



Dear Colleagues

I am very encouraged by the positive responses we received after the first issue of *Interact*. More than a dozen professionals offered to consider contributing to future editions. It would give me great pleasure to serve as catalyst for conversation about our mutual profession. If you are interested in being involved, please let me know.

In writing about psychotherapy, I frequently run into one particular obstacle, that I have not found a way to get around. It is what to name the category of human being who sits in my office and agrees to adventure into his subconscious mind as I witness. For me, none of the usual names fit. The term "patient" connotes that he is broken or sick, that I am the doctor who knows more than he does, and that he needs a source other than himself in order to be fixed or healed. That doesn't work for me; I don't believe any of those things.

To me, both "client" and "customer" imply that I'm selling him something. For example, both my lawyer and the real estate agent in my neighborhood have "clients," and the grocer has "customers."

To the contrary, my whole philosophy is about not being countertransferred, not needing or wanting anything from this person, and being completely uninvested in the outcome. Perhaps there is a word or phrase in another language that means something like "seeker into self," or "he who is willing to bungee jump into his own abyss."

If you have suggestions, I'd love to hear them.

Carol Nichols Hadlock

Integrative ideas for the process-oriented psychotherapist

Q. Here I've been trying to confront resistances and get the best enactment and what seems to work is ordinary empathy.

A. Have empathy at all times as part of your neutral stance. However, when you say things such as "trying to get" and "confront," it sounds as though 1) you have some major agendas for your client, and 2) you have been working way too hard. When you use phrases such as "best enactment" and "seems to work," it sounds as though you want your clients to end up being quite a bit different than they are.

Your agendas may be adding to the resistance your clients experience toward their therapeutic work. I suggest instead of confronting resistances, that you work with them. After all, resistance only means the person is afraid.

□ Start the work wherever the person is. If he is afraid to encounter himself and feels safe only in the external, talking-about, past, or future realm, honor that. Begin structuring your interventions in the same domain. If he feels a compelling need to be understood and he responds well to empathy, by all means start there.

As you empathize and active listen, invite the person to be here too, so *your ear* and *your empathy* are not the only ones present in the room.

□ Keep in mind that for the ninety-nine percent of his life when the client is not in your office, it is an empathic, nonjudgmental connection with *himself*, not with you, that will benefit him the most.

Q. She wants advice.

A. Congratulations. She has elected you to be the person she is dependent on. It is a good thing you know more than she does.

(Laughs) Well I don't have the faintest idea what the best thing is that she should do.

Respond however your intuition guides you in that moment and then work with her response.

□ Start by giving her advice from one perspective. Direct her to pay attention to how she responds. Then give her advice from the opposite perspective. Direct her to pay attention to how she responds to that.

□ Assist her to listen to herself.

□ Give her internal advice-giver a refereed opportunity to air both her "Yes" and her "No" arguments.

□ Invite her own advice-giving part to tell her what she needs to know.

□ Ask her to imagine that she is you and to say what you might say.

□ Using imagery, invite her to create a Wise Inner Advisor. Work with how she does or does not receive wisdom from it.

□ Tell her you will not be giving her advice. Work with her response.

□ Ask her advice for the best way to give her advice.

□ Need some advice, yourself.

"What's it like having a therapist who hasn't the faintest idea what the best thing is that you Should do."

♫

Q. Often, I find it easier just to directly tell my clients that ...

A. There are three ways to teach.

- Directive: Tell them the answer
- Invite them to tell you the answer: The Columbo approach).
- Re-directive: Provide opportunities for them to teach themselves the answer.

I hope you will find a way, eventually, not to "know" so much. As a psychotherapist, the less you know, the more effective you will be in maintaining a mind-set unpolled with opinions and judgments.

I do understand that "telling" is sometimes the absolutely most expedient thing to do. Other times, telling is nothing more than the easy way out. Either way, make the telling into an intervention:

□ "Tell them," then notice and work with their response to being told.

□ Invite them to teach you. Be a little dense and need to be shown.

"I don't understand. Show me what you mean."

It is definitely easier to tell someone something than it is to create a way for them to teach it to themselves. But it's not as much fun. Also, "knowing about" something doesn't mean a person can use it to his benefit.

Especially in the areas of relationship, communication, and mental health, one's cognitive knowledge does not ensure positive functionality. If information is all a person needs, he doesn't have to go very far to find someone to tell him about it, explain how to do it, or educate him in that area.

Parents, teachers, friends, partners, siblings, cousins, in-laws, strangers, books, songs, movies, soap operas, and newspapers, plus radio and television hosts and their distinguished guests are all eager to tell him what to do and how to do it. And all for free. Chances are, he already “knows about it” (intellectually) but doesn’t “get it” (viscerally), whatever it is. He can talk about it, take a test on it, perhaps even teach it, but he can’t *do* it. He has been unable to integrate all that information into his everyday default responses, They continue, unchanged and defiant.

