

SING FOCUSING AND SYSTEMS! *we-ing*: Focusing-oriented Family Bonding Therapy

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Your physically felt body is...part of a gigantic system of here and other places, now and other times, you and other people — in fact, the whole universe. This sense of being bodily alive in a vast system is [your] body as is felt from inside.

— Eugene Gendlin, *Focusing*, 1978 (p. 76), 1981, rev. ed. (p. 77)

So we and Focusing are systems! In Focusing, we experience what Gene, here *sings*: *felt-sensing* systems — that’s who we *are* and how we’re *becoming*.

This paper gives a brief introduction to *we-ing*. *we-ing* is a Focusing-oriented family/systems therapy model that expands Focusing. By Focusing, I mean *felt-sensing* to welcome and encourage the healing (developing, evolving, integrating, building, creating, ...) *processings* that occur naturally *within/among* us all. The first sections, through “What is Bonding?”, can help with individual Focusing. After that, the paper concentrates on family/systems therapy.

Standard Focusing, even *we*-Focusings such as Focusing partners and Interpersonal Focusing, understandably and beautifully concentrate more on *felt-sensing* individually *within*. Standard *we*-Focusings use various turns-takings: you help me Focus or you Listen to me, then I help you Focus or I Listen to you. *we-ing* concentrates on *felt-sensing among*. *among* means the physical “interacting first” (or “bonding first”), with the couple/family as one whole. Individual turns-taking often emerges in *we-ing*. But even there, concentration is not first on *me*, i.e., building up enough “ego strength” to be able to handle a *we*. *we-ing* concentrates first on the family-whole and *among* processing, even in “individual” sessions. And family-wholes are never merely wholes. Families are always bonding-wholes — good bonding or bad. So *we-ing* and family therapy are always bonding.

We start with a working definition of Focusing systems and move to a deeper and more precise Focusing understanding and experience of *we-ing*’s “bonding womb”. This leads us to an expansion of traditional Focusing that allows therapists to better interact, in *among* Focusing ways, *with/within* the family as a bonding-whole. From there, we take up a case example, showing a bonding *stopped-processing*. *stopped-processing* — Gene’s concept from *A Process Model* — is crucial to truthfully *understanding*, realistically *felt-sensing* and effectively *responding* to hurting families. We continue with the case example, giving peeks and tastes of some *we-ing*, Focusing *understandings* and interventions.

In this paper, the words in italics, e.g., *sings*, points to a more-than-logical meaning. Singing the notes isn’t *singing the music*. *italics* highlights a deeper, more felt-sense-y *processing*.

What Are Focusing Systems? My working definition includes Gene's idea of many places, many times, many people and *more* — all felt *inside* as a whole. *we-ing* is also living systems, the *inside/outside* “interacting first” that starts *A Process Model* with a bang: “Body and environment are one!” *we-ing* is family systems — the family as a living whole. And all *we-ing*, all families live and embody bondings. Families *are* their on-going bondings, their special, deeply felt, inter-relating *valuing* and *meaning*, especially their *valuing* and *meaning* of each member and of the family as a whole.

***we-ing*: The Bonding Womb.** “As human beings, of course, we begin with human experience” (Gendlin 1997, p. 106). And the “experience” where we humans begin, and in which we primarily live is *with*-others, hopefully *with*-loving-others — our “family”, our bonded *we-ing*.

In this paper, I use intense examples, often personal. A Focusing family therapist *joins* the family's *we-ing*, meaning the therapist *joins* the family's bonding. Without allowing yourself to empathically bond with the family, not only will you fundamentally *mis-felt-sense* and *mis-understand* the family, you'll also not generate the trust needed for change. And by “not-bonding”, by staying “out-of-it” and “observing”, you might reinforce trauma bondings. At the least, you'll almost certainly reinforce their defensiveness. Families must sense that you're *with*-them, that you care with an *inside understanding* and *caring*.

So one requirement of *we-ing* therapy is to become exquisitely familiar with your own bondings — explicitly, behaviorally, and by *felt-sensing*. Without that, you'll also risk *mis-felt-sensing* and *mis-understanding* the family's bonding. And your intervening *within* their/your *we-ing* may be more about healing your own bonding history and bonding present than about healing the family's bonding.

Therefore, especially when I give personal examples, please take a moment to identify your own similar experiences. Allow your *felt-sensing* of “all that” to develop; test/discover my terms *within* your own experiencing. Then you'll not only have more than just my experience of these terms to *understand*, *felt-sense* and *respond* out of, you'll also have a good start on *understanding* and *felt-sensing* your own bonding history. In the case example, allow yourself to *felt-sense join* what this family has experienced/is experiencing. And be on the *felt-sense* “look-out” for your own bonding history coloring it. That, of course, happens — what Gene calls *crossing* (See, for example, Gendlin 1995). *crossing* is basic to how we live, including such vital and healing processes as empathy. And still, you must also be continually aware of your bonding's coloring. So with all examples, please take the time to do your own deep *felt-sensing* — it's crucial.

To better understand *we-ing*, let's take two closely related aspects of *A Process Model* concepts: “interacting first” and “-ing”. Briefly, “interacting first” means “first” isn't objects — me here, you over there — we perceive each other, and then we interact. Rather, first is our interacting, or as I put it, our *we-ing*. “-ing” means objects aren't fundamental; objects aren't what is interacting. Mainly, there is on-going *processing*. So with “interacting first” and “-ing” together, first isn't you and me, first is our *we-ing*. And our *we-ing* births our *me-ings*. In a way, for humans, interacting is not first, because we have no mere interactings. For humans, first is bonding.

