

### A Dream-work Primer

- 1) Invite the telling of the dream.
- 2) Say to the dreamer: "Now tell it all over again, as if it is happening right now."
  - Don't be surprised if the telling of the dream in the first person changes the dream considerably. When that happens, go with the most recent version.
- 3a) Trust yourself. Do anything. There is no one-right-way to work with a person's subconscious.
  - listen and wonder about stuff as the dream unfolds,
  - or wait until the end of the re-telling and wonder about stuff then,
  - or any possibility in-between.

or
- 3b) Skip to the end, then invite the dreamer to daydream the dream to a different conclusion.



### Q. And that's all?

**A.** Oh no, that's just one of many practical ways to start. I think of a dream as a metaphor full of metaphors. Here are some additional possibilities.

- Choose something in the dream and invite the dreamer to explore it.
- Invite the dreamer to choose something in the dream to explore.
- Invite the dreamer to be aware of his/her inner sensations as the telling or exploration of the dream unfolds.
- Journey through the dream, moment by moment, wondering about stuff as the dream unfolds.
- Skip around. Talk to, or ask a question of, any part of the dream that tickles your intuition.
- Consider that every 'thing' or 'process' the dreamer mentions, had purpose in the dream or has been remembered for a reason.
- Trust your intuition and invite an in-depth exploration of a section of the dream.
- Wonder about (out loud) whatever

comes forward in your thoughts, then follow the dreamer to wherever the dreamer goes next.

Consider the remembering of the dream to be the psyche's way of bringing the client's issues to the forefront.

Use whatever approach you are comfortable with and invite the client to draw, paint, sculpt, act out, dance, pantomime, put to music, write about, show in the sandtray,... the dream.

Work with the dream much as you would a sand-tray, photograph, sculpture, drawing, painting, story, posture, tone of voice, choice of words, imagery, favorite story, movie, music, etc. Notice and wonder.

Invite the client to consider that the dream is maybe a metaphor for an issue his psyche wishes to work out.

Sometimes a dream unfolds as a disagreement between two parts of the dreamer's personality.

Each part of the dream may have a voice. Invite each part of the dream to:

- speak for itself
- talk to any another part(s)
- talk to the dreamer
- talk to or discuss the issues in the dream with you
- take another action and see what happens

Invite the dreamer to daydream the dream (over and over if necessary) to a more satisfactory or functional conclusion about Self.

Go right to the end of the dream, and ask, "So what was it you hoped to avoid by waking up?"

With dreams, as with most psychotherapeutic approaches, try not to ask questions that can be answered (if taken literally) by one of four different answers: "yes," "no," "I don't know," or "I don't want to tell you."

In session, questions usually go directly to the receiver's cognitive brain for consideration, and boom, you've invited the client to think-about the work, as



opposed to experiencing or doing the work. Examples follow:

Say, "Try this..." as opposed to "Would you like to try this...?"

Say, "(I invite you) to do A," as opposed to "Do you want to do A?"

Say, "See if you can do X," instead of "Can you do X?"

Offer directive suggestions like a waiter offering refreshments at a party—no agenda. The waiter doesn't care if you want his refreshments or not. His job is simply to offer them and then to have zero attachment to whether you partake of them or not.

Many opinions have been offered over the millennia about the meaning of dreams. If you believe every human is more or less the same and whenever anyone dreams about \_\_ (fill in the blank with whatever), it can be always/usually interpreted the same way, well okay—I can't see that it would hurt.

However, since I have no idea what the 'real truth' about dreams is, I like to consider them as metaphors for the thoughts, beliefs, relationships, concerns, and personality parts of the dreamer. It's a lot more fun to invite someone to work on his dream if you acknowledge to yourself that you don't have a clue about where it's going or what you're doing. (I call this approach, 'Columbo Therapy.')

Afterward, I invite you to consider everything in the dream to be a metaphor, and everything in the dream to be a projection of the dreamer. Practice thinking about projections as perceptions owned by the projector. For example, a "mother-in-the-dream" is not 100% the same as the client's actual mother. The dream mother is only his projection of who or how his actual mother is.

So during the integration work (if you happen to be in the room when it happens), say things like, “Tell the ‘mother-in-the-dream...’ rather than: “Tell your mother...”

