

## **INTEGRATION FOR INCREASED SAFETY AND CARRYING FORWARD**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

For many years, safely and profoundly transforming emotional suffering, my own and others, has been one of my heart's deepest desires. Felt-sensing has been a fundamental part of this, my ongoing transformational process, at first implicitly and then explicitly, as I learned Focusing.

Given that the Focusing community is an international one, I want to acknowledge that being an American Caucasian female who lived in New York City for sixteen years is undoubtedly reflected in the culturally bound ways and settings in which I've transformed emotional suffering.

The unexpected deadly heart attack of my father, a few days after my thirtieth birthday in 1983, catapulted me into in-depth psychoanalytic psychotherapy, the reigning therapeutic approach in New York City at the time. Psychotherapy made such a remarkable difference in my life that several years later, with a burning desire to help others as I had been helped, I embarked upon a Masters degree in clinical social work in 1990. This was while also continuing my already established career as a professional photographer.

### **SELF PSYCHOLOGY AND EMPATHIC EXPLORATION**

During my first year of social work school, my clinical supervisor introduced me to the theoretical orientation and practice of psychoanalytic Self Psychology, which deeply resonated with me then, and was how I practiced psychotherapy for several years thereafter. Among other things, Self Psychology's dedication to "experience near" empathic understanding of people as opposed to an "experience distant" understanding really felt right to me.

### **ENCOUNTERING EYE MOVEMENT DESENSITIZATION AND REPROCESSING® (EMDR) AS "SPEED FOCUSING"**

My first foray outside of psychoanalytic psychotherapy was in 1995, when I began Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) training, originally developed by Francine Shapiro (Shapiro 2001) and now widely used as a treatment for trauma. At the time, another Self Psychologist I was close to playfully chided me about pursuing EMDR and even tried to talk me out of going to the training. After reading an article about EMDR in a popular magazine, however, in which both excitement and skepticism were expressed, something inside of me felt very drawn to it. In retrospect, there was a part of me already sensing that traditional talk therapy was not sufficient to facilitate the kind of deep change I sought, personally and professionally.

With fear and trepidation, yet strongly sensing EMDR was an important aspect of my quest to deeply and safely transform emotional suffering, I went by myself on a train out to New Brunswick, New Jersey where I completed level one of EMDR training. During the EMDR practice exercises, I revisited a humiliating childhood memory that I had already spent time with in my psychoanalytic psychotherapy. The memory still made me wince whenever I recalled it, but—to my utter amazement—following the EMDR processing, this painful memory had lost all its sting.

Excited by my encounter with EMDR, I returned to New York City and shared my remarkable experience with a beloved mentor who laughed and dismissed it, explaining it away as a transference relationship with the EMDR technique. Crestfallen and taken aback, I nevertheless asserted that regardless of my mentor's interpretation, I experienced EMDR as being powerfully effective, and I had every intention of pursuing it further. In retrospect, this reflects my deep faith in my *lived experience*, even when I do not yet have a conceptual framework to hang it on.

I continued my exploration of EMDR with ongoing practice sessions with a colleague, as well as some paid sessions with another EMDR therapist. I also sought EMDR supervision and started encouraging my clients to consider experiencing it as part of their therapy.

Introducing EMDR into psychoanalytic psychotherapy, wherein many clients were lying down on the couch, was no small feat. Among other things, it meant they would have to sit up and focus on visual bilateral stimulation, obviously a radical departure from what we had been doing. I shared with my clients that this new therapeutic technique worked for many people even though how it worked was still unclear. I shared that I believed EMDR potentially could be helpful in facilitating the changes they desired.

In other words, I provided my clients with some psychoeducation, presented a case for them trying it, and explored what came up for them in relation to my suggestion. Somewhat surprisingly, several of my clients agreed to an EMDR session rather than a regular psychoanalytic psychotherapy session. This was my first experience combining two therapeutic approaches.

I found it nerve racking to embark upon EMDR with my psychoanalytic clients, given that I was drawing upon only a weekend of training and some additional practice sessions. Part of the EMDR protocol includes processing what the client finds disturbing by doing several "sets" of bilateral stimulation. After each set, the therapist checks with the client to see what came up for them. The immediate response I got from my first EMDR client was that I reminded him of an alien from another planet, which was both unexpected and disconcerting. We obviously spent time with that before the EMDR processing continued.