For example, 18 months ago, my wife, Jane, slipped on ice and fell some 15 feet off our cabin's deck. She sustained a serious Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). In two terrifying days, her brain-bleeding increased, and Jane descended into almost total non-responsiveness, staying there another two days. The brutal reality is that as Jane left, much of our *we-ing* left, and with that, much of my *me-ing* left, too, leaving me feeling hollowed out, gutted. Anyone who has experienced something at all similar knows this. They will have deeply embodied this truth, a felt memory that is lifelong.

On the fourth day, I was in Intensive Care, talking with Jane and holding her hand. She gave my hand her signature double-squeeze. With that, our *we-ing* flooded back, and out of that, more of my *me-ing* flooded back, too.

This blares out the differences between *we-ing* and a casual *togethering*, like standing in line at the supermarket. Generally, little *me-ing's* emerge out of my supermarket *togethering*. What are these vast, oceanic differences? Bonding.

What is Bonding? Through this example, especially if you're *felt-sensing* your own related experiences, you live several of bonding's key aspects.

Bonding is deeply felt and deeply meaningful. Since *we-ing* is always bonding, *we-ing* is always deeply felt and deeply meaningful. Another aspect: lots of *me-ing* flows out of (or is blocked by) a bonded *we-ing*, as opposed to a lesser *togethering*. In Jane's and my *we-ing*, *with-Jane* non-responsive, lots of my *me-ing* was gone. I was also pouring much *we-ing* into Jane, and I firmly believe our deeply-felt *we-ing* was *calling* Jane back. And from *within* the *calling* of our *we-ing*, Jane took her needed *me-ing*. Also from *within* our *we-ing's* *calling*, Jane sensed my need, my *me-ing-toward-her*.

To continue this story, when my stepson, my stepdaughter, and I left late Saturday night, on the second day after her fall, the most recent brain scan showed Jane's hematoma (brain-bleeding) still increasing. That's when she descended into near non-responsiveness. Clearly, the doctors were preparing us for her death. Indeed, when I arrived alone, early the next morning, the trauma surgeon met with me about terminating Jane's life support. I deferred, saying it was too early, and anyway I needed to talk with my stepchildren — this would be *our* decision, to be made only if and when we were all ready.

Afterwards, I sat with Jane, just us, our *we-ing*, and I spoke to her out of *felt-sensing* my pain, my deepest need. Among many things, I told her what she meant to me, and how I wasn't ready for her to die. Jane didn't stir. Regardless, inside and out, I *felt-sensed* Jane there — maybe I had to. And at least I *felt-sensed* our *we-ing* there, as I said to Jane, "My life is always our life." I spoke to her, censoring nothing — no thoughts, no voice tone, no tears. I *called-from* the truth and reality of my *embodied-remembering* of our *we-ing*, *crossed-with* the truth and reality of our present *we-ing* — very much from Gene's "here and other places, now and other times", as well as from our *we-ing* of "you and other people".

The rest of the day I spent around Jane, often talking, always touching, and from a *we-ing* that *felt-sensed* what I'd said, what we'd lived, what I wanted to keep living.

Several weeks later, after Jane had begun her long and still continuing return, a dear, dear friend — another social worker therapist — told me of his own experience that morn-

ing. Arun was raised in India, and he practices many of their spiritual traditions, developing sensitivities and skills far beyond me. As he was meditating that Sunday morning, holding all that was happening to us, he suddenly felt Jane, and he felt, as he put it, the moment of her decision not to die, but to come back and live.

In many ways, bonded *we-ing* births *me-ing*.

Does this mean that my *me-ing* is only *we-ing*, that my *me-ing* is reduced to a product or even a by-product of *we-ing*? Have we sneaked back into a determinism, where I am only the patterning of my culture, my behavioral conditioning, my early experiences, or here, my bonded *we-ing*?

Obviously, this would not be Focusing-oriented or any kind of client-centered process. But how can an idea, even one we deeply *felt-sense*, like “bonded *we-ing* births *me-ing*”, not mean this?

Bonded *we-ing* no more controls *me-ing* than a mother giving birth to a child, out of their biological (and *more*) *we-ing* pregnancy, controls the child. Reductionist determinism of any kind always fundamentally misunderstands *we-ing*, *me-ing* and bonding, just as it always fundamentally misunderstands Focusing and all living systems.¹

To take us further *into* bonding, let me tell you some of my early bonding stories.

I’m the oldest child of a mother who was adopted and who had grown up as an only child. Embodying *we-ing*, or even simple touch was hard for her. Also hard for her, initially, were boys and babies. A year after my birth, my first sister arrived. I suspect, knowing my dad and knowing my mom’s parents, my maternal grandparents weren’t much able to help mom.

My earliest memory, which I discovered in deep Focusing, is as an infant. I am being held by mom, but I can’t *feel-her-holding-me* in her hands, I can’t *see-her-seeing-me*. In other words, I can’t see/feel our *we-ing*. I am terrified; I feel as if I could be dropped at any moment, and I am helpless to stop it. All because our *we-ing* is constricted and largely blocked, or as Gene says, our *we-ing* was *stopped-processing*. I remember my mother telling me a story of how, when she was pregnant with me, she hated it, because she felt so out-of-control. She also said our pregnancy seemed extremely uncomfortable to her parents. They tried to ignore our pregnancy. This and *more* feels deeply true in my *felt-sensing* and other *embodyings*. It is given even more power by my having treated children who suffered bonding traumas in utero. As a fetus and an infant, what *me-ing* was birthing our *we-ing*? What bonding was I living out-of?