My reasoning follows: Someone once said to me, “You can only see yourself coming.” I suspect that is true. It means that whatever one human being sees, believes, or thinks about another person (real, dreamed, or imagined), his concept of this other person is concocted from his own experiences and filtered through his personal lenses. For example, whatever I think I know about you, I may be in the ballpark of ‘sorta-correct’ from time to time, but the actual “you” is most likely to be quite a bit different than my limited perception of you.

### Q. How might you work with dreams in a group?

A. Use a dream in group as you would any other issue an individual brings up. Some ideas—

- Work individually. The others witness.
- Invite the client to recreate the dream, using group members as parts of the dream.
- Invite the dreamer to choose members of the group to take on the roles of Perfect Parents. Recreate the dream as a psychodrama. Towards the end, direct Perfect Parents in validating, appreciating, and indicating unconditional positive regard for the dreamer.

□ People project themselves into what they hear as well as what they see. So after one person tells their dream, invite the others to draw or sculpt, then share (with your assistance), and work with their version of that one person’s dream.

□ Work individually with the dream. Then bring the dream’s processes back into the group. Suggest the dreamer explore how the dream parallels the dreamer’s relationship with other group members.

### Q. The mother of an eight-year-old boy flirts or is all over him physically and won’t let him alone. It feels like molest to me.

A. Legally, sexual molest is about genitalia and sexuality. In real life, molest is more about exploitation, boundary violation, and betrayal of trust.

□ Give this child language with which he can set limits. Role model words to say.

☞ “Johnny, Let’s do an experiment. We can use these chairs. You touch my chair. The first time I’ll tell you it’s okay with me and the second time I’ll tell you I don’t want you to do that.”

☞ “Okay, now I’ll begin to touch your chair and you practice saying if you do or you don’t want me to do that.”

□ Set up role plays to help this child learn good self care.

☞ Keep upping the intensity of the role play from, “Aunt

Sally, I want to get down now,” to, “No Grandpa, I don’t want to do that,” all the way to, “Hey mister, I don’t know you. Get away. Keep your hands to yourself.”

□ Ask mother how she learned to take care of her self when she was a child—lots of indirect work there.

□ If the mother is available, ask her to participate in using the therapy session to teach her son how to better protect himself around strangers as he grows up. That he will be learning to take care of himself around her will be an additional, indirect, and probably positive side effect

□ Use these or similar roleplay interventions whether the mother is in the room or not. Mother can always be represented by a stuffed animal or an empty chair.

□ Give a Mom-talk similar to my Dad-talk, which you can find on the PTI.org website. Click on “Professional Reflections.”

An adult’s unconscious sexual responses to adolescents is normal but useful only when the adult uses it to teach the children about maintaining personal

boundaries, setting limits for themselves around other people, and taking responsibility for keeping those limits. Any other expression can be exploitative, and a violation of trust.

In a perfect world this mother will accept your invitation to attend a few individual sessions for practicing parenting options. With luck, she might stick around and begin to address the starving or empty places in her psyche.

### Q. Twice during the family session, the subject of physical abuse was brought up or re-enacted indirectly. I felt afraid, and was unsure whether to mention it or not.

A. I suspect you were afraid they might be hostile, that you wouldn’t know how to handle their response like the seasoned professional you would like them to think you are, or that they would leave, never come back, complain about you to the director of your agency and then everyone would know how incompetent you really are.

#### Whoa. How did you know?

Oh, I dunno. I may have had some of those feelings myself from time to time. The thing to remember is that as you allow your uncertainty and fear to stop you from intervening, you co-behave this family and abandon yourself. When an abuse issue is brought up or reenacted indirectly, some family member is doing the best they can to bring it out in the open. Facilitate that.

□ If you perceive a suggestion of abuse (physical, emotional, whatever) in session, name and wonder about what you see. Direct each family member’s attention inward to connect with their immediate experience.

“Let’s stop right here for a moment. George, please repeat what you just said. (George repeats) Samantha, what’s your response

to that?...George, say it again...Bill, tell us what’s going on with you.

□ Next time, you might begin by naming your process last time. Turn their attention back on themselves.

☞ “Two times last session, I noticed (whatever you noticed). I felt unsure whether to mention it or not. What are your responses as I mention it now?”

