make a guess at) the common thread weaving itself through all his stories.

Wonder out loud if he is as confused as you are. Alternatively, ask him to let you know when you have passed his trustability test.

Wonder if other people have as much trouble following him as you do.

- Consider referring him for a medical and/or psychological evaluation. He may be a bit thought-disordered even though he seems to be functional at work and at home.
- Ask him to draw or fiddle with clay while he tells his stories. One part of his brain can distract him while another part can show you what he means.
- Invite him to make a chart of his stories, as he tells them. Have a pad of newsprint and crayons or markers handy for all clients.
- Sidestep his story. Work with him non-verbally: drawing, painting, sandtray, movement. Invite him to work in imagery or with his dreams.
- Let go of your need to understand. Proceed as if all his truths are true.



Q. A man has come in twice now and each time repeated the same story of his wife's sexual indiscretion.

A. And how does that impact you right now?

I guess I'm concerned that he's not getting anywhere. Maybe he doesn't feel like he's being listened to enough, . . . I don't know.

It's okay to ask him directly. Chances are it isn't *you* who isn't listening, it's *him*.

- Pay attention to process, and while he's telling his story, make some guesses and act on those guesses. Work with his responses.

"What do you notice about yourself now that you've said that? Say it all again and pay attention to your emotional experience as you talk."

"Imagine your wife is in this empty chair and tell her what you just told me."

"What is it you fear?"

"When else have you experienced this degree of amazement at someone else's behavior?"

"I wonder if you're concerned that I might not be trustworthy either? How do you respond to the idea that I see other clients? Oh, it's not a problem for you? Well what's the difference?"

"Speak from the part of You who is or would like to be sexually indiscrete."

- Invite him to explore how the sexual relationship with his wife mirrors his family of origin.
- Wonder why he chooses to stay with this indiscrete person and what the secondary benefits of such a relationship are.

- Since he is so focused on his wife's behavior, my hit is to focus him, not necessarily on his *behavior*, but on his own *responses*.

"Return to the moment you learned of your wife's indiscretion. In your mind, freeze the frame. Where are you? What are you doing? Do a tour of your mind. What's happening. Do a tour of your body. How is it responding? What else do you notice. How do you experience yourself? Notice each of your emotions. What memory comes forward?"

- Invite the whole scene (above) to progress in super slow motion, suggesting he be as acutely aware of himself as possible at each step. At any moment of realization, direct him to push the "pause button." This is a moment when he may be face to face with one of his issues. This may be one of the moments he left his body. Invite him to hang out awhile in this moment and explore it. Be gutsy and invite him to experience it. Let go of wanting or needing him to accept your invitations or to make them work for him.



Q. An eight-year-old constantly says some version of, "Nobody likes me. I'm no good. Nobody wants to play with me. I can't do anything right."

A. First of all, arrange both your attitude and the physical environment of the therapy room so that he cannot do anything wrong. (This means it's okay if something gets broken, and no judgment from you.) Even though you might really rather begin by teaching him alternative ways to think about himself, start by going *with* his process. Join him.

- Tell parallel stories.

"I knew this fellow once who couldn't do anything right and ..."

Accept and encourage his need to explore the part of him that may not be acceptable to other people.

- Since he is complaining, invite him to complain more.
- Assist him to celebrate the unlikeable, alone part of himself. Suggest he represent the Part-That-No-One-Likes by drawing it or sculpting it. He might have fantasies where he is the king of the world and stomps everybody.
- Suggest he work with that part in imagery.
- Invite him to interact physically with that part. He might talk to it, teach it, yell at it, tear it up, or even kill it.

Okay, he got his anger out and the thing is dead. Now what?

- Say, "Okay, you got your anger out and the thing is dead. Now what?"

Trust him. Stay curious and loving. Let *him* decide what's next. His psyche will lead him where he needs to go.

The Music of Therapy by Maria Klein

An intern recently asked me, "How do I make my model of therapy fit this client?" Here is my answer. For each of us, our model of psychotherapy is unique. Our model is the instrument we play: the notes we learn, the keys we play in, and the rhythms we like. We choose our model from a place deep within us; a place that defines how healing takes place. It is an intimate, personal decision.

If I am a pianist I won't be playing the saxophone. If I express myself in classical music, I won't be playing rock. If I express myself in jazz, I won't be playing country.

In school and through our internships we learn the techniques: How do notes and rhythms fit together? When to play loudly or quietly? Am I sharp or flat? Am I in tune? Am I playing a solo, or listening to the band? How is my tone quality? How is my posture?

