

**Q.** When a teen said, "Don't hate me," I said, "Why would I hate you?" When she said, "I just had sex for the first time." I wasn't sure what to say, so I said something like, "Did you enjoy yourself?"

**A.** (*laughing*) Good for you. Okay, that was my personal response. Now for the part where I suggest psychotherapeutic considerations. I have three, so far.

1. Whenever you ask questions in session, try to use open-ended questions. Sentences beginning with "Did you" usually elicit some version of "yes," "no," "I don't know," or "I don't want to tell you" as first choices for answers.

2. In session, be aware of the present (right-here and right-now) even when the client doesn't. This invites the client to introspect as opposed to leave the Here and Now and go rumble around in their brain's version of Then and There.

3. I'm going to focus here, on ways to work with her first remarks. By that, I mean rather than exploring *what* she said, I suggest you invite her to explore *her relationship* to what she said.

□ "What do you notice about yourself, now that you've said that out loud to someone?"

□ "Say that again. What do you notice about yourself, now?"

- ☞ Say it softly. "
- ☞ Say it louder. - "
- ☞ Sit up, smile, and say it. "
- ☞ Hide behind that chair and say it. "
- ☞ Look in the mirror and say it to the person you see there. "

□ "Say that again, then finish with, "and right now I..." [If she can't think of anything to add, you might guess a possible truth such as "feel grown up," "hope my parents don't find out," or "hate myself"].

☞ "Pay attention to your body's response, now that you've said that?"

**What do you hope for by suggesting all of that?**

As far as the client goes, I have neither

hope, nor agenda. For myself, I hope to do my job.

My job as psychotherapist as I define it, is to invite the client to engage in her own Here and Now—to connect with, allow, stay with, follow, explore, and learn from herself.

My job also involves holding a container of unconditional positive regard as she does that.

So instead of responding with some version of, "What happened then?" "How come you made that decision?" "Did you have protection?" or "Tell me more," I suggest you invite her to be aware of her responses to what she just said, what it was she hoped for (consciously and/or unconsciously by announcing it in the first place) and to connect with herself as she does her exploring.

**I guess it might have been a good thing to initiate a discussion about birth control.**

You bet. Disease protection, sexual behavior in general, orgasm, pregnancy, and, perhaps, sexual abuse, too. As you probably know, the sexual revolution has not occurred for many high school girls.

Girls still allow boys to use their bodies for the reward of a little touching, attention, and romantic fantasy. Many believe that orgasm is something that will happen to them "when I'm older."

**Actually, my problem is I'd feel uncomfortable talking about almost all of that.**

Hey, what a great opportunity to get some additional psychotherapeutic work done.

**Huh?**

This gives you the opportunity to consciously be a "solid object."

When Mommy (that's you) can, without shame, admit to being imperfect and, at the same time, not be labeled as "Bad," Infant (that's the client) perceives it might possibly be okay to make mistakes now and then and not be labeled as "Bad."

Start by finding a way to connect with a part of you who holds the firm opinion that it's perfectly okay for you to be

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Dear Reader,

Whatever area of mental health you practice, and whatever the title on your license, while you are giving counsel, you are a counselor.

While you are providing supportive advice and suggestions about behavior, you are a social worker.

Whenever you are teaching, you are an educator.

While you are focusing on behavior change, you are a behaviorist.

While you are trying to get across your point of view or opinion, you are just another person with a point of view or an opinion.

While you are inviting someone's psyche to heal itself of long-ago-sent-to-the-unconscious wounds, you are a psychotherapist. I could go on, but...

At the same time, my guess is if the only thing you did in session was to play basketball with the client and you managed to hold the client in unconditional positive regard the entire time, eventually the client could use your positive container to heal himself, psychotherapeutically.

So, I'm with Carl Rogers when it comes to the idea of the psychotherapeutic need for a container of unconditional positive regard, I'm with the Object-Relation folks that the only people in the psychotherapy room are Solid Object and Infant, I'm with Freud et al about most negative psychological issues having their origins between the ages of 0 and 5, and I'm solidly with the Redecision folks that the point of psychotherapy is to develop new, more functional conclusions about Self.

And...in actuality, most of what I do in session is based solidly in Gestalt—all learning is experiential.

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uncomfortable discussing any old subject you don't want to discuss whenever you don't want to discuss it.

From that "I'm Okay" space in your psyche, tell this client directly that you are uncomfortable talking about certain issues. This is a big deal.

When a parent, teacher, consultant, social worker, counselor, or psychotherapist acknowledges without negative judgment that he/she is less than perfect, this gives the child, student, or client an opportunity to introject the amazing possibility that being imperfect isn't automatically and always a shameful thing.