Another beginning EMDR session involved my client reporting that he noticed "nothing" throughout the processing. At the time I experienced an intense inner dialogue where I seriously questioned if I was doing EMDR correctly, and wondered if I should refund the session fee since it didn't seem to be working. I persevered and suggested at the end of the session that although nothing popped up, the client's process would continue and something might even present itself in a dream.

Given what seemingly had *not* happened during that EMDR session, I was shocked when my client returned the next session. He shared that while nothing had emerged in

his dreams, his crippling performance anxiety had disappeared, and he had spontaneously performed in the way he had always longed for, but thought impossible.

At this same time, I sought out an EMDR therapist in the hopes of relieving my chronic insomnia. I told her about my first memory of my mother persuading me to throw my beloved pacifier out of our car window as we drove to my grandparents' house. Years later, when discussing this with my mother, she remarked, "Funny, but you never slept well after that". My thinking and hope was that if I targeted and processed this particular memory with EMDR, my insomnia would disappear. Although it did not, but to my utter and complete surprise, I spontaneously stopped smoking cigarettes and have never smoked since. This unexpected result from EMDR was stunning to me as smoking was something I had been losing a battle against for quite some time.

In retrospect, to be able to explore and then integrate something new and very foreign like EMDR into my practice, I had to strongly sense it would significantly facilitate greater change in my clients. Even more importantly, I had to be comfortable with moving outside of my comfort zone by taking a leap of faith and then continuing to live with not knowing exactly how EMDR worked. Experiences like the ones described above, as well as ongoing professional and personal support, provided the necessary wind under my wings for further exploration and eventual integration.

## **FOCUSING: DISCOVERING MY HOME**

Less than a year later, in 1996, a client of mine who had experienced EMDR with me took an introductory workshop in Focusing and enthusiastically came into her next session exclaiming, "Elizabeth, you're gonna love this!" She was so right. I did and do love it, and to her I am forever grateful.

I immediately read Eugene Gendlin's introductory book, *Focusing* (Gendlin 1981), as well as Ann Weiser Cornell's *Power of Focusing* (1996), and took a beginning workshop for the general public offered at (what was then) Carolyn Worthing's house in Westchester, NY, and lead by Mary Lawlor.

In that workshop, I was astounded by how easily I could bypass my inner dialogue about something that bothered me, and get to *the whole of it* as it was held and experienced in my body. Furthermore, I discovered that by being with my felt, embodied sense of my problem in a specified way, I experienced a *shift* inside me that offered me a fresh way of being in relationship with whatever I Focused on. I also experienced Focusing as taking Self Psychology's stance of "empathic introspection" (asking and exploring what it's like for the client to be him or her) thereby making that exploration three dimensional. Focusing thereby infused my work as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist with greater aliveness.

Learning Focusing also made me explicitly aware of the innate human capacity to experientially resolve something and carry life forward, including how to access and intentionally work with this organic process. Focusing gave me a better understanding of what was happening as the client got better within psychoanalytic psychotherapy, EMDR—and, as I came to realize—any therapy for that matter. In fact, one friend and colleague now describes EMDR as "speed Focusing". There may be something about EMDR's bilateral

stimulation, combined with its protocol, that facilitates quickly accessing the felt sense, experiencing shifts, and carrying forward movement.

Another invaluable perspective I gained from Focusing is that each person's body has its own *inner knowingness*, which can be sensed into at any time to discover one's personal truth in relation to anything. This capacity serves as an incredible guide for living authentically, inside or outside the consultation room. I discovered that intentionally engaging my clients' felt-sensing process, as well as my own, throughout the session, helped EMDR and all other therapeutic approaches to more seamlessly unfold.

In addition to bringing my newly found understanding of Focusing into EMDR, I also began introducing Focusing-oriented interventions into my practice of psychoanalytic psychotherapy by asking clients questions such as: "Is there some place in your body where you're experiencing this?"; "Perhaps you can welcome that?"; "Maybe you'd like to ask this place how it is feeling from its point of view?"; "Is there something it would like you to know?" and so on.

Although I discovered that not everyone can answer these kinds of questions immediately, especially those clients who are disconnected from certain aspects of their experience such as body sensations and/or feelings, many can. As a result, Focusing allowed many of my psychoanalytic clients to drop down into a deeper level of experiencing, connecting and being with their felt sense of something in a way that facilitated moving forward with their lives in an enriched meaningful way.