Advice usually works for the advice giver, so most of the time external input is practical enough. Unfortunately, after puberty almost no one listens to anyone else when it comes to their personal problems. Many people will try advice out once or twice but when it doesn’t work perfectly, toss it out with the trash.

So what to do?

One thing a person can do is live a long, long time so that Mother Nature can provide him enough opportunities to learn by experience. “Oh,” he gasps, after doing, thinking, or believing the same dysfunctional thing for the ten thousandth time. “Oh I see. That doesn’t work for me! Maybe I’ll try something else.” Most of us don’t live long enough to resolve all our issues, so another option is to enter psychotherapy. One of the more challenging tasks of our profession is to offer the client a different type of learning experience, i.e. a Mother Nature type of experience wherein he might encounter himself. One can do this in the psychotherapeutic arena because it is a safe place without the major negative consequences so readily available in the natural world: embarrassment, shame, pain, illness, prison, brutality, death, and the like.

In session, the client can engage himself fully and use his in-the-moment experience to facilitate the learning process. He can be supported, in fact, as he teaches himself. He can experiment with extremes, and no one and nothing (okay, maybe a pillow or two) is harmed. At PTI we call this type of learning experience, an enactment. Enactments are representations, metaphors, and dramatizations. They can be physical or strictly of the mind. They are always experiential. They are invitations to connect with and allow experience while being aware.

Most clients are fairly stuck by the time they decide to try psychotherapy. All rational roads seems closed. From their perspective, there is no practical way out of their dilemma. Metaphors are a way to go in the back door of the mind instead of confronting the problem head on. For example, your client will find it fairly easy to brainstorm alternative solutions for Cinderella, the brave prince lost in a forest, or the ogre under the bridge whom nobody likes. The creative mind is given more permission to find out-of-the-box answers for metaphoric problems than for real world quandaries. For example, it is quite amazing sometimes to see how a client’s solution for the boy who wants to save the princess from a troll can be translated or transposed onto a real world situation one has with a workplace bully. One might group enactments into the following broad categories:

Chairs and bears

-Where the nouns in the room (people, places, & things) serve as representations for persons, objects, qualities, thoughts, etc. and are sculpted (positioned and/or moved about) to represent relationships between them and/or the client.

Sand tray, art work, ...

-Same as above only there is a physical boundary around the work (paper’s border, white board’s edge, sides of the sand tray, the volume of clay available, etc.)



The less you “know,” the more effective you will be in maintaining a mind-set unpolluted with opinions and judgments.

Metaphor, dreams, imagery, stories, ...

-Same as above but the representations take place in the mind and have no boundaries whatsoever, including the laws of physics.

Therapist’s use of self

-Paying attention to and bringing to consciousness the ongoing relationship the client has with you.

What’s the difference between an enactment and an intervention?

Not much. In general, I use the word “enactment” to refer to a physical experiment the therapist sets up on purpose. In any case, an enactment is actually a re-enactment, a physical metaphor of relationships between the client and other people, past occurrences, the universe, and the different parts of himself. Even the relationship between the two of you is a re-enactment of his relationship with someone else or with a part of himself.

I use the word “intervention” as pretty much any professional thing you do in session where the intent is to invite the client to be more aware of himself. However, to the extent you are conscious that it is also a representation of something to do with the client’s life, then it is an enactment, also. This extends to therapist countertransferences as well.

Countertransferences are enactments too, re-enactments actually, of parts of the therapist’s life as well as representations of some of the client’s more highly charged, often parental, relationship issues.

Q. He is fragile and threatened. If I guess something about him out loud, he plays verbal dodgeball with me. He will crack jokes and get very concrete. He is so defended, that guessing is really the only enactment I can do with him.

A. Listen to your assessment of him. Believe yourself. Perhaps he *is* fragile and threatened. Perhaps he feels attacked by you. Perhaps the adherence to concreteness and the distractions of jokes are ways he protects himself from you.

Actually, I feel attacked.

One way to protect yourself is to get out of the other guy’s system. *He* is the one who has come here to work on feeling threatened, not you. Consider applying the philosophy of Aikido to communication and relationships. Think, “*Here comes a torrent of loud verbal dodgeball. It is not my torrent. It is his. Out of love both for myself and the Other, I will not let it harm me. I will turn or step to the side, letting the torrent continue on it’s natural path. I breathe, and let go.*”

You name “guessing” as the main enactment you do with this person. An enactment is a dramatization, a re-enactment, usually, of some scene from his life. In this case, he probably perceives you as the perpetrator and himself as the victim. He experiences you as attempting to humiliate him or make him bad. At some level he says, “Oh no, I refuse to be the victim here. I’d rather be the perpetrator, thank you. *You* be the victim.”

That sounds so right on.

So even though you do not perceive it as attacking him when you ask questions or speculate as to underlying meaning, *he* does. And when he feels attacked, he attacks you. So work more indirectly.