Music springs from our hearts as we play. Once the notes are played they disappear, neither to be held nor grasped as something tangible. With our clients we listen, and play our instruments according to the music of our heart. Each session is unique, and like notes that are played, our words too dissolve into air.

My intern could have asked, "How do I make my music fit this client?" My response is, play your music to the best of your ability. Use all the techniques you have learned, and then let it arise from your heart. Your music will flow out of you and surround your client with the best you have to offer. Whether or not your client



hears it, sings to it, dances to it, or even turns it up, down, or off, is up to them.

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□ Should he start in again about the part of him that nobody likes, say:

"Oh oh, he's baaack. He didn't stay dead. How would you like to get rid of him this time?"

□ Whatever he does, invite him do it more and connect with himself while he does it.

He draws guns all around himself.

Again, trust his ongoing process. Invite him to do more of what he is doing.

□ *"Hmmm, I see an inch there on the paper that doesn't have a gun. Does he need one there too? His eyes are showing, how about guns coming out of his eyes, and while you're at it, how about his nose, ears and mouth too? His hairs are poison darts, how about poison gas that comes out of his pores? Are the bottoms of his feet protected too?"*

Keep supporting the negativity until he indicates, "That's enough."

So what should he do then?

There are no "shoulds." Trust yourself. Use your question as an intervention.

□ Say, *"I wonder what you'll do now?"*

He'd say, "Shoot everybody."

□ Okay. Say, "Oh. I'll watch."

Later, after everybody on the planet has been shot and perhaps shot again, continue to encourage the intensity.

□ "How about shooting the animals too?"

He'd say, "No, they're nice. I wanna pet the dog."

□ Since you do not have an investment in whether he shoots the animals or not, move in this new direction.

You: I wonder how you're going to pet the dog since you're covered with guns.

Him: I guess I don't need the guns on my hands anymore.

Viola! There is an ever so slight change in behavior. He is connecting in different way.

□ Invite him to speak from the part of him who does *not* agree that he is no good.

□ Invite him to speak from the point of view of the dog.

Does an eight-year-old understand that?

Find out.

□ Use puppets, role play, or fantasy. Verbalize the dog's part a time or two to teach him the types of phrases that might go with another stance. Let go of any need you have that he will understand. He will learn what he needs to know about it.

What if he won't cooperate?

□ Say, *"You don't want to do that right now. Oh. I wonder what you're going to do instead."*

It is not important that he do what you suggest. It is important only that you invite him. Focus on how he responds to your invitation. Notice and validate everything he says and does. By your actions, give the underlying message that *you* think he is okay to play with. ♪

Q. I want to trust myself but I get confused when one part of me says yes and another says no.

A. I'm guessing you hold the misperception that because your two parts don't agree, one of the answers is correct and the other is wrong. Consider the possibility that each opinion comes from a part of you who loves you and that both parts believe their opinion is the best course of action for you. Consider the possibility that both answers are correct. Certainly both opinions have positive intent. There are a number of things you might do here including:

- Stay confused until you have more information.
- Wait until the two parts reach a consensus, or engage a third part of yourself to stand outside the system and mediate.
- Make a rule for yourself: When there is no time to wait, the no (or yes) vote wins.

Actually I see a young woman who has the same dilemma. How would you deal with that in session?

Okay, I'll show you. Which part are you at this moment, the Yes part or the No part?

Uh, (introspects) . . . the No part.

Okay, the Yes part is sitting over here in this empty chair. Be the No part. Talk to the Yes part and make a case for yourself.

(does it)

Switch chairs.

(the Yes part makes a case for itself)

Switch chairs.

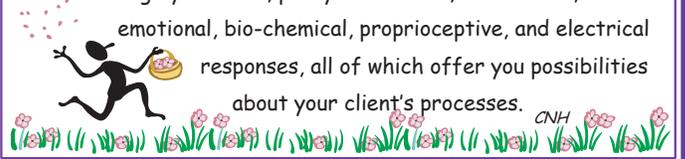
(the Yes and No parts have a back and forth conversation for several minutes) Okay, we've agreed on "No" for now.

Now be the confused part.

On Becoming a Psychotherapist

In session . . .

Your organism is your toolbox. The mirroring neurons of your brain translate what your psyche observes into experiences. Receive, as gifts to you, from your Inner Master Therapist, the images, music, memories, & random thoughts running through your mind, plus your visceral, kinesthetic, emotional, bio-chemical, proprioceptive, and electrical responses, all of which offer you possibilities about your client's processes.



