



## Integrative ideas for the process-oriented psychotherapist

### Just a Little Story about...

Some years ago a Group tried to form itself. After much effort, several members agreed to meet together once a week to discuss the group's purpose. Purpose eluded them for many months until one evening a man who was considering membership attended a meeting.

After quietly listening to the rather lengthy discussion, he rose to his feet and was given the floor. "It is obvious to me," he announced, "that the group's purpose is to find a purpose. So I propose we officially adopt that as our goal and get on with something else."

"Outrageous," declared one member. "Such effrontery," said another. "How insulting," added a third, "Get out of this meeting."

And with that, the members began to push and shove the man toward the door. Several were so angry they began pelting the unfortunate gentleman with loose objects they found around the hall.

He ran then, as boos and shouts to "never come back" followed him out of the building and into the street. Later, as the meeting reconvened inside with coffee and refreshments, several members were overheard to remark, "Now we're really a group." And the newly well-formed Group sighed to itself with satisfaction and purpose.

Carol Nichols Hadlock

**Q.** This boy doesn't want to be in therapy and he doesn't respond to, or cooperate with, treatment.

**A.** Imagine you are a rebellious teen and have a set time each week where, inside clear parameters (come each time, stay in the room, the furniture doesn't get broken, nobody gets hurt), you are absolutely accepted just the way you are. During this time, someone pays close attention to you but places no expectations or judgments on you. Not only that, but this same someone is available if you need him but does not impose himself on you in anyway.

**I'd like that.**

So, find a way to create such an environment. Attend to this boy without placing any demands on him. Include no probing questions, no disapprovals, and no hidden hopes that he will eventually trust you.

**Well, it seems very difficult to just "be" with a perverse teen for any great length of time. And how do I pay attention to him without my going bananas when he just sits there staring at me ?**

Be indirect: share, wonder, guess, or tell stories. Ask no questions; be comfortable with no response.

Find something to do that your brain judges to be productive while you are attending to this unmoving, silent, or hateful biological mass. Balancing your checkbook does not count as "attending to." Try drawing a picture of him or sculpt something in the sand tray. You don't have to be artistic to tell a story or play a game. Have no agenda and be available for him in case he decides he would like to use your brain as well as your heart.

**Well, it sounds good, but I question whether I could last a whole hour.**

Then find out what your limits are and, if necessary, arrange shortened sessions.

**What if the adolescent thinks he is getting away with something?**

He can think anything he wants. In an atmosphere of unconditional positive regard, he will be moving toward sanity, whether he wants to or not.

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**Q.** I find myself having favorites—clients who work hard and make major movement. I get really excited in session. I know that's countertransference, but that's just the way it is.

**A.** If "excited" means you are enjoying your skills and feel a humble sense of honor at being able to participate in something wonderful, then congratulations. However, if your excitement is about how cool it is that people are using your superior methodology to heal themselves, then you may be counseling from a wounded-child ego state.

Either way, it doesn't interfere with the client's work to be countertransferred when you are *outside* of session. But *inside* of session, do your best to find a way to move into neutrality. Invite your Inner Adult back into the session. See if you can transcend even your *positive* excitement.

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**Q.** He made an I-won't-hurt-myself contract with me and broke it. Why make a contract if the other person can break it?

**A.** Because they might *not* break it? People need contracts when their Internal Parent is dysfunctional. When a person does not care enough to protect himself from himself, a therapist can become a temporary parent substitute. The therapist is seen as someone outside himself who cares enough about the client to set limits and encourage behavior that will earn rewards in the long run as opposed to being instantly gratified.

As with all interventions, a no-harm-to-self contract is only another invitation. You are responsible for inviting your clients to mental health; you are not responsible for getting them there.

Any time someone makes or breaks a therapeutic contract regarding his behavior outside of session, he is making or breaking an agreement with *himself*, not with *you*.

He can use his perception of you as authority figure to help him keep his contract or, if he chooses, he can use his perception of you to give himself a reason to break it. Either way, none of his behaviors are about you.

You can participate in making a contract that someone will or will not behave in a certain way, but you cannot, under normal

circumstances, be assured he will honor the contract unless you are willing to take responsibility for his actions, give up your personal life, go live in his house, watch him constantly, and restrain him physically if necessary.

If this man is not a sociopath and if he hurt himself after making a contract not to, perhaps a part of his personality was either not in the room or not in his body during the time the contract was being made. If so, The-Part-That-Was-Not-There did not participate in the contract-making process.