#### Oh yeah.

Before we stop, there's an additional "heads-up" issue we haven't addressed—and that's her first sentence: the "don't hate me" part. Given protection from diseases and unwanted children, her protecting herself by asking you not to hate her may be the next biggest deal.

□ One idea is to respond positively, then negatively.

Her: Don't hate me.

You: Wouldn't think of it. I trust you completely. What's your response to that?

Her: (responds)

You: Oh, well, in that case I do hate you. Come to think of it, most everything you do is bad. What's your response to that?

#### I'm laughing, but I'd be worried that the girl might be insulted.

Trust yourself and watch for that. If you are uncertain, ask her about it the moment it occurs to you as a possibility.

I'd probably go for the gold and wonder out loud something like,

□ "Who taught you that you deserved to be hated?"

#### How would you work with that in the here and now?

□ Here's one possible scenario.

You: How old were you when you learned that you deserved to be hated?

Her: I dunno, nobody I guess. I just figured it out myself.

You: Who in your family could possibly have taught somebody that they were hateful. Maybe not with words—maybe just with actions?

Her: Well my (mother, brother, evil step cousin, whoever... and here are the circumstances...)

You: Hmm. If your grown-up self were able to go back in time and talk to your (infant/toddler/small child) self about whether or not she deserves to be hated, what does she need to hear? [What might shield her from believing someone else's opinion of her?]

Her: (thinks, and says whatever she says)

You: Okay, let's do that. Imagine that your today-self has traveled back to the time the toddler-you was learning that hating was a reasonable thing for someone to do to you. Notice where you are... what you see... what you hear... Let me know when you find your child-self. If you want to, find a way to connect physically with your child-self, perhaps look in her eyes. When you're ready, say the words that describe what you know now: that which you didn't know then.

Clnt: (does it)

#### I see where this might be going, but what if the child-self pushes her away or doesn't believe her, or those aren't the right words, or..

□ Breathe. It'll be okay. Just like you allowed yourself to be uncomfortable addressing certain issues, allow this younger child-self not to have to heal herself completely the first time some stranger (that's you) barges in and informs her the weird information that she's okay just the way she is.

#### Q. On my suggestion, she decided to fire her internal parents and hire new ones. But she thinks she doesn't have the skills to parent her inner child.

A. Encourage her to trust herself. The child-inside already was given enough food, shelter, water, clothing, and education to enable this person to grow to adulthood. What the child-inside needs now are the things she *didn't* get: cherishing, celebrating, attention, trust, and respect. Psychological healing will occur as those basic needs are met.

□ Suggest she is already doing a better job than her birth parents did. For one thing, she has been telling the truth to her inner-child by admitting she may not have the necessary skills and doesn't know what to do.

Little things like that go a long way. Much of the time, abandoned inner children are as starving for truth as they are for affection.

#### She wants a nice neighbor couple she remembers from her childhood to be her new parents.

So, let it be so. In your mind, let this couple take the place of the nice, neighborly part of herself that she has yet to identify as her own.

□ Encourage her to use her perception of this couple to re-parent herself.

□ Invite her to engage her creative side and imagine these two caring neighbors from childhood are in the therapy room.

☞ Suggest she imagine this couple is looking at her, right now, in the therapy room.

☞ Invite her to find words to describe both how it feels to be looked with kindness and how she is responding.

☞ Invite her to practice receiving positive looks from people who are actually pleased to be in her company.

☞ Ask her if you might speak to these two friendly imaginary people. If she says, "yes," carry on a conversation with them that involves the many positive attributes of your client.

☞ Propose these two imaginary neighbors hang out with your client for awhile, perhaps sitting in the back seat of the car as she heads for home. You might remind them they don't really need to do much other than be glad that your client is breathing.

☞ You might also invite them to trust her and approve of everything she does.

#### What if she doesn't approve of what she does?

□ Invite the neighbors to approve of her non-approving too. And since you've thought of it,

☞ Discuss that possibility with the neighbors, before they all leave the therapy session that day.

□ I'd also invite the two of them to follow her around for awhile, day and night, while she gets used to being observed through friendly lenses.

□ Eventually she might consider inviting these neighbors to adopt her. When that happens, the two of you might arrange and carry out a formal ceremony.

#### Q. I am temporarily facilitating a problem solving group for an agency. Most of the employees were angry at the director for protecting an employee (who was not in the room) instead of firing him. They spent the time trying to convince the director that it was okay for them not to like this employee. The director was annoyed at being confronted.