(introspects) There isn't one at the moment. (thinks) Does it always go away like that?

Nope. Sometimes, the need to struggle wins out over the desire for completion. More often, once each opinion is aired and seen as caring, the confusion disappears even though a final answer is still illusive. Sometimes non-yes, non-no options come forward. Sometimes I will ask the person to come sit in *my* chair and observe the yes-no, push-pull process, from outside the system. Then I and the observer have a conversation about the relationship between the yes part and the no part.

Do you always use chairs?

No. Hold both your hands out, palms up. Okay, now go through the whole yes-no conversation you had before, preceding each opinion with, "On the one hand..." or, "On the other hand..."

Q. I'm uncertain how to work with people who were abused as children, who have been in prison, are divorced, addicts, dying, have a history of . . . , a diagnosis of . . .

Q. This client's presenting problem is (fill in the blank). I can't treat that. What do I know that would be of any help at all?

A. Psychotherapy is not about, "Something is wrong with that person so now we get to fix him."

Psychotherapy is about inviting that person to be intimate with and aware of himself. Usually it isn't the *problem* that's the problem. Most of the time it's the person's *relationship* to the problem that is problematical.

Given that, here's how I see myself working with "the problem."

Th: So why are you here?

Clnt: I was abused as a child.

Th: Okay, so what's your problem?

Clnt: My wife says our sex life is disappointing.

Th: Okay, so that's *her* problem. What's yours?

Here's how I see it.

- First, there is his presenting problem.
- Then, there is the negative relationship he has with the problem.
- Then, there is the dysfunction which the negative relationship manifests into his everyday life.
- Then, there is the underlying trauma that led to the problem.
- Then, there is the original, and usually dysfunctional, underlying decision about Self which is acted-out again and again, with "the problem" as the stage on which the drama takes place.
- Underlying that is the unresolved existential issue which lead to the dysfunctional decision in the first place.
- And sometimes, particularly with addictions, the problem isn't really a problem at all, but more of an attempt at a solution (self-medication, for example).
- So, let's stop already, with the presenting-problem problem.

Your relationship is not the problem. Your relationship is where your problems show up.

Don Hadlock

If someone comes to you wanting to change a particular behavior, thought-habit, or reaction which can be addressed by cognitive, hypnotic, or other behavioral means, and you are interested and willing to work that way, well, that makes sense to me. I employ those methods from time to time, but I won't be discussing them here with any degree of expertise.

My natural interests, instincts, and probably neuroses, lie in another arena. My ultimate preference is to invite a person to explore his subconscious for the beginning of the problem, the root of the dysfunction, the primal scene during which he claimed the problem as his own. In psychotherapy, I'm looking to create an environment where the person can re-solve "the problem" to a different conclusion of:

- the relationship
- the dysfunction
- the trauma
- the decision about Self, and/or
- the existential or developmental conclusions which support the problem.

I'm wanting to fiddle with the dysfunctional decision about Self which was welded into place as a life-saving device sometime in early

childhood and defaulted to, ever since.

I want to invite a person to access his Inner Learner, that child mind-state where "ah-Ha!" moments signal that the map of the Self has rearranged itself or that dendrite changes in the brain have added new learning to the adult brain. Check back here in a few years when neuro-psychologists have figured out how it all works.

As a professional, I'm not overly interested in a person's psychological software, that library containing all the stuff he knows (cognitively) and can pass tests on and talk about.

I'm into the "knowing" that migrates back to the subconscious and adds itself to his psychological operating system - that reservoir of default beliefs such as "I'm okay; you're not," "I'm unworthy," "If you have a problem, I have to, too," and "My cup is always half empty," etc.

So, from my point of view, one needs to understand virtually nothing about "the problem."

Here's an example. Say someone comes to you defining his problem thus:

He: I crave eating live grasshoppers for lunch.

You: So what's your problem?

He: Well, this is the third girlfriend who has left me once she finds out I usually eat live grasshoppers for lunch. I don't want to give up either the girls or the grasshoppers.

Do you understand that this man's problem isn't about grasshoppers?

Sorta. 

Without knowing anything else about him, we can guess that he is frustrated, lonely, grieving, and confused. Grasshoppers (or perhaps eating, or maybe lunches) are not The Problem. Grasshopper-eating is the stage (as in theater) on which he dramatizes his issues in the hopes of resolving them to a different conclusion. He probably also has a love-hate relationship both with girls and grasshoppers along with a certain resistance to consulting a medical professional as to a possible nutritional deficiency.