☐ Make another contract and when he is all finished say, "Okay, now let's hear from the part of you who doesn't agree to any of this."

By the way, how suicidal is this guy?

**I ask about that every time. He says he's not depressed. I think it's about punishing himself. Stressed and compulsive maybe. He said he hurt himself without even thinking.**

So under stress, he goes unconscious and leaves it to his self-destructive Inner Child to decide what to do.

☐ Invite him to bring this self-hurting part into session. Engage it in conversation. He wasn't born hurting-himself, so ask why, and how old he was when, the self-hurting got invented.

☐ Invite imagery in order for him to explore his self-abusing behavior in all its gory details and to its extreme consequences. Encourage him to discover the benefits of hurting himself.

In the atmosphere of nonjudgment inside the session, he has an opportunity to become aware of how his self-destructive impulse works for him. As awareness grows and shame recedes, the more primal parts of ourselves grow less overwhelming and more controllable. As we attend to them, understand them, own them as ours, connect with them, and allow them, in time even the most embarrassing, fearsome characteristic shrinks in influence and comes to be regarded as just one more of the many diverse parts of our personality.

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**Q. She wants to learn better limit-setting skills to use with her children. I'm not sure how to go about that.**

**A.** One can set limits only for oneself. When people have trouble setting limits, it is usually because their focus is on getting the *other* person to change or because they wait until they are angry before they mean what they say. So what she is asking for here, is that you to teach her how to set better limits for herself.

☐ You might start by asking this woman to role-play with you some every-day situation with her child. At first, take the part of the child to get a feel for how she parents. Then switch and take the parent's part, in order to role-play your version of how she manages *not* to set limits. As she role-plays the child, invite her to notice how the current parenting style is ineffective or seems abusive. While you're the parent, you might role-play a few, possibly more effective parenting alternatives.

☐ Later, direct her to take on both roles herself. As she re-roleplays the part of the parent, encourage her to experiment with parenting options that might be both

effective and, at the same time, fit her personality.

**Okay, let's do a role-play about limits. I'll be the child; you be the parent.**

You: Let's say it's not all right that I sit on this bench. (walks over and sits on the couch)

Me: You can sit on that chair. You can sit on the floor. But, that bench is not for kids.

You: But I wanna sit on this bench. It's important that I sit on this bench. This bench is perfect for what I wanna do and ...

Me: Can you get off the bench by yourself or do you need me to help you?

You: Everybody else gets to sit on the bench. You always get to sit on the bench. How come I can't sit on the bench? How come you...

Me: It's hard, isn't it? (gets up, walks over to the bench, gently guides the "child" off the bench. Then, positioning herself between the "child" and the bench, looks directly into the child's eyes and says kindly, "and the bench is not for kids.")

You: (gives up and moves away, grumbling)

## *And So It Goes . . .*

*by Don Hadlock*

When working with couples, families and groups, I hold the perspective that a relationship works to the extent that each member of the system within it works. It is also my perception that relationships are the only medium through which individuals can become aware of their unresolved issues essential to personal growth. Each member of a system serves as a prop in the others' work. And anytime one individual changes, the whole system must adjust.

Bobby and Lucinda brought their 17 year-old son into session complaining he was "messing up his life." The son

agreed with everything they said. In an attempt to change the system by changing one member of the system, I invited this family into a structure.

I suggested the parents continue to complain about their son, but directly to him, instead of to me. I encouraged the son to experiment with changing the way he played his part in the family dialogue. With me feeding the son suggestions ("That is OK, I trust myself", and "Not to worry folks I am doing just fine," and "I know you love me and I appreciate your intention to help me."), he began to disagree with his parents and soon

was answering every criticism with a positive response about himself. After a few rounds of this, the father broke into tears and told his son how sorry and tired he was of being so negative, and that he did want to trust him. He hugged his son. For the moment, the system was changed.

The mother then did her part to support my belief about small changes causing the whole system to adjust. She immediately changed her part in the system by beginning to criticize the father.

Hmm, more work to do.

## How did you do that?

It's important here that the parent actually mean what she says. She must be prepared to vote with her feet. As the parent, my limit was not about *you* as in, "You can't sit on the bench." My limit was for *me*, as in, "The moment this child sits on the bench, I intend to take immediate action." Far too many parents verbalize some version of, "You can't do that," but they don't mean it. What they mean is usually some version of, "If you do that, I will nag you, threaten you, and maybe try to scare you into doing what I want—anything so that I don't have to move from where I am or stop what I am doing."