Luckily, blessedly, my next-door neighbor was my paternal grandmother. She had raised three sons, and had grown up loving and close to her two brothers. In the way of those times, she helped raise them, too. Early on, I migrated to grandma as my primary bonded *we-ing*. My dad told me a story about when I was in diapers, early on cold winter mornings, he and my mom, still in bed, would hear the door slam, and they would know I was on my way over to grandma’s.

My deepest *felt-sensed* bonding is my *we-ing with-grandma*. Three memories emerge: First, her *seeing* me, *holding* me with her smiling love and her twinkling eyes — our *we-ing*

out of which still flows much of my *me-ing* and which I can always *touch*. Second is *woo-ing* — she is looking at me, holding my hands and *we're* twirling, swinging around in a circle, while she cries, “*Wooooooooo!*” My feet free of the earth, my self safely grounded in her loving hands and smiling eyes, *we're* flowing and laughing. Third is loving food — many smells and short movies. The smell-sight-feel of oatmeal cookies cooling on the rack on her old cherry dining room table. (I use that table for my work desk.) Bubbling stew on an old high-legged stove, under which the mama cat always had kittens. Her making me “he-man” sandwiches, filled with bright chipped beef, yellow cheddar cheese, white-white mayonnaise and bread, dark green leaf lettuce fresh from her garden, with a tang of vinegar and salt. I remember so much of our *we-ing* around food — our smiling, loving, inter-giving delight. Later, my parents talked of grandma raising a family during the Great Depression, grandpa being without steady work for years. She couldn't feed her family as she wanted. They smoked carp from the river, borrowed field corn to grind in the coffee-grinder for bread, ate greasy dog-caught woodchuck for Sunday dinner. My father remembered, as a child, that there was never enough of anything that tasted good. And he remembered grandma knowing there was never enough — their *we-ing* in poverty.

What do we learn of bonding here? Bonding isn't just luck-of-the-draw. At an early Focusing International Conference, Gene said, “Thinking a child comes as a blank slate isn't just a little bit wrong. It's all wrong. The child comes knowing there should be milk and warmth and loving and *more*.”

My first-bonding with mom — we knew this wasn't right. When I found a much more right bonding with grandma, I went there, with mom letting me. And mom learned from our *we-ing*, and she grew into much better *we-ing* with my sisters and my brother, by my memory and by family stories. Also by my memory, our *we-ing* — mom's-and-mine — greatly improved, though it remained much different than her *we-ing* with my sisters and younger brother. Our *we-ing* was more sibling-like; to me she was as a much older, cautious, and loving sister, while I was the feisty and experimenting much younger brother, especially as I grew into teen years and adulthood.

What does this mean? Healthy bonding is *in-born*. No matter how bad the first or early experiences, *something* inside knows how it should be different and better. This *in-born* “something” I call *homing*. *we-ing* is our deepest *homing*, from which *me-ing* comes, and to which *me-ing* returns, again and again, throughout our lives. Gene says, of what I call *within-Focusing*, that every felt sense, if listened to, has energy toward a more right way of being. That's *homing*. So, too, with all *among-Focusings*, all *we-ings*: every *we-ing*, if listened to, has energy toward a more right way of being. That, too, is *homing*.

Bonded *we-ing* greatly, enduringly shapes and guides future *we-ings*, *me-ings* and *more...* For example, while Jane was in Intensive Care, and later, for her two months in the hospital, much of our *we-ing* came out of and was sustained by not only *felt-sensed* memories of our *we-ing*, but also by grandma-me *we-ing* and *more*.

That's another vital aspect of bonding — *more*, or as I like to write it, *....* A *....* has been called “the Gendlin ellipses”. I recall Gene once shouting, “No, no, no! Not the Gendlin ellipses! It's always *your* ellipses!” *....* by itself or following a word, e.g., *more....*, is

Gene's "the murky zone" and my "more-than unclarity" (Young 1993). is our physically felt "there", *embodying-opening* and *more* than anything we can say, think or do, *embodying-opening* our life's possibilities and potentials. is our felt sense's *implying*....

So healthy bonding is always *embodying-opening*. Currently, most attachment thinking reduces *we-ing* to defensiveness — seeking-safety/protecting to ensure that genes survive. Yes, bonding creates safety, and sometimes that safety is important. When I feel unsafe, I automatically seek out my most vital *we-ing*. I can feel enormously protective of those with whom I bond. But safety/protectiveness alone will never fully explain my delight in seeing my grandson, Kyle, or the pure joy and rightness of holding him and rocking him to sleep. Those who reduce my delight, joy, and rightness to passing on genes (we're not biologically related) live within cramped and hobbled understandings, alienated, blind to the fuller truths and realities of loving and bonding.

Healthy bonding, like Focusing, is *embodying-opening*. Seeking-safety/protecting may be a temporary stop, en-couraging, en-heartening a return to greater, deeper, farther, *more*.... *embodying-opening*. To cite a classic example, I recall my granddaughter, Kira, after she learned to crawl. Me puttering in the kitchen, my attention elsewhere, Kira would crawl off, exploring. A few moments later, I'd hear slap-thumping, and around the corner she'd come, looking up at me, wide-eyed. I'd smile — How could you not? — gently saying, "Hi." I felt our eyes bonding, and I could sense our *we-ing* birthing more Kira *me-ing*. Refueled, re-enheartened, re-*me-ing* and re-*we-ing*, off she went, *embodying-opening into* more exploring.