On the flip side, I also encountered some individual therapy clients who became overwhelmed with me guiding them to connect with their felt sense, as unprocessed traumatic experiences came flooding in, often quite surprisingly. One person I recall quit therapy with me right after getting flooded because it scared her so much, which greatly troubled me. The same thing also happened with a few workshop participants when I started teaching Focusing through The Focusing Institute a few years after being certified by Mary Hendricks Gendlin in 1999.

Especially for those clients who suffer from what the mental health field came to refer to as "complex trauma", where not only abuse was experienced repeatedly, but where the trauma took place within an environment replete with disapproval, hostility, and indifference, it is understandable how flooding occurred. In "The Body's Releasing Steps" Gendlin (1978) describes opening to the whole of something, as occurs in Focusing:

For example, if I am angry, that pushes me to hit or attack someone. This may or may not be what I will later be glad about. But if I let the anger lead me to that wider whole, 'all that which gets me angry', or 'that whole thing that is involved for me in this anger', then I will, for the moment, not feel only the anger, but a much wider, more global bodily sense of all the people, situations, alternatives, past and future that are involved in the context that makes me angry. That felt meaning (which is different than the emotion: anger) is my bodily living that situation. (p. 338).

It is not hard to imagine, then, how opening to the whole of something like anger when you are a trauma survivor who has experienced verbal and physical abuse could indeed be overwhelming. And if EMDR, or “speed Focusing”, takes you to the traumatic material more quickly, then the client would be overwhelmed even more. I soon discovered that some of my complex trauma clients were experiencing overwhelm even while doing the original first step of Focusing, “Clearing A Space”, a step which many other people find very helpful and life-affirming. However, I found that for a few clients, simply checking inside and identifying what was between them and feeling okay could be too much.

Keeping someone safe within their healing process became a big concern for me as early as 1996. Not surprisingly, safety had also become an openly expressed concern within the EMDR community, as some people were reportedly ending up in hospital emergency rooms because of EMDR processing. It had become evident to many therapists, myself included, that traversing the terrain of complex trauma was a slippery slope. With other therapists, I came to realize we needed to be able to access experience at the level of change, as identified by Gendlin, but much more skillfully than we had been doing.

In response to these therapy-induced mental health emergencies, EMDR practitioners began talking about needing to “resource” people. A resource is anything life-affirming, e.g. a positive memory, person, place, activity or personal capacity, that has a calming affect on your body. EMDR therapists began to import hypnotherapy techniques in order to create greater safety. By contrast, some of my psychoanalytic colleagues who were using EMDR claimed that the therapeutic relationship itself was enough of a resource for clients with complex trauma histories. Although I did both, the resourcing then taught by EMDR practitioners somehow felt like something imposed from the outside, while safety within the relationship did not feel sufficient. As a result, I became more cautious and took longer to get to know new clients before guiding them into deeper levels of experiencing, which helped. However, based on previous upending experiences, I still lived with uneasiness whenever I guided trauma survivors to go deeper.

As an adaptation, I developed a way to do “Focusing Lite”, if you will, embodying what Gendlin refers to as “the Focusing attitude”. I would ask clients Focusing-informed questions that were directed at their felt sense of something, without actually guiding them to go inside their body and directly access the whole of it. For example, when clients mentioned something disturbing, I would ask them questions such as: “Perhaps it would be helpful to ask yourself what gets to you the most about this?”; “Might there be more about this?”; and “Maybe there’s a sense of what would bring some easing?”.

## **SOMATIC EXPERIENCING (SE) AND SAFE EMBODIMENT**

It was not until I started “Somatic Experiencing” (SE) training in New York City in 2005 that I finally found some other, more effective ways to resource people. Peter Levine, the developer of SE, holds doctorates in Medical Biophysics as well as Psychology, served as a stress consultant for NASA, and is very interested in both the physiological and psychological expression of stress. As many of you know, he studied Focusing as well as other approaches before developing SE.

A few of the many things I found helpful about SE (Levine 2005) were learning how to mitigate overwhelm by using the body itself as a resource, i.e. bringing awareness to a place in your body that's feeling more settled, as well as "pendulating" or moving back and forth between a settled and uncomfortable place in the body to titrate the processing experience. I was surprised to find that by using a somatic resource, rather than avoiding something more painful, naturally allowed clients a safe opening into the stuck trauma that needed processing.

