

THE HEALING PARTNERSHIP

A MANUAL FOR SPLITTING TIME

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Many thanks to Suzanne for all her editing and rewriting assistance!

INTRODUCTION

This manual is a guidebook to taking good emotional care of ourselves and each other in the way that we are all naturally equipped to do. When we dare to make a significant difference to someone, and open ourselves to letting them make a similar difference to us, we discover a healing power beyond anything we had imagined. The bedrock of splitting time is the special kind of relationship that you can build with another person when you make the courageous step of loving each other wholeheartedly, and when you hold out to each other the highest expectations for your healing from the pain that has weighed you down.

This manual covers a large amount of material, which you'll want to take time to digest. I recommend moving gradually through the techniques, practicing the concepts in sessions as you go along.

All of the skills described in this manual are generalizations. Sometimes you'll find that a recommended technique is ineffective with the particular partner with whom you're splitting time. Trust yourself and your partner, not me. The ultimate measure of any approach to splitting time is whether it works.

For some suggestions on how to choose a person with whom to split time, see Section VII, "Taking Charge of Your Own Healing."

The underlying concepts that this manual relies on are explained in detail in *The Joyous Recovery*. That book is a good resource for anyone who would like to know more about the underlying reasons for the practices taught in this manual.

SOME TERMS YOU'LL NEED TO KNOW

Co-counseling: Dividing time with another person, either on the phone or in person: one of you listens for the first half, then you switch roles and the other person listens for the second half.

Splitting time: Means the same as "co-counseling," often gets used for quick sessions, such as breaking into pairs to listen to each other during a meeting

Co-counselor: The person with whom you're splitting time

Healing partner: A person you co-counsel with regularly

Counselor: The person who is in the listening role

Client: The person whose turn it is to speak, the one who receives the attention

Session: Whenever you split time with someone else, that's a co-counseling session, regardless of its length. You could be splitting ten minutes or two hours.

Mini-session: A session that's pretty short, not more than a total of about twenty minutes, ten minutes per person; when doing a mini-session, shorten all the phases of the session described in this manual

Full session: Turns of 50 or 55 minutes for each person

Distress patterns or just **patterns:** The lasting effects of our emotional injuries, which leave us chronically feeling bad or behaving in ways that aren't helpful

Emotional release: This term is highly specific in this manual, and means the five inherent body-based emotional healing processes: laughter, crying, storming, trembling, and yawning. These inherent healing releases are explained in detail in *The Joyous Recovery*.

Discharge: Means the same as "emotional release" in the specific way it's defined above.

GENDER LANGUAGE IN THIS MANUAL

To keep this manual as readable as possible, I have moved more or less randomly between "she," "he," and "they" when referring to an individual.

SECTION I: THE KEY ASPECTS OF EFFECTIVE HEALING ATTENTION

The purpose of splitting time is to use the power of our undivided, loving attention to assist each other to think more clearly, to take necessary initiatives in our lives, and to heal deeply. Through this process we help each other to get free of the effects of hurtful experiences from the past.

I'll begin by summarizing the key skills and guidelines to follow when you are in the listening role.

PAY CLOSE, LOVING ATTENTION

The most important tool for any counselor is the undivided, delighted, loving attention you pay to your client. Reach at all times to be completely present, while still remaining relaxed and natural. Keep your eyes on the client's eyes, whether or not she is making eye contact with you. Strive to lay aside your own concerns and distresses, including things about yourself triggered by her issues.

Focus on your client as a human being, as opposed to focusing on the person's wounds or patterns. Pay attention to her strengths, her goodness, and everything else that you appreciate about her. Remember that with your assistance this person can enter into the healing she needs.

When you sense your client's attention wandering, or notice that she is drifting off into feeling alone, say "hello" to her gently to re-focus her on your caring attention.

ALLOW AND ENCOURAGE DEEP RELEASE

Give your whole-hearted approval and encouragement to laughter, crying, raging, and the other inherent emotional releases. When your client is crying, for example, be calm and supportive. Don't rush in to show concern and help the person "feel better," but at the same time don't congratulate them for crying. Focus instead on paying calm, caring attention without a trace of pity, and observe the client's healing.

Although this attitude toward emotional outpourings may feel uncomfortable at first, you'll find rapidly that it becomes second nature, as if you were rediscovering something you had known all along.

If you notice your client cutting off his own crying, gently encourage him by saying something like:

- * ***Counselor: You're doing exactly what you need to do.***
- * ***Counselor: There's plenty of time — you can keep right on feeling that.***

APPRECIATE AND APPROVE OF THE CLIENT

Remind your client often of what a good person she is, and of specific things about her that you have noticed that you like or appreciate. It's next to impossible to appreciate someone too much as long as you do it in a simple and sincere way.

Let your client know how well you think she's done, given the challenges that life has sent her way. Celebrate her heroic courage and her triumphs. Remind her that she has survived, and that healing awaits her.

Sometimes your client may dispute positive things that you say about her. Don't let this bother you; given a little time you will discover compliments that she can hear. For now, don't argue with her about it; you can just gently say:

* ***Counselor: Well, I see you in a different way.***

and then let it go. Arguing with people about their negative views of themselves tends to push them more deeply into their wounds rather than lifting them out.

You don't need to support or pretend to agree with anything you find offensive. Remember, though, that these are distress patterns talking, and that the human being inside is still fully good and deserves your approval. (If you do run into any important disagreement, keep it out of the session if you can, and set aside some time later to discuss it. A session is not a good time to try to convince someone of something.)

USE SESSIONS ONLY FOR HEALING

Splitting time can have tremendous power when you use sessions for the purpose of healing. There are rich rewards for being disciplined about this. Resist temptations to use sessions for chatting, exchanging information, pursuing intellectual insights into your injuries, and other purposes that don't take full advantage of the power of undivided and structured attention. This manual will explain many ways to use a session for maximum long-run benefit.

BE HUMAN. BE YOURSELF

The more co-counseling you learn, the more you may be tempted to use a flood of different techniques. Remember that the techniques of co-counseling are tools in your hands, but the most important thing is *you*. What counts most are your essential human characteristics: your capacity to be loving, your commitment and patience, your energy, your authenticity.

Work to be hopeful, so that you can better offer that hope to your client. When it's your turn, you can allow yourself to feel the parts of you that are in despair (we all have those parts inside of us). But while it's the other person's turn, you are the anchor; your hopefulness is what provides safety for her to feel her despair and work through it.

Love your client with all your heart and apply your brilliance to helping him have a good

session. Treat him with kindness and tenderness, reaching to soothe the hurt spots still burning inside of him (as they are in all of us).

BE SINCERE

Push yourself to be present and to love your client, but don't push yourself so hard that you're not you anymore. Be sincere and honest. Your client will sense the genuineness of your appreciation and will be touched by it.

TRUST YOURSELF

You have the power at this very moment to make a great difference in your client's life, if you're willing to go forward with confidence in your best thinking. The more you learn about co-counseling the more effective you'll become, but you know enough already to guide someone toward a good session.

COUNTER THE CLIENT'S DISTRESS

As I explained in detail in *The Joyous Recovery*, our healing processes function much best when we have a "balance of attention," meaning that we are strongly feeling aspects of our painful past while at the same time remaining aware of our goodness, our power, and our support system. Healing movement is most likely to happen when we are feeling our wounds yet also feeling aspects of our reality which are opposite to those wounds. We call these positive aspects of our present-time reality "counters to distress."

The counselors fundamental goals are to create safety where the client can feel past pain, while also helping her have enough awareness of counters to her distress that she can successfully discharge that pain and process it in other healing ways.

The concept of countering the client's distress can be easily misunderstood. It does *not* mean telling the client that she isn't feeling what she's feeling, or her feelings aren't real, or her experience hasn't been what it has been. All of those things are called "invalidation" and they will interfere, not assist.

Countering the distress, in contrast, means helping your client to have an experience in the present moment that is opposite to the injuries that happened in her past. Here are some examples:

- When you are loving towards her during the session, you counter times when she was unloved.
- When you give her your full, undivided attention, you counter times when no one was noticing what she was going through.
- When you point out things you appreciate about her, you counter ways she was conditioned to think badly of herself.
- When you touch her gently and respectfully, you counter times when she was starved for contact, and you counter times when, at the other extreme, she was touched violently or

exploitatively.

To counter your client's distress well, you need to recognize what the hurts are and then counter them in a way that gets through to the person on an emotional level. You may have to develop creative ways to get past your client's numbness, hopelessness, and mistrust. Remember also that sometimes the best counter is just to be close to your client, keeping her company and letting her do what she needs to do. Other times you may not be able to give a name to your client's distress, but you will follow your intuition to an effective counter just the same.

This manual will help you learn many different ways to counter distress.

Countering distress doesn't, in itself, bring healing (a point that is widely misunderstood); but it helps to create a context in which emotional discharge and other healing experiences become much more likely to happen.

SOME MISTAKES TO AVOID

There are a few mistakes that counselors commonly make, particularly when they are first learning. Strive to avoid these, but remember also that slipping up once in a while is no big deal.

Don't solve problems for your client

Your client will be able to figure out for herself what action she needs to take once she gets an extended opportunity to think while absorbing your aware attention, to feel what she needs to feel, and to release feelings that have been trapped inside. So avoid giving your client advice or trying to direct her toward particular insights or solutions. Give her small bits of accurate information in cases where she says something that you know for sure is not true, but otherwise stay away from problem-solving unless your client specifically asks for help with that.

The temptation to give advice comes from largely not trusting that the client will be able to develop her own clarity, and not trusting ourselves that we'll be able to assist that clarity in coming.

Don't refer outside of session to anything your partner said during her turn

Complete confidentiality is a prerequisite for building trust. In splitting time, though, we *extend* the concept of confidentiality in an important way: once a session is over, we don't bring up any issue from that session *even to the client*. The client is in full charge of her issues and her deepest feelings, and she gets to retain complete control over when they are mentioned. (This is true any time we split time, even if it's just five-minute turns over the phone; the confidentiality of a mini-session is to be respected just like any other session.)

