

Steps of Healing Abuse and Trauma

Hot Topic by Gary Reiss

Note: These steps tend to happen in this kind of order, but there is no set formula, it is up to the individual's process and timing. Some never get to the later steps, some go there right away.

Step 1 in the healing process involves telling the story of what happened, with the support of family members if they are present.

Step 2 is to not only tell the story, but to step into all the emotions around the abuse. These often include shock, despair, terror, anger, guilt, rage, hatred, confusion and perhaps also love. These tangled up feelings are part of the confusion that needs to be sorted out.

Stage 3 involves their willingness to confront those involved. Confronting the abusive situation may involve confronting not only the perpetrator but also anyone who may have been able to stop the abuse. Confronting the abuser is a much more frightening situation. The job of the family therapist is most difficult here. The person who wants to confront needs to be supported, but the person accused of abusing needs to be able to react in the session in a way that is appropriate, and that the therapist knows will not lead to further abuse and retaliation at home. If the therapist is concerned about this, this issue of retaliation needs to be brought up and discussed during the session. Also, many clients are never ready to confront the abuser directly, and confronting these issues through therapy is enough for these clients.

Step 4 is unique to process work which includes checking for physical symptoms in the area of trauma. A number of therapeutic approaches suggest that our bodies hold unprocessed memories of abuse experiences. Physical symptoms are one way for the body to draw attention to an area that needs help.

Step 5 offers meaning in what the abused person experienced. While they may hate what happened to them, they may see ways that allowed them to grow as a result of their being abused. It is vital that a therapist not impose any meaning from the outside, but let the person or family find ways to grow from the abusive experience. It helps to look at life as a flow of meaningful events that form a mythical path, and to understand the role of the trauma in that path.

Step 6 goes further with making meaning. I call this homeopathic work. In medical homeopathy, a substance, which may be dangerously toxic in its strongest form, is given in a very minimal form. In psychotherapeutic homeopathy, a person who has been abused may need a tiny amount of the abuser's behavior in order to develop. For example, a

person who was severely beaten might need a drop of his parents' rage in order to be able to stand up for himself. In homeopathy, the solution is diluted to the point that you can't find traces of the actual substance, only the essence of energy of that substance. This is what we are trying to do with the abuser, harvest some of the raw energy from the essence, so that the person who has been abused retains accessible personal power and energy, and make sure it is diluted so that none of the toxic part is present.

Step 7 involves getting in touch with Process Mind. Often there has been a sense with trauma that there is some spiritual problem, some loss of faith in the background. By helping process what happened, and gaining some sense of meaning and development in one's life, it may be important to revisit some of the assumptions the person has made about their spirituality. People can often shift from a feeling of being abandoned or punished or some other negative associations with their spirituality, to something more positive in terms of viewing life as a flow, as something based on growing and learning, sometimes through suffering. Also, people may discover something eternal in themselves that is untouched by any level of trauma. This eternal sense of the Big You that has always been there, and always will be, can restore a new kind of awareness that includes the trauma and everything else as part of life. Going back always to this deepest center from which you are most connected, your center, which is never touched by trauma, from which viewing all other parts of life has perspective, detachment etc. It often helps to connect this Process mind not only with the deepest center in ourselves, but with a place in nature that radiates this quality of awareness.

Exercises

Trauma release work dyad

1. Think of a trauma in your life, and state what it is.
2. Now let yourself find the part that is frozen around it, don't feel or react. Just notice what happens in this state as you bring this part up.
3. Now imagine you have control of the thermostat, and can thaw yourself out a bit.
4. You don't have to feel the emotions, just talk about the feelings.
5. Now put some of those feelings in each of your hands, and show those feelings with your hands. Watch for edges as the hands express themselves, edges in movement and in feeling.
6. Ask if you could do one of those hands again, which would you take further. Let the hand go far enough until you can name that energy.
7. Notice if you are still frozen in movement, and let yourself, even for a minute or two, express yourself in movement.
8. Now if you can allow yourself put in one hand the symbol of what traumatized you. Show in movement a bit of what its energy is like.

9. Now don't go into that energy, but imagine into, feel into what the energy was like before it warped and twisted and became hurtful and abusive. Feel the tendency for the hand to move in that direction, and follow the tendency until you can name the quality of essence energy present.
10. Express this energy, this essence by moving your hand and showing your feelings that go along with this.
11. Ask yourself where in your life you could use a bit of this energy, and where that energy is already trying to manifest itself.

Awareness Training and Trauma

1. Tell your dyad partner something that would traumatize you in life, either something specific or a general category, like something would happen to my health, or family or whatever. This is to be something that hasn't yet happened that could happen.
2. Now the partner plays the role of the traumatizer, the dream figure that could cause this trauma.
3. Your job is to follow with your awareness what happens and find the natural power in your reaction. Be aware of any shock that may be present.
4. Go on until you find a power that carries you through and beyond the trauma.
5. Name this power and show it in movement.
6. Talk about how to use this power in your life, not only to do deal with trauma but other parts of life.
7. Now switch roles and become the traumatizer if you can, even for a moment. If this is too fast for your process, don't do it. Check out your own feedback and signals. If you can go forward, represent this traumatizer somehow in movement and sound.
8. Keep going deeper into the movement and sound until you find some kind of essence in this figure. See if you can find some kind of application where you need this essence into your life.
9. Take a moment to let yourself feel and have both of these powers, your reaction to the traumatizer, and your ability to pick up the essence behind the trauma maker.
10. Bring both of these together into your body, into your movement, and take a moment to think about where in your life you need this kind of presence, and where it may already be present in you.