So healthy bonding always has a quality similar to felt-shifting — *embodying-opening*. *Embodying* my *we-ing* opens so much more *me-ing*. Anyone in a healthy, loving relationship knows this. This quality, and its absence in unhealthy bonding is not only felt, but easily seen and heard — or — to set aside the primacy of perception in favor of the primacy of interacting first: *-ing*, and *embodying*: Healthy and unhealthy bondings are often immediately *felt-sensed* in any *we-ing*, even in a "read-about" *we-ing*. Hopefully, in my stories of Jane, my mom and grandma, you can *felt-sense* this.

Like *we-ing*, *me-ing* always has a healthy, balancing *in-born homing*. And *we-ings*, while never reducible to separate *me-ings*, always already have, as aspects of their "bonding first", *me-ings*.

Healthy bonding, healthy *we-ing* never "other-dominates" or "other-controls" or even *we-ing-controls* my *me-ing*, because I'm always powerfully in my *we-ing*. Healthy *we-ing* is never just or mostly a kind of "other", though there are others (or other *me-ing* aspects) in *we-ing*, too. I am already in my *we-ings* — my *me-ing* is always *in-there*. Gene, and his great teacher, Richard McKeon, called this "reflexivity". Reflexive is from Latin, meaning to bend back on itself, and a reflexive verb is a verb whose action comes from and also affects the subject — for example, "I'm relaxing". In *we-ing*, this reflexivity means, in my terms, that my *me-ing* is always an aspect of my *we-ing* that also births my *me-ing*. That's why I call it "my" *we-ing*, because this highlights my on-going participation within this *we-ing*.

we-ing affects all within that *we-ing*. For example, in our food-nurturing aspects of our grandma-me *we-ing*, that *we-ing* healed both our *me-ings* — mine from mom-me *we-ing*,

grandma's from her earlier *we-ings* with her other children during the Depression. Me, she could feed. And in feeding me, in that aspect of our *we-ing*, she healed some *we-ing* pain left from her earlier poverty.

Bonded *we-ing* Summary. What have we experienced about bonding? While I list learnings one at a time, giving them separate numbers, they're not ten separate "things" in "bonding", like ten rocks in a box. These are "always-there" aspects of healthy bonding, where each always *implies* and in some ways *is* all the others. These aspects are reflexively interacting — the inter-affecting of one *whole-processing*.

1. Bonding is deeply felt, deeply meaningful *we-ing*.
2. Bonded *we-ing* continually births my *me-ing*.
3. Lots of *me-ing* flows out of a bonded *we-ing*, as opposed to a lesser *togethering*.
4. Healthy bonding is *in-born*, and in some ways, that *in-born* cannot be lost.
5. Every *we-ing*, if listened to, has energy toward a more right way of being — that's *homing*, which produces felt-rightness and direction.
6. Bonded *we-ing* greatly, enduringly shapes and guides future *we-ings* and *me-ings*.
7. Healthy bonding is always *embodying-opening*, even as it is seeking-safety/protecting.
8. Healthy bonding, healthy *we-ing* never "other-dominates" or "other-controls" my *me-ing* because I am always *in-there*, my *me-ing* is always already affecting my *we-ing*.
9. All *me-ings* are inter-affecting and inter-affected by their *we-ings*. In trusting, healthy bonding, one *me-ing* doesn't chronically seek to other-dominate, other-control, or wall-off.
10. Bonded *we-ing* always has *more* than we can say; healthy bonding always has a lot of creative, responsive, *opening*

All right, so how does Focusing fit into all this bonded *we-ing*, healthy and unhealthy?

Can We Focus *with-Family*? How can we get from our usual Focusing into Focusing family bonding therapy? How can we Focus *with-family*? What could "the body" and "the felt-sense" be? In a family of four, don't we have four different bodies with four or more different felt senses?

How odd, even impossible "family body" and "family felt sense" feel when we *understand*, *felt-sense* and interact within a world built-up from separate objects, where a family is the adding-up of its individual members. Gene calls this units/parts thinking.

Let me rephrase these questions in the *understanding* of systemic *processing* and *wholes*: What is the family *embodying*? How is the family, as a whole, stuck or in *stopped-*

processing or *process-skipping*? How is the whole family triggered into structure-bound, rigidly repeated reactions? How is and isn't the family showing Focusing Attitude or Caring-Feeling Presence? How is and isn't the family Focusing *with-family*? And how can I, the therapist, invite, welcome and further *with-family* Focusing? As a useful analogy, think of "individual" Focusing, where you are facilitating four very strong, very different, very conflicting felt senses within one person, all inter-affecting each other and the person as a whole.

Can you feel possibilities and *openings* here? Ah, but still: how can we do this kind of Focusing?

***we-ing*: Focusing's Four-Way zig-zagging of understanding, felt-sensing, in-the-worlding and homing.** *zig-zagging* is Gene's term for Focusing's back-and-forth between what you think/say/do, (or as I call it) *understanding*, and your felt sense, (or as I call it) *felt-sensing*. Gene also calls *understanding* the rational or logical order — our explicit thinking, saying, doing. Gene calls *felt-sensing* the implicit order. These two *orderings* (I prefer them as *processings*) are very different and vital ways we live, though one is never found without the other. In implicit *ordering* (*felt-sensing*), words, gestures, images, whatever are always *implied*. In rational *ordering* (*understanding*), our *felt-sensing* is always at least potentially there.

zig-zagging between *understanding* and *felt-sensing* is found in all Focusing and TAE (Thinking at the Edge) steps. The steps, themselves, are explicit, logical directions — *understandings* (rational *ordering*) — which we can *zig-zag* to when our *felt-sensing* (implicit *ordering*) is stuck. At each step, we check with our *felt-sensing*. *zig-zagging* between these two *orderings* is how Gene gives us his wonderful "Instructions about not following Instructions" (See, for example, Gendlin 1990b, "Instructions for not following instructions are the essence of Focusing..."). Yes, it is usually wise and helpful to follow the explicit, logical directions (*understandings*). And our *felt-sensing* still might let us know, "Oh, this instruction, even if it is Step 4 in Focusing or Step 3 in TAE — that doesn't feel right to my *felt-sensing*." Then we stop, wait, and let come what does feel right — another, different, "better fitting", "more right" *understanding*. As Gene says, "This process is a 'zig-zag' between what is [felt] implied on one hand, and the statements or actions [or steps] on the other" (Gendlin 2004c).