The desire to connect around similar distresses or to express concern or sympathy outside

of session is understandable, and it can be a tough habit to break. But the more carefully you follow this guideline, the safer the environment for your co-counselor to work on issues that make her feel particularly exposed or vulnerable, knowing that you won't bring up the subject later on. As clients, the safer we feel to take bigger risks, the more we get out of our sessions.

Remember that when anybody takes their turn to speak at an open support meeting or at any other Peak Living Network gathering, that time should be treated the same way you would treat a co-counseling session, even if it only lasts a few minutes. That means that it's all completely confidential, and when it's over, it's over; we don't mention anything the person said unless *they* choose to bring it up.

If something that your client works on triggers you, such that you feel the need to process your own feelings about it, it's okay to go ahead and work on it during your turn; however, *don't refer to the fact that your feelings were brought up by her session* (even if it's kind of obvious). In other words, eliminate the words, "When you said ...," from your vocabulary during your turn. This will help your co-counselor not to get cast back into the feelings she was working on during her turn, which will also help her to remain fully present for you.

Finally, if you are splitting time with a friend of yours, don't bring up any issues from your sessions while spending social time together. Similarly, don't work on issues from your friendship while co-counseling with that person unless you have discussed it ahead of time (*before* the session) and have both agreed that it's okay to bring those issues into your co-counseling. In short, keep your social relationship and your co-counseling relationship completely separate. If people follow these guidelines, they can even split time with their intimate partners without creating problems.

Don't appreciate someone for expressing or releasing feelings

Congratulating your client for crying is akin to praising someone for sweating while she's exercising or telling her what a great job she did growing a scab. It's best not to turn people's healing experiences into accomplishments, especially since we live in a world that has become far too focused on accomplishment. There are many things to appreciate about a person which have more to do with *who she is*, and such appreciations will mean more to her.

I find that people are especially tempted to congratulate men for crying, which just tends to cast them back into being self-conscious about crying. What helps men the most is when you act as if the fact that they're crying is totally normal and no big deal, and you get neither excited nor nervous about it; the more you can act like this is just ordinary life, the better the chance that he'll be able to keep crying.

Our own difficulties with releasing feelings can lead us to feel impressed when other people do it, but it's only a matter of time before we recover our own healing mechanisms.

SECTION II: THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF A SESSION

Splitting time most commonly involves two people; one person is counselor and the other is client for the first half, and then we switch roles for the second half. A session can be of any length, short or long, but we have found that a turn of 50 or 55 minutes for each person allows the client enough time to be able to work into feelings at a useful and powerful depth, without being so long as to exhaust both counselor and client. We typically take a short break between turns.

Co-counselors also do “mini-sessions” in pairs, either in support meetings or over the phone, where the turns may be as short as five minutes per person.

Who takes the role of client first can be decided by any method; a flip of a coin, one person expressing a preference to go first (or second), or by alternating from session to session.

NEW AND GOOD

At the beginning of a session, the counselor invites the client to talk for five or ten minutes about positive news from recent life: things that are going well, events that he is excited about, or successes that he has had. This is a time to celebrate triumphs and tap into sources of pride.

Don't rush the “New and good” phase of a session. By habit we tend to focus on things that hurt or frustrate us, and to overlook causes for hope and joy. If we carry that perspective into the counseling session, we can't develop the kind of balanced outlook that leads to healing. Celebrating and digesting what is good gives us the strength and safety to work on the hard things.

MINOR CHALLENGES OR UPSETS

Next we spend a few minutes on recent pressures, upsets, or irritations that are bothering us a little but aren't the main focus of that session. By giving them a few minutes of quick attention, we are better able to clear them out of the way, freeing us up to attack the larger issues that are affecting us.

THE HEART OF THE SESSION

The bulk of the session is then spent on making progress on some particular issue. To begin, the counselor can help focus this section by asking questions such as:

- * ***Counselor: What do you want to work on today?***
- * ***Counselor: What's on top?"***
- * ***Counselor: What aspect of your life could use some attention?***

Much of the time the client will choose to get at a particular set of feelings in order to release distressing feelings if they are ready to come out. The inherent emotional releases, meaning the healing mechanisms that we come into the world built to use, are:

- **crying**, which primarily heals grief
- **laughter**, which primarily heals lighter fear and anxiety
- **raging**, which primarily heals outrage and anger towards injustice
- **trembling and yelping**, which primarily heal deeper fear and terror
- **yawning**, which is a bit of a mystery but is interwoven with the other four releases, especially in response to physical injuries

The word "primarily" is important here, because the reality of these emotional releases is complex. Crying plays a role in healing rage, raging plays a role in healing fear, and so forth. As you may have observed, people have a tendency to get into laughing fits at funerals, which later prompt feelings of guilt (but they shouldn't feel guilty since it's totally natural). These releases are heavily interwoven.

Opening up these discharge channels to release old pain far exceeds other modalities in permanent healing. These releases function in their own way on their own time line. Don't ever stop releasing emotions in order to go on to other things. Other things can wait; emotional release is precious and powerful.

Some common aspects of these five releases:

- They all occur spontaneously (from birth) and function throughout life until stifled.
- They will not usually kick into gear during a crisis; they tend to function after the crisis has passed, serving to release the feelings prompted by the preceding intensity.
- They are most likely to occur when a person is accompanied by someone who is safe, especially if in physical contact (a hand on you, embracing you)
- They are contagious (you'll tend to want to laugh, or cry, or yawn when you see someone else doing it)
- When working well, they are oddly welcomed despite the associated pain. We often find that we don't want the release to stop (especially when it is particularly deep) because we can feel that significant healing is taking place.
- The systems are interwoven (such as laughter alternating with tears).
- When these releases are deep and prolonged, they lead to dramatically improved mood, higher energy, and increased mental clarity.

There are many other valuable ways to use session time. Some days it's best just to think and reflect, which tend to go better when you are receiving loving attention. Some days you might need to sit quietly and have your counselor hold you. Once in a while you might want to spend the time in "guarded rest," where you lie quietly or even sleep with your counselor's caring attention. Some days it's important to spend your turn celebrating successes or reveling in happy memories.

When you're in the counseling role, it's not your job to decide what is the best way for the

client to use her time. Your job is to make sure that she's *choosing* how to spend her time, and not just riding a certain direction from habit. You empower her by asking:

- * **Counselor: What would be most productive for you to do today?**
- * **Counselor: What would be most helpful from me today?**

In the Peak Living Network, we never presume to know better than the client what is best for her.

GUIDING THE CLIENT BACK TO THE PRESENT MOMENT

When there are about five minutes left in the client's turn (or, for a mini-session, perhaps just one minute or less), the counselor should gently inform the client that it's time to "**get his attention out,**" or "**focus on present time.**" These are expressions for the process of turning attention away from pain and emotional disturbances, and putting it back out into the world. If the client is in the midst of a deep release, you might let him continue for a couple of minutes until he is at a breathing point, and then gradually begin bringing his attention out.

Strive during these few minutes to refocus your client's attention on positive aspects of reality, such as things in which he's expressed interest and things to which he happily looks forward. This helps the client to continue his day unfettered by the weight of the issue from the session, and makes it more possible for him to live outside of his distress between sessions.

Present time techniques the counselor might use include:

- * asking the client:

"What are you looking forward to?"

- * directing the client's attention to sensory experiences (smells, sights, and sounds), such as in:

"Tell me five red things you can see in this room."

"Describe any sounds you can hear at the moment."

"Describe an object you see in this room and say what you like about it."

"Tell me about the last meal you really enjoyed."

- * asking the client entertaining or trivial questions, such as:

"Name as many different kinds of _____ as you can think of (cheese, flowers, birds, wine, trees, animals, pasta)"

- * playing a quick game, such as:

"What would you do if you had the following three objects?" and then name three completely unrelated items (for example, a scooter, three oranges, and a whale) and the client

tries to come up with a way to use them all together.

- * looking at books of photographs or books that are funny.
- * anything else that is light or fun.

Consider making a Present Time Box: Take an empty tissue box (for example) and on small pieces of paper write questions such as the ones above; then fold them before putting them in the box. At the "Present Time" part of the session, you can pull pieces randomly out of the box and ask whatever question you find. Add more fun questions to the box whenever you think of them.

It's important during this final phase of the session not to refer to the issues the client has worked on; for example, avoid congratulating him for the work he did in the session or making comments such as "You went into some deep places today". *The last few minutes are for looking forward into life, not backward into the session that is now ending*; we're striving to leave all that behind until the next time we *choose* to open it up.

Although five minutes is usually about right for this "present time" phase of the session, give it as much time as it takes. If your client is having difficulty getting his attention out of his distress, you might even get up and play physically or run around together for a few minutes to really shake it off. This is especially valuable if your client was feeling intense fear during his turn.

Note: We're not promoting a denial of what's hard in life as can happen with some positive thinking" philosophies. But healing works best when we attend to our hard issues in *focused, intentional ways* at *consciously chosen* times, rather than going through our days stewing in them. We progress most when we dive wholeheartedly into the painful spots, and then dive wholeheartedly into life, avoiding the in-between zones that neither work well as healing nor work well as living.

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE SESSION?

The client and the counselor share responsibility for the progress of a session. Think of the two of you as building an alliance. Even though on the surface it may appear contradictory:

the counselor takes charge of the session
but
the client makes the ultimate decisions.

You might think of the counselor as the manager and the client as the owner of a business. If you're the owner, you hire a manager to take care of things decisively. The same applies to a co-counseling session: the client benefits from having a counselor who takes charge, but the client can step in when changes are needed and she gets the last word on how she wants to use her time.

In particular, it is the counselor's responsibility to move the session through the different phases outlined above, and to keep track of the time. Don't hold back; it's up to the client to tell you if you're being too directive.

THREE-PERSON SESSIONS

Sessions can be done with three (or more) people. Simply divide the time equally among the three of you. During his turn, each person decides which of the other two will be his primary counselor, with the other one acting as coach. I have found that the success of each turn depends on this appointment of a primary counselor, so that the client can focus primarily on one person who takes clear responsibility for the counseling. The additional person (or people) provides extra caring, thoughtful attention.