SE gave me a better understanding of what happens in the nervous system when someone gets triggered, and in turn taught me how to help clients become calm through the use of a somatic resource while slowly processing trauma. My SE experience helped me think differently about what is referred to in Focusing as "process skipping" and "a stopped process". These two terms no longer seemed like forms of intentional avoidance, but could be understood as the nervous system's attempts to self-regulate. (See Stephen Porges' "Polyvagal Theory" (2011). I also found that sharing this neurobiological understanding with my clients greatly reduced their shame and empowered them.

Encountering Nancy J. Napier, my first SE teacher, with whom I thankfully worked in a small consultation group for several years, greatly expanded and grounded my ability to treat trauma experientially. Napier brought into SE years of previous trauma training such as Ericksonian hypnosis and EMDR, as well as her own way of working, described in her published work (Napier 1990, 1993). In addition to teaching SE, Napier also introduced me to mindfulness, her form of parts work, the welcoming and integration of spiritual experiences into psychotherapy, and more.

My additional training with Nancy Napier addressed my long-standing concerns about the emotional safety of trauma survivors and was just what the uneasy place within me had needed for years. Because SE is so clearly informed by Focusing, it was fairly easy for me to integrate what I learned. I was given many more moves for safely and effectively experientially healing trauma, which pleased me greatly.

## **RESTORING CONNECTION (RC): CONNECTING THE THREADS**

I started sharing the teachings of Napier with the Focusing-oriented experiential study group of therapists I led from 2006–2009. Together we further sensed into the realms of body mind heart and spirit coming up with what felt like our own unique integration. I eventually called this approach "Restoring Connection (RC)" and later trademarked the name: Restoring Connection®.

When "Restoring Connection" came through me within the context of that experiential study group, it felt both inspired and special. In fact, there was a period of a few years that included the 2008 Focusing International where life felt quite magical at times, (as well as extremely challenging at other times.) I first presented "Restoring Connection" at the 2008 International Focusing Conference in Canada, and then at a New York Metro Focusing meeting in 2009, even though I was scared to introduce our newborn baby of "Restoring Connection (RC)" to the outside world. While our study group had marveled at and reveled in the birth of RC, I felt an anxious uncertainty as to how others might receive it. The

Focusing community was chosen for our baby's first viewing because the study group had started with Focusing and then expanded it from there to integrate other practices. Also, my overall felt-sense of the Focusing community was that it was a warm and welcoming one. Nevertheless, I remained nervous.

My husband, close friends and colleagues, as well as the study group who came with me to the International, all encouraged me. Without their support I would not have had the courage to present.

Something else that concerned me was that my presentation was scheduled at the same time as presentations of some of the most well known international teachers of Focusing. When I noticed this in the program, my immediate thought was, "Oh no! Nobody's going to want to come to my presentation."

That thought plagued me until the gathering at the initial conference mixer. Christel Kraft, whose name I knew from the Focusing discussion list, recognized my name from my e-mailed description of "Restoring Connection" and brightly and enthusiastically said, "I'm coming to your presentation tomorrow." To my amazement she did, as did so many others that additional chairs had to be brought in from another room. Furthermore, throughout the conference, people who had attended my presentation, including Christel, encouraged me. (I subsequently learned that Christel herself was integrating along similar lines several years before I was, as demonstrated in her 1999 book *Energy Flow Focusing Explorations: Passageways Into Your Hidden Treasure*.)

Another book I bought at the 2008 International was *Focusing with Your Whole Body* by Addie van der Kooy and Kevin McEvenue. I had known about Whole Body Focusing for years and had even recommended bodyworker friends to the trainings, but I hadn't thought it was applicable to me because I had initially thought less holistically.

When I read and listened to Addie and Kevin's Wholebody Focusing work, which acknowledged and integrated SE into its approach, I realized that it was so much along the same lines of what was emerging within me that I panicked and thought, "Oh my God! They're going to think I plagiarized them." So I e-mailed both Kevin and Addie, and they very graciously responded, telling me not to worry about it and to please share with them whatever further emerged.