***in-the-worlding*: we-ing's third Focusing zig-zagging.** To facilitate *with-family we-ing* Focusing, we must add into our *zig-zagging* two more *orderings*. First is what I call *in-the-worlding*. As early as the "Introduction" of *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning* (Gendlin 1962), Gene presents this *ordering*, which he names the experimental order — interacting out in the world, with the world extremely active in that interacting. (See, too, for example, "The Responsive Order", Gendlin 1997, and footnote 1 of *A Process Model*, Gendlin 1997). That's when Galileo, rather than only rationally figuring that a cannon ball would/wouldn't fall faster than a small coin, tested it *in-the-worlding*, taking both up to the top of the Tower of Pisa, dropping them and seeing what happened.²

For another, human example of *in-the-worlding*, let's use a Wittgenstein quote from Gene, (*Philosophical Investigations* 286): "If someone has a pain in his hand... one does

not comfort the hand, but the sufferer: One looks into his face” (Gendlin 2004). I may *zig-zag* between my *felt-sensing* and *understanding* to determine whether or not to comfort this person and how to comfort her. But if I want to see whether my comforting is working, I don’t just check my *felt-sensing* or *understanding*. I also check *her*: I look into her face. Now, yes, in looking into her face, I’m also *felt-sensing* and *understanding*. And I’m looking into her face.

Gene doesn’t explicitly include *in-the-worlding ordering* in his Focusing steps *zig-zagging*, though it’s included by memory in TAE *zig-zagging*, where specific instances, specific situations, times when something actually happened, are used to build theory. And Gene certainly uses this in how he does psychotherapy. In a Gene TAE DVD, he talks of demanding of his clients not generalities, but actual specifics. For example,

Client: My husband never cares about me, he never notices me.

Gene: Can you tell me a specific time when he didn’t notice you?

Client: Well it happens all the time.

Gene: Yeah, and I want one specific time.

Client: It happened every day last week. It’s always the same, he never-

Gene: (interrupting) No, no, no: one time I want.

Client: (pausing) Well... yesterday, when he came home from work, he just walked in the door right past me without saying a word, and he went into the kitchen and fixed himself a drink. Then he...

We do this automatically: including *in-the-worlding* in our *zig-zagging*. Anything else would be nuts. But without explicitly adding *in-the-worlding* into our *zig-zagging*, *with-family we-ing* Focusing won’t work. *in-the-worlding*, the actual *embodying* offers our best clues to *understandings* and *felt-sensings*.

I’m often *felt-sensing-understanding* two interacting aspects of what this *we-ing* is *embodying*. First, What *me-ing* is birthing out of this *we-ing*? Second, What Focusing *embodying-opening* is present?

Stopped-processings: from demonstrating *in-the-worlding* to demonstrating the need for another ordering. For example, a 4-month old baby is crying because she’s hungry and because her diapers haven’t been changed, and she also needs holding, coo-ing, rocking, and her mother’s smiling face — their loving *we-ing*. Her mother is depressed and feeling horrible and hopeless about her ability to comfort her child, i.e., about her mothering — mother’s *me-ing* coming out of this *we-ing*. To escape these feelings, to escape her *me-ing* coming out of their vital *we-ing*, mother locks herself into a computer game behind her bedroom’s closed doors. She’s blocking sounds and feelings from her baby and from her, the mother’s *felt-sensing*. After 20 minutes, her baby stops crying. By two more months, at 6 months old, her baby hardly cries at all.

Can you sense the *stopped-processings* here? But as Gene says, in *A Process Model*, there's only one whole interacting — *ev-ving* or everything being inter-affected by and inter-affecting everything else *within* one whole processing. This includes *stopped-processings* (See Gendlin 1997, esp. IVA e). But what happens to these *stopped-processings*?

Gene says, "...the stopped process will continue to be implied." [*felt-sensing*, the implicit *ordering*], and "**The stopped process exists insofar as what does continue is different...** [and] this difference in the ongoing process **carries the stoppage.**" [*in-the-worlding*, the situational *ordering*] (Gendlin 1979/97, p. 18, emphasis: Gene's). With this last sentence, I would say that the on-going *processing* not only *carries* and *shows/sounds* the *stopping*, it also *carries* and *shows/sounds* the on-going *needing* that's stopped or, perhaps more accurately, that's not being fulfilled and in some ways still demands fulfilling...

Using our baby-mother example and concentrating on *in-the-worlding*, the baby's silence isn't "just silence". The baby's "not-crying silence" is different from "contented silence" or "sleepy silence". *in-the-worlding*, you can see these differences in the baby's *embodying*. Of course, the baby's "not-crying silence" isn't first or just "the baby's": it's birthing out of the "interacting first" of the baby's "not-crying silence"/the mother's "not-responding". And the baby's "not-crying silence" isn't just the baby's *embodying*, either. The baby's *me-ing* of "not-crying silence" is birthing out of the baby's/mother's "interacting first", their *we-ing*. And the mother is also *embodying*, out of their *we-ing*, including out of her baby's "not-crying silence". In some ways, then, you can see the baby's "not-crying silence" in how the mother plays the computer game. The baby's *needing* to cry for her mother and the mother's *needing* to respond to her baby continue in these silently screaming *stopped-processings*, which are *embodying* in both baby and mother.