SECTION III: FUNDAMENTAL COUNSELING TECHNIQUES

The techniques you'll learn in the pages ahead will allow you to jump into being an effective counselor. Even as you become more experienced, you'll return to these basic skills over and over again. With time you'll develop an intuitive sense of which of these to try at a particular moment. Don't overthink it; just try things and see what works.

VALIDATION

Validating your client's feelings is one of the first steps to all meaningful healing work. Validation can be as simple as saying:

- * ***Counselor:* That must have been a very painful experience for you.**
- * ***Counselor:* You had every right to be upset.**

Simple human compassion is a powerful tool.

Another way to offer validation is to reflect back succinctly in your own words what you've heard your client say. This lets her know that you're grasping what she's expressing, for example:

- * ***Counselor:* So, it sounds like you just could never feel sure what your father was going to do next, and that created anxiety for you.**

This reflection also gives your client an opportunity to explain the feeling again if you didn't get it quite right on the first try.

EXPRESS INTEREST AND ACCEPTANCE

Ask questions which show that you want to learn about your client's experience. Let your client know that you grasp the feelings she is describing; and if you don't understand yet, express your interest in learning more. For example, you could say:

- * ***Counselor:* I'd really like to know what things have been like for you.**

During a time when your client is quiet, you might ask:

- * ***Counselor:* What's the thought you're having?**

If you think your client is censoring something, encourage her to share the thought. Reassure her that you won't think less of her from learning the difficult things about her.

APPRECIATION AND SELF-APPRECIATION

Let your client know the things that you appreciate about her. Notice the things that she does well, the ways that she thinks clearly, and the things that she cares deeply about, so that you can reflect those back to her.

Be alert for cues from your client about the ways she feels self-critical, and provide a counter. For example, if a client is emphasizing how badly she handled some situation:

- * ***Counselor:* You're a good person, and you don't deserve to beat yourself up. You did the best you could in incredibly difficult circumstances.**

In addition to hearing words of appreciation from you, your client can benefit from appreciating herself. Encourage her to tell you about the things she is good at, the people she has loved well, and the things she can do physically. Taking pride out loud helps her to notice her own strengths, and counters the societal taboo against feeling good about ourselves.

If appreciations you're expressing to the client don't seem to sink in, try scaling them back; for some people, milder praise actually means more to them because they find it more believable. For example, if your client can't feel it when you say, "I think you're a great person," try saying something lower-key, such as, "You don't seem like a bad person to me."

Be encouraging in the face of despair. For example, if the client says, "There's no point in reaching out, no one would want to be my friend in the state I'm in at the moment," try saying:

- * ***Counselor:* I think you're likeable, and there are certainly people who would want to hang out with you.**

If the client says, "I'm really stupid," you might say:

- * ***Counselor:* I hear that you feel that way but I can see that you're a smart person.**

Notice that this way of putting it also avoids invalidating the client's feelings.

If you find the client having negative reactions to positive comments from you, you might ask him whether something gets triggered for him when he hears praise. There may have been important people in his past who were condescending under the guise of being supportive or who made light of serious losses in his life.

TAKE STANDS

Although the counselor should avoid being critical of the client, *positive* judgment plays an important role. Let your client know what you believe about the way the world should be how people deserve to be treated. For example, when someone describes something that happened to her that was clearly unjust, you can say:

- * **Counselor: You should never have been treated that way; that was completely wrong.**

Notice when your client blames herself for things that happened to her, and point out that those events were not her fault. In cases where she did actually cause the bad circumstances, you can still remind her that she would never have done so if she hadn't already been badly hurt and confused by earlier experiences. For example, you might say:

- * **Counselor: It's understandable that you reacted the way you did, considering what had happened to you in similar situations in the past.**

Sometimes you might paint a picture for your client of how things should have been:

- * **Counselor: People should have been there for you, and they should have listened to you about what was happening to you.**

I've seen times when the client has been deeply moved by having the counselor speak in this way about right and wrong, and about what kind of world the client deserved to live in.

REASSURE YOUR CLIENT THAT THE SITUATION IS SAFE

If your client is trying to process feelings of severe insecurity in the world (often from long ago), an important beginning point is to create a sense of safety *at the present moment*. Have her look around the room, and tell her:

- * **Counselor: You're safe in this room, no one here is going to harm you.**

She may need specific reassurance regarding past attacks that are up for her emotionally at the moment:

- * **Counselor: You can tell the truth here and no one is going to attack you for that. I'm not going to make fun of you about anything you say, or call you a liar.**

If she's expressed that people in the past have pulled away from her as soon as she expressed the reality of what was going on inside her, you might say:

- * **Counselor: I'm not going to vanish. I'm staying right here. You can go ahead and tell me what things have really been like for you.**

It is common for the client to express a fear that the dark realities of what happened to her, or of her feelings about what happened, will either be too much for you to handle or will be too much for her to handle. You might say:

- * **Counselor: I'm going to be fine with hearing your story, don't worry about me. And I'm here to make sure that you're okay too.**

You can help your client work through memories that are making the situation feel unsafe, by asking questions such as:

- * ***Counselor: What feels scary about this session today? What feels like it might happen?***

Another great question to ask a client who is feeling unsafe is:

- * ***Counselor: What do you need me never to do or say?***

Once you ask this question, you must of course honor the trust she puts in you.

People feel unsafe because of ways that they were badly hurt or violated, often by people whom they trusted. So you want to look for ways to draw a sharp line between the present and the past, helping the client to feel the difference between the current safety and the past danger in which she lived.

SEE YOUR CLIENT AS A SURVIVOR AND A THRIVER

Rejoice out loud in the fact that your client made it through treacherous challenges and is now here, enriching your life and enriching the world. Given what she's already endured and accomplished, there's every reason to believe that she'll continue to reclaim her true power in the world and to heal her wounds.

Express this confidence in your client. While she works through difficult feelings, for example, tell her that you know she'll make it to the other end of that dark tunnel. Help her develop the strength to stick to her healing path when she feels tempted to give up because the painful feelings look so vast. Remember that being hopeful about your client is *realistic* and *makes sense*; there is every reason to believe that things are going to get better for her.

LAY ASIDE YOUR OWN FEELINGS OF DESPAIR, REACH FOR HOPE

For the length of your client's turn, put your own negative feelings aside and hang on to a hopeful vision of the future. Communicate this outlook with your facial expressions and tone, in the most sincere and open way possible. There are real reasons to be hopeful about the potential for each person's life to improve, and for the overall state of the world to become much healthier; get in touch with those sources of hope and share them with your client. *The more you're able to get in touch with your own hopefulness, the more safety you'll provide for your client to feel and work through the sources of her own despair.*

When it's your turn to be the client, you'll get a chance to work on your own hopelessness, and it will be the other person's turn to hold onto the hope.

PHYSICAL CLOSENESS AND AWARE TOUCHING

Closeness is essential to effective counseling. Sit near your client, and hold one or both of his hands unless he specifically prefers that you not.

The more you can work through any blocks you have to being physically close to someone in a loving and non-sexual way, the more effective your counseling will become.

Watch for your client's cues that he needs to have you sitting closer, needs you to put your arm around him, or needs to be held. Conversely, be aware of times when he needs more distance from you or needs not to be touched at all. The signals in either direction are usually there, if we pay close attention.

As you develop an ongoing co-counseling relationship, discuss explicitly with your partner what kind of closeness feels comfortable to them when they are client, and what will be the most helpful.

Holding on is often necessary for deep emotional release

When someone is beginning to cry really hard or go into other deep releases, especially in grief or in fear, it's often helpful to her to hold onto you very tightly. This physical closeness and safety will sometimes make it possible for her to just pour pain out like a dam breaking. You might even encourage the person to push her fingertips gently into your back. Notice if your client is holding onto her own hands behind your back -- a common habit among people who have faced heavy abandonment -- and ask her to let go of herself and hold onto you.

The experience of letting old pain just flow out of us, completely unfettered, is a wonderful aspect of human experience, as we feel ourselves healing through this profound mixture of pleasure and pain. These moments come most commonly when someone is holding us.

Don't soothe your client

While you want to give reassurance and a feeling of closeness through touching or holding your client, you don't want to send her "don't feel" or "don't cry" messages. The best way to avoid this is by not stroking, rocking, or patting her; just *hold* her, but keep still. That way you convey the message that it's okay for her to feel and to discharge whatever she needs to.

ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS

Asking questions is the key way to communicate to the client that we care about what he has been through and are eager to hear and learn more about his experience. Work steadily on developing your ability to ask questions that communicate caring, that show that you are really thinking about what the client is saying, and that help to draw him out. Chapter Three of *The Joyous Recovery* includes an extensive guide to asking great questions.

FLEXIBILITY

While all of these techniques are helpful when the moment is right, continue to use your own imagination and intuition. You'll come up with ways to make a difference to your healing partner that don't appear anywhere in this manual. For example, use your humor and your playfulness; if you can get your partner laughing and keep him laughing, you've given him a terrific session. Use silence, too; sitting quietly with your loving and tender attention might be the most soothing and transforming thing in the world to your client.

At times I've had people with whom I was splitting time do some surprising things during my turn. Some started to sing to me. Some drew a quick picture for me. Some created a little story, such as playing a part where they are an adult who comes along when I was a little boy and asks me what's really happening. All of these efforts have made me feel so loved, and have outwitted my injuries in ways that allowed me to experience some powerful healing. Use your creativity as a counselor.

SECTION IV: TECHNIQUES TO ADD AS YOU GET MORE COMFORTABLE

This section introduces counseling approaches that you can begin to use after you've done a few co-counseling sessions and are feeling more comfortable with the basics. Don't hurry to develop a huge tool box; just add a little something from time to time, experimenting and learning as you go.

OFFER THE CLIENT PHRASES TO SAY ALOUD

Try proposing a phrase or a sentence for the client to say aloud, reaching for words that you think will help them to capture the essence of their experience. Often the counselor invites the client to try repeating the phrase a few times and feel what that brings up. The goal is for the phrase to run counter to the client's emotional injuries, and so help unlock feelings and blockages inside of them.

When we offer a phrase, we're not suggesting that the client actually say these words to anyone; the phrase is solely for use within the session as a tool to process feelings. In the Peak Living Network we don't tell people how to handle situations in their lives, keeping advice to zero except when it's specifically requested (and even then keep it minimal).