A. The situation you have outlined is more a metaphor for the system than it is a name for The Problem.

#### Yes. Apparently communication broke down a while ago. Everyone has been collecting resentments for some time.

□ One idea is to re-enact the scenario from last week. Set up a structure where everyone is invited not to triangulate, but to talk directly to whom-ever they have a gripe with.

☞ Invite the director to sit in a chair in the middle of the room. Place an empty chair facing her and another empty chair in back of her, facing the same direction as she is. This second empty chair represents the absent employee in a director-protected position. One at a time, invite the employees to sit in the chair which faces the director. Once seated, direct each of them to take a turn telling her a) appreciations they have for and about her, b) what they don't like about the employee situation, and c) how they would like her handle the employee in question. Invite the director to respond only with, "Thank you."

☞ As each person is done, tell the director to stand up, take her chair, and move out of the way. The person is now facing the empty chair which represents the out-of-favor employee. Invite the person to tell this employee all their resentments. Then the director gets back in the middle, another person faces her, and the enactment starts all over.

#### What if the director says she wants to talk back?

☞ Tell her she will have a turn, later.

☞ Invite her to access the part of herself who appreciates that all these people are willing to take the risk to tell her their truth.

☞ Suggest that she do what she can to stay separate and not take what the various people say personally.

☞ Occasionally wonder how she is doing and validate whatever she responds.

☞ Suggest she visualize a plastic shield between her and whoever is talking at her so that she does not get slimed by what they are saying.

#### So just let them dump on the absent employee?

☞ No. As you intervene, encourage language that takes responsibility, invites intimacy and begins resolution.

#### Give an example.

Griper: And furthermore, she is always bad-mouthing other people.

You: And what's your usual response to that?

Griper: Well, I don't like it.

You: And *then* what do you do?

Griper: I stand there angry and don't tell her (the difficult employee) to stop it.

You: And then be mad at her for not stopping?

Griper: Yes.

You: Take responsibility for your part. Tell the director what you just told me.

#### Q. Not being countertransferred is hard. It seems natural to yearn for my clients to have a better life.

A. To yearn on someone else's behalf may be natural but it is not therapeutic. If yearning points the way to a better life, each individual is the only person on the planet who can be depended upon to yearn properly for himself. Just now as you used the word 'better,' you were accessing the part of your personality who holds the belief that one person can know what 'better' is for someone else.

All you can know for certain is that you might not choose this other person's lifestyle for yourself. You cannot know, absolutely, what is better or worse for him.

His less-than-better lifestyle may be exactly what he needs right now in order to teach himself the lessons he is trying to learn. It may be that he is trying to provide himself with enough discomfort so he will be motivated to resolve his unfinished business.

"Better" implies different. When you want someone else to be different than they are, you are in your Child ego state. Each person deserves a therapist in her Adult ego state who believes the client is

okay exactly the way he is, stays out of his system, and invites him towards the resolution of his issues.

During session, anytime your yearning involves another person, you are temporarily enmeshed with that person.

In your personal life, a certain amount of enmeshment is pleasant, perhaps even necessary for healthy attachment. Between a therapist and her client however, any enmeshment is over-enmeshment and interferes with the separation the therapist

must maintain in order to provide an environment of unconditional high regard.

#### I get it about not attaching to a result, but not having an intent seems unavoidable. What about our invitations to complete the process, to differentiate, or to stay in well-being? Aren't they manifestations of our beliefs in what the other person needs?

Of course. You find it difficult *not* to invite the client in the direction of the therapeutic model in which you believe. We humans carry our beliefs with us wherever we go. That's the way we humans are. But, in session, as far as intent, consider having intention for yourself, not for the Other Guy.

For example, in session, your intention for yourself might be to do your job to your best ability: "I define my job as inviting you (the client) to complete processes, differentiate, and stay in well-being."

I suggest you add the following words: "...and I will continue to complete my own processes, differentiate myself from you, and stay in well-being no matter your response."

Offer ideas like a butler offering refreshments at a party. The butler doesn't care if you want his refreshments or not. His job is simply to offer, respect your answer, then return later and invite you again. Each time he does his job, he continues to have zero attachment to whether you partake of his offerings or not.

Have as your intent to offer the invitation and let go of needing it to be accepted. Invite, let go. Invite, let go. Invite, let go.

**Q. A teenage couple caused uproar at school. Mom brought the daughter in and wanted her daughter fixed.**

**A.** Can you see them all together?

**When I suggested the boyfriend come in too, the mother refused. Then she called and canceled the second appointment because the daughter was going with the boyfriend to see his therapist! I wonder how come the mother sent the girl in with the boy's therapist and not with me.**

Sometimes, the more money one charges, the more competence one is perceived to have. Besides, you are *only* an intern. So what do *You* know?