I have had this kind of serendipitous experience several times now over the years, where I have sensed something newly emerging from within me, only to discover that someone else has already written about the same phenomena. There seems to be a larger knowing that we're able to access, sense into and express, as it uniquely comes through us.

"Restoring Connection" can be offered one-on-one or within a group as a way to bring awareness to and safely cultivate the movements of Focusing with complementary experiential techniques and practices for effecting the greatest change—integrating what I've found to be the best of the best transformational approaches into one. Beneficial in and of itself, the process can also serve as a wonderful complement to other modalities, e.g. bodywork, coaching and psychotherapy, to name a few. You can read more about it at [www.RestoringConnection.com](http://www.RestoringConnection.com).

## **ACCELERATED EXPERIENTIAL DYNAMIC PSYCHOTHERAPY (AEDP): RELATIONSHIP AND DYADIC REGULATION**

The way I had been taught Focusing and other experiential modalities such as hypnotherapy, Somatic Experiencing and parts work, was that the interpersonal relationship hummed along in the background, supporting the client's unfolding of their inner process. However, the client-therapy relationship wasn't explicitly focused upon unless the client referred to it in their process.

Sometime around 2000 I had stopped identifying with being a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and instead considered myself to be an experiential one. Furthermore, I'd eventually come to resonate with many aspects of John Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which naturally drew me to Diana Fosha's experiential application of it in her model, "Accelerated Experiential Dynamic Psychotherapy" (AEDP).

Interestingly enough, Bowlby developed attachment theory as a way of better explaining behavior he was observing in children separated from their parents during World War II, that he felt couldn't be understood by Freudian drive theory. This kind of behavior is now commonly referred to as 'attachment trauma' and the explicit therapeutic use of the relationship itself is considered essential for healing this kind of trauma.

With client consent, AEDP uses videotapes of client sessions for training purposes. Watching Fosha's work, I was taken with how she seamlessly and directly used herself, moment to moment, to address developmental trauma. I was struck by how, in many respects, Fosha appeared to be a natural Focuser, which also appealed to me. I decided, then, to immerse myself in AEDP, which included being in a small supervision group with Fosha for a few years, as well as in individual therapy for awhile with a seasoned AEDP practitioner.

Some of what was of particular significance to me and contributed to my further development of "Restoring Connection", was learning how to make the therapist-client relationship explicit and experiential, in order to effectively work with it to heal developmental trauma (Fosha 2003). One aspect of this fosters nervous system regulation dyadically, that is through the relationship itself. For example, the AEDP-informed therapist might speak more slowly in a soothing tone of voice and reassuringly saying something like "I'm right here with you", when the client taps into something highly disturbing. Furthermore, bringing awareness to and celebrating the client's expressions of resilience and life forward movement, as they naturally occur in-session, has been invaluable. I have found these AEDP-inspired interventions to be wonderful ways to resource, regulate, keep people safe, and be an integral part of processing their trauma.

In November of 2009, while beginning to further explore AEDP, I attended the first world conference on Focusing Oriented Psychotherapies. While there, I discussed with colleagues during meal times my safety concerns about using Focusing with certain clients. Gendlin was scheduled to offer a question and answer period in which he had explicitly invited people to ask some hard questions.

Sitting in the back of the conference room, right next to Mary Hendricks Gendlin, I agonized over whether or not to directly express to Gendlin the safety concerns I had raised with others. I never had to make that choice because someone I had shared my concerns with during a meal stood up in the front of the room, turned and looked around until he found

me, and pointed right at me as if to say, “Ask him your question”. So I mustered my courage, stood up and anxiously began: “I’ve found that just as Focusing can be a doorway to the transpersonal, it can also be a doorway to trauma.” I went from there, shaking like a leaf as I spoke. Thankfully, the person who had pointed at me saw my nervousness and came around to physically support me so that I was able to continue standing while I discussed this with Gendlin. Gendlin, responding to me in a very supportive and encouraging manner, did not get defensive, but openly acknowledged that what I said was true, that he had been aware of this issue for about fifteen years, and that it needed to be better addressed.

A few weeks later, after I stopped shaking internally, I sent Gendlin an e-mail and thanked him for meeting me just where I needed to be met, saying that if he had responded in a dismissive way, it would have been a totally different experience for me. Gendlin in turn responded by saying he was glad he had been able to respond to me in the way that he did.