### Q. The husband says she manipulates him. The wife says he won’t leave her alone and always wants her to ...

A. Each is possibly accurate about the other. However, accuracy about another is not very useful. Neither person is taking responsibility for their own behavior. Each is focused externally and saying, “The Other Guy is my problem.”

□ You might start by addressing the responsibility issue. Stop them each time one of them is focused on the other-guy’s behavior. Put the attention on the speaker.

☞ “And then what do You do?”

☞ “It’s clear what you think she did was wrong. What might You have done differently?”

☞ “Tell her what you want from her right now. Tell her what you are afraid of.”

☞ “And what was Your part in that event?”

□ If they have introspective skills, invite each person to retell their version, this time making themselves the star of the their discourse.

☞ For example, he might say, “When I felt manipulated, I got little, gave up my power, said “yes” when I meant “no,” and then blamed her for making me do something I didn’t want to do.”

☞ And she might say, “When I think he won’t leave me alone, I protect myself by attacking him. I get little and think I have to do what he says. I forget to stop what I’m doing, get his attention, set clear limits, or tell him when I will be available to be with him.”

□ Direct the partner to respond from a position that is not so personalized: “I care about you but I’m not your problem and I’m not your solution.”

□ Stop responding to either one of them when they talk about the other.

□ Set up structures where one manipulates or demands and the other says some version of, “I love you enough to set limits so I won’t resent you.” For example, “I really care about you but if I do what you want now, I’ll be angry later, so I’m going to say no.”

□ Invite them to practice putting words to their experiences. For example, she might learn to say, “I want something and I’m scared that I’m not going to get it. I can hear myself starting to wheedle already.” Instead of pestering, he might be willing to say, “I feel like I’m three years old, starving and nobody loves me.”

□ As they learn to say what they want in a taking-responsibility kind of way, teach them to structure their requests differently.

☞ “Find a way to tell him/her what it is you want rather than what you don’t want.”

□ Suggest they start with a contract: “I want to ask for something. Are you available to hear what it is right now?”

### What if the person who gets asked, says, “No!”

□ Teach both to put together some version of, “Okay, (thanks for warning me) I’ll ask you again, later.”

### Q. He was arrested for buying child pornography. He touched no actual children. Now his adult daughter’s therapist wants to talk with me. Probably he molested his daughter.

A. Do you mean that this client’s daughter calling you is enough evidence for you to have a reasonable suspicion of child abuse?

Well, sorta.

I know I’m stuck in my stuff when I can see only one choice of action.

[...Time passes here, while we go over the definition of the word, “hearsay,” the laws in this state, and how those laws apply to MFT’s...]

So what is it you fear?

### My concern is if I know stuff, I’ll have to say it on the witness stand.

In the first place, you don’t have to talk to anybody you don’t want to. If you are subpoenaed, claim the psychotherapist-patient privilege until (in this state,

anyway) a judge specifically requests that you talk. Then relate only what you have observed or heard first hand. Again, withhold your interpretations, deductions, observations, or opinions until you are asked directly by a judge in his courtroom.

It is very doubtful you will be asked to relate, in court, what somebody else’s therapist told you.

As this man’s psychotherapist, be neither his advocate nor his adversary. Instead, provide him a safe container within which to explore his issues, including both the part of him who might be a pedophile and the part of him who is not.

### But I’m a system’s therapist and I might be colluding with the perpetrator.

A system’s therapist is a therapist who is aware of and works within the system of her clients. In this case, the system you are treating is made up of the various parts of this person’s personality. He is paying you; he is the consumer. Your contract is with him.

### What if he wants me to talk to his lawyers? I don’t want to.

Do you mean you think you have to do everything your client wants?

No.

Do you mean that if he wants you to talk with his lawyers, you won’t want to, but you’re afraid you’ll violate yourself and talk to them anyway?

Uh, sorta, I guess.

It seems to me that when a person forces herself to do something she absolutely doesn’t want to do and then goes against the agreement she made with herself, we might define that as an example of self-violation.

□ I suggest you find a way to define your limits from a

positive perspective, i.e. say what you do want, rather than what you don’t want—what you will do, rather than what you won’t. Make limits about yourself, not about the other guy.