**Well, why would she bring her child to me in the first place, then?**

Exactly. Now you begin to notice a family process of sabotage. Try not to take any of this personally. None of it is about you.

**Q. He can't tell truths about himself if I am looking at him. If I turn my chair to the side, he is more open. Something doesn't feel right and every so often I sneak eye contact.**

**A.** Listen to yourself and think reflexively. Change the pronouns so that your description of this man involves only him.

**Okay. He can't tell truths about himself if he is being seen because he can't tell the truth if he is seeing himself. When he sees what he thinks I see, his brain implodes and, uh, he's focused so externally, he can't focus on himself.**

Possibly so.

□ Arrange the seating so that he has no one to look at but himself—think classic Freudian psychoanalyst's office.

□ Since your chair is turned away already, you might suggest that you sit in each other's chair.

□ As the work progresses, give up any goal of getting him to connect with you. Invite him, instead, to connect with himself, only.

□ Some time in the future he may want to practice connecting with other people. If so, you might offer to use yourself as a safe person on which to practice. 🌱

□ His resistance to (fear of) being seen is probably a symptom of a deeper issue. If

not a symptom, it is at least a metaphor. Let go of wanting anything from or for this person. Sit back. Expand your mindset about how humans are supposed to be. Let this person teach you about his world and how stressful it is to live in it.

**Q. An ex-client called and wants an appointment to discuss the possibility of his potentially suicidal mother coming to counseling. He also wants to be there during the mother's first session.**

**A.** Should you participate in talking about his mother or listening with empathy to his gossip about her, you will become part of a triangulated system.

□ Explain that if he wants his mother to be a client, you will be available to make an appointment when she calls you directly. Tell him you will not be discussing her with him.

□ No matter what he says, hear only his talk about himself, his concerns about death in general, and his sense of dependency on his mother.

□ Encourage him to complete any unfinished business he has with his mother.

□ Using an empty chair, invite him to tell his concerns directly to his 'mother.'

□ Invite him to connect with his sense of sadness, frustration, and fear of being out of control.

□ Invite him to explore his need to protect both his mother from you and you from his mother.

**What if his mother decides to come and wants him there?**

You have to decide what your limits are. If you decide that you are okay with it, then I guess she can invite anyone she wants.

**Q. Out in the lobby after the session, the mother said to my eight-year-old client, "Oh well, if nothing else, you certainly are learning how to draw here, aren't you?" I didn't know what to say in front of all those people.**

**A.** Learn to listen not to what a person says but to the I-message underneath what they say.

If this mother had been able to verbalize what was going on with her right then, what might she have said?

**"I'm upset."**

"Upset" suggests anger, perhaps a sense of helplessness or fear. What do you suppose she was upset about, angry at or afraid of?

**Him not getting better. She doesn't know what to do with him.**

□ So at the beginning of the next session ask her into your office and invite her to express her concerns.

**So, I should bypass her remark?**

No. Her remark was the manifestation of what is going on underneath.

□ "Last week, when you left, you said such and so. My guess is you were upset and I wonder if you'd be willing to share your concerns with me."

□ Once she tells you her fears, mixed of course with anger, invite her to tell you specifically what she wants that she is not getting.

**I felt jabbed and my guess is the kid gets these little jabs, too.**

Step back and separate yourself from her jabs. Do not take them personally. She jabbed. Then you took her jab and stuck it in your gut, rather than move yourself to the side and let the jab fall to the floor.

Just because she sees you as the adversary, does not mean you are the enemy. Change your part in the system. Be on her team. Refuse to fight. She can jab; you can refuse to be the target. Her jabs are not about you anyway. Her jabs unfold out of her frustration. They may be attempts to get your attention and your help with her child.

**I felt abused.**

You abused yourself with her jabs. You took her comment and jabbed yourself right in your vulnerable I'm-an-incompetent-therapist-because-I'm-not-fixing-the-kid-fast-enough place.

Begin learning how not to take what she says personally. Nothing she says will ever be about you. She was upset that things are not different than they are. She may also be transferred onto you, responding to you as if you were her long-ago abusive parent.

**Well, she was abused when she was a child and she is abusive as a parent and she is abusive as a client.**

Now you are jabbing her. Perceive her as an injured child, not the enemy.

**What would have been appropriate in the room with all the people watching? I suggested we talk next session.**

What you did seems very appropriate for that moment. It is what you did to yourself after she left that was abusive.