Share, guess, wonder, and tell stories. Keep your attention on his responses. You might try eliminating questions from your repertoire. In your language as well as in your heart, take responsibility for everything that

comes out of your brain. For example, “*I notice that you... My guess is... What is your response to that?*”

becomes...

“*As you talk, I notice my internal response is... and now I find myself wondering if...*” (This is where you stop talking, let go of expectations, and find the place in you where it is okay if he responds and it is okay if he doesn’t.)

Q. When I ask her what she notices about herself, she seems defensive and hasn’t a clue.

A. Modeling self-awareness in the moment is a very effective way to teach. It took you a while to become aware that there was more than content, and a while longer to be able to look behind the content and see process. Your learning took place in an environment which you perceived as nonjudgmental and safe enough for you to take in new ideas. This woman’s awareness of herself will flower in the same way, at her own speed, and when she feels safe enough for her to open up.

So doesn’t that mean I should be doing something to facilitate her feeling safe?

Answer #1: No. Mind your own business.

Answer #2: One way you might facilitate her feeling safe is to let it be okay that she is afraid and feels threatened. In fact, encourage her to become even *more* defensive. Let her know, by your behavior, that in your mind, she’s okay, just the way she is.

Q. When I suggest that someone do an enactment, most of the time I have no trouble wanting the enactment to be done or not. But from another person’s point of view, when I say, “Do this,” it must sound like an order.

A. Your invitation may indeed *sound* like an imperative. In fact, it may *be* an imperative. Check introspectively to find out. Once, *you* know that it is not, check it out with the client. It may be that your intuition is hinting that “perceiving suggestions as ordering” might be a deeper process for the client to work with. Trust your intuition. The worst that will happen is that the person will not know what you are talking about and you will have to acknowledge that sometimes your intuition is incorrect.

Even if you discover you have issued a demand, use your discovery as an invitation and work with the response, whatever it is.

“*What I just said sounded like I was ordering you about. Is that what you heard too? What*

happens internally when you are ordered to do something?”

“*I wonder why you come all this way and pay me money to order you around. Why would you do what I want you to do in session, instead of what you want to do?*”

Order him to practice telling you, “No.” If he laughs and/or says some version of “I don’t want to practice that,” then being “ordered” is probably not one of his underlying issues.

Q. I’m not doing my job if they are not working.

A. What is your job?

To help them change and be different.

When you perceive your job description as helping someone to change and be different, you imply that he is not okay the way he is, that he does not have the capacity to be different by himself, that you are omniscient enough to know that change is the correct thing in his case, and that you know enough to effect “help.”

In order to see yourself as a fixer, you need to perceive the people you are fixing as broken.

Both are frames of negative regard. There is a part of every person who wants to be different and a part who wants to stay the same.

When you perceive that your job is to help someone change and be different, you have sided with one part of him and are engaged in a struggle with the other. You are now a part of the system.

If you *have* an objective, you can not *be* objective. By wanting something, you have an investment in getting it.

I’m not sure anyone (especially me) can stop having opinions.

Outside of session, have all the opinions you want. I certainly do. But in session, the moment we have an opinion, we enmesh ourselves in the other person’s business. Most opinions come with attitude, and that attitude transmits the implied message, “*I know more than you do. Part of you is okay, but the other part needs work.*”

Negative underlying attitudes manifest themselves in your choice of words, tone of voice, body posture, and facial expressions. A negative attitude on the part of the therapist is patronizing and says, “I know what you should be and I know that you are not enough.” From my perspective, our job is not to help anyone “work” in session, nor is it to know whether or not they are working.

Based on the assertion that the human organism is moving naturally in the direction of resolution of unresolved issues, our job

is to create and sustain an environment of unconditional positive regard. One begins by inviting the person to connect fully with his experience in the moment. The client’s job is to accept or reject our invitations, as he pleases.

Q. He uses enactment suggestions as occasions to argue with me or to focus intellectually on what I’m doing.

A. Everything that transpires between you and the client is also an enactment of the work they are in psychotherapy to do. Wonder what part of his personality for whom you are a stand-in, the part he argues with, certainly, perhaps also, the part who suggests alternative behavior. Let

You know you are countertransferred if . . . (fill in the blanks)

- you**
- want them to . . .
- expect them to . . .
- hope they will . . .
- need them to . . .
- insist that they . . .
- take their side against . . .
- have the opinion that . . .
- you feel**
- scared they will . . .
- scared of them because . . .
- sad because they . . .
- resent that they . . .
- frustrated that they . . .
- glad that they . . .
- happy for them when . . .
- annoyed that they . . .
- any emotion at all in regard to them.
- you think**
- they need/should/ought to . . .
- you can make them do/feel . . .
- it is your fault they . . .
- it is to your credit they . . .
- their good work makes you competent.
- if only you knew more, they’d do better.
- you know more than they do.
- you**
- like them.
- don’t like them.
- want to protect or rescue them.
- would like to be their friend.
- are glad they’re not your friend.
- wonder about them outside of session.
- use judgment words to describe them.
- disapprove of them in any way.
- use the phrase, “get them to...” when you refer to them.

go of your frustration. His arguing is not about *you*. Separate yourself from any need that he be different.