Frustration, loneliness, grief, love-hate relationships, and resistance? Piece of cake. You can work with those things. Those things are processes. Grasshoppers, girls, lunches, and health practitioners are just content and are useful only as props in his play.

No matter what the presenting problem, the symptoms, or the trauma, most people have the same fundamental issues. There are many ways to name these issues. I tend toward the existential, so my list includes:

You do not have to share or understand the nature of a person's experience in order to provide a therapeutic environment for him. *Don Hadlock*

- Permission to exist as is; permission to *Be*
 - Shoulds
 - Shame
 - Self worth
 - Permission to experience and allow the unfolding of Self
- Existential separation and aloneness
 - Unclear boundaries
- Completion of developmental tasks
 - Dependency issues
 - Looking to externals for validation
 - Control
 - Taking responsibility for self
- Attachment issues
 - Taking on vs. letting go
 - Not always getting what I want
- Working through of trauma
 - Redecision work about Self and Self's interaction with the universe
 - Inevitability of death
 - Purpose

Additionally, all humans have the same psychotherapeutic challenges. They include

- Acknowledging and connecting with their experiences in the here and now
- Allowing themselves to move into and through impasses
- Learning new ways of being with others by honoring their true Self

So how do you explain this to the client who wants to know why you are not addressing the problem?

I'd invite him to keep the idea of "addressing the problem" in the forefront of *his* mind, no matter what *I* do. I'd remind him I am not a behaviorist, that I don't intend to ignore the problem, but the way I work is to *start* with the problem and see where it leads us. I'd let him know that, in my view, the problem will change when the problem underlying the problem is resolved. Then, in the case of the grasshopper guy, I might say something such as,

"Let me show you. Get as comfortable as you can ... and let your mind go back to (a time, the last time, the first time) you were about to have grasshoppers for lunch . . . Be there in that moment. See (hear, smell, taste) your surroundings. Be in your body. Look out through your own eyes. Experience your anticipation. Now push the "pause" button on this experience. Find the words for what you notice about yourself."

Notice how I changed the tense of the verbs I used from past to present. I haven't so much invited him back into a past situation as I have invited a past situation to be here in the present, here-now in this room. Also, I am inviting him to be himself, as opposed to *watch* himself. After that, I'd work with his response and go wherever he took himself.

Another idea: end each session by wondering out loud to the client how what he just did relates to his presenting issue. Let *him* decide.

Q. A man keeps putting the attention on me. He threatens to quit therapy if I won't answer personal questions or if he discovers he is more spiritual than I. I reflect everything back to him but it is really difficult for me, since I would like to be more spiritual.

A. You manage to stay out of the system in session, so get out of the system outside of session. Say goodbye to this person now. Yes, here in supervision. Let go of needing him to continue to see you. In your heart, give up your attachment to him as your client. That way, he can't threaten you with leaving. (Because your psyche thinks he's already gone. Get it?)

Isn't it interesting how clients seem to have intuitive knowledge of our personal issues? Well here is your chance to be more spiritual. Begin by expanding your perception. Unhook from this client's desires and demands. Individuate. Get bigger than the session. Find a metaphor within which to hold both him and yourself without judgment. From your description so far, I see him as three years old and angry that you (as a primary nurturer substitute) are not how he wants you to be. My guess is that because his habit is directing blame because the world isn't to his liking, he will probably be angry for quite awhile. One of his processes may be pleasuring Self by

discrediting Other. He may enjoy looking for a reason to reject you.

Agree that everything he guesses about you is true. Even the bizarre stuff. Confess to being completely unspiritual. Anytime he asks you a question, exaggerate the answer. Keep putting the focus of attention back on him.

He'll know I'm not telling the truth.

In session, both telling the truth and not telling the truth are interventions, nothing more. "Telling" is the medium you use to invite him to explore his responses.

Make the telling into an enactment.

Thst: Yes you're right. I do tell your mother-in-law everything you say in here. What's your response to that?

Clnt: That's not true. Is that true?

Thst: So your first response is not to be sure. No, it's not true. How do you respond to that?

Clnt: Well what IS the truth?

Thst: So you continue to think I have the answers. Well, I'm not going to tell you the truth. What happens for you when I say that?

Clnt: Well now I'm angry.

Thst: How do you experience that in your body?

Clnt: You never answer my questions.

Thst: You are correct. On a scale of zero to ten, how angry are you right now? Is that more or less than it was a minute ago?

