

THE HEALING PARTNERSHIP: A MANUAL FOR CO-COUNSELING

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The units in this manual follow the videos for Lessons 1-8 which you can find at [YouTube.com/@PeakLivingNetwork](https://www.youtube.com/@PeakLivingNetwork). We recommend that you watch the corresponding video as you work on each unit.

Following the eight units, you will find additional materials on:

- 1) Important Ways to Use Your Session Time
- 2) A Reference List of Co-Counseling Techniques
- 3) Boundaries and Ethics in Co-Counseling --- please read this!!
- 4) Co-Counseling With Friends, Lovers, and Relatives

Some Terms You'll Need to Know:

Co-counseling: Splitting time with another person; one of you listens for the first half, then you switch roles and the other person listens for the second half.

Co-counselor: A person with whom you're splitting time; the term does not necessarily mean your regular co-counseling partner, it simply refers to your partner in a particular session

Counselor: The person who is in the listening role, giving focused, loving attention

Client: The person whose turn it is to speak, receiving the attention

Co-counseling session: Any time you split time with someone, regardless of the length of each person's turn; you could be splitting ten minutes or two hours

Mini-session: A short session, perhaps just five or ten minutes per person

Full session: The opposite of a mini-session, with turns of at least 45 minutes per person and ideally 50 or 55 minutes each

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

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.

FIRST UNIT

Topics covered:

- Why co-counseling is a powerful healing path
- How the class will work
- How to do your first session

1) THE POWER OF CO-COUNSELING

Co-counseling is a uniquely powerful path to emotional healing and wellness. We learn how to take emotional care of each other, and of ourselves, in the way that nature intended. We dare to make a significant difference to another person, and open ourselves to letting them make a similar difference to us, releasing a healing power beyond anything we had imagined.

1) Co-counseling is a two-way system.

The bedrock of co-counseling is the special kind of relationship that you can build with another person when you make the courageous step of loving each other wholeheartedly, holding out to each other the highest expectations for healing from the pain that has weighed you down. A two-way counseling approach unleashes the healing power of love in a way that is difficult to make happen in a professional, one-way counseling modality.

A two-way system also makes us equals, rather than setting roles that cast one person as the skilled helper and the other person as the one in need of help. Everyone needs healing, and everyone has loving attention and careful thoughtfulness to offer in return. **Equality is crucial for deep healing because so many of our deepest wounds have their roots in experiences of inequality.** The assistance that we provide while we're in the counseling role contributes to our ability to heal when it's our turn to be the client.

2) Co-counseling is rooted in a belief that we can heal deeply and fully.

Most emotional healing approaches, particularly professional ones, assume that our capacity for healing is quite limited. They typically don't truly believe that a truly joyous life is possible. They often send messages such as, "This pain will always be with you, but you'll learn better ways to live with it." They're aiming for small improvements, not for peak living, because that's all they think we can bring about.

In the Peak Living Network, we believe that people are inherently loving, intelligent, and excited to be alive, and are courageous fighters for justice. Anything we see that doesn't fit that

image is the result of a way in which the person was severely emotionally harmed, or was systematically trained to behave oppressively, or a combination of the two. The very fact of believing in the essential goodness of the human being, including your own essential goodness, makes a visible contribution making it be true.

3) Discharge is the most powerful healing channel we have.

Laughter, crying, trembling, and storming, *when they get the opportunity to function deeply and at length*, have more healing power than any other known approach to emotional recovery and wellness. Taken together, they form our bodies' inherent plan for keeping us emotionally well; that's what those processes were designed to do, **that's why we have them**.

Yet these inherent emotional releases, which we call "discharge," are absent from virtually all approaches to emotional healing. At best they are viewed as side-effects of healing, rather than being recognized as the actual essence of how healing happens.

4) Healing works much better with a wide community of support from other people who are also pursuing their own healing.

In the Peak Living Network, we integrate co-counseling and support into our daily lives through short phone sessions, participating in weekly or monthly support groups, joining supportive discussions on the PLN Slack space, and attending PLN gatherings. You have a whole network behind you cheering for your life to get better and better.

5) In co-counseling, we attend to the reality that many of our deepest emotional injuries are rooted in systems of oppression.

Many of our deepest wounds come from ways we've been repeatedly and profoundly mistreated because of groups we're part of (or used to be part of) that are targeted for systematic derision, exploitation, and violence in modern society. Unfortunately, most healing approaches avoid talking about oppression, so it becomes the elephant in the room; we can't heal from its devastating effects if we can't talk about it. The mistaken notion that questions of emotional healing can be separated from questions of social justice ("political issues") is a major obstacle to recovery in our times.

Moreover, as we start to recognize the effects that oppression has had on us and on the people we love, and as we begin to heal from both the external and internal toll it has taken on us, we come to recognize that our individual healing is deeply connected to the need to take those systems of oppression apart in the world.

6) Co-counselors use a wide variety of counseling techniques, and are always working on

improving those techniques and developing new ones.

Co-counseling should not be confused with notions of “peer counseling,” which assume a low level of both skill and involvement on the part of the counselor, who is expected primarily to just listen. In co-counseling, we strive to become highly skilled counselors for each other, and to keep developing our abilities life-long.

And, ironically, we often use a much wider range of approaches than many professional therapists do. We take the focus off of analysis, instead emphasizing techniques that help us feel and discharge our painful emotions.

2) THE STRUCTURE OF A CO-COUNSELING CLASS

The beginning co-counseling class uses the following format:

- 1) It begins on time.
- 2) The class will start with a round where everyone present, including the teacher(s), shares something that has gone well or that has felt good in recent life (“New and Good”). These are not updates on the details of life; each person just takes a brief period (less than a minute) less to share something positive.
- 3) Beginning with the second class meeting, the next activity in the class will be a “mini-session.” Class members will pair off and take turns of roughly five minutes each (the teacher will give you the length); one person speaks for the first half while the other listens, and then you switch roles for the second half. This mini-session is an opportunity to clear things out of the way that might be on your mind, in order to help you be more fully present for the class. These quick sessions will also build connections among the class members, and will allow you to practice co-counseling principles and techniques that you’re learning. Toward that goal, it will be helpful if class members do mini-sessions with as many different people from the group as possible as the weeks go by.
- 4) The teacher(s) will present material. This will usually involve at least one new concept and one new technique, so that theory and practice can be advanced each week. There will be opportunity for questions and discussion about the material, and sometimes the teacher will ask a specific question that she invites group members to respond to if they choose.
- 5) There may be an additional mini-session in which the teacher asks you to practice a particular approach or technique.
- 6) Beginning with the second class meeting, the teacher will do a counseling demonstration, where she works with a class member in front of the class for roughly 15 or 20 minutes. These counseling demonstrations are not role plays; the teacher will work with the person on real issues that the class member wants to put attention on. At the end of the demonstration, the teacher and the class will discuss the counseling that the teacher did. *This is not a time to discuss the client (the class member who participated in the demonstration), to analyze her, or to say things to her about what she worked on.* In fact, we strive to discuss the counseling while making the least possible reference to anything the client worked on.

After the discussion, the teacher will return to the “client” and do some wrap-up work with her called “Present Time,” and then will declare an end to her turn. *Once the class member’s turn is*

declared to be over, no one in the class will make any further reference to anything she said while she was being the client in this counseling demonstration. In other words, the subject of this particular demonstration is closed once the teacher formally ends the person's turn in front of the group.

(You'll learn more soon about why we don't refer to someone's turn once it's over.)

In order to participate in a counseling demonstration, there's no need for you to already have a plan about what you'd like to work on. If nothing comes to mind, the teacher will help you figure out a theme that could use your attention.

During the demonstration, the teacher may ask you to try saying certain phrases aloud. *These are for use in the demonstration only.* The teacher is *not* suggesting that you actually use these phrases in your life. Phrases that we use in sessions are used only for the purpose of exploring and releasing feelings. (We'll be talking in detail about the use of phrases further on.)

7) The class will end with a round where all members and the teacher(s) share something that they are looking forward to in the time ahead. Again, this is a quick round of less than a minute per person.

8) Between classes each week, each class member will do a co-counseling session with another member of the class. The teacher will explain more about how to set this up and how to do it. These outside-of-class sessions are crucial to integrating the learning from the class; in fact, there would be little point to taking the class without these, akin to taking a driver training class that didn't involve any actual driving.

3) HOW TO DO A CO-COUNSELING SESSION

Co-counseling involves two people; one person is counselor and the other is client for the first half, 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 is ideal, allowing the client enough time to work into feelings at a powerful depth without being so long as to exhaust both counselor and client.

Co-counselors also do "mini-sessions" in pairs, usually over the phone or internet, where the turns may be as short as five minutes per person.

Any method can be used to decide which person is client first; one person may express a preference to go first (or second), or you might alternate based on who went first last time you co-counseled, or you could flip a coin.

The counselor is responsible for setting a timer for the client's turn. Set the timer to make a clearly **audible tone**, so that both you and the client will know when time is up (and so that you don't have to look at it at all during the client's turn, which can be distracting to both you and the

client). Set the timer to go off when there are five minutes left in the session; at that point, set it for another five minutes so that it beeps audibly again when the client's turn is over, at which point it's time to switch roles (or the session is over for both people).

The session takes place in four phases. **It's the counselor's responsibility to move the session through its phases.**

First Phase: "New and Good"

At the beginning of a session, the counselor invites the client to talk for four or five minutes about positive news from recent life, by asking, "What's new and good?" This is a time for the client to notice things that are going well, recent moments that have felt good, and successes or accomplishments. Strive to celebrate triumphs, tap into sources of pride, and remember good moods.

Don't rush or skip 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 strength and hopefulness we need in order to do deep healing work. Bringing to light and digesting what is good gives us the power and safety to work successfully on the hard things (rather than just stewing around in them).

Second Phase: Minor Challenges or Upsets

After a few minutes spent on recent positive feelings, the counselor asks, "Have there been any small things that have bothered you lately?" The client spends four or five minutes on recent tensions, upsets, or irritations that she would like to give some attention to but doesn't want to make the main focus of the session. Giving these side issues a few minutes of attention helps to clear them aside for now, freeing up the client to address the larger theme she'd like to take on that day.

Sometimes a "minor upset" is not minor at all; it just goes in this category because the client has something else that she wants to primarily devote her turn to that day.

Third Phase: The Heart of the Session

Once the client has spent a few minutes on the smaller concerns, it's time for the counselor to ask, "What would you like to focus on today?" This third phase is the bulk of the session, which the client spends doing healing work on whatever she chooses to bring with.

If she's not sure of a direction for her turn, the counselor can ask questions such as:

Counselor: What aspect of your life could use some attention?

Counselor: What feels like it's most in the way recently of fully enjoying your life?

Counselor: What's on top?

When you're in the counseling role, it's not your job to decide, or even to suggest, what the best way is for the client to use her time. Your job is to support her to make her own choice about what direction to take today.

Co-counseling (and the Peak Living Network overall) is an “advice-free zone.” Unsolicited advice – even at the level of saying, “Could I make a suggestion here?” – is not acceptable. We strive to even steer away from problem-solving, such as questions that start with the words “Have you tried”?

The counselor may make suggestions for approaches to try **inside of the session** – techniques, in other words – but never gives advice about actual actions to take in the world outside of session.

Your role as counselor is to support the client to feel her feelings, and to discharge them when possible, using a large array of techniques and approaches that you'll be learning in the pages ahead.