Stop suggesting enactments.

Keep suggesting enactments and work with his response. Engage with him in the moment. Keep the attention on how he relates either to himself or to you.

"I'm wondering how 'arguing' benefits you."

"What is you want to say to me underneath how you just responded?"

Use indirect interventions only. Do not name anything, suggest anything, or ask any questions. This is useful for people who are always in their head, or who focus on you, or who insist on reacting to you. Stay out of their system and pay attention to your boundaries. The heat gets turned up pretty fast. For example,

Guess, share, wonder, tell stories.

Clnt: (Focusing on you) So how's it going?

You: Interesting. My immediate response is to feel invaded and want not to respond to you. I wonder if other people feel that way when they are with you.

Clnt: (Intellectualizing) What do you mean?

You: My guess is you'd rather talk about me than yourself, today. I wonder if you're scared about something.

Clnt: You are the strangest therapist.

You: I watched a toad once. He was sitting on a rock, reacting to a nearby fly. It was as if they were dancing, attached by an invisible wire. As the fly flew around, the toad maneuvered to face him. Quite a fascinating dance.

Clnt: What's that got to do with me? Why don't you ever answer my questions?

You: My guess is you feel a little frustrated. I wonder what you're going to do now.

Q. I forgot to return her call. I didn't even mention it the next time I saw her. Later, she left a long message about how hurt she was, how much she needed me and how I didn't come through for her. I feel guilty.

A. You *are* guilty. Guilty of not returning her call, and guilty of not having her as the center of your universe. Use the incident as an intervention. Next time you see her, acknowledge your part in the drama and invite her to identify hers. Wonder to her who else does that in her life.

Everybody. Her mother.

So her response is not just about you. It is about the millions of other times she felt let down by people.

So soft pedal my guilt?

No. You get to feel as guilty as you want, on your own time. When you are with her, transcend your issues and use your process in her work.

She was very clear about all the pain I had caused her.

That is the part that is not true. You are not that powerful. You did not cause her anything. She used you to cause herself pain. She used your behavior to get in touch with pain left over from previous abandonments and rejections. She used her annoyance at you for not meeting her expectations. She tapped into some old pain from her childhood. She wants things to be the way she wants them to be. She wants caring to come from outside herself; she does not want to be the one to do it. This desire, while appropriate for a child, is a ticket to misery for an adult.

She complained that I worked with her husband too much when I saw them as a couple. Then when I worked with her alone, she complained that I put her on the hot seat too much.

The phone incident was an enactment of that same process. She wants something from you. You give it to her. She complains about it and wants you to be different. If you had thought to do the phone enactment on purpose, you could be in here bragging instead of feeling bad.

Make more mistakes on purpose. Work with her response to your mistakes.

The next day she left a message saying it probably wasn't my fault and that she would see me next week.

So she also makes excuses for the mother who does not come through for her.

Point that out.

"I flaked. I forgot. I notice what you did was protect me from your anger. My guess is you protected your mother just like you protected me. Is that true? Let's work with that now."

That really blows my conditioning which is that I am supposed to do it right.

Apparently, both you and your client believe that Primary Object, Mommy, Daddy, Boss, Doctor, Authority Figure, and, oh yeah, Therapist should be good, and right, and never make mistakes. I have some bad news for you. You are fallible. You can strive to "do it right" for yourself but you can't ever be certain that you will "do it right" for the Other Guy. And since you're human, you will seldom "do it" perfectly. Use your personal therapy time to move away from shame that you are not perfect.

Use your occasional mistakes as enactments in your client's work. In this case, your mistake-making invites all that old rage at her parent. Mostly she transfers that anger and feels it toward people with whom she is intimate, instead of working it out through her internal parenting apparatus. Stay out of her system and invite her to work it through with you.

She often tells her husband he doesn't take care of her enough or pay her enough attention.

Children whose primary nurturer is neglectful or abusive have quite a dilemma to solve. These children sense that if they allow themselves to own the full extent of their rage, death will surely ensue. Either they would kill the primary nurturer, or since the primary nurturer is obviously omniscient, the child would be abandoned altogether. Most children in this predicament spend much of their childhood protecting the primary nurturer.

Any number of methods are used, ranging from not-seeing to denying, to rearranging reality. Later, many of these children redirect their conflict, marry a safe substitute for the primary nurturer, and abuse him or her. They project "Primary Nurturer" onto their adult partner and spend a great deal of time trying to get the partner to do a parent's job, i.e. to cherish them, protect them, attend to them, and to do things right. The definition of "right" being: "I get what I want."