Can you feel, even hunger for that quality, that truth and reality which the word "*needing*", above, highlights? The baby *is-needing* to cry for; the mother *is-needing* to respond to. Our hunger for their *needings* is so basic, so *in-born*, so "must happen to be at all right" that we could not sit there and allow this to go on indefinitely. We could accept many different *in-the-worlding* responses. **But we cannot accept anything we experience as continuing not-crying-for/not-responding-to.** We could also accept many different and complex *felt-sensings* of "all that". **But we cannot accept anything we experience as not-felt-sensing baby's needing to cry for, mother's needing to respond to.** We could accept and need to accept many compassionate and fulsome rational, situationally-based *understandings*. **But we cannot accept anything we experience as not-understanding the continuing *needing* and *moving-toward* baby's crying-for/mother's responding-to, no matter how "reasonably", how "understandably" (given their history) that mother and baby are now caught up in *stopped-processings*.**

homing: the fourth ordering of we-ing zig-zagging. Gene writes in his *Focusing* book, "*Every bad feeling is potential energy toward a more right way of being if you give it space to move toward its rightness.... Your body, with its sense of rightness, knows what would feel right.... It knows the direction*" (Gendlin 1978, p. 75; italics: Gene's). This is *homing*, which has a direction that transcends the merely situational and which has a quality of *gifting*, even *gracing* when we *open* ourselves up to it — beyond what we, ourselves, are capable of. *homing*, too, is "caring feeling presence" which Ed McMahon and Pete Campbell

teach so beautifully, by story and example, and about which Ann Weiser Cornell writes so clearly and eloquently. I call *homing* the *with-Being/toward-Being ordering*. *with-Being*, of course, is what I call *presencing*. *toward-Being* is the “direction” which is beyond just the situation.

CASE EXAMPLE

All humans live *in-and-with* bonded *we-ings*. This is especially clear with children. Who they are and how they do their *we-ing* varies greatly from culture to culture, even from family to family. But if within this *we-ing*, as there is persistent and pervasive not-*attuning*, then their *we-ing* becomes more and more cut off from *homing*. (*attuning* is reflexively, continuously and accurately adjusting *me-ings-within-we-ing*, this as experienced through the *orderings* of *felt-sensing*, *understanding*, *in-the-worlding* and *homing*, all within the *giving-receiving* of “interacting first.” With *attuning*, a healthy *homing* at least eventually emerges as *embodying-opening*. *attuning*, of course, is never perfect. But *we-ing* never becomes healthy (healing, whole, developing, evolving, stably building, ...) without *attuning* under the guidance of *homing*.

To demonstrate this, let me introduce William and his mother. Obviously, I have changed some information, but only by substituting from similar clients. All you read below is true. You may think I am giving “too much information.” Actually, I’m giving barely enough. Again, healthy *we-ing* is never observing. To *understand* the various “moves” of this *we-ing* Focusing, you must be able to *felt-sense* your way, to *join* as deeply as possible, the family’s on-going *we-ing*. And with RAD (Reactive Attachment Disorder) — William and his mother’s bonding — the past weighs heavily on the present. So knowing that past helps the therapist tentatively *felt-sense*, *understand* and explicate what’s going on, leading *we-ing* into likely or at least possible places until *attuning* and *homing* re-emerge.

William is a curly-haired, freckled bi-racial child with a button nose. Fourteen years old, his long, thin legs have outgrown his upper body, and his voice often cracks. I see him in the waiting room, and he comes into my office, like so many children I see, with a rigid body, a frozen smile and two screaming eyes. His adoptive mother, like so many mothers I see, looks haggard and tense, her eyes much more fearful than hopeful. Neither are *attuning* to me or to each other with anything like *embodying-opening*. My first goal with William and his mother will be my *joining* their *we-ing* in such a way that I can facilitate (invite, welcome, build, encourage, ...) *attuning*, given their obvious distress. Regardless of culture, their painful not-*attuning in-the-worlding* lets me know that they are detached from their *we-ing’s homing*. And thus, the *me-ings* birthing from their *we-ing* are unhealthy and in some vital ways, untrue — an untruth experienced in the *orderings* of *felt-sensing*, *understanding* and *in-the-worlding*.

I recall meeting William and his mother in the waiting room — their *embodying/we-ing screamed*. I felt my stomach scrunching, my neck and shoulders tightening — common signs of my own walling-off “in response to”. I took a few seconds for *presencing-with* my own walling-off, having a good idea of my bonding issues involved, which I *presenced* as well. As I can *be-with* my walling-off and my “all that” behind it, genuinely, so I can

then also *be-with* William and his mother. I can *join* and *attune* to their current walling-off *we-ing*. Believe me, my bonding issues don't need to be "resolved". I just need to *felt-sense* and *understand* them and their *processing*, and I need to be *presencing-with* them. That is enough to allow me to *join* and *attune* to the *now* of their *we-ing*.

William and his mother come into my office and sit down:

Dave: What brings you here today?

William: To get some help.

Dave: Help with what?

William: Lying.

Dave: How is lying a problem?

William: It's caused my mom a lot of stress.

Mother: It's caused a lot of pain between the both of us, which has not been the best thing.

Dave: How long as this been going on?

Mother: Twelve years, probably more. We've tried to get help before.