Encourage him to protect himself if he does not feel safe with you.

Wonder if he can think of ways other than leaving to make himself feel safe.

Wonder if he threatens to leave every relationship every time the other person is not doing what he wants.

Wonder who taught him to relate this way.

Stop scaring yourself. Notice that he *threatens* to leave but, in fact, he does *not* leave.

Q. I hate being a slow learner. I feel so dumb.

A. Accept that you *are* dumb. We are *all* dumb. The sooner you understand that you do not know anything, the better psychotherapist you will be. As far as I know, wisdom is knowing that you do not know. The more you understand you know almost nothing, the more competent you will be. You will not spend your time trying to understand everything. You can let go of thinking that your knowing is important and instead, invite the *client* to discover whatever there is to know.

But if I don't know anything, how can I know what to do in session?

If knowing what to do means being sure that what you are about to do will create positive change, you cannot. You cannot change people; you cannot fix them. You cannot know what is right or wrong for them or why their life is working or not. You can only make guesses. Once you have accepted that you do not know anything and that you cannot know, with certainty what to do, here is what to do in session:

Direct their attention back to themselves.

For example if someone says, "My mother hates me, I lost my job, my dog died and nobody likes me, what should I do," shrug your mental shoulders, think, "I don't know," and say, "*Pay attention to your body right now, what do you notice? (What's going on?)*"

"Listen to your internal dialogue. What are the different parts of you saying you should do? Let's explore that. I suspect that when these parts agree on a solution - that's what you should do."

ChANnge

by Don Hadlock

When working with couples, families and groups I hold the perspective that relationships work to the extent that each member of the system within it works. Anytime an individual changes, the whole system must adjust. In session I remember that relationships are, in fact, only a medium through which individuals can become aware of their unresolved issues essential to personal growth.

As individuals become more aware of themselves, they can make proactive changes and become more fulfilled, therefore bringing more fulfillment to their relationships. Each member of a system becomes a prop for the other's work, as well as a partner for celebrating growth.

Here is a recent example of this process. Bobby and Lucinda bring their 17 year old son into session and complain that he is "messing up his life." He agrees. In an attempt to change the system by changing one member of the system, I hit on the idea to invite the son to disagree with his parents and answer every criticism with a positive response about himself.

At first, I give him word-for-word sentence suggestions As he comprehends, I pull back and only suggest ideas as he creates his own sentences. Soon, he is no longer playing his part in the negative system. Instead he responds with "That's OK; I trust myself," and "Not to worry folks, I'm doing just fine," and "I know you love me and I appreciate your intention to help me."

According to the theory, something has to change. Sure enough, after a few rounds of this, the father suddenly breaks into tears. He tells his son how sorry he is and how tired he is of being so negative. "I do want to trust you," he says, and hugs his son right there in session. The system is changed. Change, however, doesn't necessarily mean things are fine. Change just means things are different. In this case, change meant that the drama stayed the same and the people exchanged roles. How do I know that? Because the mother immediately changed her part in the system by beginning to criticize the father!

Hmmn. More work to do.

Observing Client Processes

Notice the process of choosing images. Does the client jump right in and hastily build? Does he/she look at each shelf and drawer before beginning? Is he concerned with “right” and “wrong”?

Note the client’s actions. This information sometimes becomes useful either during processing or later in talk therapy. For example, one of my clients, a 50-ish woman, really struggled with uncertainty and worried about choosing and placing her images in “the right way.” At a later time, I was able to use what I had observed while watching her build her sand tray to validate her as we discussed other parts of her life.

Placing Images

Observe which images are placed first and last. Sometimes this will be an important image, sometimes not. I notice which ones are placed and then rearranged and or which ones the client seemed to have difficulty in deciding where to place. One client struggled with a large porcelain dove, trying to place it over a cage in the center of the tray. She was finally satisfied when she placed one wing on a full-size baseball, which was able to balance the wing of the dove quite well.

Later I used this information in image dialogue with the baseball, a technique which helped the client access an old memory. In this case, I spoke directly to the baseball: “I noticed that (client) really struggled to balance the dove, and at last she found you and was able to find some relief for her dove.” I had no idea what meaning the dove’s wing and the baseball held; I only knew I was curious. My intuition and curiosity was the catalyst for the client’s going deeper into her process.

The Approach the Client Takes

Does the client seem to be in his/her head and logically planning the sand tray or is he/she going at it from a right-brain, intuitive side? Either way is fine. Silently note this information and do not judge.