Right now this woman is trying to get *you* to do it right. That's not a problem as long as a) you understand it isn't *you* she's aiming at, and b) you set and maintain firm limits for yourself.

Her parents were alcoholic and fighting all the time.

Then she also learned that fighting is the way to be intimate with those you love. Therefore that is the way she knows to connect with you now.

How can she get past her rage at her mom?

My first choice of intervention: Encourage her to feel, not her anger, but her grief. Do that regularly, no matter what else happens in session.

In the meantime, remember that anger is a defense against (a fear of) grief. Invite her, rather than to get *past* her rage, to go *into* her rage. Invite her to connect with the rage that the child-she-used to-be couldn't feel. Encourage her to own it as hers, allow it, experience it, and connect with the grief that will follow.

Does this woman have any history of uncontrollable physical violence?

No.

Riding a Bicycle

by Heather Perlitch



I co-facilitate an addictions recovery therapy group. In supervision the other day, I referred to one client's behavior in the group and my behavior in response. As I explained that the client was acting like a two year old and that I had just ignored his behavior, something about my explanation felt "off." So I stopped talking and asked myself what really happened in the room with the client. A lot was happening, yet my abbreviated explanation was missing most of the truth. I was curious about this. So I slowed down the telling of what happened and became more aware of my creativity in the situation.

The following is the replay in slow motion of what happened in the therapy group and the choices I made in the moment:

As we sat down in group, my client was huffing and puffing with his breath, making downward noises, rolling his eyes, crossing his arms tightly, making slight gestures of forward motion, and then turning his back to the group. I interpreted these gestures as disinterest and anger. I had what seemed to be an automatic reaction to protect myself by tightening my muscles and questioning my value-even to exist in the room (when this thought of existence comes to me, I know my fear is in the room). I allowed my courage to come forward and reached out verbally to my client by asking him to "check-in". Along with my words, I noticed I leaned slightly forward in my chair in order to make a connection with him (even though he could not see me).

His response was to exaggerate his previous postures. I automatically recoiled. Interestingly, in my recoiling, I became aware of my thoughts and somatic feelings. Since I am still training to be a therapist, my thoughts were about my abilities and lack of abilities, my emotions were fear and disappointment, and my somatic feelings were tightening and numbing. I was so aware of these automatic reactions that my next thought was "Ohhh, I am in a triggered state. This is perfect for what I had planned to talk about in the group tonight." I was going to bring attention to and experiment with triggered states of mind. What a gift this turned out to be!

I was going to present a short psycho-education piece about when we are in our triggered states, we tend to have less room to make conscious or creative choices. We often choose old fearful patterns to try and keep ourselves safe, and/or we use drugs and alcohol to numb the uncomfortable thoughts and feelings of triggered states. I was facing my own triggered state.

It was my awareness and acceptance of my own triggered state that gave me the "room" to reach for conscious and creative choices. I then became more curious about our interactions. I was able to reinterpret my client's original behaviors. I made room for more compassionate guesses about his possible internal story-lines or "trauma activating" scenarios within our relationship. I then felt more open and relaxed. As I watched him doing the same gestures as before, I actually saw him differently. Now, because of this shift in my body and in my thinking, I saw there were other possibilities of what was going on for him. One possibility was that he was a very capable human in a "triggered" state of consciousness. I know "I" did not "do" anything "bad" to cause his behavior, but my position as the "leader" role in the room may have been a trigger for him. I would have to find out from him what was really going on.

All of the above took only a couple of minutes in length of transaction. Next, I took a resourcing breath and soothed my inner child (my child thought she needed to lead the group). I invited my inner adult and

nurturing parent into the room, and then consciously decided to accept the way this other human being was deciding to show up. I imagined holding space for both of us to be in the room "as is." This "holding a space" reminded me of my experience of being with my children when they were younger. I would sit in a chair in the backyard while they were playing. They would be exploring new ways of playing with each other. They would experiment with each other's physical, emotional and mental edges. I would simply observe the process and only intervene if hurtful behavior appeared. I realized this is what I was doing with this client. I was simply observing (not ignoring) his experiments with me in the "authority role." The authority role brought up physical, emotional and mental edges for him. I was clearly watching him wrestle with his own internal fears and projections.

As soon as I stopped defending myself (since I was not in any real danger), things shifted in the relationship between my client and me. I knew there was a change in me, and I detected a change in his posturing. I made a decision to give more room to our interaction. I softly moved my body back into my chair and moved my attention away by checking in with another person in the group.

Ten minutes later he still had his back to me, yet he had occasionally been making comments during the conversation I was having with another client. His remarks indicated that he had been listening the whole time. The tone in his voice also seemed softer and more playful.

