

Body Psychotherapy
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Learning the Art of Letting Go
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Therapy as a Healing Partnership

At the Body Synergy® Institute, we see therapy as a partnership in which we create a caring, safe, challenging, and creative learning environment with our clients. We combine Deep Tissue Bodywork with a variety of approaches to psychotherapy including Existential and Humanistic Psychology, Expressive Therapies, Gestalt Therapy, Object-Relations Theory, Bowen Family Systems Theory, Contextual Therapy, and Cognitive and Behavioral Therapy.

The Deep Tissue Bodywork we do is informed by the pioneering work of Ida Rolf, Ph.D. inventor of Rolfing®, Judith Aston developer of Aston Patterning®, Emilie Conrad developer of Continuum®, Moshe Feldenkrais, and F. M. Alexander. In addition, the innovative body awareness approach we have developed over the last 30 years integrates verbal and hands-on dialogue. Our intention is to create a therapeutic alliance where safety, respect, and deep listening is present. This supports clients being able to learn new ways to relate to themselves and others.

Problematic thoughts and emotions associated with significant relationships and events come into conscious awareness and are released through the dialogue between therapist and client. As our clients become aware of more freedom and ease in their bodies and experience greater vitality, they are better able to pay attention to how they relate to their bodies. This awakening process is freeing and leads to greater curiosity, clarity, and new behavior.

We draw our clients' attention to the relationship between their mind, body and how they express themselves. At the beginning of a session we are seated facing one another. We talk with the client to help uncover the feelings they have been suppressing, as well as to work with them on expressing and releasing those emotions which are burdensome to them. The dialogue continues when they lie on the massage table and are receiving the hands-on bodywork to release the physical holding patterns that are associated with their blocked emotions. If clients' emotions build up in the therapy process, we teach them to be aware of their heightened intensity before they get to the point of feeling out of

control. We coach them on how to connect to their body to alter or alleviate their distress. We intervene in order to enhance the structuring and organizing capacities of the body, to help clients gradually link cognitive, emotional, and sensorimotor abilities. Our intent is to move people from a non-relational stance of isolation to a relational stance of being open to self and others.

The fundamental concepts of Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue have greatly influenced how we interact with our clients. His idea of "healing through meeting" is expressed by how we touch and talk with our clients. It is our experience that our ability to relate to our clients with empathy and to hold them in positive regard is fundamental to the success of our work, regardless of what techniques are used. The exploration of and reliance on this genuine connection between therapist and client is what we find enables our clients to discover their capacity for self-healing. Trust and relationship is paramount when there has been a history of trauma. You don't develop either without the other. Therefore, we find that the therapeutic alliance that we develop in partnership is essential.

Why Deep Tissue Bodywork (Structural Integration)?

Many people who come to us because they are in pain do not fully understand why they have pain, or what they can do to eliminate it. More importantly, they may not realize they have the capacity to heal themselves. Deep Tissue Bodywork, which is also known as Structural Integration, is a process of psychophysical re-education during which clients learn to heal themselves through gaining awareness of old postural (compensatory) habits and by being conscious of how they sit, stand, and walk. They learn how to be aware of and release physical holding patterns in their tissue. As holding patterns are released, habit patterns are no longer automatic, and the capacity to function differently in their body emerges.

We explain that fascia (also called connective tissue) spreads throughout the body from head to foot. It surrounds every muscle, bone, nerve, blood vessel and organ of the body. When there is physical and emotional trauma, the myofascial system reacts as a compensatory mechanism for pain. Unfortunately it often overcompensates. The fascial wrappings and underlying muscles become tight and stuck together. The result can be restricted movement and chronic pain, often in seemingly unrelated parts of the body. This vicious circle-by which injury begets injury-can be reversed through deep tissue bodywork. By using gentle hands-on methods to release and integrate this myofascial tissue, we help to restore the body to a comfortable balance and movement becomes more fluid again.

Some people's injuries might have been so minor, as when a child falls, that they were given no attention. Not until years later are the consequences noticed in the form of possible distortions and chronic pains. People forget even more serious injuries and are baffled by their aches and pains. It is often only when the therapist helps them to release

tightness in the body that a memory of the injury and its physical or emotional pain emerges. When a trauma that has been held in the unconscious is consciously released, it is a profound clarification and relief.

One person we worked with had broken his leg while skiing 20 years before. He wanted relief from pain in his back and in the leg that had not been broken. During his therapy, he came to understand that he had been overusing the good leg, not only for the six months that the cast was on, but also ever since. This pattern of compensation, while understandable at the time of the break, had continued and eventually caused one leg to function as if it were shorter than the other one. This in turn created chronic lower back pain.

During a basic rehabilitative program of ten two-hour sessions, we released and balanced all of the structural relationships in his body, including restoring his two legs to equal length. The client consequently changed his habitual way of standing, sitting, and walking. He found that he could once again engage in all of the physical activities that his pain had prevented. This integrative structural approach to working with the body is a fundamental aspect of what we do at the Body Synergy® Institute.

When Your Posture Changes, You Change

In Body Psychotherapy, when we speak of "posture," we are not just addressing physical issues, but also attitudinal and emotional patterns. Learning to stand up for yourself when there is a history of intellectual, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse requires an integrated and comprehensive approach to changing the mind-body relationship.

