



Using Alternative Therapy to help a psychologist with Emotional Abuse Recovery

A clinical psychologist in her 50's with many years of her own therapy under her belt, demonstrates how an Alternative Therapy - Emotionally Focused Bodywork helped her to connect more deeply to herself and her body through her continuing efforts in emotional abuse recovery.

SITUATION

This case study briefly describes a session with Judy as she takes another step in her emotional abuse recovery. In the face of an emotionally toxic childhood, Judy held on to herself by utilizing whatever intellectual defenses she could. Much to Judy's credit, through healing from this ordeal she came to know herself as a brilliant and compassionate woman and astute masterful clinical psychologist. However, the still-unresolved traumas of childhood continued to reverberate at crucial moments as a splitting between mind and body.

The pain she was experiencing in her emotional abuse recovery process, she said had to do with her awareness that she was always hurrying psychologically and emotionally to keep up with her mother so she wouldn't be left behind. Her fear was that if she slowed down, she wouldn't exist. I could see, hear, and feel that her identity was overwhelmingly habituated to this quicker rhythm. It was also tied up with being rejected by her mother, and desperately wanting her mother's unconditional love. Her feeling of being entitled to be a person in her own right with her own unique life rhythm coursing through her body was missing and was compromising her emotional abuse recovery.

EMOTIONALLY FOCUSED BODYWORK for Emotional Abuse Recovery

As a therapist, Judy understood the pitfalls of too much verbal analysis. We knew from past sessions that helping her to drop down into her non-verbal experience was essential. So, I offered, "How would it be if you start off by just coming into the present as you sit there by focusing on what you're experiencing from moment-to-moment in your body?" When I asked her what sensations she was experiencing, she said that she was aware of tightness in her neck and sadness. I asked her to stay with this awareness and allow it to deepen.

After only several minutes of our tracking her heightened body awareness I could see that she was in distress, so I asked if I could come and sit closer. She knew that this offer was to provide her with emotional, energetic, and physical support in her emotional abuse recovery. When she said yes, I switched to a stool on wheels and sat to her side. There I could comfortably place one hand on her shoulder and the other on the back of her neck, after getting her permission to do so. I felt that what Judy needed was for me just *be with her* and her emotional abuse recovery process.

How to intervene with Judy at this crucial moment and not cause an emotionally based self-protective defense? What to say to guide her toward the emotional abuse recovery that comes from Emotionally Focused Bodywork? I wanted to say just enough and no more. So I said, "Often the rhythm of the body is slower than that of the mind. Perhaps you could allow yourself to explore that slower rhythm for the moment and see where it takes you."

She told me with a sense of wonderment that her awareness of a fear of slowing down was without forethought and had caught her completely by surprise. She indicated that my distinction was helpful and then there was the crucial healing silence as I continued to touch her and monitor her embracing of this life-giving slower rhythm.

RESULTS OF EMOTIONALLY FOCUSED BODYWORK for Emotional Abuse Recovery

As Judy's throat softened, I could feel with my hands her letting go in her body, see her rib cage soften and expand, and hear a change in her breathing. Now there was no sense of strangled affect. It had been replaced with a solid connection to her more embodied presence, coupled with her effortless and deeper breathing in her emotional abuse recovery process.

Judy and I then discussed the implications of this mostly non-verbal experience for her emotional abuse recovery process. She came out of the session with an important realization of an unconscious shame-based fear she had been carrying. The way she put it was, "I'm too slow. I can't keep up."



We clarified how this shame-based belief reflects a mind-body split and an over-identification with her cognitive functioning at the expense of feeling and utilizing her connection with her body. As Judy said to me about herself, “No one is better at *quickly* analyzing and understanding what a client is presenting.” The part of this that works against Judy, rather than for her, is that it represents and reinforces a compensation for her fear that she will be left behind.

A signpost indicating significant progress in Judy’s emotional abuse recovery is her subsequently reporting how she is **comfortably slowing down in her work** as a clinical psychologist knowing that she is being even more effective by purposely taking longer to listen to her clients before offering them her insights.