This whole interaction, which included reactivity and creativity, was like learning how to ride a bicycle, I would go off balance (into reactivity) every so often due to fear. Fear did not want me to accept his behavior or my own relaxed behavior. Fear encouraged me to try to change both. While balancing on the two wheels of love and awareness, I had to recognize the fear, feel it, and allow room for it. As I broadened my view, the fear washed through me like a wave and my balance on the "bicycle" naturally returned with a softer, more loving focus. If I tried to force myself back into balance by resisting the fear, my focus would become too narrow (and judgmental) on any physical feeling, thought or emotion that was going by in my experience. In the moment of resistance, I would fall off my "bike" and crash on the sidewalk below. When I allowed fear to be in the room and softened my focus on the fuller more loving landscape, I was able to stay up on the "therapeutic bicycle" and accept all of the landscape coming into view.

In taking the time to slow down a process, what I really would have liked to share in supervision was my success in awareness, my falling off into fear, and my choices to return to love. I was glad I was able to hold love's view point while another human was finding their foot steps inside a triggered state.

Later in that same session, the client verbalized his own insight. He wondered why he was so angry. He realized he had nothing to be angry about. He connected this to the other times when he wakes up angry, with no apparent reason, or just becomes angry at different times in the day. In a non-judgmental space, he came to his own healing and awareness naturally.

In my mind, this awareness was huge. It was the opening to his freedom to choose. In the same fashion, by writing this article and telling my truth in awareness, there has been an opening to my freedom to choose. I thank my both client and myself for showing up "as is" not as we "should be."



Placating by Don Hadlock

D: Well Ralph, I have been working with you for a few weeks and I have diagnosed you with a very common disorder.

R: I'm sorry I caused you such an inconvenience. If it is not too much trouble, may I ask what it is?

D: It's called placation.

R: I'm sorry for asking, but could you tell me how you arrived at that?

D: By observing you. In fact, you are doing it now.

R: Oh my goodness, I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to challenge you. You know best.

D: Listen to yourself, Ralph. You're doing it again.

R: Oh, this is awful. I am so sorry. Are you disappointed in me?

D: And again, Ralph. But not to worry; it is curable.

R: Would it be okay if I asked how?

D: Yes. The cure is for you to be thinking and acting in your own best interest before considering the approval of others.

R: Excuse me for saying this, but isn't that being selfish? Wouldn't that be a disorder as well?

D: I guess it could be, if done compulsively.

R: Is there a cure for that?

D: Yes. Placation.

□ Then invite her to express her anger physically in session. Along with any other anger interventions you know, invite the anger to exit her body through her muscles.

□ As well as the grief work, keep inviting her to take ownership of her many projections and to explore how she can begin to come through for herself.

Q. This couple fights. What to do with them in session?

A. Invite their process to be more explicit.

□ Encourage them to do more of whatever they are doing.

"I'd like you to stop for a minute. Thanks. First off, what I suggest is that we slow your whole process down. Let's try this experiment. Start over, and this time no matter what the other person says, each of you go out of your way to find something wrong with what the other one said."

□ Make a guess as to what is going on with them. Don't worry whether you are accurate or not.

"My guess is you guys are fighting because you don't feel listened to. Is that true?"

□ Direct them to experiment with other behaviors.

"Let's you guys do something different. Any ideas?"

"I have an idea. Here it is... Okay, let's practice that right now in session."

Actually, they came in and started in on each other like I wasn't even there.

□ So wait. Move your chair back. Even further. Watch. (In the extreme, open the door, move your chair out into the hall, and announce that you'll be available whenever they want your services.) Stay neutral. Want nothing. At some point one of them may question what is going on or they may get tired and wonder why they have come all the way to your office and pay money to do what they already do at home for free. It is not until the moment, when one of them expresses a desire for change or at the very least they give you their attention, that you can begin to intervene.

In our role play, you had them throwing tissue at each other along with their words.

Yes, they were slinging insults. Throwing tissue made explicit both the process of slinging-at and the hostility underneath the slinging.

The man wanted to throw the box, but you wouldn't let him.

Part of my job is to create an safe environment. The tissues are symbolic. Boxes can be painful. With tissues, no one gets hurt.

Why did you have her hold the tissue box for her husband while he hurled tissues and insults at the chair she had been sitting in?

It was one way of arranging that each of them got what they wanted. She said she wanted to do something different; he said he wanted to continue to fight. The therapist's job is to invite them to learn. In this structure they would be exposed to the following ideas:

- That ways exist to express anger without being abusive.
- That it is possible to get out of the way of another person's expression of anger at you.
- That it is possible not to take another person's anger personally.

In our roleplay, the man got to experience expressing his anger nonabusively while being supported, and the woman got to experience

separating herself from his rage. They were both invited to notice that they are different people and that they both might win.

It's hard for me, sometimes, to accelerate the process like that. I want to end violence.

Often the way to end violence is not by turning the heat down, but paradoxically, by turning the heat up. By making a violent process more explicit, you are not making *more* violence. You are inviting increased awareness of how very violent the person already is. It is easy to deny our desire for another person's pain when all we are throwing are insults and sarcasm. They are only words, after all. With the tissues as a substitute for the insults, and more of the body directly involved in the throwing, it is harder not to notice the hostility underneath.