Sometimes I ask clients to observe for themselves how difficult it is to allow the images to “choose themselves.” Images are chosen for various reasons. It might be because clients are familiar with or just happen to like a particular image. It will often be obvious if a client does not like an image. They may keep the figure at arm’s length, wrinkle their noses, or close their eyes. Again, simply observe their process of choosing and make a mental note of it.

Difficulties in Placing Images

Is the client having difficulty deciding whether an image should be in the tray? Here again make a silent note. Later you might say to the image in the tray, “I noticed you almost didn’t get into this tray, but somehow you must have insisted! Tell (client) what was going on with you.”

Identification of Feelings

When the client has finished building the sand tray, the first level of processing begins. ESTT processing involves no interpretation or analysis on the part of the therapist. In fact, it asks just the opposite. Processing invites you to be in a place of “not knowing.” Sometimes I refer to this as “the Columbo approach.” As at the previous stages, a client’s feeling of safety is paramount. Each of the following levels of processing described here is an intervention in itself, and the client need go no further.

After the building, invite the client to enter into the experience. At first, ask him/her to identify the feelings from the observer/witness stance. Try to be aware of the client’s emotional and physiological signals and use these cues for guidance. Identifying feelings is the first step “into” the experience. I often walk around the sand tray myself, and invite them to do so, too. We both stand or, if time allows, I use two folding chairs and ask them to choose where to sit and decide where they feel comfortable with me sitting. I am establishing a sense of safety and trust. I ask them to “Look at the sand world



before you and begin to identify how you feel about it...it likely holds more than one feeling and they can be conflicting...like both happy and sad...or confident and scared.”

Emotions often hold the client’s preset ideas about the world. These feelings often become shape-shifters as the processing deepens.

At this stage I am intent on reflecting, understanding, and receiving my client while communicating acceptance. This “receiving” sets an important foundation for the deeper work that is to come. Identifying feelings may

be all that a client can do, either emotionally or developmentally. For some clients, simply making the invisible visible will be enough. The sand tray process can end here. It is most important to follow your client’s lead, rather than be determined to “get into the good stuff.” Trust the process! You do not have to get into the deeper phases of processing to have a successful sand tray session. Identifying feelings is an excellent intervention in itself. The images will hold the invisible, subjective experience of the emotion, and display it to your client. This enables both you and the client to “see” what has been invisible. Making this emotion concrete and three-dimensional can be immensely helpful to a client who is barely able to describe what he/she is feeling.

If you feel it is more appropriate to remain in this phase, you can sometimes deepen the experience by inviting your client to explore the opposite feeling. Or you can ask that they escalate it or de-escalate it. This can be done by asking the client to “Choose an image that shows us how this feeling might look if it were bigger (or smaller).”

A simple invitation to show and identify feelings may be enough. In some sessions, I have abandoned the sand tray altogether and helped my client focus internally by asking him/her to call attention to the feeling and then exploring it with them. I use a phrase like “See if you can identify where this feeling is in your body,” “Go back in time as far as you can; when was this feeling born?” This is a way of exploring what a feeling is inviting the client to learn.

During this phase I also join my client in this newly created space. Be aware of your own feelings, sensations, and judgments as you first set your own eyes upon their sand world. You are a guest and partner in their discovery process. You too will gain a new perspective as you join your client in viewing his/her world.

This phase of identifying feelings is meant to serve as a threshold to deeper processing. Your intuition and inner guidance will tell you whether or not to proceed further. If you are new to working with the sand tray, I suggest you stay in this phase with your clients instead of working too deeply. Learn to listen to and trust yourself. Notice whether you want to jump in and interpret a sand tray. It is quite tempting to do so! Teach yourself to truly listen to the feelings the client is identifying. Play with this process until you feel comfortable and at ease with it before exploring the deeper levels of ESTT processing.

Telling the Story

...and thus the threshold has been crossed, and we are at the portal to deepen the work at hand; whatever that may or may not become. This is an exciting time, filled with wonder. This is the time of entering the story.

You may have arrived at this stage of the session very swiftly. Some clients spend little time or effort identifying feelings because they are so ready to go into the story. They will naturally go from describing their feelings to telling their story without needing your guidance. Other clients may remain at the first level, needing simply to be with feelings that are difficult or unfamiliar.

Other clients will need to be eased into this second phase of processing, especially as time is usually a concern. I now invite them to verbalize their experience at a deeper level. This creates safety because they are talking about their experience. The observer/witness stance is maintained, and the client remains a respectful distance from the experience.