## But by "action," don't you mean she might have to slap or spank him if he insists?

No. The first action I took was to tell the child (you) what *To do*, as opposed to what *Not to do*. I did not argue or otherwise regress to the same age as the child. I was in my body, felt compassion for the child, voted with my feet, and connected with the child by touch and eyeballs. You, portraying the child, were quite clear and interpreted correctly that I meant what I said.

## But what if he starts screaming and kicking and...

The first few times, he discovers he is not going to get what he wants, the parent may need to hold him or restrain him while he rages.

At the very least she will have to physically remove him from the bench and continue to monitor the use of it until she is certain the child believes her.

It is always much easier if this kind of confrontation takes place while the child is young and considerably smaller in size and strength than the adult.

It's my belief that if a parent can teach her two to five year-old that "Mommy really likes me *and* she absolutely means what she says," adolescence will be much more of a pleasure than a trial.

Picture this—

One teen: "Hey, come on over and do (some taboo or dangerous activity.)"

Your teen: Oh no, I can't. My mother would *kill* me. (And somewhere, buried deep in his psyche, he sorta believes she really might.)

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**Q. A young woman said she did a lot of yes-no stuff the night she got date-raped. She's talked a lot about it, and been angry, and cried. But still, I don't know, there's something more.**

**A.** To come up with a possible intervention for what she has described, quiet your cognitive mind while she talks and allow the non-logical part of your brain to "see" what she is saying. Then find a way to create, in the room, a representation of the picture in your head. Here's one idea.

*"I'll stand here and you stand over there on the other side of the room. Say, 'Yes,' and take a half step forward. Okay say, 'No,' and take a half step back. Now take a half step forward each time you say, 'No' and a half step back each time you say, 'Yes.' Repeat that several times. Pay attention to your internal experience."*

**(tries that out) That's creepy. But she wasn't responsible for her rape.**

No, of course she wasn't. But she can begin to become aware of whatever part she *did* play in what happened.

Some of her therapeutic work will be to acknowledge and take responsibility for (and I'm just guessing here) how she puts herself in jeopardy, doesn't pay attention to her internal dialogue, and sometimes continues forward either not listening to, or in spite of her inner warning ("No") signals. As you work with this girl, think of the rape scene as an extreme and violent representation of how, sometimes, she arranges her life to be taken advantage of.

**I don't understand.**

□ Invite her to explore the part she plays in her everyday rape, specifically those times she is emotionally assaulted or verbally abused, perhaps by family, friends, co-workers, or rude acquaintances.

□ Invite her to discover how her relationship style invites others to violate her boundaries.

□ Invite her to resolve the unfinished business from her childhood that she brought with her to that evening.

□ Invite her to become aware how she rapes other people, not sexually of course, but perhaps how she violates their boundaries or exploits them.

Besides dealing with her rage and grief regarding the rape itself, sexual issues will also come to the forefront at this time. Some of those sexual issues will have been created by the rape. Others, dormant since childhood, will resurface now and demand attention.

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**Q. They are so enmeshed. I've done everything I know. I-messages, negotiating,... Nothing changes.**

**A.** Some pairs of people are too enmeshed to work with as a couple. They are so intertwined, that one can't raise an eyebrow without a reaction from the other. Each brings their partner into therapy as a representative of their own shadow-side, refuses to own it, and asks the therapist to change the relationship by fixing the Other-guy.

If you want to continue to work with these folks as a couple within the frame of communication skills and conflict resolution, I suggest you find a way to perceive of them as one entity. So from your point of view, there are just two things in the room—you and them. This is not easy, because at the same time, your other challenge is to invite them to perceive themselves as two individuals.

**For sure. All each one wants is for the other one to change.**

Listen to your own diagnosis: all each wants is for the other to change. Most likely, they are re-enacting the relationship they observed in their respective families of origin. It is quite possible they are not ready for couple's work.

□ Arrange for them to have a new experience in your office. Access the part of your brain which houses the idea that

on becoming a Psychotherapist

### In Session...

Hang out in the mind-set wherein the only thing you know for *sure*, is that you don't actually know much of anything for certain. I call this the Columbo therapeutic approach:



"Huh? I don't quite understand. . .

Show me what you mean."