In time, one of these people might begin to take responsibility for the anger behind the throwing, or perhaps, get in touch with the part of them who does not want to hurt their partner. One or both partners may also notice that, as a couple, they are spending most of their time not-resolving their problems. With luck, they may eventually get in touch with how they use fighting as a pastime, or more frequently, as a way to be intimate.

Q. She interprets my invitations as demands.

A. Do you have an investment that she do what you say?

(thinks) No, I really have no agenda at the time I intervene.

So, what is your problem?

Right now I'm scared she'll get mad and quit.

□ Use your response to keep your focus on the other person's response.

Clnt: (indicates that your invitation is interpreted as a demand.)

You: I'm guessing you think I'll get mad and abandon you if you don't do what I say.

She: (nods her head)

Clnt: (letting go of whatever it was you suggested in the first place and going with this new process) Okay, say to me, "Don't tell me what to do."

She: Don't tell me what to do.

Clnt: Now say that to your mother.

She: (turns to an empty chair) Don't tell me what to do.

Clnt: Did you say that to your mother because you *wanted* to or because I *told* you to?

How do you know it's about her mother?

I don't. It doesn't matter. Either she will say no, it's not about her mother, it's about... (whatever) or she will interpret your new invitation as a demand and then you get to invite work with that new, but same old, response.

Q. I'm having a lot of problems with this family and I'd like some ideas I can use in session.

A. Before we do that, would you be willing to

give up the idea that it is your responsibility to fix this family?

Reluctantly, but okay.

Since it is not your responsibility to fix this family, can you also accept that you *cannot* fix this family, that they have to fix themselves?

Yes.

If it is not your responsibility to fix this family, and in fact, you cannot fix this family, would you also be willing to give up the belief that there is

The Tao of Parenting...the Beginning

by Susan Aiken

When I was pregnant the first time, I had a dream so powerful that it informed how I would parent the child about to be born and the three that came along over the next six years. And though I didn't know it at the time, it was my first teaching in the Tao of Parenting.

Here it is :

I found myself looking down at my newly born baby. I was holding her out in front of me, gently rocking her up and down, completely enrapt with her. I was experiencing this feeling of absolute elation and pride in what I had created. I had this dialogue in my head: "Look what I made! Look what I did! I made her! She's Mine. Oh my gosh! Look what I have now." Underneath the dialogue was this feeling of wanting to make her into the little girl I wanted her to be. She was mine and I could do what I wanted with her. I was reveling in my fantasy of how it was going to be as I raised her.

In the next instant, I put her down in front of me and she began growing up before my very eyes. I felt a huge gamut of feelings as I watched My Little Baby shift and change and morph thru her babyhood, toddler-hood, childhood, teenage years, and into her young adulthood. (I have reflected back many times over the years to that gamut of feelings. They were dead-on!) At the end of this morph, there she was standing in front of me, a beautiful young woman. And I didn't know her at all! She was a stranger to me. I felt alienated from her.

A strange air of hostility and disappointment filled my heart. I wanted my baby back! But there was no going back. She had grown into the woman she was meant to be all along and it had nothing to do with me; nothing to do with what I wanted her to be. I knew that I had created the alienation and disappointment I was feeling because I had fought with her all through the years trying to get her to do "the right thing" and "become the person I wanted

her to be." I wanted to go back and start all over. I wanted to find out who she was from the very beginning.

Then right there in the dream, I had an epiphany about being her mom. From the beginning I would have a choice: Find out

who she is and love this reality unconditionally, or spend my time trying to mold her and push her and make her become the person I thought she should be. I could feel in every cell of my being what each of these different parenting paths would feel like. I could also see clearly the end result of both approaches on my adult relationship with her. There was no doubt in my mind. I didn't want to end up in the hostility and disappointment. I loved her from the beginning and I wanted to feel close to her when my job as parent was done.

End of dream.

That was 28 years ago and I can still feel the imprint of this dream. It saved me from being the "controlling bitch of a mom" I could easily have become. It tempered me. I still had to fight the urge to control my kids over the years of active parenting but I was better. Yes, better.

The heart of the Tao has to do with the Flow of things, the perfection of things as they are. The practice of the Tao has to do with finding that flow and accepting it completely. This is the perfect message to us as parents.

Our children come to us whole. They are here to experience their own lives - not our life. They will do that no matter what. We are part of their experience in a very big way. But we are confused about what this means. For many of us we are like little beaver parents-creating endless dams.

Water is an amazing substance. It will always find ways of flowing, through the smallest crack if necessary. Dams break. Levies break. Eventually, water demands a release. Water is meant to flow because of its nature. So it is with

this perfect intervention that if only you could think of it, the family would start to turn around?

I don't want to, but all right.

All right. You agree that it is not your responsibility to fix this family and in fact, you cannot. And there is no best intervention that anyone else could use to fix this family. So now, what's the problem?