Fourth Phase: “Present Time”

When there are five minutes left in the client's turn, the counselor informs the client that it's time to **“get his attention out,”** or **“focus on present time.”** In this final phase of the session, the counselor helps the client to turn his attention away from internal pain and emotional disturbances, and put his focus back on the world outside.

If the client is in the midst of a deep release, let him know that five minutes are left but allow him to continue discharging for a couple of minutes; he will need to rise gradually to the surface (like a scuba diver who needs to avoid coming up too fast).

The goal during the “present time” phase of the session is to bring the client's attention onto positive aspects of current or recent reality. We do this by asking the client what he's looking forward to, directing his attention to sights and sounds in his environment, or asking him entertaining questions such as trivia. This process makes it possible for the client to continue his day unfettered by the weight of the issues he worked on in the session.

We'll be discussing these phases of the session in more detail throughout this manual.

Who Is In Charge of the Session?

Co-counseling works best when the counselor takes *decisive charge* of running the session. She sets the timer, she asks “What’s new and good?”, and she moves the session crisply through its four phases. By managing the session confidently, she creates a sense of safety for the client, a sense of being in the hands of a loving and competent caretaker. When you’re in the counseling role, strive to be a strong leader.

At the same time, however, the client is the one who has the **ultimate say** over what happens during her turn. If she wants to shift direction, or she doesn’t want to try a technique that the counselor is proposing, or she wants to alter the structure of her turn that day (for example, to skip one of the phases), that is absolutely her prerogative. Her turn belongs to no one but her.

You might think of the counselor as the manager of a business and the client as the owner. If you’re a business owner, you hire a manager to take care of things decisively. You can overrule them anytime you choose to, but apart from those times you want them confidently running things.

There’s even a further wrinkle, though: the client will get more out of her sessions if she puts some thought into how she wants to use her time, and gives her counselor feedback about what works well for her and what doesn’t. (We’ll talk about this subject in more detail in the section on “Making Your Sessions Work For You” in Unit 6.)

SECOND UNIT

Topics covered:

Confidentiality, including not referring to a person's session
The fundamentals of effective counseling in the co-counseling context

1) CONFIDENTIALITY AND ITS EXPANSION IN CO-COUNSELING

Complete confidentiality is a prerequisite for building trust. Nothing you hear in a co-counseling session is to be repeated to anyone else even if it seems like a light-hearted issue and not something that would require privacy. We don't actually know which issues are emotionally loaded for someone, nor do we know which issues they desire privacy about; don't take any risk of making someone else feel exposed. We all need to be strict and disciplined about this principle in order to have emotional safety among co-counselors, and in order to create an atmosphere in which people can do deep healing work.

Furthermore, in co-counseling we extend the concept of confidentiality further, in that we don't make any reference to things a client said in a 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 co-counsel, 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 can be a tough habit to break. A co-counseling relationship and a friendship are two different things, and the distinction matters. The more carefully you stick to not making reference to your co-counselor's session, the safer the environment will be for her to discuss issues that make her feel exposed or vulnerable and to discharge her pain, knowing that you won't bring up the subject later on.

Please don't ask, "Is it okay if I refer to something from your session?" She has no way to know what you're talking about unless you say specifically what the issue is, and once you do that, it's too late, because then you've made reference to it. Not only that, but some people will say yes just because they're caught off-guard or feel awkward about saying no.

Any counseling turn that someone takes in front of a group – such as a counseling demonstration in a co-counseling class – is a session. Treat those turns just as you would treat a two-person session, and make no reference to them once they're over.

If something that your client works on triggers you, so that when it's your turn you feel the need to process what got triggered, go ahead and work on what came up for you. Just don't say, "This is up for me because of what you were talking about." In other words, eliminate the words,

“When you said ...,” from your vocabulary during your turn. Being careful about this will also benefit you personally, as it will help your counselor not to be cast back into the feelings she was working on during her turn.

The only time it’s okay to make reference to a past session is when the client brings the subject up. In this case, it’s okay for the counselor to say, “Yes, I remember about that.” But leave it at that unless the client chooses to go back into it.

A final point: If you co-counsel with someone who is a friend of yours, don’t bring up any issues from your co-counseling sessions when you’re spending social time together. The confidentiality of sessions still applies, including the agreement not to refer to anything from a session. This principle means that when friends decide to co-counsel together, they need to pay attention to remembering which things they learned from sessions. (You’ll find a section on co-counseling with friends and lovers later in the manual.)

You’re Free to Make References to Your Own Sessions

You are, of course, free to discuss what happened during your own turns anytime you wish, including sharing comments that your counselor made while you were client. For example, if you want to tell someone, “So-and-so did this great thing counseling me the other day that totally worked for me,” you have every right to do that. Your turn belongs to you.

Is the Fact That the Session Took Place Confidential?

Unless you and your co-counselor agree otherwise, you are both free to tell others that you co-counseled together, as long as you don’t say anything about what happened in the other person’s turn (not even a vague description, such as “it was intense”). If one person feels the need to have no one know that you counseled together, it’s up to him or her to raise that issue and see if you’re comfortable agreeing not to mention it.

Limits to Confidentiality

It could happen that something comes up in a session that you don’t feel you can ethically keep confidential. (I need to say, though, that in the 40 years I’ve been co-counseling this has never happened to me, so it’s not common.) For example, if the person expressed a plan to hurt someone else, or to hurt herself, you might feel that you needed to take action to prevent the plan from being carried out. In such a case, you should of course take whatever steps you consider necessary to prevent the harm. If the situation feels dangerous, consider involving a professional or a hotline.

Another possibility that is somewhat less rare (but still not common) is that there could be a time when what the client has disclosed to you is simply too large a burden to shoulder yourself.

In this case, please take the following steps:

- 1) Inform the client that you don't feel that you can handle the weight of holding the issue yourself.
- 2) See if you can mutually agree to a specific person – ideally another co-counselor – to whom you will go to get support for yourself about the issue.
- 3) Don't tell anyone else about the issue unless you and the client cannot arrive at a mutually agreed-upon person for you to talk to about it.
- 4) If you are part of a co-counseling support group or class that has a teacher/leader, or have access to some other person with long-time co-counseling experience, ask the client's permission to get that person involved in supporting the two of you in dealing with the issue.

In short: Don't get left alone with weights that are too much for you to carry, but do proceed very carefully and thoughtfully, doing everything you can to protect your client's privacy and emotional safety, and to protect that person's sense of trust in you. Be kind and respectful.

2) THE KEY ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE COUNSELING

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

Co-counseling begins with fundamental skills and guidelines that underlie everything we do together.

Pay Close, Loving Attention

The most important tool for any counselor is the undivided, delighted, loving attention you pay to your client. Our goal is to be completely present, while remaining relaxed and natural. Keep your eyes on the client's eyes at all times, whether she is looking at you or not. Focus on hearing and digesting what she is saying or expressing.

In co-counseling we strive to see our client's humanness and strength. Avoid analyzing her, even in your own mind. Notice her goodness, her courage, her clarity, and everything else positive that you observe about her. Remind yourself that, with your assistance, she can heal deeply.

Strive to lay aside your own concerns and distresses, including things about your own history that get triggered by her issues. If you notice that your mind is wandering, or that you're getting caught up in your own emotions, gently pull yourself back into the present moment and return to

focusing on your client and her experience.

Your phone should be turned off. If you're using the phone as a timer (which I don't recommend), turn off all your sounds and notifications, because you will lose some of your focus just from knowing that a message has come in for you. (All co-counselors should obtain a kitchen timer as soon as possible so that your phone can be completely off during sessions.)

Offer Support and Validation

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

Counselor: That must have been a very painful experience for you.

or

Counselor: You had every right to be upset.

Respond with the same compassion and understanding you'd show to any loved one in your life. Although we have some specific ways in which we do things in co-counseling, at the core we're simply trying to effectively share our caring and love for each other. We begin by giving heartfelt reactions to the things our client shares with us.

Validation can also be expressed by reflecting back succinctly, in your own words, what you've heard your client say, so that she can see that you're grasping what she's expressing. For example:

Counselor: So, it sounds like you just could never feel sure what your older brother was going to do next, and that left you with a lot of anxiety.

Reflecting back what you've heard also gives the client an opportunity to tell you if you're not getting it quite right, and then she can explain the feeling again.

Validation should not involve any analysis; in co-counseling we don't propose interpretations. Reflect back only what you think was already contained in what your client said; your role is to express it in your own way so that she feels understood, and to try to bring essentials of what she has said to the forefront.

Support and Encourage Your Client to Feel Feelings and Discharge Them

Show your approval and encouragement any time your client starts to discharge emotions through laughter, crying, storming, and the other inherent emotional releases (which are explained in detail in the next class). We have all received negative messages about these healing processes and have been taught that we need to choke them off; it therefore becomes important

for the counselor to counter those messages.

If your client cries, strive to be calm and supportive, showing your caring while remaining relaxed. Avoid looking or sounding concerned (which is different from showing that you care), and keep all pity out of your voice. You are watching the healing of a strong, resilient human being; she's just fine and is doing exactly what she needs to be doing. Indicate, through your facial expression and tone of voice, that you see her that way.

Although you may find it uncomfortable at first to show this relaxed, confident attitude toward intense emotional outpourings, doing so will rapidly become second nature to you, as if you were rediscovering something you knew all along.

If you notice your client cutting off his own crying, gently encourage him to continue, as in:

Counselor: Let the tears come; you're doing exactly what you need to do.

or

Counselor: There's plenty of time — you can just keep right on feeling that.

Share Your Appreciation of the Client

Find opportunities to express to your client what a good person you think she is, and to share specific things you notice about her that you like and appreciate. Let her know how well 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 she is healing. Notice her courage, her generosity, her intelligence, her creativity, her humor, and more, and reflect these back to her any time you feel moved to do so.

Most people who are learning co-counseling – and even people who already have a lot of experience with it – run into times when they feel that it's time to say something to the client but they can't think of anything at that moment. You can always fall back on sharing your appreciations; the option is always there to tell her a couple of things you admire or enjoy in her. And it's next to impossible to appreciate someone too much, as long as you make your positive comments in a simple and sincere way.

Occasionally, you may have times when your client disputes positive things that you say about her. Don't let this bother you; you'll find other compliments that she's more prepared to hear. But also don't argue with her; debating with people about their negative views of themselves pushes them more deeply into their wounds rather than lifting them out. At the most you might just say (to her negative self-comment):

Counselor: Well, that's not how I see you, but I understand that it feels that way to you.

Then let it go. She will escape her bad feelings towards herself over time by healing them, not by having people try to talk her out of them, which never works.

Ask Questions

Farther along we'll have a section covering many ideas about how to ask good questions. For the time being, the main points to keep in mind are:

- * The asking of questions is one of the most central ways in which you can show that you're interested in the person's experience and care about it
- * Reach for questions that are pointed more at helping the person feel his feelings, rather than ones that strive to analyze. But don't worry about this distinction too much; mostly just ask what you feel like asking. It's better to ask too much than too little.
- * Ask several questions over the course of a session but at the same time don't pepper the person with questions. We want the client to be able to follow where his thoughts and feelings lead him, so we need to be careful not to be taking him off track.

Be Genuine, Be Yourself

Many people feel that they need to put on a special "counselor" personality when they're in the counseling role in a session. This seems to come partly from our prior experiences with professional counselors. But in co-counseling, we strive to be entirely our normal selves during the other person's turn. Don't change anything about how you would be with a close friend or any other loved one from your life except for one important shift: you always remember that it's the other person's time, which means that 1) you don't talk about yourself, and 2) you keep your comments brief.