CNH

each of these people is perfect, and that their enmeshment is the perfect milieu for them to confront and work through their individual issues.

### **They can only afford one session a week.**

□ Begin by treating them as two individuals. If they won't be seen alone because of time, money or other constraints, do individual work with each of them while the partner is in the room. Work individually only. Work with one while the other witnesses.

Witnessing usually generates intimacy and a feeling of empathy. Supporting one's partner becomes a lot more attractive when a person perceives that their partner's Enemy is not themselves but something else, Out There, somewhere.

□ Wait until some movement toward individuation occurs before inviting couple's work again.

### **How about I work with one of them for twenty minutes or so and then turn to the other and say something like, "How was that for you to see your partner doing that?"**

Sure. And working from the theory that people often respond toward their partners as they did toward their parents or other significant members of their family of origin, another idea is to use each person as a prop in their partner's work. When one of them works on some unresolved childhood issue, bring the resolution back into the current relationship. For example,

□ If, in the course of some individual work, one of them discovers they need to tell a parent some assertive truth, invite them to say whatever it is to the parent as if the parent were in the room.

□ Either right then or later after the work is through, you might direct that person to, "Now turn to your partner and say those same words to him/her."

### **What then?**

The work may continue within the partner relationship, it may return to the individual's work, it may completely change focus onto the other partner. Trust yourself. You'll do something different each time, with each couple. Pay attention and take your cues from a) your intuition and b) the response of the person you are working with at the time.

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### **Q. She says she has a memory of her father hurting her, but he died before she was born. Since it can't be true, I'm uncertain how to proceed.**

**A.** The leftovers from any incident which remain in our mind are the parts that represent our relationship with the incident. At best we remember only the parts of any event which are important to us, or have meaning in some way. And if certain important-to-us-in-the-future details eluded us at the time, the mind will often fill them in, particularly for events which occurred in childhood.

On the other hand, a memory always *mirrors* the truth, even if the memory is not real. So, let go of *ever* needing to believe *anything* that *any* client *ever* tells you (hyperbole intended). Truth is not necessary in order to work with psychological issues.

Think of a memory, thought, story, dream, idea, guess, imagery, deliberate falsehood, suspicion, hope, fantasy, picture in their mind, picture in your mind, drawing, photograph, poster

on the wall or whatever, as a canvas on which the describer has painted a projection of himself. And yes, that includes you. In the psychotherapy session each of those things is a metaphor for whatever the person's psyche wants to work through. If the client brings it to the session, it represents the client's inner reality. Real world accuracy is not important.

Work with any issue as if it were true, exactly as it comes from the client's psyche which, in my opinion, knows way more than we do about what is relevant to the client's psychological healing. Invite the "memory" into the present moment. Since it can't possibly be true, then think of it as a metaphor for something else.

### **Well, part of me thinks she's lying. Or she's a bit crazed.**

□ So find ways to invite this person to explore this lie/fantasy and find out what it represents to her. She may discover that it *is* a memory after all, only perhaps, not about her father.

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### **Q. A woman says she gets verbally abusive to her husband and her children. How would you work with that in a group?**

**A.** No matter what issue an particular individual works on, nearly everyone else in the group is working on it too.

□ One idea is to work with the woman just as you would in an individual session. The others will learn vicariously.

□ You might arrange a dramatization of the abuse. Invite group members to take over the roles of the husband and children. As the work progresses, invite the woman to step outside the system and ask a group member to take over the abusive-wife role. Direct the group to work it through to different conclusions.

□ Set up a dialog between the woman and her abusive part. After awhile, invite other group members, one at a time, to take over this polarity work. Notice the similarities in each person's work. Focus on how they can all learn from each other.

□ Invite the woman to go around the room and summarize the problem to each member in turn. As she clarifies and explains, the solution may become clear to her. Alternatively, an underlying issue may present itself.

□ Suggest that the issue *everyone* work on this session be verbal abuse. As a group, they may not go along with your suggestion, but abuse of some kind will undoubtedly surface as a topic.

□ Invite everyone to tell a fairy tale about someone who was verbally abusive to someone or something they loved. Suggest each teller get creative in their endings to these stories.

□ Group poetry, group art, group dance, group movement, group sharing of real life stories, group exploration of solutions, group role playing, and group practicing are additional ideas.