**Q. The father molested the daughter. The daughter refuses individual time but will attend family sessions.**

**A.** You report that this father will have his court hearing soon but in the meantime, although explicit sexual violations have stopped, the subtle dynamics of abuse, denial and victimizing continue on a daily basis.

Determine your limits. If your limits for yourself include seeing an abusive family only after the victim has worked through some of her issues and is able to protect herself from further abuse, then honor your limits.

Outline your treatment plan and be prepared to decline the case if your treatment plan is refused.

If your limits for yourself are that seeing this family is okay, let the girl know you recommend that first she see an individual therapist, but bottom line you intend to respect her wishes as long as you perceive she is safe.

See the family only if you can stay out of their system. To do that, adopt a personal agenda for yourself. So as not to participate in any form of their ongoing issues, agree with yourself that:

- In session you will respond only to the answer to this ongoing question: "What are these people doing right now?"

- The moment you perceive a violation of boundaries, no matter how subtle, you will immediately intervene in some way.

- Name what you see, suggest alternatives, invite introspection, create an enactment, set limits, or any intervention you can think of.

*What* you do is not so important. *That* you do something is.

**Q. A three-year-old is terrified since a particular traumatic event. She is scared of the dark, jolts awake many times per night, won't take naps and wants to sleep with her parents. Her parents are uncooperative and refuse all suggestions that pertain to them taking action to make an environment**

**which the child perceives as safe. They have no time for a less than perfect child. And yet they expect me to fix their daughter.**

**A.** In a perfect world, this child's fear would be respected. She would be strapped to some adult's body and carried around in complete safety until she clamored to be let down. Once she was unstrapped, a parent would insist that she always be in the company of someone who could watch her and protect her, until the girl got sick of the whole thing and made it very clear that she Wanted Some Space. The whole procedure might take months.

These parents want their daughter to be different. It sounds as though that one cannot always have what one wants with which everybody in this family is confronted.

□ Draw on the parent's perception of you as the expert. Tell them, "I'll do my best to fix your child but you have to do *exactly* as I say." If they say okay, tell them what to do. Prescribe that they take seriously everything their daughter says, that they commit for a period of time to provide their daughter with a sense of safety at night, that they expect many mistakes and setbacks, and that they implement all of your suggestions in good faith.

□ Refer all parenting questions back to their own experiences as children.

*"How did Your parents let You know Your home was safe when You were three and scared?"*

*"If you were three in a situation like this, what would you want?"*

□ Role play different night-time scenarios with the whole family taking part. Be alert for underlying communications.

**The child implemented a suggestion for solving the problem I had made during the last session. The parents had previously rejected it. The mother was angry with me.**

Start by finding your inner humble place. Prepare yourself to be okay with the idea that this mother may reject every suggestion you offer, use your wonderings at home as springboards for her own useful ideas, and that you will neither hear about nor be given credit for any of her positive conclusions.

Clearly this child is interested in solving the problem.

- Keep making suggestions even though the parents reject them.

- Continue to give positive messages about self-worthiness and safety.

- Have no investment in whether or not the parents continue coming to sessions.

**During this last session the girl heard a noise in the building and panicked. I said, "Let's go find out what that noise is." She refused.**

□ Invite everyone to re-enact the incident to a different conclusion. Direct the mother to pick up and hold her child tight, perhaps even covering her with a blanket or pillow while all three of you, showing caution, slowly discover what made the noise.

□ Or, as you already did once, role-play a caring parent.

☞ "I'll make certain you are safe. (Getting up out of the chair) *"Excuse me a moment, I'm going to go find out what that noise is."*

**The mother's response to my version was typical—"Oh, it's nothing."**

Yes, it seems reasonable that the girl would interpret her mother's response as a form of, "My daughter is nothing."

**It's hard for me not to disapprove of the mother.**

□ That makes sense to me and, ...since you feel parental (judgmental) toward the mother, use that in your work. Role model positive parenting. Find the positive intent of everything she does or says. Re-enforce the tiniest thing the mother does that's in the least way positive and, the best you can, completely ignore (or stay neutral) when you perceive her behavior as negative.

**How might I "reinforce" the mom's positive behavior?**

□ It doesn't have to be a big deal. Be subtle. Smile. Nod. Turn toward her momentarily and mumble things like, "Uh, huh." "Yeh," "...like how you did that."

□ Another idea is to handle your disapproval the way you would any other countertransference. Use it. In this case tell the mother your concerns. Take responsibility for the problem and then, with respect, invite her attention back on herself.

☞ "I find myself frustrated with what you just said, Mother, and I need to clear something up with you before we go on. Your child is clearly frightened. My perception is that you really do perceive her fear as Nothing. Is that true?"

