Resolving Trauma Without Drama

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Good News about PTS

We are finally recognizing it

Bad News about PTS

We have mainly one idea and approach to it and some prevalent myths

Myths and misconceptions about trauma and treatment

1
All people who suffer trauma develop PTSD
Trauma doesn’t necessarily lead to PTSD
- 60.7% of men; 51.2% of women in the U.S. have experienced at least one traumatic event meeting DSM criteria
- In Detroit, nearly 90% of residents have been exposed to traumatic events
- But the general lifetime prevalence of PTSD is about 7.8% and Detroit residents is 9.2%.


PTS often resolves without treatment, but treatment can help resolve it faster
- There was a steep decline in the prevalence of PTSD over the first 12 months after it developed, followed by a gradual decline for 6 years.
- But treatment seekers had about half the duration as non-treatment seekers.


Myths and misconceptions about trauma and treatment

People who develop PTS only resolve it through therapy

People are often more resilient than we therapists give them credit for

Expected rates of PTSD following 9/11 didn’t materialize

“Resilience is often the most commonly observed outcome trajectory following exposure to a potentially traumatic event.”

There is a whole literature on Post-traumatic Growth and Resilience

Example of natural resolution of PTS (post-Katrina)
911 operator in Katrina disaster

Myths and misconceptions about trauma and treatment

Long-term, abreactive therapy is the best (or only way) to resolve trauma

Resilience and recovery from trauma: A lesson from Cambodia

Four major approaches

1 future pull
Four major approaches

2
Inclusion

3
Pattern Change

4
Re-Connection

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Future-oriented interventions for resolving trauma
FUTURE PULL: Connecting with a Future with Possibilities and in which the Post-Trauma is Resolved

Howard Lutnick, CEO Cantor Fitzgerald
Lost his brother, his best friend and 658 of his employees in the 9/11 attacks
We always thought we’d fall apart at some point. I’d tell people it was like surfing in front of a very large wave and as long as I kept going forward as fast as I possibly could, the wave would never get me. But if I ever stopped, and took a moment to look back . . . Whoosh, the wave would crash over me, and I’d get crushed. But if I kept moving forward, the wave would get smaller and smaller, and that’s what happened. (Fall 2006)
Future Pull
“There is a reason that the rearview mirror is smaller than the windshield.” –Sign on a church in Winnipeg

Problems into Preferences
✓ Rephrase from what is unwanted to what is desired
✓ Redirect from the past to the future
✓ Mention the presence of something rather than the absence of something
✓ Suggest small increments rather than big leaps

Expectancy Talk
✓ Yet, so far
✓ Before
✓ After
✓ When
✓ How quickly?

Letter From Your Future
✓ Write a letter from your future self to your current self
✓ From five years from now
✓ Describe where you are, what you are doing, what you have gone through to get there, and so on
✓ Tell yourself the crucial things you realized or did to get there
✓ Give yourself some sage and compassionate advice from the future
**Letter From Your Future**

Use these questions to guide their letter writing:

- What have you learned and gained perspective on since back in [fill in the present date/year]?
- What things were you worried or frightened about in those days that seem trivial or far away for you today?
- What problems seemed overwhelming or insurmountable in those days that you did eventually resolve or overcome?
- What sage advice would your future self give to that present self?
- What comfort or reassurance would your future self give to your present self?
- Who were you troubled by, frightened by or concerned with that now doesn’t matter as much?

**Future Pull**

"You have to go fetch the future. It's not coming towards you, it's running away." –Zulu proverb

**A simple future method**

- What is your sense of a future you would prefer (vs. problem-determined or problem-continued future)?
- What would you do or focus on or think in the near future if you were committed to or moving toward that future?
- Could you do any small part of that right now or in the near future?