1) Talking to absent people

The counselor can invite the client to speak out loud to someone in her life as if that person were in the room. For example:

- * *Client:* What my mother did was so unfair!
- * ***Counselor:* What do you wish you could have told her at the time?**
- * *Client:* I wish I could have yelled at her to leave us alone.
- * ***Counselor:* Okay, so how about yelling at her loudly now, exactly what you would have wanted to say, as if she were here?**

A contrasting scenario:

- * *Client:* There are so many things I never got to say to my mother before she died.
- * ***Counselor:* What do you most wish you could have said?**
- * *Client:* I wish I had told her how much I loved her.
- * ***Counselor:* Talk to her now and tell her.**

Talking aloud can counter feelings of powerlessness that we felt during hurtful times, and can counter the isolation we experienced because no one knew what we were going through. It also counters injuries sustained in times when we felt forced to remain silent or couldn't find a way to have a voice.

Short, succinct phrases typically work better than long statements. Encourage your client to

keep it simple; choose a short phrase and say it several times over, feeling into it.

2) Clear statements of emotion

You can give your client phrases to say aloud that might succinctly and powerfully capture some feeling or experience from the past that he's been describing. For example:

- * *Client:* My family never took any of my opinions seriously.
- * ***Counselor:* That must have really hurt. How about saying forcefully now, "Someone should have listened to me!"**

A phrase might also address a current feeling that your client is experiencing:

- * *Client:* I tend not to let people see how things are really going for me.
- * ***Counselor:* Then how about saying to me now, "I'm going through a really tough time these days."**
- * *Client:* (Tries the phrase)
- * ***Counselor:* Okay, now try saying it again, with even more force.**

Keeping phrases short and simple tends to add to their emotional power. Here are a number of other examples that would fit different situations:

- * ***Counselor:* Try saying: "I used to get so scared."**
- * ***Counselor:* Try saying: "I felt so betrayed."**
- * ***Counselor:* Try saying: "You were really important to me."**
- * ***Counselor:* Try saying: "I don't want you to die."**

The last two examples above are for saying to absent people.

3) Phrases that point the client in the opposite direction

You can offer your client phrases that are actually the opposite of how he is feeling, especially when he feels hopeless or bad about himself:

- * *Client:* I'm a walking disaster area these days. Everything I get involved with gets messed up somehow.
- * ***Counselor:* Try sitting up proudly and saying, "I am an exceptionally competent person."**
- * *Client:* (Tries the phrase a few times, laughing each time)

In this example, we're reminding our client that in reality he's very capable, but we're doing so in a playful way so that he can release distress through laughter.

Here's a different example:

- * *Client:* I'm feeling so isolated at the moment.
- * **Counselor:** Try saying, "I'm surrounded by love right now," and imagine what that might feel like.

Here's an example where using a statement that's absurdly opposite can prompt laughter.

- * *Client:* We lived with so much stress about money, we barely made it by.
- * **Counselor:** Try saying: "We used to have four servants and eat out of gold bowls."

The goal of these kinds of directions is not to deny the reality of how the client feels, nor to try to get her to stop feeling that way. The techniques are for the purpose of helping her feel what she feels, but in a form where the feelings will be able to move through her rather than stay stuck, and ideally where she'll be able to discharge them through crying, laughter, or other emotional releases.

4) Asking for the first thought

After your client tries saying a phrase aloud, you might ask:

- * **Counselor:** What was your first thought after saying that?

This technique can help overcome patterns of self-censorship or blocking, leading to the key feeling or memory that is underlying an issue.

WORKING ON CURRENT SOURCES OF DISTRESS

The particular feelings that your client wants to work on may be from the present rather than the past. Current issues can be harder to tackle than old ones because the client experiences the issue as very alive and sometimes despairs of finding a solution. When we can't get distance from a challenge, it can be tough to gain a balance of attention.

One way to "unstick" these challenges is to look for connections to the client's past. In a sense, we can see present pain as an opportunity to get free from the effects of the earlier hurts that it triggers. Here are some of the questions a counselor might ask at such a time:

- * **Counselor:** What does this remind you of?
- * **Counselor:** When was a time in the past when something like this happened to you?
- * **Counselor:** What's your earliest memory when you felt similar to how you're feeling now?

For example, when your client is feeling burdened by critical messages, you could ask:

- * **Counselor:** Who first told you to believe these bad things about yourself?

- * **Counselor: Who sent you the message that nothing in life can stay good for long?**
- * **Counselor: Who taught you that life is unfair?**

While sometimes questions about the past will elicit a clear link, other times your partner will explore a few memories but not be able to identify "the one." To save time, it's best to just focus on one. You might ask, for example:

- * **Counselor: Which of these memories do you feel the closest to in your gut?**

If your client still can't come up with any past connection that seems useful to him, go back to the present issue to explore it more.

RECLAIM POWER

Each person is a potential fountain of true human power, meaning the power to create, to defend herself against harm, and to set things right in her own life and in the world. This creative power stands in contrast to inhumane, abusive "power", which is the "power" to control other people or to destroy, and which is inherently unsatisfying and addictive.

There are various ways to help your client feel powerful; these techniques are particularly helpful in dealing with aspects of life where she has felt victimized.

Tone of voice, posture, and volume

Ask your client to try sitting up straight and speaking in a clear, proud tone of voice. This can be particularly important when she is trying phrases such as the examples given above. Encourage her to speak forcefully and even loudly, especially if she is expressing anger or outrage.

After she moves in this direction for a minute or two, have her relax to observe any feelings triggered by her speaking. Sometimes you won't even have to ask; for example, sometimes clients who are expressing anger will spontaneously burst into tears.

Go back to the past with power

You can invite your client to imagine being back in the painful situation, but this time acting with complete power. Again, posture and tone are important. Encourage him to imagine what it would have been like to stand up strongly for himself at the time: have him speak aloud as if he were back in the past, but now using a tone of voice that is commanding rather than pleading. Encourage him to try to imagine what things would have been like if he'd had the power to set the situation right back then.

Stand up, stomp, pound pillows, push

Using our bodies helps us to feel powerful. You can ask your client to yell an angry phrase while pounding a bed or a pillow, for example. Standing up can help the client to feel less victimized, and makes it possible for her to stomp her foot. You can also have her push against your hand or your shoulders, or grab you by the shoulders and shake you, while she yells out the things she wishes she could have said.

CREATE IMAGES FOR YOUR CLIENT

Your imagination is a powerful tool in counseling. One use is to create images for your client that run counter to his wounds. If you have poetic abilities, so much the better.

Recreate the past

Suppose that your client has just relayed how he got hurt playing, and no one helped him or took his hurt seriously. You might say something like:

- * ***Counselor:* Imagine what it would have been like if someone had come along and noticed how hurt you were. Picture that person carrying you home, laying you down on the couch, and bringing ice to put on your knee. Picture the person stroking your hair while you lay resting there.**

In a different scenario, this imaginary person might actually intervene in an event of mistreatment. For example, you might say to your client:

- * ***Counselor:* Let's imagine that I come into the room.**

and then say (loudly, as if people were present in the room.):

- * ***Counselor:* You stop joking this second about what happened to Victor – he's really hurting!**

It can be moving for the client to hear this acted out, and to imagine what it would have been like if an ally had intervened on his behalf to interrupt the coldness and insults he suffered.

Shoulder the client's burdens

Another surprisingly powerful image is to "hold onto things" for your client. For example, if your

client is anxious about the number of things she has to keep track of, you can say:

- * **Counselor: For the next hour, I'll keep track of everything for you, so that you can just focus on what you want to work on in this session.**

You won't literally take care of anything for her, of course. But imagination is powerful, and the agreement that she is leaving her burdens on your shoulders for an hour can have more of an impact than you might think.

Similar examples include telling a client that you will "hold onto the hope," and then give her permission to feel as completely hopeless as she truly feels; or telling a client who is weighed down by sadness that you will "hold onto part of her pain for a while" so that she can rest.

FOLLOW CHANNELS WHERE THEY GO

In addition to prompting valuable emotional stirring and processing inside of your client, any of these techniques can also lead to eruptions of emotional release. Don't be surprised if your partner starts to laugh hysterically, or sob with lots of tears, or experience other outpourings. Of any activity we can undertake, *these moments of deep discharge bring the deepest and most lasting healing*, so never interfere with releases that are pouring out. Remain loving, calm, and supportive, and allow – in fact, encourage – the client to keep releasing that old pain for as long as he can.

SETTING GOALS

Near the end of a session, but before bringing your client's attention out, you might ask her if she wants to set any goals for the week ahead.

For example, suppose your client has worked on her tendency to take on too much responsibility and to have trouble asking for help. She might now set a goal in the coming week to ask somebody for help at least three times, despite the discomfort that comes up.

Aim for success. The counselor might ask, for example:

- * **Counselor: Is this a realistic challenge to take on right now?**

Avoid shooting too high – she doesn't want to set herself up for failure -- but don't shoot too low either, because a degree of discomfort is crucial to growth.

Next, you might ask:

- * **Counselor: Is there anything that might get in the way of carrying out your goal?**

If she perceives possible obstacles, the two of you can strategize together how she can overcome those obstacles.

To assist in goal setting, you can ask:

- * **Counselor: What would be a good next step for you right now regarding this issue?**

A key principle regarding goal work in the Peak Living Network is:

we never criticize our co-counselors, nor do we express disappointment, when they don't follow through on a goal that they have set for themselves.

Focus instead on helping the person succeed next time, by asking the following questions:

- * **Counselor: What got in the way of doing what you set out to do?**
- * **Counselor: What do you think would have made it possible for you to succeed?**
- * **Counselor: How should we change the plan to make it more likely to work next time?**

For example, to help propel the client through places where he gets discouraged or loses his nerve, perhaps the client needs an extra check-in during the week, such as a mini-session on the phone, or needs to set a smaller goal.

When people feel like they're failing, they tend to do even worse the next time. So work to design plans that will succeed.

(A complete guide to doing goal work can be found in Chapter Fourteen of *The Joyous Recovery*.)