☐ Notice and work with how she responds to you. Be particularly alert to how she either ignores your comment, disapproves of it or blames you for being wrong. Since that is how she treats her child and that is what you found yourself doing to her, disapproval and blame are probably firmly imbedded in the family system.

☐ Individual sessions with the girl might turn out to be more useful than family counseling at this point, especially if the parents are rather stuck in their parenting responses.

☞ Validate everything, stay out of the way and watch. Marvel at how a child will naturally heal herself. In the unconditionally accepting environment of the therapy relationship, this child might discover that bullying is not the only way grown-ups respond to kids.

With luck, she'll remember her sessions with pleasure and when she is an adult she may return to therapy and possibly begin to work through her fears and re-do many of the crippling and inaccurate decisions about Self that she made when she was young.

☐ See both parents together without the child.

**They probably wouldn't stay long or maybe even not return for a second session.**

Then make the most of the one session they do attend. Don't waste time. Be direct.

☐ Wonder what it is the parents are *not* telling you. Find ways to invite their exploration of

☞ Left-out info about their family life: positive stuff, external pressures, etc.

☞ Things about parenthood each enjoys.

☞ Things that happened in their family's of origin when they were about the same age as their daughter?"

☞ Who, in their family of origin were the adults they liked the best, and what was so likeable about those people?

☞ How each is handling their (or their partner's) response to the events that brought them here?

☐ Refer these parents to an external class or group focused on positive parenting. If there isn't one nearby, consider creating one yourself.

☐ Engage the family in various sculpts where each parent *shows* (instead of *tells*) what they want verbally and physically when they are scared, upset, sad, angry, happy, cold, wet, etc. and lonely, feeling left out, etc. and maybe how they'd like to be dealt when it just way too dark outside.

☐ Invite the child to show what she wants when she's scared and also, what she wants from her parents right her, right now in this room.

**Q. He said part of himself doesn't want to come to session. Apparently, it is a small part, but seriously afraid of anything new.**

**A.** Invite all personality parts to speak for themselves. Encourage negotiation between the parts.

☐ Propose that this man's afraid-part come to therapy and then take care of itself by hiding someplace safe. Or perhaps it could serve as traffic light, letting the two of you know when to slow down, stop, or continue. If it agrees, the rest of the personality might be able to come forward, and get some work done.

☐ Engage in a conversation with the 'afraid part.' Ask what it wants from you. Wonder what it might do to take care of itself besides not showing up.

☐ Wonder how old he was when someone taught him that change was usually not a good thing.

**Q. Usually I "invite" in therapy and I seldom have an agenda. But sometimes I find myself teaching, educating, or lecturing. That's when I want change.**

**A.** I want to say "Yes-but" right here, however "Yes-and" seems more fitting. What I hear is that you define your teaching behaviors as not particularly therapeutic. Is that so?

**Yeah, I guess so. Sorta.**

In session, role-model living in integrity. Trust yourself totally. Given that you are committed to being psychotherapeutic,

consider the possibility that, in session, when your intuition suggests you educate, this is a time when "teaching" is exactly what the therapy needs.

Your mind-body is your only real therapeutic tool. If you have an inner invitation to teach, educate, or lecture, then do it. Notice the result.

Your intuition isn't all-knowing; sometimes it's dead wrong. However, it

loves you and it wants you to be the most master-therapist you can be.

And, just like your conscious mind, one way it learns is by making mistakes.

If you want, you can take the time to puzzle out whether or not teaching is the exact right thing to do, but by the time you know for absolutely sure what the answer is, either you or the client may have died of old age! So since you cannot know for sure that you are going the right thing, trust your intuition, even if you do not understand.

Consider everything you do in session as an intervention. Notice what you are doing, give up wanting other people to "get it," then teach, educate or lecture without agenda.

Pay attention to process and work with the client's response to your interventions.

Speaking to the polarity for a moment, should you find yourself teaching because you do not know what else to do, because you like showing off, or because you sense it's the only safe way to be in session, then perhaps your fear is in the way.

☐ If that is the case, take responsibility for your problem and make your countertransference into an intervention.

*"A part of me wants wants to tell you what I think you should do. But another part would like to figure out a way so that you could teach it to yourself. Hmmn. (trusts brain, censors nothing and goes with the first thought that comes to mind) Let's try this ..."*

or

*"(introspects) My mind's a total blank. Apparently I need to be quiet. What's going on for you right now?"*

☞

**Q. Due to an emergency, we abandoned the building halfway into the session. I'm not sure it's fair to charge him.**

**A.** Either create a policy for interrupted sessions before your next session, or in the next session, negotiate the subject with your client.