Other than those two important changes in style, just be your regular self. Reacting in the same way you'd react to anyone else you care about, make the same supportive and validating comments you'd normally make, using the same tone of voice.

You will learn more and more counseling techniques, but even once you're equipped with all those tools, your most important gift as a counselor will still be you. What will always count the most is your capacity to be loving, your commitment and patience, your energy, and your authenticity.

Take Firm Charge of Your Client's Session!

As I explained earlier, the counselor needs to take decisive leadership in the session, not backing off from doing so unless the client explicitly asks the counselor to do so. Timid counseling is one of the most common challenges for newer co-counselors. Keep reminding yourself, "I'm not stepping on anyone's toes; decisive running of the session is what I'm supposed to do." That message will help to counter those voices in your head telling you that you're taking too much leadership in the session.

As I've said, the client always has the last word, but it's up to her to speak up if she wants to change the normal format of a session. If, for example, she wants to skip the "Minor Upsets" part of the session, she can let you know that. But your job as the counselor is to lead her through the usual format unless she asks for changes. And that doesn't happen often; most people find that, on most days, the standard session format works best for them.

So don't hold back about setting a timer, getting the other person's turn started, moving the session through its phases, and letting her know when her time is up. Be a strong counselor.

By the way, both people need to take responsibility for getting the session started on time, which means not chatting before the session. This responsibility has to be shared, because at the start you haven't decided yet which person will be counselor first and which one will be client. Chatting when you meet to co-counsel, whether in person or from a distance, is a mistake for multiple reasons; fight that temptation.

Be the Anchor and the Source of Hope

In order for the client to have the safety to feel and discharge her feelings of discouragement and despair, she needs to have a counselor who is holding onto the hope for her. Another way to say it is that the client has the need to swim out into some very stormy seas, but she can't do that unless she knows that you have her firmly anchored to shore.

So when you're in the counseling role, you need to connect with the places inside of you where there is optimism; the places where you believe life can be good, where you believe healing is possible, where you believe your client can get through what she needs to get through. It's not enough to just say these things; during her turn, you need to genuinely believe them.

The thing is, you definitely have these hopeful places inside of you. If you didn't, you would have already given up on your own life, and you wouldn't, for example, be bothering with co-counseling. It's important to do the work of calling that strength up inside yourself anytime you are giving a counseling turn to someone else. By doing so, you create an atmosphere that your client can sense, consciously or unconsciously, is one of safety. And with that safety she can go into the dark places she needs to visit.

When it's your turn, you can allow yourself to feel the parts of you that are in despair (we all have them). But while you're in the counseling role, work hard to stay out of there.

A Few Key Things Not to Do

There is a handful of crucial "don'ts" that we want to keep in mind:

* Don't give advice or go into problem-solving mode. This means that we resist the temptation to even ask the client "Have you tried x, y or z?" in response to the distress she is talking about. (It's fine to ask, "What have you tried?," but we have to let the answers come entirely from the

client.) Under no circumstances do we make suggestions or give advice; this is an ironclad principle of co-counseling that must be respected.

If you happen to have a lot of information or experience related to a struggle the client is having, it's acceptable to say (if you choose to), "This is an issue I know a lot about, so feel free to ask me for resources about it after the session if you wish." But then you don't offer it again; any follow-up must come from the client *if* she is interested.

When we get the love and support that we need, and when we get opportunities for deep discharge, the solutions to problems emerge. Trust your client to find her own solutions if you can simply facilitate her healing.

* Don't talk about yourself at all, even as a way to be supportive. This means we don't say, for example, "I know how you feel because I've been through something similar." This can be a tough habit to break, but it's important to do so. The client's turn is 100% about her.

* Don't make any reference to her session once her turn is over, and don't even make reference later in the session to distressing subjects she talked about earlier but has moved on from. This principle means also that we don't make any summarizing or congratulating statements toward the end of a client's turn, such as "You did some really good work today," or "You went bravely into some hard stuff in this session." Those kinds of comments, though well-intentioned, have the effect of pushing the client back into her distress, which we're trying to help her move out of when we're approaching the end of her turn.

THIRD UNIT

Topic: The innate healing releases (discharge) and how they work

UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORTING DISCHARGE

Our innate bioemotional healing releases, which we refer to as “discharge,” are the single most powerful avenue the human being has to recovering from past emotional wounds. They are, in fact, our bodies’ plan for keeping us emotionally well, and were designed to protect our bodies from the physical damage that can come from chronic emotional distress. These healing mechanisms are *innate*; we are born with them and the function automatically, without anyone teaching us how to use them. The innate healing releases are the following:

- 1) **Deep, prolonged crying with tears and periodic sobbing**, which primarily serves to carry away grief and its effects
- 2) **Deep, prolonged laughter (“belly laughter”), sometimes accompanied by sweating or a case of the shakes**, which primarily serves to carry away fear and embarrassment and their effects
- 3) **Deep, prolonged trembling, whimpering, vocal outbursts (such as “No! No!”), and abrupt physical movement** which primarily serves to carry away terror (intense fear) and its effects
- 4) **Deep prolonged storming, vocal outbursts, and waving or pounding of arms and legs or other abrupt physical movement** which primarily serves to carry away anger and outrage and their effects, which in turn are caused primarily by the pain of injustice
- 5) **Deep, prolonged yawning**, which is somewhat mysterious in its function, but is undeniably part of this innate five-part healing system, as I will explain soon

If these innate mechanisms had been permitted and supported to operate fully in the way they are supposed to, we would need little or nothing else in order to heal from past emotional wounds.

These discharge channels can be brought back to vibrant functioning, even if they have been shut down for many years. Learning how to make that happen is a big part of what co-counseling is all about.

The Central Characteristics of the Innate Releases

The innate releases have distinct elements in common that make it clear that they're part of an integrated system. No other healing process shares all of these central characteristics that the five forms of discharge have. These are:

- 1) These processes are *built into our bodies*. They do not have to be learned; they operate spontaneously and are exhibited by even the youngest children.
- 2) They function most deeply *after a crisis has passed*. They're designed to swing into gear as our circumstances start to improve. (You'll be hearing a lot more about this dynamic.)
- 3) They function most deeply in a person who is feeling *safe, loved, and supported*, and who is in physical contact with another person, perhaps even being tightly held. (This point is an extension of the previous one; feeling safe and supported are key signals to our bodies that the crisis has passed.)
- 4) They are *contagious*; when you see anyone discharging in one of these ways, you're likely to feel the desire to do so as well. It isn't the emotion that's contagious; what makes us want to join in is our awareness -- largely unconscious -- that we're witnessing *healing*. Tears, laughter, and yawning are particularly contagious.
- 5) They are *interwoven*. Deep releasing in any of the five forms (crying, laughter, storming, yawning, or trembling) typically leads to outbursts of one or more of the other forms as well. A person who is discharging deeply will commonly *cycle* among the different forms of release (e.g. laughing, crying, yawning, back to crying, and so forth) with no conscious effort to do so. This cycling is considered odd, but is actually entirely natural, common, and healthful.
- 6) They create a *mixture of discomfort and pleasure*. A hard cry, for example, can be compared to a deep massage that "hurts so good." An intense laughing fit can become almost unbearable -- yet we don't want it to stop. This mixture of pain and pleasure results from the fact that deep distress is going through us *but is getting out*.
- 7) They lead to *lasting, observable healing*. When these releases get to function deeply, they bring us dramatically improved spirits, mental clarity, hopefulness, and energy. They lead us to find a way forward where none seemed possible prior to the discharge. Over time, they can fully heal even the deepest emotional wounds. They contain a healing power that is beyond any other known path to emotional recovery. And this makes sense given that they are natural to us, built into our bodies.

All of these five forms of discharge face societal prohibitions, unfortunately. We're steadily discouraged by people around us from doing exactly what would be most beneficial to our emotional well-being. We hear lines like, "It's okay, please don't cry," and "Geez, it wasn't *that* funny, enough already," and, "Calm down and pull yourself together, you're shaking like a leaf." Reforming these destructive cultural messages regarding emotional discharge is a crucial and

urgent project. If we all could heal emotionally, the world wouldn't be in the shape it's in.

How About People Who Feel Worse After They Cry?

If you feel worse after you cry -- which can make you hate crying, as some people do -- this probably results from one or more of the following factors:

- 1) You're crying in unsafe circumstances, such as in the presence of people who are verbally attacking you or who look down upon you for crying; or you've been in such situations a lot in the past.
- 2) You're fighting to hold the tears back, or your crying channel is blocked up, because you were yelled at or humiliated for crying as a child. The result is that you now cry in halting and superficial ways.
- 3) You feel acutely powerless and victimized in your *present-day* life, with the result that crying reinforces your sense of despair rather than feeling liberating.
- 4) You are sitting on a mountain of undischarged *anger* that is blocking your ability to have hard, deep cries (though you may still be able to weep, perhaps even for long periods of time). This dynamic is especially common in women, who face severe societal prohibitions against expressing and releasing anger.

All of these obstacles can be overcome; further on we'll be looking at strategies for doing so.

Tap Into the Power of Laughter

Laughter is a powerful healer of anxiety and other lighter fears (short of terror). Don't underestimate the power of this channel; many or most of the day-to-day obstacles we face -- the blocks that keep us from moving forward in life the way we want to -- come from our *lighter* fears and anxieties. (The terror we carry creates important problems of course, but generally not the ones we most notice and feel frustrated by in our daily lives.) Tapping into laughter makes it possible to take those leaps we need to take. A laughing fit is also super helpful prior to entering a situation that you dread, such as a performance evaluation at work or a gathering with difficult relatives, allowing us to go forward with greater calm.

Storming

Understanding anger discharge and how it works is a little tricky; you'll find a section specifically about that a little further along in this manual. For now I'll just say that discharging anger doesn't look anything like destructive or intimidating behavior toward other people; that's why people who behave in intimidating ways don't get any less angry or toxic over time. When

true anger discharge happens, it leads to relief and clarity just as the other forms of release do.

Yawning

Yawning has baffled scientists for decades. A recent study, though, concluded that repeated yawning reduces stress. This isn't really surprising, given how interwoven yawning is with the other forms of emotional discharge.

Yawning doesn't actually make people sleepy; rather, it relaxes them enough that they become aware of how sleepy they already were. Repeated yawning will in fact perk a person up (unless, of course, they're so exhausted that they simply must sleep). Try this in your car some time: If you have, say, a twenty or thirty-minute drive ahead of you and you're feeling low energy, try to keep yourself yawning through the whole trip. You'll be struck by how much less draggy you'll feel by the time you arrive.

Yawning often comes before or after the other forms of discharge. If you can tell you need a good cry but you're having trouble getting it to come, spending ten or fifteen minutes having deep yawns can sometimes turn the crying loose. Similarly, a wave of hard sobbing or belly laughter often leads to a spontaneous eruption of deep yawns.

Trembling

The innate response to terror, once the danger has passed, is to "freak out"; there's simply no better term to describe it. A person who's been terrified needs to tremble, scream, yelp, yell out "No! No! No!", and make abrupt physical movements such as running around the room. This release -- if it's permitted to come -- will generally be interwoven with short periods of crying, storming, or laughter.

Tragically, what I've just described is *the society's definition of what insanity looks like*. So it's no wonder that almost nobody dares discharge terror.

If you have insane-looking freak-outs sometimes -- which can feel like a dark secret -- you're in good company. (I'm with you, to name one person.) The healing effects of discharging terror are every bit as powerful as the other channels I've been discussing.