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### **Q. The mother was trying to get the father's attention, the father was trying to get the kids' attention, and the kids were yelling at each other.**

**A.** Families are a wonderful test of how well you are staying out of other people's system. First, separate yourself from the family struggle. Then go with the flow.

## Chairwork

by Amanda Morgan

I used chairs and it worked! I used chairs and it worked! I am hopping and clapping as I report that I used chairs and it worked. NR complained of 3 F's on his report card as he approaches the end of his freshman year. His mom had died at the beginning of the school year, and he'd made her a promise to finish high school. He felt guilty he is not doing so.

After a quick "dialogue" with mom in an empty chair went nowhere, I decided to explore what was blocking NR from picking up some extra work to bring his grades up before June.

He listed three reasons. With each one, I put a chair in front of him, and with each one, he laughed and stared right at the new chair. I put colorful Uno cards on the table across the room.

These are your passing grades for freshman year," I said. He looked at the chairs between him and his grades with an expression that seemed to say, "This is easy!"

"What are you thinking?" I asked.

Without looking at me, he said, "This is lame, huh?"

"Well, what are you going to do?" I asked.

He got up quickly and slid the first chair aside.

Just as in class, I said, "What just happened?"

He said, "I threw my laziness over there."

"How was that for you?"

"Easy. And my friends can wait over here," and away went the next chair. He pushed aside the 3rd chair and sat back down. The cards were still on the table across the room.

Again, I asked, "what just happened?"

"I got that stuff out of my way," he said.

"How did you do it?" I asked.

"I just did."

"Oh, pretty easy, huh?"

"Yep."

"I see that your grades are still over there. What do you need to get them?"

"Support."

"From who?"

"My brother."

I pushed a chair behind him. "Here's your brother. What might he say to you?"

"You can do it, N."

"What else do you need to get those

grades?"

"My aunt. My sister. My nieces and nephews."

I pushed all the chairs in the room behind him and asked him to take a peek back at all the people who love him and support him. "Now, can you go get those grades?"

NR stood up and walked quickly to the "grades," picked them up and sat back down, smiling. "My mom used to play Uno with me all the time," and he told a story of a time when he'd won and teased her lovingly.

"I think we forgot one chair," I said. I pulled one chair up next to him and said, "here's your mom. She supports you, too."

Getting close to tears, NR snapped himself out of it. "Hey! Will you make me a contract that says I'll bring my grades up and sign it?"

"How about if you make the contract and sign it, and then I'll sign as your witness?"

In blue crayon he wrote, "I, NR will do extra credit to graduate from freshman year." N—R—

And I signed: Amanda Morgan, Witness

### What do you mean "go with the flow?"

In this instance, "go with the flow" might mean—direct them to do what they are doing. Then direct them to do it *more*. In the extreme, this is a paradoxical solution—they get to do what they are doing; you get to be in charge. Once they are out of control at your direction and leadership, when you tell them to stop, they will. Usually.

□ Invite yourself to get separate from this family's system by getting some emotional, and perhaps some physical, distance. Get out of your chair and step back to watch. For more distance, open the door, and step outside the room. If you have to, observe and comment from the hall.

#### Literally?

Sure.

□ If you are feeling creative and unafraid, in the middle of the chaos, you might hide behind a chair and announce that you are staying there until it is safe to come out. This a powerful enactment of how at least one, if not all, of the family members probably feels. It also models permission to protect oneself.

□ Join their process of getting other people's attention. Be more chaotic than they are. Get out the whistle in the back of that drawer over there. Jump up and down while you blow it.

□ Join the process of *trying* to get other people's attention. Should you ever get their attention, decline it. Let them know you are just joining in the *trying-to-get* attention since it is apparently against the rules in their family to actually *get* attention.

Once you get control (of the session, not of the family), direct the chaos. Keeping yourself separate from the family system, experiment with the chaos. Intervene in ways that accelerate, decelerate, or prescribe the chaos. Give concise directions to each member of the family. Introduce one change at a time.

□ Direct the kids to distract by yelling at each other on purpose.

□ Invite mom to try to get her husband's attention and tell dad to ignore mom and to try to get control of the kids.

□ Encourage each person to "Do it more," until one or more of them indicates they've had enough.

"Everybody do the same thing. Now everyone do the exact opposite of what everyone else is doing."

Once they are done with the immediate acting-out (they are all scared, you know), you can get on with encouraging the parents to use positive energy to influence the children's behavior, to take care of themselves, and to be available to listen to their spouse.

