

WHOLISTIC PEER SUPPORT TECHNIQUES

By Amara Karuna

1.1 HUMAN INTELLIGENCE, EMOTIONAL HEALING AND BEGINNING COUNSELING

This is a summary of the basic ideas from Re-evaluation Co-counseling, (RC). RC is based on observation of what really works in practice, not on theories of what ought to work. It evolved from the experiences of thousands of people. It is a grassroots, people's movement, aimed at teaching lay people how to be effective in helping themselves and others with emotional issues, and in regaining our innate goodness and intelligence.

You can use it on different levels- use it occasionally just to blow off steam in stressful times, or as a deep long term therapy, systematically changing yourself for the better, and removing the blocks that keep you from realizing your dreams.

Take what you want of these ideas, just the ones that make sense for you, and leave the rest- you are encouraged to think for yourself about everything in these handouts and classes.

BASIC THEORY OF OUR HUMAN NATURE

What are human beings really like? Underneath all the programs, conditioning, expectations and hurts that we get, what is our true basic nature? Think about: What would you be like if you were really free to be your true self? What are young children like before they are socialized?

-Human beings are basically intelligent, zestful, loving, communicative and cooperative. Our inherent nature is: Each of us is whole and complete, unique, and with limitless potential. Nothing can permanently damage our real nature, but many things can cover it up.

NORMAL THINKING PROCESS

-Intelligence is defined as the ability to respond to new situations in a fresh, appropriate way. When thinking well, we look at a present situation, and our minds compare it to many past experiences, and then create a new, precisely tailored, successful response. We are naturally vastly intelligent.

Animals with less capacity for intelligence rely on instinct, which gives them general responses for situations that happen frequently, such as what to do when an enemy is nearby. But these instinctual responses are not flexible, and so don't always work well in every situation. Example: a opossum on the road will freeze when startled, which may or may not be the right (survival oriented) thing to do at that moment!

-When our thinking process is working well, when we are relaxed and feeling normal, information from

our environment (sounds sights, smells) comes in, (as it always does) mostly on subconscious level. It gets evaluated, processed and sorted, and then filed in our memory in separate isolated bits, which can be recalled at will later.

HURTS

Why don't people always act according to our true inner nature? We get hurt. Physically, mentally and emotionally-on all levels, and frequently.

-When we are being hurt, our thinking process shuts down, or seems to work very differently. People do not usually think well while hurting. Ever try to think with a headache or while very upset? The input of information from the environment is still pouring in, but it's not getting processed or evaluated as usual, and a kind of mis-storage occurs. All the sights, sounds, smells, etc., emotions, as well as the experience of being unable to think clearly get stuck together in one big recording/ memory. This recording is like a videotape of the incident, which is stored for later processing, perhaps at a safer time.

-In an ideal situation, as soon as the hurtful event is over, the person would be able to release the hurt and heal. Hurts always naturally seek release. However the safe space, time, and attention from a caring person which encourage the healing is not usually available to most of us, so the emotions and information tends to stay stuck. They will stay stuck an entire lifetime unless they are processed. EXAMPLE: People afraid of heights because once they fell down.

Negative effects of STORED HURTS:

- A stored hurt creates a rigid, inflexible spot in our mind, a recording of the whole event. The recording seems to take up space, to use up some of our capacity for intelligence. All the information seems to be stored in one big lump- separate bits can't be remembered separately as they can when it is stored normally. It becomes a place where we can't think well, that when alone we **avoid remembering**. Why? What happens right now when you think about something that was really a hurtful event? -You re-experience the hurt. It's all still right there, and so we try to avoid remembering it.

- But it's also booby-trapped: a later event which is similar enough to the first recorded hurtful event will "set off" a re-playing of the old recording. The new situation may not even be a hurtful event- it can just be similar in any way. We call this being "Re-stimulated" or "Triggered." (it's commonly called getting buttons pushed, or overreacting.) When the old recording starts to play, it feels like a replaying of the old incident- you feel the same feelings, sometimes find yourself saying the same words.

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A person in the grip of an old distress recording will:

Say things that are not pertinent; do things that don't work; fail to cope effectively and gracefully with the present situation; and endure terrible feelings which may have nothing to do with the present situation. You can tell you've come across residue in someone: they're acting frozen, nonsensical, rigid. They become irrational and "not themselves". They may get memory flashes of the old situation.

Can you think of times when you have acted like that?