Setting "Directions"

Sometimes we set goals that focus on attitude rather than action, and we call these kinds of goals "directions." The client might decide, for example, to concentrate during the week ahead on remembering that her friends and family are happy to assist her and that she has a right to expect help from people. With this kind of goal, your client focuses on setting aside her usual assumptions in order to operate from a more accurate set.

You might ask:

- * **Counselor: What direction do you want to keep in mind over the next few days?**

It's fine for the counselor to propose a direction, whereas goals should come only from the client. The difference is that proposing a direction doesn't involve giving any advice about how to handle specific situations or what to do; it only recommends an outlook, ideally one that runs counter to limiting messages that the client carries from old injuries. Directions are formulated

to break patterns, not to “solve” problems.

WORKING THROUGH HEAVINESS AND NUMBNESS

Some memories can be so painful that when we attempt to tell about what happened or process the surrounding feelings, we may feel ourselves sinking under the weight of it all. We all have days of exhaustion or discouragement, when it’s hard to get in touch with any place inside of ourselves that feels powerful or hopeful, or when we feel numb and distant from any feelings at all. Here are a few suggestions you might try as the counselor, if your partner is in one of those heavy, stuck-feeling places.

Tell a third-person story

Your client can get some distance from an overly painful story by telling it as if it happened to someone else. For example, he could start a story from his childhood, “There once was this little boy, and he...” and continue the story in this way. I have watched this technique prompt surprisingly powerful results.

A similar technique is for the client to tell his story as though it happened to an animal: “There once was a little puppy and this puppy had a very cruel teacher.” Telling the story this way may enjoy the additional benefit of prompting laughter.

Use detailed memory

Telling a story from the past in minute detail can puncture layers of numbness and forgetfulness, bringing memories to life. For example, you can help your client open her feelings from a memory by asking her to try to remember the color of the walls in the room, what she was wearing, the odors in the house, or the exact words she heard others say.

Imagine the missing pieces

In cases where your client is unable to remember some important details of an experience, or can’t remember any part of what happened, ask him to guess what might have occurred. If he can’t even guess, ask him to invent a possible scenario without worrying about accuracy. *We sometimes can do profound emotional processing and healing using made-up stories.* Don’t worry whether the events really happened or not; the painful feelings elicited are coming from *something* that really did happen, and the story is creating an opportunity to heal them.

Sometimes the processing of feelings from an invented story will incite genuine memories to crystalize over time. I have experienced this process myself and have observed it in other people, especially in cases where the person releases strong feelings about the imagined

event.

The client speaks to his or her own younger self

Your client can try to picture himself as an adult entering a scene where his younger self was in pain. He then speaks to the child to encourage and comfort him. You can offer to join your client in this effort, as in

:

- * ***Counselor: So this little boy is walking home from school alone. Let's catch up with him and talk to him.***

Through this imagery your client can envision breaking the child's isolation, and is allowed to say to the child the precise things he wishes someone could have said to him at the time.

LIGHTNESS TECHNIQUES

Sometimes, despite all your efforts, your client will simply "sink," meaning that the distress weighing on him seems to win temporarily, and that day he gets stuck in depression or hopelessness. At a certain point it becomes valuable to accept that such day is not favorable for deep work. Rather than having both the counselor and the client hit up repeatedly against frustration, take a step back and spend the rest of the client's time on lightness techniques. Following are a few ideas you might try.

Pleasant memories

Ask your client to describe a happy memory for you. If her mind goes blank (which can happen when we try to think of something positive in the midst of feeling "sunk"), give her suggestions for categories of pleasant memories, such as:

- A time when your family went to a park or a beach (or other favorite place)
- A time when you made a new friend
- A time when you had fun with friends doing something you weren't allowed to do
- Happy memories involving your pets or other people's pets
- Happy memories involving favorite relatives

You can think up additional categories of your own. If you narrow down the question in this way, even people in dark places emotionally can remember happier times. Once the positive memory comes up, ask her to tell you every single detail she can remember.

Items of current interest

Another approach is to ask your client about something that is of particular interest to her. For example, if you know that your client makes quilts, ask her to tell you all about quilt making, including why it means so much to her.

Embarrassing stories

There is endless potential fun from recounting embarrassing stories. And the client tends to reap a double benefit: not only do such stories lead to a lighter mood, they also prompt discharge as they make us laugh and shiver.

Cuddling

When enough trust has been built in your co-counseling relationship, there may be times when you sense that your client might need a hug or need to hold onto you for a while, and you can suggest this to him.

Present time techniques

All of the techniques that I described earlier for getting a person's attention out of distress at the end of his turn are also useful for lifting someone who has sunk into oozy feelings. You can draw your client's attention to sights and sounds in the environment, put on some music, get up and walk (or run) around the house or yard, play a word game, or anything else that is fun or sensory.

COUNSELORS CAN ASK FOR HELP!

You are always free to ask for help when feeling like you don't know how to counsel someone effectively. *It's particularly important to ask for help if your client is in a crisis that is giving her the urge to hurt herself or other people.*

Let your partner know that you feel the need to talk to someone, and decide together who that person will be. It might be another person from the Peak Living Network or a mental health professional.

If your client won't give you permission to speak with anyone else, you will need to break her confidentiality against her wishes if she is talking about harming herself or someone else.

Don't leave yourself isolated with a burden of responsibility; it will put an unfair burden on you and it won't help your client. (See also page 32, "Reflection Sessions and Supervision.")

SECTION V: A FEW ADDITIONAL CO-COUNSELING CONCEPTS

In this section I briefly cover some concepts about splitting time that are valuable for everyone.

IF SOMETHING WORKS, KEEP DOING IT UNTIL IT DOESN'T

When you discover a technique or a statement that has a powerful or useful effect on your client, repeat it again when the effect starts to wear off, and use it over and over again until it stops working.

For example, if your client says a phrase aloud and then begins to laugh, have him say the same thing again when he stops laughing. And if it makes him laugh again, have him say it a third time.

I've had counselors use the same technique with me for an hour. I remember a time, for example, when I was splitting time with a friend and he said to me (referring to a really hard time I had gone through that I was addressing):

- * ***Counselor: When those feelings were going on for you, you were doing great to just be able to keep putting one foot in front of the other.***

Every time he said that, I would start crying hard and continue for a few minutes. Whenever I stopped, he would look at me with a loving sparkle in his eyes and say the same thing again. I cried like a baby for practically the whole hour (and felt like a new person for days afterwards from getting such a deep release)..

You may get an idea that you think will deepen the experience even more for your client, and it's fine to try out your idea. For example, a person who is crying will often cry more deeply if you place your hand on her arm or if you hold her. However, if you try that (or try anything new) and she seems distracted by what you did, or if she was releasing feelings before but now she stops, discontinue what you *are* doing and go back to what you *were* doing.

A technique may not only work repeatedly within a session, but also through many sessions over time. For example, a dear woman named Kathleen with whom I split time every week for many years created the following scenario as I described events of my nine-year-old self:

- * ***Counselor: Okay, so let's say it's back then and there you are, sitting in the backyard by yourself and no one in your family is noticing what you're going through. But now I come walking along and I see you sitting back there, and I walk over to you. And I say, "Hi there, little guy. I can see that you're sure feeling sad today. How about telling me what's going on?"***

I would imagine what it would have been like for me if this loving stranger had come up to me and said these things and I would cry hard. Over the years we periodically returned to this

image to see if it was ready to work its magic again, and often it was. I unloaded so much accumulated childhood injury through the hours of crying that this one scenario brought me.

REMIND YOUR CLIENT THAT THE PRESENT IS NOT THE PAST

Our distresses often cause us to have trouble distinguishing emotionally between the past and the present. Draw your client's attention to this distinction whenever it's appropriate. For example:

- * *Client:* I felt so totally alone after my sister got married. There wasn't a soul in the world for me.
- * ***Counselor:* I get it what a really hard time that was. Things are very different now, though. There are so many people who care about you now.**

However, remember to draw these distinctions in order to help the client process and release his feelings, *not* to convince him not to feel them. This is a crucial distinction between the PLN approach and some other "positive thinking" philosophies.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

As I explained earlier in this manual, and in more depth in *The Joyous Recovery*, deep discharge tends to happen when we're feeling pain from an old injury but we're simultaneously aware of present realities that run counter to that injury, providing us the strength and hope necessary to have a deep release.

However, these sources of strength that allow us to enter a deep healing place are sometimes mysterious. You may, for example, have a time when the client is saying, "I'm a horrible person," while he cries his heart out. *Don't argue with success*; for example, don't start insisting, "No, no, that's not true about you!" If he is discharging deeply everything is working just the way it should, so don't get in the way of it.

What is giving him the strength to sob so deeply? Most likely it's simply his awareness of your loving presence, combined with the fact that you're letting him feel what he feels. This is crucial: it may be such a relief to him to be with someone who stops trying to talk him out of his feelings, and that may be why he's able to discharge so deeply! So if you were to rush in at this point for the purpose of persuading him that he's not so bad, you would become one more person sending him the message that he shouldn't say aloud what he really feels.

SPEND THE SESSION ON WHATEVER IS MOST HELPFUL

When it's your turn to be the client, there are many useful ways to use your time. So don't spend your time trying to fight your way into deep feelings on a day when you can tell such feelings just aren't going to come. Instead, enjoy your counselor's loving attention while you:

- * Accomplish something that's you've been having a hard time doing by yourself, such as making a difficult phone call or tackling an overwhelming pile of bills (yes, this is a completely legitimate, in fact excellent, way to use session time to propel your life forward).
- * Think through a challenge in your current life that you need to figure out.
- * Share about something large or small that's important to you, such as a book or a movie that meant a lot to you, or an interest that you have in life; tell about activities in life that you feel passionate about or that bring you joy.
- * Celebrate successes you've had, whether recent or far in the past.
- * Tell the story of your life (I believe everyone should undertake to do this at some point, though it will take a few sessions).
- * Sit quietly and be held.
- * Listen to your counselor sing to you (I've had a few co-counseling partners who loved to have me sing to them during their turn).