### **What do you mean, by, "they are all scared?"**

Well, let's make some guesses: scared of showing up, scared of being seen, scared of being judged, scared of not ever getting their needs met in this lifetime,...on and on. Scared clients or not, your job is to illuminate their current process and offer an alternative structure in the session.

□ As the kids yell at each other on purpose and the mother tries to get her husband's attention, direct the father to follow your instructions. Invite him to connect with his wife by eye contact or touch and to say some version of, "I care what you have to say and I'll talk with you as soon as the noise level reduces to where I can hear." Assist dad to touch each of the kids in turn, and wait until he gets eye contact and their attention. Teach him to ask them what they need, respond directly to that need, and then tell them what he wants.

Practice the same structures several times with variations in detail.

□ Tell the mother to think of other things she wants to tell her husband.

□ The family can plan out in advance what the dad is going to tell the kids to do.

□ If the kids are the argumentative type, they can plan out which arguments they are going to use and what, exactly, dad has to say so they will feel willing to cooperate.

□ Direct them to exchange roles.

□ Once the session is under control, the chaos may go underground and not be so explicit. Pay attention.

□ Attend to what happens when this family finally understands that it is okay with you whether they listen to you or not.

□ Direct them to articulate what it is they have to do in order not to be so lost in a chaotic situation. They may have to re-enact the chaos several times while they collect the information.

□ Invite them each to stay in their body, not take it personally when another person does not respond right away, let go of impatience, and remember that their long term goal is a good relationship.

*"Let's act that out in session and see where (whatever family dynamic one of them suggested) might lead.*

□ Tell them a parallel story.

You: This reminds me of a children's story I read once. There was this place where there weren't any grown-ups. No one ever got past the age of six developmentally. Kids just got taller and taller but no one ever grew up. Everything was, I Want It Right Now and Gimme Mine. Nobody ever called for order and quiet and there was no place to go when all you really wanted was a hug and everybody was upset and mad all the time because nobody was getting his needs met.

Family: What happened then?

You: Well, my stomach got in a real hard knot (Not) every time I started to read that story, so I finally gave up and just put the magazine, or whatever it was I was reading, back where I got it. Y'know I always wondered about the ending. I never did find out. I'm up for suggestions. Anybody here have guesses? Ideas?

### **Did you just make that up?**

Yeah.

### **I wish I could do that.**

You can. All you have to do is not-care whether you do it "right."

**(sighs) Well, what you said before, "continue until they say they've had enough," that sounds like you are sure that change will happen.**

Well, change *will* happen. Think of the universe as more of a verb than a noun. For me, the saying which applies is, "The only thing that doesn't change is that everything changes." As part of the universe, humans change all the time. However, they may not change for the better. And it is highly probable the change which occurs will not be the change you were expecting. The only guarantee is that *something* will be different. If nothing else, someone will get hungry or bored or have to go to the bathroom. Be prepared to work with their change, whatever it is.

### **What if the only time they stop is when someone has to go to the bathroom?**

That's just another process. Think of it as a gift from your clients to you—in this case, a metaphor for how they relate to one another.

□ Use it as part of the work.

*"I notice that everyone is willing to interrupt the pattern if someone has a genuine physical need. I'm guessing that in this family, emotional needs are perceived as not particularly important. Is that true?"*

*"Everybody stop, I have to go the bathroom too. (They don't pay attention.) Hey, how come you all stopped when He had to go but not when I have to?"*

*"Okay, while he is gone, let's see what changes."*

*"Oh good, now you're back, let's do it even More."*

### **What if their response is, "I'm tired of this. This is stupid."**

Take a deep breath and give thanks to the god of your choice. Then work with what they said.

*"Okay. So what's something you guys Can do right now that Isn't stupid?"*

### **No. They don't want to do something different. They want me to do something different.**

*"My sense is you want Me to do something different. Is that what goes on at home—everyone wanting the other-guy to change?"*

*"So, tell me what I should do differently."*

*"Okay. Do this instead."* (Then tell them to do something that may, in fact, be more functional.)