Dave: [turning to William] Has anything helped?

William: Nothing's really helped to get me to stop lying.

Mother: He's tried equine therapy, and he's worked with a lot of psychologists and psychiatrists. And he has problems with stealing and cheating, too.

Mother takes over, telling their *we-ing's* story. William and his two brothers were adopted away from a biological mother who made her living as a prostitute, William being 3 years old, and his older brothers 5 and 6 years old. In all sorts of weather, his bio-mother regularly locked the children out of her trailer while she was working, often leaving them for many hours with little or no food. When they were in the trailer, bio-mother (who was probably quite depressed) ignored them, escaping into drugs, alcohol, computer games and sleep. The trailer was reported filthy, smelling of rotting food and molding soiled diapers. Most of William's contact had been with his older brothers, locked into a fierce competition for food, warm shelter and attention. (Affection was rarely present.) While there were no specifics, sexualized behaviors strongly suggested that the children were at least exposed to bio-mother's johns, and most likely they'd all been molested.

A year before our appointment, William's two older brothers accused their adoptive father of molesting them. William was adamant that they were lying, and he had given details of their anger at their father and of their planning their accusations. An expert on RAD, who testified in Court, believed these accusations were false, providing many specifics. Father steadfastly denied molesting. The judge, however, sentenced father to 10 years in prison, where he is unlikely to receive parole because he refuses to admit molesting.

Adoptive mother and father had already raised a family of four biological children, now grown. Since adoption, they and the three boys had often been in psychotherapy, but to no effect. Only during the trial was RAD discussed. William's mother visited his father twice a week in prison, but William wasn't allowed visitation because his father had not admitted to molesting. Mother and father had a deep Christian faith, conservative, but not fundamentalist, which was how they had been raised.

Take a moment to *be-with* William-and-his-mother, to *join* and *attune* to their *we-ing*. Admittedly, you're getting in a few paragraphs, what I got over, say, fifteen minutes, during which I could *see/hear/felt-sense* a mother filled with barely concealed and highly understandable rage, while William became more and more rigid — eyes still screaming, smile still frozen, speaking little and in short single sentences, if possible, one or two words.

Can you sense the *in-the-worlding*, situational reasons and the *understandings* shaping William's and his mother's *we-ing* and their *embodying*? Can you sense how their *embodying*, their *we-ing* has become tragically detached from the *toward-Being* (beyond situational direction) and *with-Being* (*presencing*) of *homing*?

As their story unfolds, with its litany of bonding pains, what am I, the therapist, doing to facilitate the *we-ing* of *with-family* Focusing? Analogous to individual Focusing, to guiding myself in individual Focusing with highly conflicting and overwhelming felt senses: first, of course, is my own *presencing*. I am fully *attuning* and *embodying-opening* to the *past-storying/present-embodying* of this *we-ing*. Is my *embodying* *grounding* and *holding*? Or are (many?) aspects of my *me-ing* lost within this storied *we-ing*? The often obvious, sometimes subtle physicality's of these different *processings* are well known to experienced Focusers, though they can always surprise us by coming in new forms. If I become aware of my own anxiety or spinning, I know what *me-ing* is birthing from this *we-ing*. I also know what my *embodying* is reflexively feeding into this family's *we-ing*. This may be majorly pushing one of my own bonding hot-buttons; I may be experiencing their — William's and his mother's — longstanding *me-ing* birthing from this *we-ing*; and it may be both.

The problem is not *having* or *felt-sensing* the anxiety or the overwhelmed. With *we-ings* like William and his mother's, if you're not *felt-sensing* something like anxiety, anger, overwhelmed, and the tragedy of all that, you're likely not *joining/attuning*-to the family. This is the second common type of therapist *embodying* problem: walling-off/dissociating.

Experienced Focusers know this feel in themselves, again, in ways obvious, subtle and sometimes new. Naturally, you bring *presencing* to this *embodying*, too. And you're also *felt-sensing* and *presencing-with*, as best you can whatever *embodying* is birthing your walling-off/dissociating. Here, too, this *we-ing* may have triggered your own bonding hot-button and/or you may be *embodying* this family's *me-ings*. And as it's the latter, your *presencing-with*-walling-off and at least a little *felt-sensing* awareness of the possibilities of what birthed it may, in itself, be vital and healing in their *we-ing*.

I worked with mother individually, nearly twice weekly, for almost two months within a *we-ing*, William-mother context. I had several steps in mind. First, she needed empathy from me to create a *we-ing* about her her-William *we-ing* which could birth a new *me-ing*, so to speak a new *mothering*. Usually folks need empathy before than can give empathy, before

they can truthfully let go into *we-ing*. Second, mother needed my *we-ing* with William, as I reported to her, birthing a new *understanding*, *felt-sensing*, *in-the-worlding* so she could re-claim her *homing* and empathize, accurately and compassionately, with William.

One caution: In badly hurting families where bonding has long been fractured, especially with RAD, normal reflective listening may not only be ineffective, it may actually be harmful. I'm reminded of Marshall Rosenberg dropping by our Hyde Park Changes group, "listening" to an entrenched old-timer who'd been telling the same story, the same way for years. Marshall "listened", but differently, and the old-timer moved some. Afterwards, I asked Marshall what he did:

"Have you noticed," Marshall said, "that when you reflect content, you get more content?"

"Well... sure Marshall," I answered, feeling puzzled.

"And when you reflect feelings, you get more feelings?" I frowned. "Of course."

Marshall fixed me with his intense dark eyes. "Dave, when you reflect an alienated view of the world, you just get more alienation."