☞ For example, here’s a version of what I might say (first, to myself and then later, to the client): “If you sign a release for me to talk to your lawyers and if they call me, I will relate only what

I have seen and heard in this room. I will not give interpretations, deductions, or opinions. I will not participate in any manipulations in which you and the judicial system mutually indulge. My office is one place I intend to be safe.”

### What if he confesses to previous molests. I have to report them don't I?

Be aware how stuck in concern you are. Take steps to protect yourself when you feel in jeopardy. Mostly that's about understanding your legal mandates, making limits for yourself, then taking responsibility for sticking to those limits.

Let this man know, ahead of time, that in this state you have a legal mandate to report reasonable suspicion of abuse of humans who are/were under the age of eighteen at the time of the abuse.

Remember that the purpose of the report is not to make a bad-guy out of the perpetrator. Let the justice system do that. The purpose of reporting child abuse is to protect children. If it turns out that this man does, in fact, prey on children, and if you decide to continue being his therapist, you might keep in mind that he was not a pedophile the day he was born. At some point, someone else assisted him to associate sexuality with childhood.

Be one person in his life who does not molest him. Hold him in high regard no matter what, tell him your truth, invite his focus onto his own process, and bend your mind toward staying out of his system. If these approaches aren't possible for you right now, then respect yourself. Do not force yourself to exceed either your personal or your professional limits. Direct this man to another therapist who is more comfortable with his situation.

**Q. She complains her life is such a mess, says it's impossible to fix, and berates herself that she's bad and wrong and should be more this and less that. On and on.**

**A.** Here's one idea. The next time she comes to session consider this intervention using an empty chair.

She: (in chair #1): I did XYZ and I should never have done it and I keep doing stuff wrong and I never do anything right and...

You: (interrupting) Amy, come sit over here (pointing to chair #2).

She: (Amy moves to chair #2))

You: (to the Amy in chair #2) Right now, Amy needs someone to yell at her and tell her how bad she is. If you're available, this would probably be a good time.

**The moment you have a preference for how his life works out, you are part of his dysfunction.**

She: (in chair #2, yells at chair #1 and tells her how bad she is)

You: (speaking sincerely) Thank you. Switch chairs.

She: (changes back to chair #1)

You: (speaking to chair #1) So, if she (pointing to chair #2) is the part of you who yells at you and tells you how bad you are, what part are you?

**Q. My other supervisor's style is this way... I think a more involved, enactive style like process therapy is better.**

**A.** From psychoanalysis to behavior modification, whenever a therapist has her attention on the process in the room and is not countertransferred, a therapeutic environment is created. Resolution is invited. In that way, all effective psychotherapy is process therapy.

Every therapist adopts a theory and a repertoire of techniques which is compatible with her belief system and her personality. Most successful therapists attend to process rather than content although they do not necessarily name it in those words.

You enjoy creating physical enactments. You perceive that therapy seems to move along faster and you like that. One enactment is never better than any other enactment. An enactment with chairs and bears may be more concrete than the process it seeks to parallel, but it is never better.

Less active therapists prefer to work with the process in a less material form.

Attend to process as it flows from one client response to another, trust yourself totally, stay out of the system, invite

introspection in the moment, and work with client responses. In a container of unconditional positive regard (both for the client and yourself), whatever techniques you, your colleagues, or your supervisors use will be fine.

**Q. Is depression, anger turned inward? I thought depression was grief.**

**A.** Both are probably true. When depression looks like sadness, it is often acted-out but unmet grief. The existence of an angry component lurking in between depression and grief is

Addiction to depression is common and it is easy to get stuck in a depression pit. Annoyance is often easier to access than grief, so one way to invite a connection with that grief is to access and work through the anger that protects it.

Start with any anger. Nonspecific anger will do. Anger that the sky is the wrong color works as well as anything. Anger appears to be a biochemical antidote to depression. Just as depression saps energy from the body, anger adds energy to the body. With anger also comes a feeling of power and control.

After the anger is experienced and released, the corresponding grief is freer to surface.

Of course, underneath the grief underneath the anger is yet another emotion, usually on the joy continuum and experienced as caring, love or acceptance. For if love were not fundamental to all other emotional responses, a person would not get mad, sad, glad, bad (shamed), or afraid in the first place.

Sadness seems to follow quickly on the heels of connected-with rage. The experience of love sometimes takes a little longer to surface and is occasionally not noticed or acknowledged.