Unfortunately, the overwhelming societal response to someone who is trembling is to give the person alcohol or other sedatives "to calm your nerves." The alcohol stops the trembling, and that stops the healing.

A person who is releasing terror in your presence needs you to stay looking confident; your confidence allows them to feel safe in the present so that they can release their terror from the past.

A person who's having a good freak-out feels the same way that you feel during an intense cry or a belly-shaking laugh; the mixture of pain and pleasure can feel overwhelming. But it's rollercoaster-type overwhelming, not being-chased-in-the-dark-type overwhelming; the

difference being that on some deep level they know they're okay. And so they want the release to continue, because they can feel how freeing it is.

Make the Pursuit of Discharge a Priority

There is a wide range of ways to use your co-counseling sessions to support and further your emotional healing. But nothing will bring you progress as deep and lasting as what you will get from sessions of deep laughter, crying, storming, and the other inherent emotional releases. Spend a substantial portion of your sessions going after deep feelings and seeing if you can get them to move through and out of you in this way. In the pages ahead you'll learn a wide array of techniques for opening up each of the above release channels, so that you can experience deep discharge.

FOURTH UNIT

Topics:

- Balance of attention and counters to distress
- The art of asking questions

1) “BALANCE OF ATTENTION” and “COUNTERS TO DISTRESS”

Our discharge processes rarely function well when we’re at our worst points, for example, depressed people cry *less* than other people, not more, as research has shown. Releases come more commonly and easily when a bout of pain or stress *is starting to improve*. To describe this dynamic in different words, we discharge most deeply when our awareness is roughly balanced between:

- 1) the distress we’re carrying from the past
and
- 2) positive aspects of our present-day reality that are the *opposite* of that distress.

For example, the reason we cry so much harder when in someone’s arms is that being held makes us feel loved and nurtured; this awareness in the present moment is the opposite of the loss, emptiness, loneliness, and other feelings that our past grief is made up of. The **balance of attention** that results is what allows the deep discharge to happen.

A common example of this dynamic is so-called “tears of joy,” which are actually tears of sadness like any others. We think of them as tears of joy because they were brought on by a distinctly happy thought or event; and those positive present-time emotions spontaneously created a balance of attention with hurts we had in the past. The result of this balance was that discharge spontaneously started to pour out. When people who deeply love each other have been separated for a long time and then are finally reunited, the joy of being together creates a balance of attention with the load of sadness they’ve been carrying about missing each other. So the tears come bursting forth.

Anytime you have a sudden, unexpected burst of tears or laughter, something has just happened that caused a powerful cross-current of feelings inside you, feelings that are quite distressing side-by-side with others that are quite positive.

This dynamic is true even of yawning; a study found that people recovering in hospitals yawn more frequently as they move into the upswing of their recovery, past the peak of their illness or injury. Their awareness of starting to feel better is balancing against how bad they felt earlier on.

Counters to Distress

In co-counseling, we say that our awareness of positive aspects of our current reality **counters the distress** that we're carrying from the past. Feeling loved today by a friend or a partner, for example, counters our old distress of not receiving love we needed. An experience that counters our distress causes a balance of attention, and we therefore are likely to feel the urge to discharge. Similarly, the reunion of loved ones counters the distress of their time apart. A proud moment today counters distress we carry from times we were made to feel bad about ourselves in the past. Being held counters distress from abandonment or loneliness.

We therefore say that the role of the counselor is to seek ways to counter the client's distress so that she can feel her old feelings more deeply and, ideally, discharge them.

Countering distress has nothing to do with encouraging a client to "look on the bright side," which we strictly avoid in co-counseling. The goal of countering distress is to feel our feelings more, not less, but also to feel them with a balance of attention so that we can discharge them. Discharge is where the healing happens; countering distress is just a way to get there.

Countering a client's distress does *not* mean telling him that things weren't so bad, or that he should take a different outlook on things; those kinds of comments are just invalidation.. Countering distress means, rather, helping your client to have an *experience* (not to adopt an *attitude*) that is contrary to the injuries that happened to him in the past. For example:

- * When you are loving towards him during his turn, you counter times when he was unloved.
- * When you give him your full, undivided attention, you counter times when no one was noticing what he was going through.
- * When you point out things you appreciate about him, you counter ways he was conditioned to think badly of himself.
- * When you put a hand on his arm gently and respectfully, you counter times when he was starved for contact; and your thoughtful touch also counters times when, at the other extreme, he was touched violently or exploitatively.

Your loving, undivided attention will often be enough in itself to make it possible for your client to feel feelings and discharge them. But we'll be learning an array of other ways to counter distress.

2) THE ART OF ASKING QUESTIONS

When you are the counselor, the questions you ask are the key way for you to communicate to the client that you care about her experience and want to learn more about it. The counselor asks questions of various kinds:

- * Questions that draw the client out
 - “Can you tell me more about that?”**
 - “What led up to that? What happened after that?”**
 - “What’s your understanding of why that happened?”**
- * Questions that pursue emotions
 - “What was that like for you?”**
 - “Did that make you feel like [fill in the blank]?”**
 - “Did you feel sad [angry, nervous, etc.] what that happened?”**
- * Questions that look for sources of strength
 - “How did you get through that time?”**
 - “Who has come through for you?”**
 - “What was that good period like?”**
- * Questions that address injustice
 - “What should have happened instead?”**
 - “How did you try to make your voice heard?”**
 - “What price did you pay for standing up for yourself?”**
- * Questions that help that day’s session go well
 - “What would you like to focus on today?”**
 - “What most needs your attention right now?”**

There are endless possible questions to ask. At the end of this section you’ll find a handout with a large collection of examples.

“What If I’m Asking a Question Just Because I’m Curious?”

Many beginning co-counselors raise this concern with me. My response is to tell them not to worry about it much; you don’t need to second-guess yourself about the questions you’re posing. Most people love being asked questions, making them feel that the counselor is truly interested in understanding their experience.

If you’re concerned that a particular question might be too prying, you can preface it with, “Please don’t answer this if it’s something you don’t want to go into.” As long as you remain sensitive and thoughtful about what you ask, your questions will be appreciated; there will not often be a “wrong reason” to ask a question.

“How Many Questions Should I Ask?”

This is a hard one to answer; I’m inclined to say, “Ask a lot, but not too many,” which I realize is not very helpful. All you need to avoid is peppering your client with questions as if

you're a news interviewer. Allow some pauses so that your questions don't fill every available space. Don't rush the client by jumping in with questions if she already has a lot she's trying to say. Above all, keep your questions brief, because you don't want to take up space during the other person's turn. But keep asking.

A Few Questions to Avoid

In co-counseling, we stay away from some questions that people habitually ask each other. These include:

- * questions that put the person on the defensive
 - “Don't you think there would have been better ways to handle that?”
 - “Do you really think that was a good idea?”
 - “Don't you think your reaction was a little out of proportion?”
- * questions that appear to excuse or minimize other people's hurtful behavior
 - “Don't you think she meant well?”
 - “Did you maybe take that the wrong way?”
 - “Well, he was going through a lot when he did that, wasn't he?”
- * questions that analyze the client
 - “Was it maybe something else that you were actually upset about?”
 - “Did that action serve to meet some other need you had?”
 - “Did that connect to your experience with your parents?”

Our goal is to pursue feelings, and to discharge them whenever possible. We're not after insights; those will come of their own accord if we get a chance to heal. (And anyhow, healing moves our lives forward much more than insight does.) If the *client* wishes to pursue possible connections, that's entirely up to him, but connections should never be proposed by the counselor.

Not only that, proposing possible connections means you're making reference to the client's past sessions, which is off limits to the counselor (as we discussed earlier).

Similarly, the choice to analyze past behaviors and to become self-critical (in a positive way) about those behaviors is entirely up to the client; it should never be pushed by the counselor. It won't help your client if she feels judged or criticized by you, even if your intentions are good.

(The only exception to this is would be a case where you believed the client was engaging *currently* in actions that were severely dangerous – and I mean life-threatening, not just unhealthful – or severely unethical. Such a concern is rare; in my four decades of co-counseling one has never arisen for me.)

Asking “What does this remind you of?”

This can be a bad question or a good one. Please don't ask this question to pursue analysis or

insight, and never use it because you think the client's feelings must be coming from some earlier issue; it's not our place to make that judgment, nor would it be a helpful one.

There are proper uses of this question, though. We ask it in the following circumstances::

- * when the client is working on the same recent feelings week after week, or month after month, but they're staying the same; looking earlier may be the way for her to get unstuck
- * when the client is battling numbness regarding an issue; looking earlier can help her feel more feelings about it
- * when the client is having repeated difficulty discharging painful feelings; distresses from earlier in our lives are generally (though not always) easier to discharge than more recent ones

Contrary to what many people assume, working on issues from earlier in life is not inherently deeper or more important work. The depth of the healing can only be measured by the intensity with which the client feels the feelings that come up, and the intensity of the discharge. Working on feelings from yesterday can be just as deep as working on stuff from forty years ago. So when we ask, "What does this remind you of?" we're not doing so because working earlier is more valuable or because it will "get at the real issues" (as if the recent issues were less real). *We do so only because feelings from longer ago are generally easier to get a balance of attention on, and therefore easier to discharge deeply.* When we work earlier, we often find those feelings move more readily.

Therefore, it would be a mistake to ask the client, "What does this remind you of?" on a day when his feelings are already moving through him well; you would just be taking him off track and interfering with his discharge.

Work steadily on developing your ability to ask questions that help to draw your client out, that communicate your caring, and that show that you're thinking about what the client is saying. The art of being an effective counselor is largely the art of asking questions that are caring and supportive, and that help to cut to the heart of the matter.

PLN HANDOUT: KEY QUESTIONS TO ASK

Here are many ideas for things you can ask your client. Any of the questions below may refer to a single incident, or a period of many years, or anything in between. Review these questions periodically and make them part of your toolkit.

- * How are you feeling? (how does that feel, what is that feeling like, describe that feeling, etc.)
- * What was that like for you? (about a past experience or a period in life)
- * What does this feeling remind you of?
- * Can you tell me more about that?
- * Do you want to take a minute to just feel that?
- * Did that feel like [fill in the blank]? (you were all alone, they were ganging up on you, it was all your fault, nobody cared, you had to handle it all, they were out to hurt you, etc.)
- * Does this feeling reside in your body anywhere?
- * What do you need to focus on today? What's on top? What needs attention put on it?
- * What do you need right now?
- * What should have happened (instead of what did)?
- * What do you think was the real reason he/she/they did what they did? (an especially good question when the client describes having been blamed for other people's actions)
- * What do you wish you could have said or done?
- * How did you get by? (what did you draw strength from, how did you survive, how did you get through that period, etc.) What are you drawing upon for strength nowadays?
- * What did you do well (during that hard event or hard period in life)?
- * What are you proud of? What could you take pride in that you haven't yet?
- * When did things get hard?

AND A FEW THINGS TO SAY

- * I'm with you.
- * I'm hearing you.
- * I'm here caring about you.
- * I'll just be here loving you, and you feel what you need to feel.
- * Let the tears come.
- * Hang on, don't rush on. Feel that for a moment. Sit with that for a moment. (etc.)
- * Notice how that feels.
- * I'm not going anywhere, I'm right here.
- * I really appreciate how you (fill in the blank)
- * This is your time, your turn belongs to you.