As I have said many times, there is no right or wrong way, no linear way, to work with this method. The most important thing is that you are not tied to your own agenda. Follow the client and follow the juice.

I invite entering by saying that I'd love to have them show me around their world now, and that they can do this in whatever way is best and right, for them. Sometimes I say: "Pretend we are like two small travelers, and we are entering this world together and you want to show me around." I model acceptance, respect and curiosity every inch of the way. I am genuinely excited to learn more about my clients' sand worlds, and they catch my natural enthusiasm. Something special happens when you accompany your client in this way. I think the internal critic and defenses within the client somehow decide that this process is likely harmless and they let down their guard.

The story now unfolds. Usually the client will go image by image, referring to each one by pointing to it and telling me about it. For instance, a client will point to a small child and say "This is me when I was seven." Sometimes they might refer to images that represent qualities about themselves, as in "This bear represents me and how I feel about my children, who are here next to me." Sometimes clients don't know why an image is there. I acknowledge them for their willingness to put it into the sand world anyway, in effect validating their ability to let go of needing to know what it all means. I listen and follow my goal of remaining as fully present as I can be, mirroring back acceptance and respect for the story.

The most important thing to remember as a therapist is to let go of the need to begin interpreting or analyzing the story yourself. If you find yourself thinking: "A-ha! I know where this is going," you are no longer fully present. You are in your own story, perceptions, or beliefs, and you are not fully available to your client.

Sometimes there is a need or curiosity to clarify what something is, and I will ask a question as I am being shown around the tray.



Other times, silent witnessing is what is needed. If you are in the present and fully available, this is the time to trust your own intuition in order to "be" with your client. Some clients feel reassured by your wanting clarification of various images in their stories; others will not.

The second important thing I am doing during this stage is getting a feel for where to begin the action and image dialogue when we get to the deepest level of processing. I am listening for and storing information that may or may not be used at that time. What sort of information? I am noticing what sparks my curiosity. This is when my own intuition begins to kick in. I am wondering what kinds of subjective experience these images are holding, what stories might there be in here, what history is here, who are the cast of characters, and what are these images inviting us to explore, to experience or learn? What image might be productive to begin with? What image appears safe, or isolated, or judgmental—or juicy?

Some clients will go through the story very quickly, and others will take more time. Generally it does not take much time for the story to be told. As storytellers describe their world and the images or participants in it, they begin to enlarge their experience. They are also engaging in a very important task—that of becoming the observer. They are not yet aware that they are observing their own internal subjective experience.

The client is still talking about his/her world and not yet engaged in subjective experience. Some clients need go no further than this – it might be all they can manage.

Sometimes you will see a sand tray that feels sacred, or feels like a personal mandala. A mandala has become a generic term for a geometric pattern that metaphysically or symbolically represents an important internal perspective. At times it feels as though the sand tray scene needs no further processing than clearly seeing what is before us. When this occurs, I generally stop to validate the power within the world they have created.

Discovery and Experience

Now we will be using action methods and voice dialogue. These are processes rooted in the soil of the Gestalt process and psychodrama methods. Action method refers to the process where the client may physically move, add, or remove images in the sand tray. Image dialogue is the process where the images are spoken to by both client and therapist or where the images are given voice by the client. The images become the container for the client's projections. These projections become manifest, concrete, and observable, thus allowing clients a rare opportunity to "see" themselves, their values, beliefs and relationships—their story comes to life! As one client said, "It's like having a second set of eyes!"

The client and therapist are both in the observer/witness position, and this creates a removed, yet respectful, distance from what is happening in the sand tray. At times the client is also in the subjective experience of the image in the sand tray, thus giving the client both subjective and objective experience. This dance, always in present-centered/here-and-now time, seems to bypass the judge/critic. It allows the client a unique opportunity for self-reflection, acceptance, and even setting of intention.

Image Dialogue

Not every clinician will feel comfortable with the image dialogue technique at first. Talking to small images and having the image talk to the client—following the juice of discovery—is unfamiliar to say the least. Be patient. Be accepting and kind to yourself. If this style of sand tray therapy is right for you, your experience will deepen and you will learn to trust yourself, your intuition, and your deepest self with time.

As clients build their sand worlds, they transfer their subjective experience (the interpretations they have made about themselves, others, and life) onto images in the sand. Image dialogue creates a conversation between the observer/witness and the images which now hold the subjective experience.