**How could a person not notice feelings of love?**

The great taboo in Western culture isn't sex, violence, or greed. It is joy. Most of us have a joy quota which developed in childhood. We allow ourselves not one pleasure point more than this allotment. Love (an emotion on the joy continuum) is usually experienced as a warm, pleasant sensation that might be expressed as, "At this moment, I am perceiving things as Okay exactly the way they are. I am content."

If the love is perceived as being toward or because of someone else, the words might be, "At this moment, I perceive you as Okay just exactly the way you are. I need nothing from you. I am celebrating being alive right now and you are the object of my celebration."

Connection to the emotion of love often waxes and wanes quickly and if we are not paying attention, and we do not have permission to feel very much joy in the first place, the feeling of love can come and go without our being aware of it at all.

**Q. All they do is judge and feel blamed. I'm thinking of taking a family history so they can understand how things got this way.**

**A.** Like any other intervention, the family history is a means, not an end. While you are taking the history, stay aware that history-taking is an intervention. Be aware how the family's process is re-enacted over and over again during each session.

Family members will continue to be how they are and do what they do, no matter what the activity. For example, in this family, someone will most likely become judgmental or feel blamed soon after the history-taking begins. When that happens, stop the content and attend to their process.

- "What just happened?"
- "What is your response?"
- "What do you notice about inner experience right now?"
- "What was your experience when she/he/you said that?"
- "Say what's going on with you and what it is that you want right now."
- "Let's exaggerate what you guys just did. One of you volunteer to be blamed and one of you volunteer to judge. Then we'll switch."

**Actually, I like taking a family history. I find out things I'd never have known, otherwise.**

What you find out might give you intervention ideas later but what you are going to discover is already being played out right in front of you while the family history is being taken. Remember that it does not help the family for you to find things out, and actually, it is none of your business. Your job is to facilitate them finding out.

If they end up telling you the same thing the same way they have been telling neighbors, friends, and themselves for years, then the only benefit of the history is that you are entertained and more conversant in their family's gossip.

To use the taking of a family history as an enactment, encourage family members to pay attention while giving you their accounts. Most often, people learn by combining all three learning modes: kinesthetic, visual, and auditory A family history which is written, drawn, role played, laughed at, read aloud, and listened to, is more apt to be internalized than a spoken-only experience. In addition, enactments that blend body movements with words often terminate in Ah-ha experiences. The eyes light up. The intuition is engaged. There is an emotional as well as a whole-body response. The intellect understands. Learning has happened. It is not just "telling," or "talking-about" anymore.

- Invite family members to recreate the family history in vivo.
  - Start with any known emigrating forebears.
  - Invite family members to assume body postures that reflect what they guess these forebears believed, felt or taught to their children.
  - Invite each person to articulate a word or short phrase to summarize how this person is in the world. Family members get to take on a number of roles in this dramatization as ancestors die off and new people are born or enter the family by marriage.
  - Continue into the present day.
  - Focus on relationships.
  - Before beginning such a project, the family might choose a certain subject to explore such as how attitudes about anger, intimacy or sexuality have been handed down.

**Q. He is very religious. When engaged in activities that excite him sexually, he feels shamed and dirty. The dreams he brings to session have sexual content. I wonder if he sees me as his confessor, the Madonna, or a whore.**

**A.** You sound a little alarmed. It isn't until he sees you as Something, that he is transferred onto you sufficiently for the therapy to progress. No matter what, stay out of the system.

Do not be his confessor, Madonna, or his whore. Be the psychotherapist. Be a blank slate and know that whatever he projects onto you, it's all about him, uninvited and unpolluted by you.

- He may be trying to seduce you with the sexual content. Be aware how successful he is or isn't.
- Invite him into dialogues with his religious part, his dreaming part, etc.
- Invite him to be and work with all the different parts of his dreams.
- Since he is religious, encourage dialogues with a loving deity in session.

Him: I'm lustful, shamed, and dirty.  
Deity: Yes, I know. I made you and I love you anyway.  
Sometimes people need to get their deity's permission to work therapeutically. A loving deity can also give permission to celebrate sexuality. Not at the expense of others, of course.