Since then, people within The Focusing Institute have done many things to more directly address safety concerns. It warms my heart whenever I hear of another one.

### **RESILIENT-YOU (RY) AUDIO PROGRAM: REGULATION AND RESOURCING IN THERAPY AND BEYOND**

Although I haven’t personally experienced overwhelm while learning and practicing Focusing for over fifteen years, I have occasionally felt overwhelmed while encountering other powerful experiential approaches. Getting thrown into a fight, flight or freeze response is not one of my favorite things, nor do I relish inadvertently triggering this in others. Furthermore, when it does happen, I want to be able to quickly right myself as well as be able to help others do the same.

Addressing my felt need for safe, non-triggering processing was the impetus for adding what I learned from SE and Napier to Focusing and is an important beginning part of what emerged as “Restoring Connection”. With the help of invaluable assistance, feedback and support from many people, I have spent the last several years developing an audio program “RESILIENT-YOU®”, available through “CD Baby”, “iTunes” and “Amazon”, which I introduce to clients in their first or second session. As the listener’s companion and guide, together we experience a smorgasbord of simple, powerful ways to safely manage overwhelm, be it related to traumatic material or not. Also provided in R-Y is enlightening information about the nervous system’s regulatory process, including how to work with it masterfully.

Imbued with Focusing, R-Y integrates aspects of many of the approaches I have already mentioned in this article. In one selection of R-Y, after guiding the listener to identify their existing inner and outer resources, I take them through a guided experience, “Connecting With Your Resource”, which explicitly includes Focusing’s steps two, three and four. Introducing people to steps of Focusing by guiding them to first get a felt-sense of something positive and soothing in their life, contributes to setting the stage for safely processing trauma that may emerge. As previously explained, step one of Focusing, “Clearing A Space” indeed does this for many, yet not for all.

Offered as an initial stepping stone, my audio program is a safety bridge that allows people to enter and work from the inner place where deep change occurs, a place they may

not otherwise access and stay with for awhile. Because I too use what is offered on R-Y, I am able to self-regulate during experiential trainings, allowing me to hang in there and then learn other powerful techniques to combine with Focusing. I am tremendously relieved to be able to self-regulate while also providing my therapy clients and workshop participants the means to do so, as well. After completing the audio program and making it widely available to the general public, I realized I had come full circle and finally completed what I had always intended, that is to address my concern about safety which began in 1996.

Allow me to share a personal example of how, in an experiential workshop I attended, I used my self-regulation tools in order to avoid overwhelm and process-stopping. I was learning a powerful way to shift something when stuck. I thought I was choosing a fairly benign problem to address, i.e. getting through a pile of mail. When asked a series of questions to uncover my underlying avoidance, I said the task seemed tediously boring, and then eventually said it felt “overwhelming”. I was guided to really feel the overwhelm. When I did, a rush of intense feelings came flooding in, including an image of a photo I’d seen of a Japanese person riding their bike along a shore line with a gigantic Tsunami wave headed toward them.

Given my understanding of nervous system dysregulation, I was able to immediately recognize what was happening and without feeling ashamed say, “I can’t continue like this. It’s too much for me.” And with that, I internally took a step back while breathing in through my nose and out through my mouth, creating needed distance between me and the whole of “overwhelm”. I further helped my nervous system regulate by taking the Tsunami image and placing it outside of myself at a comfortable distance, where I could look *at* it rather than feel taken over *by* it. And with that, I was able to safely move forward in this guided process to the point where the thought of my pile of mail was no longer overwhelming, and I was capable of tackling it—a powerful shift indeed. So there you have it, the combination of creating safety, facilitated change, and carrying life forward.

## **EXPERIENTIAL JUXTAPOSITION AND COHERENCE THERAPY: MAKING TRANSFORMATION PRECISE**

Something I’m very excited about now is how I am learning to further pinpoint transformational change moments, thereby consciously setting the stage for, as well as further facilitating them. Bruce Ecker and his “Coherence Therapy” colleagues seem to be doing just that, based upon their understanding of recent memory reconsolidation research, which actively uses the experiential juxtaposition of contrasting “old” and “new” learnings to create transformational change. As Ecker, et al write in *Unlocking The Emotional Brain*, juxtapositions occur spontaneously within change processes like Focusing, EMDR, Gestalt, AEDP and other approaches, “...and carrying it out *knowingly* can significantly increase a practitioner’s frequency of achieving powerful therapeutic results” (2012, p. 5).