### **What if they won't do what you suggest?**

First of all, your task is to not-expect them to take your suggestion. One idea is to remember their response for later. Then practice good parenting. The next time they want you to tell them what to do, say some version of,

*"Well, would you be willing to go along with me and actually Do what I tell you to do this time?"*

□ If the answer is anything but an unequivocal "yes," then tell them, no you're not willing to tell them what to do. Then put the attention back on them:

*What's your response to that?*

*How do you respond when the kids/parents don't do what you tell them?*

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## *The Language of Taking-Responsibility*

It makes sense to most people that when it comes to negativity, the language of ownership is easier to hear, and more likely to get the listener's cooperation. And since negative judgments are fairly easy to catch yourself making, it's fairly comfortable to change, "That's no good," to "I don't like that," or "I'm having a problem with that."

Positive judgments, on the other hand, are often delivered unconsciously. Notice how often you and others say positive judgments like, "How nice," "Good job," "You are so right on," "That's so pretty," "You look great tonight!" These types of phrases are nearly always delivered with positive intent. And yet, they are still judgments.

I define judgments as statements carrying the underlying message, "I know what (good, bad, pretty, great, wrong. . . whatever) is and isn't, and I'm going to tell you where I think you are on that scale rather than owning or naming my own reactions, emotions, feelings, and preferences."

My focus here isn't so much about making judgments but about—

- a) owning that you are, in fact, judging, and then
- b) beginning to use language that takes responsibility for your opinions, responses and behaviors.

I invite you to

- a) to catch yourself using or about-to-use judgment words and
- b) to add or substitute a statement that describes and takes responsibility.

So, I issue a challenge to you. For the next few days notice how often you use externalized judgment phrases instead of owning them. Pay attention as you indulge this national habit not only with patients and clients but also with each other around the office and in your personal life.

When it comes to telling the truth about emotions, responses, or intent, the language of ownership is often awkward. If you can't bring yourself to say the following phrases, I invite you to practice thinking them.

- |                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| So,                                  | ...Try something like:  |
| Instead of saying...                 | ...I like it.   |
| Good job.                            | ...I like what you're wearing.  |
| You look great.                      | ...I have the same response.  |
| You are so right on.                 | ...I appreciate that. Thank you.  |
| How nice.                            | ...I feel good when I hear that.  |
| That's wonderful.                    | ...I have a problem with that.  |
| That's not right.                    | ...I'm really glad to see you.  |
| You look great.                      | ...I'm appreciating your skill.   |
| You do that well.                    | ...I don't like that.   |
| Yuck.                                | ...I'm starting to feel annoyed.  |
| That's enough!                       |   |
| You make me mad.                     |   |
|                                      | ...I'm angering myself right now.   |
| She is so....(negative adjective)    |   |
|                                      | ...I'm being judgmental.  |
| You made me love you.                |   |
|                                      | ...I let your actions decide how I feel.  |
| But you said (or did, or implied)... |   |
|                                      | ...I'm taking things personally again.  |
| If it weren't for you. . .           |   |
|                                      | ...I prefer to blame you for my behavior.   |
| That makes me happy.                 |   |
|                                      | ...I'm using that to make myself feel good.   |
| You...(some sarcastic quip)          |   |
|                                      | ...I'm really ticked right now and a part of me wants to blame you and make you feel bad. |
| You hurt my feelings.                |   |
|                                      | ...I stab myself in the heart with your words.  |
| Do That Right Now!                   |   |
|                                      | ...I'm only two years old & I'm afraid I won't get what I want.                           |
| Isn't it awful that...               |   |
|                                      | ...I love having someone to share negativity with.  |
| That's so beautiful.                 |   |
|                                      | ...I experience pleasure when I see that.   |

CNH

**Q. I wouldn't ask a first time client to hit a pillow or throw something at the wall on the first session. This guy might scare himself and leave therapy.**

**A.** Then trust yourself and don't do it. At the same time, be aware that it may be *you* who would feel scared if someone suggested you hit a pillow or throw something against the wall the first time you met.

Clients will usually let you know what it is they need to do. Some first-timers will tell you directly that anger is the emotion which is up front for them. Others will pound the chair or poke at their leg as they talk. Still others will tell stories that are directly or indirectly about physical expression of anger. Pay attention to the ever-changing processes. The moment you

invite someone to do something, whether or not it has to do with anger, the thing you have invited him to do is now a 'what'. Turn your attention to the 'how'. Work with *how* he responds.

If you approach the psychotherapy session from a neutral position, should "hitting a pillow" cross your mind, trust that hitting-a-pillow has something to do with the work this person needs to do. Invite pillow-hitting as casually as you would wonder what he is angry about. Let go of the outcome and work with his response to your invitation.