**Q. What do you mean, many people don't finish therapy?**

**A.** Most people leave psychotherapy as soon as they feel relief. Resolution is an entirely different matter.

Given enough time, psychotherapy unfolds in the same way as the human psyche. No matter how small or extensive the presenting problem is, people in therapy move through the developmental stages from basic trust to autonomy relative to the therapist. In the beginning, personal power is given away. The therapist is romanticized, sometimes deified. The same demands and expectations an infant confers on a primary caregiver are given to



the therapist and the same rage follows when the therapist proves imperfect. Whatever issues the person is working through, the underlying relationship between patient and therapist parallels the conflicts or lack of them from the person's childhood. Eventually, there comes an adolescent sort of time when the client rebels and takes back any remaining pieces of personal power he gave away in the beginning.

The whole process can take a little or a long time depending upon the depth of the psychic wounds, and the commitment to and intent towards healing. A person with only a few "stuck places" might breeze through or skip entirely one or more of the developmental parent-child stages. Another person will come in as a rebellious adolescent, and after working through one issue, will move backwards in time toward the previous unresolved issue, and when that is done, move backwards in time yet again.

Another person with only one particular trauma piece to complete, may breeze through all these stages in a moment, let go, work deeply, and move through to a new decision about self in the space of an afternoon workshop.

When psychotherapy is "finished", a re-parenting of self has taken place. The client is able to translate the comfort, intimacy, and openness of his relationship with the therapist onto his relationships with the other people in his life. And unless the therapist is countertransferred she too, thinks of him as just another comfortable to-be-with adult.

**What about afterward? Occasionally he might call to say hi.**

Needing to call occasionally is a bit like being five years old and feeling safe about playing down the street because Mommy is always available if necessary. There is a need to be special and remembered at "home." When this is the case for an adult, therapy is probably not complete.



**Q. I suspect the substance abuse group people who want me to disclose information about myself, really just want to define my experience as trivial compared to theirs.**

**A.** Use your suspicion as an intervention.

"My guess is you really just want to define my experience as trivial compared to yours. Is that true?"

"I've had all these (overexaggerated) experiences. How do you respond to that?"

"I've had these (under exaggerated) experiences. What is your response to that?"

Label an object as your disclosure. Give it to someone and notice what they do with it. "This represents something personal about me. Show me what you might do with it."

They may throw it away, treasure it, or give it back to you.

Direct them to do it again and this time pay attention to their inner experience.

Reverse the intervention so you receive a disclosure about them. Direct them to focus on their experience as you do or do not appreciatively receive their gift.



### A few comments about "I"-Messages

In session, encourage, by example and suggestion, that people take responsibility for how they are, what they feel and what they do.

Changing the language used is one way to invite the psyche to move toward ownership. Suggest that each person learn how to speak in I-messages.

'You-messages' normally invite defense:

You: You aren't doing that right.

The Other Guy: I am too! What's the matter with you, (you jerk)? Or, (whining) you are always criticizing me—I can't do anything right.

'I-messages' invite different responses even when they seem rather brutal:

You: I'm judging what you're doing right now. I want you to do it my way and then when you're done, I want you to tell me that I am not only smarter than you but you appreciate that I said this.

The Other Guy: (laughing) Oh.

I-messages tell the truth about oneself, not about others. In changing the syntax of your phrases, you turn your attention away from hoping that you might be able to convince or force the Other Guy to be different than he is.

Instead, to make rational sense out of what you are saying, you must focus on the harder job of introspecting and saying what is in your heart at the moment.

I-messages take responsibility. They require introspection and a certain degree of self-awareness. Underneath the "I don't like it when you..." are the other truths—the "what I hope for's", the "right now I'm anxious about's", the "I'm having trouble adjusting to's" etc.

People sometimes get the idea that an I-message is any sentence that starts with the word "I." When that happens, the phrase "I feel that..." becomes a favorite lead-in to doing the same old thing—talking about the other-guy instead of oneself. For example someone may say something like, "I feel that he

is a jerk," instead of saying the truth about themselves, which might go something like, "Sometimes I have trouble taking care of myself around him. I extend my self-boundaries to include him and his activities. Then I disapprove of him, judge him, and attempt to make him feel bad or try to get him to be different by being rude."

Certainly, sometimes you do think the other person is a jerk, and maybe she or he is. But as you speak of these things, the other person becomes the star, the center of your attention.

I-messages gently push you, the speaker, in the direction of acknowledging what is true for everyone, i.e. that you are the star of your own play.