As I look back on the life changing experiences I’ve had on both the receiving and giving end, inside and outside the consultation room, it does seem probable that it has been at times of experiential juxtaposition that the most profound shifts have occurred. An example of this kind of shift occurred while working with an adult suffering from complex trauma. My client experienced an intense global sense of helplessness, aloneness and belief that people are not to be trusted because they will always hurt you. Prior to this session, my

client had gotten triggered by recent contact with his family of origin. Efforts on my part to facilitate creating some internal space between his painfully crushing process and himself was futile. Finally, I said, “Right here, in this moment, can you sense that I am here for you and will not hurt you?” With this, he paused, quietly sensed into his experience of me then and there, and very slowly said “Yes I can”. He went on to express how responsive he felt I’d been, how touched he was by my responsiveness, and how appreciative he was of me.

Bringing his awareness to the juxtaposition of past experience which had taken hold of him—in contrast happening with me in the present moment—created the most profound shift to date in our work together. Of course this alone did not completely change this person’s life. Thankfully other juxtaposition experiences continued to occur inside and outside their therapy. With complex trauma it takes experience after experience like this, including their integration, until a tipping point results in a shift in the personality. Perhaps further pinpointing the process of experiential juxtaposition and therapeutic (memory) reconsolidation is a carrying forward of Gendlin and Rogers’ collaborative research on change?

## **FOCUSING AGAIN: RETURNING TO HOME BASE AND FURTHER INTEGRATION**

Not surprisingly, I’ve found using the practice of Focusing for “discovering the emotional truth” of a presenting problem, following Ecker et al’s “Coherence Therapy” to be invaluable. In fact, I strongly believe that anyone who is working experientially, regardless of approach, would tremendously benefit from learning Focusing because Focusing makes explicit the innate human process of experientially resolving something and carrying life forward, the process first identified by Gendlin and Rogers. By learning the practice of Focusing, one learns to make direct contact with, gain a visceral understanding of, and ultimately trust his or her organic process. Without Focusing, I believe clients and therapists alike end up groping in the dark, inadvertently bumping into “experiential truths”. I have often thought in experiential trainings, how much better off people would be if they had Focusing to ground them in working experientially. With Focusing as a base, there is so much more a therapist can then learn and effectively integrate, as exemplified by my ongoing work with “Restoring Connection”.

Part of this base of understanding that Focusing provides is the awareness that each person’s body has its own inner knowingness which can be sensed into at any time in order to discover personal truths. No *matter* what other therapeutic approach is used, Focusing can offer embodied knowing. Inviting clients to sense into their body’s wisdom, as well as sensing into your own as the therapist, serves as a reliable guide for safely navigating within any deeply transformative process.

Very simply stated, with attuned-holding-presence as my stance, I now find myself working fairly seamlessly, sensing into what therapeutic approach might be right in the moment, in order to help a client become unstuck and safely restore connection with their organic carrying life forward process. I now can draw from a range of interventions that I have at my disposal. I even find myself improvising new strategies by first inviting the client to sense into whether something feels right or not as we proceed, and then together, co-creating new transformative experiences. Frequently checking in to find how something is landing inside of a client and then sharing what’s coming inside of me, as well as processing

what it was like to experience something that we experienced together, are some of the many dance moves.

In closing, there is so much more to all that I have shared with you here. As perhaps you can sense, within all of this is much implicit intricacy that hopefully we can explore further at another time. How deeply gratifying it is for me to realize that my heart's deepest desire—to safely and profoundly transform emotional suffering—is continuously being further realized. With felt-sensing as both my home base and guide, I have been able to tolerate moving outside of my comfort zone, to take leaps of faith, to learn to live with not-knowing, and seek out and be open to various life changing experiences, as well as ongoing professional and personal support, to continue to make safe transformation possible. I am profoundly grateful for how the Focusing process itself, as well as people within our Focusing community and the opportunities afforded me, including writing this article, have been such an integral part of fulfilling my heart's desire.

It seems fitting to leave you with this Gendlin quote: "The change we want is really a change from a blocked life process (i.e., from no change to change.) It does not go counter to the nature of ourselves, but restores it." (1978).

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