Either way, use the subject as part of the therapeutic work.

☐ If you decide you are negotiable, take the opportunity to teach negotiating skills. Begin by not caring whether you get paid or not. Then assist him to propose and counter propose until both of you are satisfied.

☐ If you decide you are not negotiable, be prepared to work therapeutically with his response. For example, if he is resentful, assist him express his anger appropriately and tell you what he wants. Use this opportunity to encourage him to connect with his existential rage that he cannot always have what he wants.

☐ Should he respond by being a little too nice, he may be placating. Check it out and work with the placation.

You: "My guess is you have some resentment about being charged for only half a session. Is that true?"

Him: Well, a little bit.

You: So from that perspective, it looks like I've gone and cheated you. How much do I have to cheat you before you will take care of yourself and say 'No, that's not acceptable?'"

☐ "Repeat after me, "What I want is to pay for half a session only."

**Q. During group, a seventeen and a half-year-old said her forty-year-old neighbor spoke to her about masturbation and took her to a hot tub spa. Essentially he wanted to play show and tell. She has not allowed any sexual touching so far. I am unclear if this is a molest and if I need to report it. She continues to see him. She is also trying to break off with a boyfriend who is somewhat physically rough with her.**

**A.** Let's assume this girl has underlying, possibly unconscious motives for sharing this information in the group.

Certainly she is not protecting herself completely. Perhaps she hopes someone in the group will.

Underneath her description of the neighbor's behavior may be the plea, "I'm not doing too well, here. Please rescue me."

A previously non-abused, developmentally normal seventeen-year-old with high self-esteem would ordinarily spend little time trying to break off with someone who was physically rough with her. She would say, "good riddance to bad rubbish," the second time that person physically hurt her.

So chances are good that this girl has been, if not abused or molested previous to her encounters with either the boyfriend or the neighbor, then taught that she has to settle for men who do not respect her very much. Take whatever action seems appropriate to you.

☐ Inform the girl you are considering a report to child protective services. Be available for her to learn:

- That she is worth protecting.

- That you believe abusive behavior is inappropriate.

- That there is one adult on the planet who is available to take steps to ensure that her body is respected.

Another guess is that under ordinary circumstances she holds up well, but under stress, she abandons herself and leaves the "one-down" part of her personality to handle her intimate relationships with men. If so, at least one part of this girl's personhood is not seventeen but the age at which she was taught that one of her roles on this planet is to be moderately victimized."

☐ Invite the group to do dramatizations where one person takes advantage of another. Vary the content from fiscal to physical to emotional to sexual. Invite all group members to encounter the exploiter, the victim, the rescuer, and the deny-and-refuse-to-rescuer.

☐ During group, invite everyone to invent, show or try-out various ways to confront or to say, "No!" not only to the (imaginary) neighbor, but to anyone or anything one of them thinks up. This technique will often bring up material that will increase everyone's understanding of their own conflicts, motives, and options.

**Another thing is that she's probably sexually attracted to this man.**

Of course. And, in a different part of the world, if she were unmolested, developmentally seventeen, and responsible about disease and birth control, a forty-year old might make an exciting and instructive first lover. This neighbor appears to be only

five years old however, and the fact that she chooses him indicates that she might be too young. 5-year-olds, as I recall, are not known for their excellent decisions. So if you deem this relationship as abusive, yes, make a report.

**Q. An alcoholic wants me to tell him what to work on and also to figure out what to do next.**

**A.** Of course he does. And what is *your* problem?

**Well, if I don't tell him what to do, we won't get anything done.**

So you think a) "getting something done" is an important activity, and b) that it is your responsibility to do it.

**Yeah. I guess so.**

So how are you enjoying being firmly "in the client's system?"

**I'm not.**

In your relationship with this man, you have set up an enactment of his issues. He insists on being dependent. He is mad when he cannot have what he wants. He refuses to take responsibility.

He wants to make someone else the problem. He wants someone else to be the solution. He wants that someone else to be you. And you are considering volunteer work as the "someone else."

From his perspective, your client is one lucky dude.

Please realize that if you do all the work, he may never have the chance to confront whether or not he cares enough about himself to expend the energy necessary to heal himself.

☐ Refuse to tell him what to do. Let his demands glide right by you and sink to the floor as they come in contact with the wall behind you. Work with his ever increasing anger each time he requests guidance and you remind him (with love) that you completely trust him to guide himself.

☐ Or you might say, "If I tell you what to do, will you do what I suggest?"

☐ If he says yes to the above question, direct him to begin deep introspective work. You will not know exactly what he needs to do. Besides he probably won't do it. So just make a guess and jump in.