They nudge you toward taking responsibility for your feelings, your opinions, your motivations for talking about them, and (most importantly for your listeners) what it is you want as the result of opening your mouth and mentioning how you feel in the first place.

CNH

**Q. What do you mean, most of us marry our mother? My first husband was just like my father.**

**A.** As I recall, it was Freud (or Sophocles perhaps?) who noticed that first. Physical appearance, culture, gender, and behavior of our partner aside, most of us arrange to have a major romantic relationship in which we respond to the other person in much the same way we responded to our primary nurturer.

Particularly in the beginning, we adore and exalt the person. We want them to adore us back and love us unconditionally. We want to be cherished. We blame the other person if they are unable or unwilling to love us the way we want. We become very upset when they turn out to be imperfect, if they have needs which have nothing to do with us, or they are not available at our beck and call. Ask yourself, "at what age are those behaviors developmentally normal for human beings?" Your answer will most likely vary between birth and oh,... 6 years old.

This picking of someone we respond to as we did a primary object appears to be the natural way we humans invite circumstances into our lives through which we can resolve unfinished early childhood developmental and existential issues. Each primary relationship functions as a medium or a stage on which we can rewrite some of the drama of our lives to a different and hopefully more functional conclusion.



**Q. He brags and is a motor mouth.**

**A.** Motor-mouthing in session is often about a fear of intimacy. It can also be about terror—the fast talking primarily an attempt not to connect to feelings or perhaps to distract from what really needs to be talked about.

Take notes. Yes, actually write down everything he says. Stop him every time he gets ahead of you and ask him to repeat it "more slowly, please." Interrupt him and ask questions. Be very, very interested. Really listen.

"Say again, what color the bus was. And did you say that you did...(this), or...(that)? I'm a little confused."

Invite him to listen to himself.

Tell him you did not understand

everything he said and will he please say it all again.

When he's done (or takes a breath), ask him to give you a synopsis of what he just said in a paragraph or two. When he's done that, ask him to see if he can say it all again in a sentence or two. One phrase? One word?

I've had good luck moving myself closer and closer to a motor-mouth's chair, then speaking slowly and softly, saying something like, "I'm wondering what it is, exactly, you are afraid of, right here, right now, in this room, with me."

Bragging may be about low self-esteem.

Ask him how long he has been invisible, and under what circumstances did he teach himself to be that way.

Bragging may a symptom of fear.

Ask him what he is afraid of.

Make an out-loud guess as to what it is he is running (motoring) from.

Wonder who it is he is protecting.

Ask him how old he was when he was first terrified.

Pack pillows around him, cover him up with a blanket, use furniture to hide him from your eyes, and direct him not to talk until and unless he perceives he is safe.

Bragging may be a defense mechanism often used to counteract shame.

Invite any overt non-abusive expression of anger in which he is willing to participate.

Bragging may be an unconscious acted-out celebration of Self. By "acting-out," I mean manifesting a behavior which reflects an internal experience and, of which, the owner has no conscious awareness.

What I'm suggesting is that lurking underneath this man's many layers of unresolved psychological issues may be a quality unknown and unowned by him that is exactly what you see, but he doesn't—a great joyfulness.

Use the bragging to help him connect with this celebration, and of course, the feelings defending it. Invite him to pay attention to his body and to experience his good feelings as he brags about how good he is or how well he has done. Here's where the fear may come forward.

As he opens himself up to celebratory emotions, he will be vulnerable for connection to any emotions he considers too overwhelming to handle.

Whatever he discovers that his bragging is about:

Invite nonverbal expression: art, sandtray, movement, physical metaphors, bodywork, imagery, sculpting, etc.



**Q. The husband complains that both of them are so nice, they have a hard time deciding anything. "What would you like to do?" "I don't know, what would you like to do dear?" Etc. He says he's the one who usually gives in, thinks of something and they do that.**

**A.** Do not be lulled by his niceness. That he complains, thinks it is hard to decide and perceives himself as giving in suggests underlying martyrdom

**It sounds as if they are having a nice-fight, as in who can out-nice the other. Apparently the wife usually wins.**

Teach them to propose and counter propose. Pay attention to how they respond to the tasks involved: brainstorming ideas, truth telling, setting limits, and negotiating to a place where everybody wins.