Snowballing of distress-

Because the person has failed to cope effectively with the new situation, it also becomes a hurt experience, and gets recorded with all its new feelings, sensations and thoughts. Thus new situations are added on top of the old ones- and the distress recording gets bigger, adding more layers:

This means: The booby trap has more triggers. It takes up more of our free thinking space, and there are **less areas available** which are not upsetting to us. The person becomes more disposed to be upset by more situations, and more deeply upset, and for longer times.

It has been estimated that a very successful adult in our culture is probably using only approximately 10% of the original capacity of the flexible mind we were born with.

We get hurt early and often- By accident, when we are babies: we get bumps, or get cold, hungry, frustrated or scared. This is a normal part of life, and could get taken care of by our inherent healing process, if it were allowed to happen. But by far the greatest cause of our hurts are from **contagion** from distressed adults. When the adults around us get restimulated and act irrational, this is a very distressing experience for a young person. For example, a child runs outside naked, and the parent (having been punished by their own parents for exactly the same thing) gets upset and yells at the child, telling them how bad and embarrassing they have been acting. Then the child carries guilt, shame and fear about their body as a recorded distress. Other Examples?

PATTERNS

When there has been **enough restimulation, and when the same hurts happen over and over,** they form patterns which become incorporated into our personalities and even reflected in our body structure.

-Most patterns are latent, when you do not feel the distress all the time, but it lies inside waiting to be pulled out by a similar event. We see these as our "problems"- like "Oh, I always get mad when someone is late for anything."

-Chronic patterns: happen when we are hurt so frequently over a long time, that the feelings become pervasive, and we think "that's just the way I am". These are seen as idiosyncrasies of personality, or as your viewpoint on reality. Chronic patterns are constantly restimulated; they play all the time. They are like colored glasses through which we see the world. They can be identified in a person's posture, speech, emotional attitudes (like pessimism), and ritual rigid behaviors (addictions).

Q- What kinds of patterns have you seen in yourself and others?

THE INHERENT HEALING PROCESS

-The process of storing hurts can be reversed. Our abilities to think clearly can be recovered, and repaired.

-A natural healing process is built in, we are all born with it. If it could operate, it would allow stored distress to be removed immediately. This emotional release process can be called "discharge" in the sense of discharging or draining a battery.

-Emotional release is a natural, inherent process- every child does it spontaneously. It looks like: When sad, we cry, When afraid, we laugh & tremble & have cold sweat, when angry we rage with loud sounds and large movements & have hot sweat, when we have physical discomfort we relieve it by yawning & stretching, and animated, non-repetitive talking.

-If the process is allowed to finish, the stuck information is released, evaluated and stored correctly. The area of our thinking is restored to flexible awareness. This is called "Re-evaluation," and is an automatic response after emotion has been discharged. It is the "Aha" feeling of resolution (understanding). The purpose of counseling is to encourage the discharge process so that we can reclaim all the areas of our flexible thinking that have been blocked.

BLOCKS TO THE HEALING PROCESS

-What keeps the natural healing process from happening?

Mainly the lack of an attentive, loving person.

There is a vast shortage of people who know how to truly pay attention to someone else. We grow up with a chronic feeling of never having enough personal attention. This is due to similar hurts instilled in the adults we depend on, and also to the isolating structure of our society which makes it very hard for parents to get the help they need.

Do you feel like you got enough attention while growing up?

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Our culture also confuses the healing process with the hurt. We think, if someone is crying, that if we can get them to stop, then they will be all better. We do not realize that the crying itself was what would make the hurt dissolve. Inhibiting mechanisms are learned early- We are told "don't cry", and get lots of patting, rocking, threats, or humiliation: "Big boys don't cry". Soon the inhibitions become internalized, and we stop ourselves without having to be told.

No form of discharge is more important than the others. If they are encouraged and persisted with, the stuck hurt will be released in just the right way for the client. Often you will have many different feelings about one hurtful event.

-Everyone keeps trying to get attention, although unawarely. We talk out our problems, or cry on a shoulder with friends. But it is hard to be thorough and deep with this unaware clienting, because our conditioning not to have feelings takes over whenever the discharge gets deep. Also friends are often unskilled at listening and will often offer advice, give criticism, or just take the attention back to themselves by interrupting and talking about their own feelings. If you listen, much of everyday conversation is people trying to client about their problems.

In co-counseling we structure our time together so that we create a safe time for us each to have a turn being listened to, when the listener has been trained to listen well. In this way deep and true healing can take place.

-If the discharge process is allowed to operate, people can return to natural state of freedom and zestful living. Each gain in recovering our capacity for intelligence is worthwhile, however small. Total re-evaluation is called "re-emergence".