FIFTH UNIT

Topic: The use of short phrases as a key counseling technique

THE USE OF SHORT PHRASES

The short phrase, proposed by the counselor for the client to say aloud, is one of the most common and powerful techniques used by co-counselors. The client can also come up with the phrase herself. The power of a phrase comes out when the client says it *several times aloud*, with some effort to “feel into” the phrase, saying it with emotion and allowing feelings to bubble up. The phrase will work better if the client says it louder than a normal speaking voice, projecting into the room.

We use phrases of four kinds:

1) Clear statements of emotion

Look for a phrase that succinctly and powerfully captures the feeling or experience that the client is working on. For example:

Client: My family never took any of my opinions seriously.

***Counselor:* Try saying forcefully, “Someone should have listened to me!”**

Here’s another example:

Client: I tend not to let people see how things are really going for me.

***Counselor:* Then how about saying to me, “I’m going through a really tough time these days!”**

Client: (Tries the phrase)

***Counselor:* Now say it again, with even more force.**

Keeping phrases short and simple adds to their emotional power. Here are a number of examples for different situations:

- * **Counselor:** Try saying: “I used to get so scared.”
- * **Counselor:** Try saying: “I felt so betrayed.”
- * **Counselor:** How about saying, with feeling, “He was so mean to me!”
- * **Counselor:** Try looking at me and saying, “This is really hard!”

The phrase may simply be what the client was already saying, But by keeping it simple, saying it loudly, and saying it over and over again, the client will get her feelings to start to release.

Why does this work? It seems to be due to a few factors:

- * Saying the phrase forcefully and repeatedly counters earlier experiences of not being heard, being ignored, or being silenced; the client starts to connect to the fact that she's telling an essential truth about her experience
- * The repetition helps the client take in the fact that the counselor is hearing what things feel like for her, so she feels more accompanied
- * The succinctness of the phrase helps the client to avoid burying her feelings in a stream of words
- * By taking a few moments, with a few breaths, between each repetition, the client helps the feelings that are evoked by the phrase to come to the surface

2) Talking to absent people

The second type of phrase involves the client speaking aloud to someone in her life (past or present) 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: To leave us alone.

***Counselor:* Okay, so yell now, "Leave us alone!"**

Here's 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:* Tell her now, as if she were here with us, "I love you so much."**

Again, succinct phrases work better than longer statements most of the time. In the example above, the client might start making a whole speech of what she wished she could have said to her mother; but after a minute or two, encourage her to go back to the simple phrase, "I love you so much," and to let herself feel into it.

Here are a few examples from different situations, where the client imagines the person they're speaking to being present in the room (and still alive if in reality they've passed away):

- * **Counselor:** Try saying to your aunt: "You were really important to me."
- * **Counselor:** Try saying to your friend: "I don't want you to die."
- * **Counselor:** Tell that teacher, "You made a huge difference in my life."
- * **Counselor:** Try saying to your brother, "You're such a good brother to me, I feel so grateful for you."

For feelings from the past, the client can try saying the phrase from the perspective of today,

or saying it as if she were back in time. Using the example of the client who is processing feelings about how much she loved her mother, she could say, “I love you,” as if her mother were still alive, or “I loved you,” as if her mother were listening to her from beyond the grave. Either form might be the one that hits the sweet spot for the client and brings tears.

An important note: When we offer a phrase for the client to say to an absent person, we’re *never* suggesting that she should actually say this to the person in real life. The phrase is solely for use within the session as a tool to open up discharge and process emotions. In the Peak Living Network we don’t tell people how to handle situations in their lives; we keep advice to zero.

3) Phrases that reclaim power

One way to counter the distress from times in the past when we experienced powerlessness, or had our power stripped from us, is to connect with feelings today that make us feel powerful. We can do this by using powerful words and tones of voice, feeling into what it would have been like if we’d been able to take charge of the injurious situation when it was happening:.

Counselor: Try pointing your finger and yelling, “You get away from me right now!”

Counselor: How about saying, “Shut up! Shut up!”

Counselor: Try the words, “I’m the only person here who knows what they’re doing!”

The phrase can also be from the perspective of today:

Counselor: Let’s try the phrase, “They never succeeded in getting me to say it was my own fault.”

Counselor: How about, “I’m proud of how I live. I didn’t turn out like them!”

Counselor: Try saying forcefully, “I’m coming back for what’s mine.”

4) Phrases that run counter to the distress

The client can try phrases that are *the opposite* of how he’s feeling, or the opposite of what actually happened in his experience. This technique is especially good for bringing out feelings that are getting locked up by hopelessness or self-blame:

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.

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)

You can even try a statement that's absurdly opposite:

- * *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.”**

These kinds of directions are *not* intended to deny reality or to get the client to feel differently. The goal is the opposite; to use phrases that take us *toward* our feelings, but in a way that allows us to laugh, yell, shake, or cry them out.

(The previous two directions are what we call “outwitting a pattern.” For example, if I were to say in a serious voice of to the client, “You actually handle things very well,” my words may have little effect on her, because they get knocked down so quickly by critical voices in her head. So instead we try drawing upon humor and exaggeration, a playful approach that can catch the pattern off guard and lead to discharge.)

Remember, we won't discover the power of short phrases unless the client says them over and over again, five to ten times or even more, with feeling and intensity. Increased volume will often help, as will getting the body involved through pointing a finger, waving arms, or shaking the head. Between each couple of times of trying the phrase, the client should pause for a moment to notice her breathing and attend to any feelings that are coming up, making room to release them when possible.

SIXTH UNIT

Topics: Getting the client's attention out ("Present Time")

Making your sessions work for you

1) GETTING THE CLIENT'S ATTENTION OUT ("Present Time")

The final part of any session, whether short or long, involves helping the client move up and out of distressing emotions that he's been processing, making it possible for him to refocus his attention on the present moment. We use the terms **"attention out"** and **"present time"** interchangeably. Assisting your client to get his attention out is its own art form, one that you can become more and more skillful at over time. If you can draw upon any abilities you have as a humorist, entertainer, or trivia specialist, so much the better.

The classic present time technique we use in co-counseling is to ask the client, **"What are you looking forward to?"** This question never wears out. But there are plenty of other approaches to use, including:

1) Directing the client's attention to sensory experiences (smells, sights, and sounds), 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."

2) Asking the client entertaining or trivial questions that require some thought, such as:

"Name as many different kinds of _____ as you can think of [cheese, flowers, birds, wine, trees, animals, pasta]."

"How many first names can you think of starting with the letter _____ [any letter will do]?"

"Name all the states [or provinces, or countries, or districts] that you have been to. Name as many as you can that you have not been to."

"In your home, how many [windows, mirrors, light bulbs, drawers] are there?"

3) Playing a game in which you think of three completely unrelated items – for example, "a scooter, a whale, and four oranges" – and then ask the client either:

"How would you use these three items?" and the client then tries to find some way to combine

them in some useful or humorous or absurd way
or

“Tell me a brief story that includes these three items,” and the client tries to include all of the items in a brief series of made-up events.

4) Anything else you can think of that’s light or fun. You can create endless variations on the ideas above or come up with new and creative ways to get your client’s attention out.

I recommend making a **Present Time Box**. Take an empty tissue box and, on small pieces of paper, write questions such as the ones above and put them in the box. At the "Present Time" part of the session, you can pull slips out of the box and ask whatever question you find. Add more fun questions to the box whenever you think of them.

Although five minutes is usually about right for this “present time” phase of the session (and much less for a mini-session), be sure to 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 walk around together for a few minutes to really shake it off. This is especially valuable if your client was working on intense fear..

During this this final phase of the session *fight the temptation to refer to any issues the client has worked on*. For example, don’t congratulate him for work he did in the session, and don’t try to sum it up with comments such as "You went to some deep places today." It can be hard to let the work portion of the session end without comment, but discipline yourself to do it. The last few minutes are for looking forward into life, not backward into the session, so we don’t want to push the client’s attention back in that direction or risk bringing up more feelings for him.

Our approach contrasts with professional therapy, where there is often summarizing or reviewing of the session and encouragement to reflect on the distress during the week.

Please note that we’re not promoting denial of the hard aspects of life, as can happen with some “positive thinking” philosophies. Rather, we believe that healing works best when we attend to our deep issues in **focused and intentional ways** at **consciously chosen times**. Little healing comes from going through our days stewing in distress. We progress most when we dive wholeheartedly into the painful spots and then dive wholeheartedly back into life, avoiding (as much as we can) the in-between zones that neither work well as healing nor as living.

2) MAKING YOUR SESSIONS WORK FOR YOU

Your progress toward the kind of healing you desire depends as much on you as it does on your co-counselor; the two of you are a team working together. A co-counseling turn is a time when the counselor and the client both strive to do their best thinking about the client. There are many efforts you can make before, during, and after your sessions that will make it more likely

that you'll be able to feel what you need to feel, process those feelings, and discharge them.

Be Intentional About Your Session Time

Ahead of a session, put some thought into how you would like to use your turn that day. What most needs your attention? What could you work on today that would help you the most in the days ahead? How could your counselor be the best possible support to you today?

During the session, monitor how much time you're spending on side topics. Is it useful for me to be talking about this issue for this long? Am I leaving enough time for the important stuff?

Balance your session time between celebrating what has gone well, working on distress that you need to process, and setting goals and directions for yourself for the future. If several weeks go by and you realize that one of these three elements has fallen to the side, make it central in your next session.

Make the pursuit of discharge a priority. Don't talk your way through your whole turn week after week. Make sure that every session or two you're choosing some feelings to zero in on, and see if you can get them to move through you. Explore what helps you laugh and cry, and think about how to bring those releases into your sessions. Do you want to bring a song or a poem that is emotionally moving to you? Do you want to tell an embarrassing story, which is an almost guaranteed way to get yourself laughing?

When feelings bubble up inside you, make room for them. Sit with them, notice your breathing, and let those feelings be and move. Lean towards them rather than away from them. Get brave about going after discharge, working to overcome the embarrassment that we tend to feel about yelling or crying or yawning. (We even tend to feel embarrassed about laughing if we are doing so "too much," or are laughing at things that we're not "supposed to" laugh at.)

Make co-counseling 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 co-counseling, get a full session at least once a week with turns of forty-five or fifty minutes each, and get at least two additional phone mini-sessions each week with turns of five to ten minutes each. These sessions can all be with the same person or can be with all different people.

Some life situations make it unrealistic to fit in this much session time. This is particularly true for parents and for people who have to work more than one job. But keep reaching for it. You won't know what co-counseling can do for you until you spend a substantial amount of time on it weekly, and until you open up your discharge channels and start to use them often.

Ask For What You Need

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

example, to:

- * give you reassurance that you're needing about areas where you doubt yourself, lack confidence, or feel bad about yourself
- * repeat a particular phrase that you feel the need to hear
- * give you more responses or reactions while you're speaking (or give you less, if he's giving too much input)
- * sit closer or move farther away from you

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

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

Once your counselor has this information about where you need to go, he can start focusing his thoughts on how to help you do that.

Speak up also if:

- * your partner is doing something distracting or bothersome during your turn, or doing anything that makes it feel like he's not entirely focused and present
- * your partner is taking you off in the wrong direction, such as asking a question that would lead you down a path that isn't where you need to go that day

Be open to suggestions; but don't spend much time on an approach that you can tell isn't going to work that day.

When your counselor makes suggestions that do seem helpful but don't quite hit the spot -- such as proposing a phrase that aims in the right direction but is worded in a way that doesn't entirely do it for you -- make adjustments to his idea to make it fit you better.