I believe it is not the event, but the reactions to and interpretation of the event which hold

clients hostage to pain. In the discovery stage, my only goal is to be fully present with my client and follow the juice of intuition and curiosity. My attention allows clients to be present with their own experience, both subjectively and objectively.

The dance of discovery is between the subjective experience and the reflections of the witness/observer in the moment. At this stage the client might—or might not—stretch his/her perspective and interpretation of their experience.

This deepest stage will invite a client to experience from the observer/witness position which has been established in the previous stages. The therapist becomes a witness to the story, and this witnessing itself becomes a healing intervention. The attitude of the therapist is collaborative and supportive as he/she remains totally present with the client.

Entering Image Dialogue

It is now time for you to enter your client's life experience and story. It is time to set your own story aside. You have no idea where this will go, nor do you need to know. Whatever you encounter, simply "is." Sometimes what you encounter is a symphony of validation, and the sand tray wants to mirror back to the client how far he/she has come in their healing process. Other times it is painful, and you must be able not only to help it unfold and be seen, but also to process the pain with them.

The stage has been set, the actors are in place and you are ready to engage in image dialogue. At this point, I turn to my client and say: "There are different ways we can enter and learn about your story now, and here is one. First I am going to thank these images . . ." I turn my attention toward the images in the sand tray and begin speaking with them. I offer gratitude to the images for choosing my client and placing themselves in the sand tray. If the client is less abstract and I sense a more concrete-type of person, I might choose to skip this step. I then return my attention to my client. "Now, I am going to begin speaking to an image in here and I would like you to give this image a voice and respond in the first person...it is as though you become the image yourself."

Some clients will go into this very easily, but for most it takes a little practice. They might respond in the third person, and if so I simply say, "Try to be the object...try to speak as the image would speak." It is most helpful for you to have practiced this beforehand. This will come easily to some therapists and will be more difficult for others, just like our clients. Again, it is like learning how to dance, this deepest part of the processing. This is often the biggest obstacle to working in the sand tray this way, this challenge of entering into image dialogue.

If a client struggles with this to the point of not being able to do it, then simply follow his/her lead.

They will show you another way to enter if you are fully in the present with them. Some clients will need to stay in the observer/witness stance talking about their sand world and their story. Trust them to know what is best. It might be too much for them to go into the first person, subjective experience at this time. Simply stay with them and ask them to talk about what you are intuitively curious to learn more about.

For those clients who are able to enter image dialogue, this is when you begin to follow the juice, which means that you trust what your own intuitive curiosity wants to learn more about. The best way to learn this is to experience it yourself, and this takes practice. Find volunteers to practice with and begin to trust this intuitive place within yourself. As you become more confident, you will find yourself growing and expanding in this ability.

It is helpful to have anchored for yourself one sure-fire way to begin this stage that you are very comfortable with. My own is to speak to an image that either I have chosen to begin with or that my client has chosen to begin with. I turn toward the image and say, "I have a sense you have an important place in (client's) story. Tell me...what is your purpose in being here today?"

After this—if you are present with your client—the story will begin to unfold. It's magic time!

Restructuring and Setting Intention

In this final stage, the client is given the opportunity to re-structure the world he/she has created and perhaps to formulate a solution to the problem. There will be times when you cannot successfully enter this phase. Sometimes it is because the time is up, or it may be because it does not seem appropriate. If enough time remains and you sense this might be worth exploring, consider this intervention. The way in which I do this is to make a straight-forward suggestion such as:

"Before we end our session, I would like you to have the opportunity to move or remove any image or object that you desire."

"Pretend you are the master of this universe and can create a solution to this problem . . . and do so by moving or removing any image you like."

"You've seen a lot with this sand world today. I'm wondering if it might be reflecting back to you some other possibilities for dealing with this situation. Why don't we ask the images to lead the way, and show us other possibilities?"

"If you could change this world to reflect what you would like to have happen, how would it look?"

"Before we end our session, I'd like to invite you to tell this world how you feel about what you have learned today."

"If there is any image in here that needs to hear something from you before we end our session, would you express this now?"

"Show me what you would like your life to look like six months (one, two years) from now."

Journaling

Some clients continue to use the picture to reinforce what they have seen in the sand tray experience. Some will journal at home as they continue to ponder the questions such as the ones given above.

Photos of the Sand Tray

It can be helpful to provide clients with a visual representation of the work they have done in the sand tray. I give my clients an 8x10 color photo which I take with a digital camera and print out on an inexpensive HP printer that takes my photo card. I then print out a small hard-copy for my files and/or store the image in a client file on my computer.

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