*"Okay. Lie down on the floor. Now kick your feet. Make lots of noise. Now kick your feet and squeeze these pillows with your hands as you yell, 'I hate you,*

*I hate you, I hate you ...' over and over and over as loud as you can."*

*"Remember a time you were abused as a child. Close your eyes and go back to that scene ..."*

*"Imagine your parents are here right now. Tell them ..."*

□ An alternate tack should he say some version of "Yes, I'll do what you say," is to create an enactment that parallels the placating nature of his response, if that's what you think it is.

*You: "Okay, dust my bookcase .. Now do a head stand in the corner ... now ..."*

Continue until he rebels and says some version of: "Wait, I don't want to spend my therapy time doing that You want me to do; I want a say in how I spend my time in here."

*You: Oh! Well, okay. What would you like to do now?*

### **Wouldn't you deal with the alcoholism?**

Probably not. I don't generally do much in the cognitive behavioral realm. Other people are way better at it, than I. Addiction is one of those issues where the substance (or behavior) isn't necessarily the "problem," it's often more of an attempt at a solution to the problem."

Invite polarity work between the various parts of himself he presents in session:

- Between the part who wants to know 'what to work on' and the part who doesn't want either to know anything and certainly not work.
- Between the committed alcoholic part and the part who got himself into treatment.

Do your best to support whatever steps he takes towards meeting whatever goals he has for himself in that arena.

In session, offer opportunities for him to explore the underlying issues for which he uses alcohol to self-medicate. Should he (with a support group's help) manage never to use alcohol again, those issues about wanting someone else to tell him what to do as long as he agrees, will still be there, waiting to be resolved. Invite him to begin work on them now.

♪

**Q. His primary complaint is that ten years ago, his wife was depressed for seven years. They both have trouble talking about stuff.**

**A.** Start with the problem as stated. Sculpting might be a helpful nonverbal intervention here.

□ Direct the wife to assume a posture that mirrors her husband's complaint about her. For example she might sit apart, dejectedly slumped, holding one hand over her mouth. Invite her husband to suggest changes in her posture until what she is doing parallels the picture he sees in his mind. Remind her that this picture is not necessarily an accurate rendition of reality, but it is the husband's picture. Work with their responses to the sculpting process, to the content of the sculpt, and to your directing.

♪ Invite the husband to put himself in the picture by showing his responses to his wife's depression.

♪ Once he has an accurate sculpt of his version of reality, direct the two of them to change places in the sculpt. Direct them to say what they notice about themselves in the other person's position.

□ Invite sculpts of how-things-are-today and notice the differences between that and sculpts of how-things-used-to-be. Invite them to connect with their experiences as they move around the room. Wonder,

♪ "How do you benefit from this?"

♪ Try some experiments right now. What can you do so something changes?"

□ Experiment by sculpting options, how things could be versus how things should be.

□ Sculpt and work with her version, too.

□ Invite this man to explore his own anger depression, helplessness, martyrdom, and denial.

♪

**Q. I'm comfortable working with sexual issues but I'm a little unsure how I might address this one client. A sexual trauma occurred when he was fourteen and he got stuck at that age sexually. He is very focused on breasts.**

**A.** Non molested fourteen-year-old American boys are not usually overtly sexually active with people other than themselves, but they think about sex all the time. And they talk about it with whomever will listen. And they fantasize a lot. Here's one idea.

□ As an experiment, encourage this man to be fourteen years old for several weeks or months. Prescribe no intercourse, lots of masturbation and fantasy, conscious but victim-less voyeurism and two therapy sessions a week with exaggerated sexual talk. Focus on celebration and appreciation. Suggest he keep a journal.

♪ In session, invite many experiences with breast representations. Use clay, wet sand, or big pillows. Encourage him to regress and experience his immaturity with joy. Have a baby bottle handy.

♪ Create the Ideal Primary Nurturer and introduce it into the therapy. Pull up a chair, direct him to sit in it and speak with the voice of this Ideal Parent. Since he probably has no idea how to speak from a position of unconditional positive regard, the Ideal Parent can simply repeat after you. Tell Ideal Parent to say some version of,

- It's okay if you ... (masturbate, be mad, don't believe me, think this is stupid, don't want to do this, love doing this, are afraid, are embarrassed, obsess about breasts ..)

- I trust you completely, and

- I love you just the way you are.

Depending on the circumstances, the Ideal Parent might witness, affirm, and care for the internal-child in every session. The moment this man integrates that it is okay to be fourteen years old forever, he will have the freedom to make the choice to change.

♪

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Editor: Carol Nichols Hadlock Contributing

Editor: Don Hadlock

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