You and your partner are a team. During your turn, take the attitude that you and your co-counselor are thinking cooperatively about how best to help you. Be aware of old wounds that can send you the message, "No one's ever going to really be there for me, so I'd better do it all myself." This pattern can lead you to resist accepting techniques or ideas proposed by your counselor, feeling that all his ideas are wrong and he won't ever know how to help. Give your counselor some space to counsel you.

Some people struggle with the opposite challenge, in the form of an internal voice that says, "I'm helpless and victimized, so my co-counselor had better help me quick. If he doesn't come up with something helpful, I'm going to be crushed with disappointment. And it will show that he doesn't really care." These old feelings can lead you to put the full weight of responsibility on your counselor. This stance is doomed to fail; the client has to share the work of thinking about how to make the session go well.

Avoid both of these wounded stances and aim for a creative, synergistic process where counselor and client put their heads together to help one of you -- the client -- to heal.

Get Some Mini-Sessions by Phone during the Week

When distress is leaning hard and you can't seem to shake it off, or at any other time when you crave support, call a co-counselor 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. Mini-sessions during the week will also support and strengthen the work you do in your full sessions (and vice-versa).

The most important time to call is precisely when you feel that you're in no shape to do so! Push through feelings that are telling you that you can't call when you're feeling this bad, or that a mini-session won't do any good. These are often the moments when your feelings are the most available to you, ready for productive work. And these are great opportunities to counter the distress patterns that say, "I'm completely alone, no one's really there for me."

Strive To Live Outside Of Your Wounds between Sessions

The quality of your co-counseling sessions depends to a significant degree on how you live your life the rest of the week. 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 we break out of the patterns thrust on us by old wounds, but it's a much more satisfying life and leads us to better self-esteem. *The way we're living in the present then becomes in itself a counter to the messages being sent to us by our distress.* This countering in turn gives us more capacity for deep healing work during 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 and that therefore it's okay to lay those feelings aside for now; you're not avoiding them, you're just waiting for the right time.

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.

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

Live a life that you can be proud of. Work bravely to further your interests and the interests of those you love. Resist oppression wherever you experience it or witness 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. You are your own best guide and measure.

Avoid Substances That Interfere With Healing

Drug or alcohol use isn't conducive to healing. They mask our feelings, slow down our processing, and keep discharge from working.

For example, people can cry hysterically for hours while drunk and nothing actually gets discharged. It isn't clear why this is true; one theory is that there's something *inherently distressing* about being under the influence of a chemical, so that old injuries that a person tries to process at those times get traumatically re-recorded before they can actually get out. But whatever the mechanism may be, the block to discharge is obvious, because an alcoholic can cry about the same sadnesses for hours each week and nothing lightens in the load he or she is carrying.

Caffeine, nicotine, and even sugar affect the quality of a person's attention. You can notice a difference in how fully present your co-counselor 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 healing. Many people complain that their psych meds block them from having a normal range of emotions, never mind being able to laugh or cry hard. But I've also spoken with some people who report succeeding in doing significant healing work while on a psych med. You'll have to decide which of these is true for you.

Choose the Best Counseling 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 she's going through, or because of any other motivation except that you believe *you* will get a good session.

The more you love your co-counselor and feel inspired by her, the better sessions you'll have. Counseling technique is of course important, but it's not a substitute for deep mutual fondness and respect. Seek a partner that you look forward to counseling with and who is open to learning how to counsel you better and better over time.

Your co-counselor does not need to have a similar background to you, or similar wounds. Too much similarity in the distresses that you and your co-counselor are carrying can actually get in the way over time. You may of course need certain kinds of similarity in order to feel safe – women will often prefer to co-counsel with other women, for example – but if you both tend to get triggered badly by each other's material, that becomes an obstacle. It can be beneficial to

split time with someone whose distresses are different enough from yours that you can each stay in clarity when the other one gets triggered.

Nurture and Treasure Your Co-Counselor

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, turn all notifications off).
- * 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").
- * Don't send texts to your co-counselor about distress that you're in (this is a modern problem). Doing so amounts to taking counseling time from them without their consent, and without a reciprocal exchange.
- * When 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, and that has some attractive and interesting things to look at. A room with a hopeful and positive atmosphere helps us 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.

Be committed to your co-counselor. 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. 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.

"Report Backs"

A co-counseling pair benefits from occasionally giving each other feedback about how things are going, and discussing ways to make their counseling more effective. Periodically, a counseling pair can undertake a process called a "Report Back" as a way to make this communication happen.

A Report Back is facilitated by a third person, who can be any co-counselor that the two of you agree to have join you. It's helpful, but not necessary, for that person to have quite a bit of co-counseling experience. (PLN can provide an experienced person to do the Report Back with you, as long as the two of you have done at least five full-length sessions together – 45 minutes each or longer. Send a request to PeakLivingNetwork@juno.com.)

The process begins with each member of the pair taking five or ten minutes to talk about what is *going well* for them during their turns in the pair's co-counseling sessions. This is the time to explore questions such as:

- * What are some things that your co-counselor does in the counseling role that feel good to you? What is most helpful to you about what she does? Can you think of specific things she has said that have helped you explore feelings or have helped you to discharge? What most makes you feel supported and heard?

After both partners have answered these questions in some detail, each person takes about ten minutes to talk about their co-counselor could do that would help them more. Some questions to explore in this part of the Report Back include"

- * What could you use more of from your co-counselor?

- * What things does she do that you could use *less* of, such as things that make it hard for you to feel your feelings, things that make it hard for you to discharge, or things that throw you off the track of where you would like your turn to go?

The third phase of the Report Back is a time for either person to raise 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, the Report Back finishes with each co-counselor sharing a few more things that they appreciate about the other person and about their co-counseling relationship. It's important to always end on this note.

Following the co-counseling principle of keeping time equal, the person who facilitated the Report Back takes a turn of 20 or 25 minutes at the end of the process, if she would like to.

A counseling pair can use the Report Back process without a third co-counselor present with them, but the extra support is very helpful, so have someone facilitate unless you just can't find anyone to do it.

Build and Participate In Your Local PLN Network

In addition to two and three-person co-counseling sessions, local networks of PLN can include support groups, co-counseling classes, healing workshops, and local newsletters. And 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 network.

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

Participating in a wider network supports and deepens the work we do in one-on-one co-counseling. Feeling part of a strong community of people who share similar healing practices and principles provides a counter to our isolation, and we can carry that strength into our sessions; we feel everybody's presence even when there are only two of us in the room at the moment.

PLN HANDOUT:**MAKING YOUR SESSIONS WORK FOR YOU**

Have a plan ahead of time for how you're going to use your session.

Eat healthful food beforehand, then take a walk or do some stretching, so that you go into your session alert and energetic.

Focus wholeheartedly on what's positive during the "new and good" part of the session, no matter how hard that is for you; this discipline will lead to much deeper work.

Be thinking about yourself and your needs; don't rely on your counselor to do all the thinking. Speak up about what you think would work for you; you are the ultimate authority in the session.

Put thought into what helps you feel your feelings, and what helps you release distressing emotions. You might bring photos, listen to a song that brings up feelings for you, or tell certain stories from your life that get your feelings going. Draw upon your knowledge about yourself.

Spend a significant portion of each session feeling your feelings and pursuing emotional release -- don't talk the whole time. Words can help lead us into our feelings, but an endless stream of words will keep our feelings away.

Come to sessions as substance-free as possible. Avoid alcohol, drugs, sweets, nicotine, and caffeine to the fullest extent you can. In this way you'll be more able to feel your feelings, as all of the above substances chase feelings away.

Take risks in your sessions; open up, show parts of yourself that are hard to show, challenge yourself to take some uncomfortable steps. (But don't do this if your gut is telling you that your counselor is not someone you should trust.)

Take risks between sessions, live courageously, pursue connection. Having good sessions will help you to live well, but living well will also help you have good sessions!

SEVENTH UNIT

Topics:

Self-Appreciation

Lightness Techniques, including Positive Memories

1) SELF-APPRECIATION

We tend to get the message early in life that speaking positively about ourselves is “bragging.” But it isn’t. Bragging is when someone is saying, in words or in tone, that they’re better than other people; this has nothing to do with appreciating oneself, but unfortunately we get taught that they’re the same thing. The notion that we might love and appreciate ourselves the same way we love and appreciate others is not likely to ever have been introduced to us, alas.

So we all have some work to do on recovering our ability to:

- * identify what we like about ourselves
- * recognize our successes and accomplishments
- * take pride in the ways we’ve been good to others
- * take pride in our courage, including our efforts to stand up for justice for ourselves and others

It can be an even harder step to recover our ability to say these things aloud. So in co-counseling we want to set aside time to tell our counselor proudly the things we like and appreciate about ourselves. When you’re in the counseling role, look for times to ask your client what he’s proud of and what he feels good about regarding himself. Support him to get past the embarrassment he may feel about self-appreciation, and press him to speak with delight about himself.

Asking questions about self-appreciation should also be added to your collection of present-time techniques, as they are great mood-lifters.

2) LIGHTNESS TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING ON HEAVY TOPICS

Some memories can be so painful that when we attempt to tell about what happened or process the surrounding feelings, we feel ourselves sinking under the weight of it all. Similarly, some days we feel stuck in exhaustion or discouragement, unable to get in touch with any place inside of ourselves that feels powerful or hopeful. In a co-counseling session when we’re trying to deal with either of these challenges, we may feel numb and distant from our feelings, or we may feel just plain bad and the distress just can’t seem to move through us at all. We refer to this

state as feeling “sunk.”

In a session that’s feeling like this, we’re more likely to get to some productive feelings, and some discharge, by trying a number of lighter strategies, rather than throwing ourselves up against distress directly on a day when it doesn’t want to move.

Here is a collection of ways we can mix things up to get out of a sunk place:

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 can start a story from his childhood, “There once was this little boy, and he...” and continue the story in this way, but simply telling what actually did take place. This technique can sometimes create enough of a sense of safety – just because the client is picturing this happening to someone else – to allow the client to really feel what it was like and be able to release the pain.

If even this approach feels too heavy to the client, have him try telling the story as though it happened to an animal: “There once was a little puppy and this puppy had a very cruel teacher,” or whatever the memory has to do with. (Telling the story this way may often brings 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 discharges deeply 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. A variation on this technique is to have the counselor be the one to talk to the imaginary young child, while the client imagines being that child (which he indeed once was).

Positive memories

Ask your client to describe a happy memory for you. It tends to work better to ask specific questions; otherwise the client's mind tends to go blank when she tries to think of anything good that has happened. So you can 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

(See the list of questions below under **Positive Memories**.)

The value in this approach comes from having the client tell the memory in as much detail as she can remember, including what she remembers feeling. This can have three effects, any of which is welcome: 1) Simply helping to lift the person out of the dark place they have sunk into emotionally that day, so the rest of the day might go better, 2) Drawing strength into the person, so that later in the session she can try again to talk about harder things and see if now the feelings will move, or 3) Directly lead to an emotional opening, so the person has a wave of discharge that is brought on spontaneously by the pleasant memory, as a wave of sadness or anger or anxiety floods into her and is able to be released. (What has happened in this case is that the

pleasant memory has created a balance of attention, which leads to discharge.)

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 (if you are co-counseling in person).

Drawing upon present time techniques

All of the techniques that we use for getting a person's attention out at the end of a counseling turn can also be used to lift someone who has sunk into heavy feelings don't appear to be willing to move that day. 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.