"Poor" posture is learned by imitating others or developed by compensating for physical and emotional injuries. When one part of our mind-body relationship is thrown out of balance by an injury, we automatically throw other parts out of balance to compensate: we limp when we sprain an ankle or draw our shoulders up and contract into a defensive posture when being scolded. These patterns of compensation become locked into our bodies over time so that it requires physical releasing combined with self-awareness to change them.

In Body Psychotherapy, we see people benefiting from learning to understand how their mind and body function together. This viewpoint leads to progressive and dynamic change. Emotional traumas, such as abuse, produce unconscious physical compensations, just as physical traumas, like accidents and athletic injuries, produce unconscious emotional compensations. These compensations in the mind-body relationship are profound and self-limiting. For change to occur during the therapeutic process, it is essential to understand, experience, and release the physical and emotional consequences of compensating for earlier traumas, including seemingly minor ones. Physical modalities, when not combined with psychotherapy, may not produce sufficient

awareness of those thoughts and feelings that must be simultaneously understood and released along with the releasing of physical compensations.

Letting Go in the Mind-Body Relationship

At the Body Synergy® Institute we teach you the art of letting go. Letting go of the negative consequences of the past allows you to learn from the past and discover your inner resources to live your life now. In Body Psychotherapy, people awaken to new possibilities for how to be in their bodies. Restrictive or distorted patterns of thinking and feeling and their effect on physical holding patterns are identified and let go of during this hands-on process.

Letting go is necessary in order to make room for newness. It takes courage to let go of long-standing ways of doing things that have caused pain, confusion, or numbness. Sometimes a gentle and artful conversation with a sensitive and caring person can help you find the courage to discover how to release. Being able to let go means that you have come to a turning point where you have sufficient inner strength to question the choices you have made thus far. Body Psychotherapy is a dynamic process that connects people to an awareness of their real strength and resourcefulness, enabling them to learn and grow.

Exploring the Mind-Body Connection

By developing a conscious mind-body connection, our clients have experienced a wide variety of physical changes and personal transformations including relief from chronic pain, increased energy, the release of blocked emotions and memories, and more fluid graceful movement. Physical and emotional symptoms are the mind-body's way of saying, "Wake up! Notice what you're doing." Our clients learn that if they attend to the physical, emotional, and cognitive components of their stresses and strains, their awareness will develop into a constructive internal feedback system. They come to know that a balanced body prevents and eliminates burnout and leads to personal effectiveness.

Some of our clients will find an increase in their energy level, others a slowing down, but for all Body Synergy® is a process of healing and enlivening themselves--physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. People who have been emotionally cut-off from their spouses, parents, siblings, children, or other family members find the emotional strength and physical sense of balance and well-being to face their feelings and reconcile family differences. As people committed to their personal and professional growth, our clients develop the realization that a better understanding of and connection to their bodies will positively affect how they relate to themselves and others.

Finding the Missing Source of Well-being

An example of our approach was our working with Ted, a 40 year-old Ph.D. He was a corporate executive in a large company. Matthew tells us the story: "Ted had been having an inexplicable feeling of despair. Even when he was productive, he lacked a sense of happiness and well-being in his life. He knew that a missing ingredient was keeping him from succeeding in his managerial role, and undermining his efforts to achieve the corporate mission he had envisioned. He seemed to be losing the natural enthusiasm and intellectual brilliance that his peers had come to expect of him. Also importantly, he was withdrawn and undemonstrative at home with his wife and children.

"One day, as we talked about what might be preventing him from receiving the full benefit of my work with his body, he began telling me about a major trauma that had occurred 10 years earlier. As we talked about it, Ted realized that he'd been so overwhelmed at the time of the event, that he had buried and never expressed his feelings. He described how he'd had to stand by watching helplessly as a flood carried his first wife and child away. For the first time since then he was able to grieve his loss, and he cried without restraint. He was able to let go of what had been locked up inside.

"Ted's connection to this tragic event changed as he grieved. He let go in his body and released his resistance to feeling the depth of his pain. Only by acknowledging and experiencing this could he move from being frozen to becoming free of the past. He could now look at how the loss of his deceased wife and child was affecting him now. As my heart and hands touched him, he found the courage to open to the possibilities now available in his life. The trust and safety in our relationship was key to his being able to explore and release his feelings.

Mutuality is a Vital Resource in the Therapeutic Alliance

"The day described above 'happened' to coincide with my having gone through a minor trauma two days before: I got a telephone call and was told that my daughter had been in an auto accident and was taken in an ambulance to the hospital with a head injury. Driving to the hospital, not knowing what condition I would find my daughter in, I felt utterly helpless. When Ted was talking of his great loss, I could hear him with both professional and personal ears. We sensed our connection as two men, both husbands and fathers, intimately sharing about tragic events. A healing bond was deepened between us that went beyond words to the heart of what life is about and the courage it takes to live it. I find this sense of shared humanity to be present in the therapeutic alliance when healing is occurring."

Many of us don't have to face losses this dramatic in our lives, but all of us have traumas or challenges of one kind or another. Releasing ourselves from the negative, self-limiting consequences of these events is necessary for fundamental changes in body, mind, and spirit to occur. Our hands-on approach addresses resistance carried in the body and in the process clients are able to release physically, emotionally, and mentally. The mind-body

is restored to health by this releasing. When this sense of well-being emerges, more than just the body changes: the whole being grows. This is our vision at the Body Synergy® Institute: healthier, happier, more productive human beings.

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