TAKE RISKS

Don't hesitate to propose something that may seem unusual, such as pulling out a box of crayons and asking your client to draw a picture, or seeing if your client wants to listen together to one of his favorite songs during his turn, or anything else that your gut tells you might get things moving inside the client. Creativity in counseling is great.

There's no harm in proposing things to try; your partner can simply tell you if she doesn't want to try your idea. Try not to allow the fear of making mistakes to lead you to be a timid, conservative counselor. If you have a hunch, try it out.

HELPING MEN CRY

Many men have been heavily conditioned to perceive crying as shameful and unmanly, and may go years at a stretch without crying at all. If a man brings up his inability to cry, here are some things you can have him try:

- Have him explore his childhood memories of times when people laughed at him, hurt him, or threatened him for crying; encourage him to take time to process his feelings from those memories, using other discharge channels that might be more open for him (especially laughter).
- Encourage him to tell stories from his past in a lot of detail and just let his feelings be whatever they are. Men tend to be more likely to cry when they aren't trying to.
- If he keeps shifting the subject into ideas, try to guide him back to telling you how things have felt to him.
- Men can often benefit from just sitting quietly, and should be invited to take some session time to do so.

- *Don't get excited if he starts to cry*, which is almost guaranteed to stop the tears. Instead, treat his crying as completely normal and unsurprising. And don't congratulate him for crying, which will make it harder for him to cry the next time. Just love him.

WOMEN AND ANGER

Women tend to cry more easily than men (though they still often have trouble allowing themselves to cry *hard* and *at length*). What you may find more pronounced, though, is that women are conditioned not to express or release anger.

When you see your female client back off from a point of anger, support and encourage her to go ahead with it and let it come out in its full force. She will often find it frightening to do so, and it can be helpful for her to review the experiences that taught her that it's not safe to be angry.

Women are also conditioned to feel responsible for other people, and so to conclude that it's mean or unfair to express anger or outrage. You can help overcome this block by reminding her that she is a valuable person, and that she has a right to her anger and to other bad feelings toward people. She doesn't owe it to the world to 'be nice.' Also remind her that the person she's expressing rage towards isn't even present at that moment, so how could it hurt to let it out?

Encourage her to give physical form to her anger by pushing or wrestling you. She may want to alternate between times of pushing you away and times of pulling close to you again; as her feelings move between anger and fear.

THE CLIENT IS YOUR BEST SOURCE OF GUIDANCE

It isn't up to the person in the counseling role to always have ideas about what to try next. Your partner has a wealth of information about herself, and often she can figure out what would be most helpful for her. Don't hesitate to ask questions such as:

- * ***Counselor: What do you need from me right now?***
- * ***Counselor: What would be helpful to hear me say?***
- * ***Counselor: Where do you think you need to head now in today's session?***
- * ***Counselor: Is there something you need to say aloud to this person you've been talking about?***

REFLECTION SESSIONS AND SUPERVISION

A healing partnership benefits from occasional reflection on how things are going. I recommend setting aside thirty or forty minutes every three months for this reflection. If there is anyone available from your healing network, invite her to join you during the Reflection Session for extra support.

Begin by each co-counselor taking five or ten minutes to talk about what is *going well* for you during your turns when you split time with this partner.

Second, each of you takes about ten minutes to talk about what your co-counselor could do that would help you more, and what they are doing that is interfering or that you would prefer they not do.

Third comes the moment for either person to bring up any difficulties or tensions that are affecting the relationship. For example, this could be a time to raise issues about chronic lateness, or frequent cancellations of sessions, or anything else that's bothering you or affecting your enthusiasm for splitting time with the person.

Last, finish by each co-counselor sharing a few things that you appreciate about the other person and about your relationship. It's important to always end on this note.

If a third person attends your Reflection Session to support you and your partner, remember that the time they gave needs to be traded. You could do in one of the following ways:

- Sitting in to support them the next time they do a Reflection Session with a co-counseling partner
- Giving them a counseling turn now of 25 or 30 minutes

“Supervision”

I also recommend that each long-term co-counseling pair agree on a third person from the network to be their "supervisor". (It's great if this person has quite a bit of experience but not necessary.) You are agreeing that confidentiality will not be entirely strict with respect to your supervisor, so that either of you is free to contact the supervisor for support or problem-solving regarding issues in your sessions that you're finding difficult. The supervisor agrees to keep everything shared by either of you fully confidential.

I recommend that each person in the PLN network volunteer to act as supervisor for at least one other counseling pair. In that way, we can make sure that this role is shared equally by everyone, which is one of the central goals of our network.

GET GOOD SESSIONS FOR YOURSELF

Although practicing technique is helpful, counseling is ultimately an intuitive skill. The more you have positive experiences as a client, the better feel you will develop for how to be helpful when you're in the counseling role. Thus a key to becoming a good counselor is to get good sessions for yourself regularly.

You'll learn volumes about how to assist someone else by discovering what works for you. In addition, you become a more present and effective counselor by working your way through important pieces of your own distress.

If you find that you are having difficulty counseling someone well, take some session time to explore any feelings that get in the way of you thinking clearly about that person. I recommend doing this with a different partner, however, as it can be quite triggering for your counseling partner to listen to you talking about what you find hard about trying to assist them!

SECTION VI: BOUNDARIES AND ETHICS IN HEALING PARTNERSHIPS

A healing partnership is a special and potentially powerful connection between two people. Due to its agreed-upon structure and guidelines and the shared assumptions about human nature and human needs, often we are able to be unusually open with each other in a short time.

However, this rapid emotional intimacy carries with it considerable responsibility, as it also creates the potential for people to get hurt. When we open ourselves to someone, bad experiences from the past can get triggered in powerful ways, as we all carry a legacy of hurts from abandonment, breaches of trust, and abuses of power.

And unfortunately some people have strong addictive pulls toward sex or power and therefore can cause harm to others. We can't always tell immediately who they are.

So it's important for participants in the Peak Living Network to respect a clear set of boundaries and ethics.

HEALING PARTNERSHIPS ARE FOR HEALING

My first recommendation is that you not start friendships or dating relationships with people you meet through PLN until you have known them for at least a year, and perhaps not even then. *Use the connections you make through PLN for healing*, maintaining the same kind of boundaries outside of sessions that a professional therapist would keep with a client.

A healing partnership develops closeness very differently from the way a friendship does; we reveal ourselves at an unusually rapid pace, and we interact in a highly structured way that brings out the best in people. This serves a wonderful healing purpose, but it doesn't lay the groundwork for a successful social relationship. I have participated in a number of co-counseling networks over the years and have observed how quickly relationships tend to fall apart once participants start to socialize.

Even in cases where a social or business relationship works out reasonably well between people who met through co-counseling, their relationship can still have a negative impact on their healing network. Why? Because it leads people in the network to question each other's motives for participating. We all benefit from being able to trust that other people are not there to shop for friends, lovers, or clients.

By respecting clear boundaries, you can make your co-counseling sessions, support groups, and other PLN activities uniquely safe places to be entirely yourself, without having to be concerned with the additional responsibilities that a social relationship brings. You can share information about yourself without worrying about how it will affect your relationship in

the future. You can also take advantage of that safety to work on healing unmet needs from the past (“frozen needs”) that could be making you feel compelled to socialize or to be sexual with your healing partners.

We are all lovable and can find good friends

A quite different reason not to form social relationships with people you first come to know through the Peak Living Network is that we want to use our healing network to make the changes needed in our lives, not to avoid that work. Forming close friendships and relationships of all kinds is one of life’s key challenges. To find closeness we have to push through timidity, self-doubt, and fear of rejection. Splitting time can help us triumph in these areas. But if we rely on our healing network as a source of close relationships we’re avoiding the growth needed to learn how to do so for ourselves.

SEXUAL CONTACT IS INAPPROPRIATE IN THE PLN CONTEXT

It is inappropriate for people to be sexual with each other when meeting to co-counsel or while participating in any other Peak Living Network activity. This is the clearest and most dangerous boundary violation. In the times we live in *everyone* carries significant emotional injury with respect to sex and our bodies, and thus the potential is high for people to be emotionally reinjured in the trusting environment of a healing network. Sexual contact can accentuate power issues, especially between men and women.

The healing process of a survivor of abuse suffers particular damage when a healing partner has sexual contact with her. Lingering distress from her abuse experiences can lead a survivor to consent to sexual interactions that she doesn’t genuinely want. Even when a sexual advance is successfully warded off the experience can cast a survivor back into feelings of mistrust toward others and lack of safety in her own body, feelings she is working hard to escape.

There are various ways in co-counseling to work on sexual issues that are bothering you and to heal from past experiences of sexual injury. However, *none of these ways involves having any actual sexual contact while co-counseling. Don't trust anyone who tells you that sexual interactions with him or her will help your healing; it never works.* And anyone who would try this maneuver is being selfish and not actually thinking about your healing at all.

Let someone know if your boundaries are not respected

If someone you know through the Peak Living Network presses you to have sex with them, or in other ways fails to respect your physical or emotional boundaries, please do not keep the interaction secret; let other people know, including other people in the network. This is important so that you are not left alone with the experience and so that your local network can respond to the inappropriate behavior.

A HEALING PARTNERSHIP IS A PROFOUNDLY VALUABLE RELATIONSHIP

I have sometimes seen people get focused on what they are losing by choosing not to spend social time with someone from their healing network whom they love or care about. As a result of that outlook, they are failing to notice how much they gain. A healing partnership is one of the greatest ways to be close to someone else.

Our lives have many different kinds of relationships, and they are all valuable in different ways: friends, lovers, relatives, teacher-student, clergy-congregant, coach-athlete, and so forth. Is your relationship with your pastor a missed opportunity because you aren't hanging out socially? Are you missing an opportunity because you aren't sleeping with your personal trainer? Of course not. Value each important relationship in your life for the role it plays.

A healing network is also a particular type of *community*, different from a town, company, or bowling league. Your entire network benefits from the increased safety that comes from maintaining clear boundaries. And conversely, your entire network may be affected negatively by the tensions and disruptions that typically arise when people decide to socialize with their co-counselors.

WHAT IF I WAS ALREADY CONNECTED TO A PERSON BEFORE WE WERE IN THE PEAK LIVING NETWORK?