PLN HANDOUT:**QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORING POSITIVE MEMORIES**

“Tell me about a time when:

- * you went to the beach or on some other kind of outing with friends or with your family
- * you made a new friend
- * you had a special time outdoors, enjoying a beautiful or special spot
- * you had fun doing something you weren't supposed to be doing
- * you felt full of a sense of purpose while you participated in something
- * you had a funny or interesting encounter with a stranger / someone you didn't know
- * you had an embarrassing moment
- * you felt at peace, rested, relaxed
- * you had a great vacation going somewhere
- * you had a great holiday or celebration
- * you had a happy time related to what season it was (e.g. you felt spring coming on, you had a great time in hot weather, you were out somewhere in the autumn, you enjoyed the snow)
- * you felt like something miraculous happened / you had a positive experience that was telepathic or supernatural, or seemed it
- * you laughed a lot (e.g. the most recent time that you laughed hard or long, a laughing fit when you were a kid, a laughing fit in a group of people, etc.)
- * you stood and really took in a beautiful sight (e.g. what's the last beautiful thing you took a picture of)”

EIGHTH UNIT

Topic: Approaches to Healing Anger

TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING ON ANGER IN SESSIONS

- 1) Stand up tall, take a powerful stance (feet at least shoulder width apart), hold your head high but keep your chin in.
- 2) Use a voice that is strong and powerful, not screechy or whiny. Try to sound like someone who is giving orders, not someone who is pleading or begging. Keep the pitch of your voice toward the low end of your range.
- 3) Stomp on a pillow or cushion, or pound a couch or a bed. Another great device is a plastic baseball bat that you can hit things with (without harming anything). Speak loudly and forcefully while you pound, but don't yell your loudest or scream — not because there's anything wrong with doing so, but because doing so tends to make us feel less powerful, not more so.
- 4) Take frequent quick breaks to make eye contact with your co-counselor and take in the fact that s/he is there. Keep absorbing the support and caring.
- 5) Ask for reassurance periodically if you need it. When we're releasing anger, we often feel ashamed or embarrassed about doing so, or feel that it looks kind of ugly. These barriers can be even greater for women than for men, so keep checking in with your co-counselor to see that s/he is still approving of you and accompanying you.
- 6) Imagine that the person you're enraged at is present in the room, and direct your anger at that image. (It might be multiple people.)
- 7) Keep the words simple, and say them over and over again with great force. For releasing anger, this technique works better than giving a speech about all the things you're angry about. Choose one or two short phrases (perhaps things like "Get away from me!" or "Don't even think you can get away with that!" or "F*** you!") to use repeatedly.
- 8) It often works best to use a phrase that goes against what actually happened; for example, you might try yelling "You can't get away with this!" at someone who actually did get away with what they did to you at the time. This contradictory-seeming approach will tend to release anger more successfully, as it will help you feel more powerful in the present. Try it.

9) Follow on into other feelings that come up. When anger is successfully getting out, it will commonly lead to moments of crying or laughing, or even of cycling between laughing, crying, and angry storming.

10) Take pride in your outrage. You are right to feel enraged and bitter in the face of the injustices you've experienced. You of course need relief from your anger because it's eating you up inside, but that doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you for how angry you are. Remembering this tends to be especially important for women, who've been societally conditioned to feel that their anger is ugly and "unladylike." (You could have a good anger discharge session fighting back against those terrible messages about anger.)

Anger is only an unhealthy reaction when it's used by violent or abusive people as an excuse to frighten or control others; and even then, it's just that – an excuse.

11) If you are doing this work by yourself, keep giving yourself encouragement ("Go for it! Don't hold back! Fight hard!") just the way a co-counselor would do for you. And keep picturing your close people -- whoever they are at this point in your life -- and imagine that they're present with you and rooting for you.

12) As always when doing deep emotional work, take plenty of time at the end to come out of the painful feelings and into positive awareness, focusing on looking forward to the rest of your day.

A final point: Some people – and this is particularly common with men but can also be true with women – don't really need to be discharging anger at the moment. For those people, what they're thinking of as anger is primarily a layer of deep frustration. And frustration yields much better to other forms of discharge, particularly tears, than it does to storming. In fact, some of our deepest frustration can come precisely from having had our access to crying blocked off. People in this category often need to put more anger into getting their laughing and crying channels opened up. This is another reason why, when you're working on anger, it's important to follow it into whatever emotions come up for you and not try to control the process..

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS

1) IMPORTANT WAYS TO USE YOUR SESSION TIME

Although our deepest healing will tend to come through discharge, there are many paths to those releases. All of the following uses of sessions will contribute to deep releasing, though often by creating the context for the discharge to come on a different day. It is valuable for people to plan periodically to devote sessions to all of these purposes.

- * Pursuing deep discharge (most commonly laughter, crying, storming, and yawning, but shaking/trembling may be accessible sometimes also)
- * Telling the story of your life (over a number of sessions)
- * Pleasant memories, using the questions from the handout
- * Accomplishing something that you've been having a hard time doing, with your counselor's loving attention
- * Telling the story of an important friendship/relationship/relative in detail
- * Looking at photographs
- * Listening to pieces of music that are especially moving to you
- * Going through the exercises that accompany *The Joyous Recovery*
- * Working with the inventory of strengths from Chapter 5 of *The Joyous Recovery*
- * Setting life goals, checking in on how previous goals are going (Chapter 14 of *TJR*)
- * Talking to people who aren't present (including ones who are no longer living), expressing what you've most needed to express to them
- * Telling sections of books or movies or shows that have mattered to you
- * Sitting silently
- * Having guarded rest (closing your eyes, lying down, with the counselor's full attention)
- * Having fun (for example, talking about a subject that you find it fun to talk about, such as one of your main interests or "hobbies"; going into stories or subjects that make you laugh; or whatever you would most enjoy)
- * Rehearsing what you would say to someone, not just to work on the feelings that come up (which you would also be doing, whether you mean to or not), but toward the goal of actually doing it.
- * Talking in great detail about one of your key life's interests or passions, whether current or from earlier in your life.

2) A REFERENCE LIST OF COUNSELING TECHNIQUES

- * Giving the client your full, undivided, caring attention
- * Asking, “How does/did that feel?”
- * Validating, as in, “I can totally get why what happened would feel bad to you.”
- * Looking and sounding interesting, showing with your facial expressions that you care
- * Asking lots of questions; questions that show interest, that get the person to say more, and that show that you’re taking in what the person is saying; asking the client to tell you more about something s/he said.
- * Slowing the client down when you can see feelings happening. “Take a moment to feel that.”
- * Redirecting the client back to feelings/releases if she rushes on with talking. “What was the thought that brought those tears a moment ago?”
- * Leave some periods of silence, so that the client can just feel her feelings, and so that discharge can come if it’s ready to.
- * Working with the client to find a short phrase that captures the essence of what she is or was feeling. Then encourage her to say the phrase *several times* aloud, stopping every few tries to feel what she’s feeling. On a few of the times that she says the phrase, have her look right at you as she says it, and see how that it.

Kinds of phrases: 1) Speaking to a particular person (e.g. expressing anger towards someone that they’re talking about in the session); 2) Clear statements of emotion (e.g. “I’m having a hard time these days”; 3) Phrases that run counter to the client’s distress (e.g. “I feel like nothing can stop me!” during a period of discouragement)

Encourage the client to say the phrase with some intensity of emotion. Ask her periodically to notice what’s going on inside of her as she does this.

- * Having the client listen while you (the counselor) speak to the imaginary person on the client’s behalf. (For example, you might speak sternly to a person who harmed her and tell the person how totally wrong their actions were and that you won’t let them get away with it.) Then ask the client to notice how it felt for her to have you stand up for her in this way.
- * Asking for the client what her first thought was after trying a phrase.
- * Telling the client what you like and appreciate about her, based on what she’s just been telling you. (You can learn all kinds of positive things about people from listening carefully to the stories they tell about what is going on for them and what has happened in the past.)
- * Asking the client to talk about what she appreciates about herself or what she has done well in the past. For example, you might say, “Tell me some of what you think you’ve done well as a mother,” or, “It sounds like you’ve been courageous – could you tell me about a couple of times you’ve bravely stood up for yourself?”
- * Asking, “What does this remind you of?”
- * Being in physical contact with the client, unless s/he specifically asks you not to be
- * Reflecting back to the client the feelings s/he seems to be describing: “Wow, that must have

felt like etc.” -- this validates the client if you get it right, and gives the client a chance to explain her experience again if your reflection missed the mark.

- * Taking stands about how the client should have been treated, as in, “The things they said to you that day were not okay,” or, “Your sister should have been there for you instead of getting competitive.”

- * Reassuring your client that the situation is safe in the moment, as in, ‘No one’s going to hurt you while you’re here” or, “I’m not going to put you down, you can tell the truth here.”

- * Having the client try using a powerful voice, tone, and posture, perhaps even standing up, stomping her foot, waving her arms around, and so forth, to help her work through feelings of powerlessness.

- * Having her reimagine past events as if she’d had power at the time.

- * Creating images for your client, such as pretending that she’s little again and a loving adult comes along and asks her why she’s so upset.

- * Having the client tell what happened as if it happened to someone else (e.g. “There was this little boy, and... etc.) or happened to an animal (e.g. “There was once this little rabbit”)

- * Exploring pleasant memories of different kinds (see that sheet of questions)

- * Asking the client to tell an event in great sensory detail, including what the walls or surroundings looked like, what the smells might have been, what the weather was like, every other detail the person can remember

- * Speaking to the client’s young self; or having her speak to her own young self

- * Asking the client a question that isn’t actually for her to answer, but rather is for her to take in the feeling of what it would have been like to be asked that questions by a caring person at the time of the hurtful events

- * Exploring embarrassing stories (it’s fun and tends to lead to discharge)

- * Being the voice of hope, exhibiting hopefulness in your tone, facial expression, and posture.

Lay your despair aside during the other person’s turn.

- * Asking for feedback on your counseling, towards the end of a session (but before present time)

3) BOUNDARIES AND ETHICS IN CO-COUNSELING

A co-counseling relationship is a special and powerful connection between two people. Due to its agreed-upon structure and guidelines, and to the shared assumptions about human nature and human needs, we're 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.

To make matters more challenging, there are people in the world who have strong addicted or entitled pulls toward power, and they can cause deep harm to others. And we can't always tell immediately who they are.

For the above reasons, it's essential for people who participate in co-counseling to respect a clear set of boundaries and ethics.

Co-counseling relationships are for healing

My first recommendation is that you not start friendships or dating relationships with people you have gotten to know through co-counseling classes, sessions, or workshops. Use your co-counseling connections for healing, maintaining the same kind of boundaries outside of sessions that a professional therapist would keep with a client.

A co-counseling relationship 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.

A normal social relationship involves such factors as making decisions about how to spend time, negotiating different desires or differences of opinion, learning to deal with each other at times when one person is in a cranky mood or is not fully present, figuring out the mutual meeting of physical needs (When will we eat? What will we eat? Who's going to pay for it? etc.), negotiating different desires about how often or how long to be together, and on and on. Learning about these areas is essential to how a close social relationship is built. *A co-counseling relationship can become very close while skipping all of these foundation-building elements.* That's a wonderful fact – but it's not the context for a successful or healthy social relationship.

Even in the rare 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 co-counseling activities uniquely safe places to be entirely yourself, without having to be concerned with the additional responsibilities and vulnerabilities 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 co-counselors.