(laughs) There isn't one.

each human being who is born onto the planet. Each person has their own nature which will continually seek to flow. When blocked it will eventually find a way around us. Parents, teachers, authority figures of all kinds can try to stop it's flow. Sometimes it works, at least for awhile. But there are consequences to the child, and the parents, et al. However, that's another conversation.

Becoming a parent is about expanding, expanding beyond our own ideas of who these children are and what is right for them. Imagine what your life would be like if your parents really "saw" you and celebrated you and reflected that back to you. Imagine if they had taught you, and disciplined you, and encouraged you based on that. Well, paying homage to the Tao, however it happened for you it was perfect. Now let's get back into the Flow as we go forward.

It isn't my job as a parent to dictate who my children are at the core. They are who they are from the day they are born. I can look back at each of my four children when they were wee babies and see that they are exactly the same now in their twenties. Their basic temperament, their basic essences-the things that make them utterly unique and utterly who they are-are exactly the same as the day they were born. I'm glad! They are each amazing and utterly fascinating to me. They are also all close to me and I believe that's because they trust that I love them just the way they are.

They have all done some things over the years that have made me cringe, cry, scream, pray, dance, lecture, hold my breath, grieve, sing, rejoice, beam, hide, brag, and feel proud.

Being a parent is not easy! I've been deeply impacted by them each and most importantly deeply impacted by the experience of parenting them. They've helped me find my own Way and Flow. I know more now. And I also know less! But that's the Tao.

Encouraging I-Messages

Encourage all clients to move toward intimacy, both with themselves and the people with whom they are in relationship. Despite the advertising industry's ubiquitous message, Intimacy and sexuality are not the same thing. Surprise! Intimacy is when people take responsibility for their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors and share that information with a cared-about Other.

Intimacy is about the here-and-now. Intimacy occurs when each person involved shares the truth about himself in the moment when the truth (whatever it is) is happening. "Truth" doesn't necessarily have to be the Whole Truth, but relationships certainly unfold more smoothly when "nothing but the truth" is told. And in relationships, "truth" means one's truth about oneself, not one's truth about the Other Guy.

As you all know, I-messages are one way to prompt a speaker to tell the truth and to talk about himself, rather than focusing on what he thinks is going on with the other guy. I-messages take responsibility and require a certain degree of self-awareness. Underneath the usual "I don't like it when you", are the other truths about Self,

- the "what I hope for's",
- the "right now I'm anxious about's,"
- the "I'm having trouble adjusting to's," etc.

"You-messages" often invite the Other Guy's defenses. For example:

You: You aren't doing that right.

The Other Guy: I am too! What's the matter with you? [(or whining) You're always criticizing me. I can't do anything right.]

Complete 'I-messages' invite quite 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 not only am I smarter than you, but that you appreciate I said this.

The Other Guy: (laughing) Oh.

As the syntax of a statement is changed from a "you-sentence" to an "I-sentence," the speaker is invited to turn his attention away from the usual process of hoping he might convince the Other Guy to be different than he is. Rather, in order to make rational sense out of what he is about to say, he must focus on the task of introspecting and either saying what is in his heart at the moment or discovering and sharing the message which underlies his current emotion or perception.

As they begin to learn this skill, some people get the idea that an I-message is any sentence that starts with the word "I." Professionals who encourage introspection by asking, "What do you feel," often get a response similar to one below in the cartoon. The challenge for the clinician is to encourage the speaker to name a truth about himself (it doesn't have to be an emotion), right here, right now in the session.

☐ Encourage introspection.

"Complete this sentence: 'Right now, what I notice about myself is ____'"

"What do you hope for, by saying that?"

"Yes, that's what you think. What is it that you feel?"

"Try this: '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 by calling him a name.'"

In real life, it doesn't help much to tell the Other Guy that you think he's a ditz. Telling him is neither going to change his behavior nor induce him to consider changing his behavior. If anything, it will invite him to dig in, defend himself, and reinforce the exact behavior you object to. Also, it takes the speaker's attention away from the person who can actually do something to change the situation, namely himself. One cannot usually change a "ditz" into a "nonditz," but he might have success if he focuses his energy

on amending his response to the Other Guy's ditz-ness. The annoying part is that one has to be aware of one's response in order to begin to fiddle with it. One way to learn how to invite clients to begin to speak mostly about themselves is to practice on yourself. Experiment. Each time you share how you "feel" with someone else (in or out of session), challenge yourself to take a few moments and ascertain your part in the transaction. Certainly sometimes you *Do* think some other person is a ditz, and maybe he is. So what? More important is what happens for you when he does ditz things. Take responsibility for your responses, feelings, opinions, your motivations for talking about them, and (most importantly for your listener) what it is you want as the result of opening your mouth and mentioning how you feel about it in the first place.

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Teaching I messages-stumbling block #1

Svetlana Kreimer & Carol Hadlock