If you've already formed a significant connection with a person, adding the element of co-counseling usually works fine.

This is an interesting dynamic. Relationships tend to fall apart when people add a social relationship to a healing partnership; whereas moving in the opposite direction, adding a healing partnership to an already-existing social relationship, often works out great. And even if it doesn't, it rarely causes any harm to the friendship.

So by all means split time with your friends, relatives, and lovers. Here are a few guidelines to follow in co-counseling with people who are in your life:

- Keep the time even, just as you would with any other healing partner. If a friend asks you for a counseling turn one day and there isn't time afterwards to switch roles, put that time "in the bank" and take a turn for yourself of a similar length with that person on another day. Making sure that splitting time stays roughly even is crucial to making our healing relationships work.
- Don't start a session if there is tension between you; at best the session will be a waste of time and at worst it will deepen the bad feelings. If you need to talk in order to clear the air, then talk. If you have some time left after you're done talking things out, then split the remaining time; otherwise, reschedule your session for another day.
- Keep your healing relationship and your social relationship completely separate. In other words, while you are spending social time together, don't ever mention anything that either of you has said while co-counseling. Those sessions are still confidential and are not open

to being commented on.

- Don't bring tensions or issues from your social relationship into your co-counseling sessions, except in cases where the two of you have agreed to that in advance, *before* the session started. So unless you have decided together to work on your feelings about your relationship during your turn that day, take your issues from that relationship to a different healing partner.

What about after a year goes by?

As I said above, I recommend waiting at least a year before socializing with someone you've come to know through PLN. Usually by the end of that year, the urge to hang out (or date) has passed: the two people have settled into being co-counselors and they decide to leave it that way. But what if a year has passed and you're still convinced that the two of you would be great friends or even dating partners?

First, make a commitment to spend a substantial number of co-counseling sessions working on the feelings that give you the urge to change your relationship. The point of this emotional work is to make sure that you aren't being driven into this decision by old hurts and frozen needs from the past. Take into account that you're gambling with your healing relationship, because if your social connection turns sour you won't be comfortable splitting time together anymore either. (It can get hard to even go to support groups or workshops together.)

Be open about this decision with other people in your healing network, because they can be affected by what you decide. Get their thinking and support. No secrecy.

If you do decide to go forward, *move slowly*. Don't launch immediately into spending tons of time together. A co-counseling relationship does not build the same groundwork that a social relationship does; you need to carefully build those early stages – which won't seem necessary since you feel like you already know each other well – of the relationship will blow up on you. If either of you starts to feel misgivings, go back to just being co-counselors and network members together.

SECTION VII: TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR OWN HEALING

For the process of splitting time to work well, it is important to find a partner with whom you like to work, to whom you can gradually grow closer, and who is open to learning how to counsel you better and better over time.

At the same time, your progress toward the kind of healing you desire depends as much on you as it does on your co-counselors. So we now turn to looking at how to get the most out of your own turns as client, and out of your overall participation in the Peak Living Network.

CHOOSE THE BEST HEALING PARTNER FOR YOU

For long-term work, it's important to choose a co-counselor whom you like, trust, and respect. Avoid doing sessions with someone because you feel bad about what they're going through in life or because of any other motivation except that you believe *you* will get a good session. A local PLN hub functions most successfully when people do not rescue each other (except for brief periods during an exceptional crisis in one person's life), and instead make sure that every interaction works well for both people. Co-counseling is a two-way system.

The more you love your healing partner and feel inspired by him or her, the better sessions you'll have. Counseling skills are important, but are not a substitute for deep mutual fondness and respect.

NURTURE AND TREASURE YOUR HEALING PARTNER

Attend thoughtfully to your relationship with your co-counselor. Both of you will benefit if you do so. Begin by honoring the basics:

- Be consistently ready to start on time.
- Don't cancel sessions at the last minute (except for true emergencies).
- Don't interrupt sessions for phone calls (your service should be turned off during an in-person session; don't respond to incoming calls during a phone session).
- Don't make surprise changes in the length of the session (as in, "Oh, by the way, I have to be finished in an hour instead of two hours today").
- If you are hosting an in-person session, make the environment as visually appealing and distraction-free as possible. Both people will have a more productive session in a room that is clean and tidy with some attractive and interesting things to view. A room with a hopeful and positive atmosphere helps us to get into a healing state of mind.

Be fully present during the other person's turn, thinking about her and not about your own concerns. The better session you give to your partner, the more attention she'll be able to pay to you during your turn.

YOU AND YOUR PARTNER ARE A TEAM

During your turn, take the attitude that you and your co-counselor are *thinking together* about how best to help you.

Be aware of old wounds that can send mental messages such as, “No one’s ever going to really be there for me, so I’d better do it all myself.” This pattern can lead us to resist accepting support or suggestions from our co-counselor, feeling that all his ideas are wrong.

Another obstacle is an almost opposite internal voice, one that says, “I’m helpless and victimized so my co-counselor had better help me quick, and if they don’t I’ll be crushed with disappointment.” These old feelings can lead us to put the full weight of responsibility on the co-counselor, transferring the work of thinking about who we are and what we need away from ourselves, and then to come out feeling that the other person let us down.

Instead, aim for a creative, synergistic process in which counselor and client put their heads together to take on the same task. Think of each turn as being a time when the two of you cooperate to help one of you -- the person whose turn it is -- to heal.

ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED

Give your partner as much information as you can about how best to assist you. Ask him to:

- sit closer or move farther away from you
- repeat a particular phrase that you feel the need to hear
- reassure you about issues when you are doubting yourself or feeling bad about yourself

If you have a sense of the direction you need to go, put it out there:

* *Client:* I think I need to try getting really angry about this.

In this way your partner can start thinking in a specific direction to develop ideas for you to try.

Speak up also if:

- your partner is doing something distracting or bothersome during your turn, or
- you think your partner is taking you off in the wrong direction.

Similarly, make adjustments to suggestions made by your counselor that are helpful but don’t quite hit the spot. For example, if you’re offered a phrase to try, don’t hesitate to change the wording of it to more precisely fit what you’re feeling or to better capture what you need to powerfully express.

Be open to suggestions; but at the same time remember that it’s your turn and you’re the ultimate judge of what you need. Don’t spend much time on an approach that you can tell isn’t

going to work that day.

BE COMMITTED TO YOUR HEALING PARTNER

Work hard to support your co-counseling relationship, and stick with it through hard times. Although you will sometimes reach a point where it makes sense for you to move on to co-counseling with someone else, don't give up easily. And, above all, don't disappear mysteriously. If the sessions you are doing together have stopped working for you, communicate clearly about your difficulties and seek outside help and support (see page 32 above, "Reflection Sessions and Supervision"). When the time does come to move on, do so lovingly, appreciating your partner for who they are and for what they have done well with you.

STRIVE TO LIVE OUTSIDE OF YOUR WOUNDS

The quality of your co-counseling sessions depends on how you live your life *between* sessions. Push yourself to live with courage, to go against the grain of your distress patterns, to maintain clarity, and to take good care of yourself.

Life is more unsettling when you break out of the patterns thrust on you by old wounds, but it's also more satisfying and leads to feeling better about yourself. This process in turn gives you more capacity for deep healing work during your sessions, including more access to the crucial emotional releases.

Living in clarity feeds healing, and healing feeds the ability to live in clarity. When you get this loop going, the sky's the limit. Between sessions, focus on your strengths and joys to the fullest extent you can, not on your pain and self-doubt. When distress starts to pull at you, remind yourself that session time is coming soon so it's okay to lay those feelings aside for now.

In your attempt to live outside of distress patterns, don't necessarily try to do *more*. As we heal from old injuries, we find an increase in the *quality* of what we do, but not necessarily in the *quantity*. Respect your need for rest, relaxation, and regeneration.

AVOID SUBSTANCES THAT INTERFERE WITH HEALING

Drug or alcohol use is not conducive to healing. Alcohol and mind-altering drugs mask our feelings, slow down our processing, and interfere with emotional discharge or keep it from working at all. For example, people can cry hysterically for hours while drunk and nothing actually gets processed or healed. It appears that there's something inherently distressing about being under the influence of a chemical, so that old injuries get re-recorded as the person attempts to discharge them.

Caffeine, nicotine, and even sugar can affect the quality of a person's attention. You can

notice a difference in how fully present your healing partner seems to be just from their having had a cup of coffee within the previous couple of hours. Strive to come to sessions not under the effects of any of these drugs, and enlist the support of your co-counselors in eliminating chemical dependency from your life over time.

Note: It's unclear to what extent psychiatric drugs interfere with discharge and other aspects of emotional healing. Many people complain that their psych meds are interfering with even feeling their normal range of emotions, never mind being able to release them. But I've also spoken with a few people who report succeeding in doing significant healing work while on a psych med. Therefore, PLN neither encourages nor discourages the use of psych meds; you should make your own decisions about what you find helpful. However, if you do decide to go off of psych meds, we recommend doing so gradually and with plenty of emotional support. (I recommend Will Hall's guidelines to weaning carefully off of psych meds.)

MAKE SPLITTING TIME A PRIORITY IN YOUR LIFE

Given the frantic pace at which so many of us live, it's easy to feel that it's impossible to set aside time for healing. But co-counseling sessions *save more time than they use*, due to the increased clarity, energy, and initiative they produce. To experience the full benefit of a healing partnership, I recommend that you have a full session once a week where you get a turn of 50 or 55 minutes, and at least two additional phone mini-sessions in between.

At the same time, I recognize that some life situations make it unrealistic to hope for a weekly full session (for example, single parents on tight budgets). These people will need to catch time for co-counseling piecemeal here and there as their schedule permits; you can still get surprising benefits from splitting time.

USE THE TELEPHONE

When distress is leaning hard and you can't seem to shake it off, or at any other time when you crave support, call someone from PLN for a phone mini-session. A turn of just five or ten minutes can make a difference in how you feel and in your ability to do what you need and want to do that day.

The most important time to call is precisely when you feel that you're in too bad of shape to do so, or feel that calling won't do any good. These are the moments when feelings are available and ready for productive work, and when old wounds from hopelessness or abandonment can be powerfully healed.