- Invite him to do any old thing, like—  
"Hit this pillow."

Or, "Throw this ball against the wall."

**This guy would probably say, "Uh..."**

- Okay. Immediately, let go of pillow-

hitting. Stay with and work with his response, which was, "Uh..."

**So what would you do with this hesitancy?**

Each therapist interprets process through her own personal psychotherapeutic theory and works within that interpretation. If you suspect that "uh" means he is hesitant, the scene might develop like this.

- Issue an invitation; attend to the response.

You: Hit this pillow.

Him: Uh...?

You: (Letting go of agenda about hitting pillows and taking a guess about his response) You seem hesitant.

Him: Well, yeah, uh...

You: (Staying with his "Well, yeah") So tell me, "No, Clara, I don't *want* to hit the pillow."

Him: (Touches pillow gingerly) Well, but you're the therapist and...(shakes his head)  
 You: (Staying with one of his new processes) So say out loud, "I should do what *You* want me to do instead of what *I* want me to do."  
 Him: Uh...?  
 You: What's going on now?  
 Him: Uh...?  
 You: (Making a guess) Get back in your body. Breathe. What do you notice about yourself right now?

People begin to trust you when you do not need them to be any different than they are. You can *invite* a client to do anything, no matter how

**You can invite a client to do anything, no matter how bizarre, if you remember that your goal is to work with his response to your invitation.**

bizarre if you remember that your goal is to work with his response to your invitation. If you think that what you have asked him to do is important, or that he should actually do it, then you have an investment in the outcome and, in that moment, you are countertransferred. Instead, pay attention to how he responds to your invitation and create a way to work with that.

**Q. How might I use a sand tray with a large family?**

**A.** A family sand tray is another version of a family sculpt. Use it the same way you would use a family drawing

- The simplest way might be to tell them to work together (with or without speaking—your choice) and to make a scene in the sand.
- Or direct each member to pick out several objects to represent himself and to place them in the sand tray.
- When they are done, you can either do nothing or invite them to introspect.

Work both with the content *and* with the process.

- You can work with just "the stuff" i.e. the objects in the sand: Direct each person to introduce their objects all around and say what part of themselves each object represents. Encourage dialogues between the different objects. Is each object where they want it in relation to the others? If not, how do they want it, and what does each of them have to do to get what they want?
- You can work with the scene that the individual objects make in the sand tray. How does the picture reflect the family's

interrelationships? Is that how they want their family to be? If not, how *do* they want it to be. Invite an exploration of what each person has to do so it becomes the way they want?

- You can work with the process. Who put their pieces in first? Last? Who hogged the space right in the middle? How did each determine his territory? How did or didn't they take each other into consideration? Notice out loud how they played control-concede? Is that how they are in the real world? What was different here? What about boundaries?

When one person touched or moved another person's object without asking permission, what were the external responses, the internal and

unspoken responses? Wonder out loud how they cooperate with or impose on one another's territory at home and how they handle that. Are they happy with how they worked together to accomplish a common goal such as this one?

- If they are not happy with their behavior, wonder what they would want to do differently next time. Be specific here. The most common response is that the Other-guy should have done something different. The most *useful* response is an I-statement from each such as, "One thing I (might, would, want to, will try to) do differently next time is. . ."

- If even one person can take responsibility for changing his behavior, a change in the system is possible. Invite the group to do another sandtray, this time paying attention to how or what they are doing as opposed to what they are making.

**How would that work with a couple?**

Exactly the same.

**Could you use the sand tray with any particular problem?**

Sure. And you do not need sand, a tray, or fancy objects, either.

- Mark out an area of the floor or other flat area. Then pull out a desk drawer with all those little office supplies in it and say, "Here's some stuff. Find a way to use it to make a picture that shows the problem."
- Ask them to show what the problem looks, right now.
- Then ask them to show what the problem would look like, solved.
- Then invite them to articulate how the picture changed from problem to solution.

What exactly had to change and in what order? Ask them to explain it to you in great detail. With luck, they might listen to themselves.

- Wonder how they might translate what happened in and around their sandtray to their outside of session life.

**Q. Since the child ego state is the source of our intuition and creativity, what's wrong with having your child ego state in session?**

**A.** Well, there's the Creative, Free-Child ego state and then there is the Needy, Whining, Want-it-right-now-Game-Playing-Child ego state. One can be useful during someone else's therapy and the other, uh...not so much.

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