That was one of my "Great Learnings". How to accurately and empathically "listen" — which is based on *presencing* — without reflecting alienation is tricky and not subject to easy formula. As a start, I'd recommend Marshall's empathy form: "You're feeling because you're needing", found in his latest general book on Non-Violent Communication (Rosenberg 2003). This helps the listener and the person being listened to go a step deeper, one that brings gentle ownership and vulnerability.

Let's skip back to mother and William, who've been back in session together, here, for about two months. William has just revealed physical abuse by his two brothers, starting as early as he could remember and continuing, literally, until the older boys left for foster-care:

Dave: And you never told anyone [I said softly.]

William: No. [William stays looking at his feet, avoiding our eyes, avoiding our *we-ing*. He has enough courage — great courage — to tell, but not enough to see himself in our gaze.]

William: I thought if I told... that they'd hurt me even worse — they told me what they'd do. And... [William stops and swallows] and I figured mom and dad already knew.

Dave: [I hear mom gasp, and I put up my hand to stop what she was going to say. I turn to mom, my face sad, and say] Mom, can you imagine how awful William must have felt, thinking you and his dad knew about his getting beaten up and not stopping it?

The next ten minutes or so are me coaching mom to give William empathy for all the deep and terrible *felt-sensings* and *understandings* he'd lived, his whole life. Throughout,

William gave little felt-shift sighs and slight nods, letting me know, to some extent, he was *we-ing* Focusing *with-mom*. But I knew that until he could look at his mom and accurately *attune* to her, this *we-ing* birthing his *me-ing* wouldn't heal. Finally, as much of William's body tension releases, this for the first time I've ever seen, I gently ask:

Dave: William?

William: Hmm?

Dave: Can you look at your mom? [Immediately, William's full tension returns. William gives no other response. I give him a minute or so, and still no response.]

William? Is it all right if your mom touches you?

Again, we — his mom and I — give him time and space. After a minute, William nods. William is an extremely courageous boy. By this time, of course, both mom and I have tears.

Dave: Mom? [I ask] Can you move closer to William? [She does; William tenses. I wait a moment, then ask]

William? Are you sure it's all right for mom to touch you? [This time William's nod comes sooner.]

Dave: Mom? [I ask] Could you put your hands on William's shoulders?

She does, with my encouragement rubbing William's shoulders gently — a living, moving touch, and caring as I can see from mom's face and body. I give that time to settle in, as I'd give a deep felt-shift time to settle in. After a minute or so, William gives a felt-shift sigh and his body and face relax. He's still staring down at his feet.

Dave: William? [I ask] Can your mom touch your face?

William's body tension returns, but not full tension. We wait. After a few moments, William nods, and I have mom gently cup his face in her hands. Again, mom's body, face and touch speak empathy. She gently strokes his cheek with her thumbs. Again, we give William time to settle in, as he does with another little felt-shift sigh and relaxing. William is *we-ing* Focusing. Courageously. His body, his self is connecting to his deep *needing*, his *homing*, now, as we take small steps and give him time.

Dave: William? [I ask] Can you let your mom lift your face so you can see her?

I'm surprised there's no return to tension. William is ready. The *homing* within him knows this is the next step. I nod to mom, who slowly, gently raises his face. Mom is still

crying. When William's and mom's eyes meet and become a deeper *we-ing*, William shrinks a little.

Dave: William? [I ask] I feel very respectful of you for saying all you've said, for letting your mom touch you, and for looking at your mom. That takes a lot of courage. Right mom?

Mom, still crying, nods. William remains looking at her, still physically tense. But his eyes are no longer screaming, his face no longer blank and walling off. His eyes are searching, they're trying to *attune*, trying to *we*.

Dave: William? [I ask gently] What do you see your mom feeling?

William: [William's eyebrows scrunch. Finally, uncertainly, he says] Mad?

Dave: Ah... Mad. That makes sense, given all that's happened to you. Right mom?

Mom nods, with even more tears. Gross *mis-attuning* is almost a defining and certainly a reinforcing characteristic of RAD and terribly *mis-attuning* families.

Dave: But you're not sure she's mad? [William shakes his head.] Yeah... it's hard to be sure. What do you see in her eyes?"

William: [William hesitates, then says] Tears?

Dave: That's right. Tears. What feeling do tears often mean?

William [William searches and thinks hard, finally and still tentatively saying] Sad?

Dave: Yes. Sad... Mom, are you feeling sad?

Mom: [Nods, with more tears] Very sad... [she says]

Dave: What are you feeling sad about? [I ask]...

And we begin, once again, the long, slow, gentle *processing* of *attuning*. William and his mother, with small steps, are *embodying-opening* into a more true, more realistic *we-ing* that births more true, more realistic, and much more in-touch with *homing me-ing*.

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ENDNOTES

1. Bonding is always first a whole interacting. As such, we can always start afresh, re-*understanding* it out of different specific experiences and coming up with different, equally valid and, perhaps, even more relevant aspects — at least more relevant to other particular bonding experiences that we are facing. This isn't "just philosophy"; it's vital to Focusing bonding therapy. *we-ing* therapists must always be prepared to re-*understand* specific bondings afresh. We must allow new *understandings* to emerge out of and affect our *felt-sensing* of this family's bonding, should we sense that our previous *understandings* fail to *open* us to this family. Developing this creativity is essential to *we-ing* therapy, just as something similar is essential to Focusing guiding, and to our own *opening* to our individual felt senses.
2. This does **not** give this *ordering* primacy over the other three *orderings*. Rather, as with the other three, this recognizes this new *ordering's* distinct role and its place at the table of our interacting first, our bonded *we-ing*.

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