We are all lovable and can find good friends

A different reason not to form social relationships with people you come to know through co-counseling 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 co-counseling context

It is inappropriate for people to be sexual with each other when meeting to co-counsel or while participating in any other co-counseling activity. (It’s inappropriate even at PLN gatherings that aren’t related to co-counseling.) 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 sexual abuse suffers particular damage when a co-counselor has sexual contact with her or him. Lingering distress from abuse experiences can lead a survivor to consent to sexual interactions that aren’t genuinely desired; and in the midst of co-counseling interactions it can be especially difficult to sort out what is desired and what isn’t, because we’re making ourselves vulnerable with each other in ways that can create a tangle of feelings; and these feelings can include the illusion that sexual interaction in that moment is exactly what we need. So don’t go there.

And when a sexual advance is successfully warded off when unwanted, the experience can still cast a survivor back into feelings of mistrust toward others and lack of safety in her or his own body, feelings that the person is working hard to escape in life.

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 manipulative; in other words, they aren't actually thinking about your healing at all.

Let someone know if your boundaries are not respected

If someone you know through co-counseling approaches you for sexual contact, 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

People sometimes get focused on what they feel like they're losing by not spending social time with someone from co-counseling whom they love or care about. As a result of that outlook, they are failing to notice how much they gain. A co-counseling relationship is one of the greatest ways to be close to someone.

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 co-counseling 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 doing co-counseling?

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 co-counseling one; but moving in the opposite direction – bringing co-counseling into an already-existing social or lover relationship – tends to work 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 partners. (In the next section you'll

find a few guidelines to follow in co-counseling with people who are in your social life.)

What if the intense desire to be friends or lovers with my co-counselor just won't go away?

Most of the source of that desperate desire to be in each other's social lives is early frozen needs. The best way to deal with it is to take session time, with other people or with the person in question (or, even better, both) and work on exploring and discharging that pull to socialize or to be lovers. Work especially on feelings of longing and deprivation from early in life.

If the feeling between you and another co-counselor is mutual, and you are both feeling a strong pull to socialize, I strongly recommend a *one-year waiting period* from whenever you mutually acknowledge the desire to see each other socially. During this year, you commit to work in a substantial number of sessions, both together and separately, on the feelings that are coming up.

I press people to observe this one-year waiting period for two reasons:

- 1) In the great majority of cases, the pull to socialize will have faded during that year – because the pull of frozen needs tends to wear off – and you will have avoided entering into a connection that would have most likely had a short life, and that therefore would have damaged your co-counseling relationship and potentially harmed your co-counseling network. (For example, once your social relationship falls apart, it is likely to be uncomfortable or even impossible to be at co-counseling gatherings together.)
- 2) The waiting period will force you to look seriously at what's coming up for you with respect to the other person.

Now, what if this turns out to be one of those rare cases where a year has passed, you've been doing the work I've outlined above during that year, and you're still convinced that the two of you would be great friends or even dating partners?

First, be open about this decision with other people in your co-counseling network, both because they can be affected by what you decide and because their thinking and support may be important to you. *No secrecy.*

Then, if you do decide to go forward on spending social time together, *move slowly*. Don't launch immediately into spending tons of time together (which is what those feelings of desperation will tempt you to do). 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 – or 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.

4) CO-COUNSELING WITH FRIENDS, LOVERS, AND RELATIVES

When you have built a substantial relationship with someone through normal social interactions, adding a co-counseling relationship to your connection can be great. As I explained in the section on boundaries, making a friend or a lover into a co-counselor of yours has a completely different set of dynamics than making a co-counselor of yours into a friend or lover (which is almost always a mistake, as I discussed in that section).

Just use the following guidelines in your relationship:

- * Keep the time even, just as you would with any other co-counselor. 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 your co-counseling relationship work.
- * Don't start a session if there is unprocessed 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 co-counseling 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, just as they would be with any other co-counselor.

Similarly, 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. (Sometimes your friend or lover may say, "Okay, I feel like I can counsel you about your feelings about me today," and other times they might not feel prepared to take that on.) **Make it your standard practice to take your issues from that relationship to a different co-counselor.**

5) OPPRESSION

Oppression is about *power* and *control*. We hear a lot about individual prejudice and discrimination, but these are actually the smaller pieces of how oppressive systems injure people. The larger and more devastating dynamics is the way in which the powerful groups in society use policies, punishments, and propaganda to *keep* oppressive systems in place, including powerful attacks against people who try to dismantle those systems.

So while, for example, it's an unquestionably terrible thing when a landlord denies a rental to a family because they are dark-skinned, that act pales compared to government officials consciously promoting policies designed to lead to the incarceration of a large proportion of the country's people color. (I recommend highly that you see the documentary "13" to understand how this has been done in the United States.)

We have to attend to oppression at both of these levels; at the micro level of overcoming bigoted attitudes and individual acts of discrimination, but simultaneously at the macro level of confronting and taking apart powerful and deliberate social systems.

Dynamics common to all systems of oppression:

- * The use of violence and intimidation, including the threat of violence, starvation and the threat of starvation, and incarceration
- * Sexual violence and boundary invasion toward the target group
- * Vastly unfair distribution of wealth and other desirable elements of life, including leisure time, access to open space, health care, and access to healthful food and water . In fact, unfair distribution of resources, coupled with labor and sexual exploitation, is really what oppression exists for – the rest is distractions and excuses.
- * The target group being viewed and characterized as **inherently inferior** – less intelligent, less logical, less honest, less deep, less competent, less ethical, and less worth listening to or taking seriously
- * The pervasive telling of lies about that group, the burying of the group's history, and the twisting of current events to make the group look bad, in news media, textbooks, and other key sources of information. The powerful work hard to hide oppression or, where it can't be hidden, to make sure that the victims get blamed for it, thereby indoctrinating the whole society.
- * Power and control – the taking away of the group's rights, freedom, and say
- * Silencing and retaliation for any efforts on the group's part to have a voice or to name what's being done
- * Fostering the group's dependence on the powerful group, including sabotaging any progress toward independence

- * Controlling access to information for members of the group, making it very hard for them to find the information they need (for example, making sure that prisoners don't receive magazines that explain prisoners' legal rights)
- * Taking children away from parents for various pretexts (selling slaves, taking tribal children and imprisoning them in government "boarding schools," taking children from their parents by child protective services for racist or classist reasons)

Two key additional dynamics common to almost all systems of oppression:

- * Exploitation of the group's labor – slavery, unpaid work and underpaid work, no rights in the workplace, dangerous working conditions, long hours, little vacation, and no say over anything during the workday; this was probably how and why oppression began at all, as men started to get power over women (five or ten thousand years ago) and started to exploit their labor.
- * Exploitation and theft of the group's resources – taking away the group's land, hunting grounds, and fishing grounds; taking water sources and waterways; polluting the group's land, water, and air (colonialism being the prime example of this)

There is no way to justify any of these actions. However, we spend our entire lives being exposed day in and day out to "information" that attempts to do just that.

Facing the Realities of Oppression is Crucial to All Emotional Healing

The above is a lot to take in. But the load gets *less*, not greater, when we move bravely forward directly into the issues. If we choose not to think about any of this *we still feel it weighing us down*; we just don't know where the weight comes from, so we call it depression or we blame it on other people or we decide that's "just the way life is." As you start to digest the reality of what oppression has meant in your life, and in the lives of people you care about, you will find before long that you're feeling more hopeful and more powerful, not less so; and this will become even more true when you start to actively work on these experiences in co-counseling and discharge your pain regarding them.

The failure to examine and address the role that systematic oppression plays in our emotional injuries is one of the central reasons why current popular approaches to healing and recovery are not working well.

Resistance to Oppression Springs Eternal

The oppressed are not just a collection of wounds. Inside of us there is resilience, and strength, and wisdom. We keep rising again, no matter how beaten down we get, to fight once more for our rights. The oppressed will never give up.

A powerful aspect of working for liberation is for each of us to recover our own history of resistance to oppression, and the history of our people's resistance which goes back hundreds or

thousands of years. There is much more fighting back happening today than we ever hear about, and there always has been. In fact, the oppressors work hard to conceal our history of resistance from us – including refusing to let our children learn about it in schools – because they are well aware of how quickly our liberation movements would grow if we had that knowledge and inspiration.

You have a personal history of resisting oppression, whether you remember it or not. A great way to start working on oppression in sessions is to go digging into your memories, beginning in young childhood, of times when you

- * questioned oppressive teachings you were exposed to (including silent resistance, meaning times when you objected to oppression internally but didn't feel safe to let your objections show)
- * got upset about how an oppressed group was being treated
- * were upset by being pressured into participating in oppressive behavior or joke-telling
- * spoke out against oppressive behavior or intervened to stop it

(* You can read more about oppression in Chapter 18 if The Joyous Recovery. *)

6) INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

When we experience oppression, the mistreatment that we've been the target of gets internalized through the wounding process. This internalized oppression affects:

- * What we believe about ourselves – parts of the negative messages we've absorbed about our group creep into our self-image
- * What we believe about each other – parts of the negative messages creep into our view of other people in our same oppressed group
- * Our ability to trust people from our own group -- we unduly suspect members of our own group of being dishonest, of being out to hurt us, or of collaborating with the oppressors (though our suspicions are sometimes justified)
- * Our view (which becomes idealized) of the dominant group – we start looking up to our oppressors and admiring them, even though we continue to have great bitterness toward them at the same time, while looking down on members of our own group and wishing they'd act more like the dominant group
- * Our ability to unify enough to fight back against the oppression -- anytime you see oppressed people pouring their energy into fighting against each other instead of against the dominant group, internalized oppression is operating inside them (along with divisions deliberately sowed by the dominant group)

Through all of the above dynamics, internalized oppression also leads us to:

- * Reject ourselves and try to be like the dominant group, hoping to join them; and sometimes even to participate in keeping our own people down, in order to try to score points with the powerful people

Some Counseling Approaches For Working On Internalized Oppression

I recommend doing at least some of the work I describe below – or all of it, if you choose – with counselors who are from your same group. Doing this work with a counselor who is an ally may work well also, as long as you trust that person's ability to take in what you're saying, and to be there for you as deep hurt and anger come up for you regarding the oppression.

1) Here are a number of powerful phrases (“counseling directions”) you can work with during your turn. Choose one that seems most likely to touch something inside you (or try various ones and see which ones cause a reaction in you). Say the phrase many times over, with force and feeling. Each time you say the phrase, pause for a moment to feel what you’re feeling and to allow discharge to happen if it’s available. If there’s a phrase that really causes you to laugh or cry, stay with that phrase until it doesn’t bring discharge anymore.

“You are my people.” -- said while holding an image of certain people from your same targeted group, or maybe an image of your entire group, and reaching to say it with love and pride

“They pulled me away from you.” -- again, expressed to your own group, referring to the ways that oppressive treatment and oppressive messages caused you to become divided, or to divide yourself, off from your own group; try also adding the phrase, “but we’re finding each other again” or “but we’ll find each other again”

“I am a _____” -- filling in your identity as a member of the group whose experience you’re counseling about (a woman, a Jew, a gay man, a working-class person, an African-American, etc.), and saying it with force and pride and with head held high

2) The counselor can ask questions such as:

“What do you admire about your people?”

“What are some of the strengths of your people that you can see in yourself?”

3) The client might also choose to work on:

* What negative messages about your people do you feel like reside inside you? Feel the grief or anger you have about carrying those messages. Try also yelling at those messages to go away.

* What resentments or frustrations do you carry toward your own people? What leftover hurts do you carry from being let down by your own people? (These issues will often feel safer to work on with a counselor who is also from your same group; you may find that you don’t want to work on them with an ally, even one whom you trust quite a bit.)

(* You can read more about internalized oppression in Chapter 18 of *The Joyous Recovery*. *)