MAKE YOUR GOAL TO LIVE BETTER, NOT TO FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE

Breaking out of patterns caused by old wounds is uncomfortable. But if we can keep making better decisions and handling our lives in more daring and creative ways, and find time for

emotional healing and support, our lives become more and more *satisfying*. A life of deep connection to ourselves, each other, and our world, will tend to be a turbulent life but the upheaval is so worth it.

PARTICIPATE IN, AND BUILD, YOUR LOCAL PLN HUB

In addition to two and three-person co-counseling sessions, local hubs of the Peak Living Network include such resources as support groups, online discussions, classes on counseling techniques, occasional workshops, and local newsletters. In addition to your weekly co-counselor, you may have two or three others -- or any number -- with whom you meet for sessions less often, thus building a wider base of support and connecting further to your local hub.

The national Peak Living Network office is here to help you grow and develop your local hub and to help you start one if none exists near where you live. Check out all of our resources at **PeakLivingNetwork.org**, including listings of local groups and guidelines for starting a group. You can also send inquiries and requests for assistance to PeakLivingNetwork@juno.com.

BALANCE YOUR SESSIONS BETWEEN EMOTIONAL PROCESSING, CELEBRATION, AND PLANNING

There are many ways to split time productively, as mentioned earlier in this manual. These fall roughly into three categories:

- emotional processing, which often includes the pursuit of deep discharge
- noticing and celebrating what has gone well in the past and what's going well now
- setting goals for the future and planning your direction

Over periods of weeks, make sure that you're getting to all of these aspects of the healing process.

At least once every three months set aside a full session for goal work, in addition to spending a few minutes on it regularly in other sessions.

LIVE A LIFE THAT YOU CAN BE PROUD OF

The more you can live your life in a way that makes you feel good about yourself, the better sessions you'll have. Work bravely to further your own interests and the interests of those you love. Resist oppression -- your own and that of others -- wherever you see it, in whatever way you can. At all times do the very best you can, and then forgive yourself freely for what you are not (yet) able to accomplish. Notice if you get caught up in attempts to please or impress other people; if so, return to yourself, for you are your own best guide and measure.

SECTION VIII: HEALING FROM OPPRESSION AND INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

As explained in *The Joyous Recovery*, oppression and its relationship to healing is a profound and complex subject. The majority of our deepest and most long-lasting emotional wounds have their roots in systems of societal oppression toward targeted groups. Especially common are the devastating effects of systematic cruel treatment that exploits and dehumanizes people for being children, females, people of color, and members of the working class, as well as many other groups that are destructively targeted.

Even emotional injuries that people do not perceive as related to oppression tend to tie back in one way or another to these systems.

While we work to heal our internal wounds from oppression, we also have to attend to the reality that oppression is rampant *in the world* and must be stopped *in the world*. Since our personal healing is linked to taking back our power, we will hit limits to how deeply we can heal through our sessions unless we are also actively combatting oppression around us.

OVERCOMING THE DIRECT EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION

The first step to healing from experiences of oppression is to describe the experience. Tell it in its full force and impact, without sanitizing it in any way. Your choice of co-counselor for this work is important; people often find that they have the greatest safety when their co-counselor has experienced the kind of oppression that they are addressing. For example, people of color often report that they can more effectively process the effects of racism with a co-counselor who is also a person of color, perhaps even someone who is from their particular group (e.g. African-American, Latino/a, Indigenous).

At times, though, people crave the sense of “making someone listen to what it has been like,” so for that work they prefer a co-counselor who is from the dominant group.

Taking complete pride in yourself gains even more importance when working on experiences of oppression. And it becomes crucial for the co-counselor to take a clear, unbending stand against the mistreatment.

If your client is working on oppression carried out by a group that you’re part of, her statements may sometimes feel like an attack on you. For example, a young client may say, “You adults just don’t care about young people’s opinions,” or a working class client may say, “You middle class people talk to us like we’re stupid.” Remember that the person’s healing work is not directed at you personally; they are working through the profound realities of their experience. Welcome their anger and accept it as a sign that the person trusts you and considers you capable of understanding.

Remember also that you always have more to learn about any form oppression which you yourself haven't lived. Allow the possibility that you might be ignorantly contributing to the problem. Keep an open mind and avoid defensiveness.

OVERCOMING INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

To undo the internalization of oppression, we must heal the hurts that have led us to accept the oppressor's way of looking at us. For example, as children we all experienced not only the pain of being treated as inferior to adults, but also the pain of gradually coming to believe that in fact we are inferior.

In many ways this second layer of pain is even more excruciating than the first. What could be more devastating than coming to believe that the oppressive images of us are the truth?

One way to uncover the internalization is to talk about the things we don't like about members of our own group. This process tends to reveal the negative stereotypes that we've accepted about ourselves.

Another way is to say loudly and in a tone of complete pride and delight:

- * "It's great to be a ..." (young person, woman, African-American, etc.)

Either of these approaches may lead to embarrassment and other fairly light feelings, or may tap into heavier grief and fear.

We can also pursue questions such as:

- * "How am I proud of my group?"
- * "How have I felt loved and supported by my people?"
- * "How have members of my own group hurt me?"

Feeling pride in oneself as part of a self-identified group will counter internalized oppression. As counselor, encourage your client to notice the beauty and strength of her own people.

GAIN ACCURATE INFORMATION

Since mistreatment and misinformation are woven together, we need to seek out accurate information about groups to which we belong, learning our own history. We benefit from learning not just how our people have been oppressed, but also how we have historically *resisted* oppression. This knowledge is essential both to fighting oppression in the world and to fighting its internalized damage inside of us.

Similarly, as part of overcoming our own oppressive attitudes and behavior towards others, we need to learn the history of oppression and resistance regarding groups to which we *don't*

belong. This information assists us in building effective alliances in overcoming oppression.

Participants in the Peak Living Network can assist each other in this quest by sharing information about books, articles, movies, and other media that they have found helpful in learning about a particular group or form of oppression.

SPECIFIC SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups devoted to confronting and healing a particular form of oppression have a long history of power and effectiveness. In gatherings with only members of the oppressed group present, participants feel increased safety, focus, and understanding. Support groups seem to work especially well when they discuss and analyze oppression as a group, then allow some time for each person to take a turn as client with the group's loving attention.

Support groups can also be formed around creating better allies to oppressed groups, such as “overcoming racism” or “overcoming sexism” support groups, again with a mixture of theory discussion and counseling time.

OVERCOME COLLUSION WITH OPPRESSION

To the extent that we continue to harbor oppressive attitudes, and to treat people in oppressive ways (for the most part unawarely), we are working against our deeper beliefs and goals. If you want to become a better ally to a particular group that you aren't part of, spend some co-counseling time exploring the issues that exist inside you regarding that group.

However, please follow a crucial guideline here:

Don't work on oppressive things you have felt or done toward a particular group *with a member of that group as your counselor.*

It's reinjuring for people from targeted groups to listen to other people "working out their issues" toward that group. For example, men need to work on their issues about women with a male co-counselor or in male-only groups.

To work on these collusion issues, first work on your own experiences of enduring oppression. No one has escaped oppression; for example, even the most privileged, rich, white, straight, able-bodied, adult male has been through the experience of being a child, and therefore knows first-hand what oppression is like *if he recovers his memory of it.*

The point of this work is not to say “me too” when people open up about experiences of being oppressed (which is distinctly unhelpful). The purpose is almost the opposite: to help us have a deeper understanding of the need to listen carefully and absorb what members of other oppressed groups are sharing.

Secondly, work on your feelings about the oppression of the group in question, both in the world and in your life. Look at times you observed the oppression taking place as a young person, or at feelings you have about current oppressive treatment you've discerned. Spend extended time exploring how painful it has been to you – to the extent that you can remember it – to observe other people being oppressed and to be aware of that mistreatment.

Don't underestimate the importance of this step. Ironically, our unhealed pain about oppression towards others that we've witnessed or heard about is one of the powerful forces propelling us unconsciously to defend and collude with it! For example, men who work on childhood memories of seeing girls or women that they loved being mistreated will find that this work helps them get clearer about sexism and helps them participate in it less.

As a third step, work on experiences where you colluded with the oppression or perpetrated it. Discharging the guilt, shame, and sadness that you feel as a consequence will help you avoid the actions in the future and empower you to become a better ally to that oppressed group.

BE AN EFFECTIVE ALLY WHILE COUNSELING

When you are in the counseling role with someone who is working on their experiences of being oppressed, avoid sinking into or expressing your own guilt feelings, which will serve only to switch the center of attention to you and take the focus off of the client's healing. Instead, focus on:

- indicating that you see the person as whole human being, not just as a member of a particular group
- sharing in their outrage at how their group has been treated
- treating the person as a survivor of oppression, not just as a victim of it, bearing in mind that they have a long history of resistance to that oppression (whether they remember it or not)
- not telling them stories about people from their group to whom you've been close
- not talking to them about how you are “working on” your issues about their group in your life or in your sessions
- being yourself as you support them

TAKE PRIDE IN RESISTANCE

Take pride in ways in which you've resisted oppression, whether your own or that of other people. When you raise issues of oppression in a discussion, or challenge people about their behavior or their jokes, or take part in protests, you're making a contribution. Ignore signals you may receive from people that you're being annoying by raising these issues or that you lack a sense of humor. ***In an oppressive society, a questioning and rebellious attitude is the only outlook that makes sense.*** (Ironically, we're taught in school to honor the American Revolution but to have contempt for all other types of revolutionary activity, past or present.)

Take pride also in the creativity of your resistance: the new efforts you make, the new ways you find to help people hear, the new cracks you discover in the oppressive system in order to create openings for change.

SECTION IX: SPLITTING TIME AS A TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS

Don't underestimate the power of splitting time. Yes, you could use the co-counseling process for small goals, such as bringing a little extra support into your life, but you can also use it to heal on the deepest levels and transform your life.

Healing is a life-long process. Consequently, you will get more and more skillful over time in how to support another person's recovery and in how to make you own recovery move forward.

Healing is a right for all people, and we are here to help you claim it.

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