Invite them to show themselves having a nice-fight. Give them two options of just about anything, or give them the task of coming to a mutual decision.

**Like what?**

Oh, any old thing. "Each of you pick an object in the room that you like. See if you can persuade your partner than your object is the best one."

"Both of you walk to this spot in the room. Okay, now make a mutual decision on which way to turn—left or right."

"Plan your next weekend get-away."

As soon as you perceive one of them conceding and/or out-nicing the other, stop them and invite each to turn their attention inward and share their experience.

Ask them, one at a time, to, "Show how your parents handled the making of decisions."

☞ "Now imagining your parents are here in the room, show how you would like them to have handled the making of decisions...Take your time; make mistakes. Find a way that works for the two of you."



### Q. What's "mentally healthy" mean anyway?

A. I'm guessing that, like most everything else, "mentally healthy" is in the eye of the beholder. Possibilities include:

- Acknowledges and experiences oneself physically, emotionally, and intellectually in this moment.
- Accepts perceives as positive, and honors all one's personality parts.
- Takes responsibility for one's own thoughts, behaviors, perceptions.
- Is able to separate Self from Other.
- Has resolved most of the developmental and existential issues brought with one from childhood.
- Has tools for resolving any additional unfinished business that may, in the future, surface from one's subconscious.
- Has tools to name one's own dysfunction and consciously choose not to immerse oneself there.
- Can communicate clearly to someone else, "This is my experience at this moment; this is what I want right now."

Many of us live in that ballpark much of the time, but I suspect most of us are hanging out with the shortstop, certainly not anywhere near home plate.



### Q. She wants intimacy.

A. Let's define intimacy to be some version of: I am here, now, doing/ experiencing this with you.

☐ Invite her to be intimate with herself, i.e. to be aware of her experience and to share it with herself in the moment the experience is happening.

☐ In session, you can be a role model by staying connected to yourself and sharing your truth in the moment, without expectations.

**How else do I invite her to connect and be intimate with herself?**

Any invitation to introspect is an invitation to be intimate with Self.

☐ Begin by inviting her to become aware of her physical sensations. This is easy for most people and can be a bridge to needs, emotions, thoughts, fantasies, and wants.

### What if she's embarrassed to do that?

That's possible. Some folks are too embarrassed to articulate their physical sensations to themselves, let alone to share them with you. Your continuing tool is to maintain a safe and respectful environment.

☐ Use guided imagery.

*"Notice something outside your body, a sound, a smell, a color, a thought, or a memory... Now notice something inside your body. Now something outside. Now inside, etc... Be aware of your emotions and other physical responses as you notice what you notice. Come back to this room. Let's talk a bit. Say something about the similarities, differences, and patterns that you became aware of. Okay, let's do that again. I wonder what else you will notice this time."*

☐ Invite her to work with art materials while she talks. Her inner experiences will be expressed with these mediums, whether she is conscious of them or not.

☐ Suggest bodywork such as Hakomi or bioenergetics.

☐ She might be willing to explore her dreams.

☐ Use your imagination. Let go of wanting her to be successful.

☐ Use unguided imagery. Invite her to allow any old image to come forward.

*"Let me know what happens as your image changes."*

My preference is that a client keep me in the loop so I keep saying some version of, "What's happening now," periodically or when I perceive something has changed.

### How come you like them to keep you "in the loop" when they're doing imagery?

Reason #1: The subconscious is quite experienced in forgetting, disguising, and hiding vital material, so "thinking about" an imagery after it has been imagined is not a substitute for in-the-moment awareness.

So as much as you can, invite clients to access both left and right brains at the same time. While this woman's creative brain makes the imagery, she has to access her cognitive brain as well, in order to tell you about it.

So as she is invited to be aware of, connected to herself, and at the same time, share that with another human being, both halves of her brain are intimately in play. I suspect this offers a deeper experience and possibly the opportunity for her to integrate her imagery with her cognition in the here and now as her imagery is unfolding.

Reason #2: Professionally, I make rules for myself, rather than for the clients. So when it comes to a client who wants to daydream in session without an active witness, I respond the same as I do to a client who doesn't want to pay for psychotherapeutic services: it isn't that he cannot see me if he won't pay me, it's just that when he comes, I won't be there.



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