WHAT SESSIONS LOOK LIKE:

-Usually a two person team, taking turns being counselor & client, one after the other. (Sessions with three or four people are also common).

-Usually it is a 2 hour exchange, one hour each way. (Smaller or larger amounts of time may be scheduled as needed)

In General: Be courteous- arrive on time, be responsible about rescheduling is need be. Make the environment safe- no phone calls, no children, pets, whatever is needed to ensure privacy, comfort. Decide who goes first by checking in about who feels they need it most. Or flip a coin.

Do not: break or harm anything that is valuable, or disrupt the environment with inappropriate noise (be aware of muffling sounds if there are nearby neighbors).

Don't come under the influence of drugs, ideally even caffeine & sugar. Strong chemicals interfere with the natural ability to discharge.

How to begin as counselor:

First step: Give them your complete, aware attention. Listen! With interest and full attention. Ideally be relaxed, cheerful, confident and loving. This is healing all by itself, and is a contradiction to basic hurts of not getting enough attention. This can go a long way.

Counselor should maintain eye contact, while the client may or may not as they choose. Practice the counselor's attitude: look at someone, and imagine looking under the mask of who they think they are, at the real human underneath. It is an attitude of respect. Keeping in mind that they are fully powerful, capable humans, who may have just forgotten this momentarily. They will solve their own problems, and they just need your attention and support to do so. You don't have to figure it out for them. They have always done their best.

Any difficulty in keeping this attitude will show where your own patterns are hidden.

Next step: permissive counseling. You become a little more active than just listening. Now you may:

Ask questions- to draw the client out, and to reassure them of your interest. Or to steer and guide their attention back to feelings and discharge. Do NOT ask question from your own curiosity, because you want to know what happened.

Make comments- to validate their feelings & show your interest. What are some good questions or comments? "How did you feel then?" "You really liked it when she did that."

Permit and encourage discharge- notice what ideas or feelings bring discharge and dwell on that. Support the way they want to go. "Tell me more." "Stay with that feeling."

It's better to be silent if you're not sure what to say.

WHAT NOT TO DO

Don't let the client's troubles bother you (easier said than done! Just remember it's not your problem).

Don't give advice- this is insulting and also not helpful. Your goal is to help them figure out their own problems.

Do not make commentary about what you think of the problem, because this can be perceived as judgements.

Never interrupt discharge- if they are crying, let them cry, don't ask them to explain why.

Avoid comparisons to your own life, because this is stealing the attention back on to yourself.

No sympathizing with a "oh poor you attitude", invalidating (What did you feel THAT for?) or reacting emotionally (getting really upset yourself).

DO NOT refer to what the client says during a session, outside the session. This is very tempting and very impor-

tant not to do, for the sake of the client's feeling of safety. Don't mention it to the client or to anyone else.

Client decides what to work on. Think of it as gift to yourself. It is your own time to explore however you want within. Some possibilities: you may sit, stand, or lay down and rest. Take a nap. Hit things, throw things, dance. Make any sounds. Go out somewhere & take the counselor with you, like to a scary medical appointment. You may touch in non-sexual ways, such as cuddling, hand holding, or not as you feel comfortable.

OTHER THINGS TO KNOW TO BEGIN

Mini Session instructions: these are short trades of listening time, 5 to 30 minutes each way.

What is the purpose? Use them to blow steam off, tell all the recent good things, small annoying things, or whatever may keep you from being here & now. You can use them however it feels best- in class we may suggest topics, but you don't have to stay with the topic given. Minis can be used well over the phone.

Lighter Techniques

Start sessions with light techniques to help the client avoid feeling overwhelmed.

To begin: Say hello! Ask them for a New & Good (something that has happened recently that is good)

At the end: Use Attention Outs- these help them come back out of their feelings into normal awareness, and these can be many different things: check to see what works for your client. Examples: Drawing attention to the environment (How many green things can you see?). Change the environment (Go outside). Tell a story, a joke, do a math problem. Ask them to talk about something pleasant they are interested in- a movie, a book, a hobby.

If you feel still upset after a session, it probably means you did not spend enough time getting your attention out, or that the issue you were working with needs more time in session to come to a sense of resolution.

Demonstrations are sessions done in front of the group. When watching, do not release/ laugh /cry louder than the client. Keep your eyes on client to assure them of your attention. Don't respond or make suggestions unless asked to. Everything they say is confidential- don't bring it up afterward without asking permission.

Sources: The Human Side of Human Beings, and The Fundamentals of Re-Evaluation Co-counseling Manual by Harvey Jackins. Summarized by Wahaba Heartsun, © 1997