**The Miracle Question**

- Say: “Imagine that as you were asleep tonight, a miracle occurred and the problem or concern that brought you to therapy was resolved.” Make certain that the client is experientially involved in the scenario.
- Ask: “When you first open your eyes, what the first thing you will notice that will let you know that this miracle has occurred?”
- Ask: “How would other people know the miracle had occurred? What would they notice that is different about you or what you are doing?”
- Keep tracking the changes through the day, the week, the month and so on.
Other Future Metaphors

- Crystal ball
- Time machine

Future Pull

“The best thing about the future is that it comes only one day at a time.” – Abraham Lincoln

Other Future Metaphors

Rainbow bridge

Future Pull

Methods
✓ Problems into preferences
✓ Letter from the future
✓ Positive expectancy talk
✓ Miracle question/time machine/crystal ball/rainbow bridge
Acknowledgment and Possibility

Transitioning between past, problem and possibilities; validating/normalizing, then inviting

Carl Rogers with a twist

3 methods
✓ Reflecting in the past tense
✓ Reflecting from total to partial
✓ Reflecting from truth/reality claims to validating perceptions

Letter from Abraham Lincoln to Fanny McCullough

Dear Fanny

It is with deep grief that I learn of the death of your kind and brave Father; and, especially, that it is affecting your young heart beyond what is common in such cases. In this sad world of ours, sorrow comes to all; and, to the young, it comes with bitterest agony, because it takes them unawares. The older have learned to ever expect it. I am anxious to afford some alleviation of your present distress. Perfect relief is not possible, except with time. You can not now realize that you will ever feel better. Is this not so? And yet it is a mistake. You are sure to be happy again. To know this, which is certainly true, will make you some less miserable now. I have had experience enough to know what I say; and you need only believe it to feel better at once.

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Validating/inclusive interventions for resolving trauma

Undifferentiated/Unboundaried Self

Undifferentiated self
Undifferentiated self

Unowned/"bad" feelings, thoughts, sensations, memories, fantasies, desires, aspects of self

Dissociated/Disowned/Devalued Aspects/Experiences

Inhibition or Intrusion

Devalued aspect is either inhibited, suppressed and numbed or becomes intrusive, dominant or compulsive

AKA "The Missing Roommate"
Inclusion Level 1

Permission #1
To
- You can
- It’s okay
- You’re okay if

Permission #2
Not to have to
- You don’t have to
- It’s okay if you don’t
- You’re okay if you don’t

Inclusion Level 2

Inclusion of seeming opposites
- You can and not
- Opposite polarities
- Previously incompatible experiences/traits

Inclusion

“Do I contradict myself? Very well, then I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.”

–Walt Whitman
In logic, no two things can occupy the same point at the same time, and in poetry that happens all the time. This is almost what poetry is for, to be able to embody contrary feelings in the same motion.”
—Donald Hall

“Anger and tenderness—my selves. And now I can believe they breathe in me as angels and not as polarities. Anger and tenderness—the spider’s genius. To spin and weave in one moment anywhere. Even from a broken web.”
—Adrienne Rich

I am not I.
I am this one walking beside me whom I do not see, whom at times I manage to visit, and whom at other times I forget; who remains calm and silent while I talk, and forgives, gently, when I hate, who walks where I am not, who will remain standing when I die.

Exceptions
That’s the way it is, except when it’s not
- Moments of exception
- Including the opposite possibility
- Recognizing complexity
The Inclusive Self

Nature
Influenced by alien voices (society's/others)

Future selves
Devalued aspects (Disidentified Self)

Exceptions
Polarities
Community

Identified Self (Identity Story)

(Non-Identified self)

Where to Apply Inclusion

➢ Injunctions
  ➢ Restraining - Can't, shouldn't, won't
  ➢ Compelling - Have to, should, will, must

➢ Be, think, feel, know, notice, do, talk about

Undoing Injunctions

Determine the injunction
Sex is bad.
It's not okay to get angry.
I have to relax or stop obsessing.

Use any or all of the inclusive methods to undo injunctions
"It's okay to be connected and sexual."
"You don't have to relax. If the obsessions are there, you can just let them be there."

Review: Levels of Inclusion

3 Levels of Inclusion
✓ Permission
  • To
  • Not to have to
✓ Inclusion of (seeming) opposites
✓ Exceptions
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Pattern changing/breaking interventions for resolving trauma

Patterns as problems

John Cage:
“I can’t understand why some people are frightened of new ideas. I’m frightened of the old ones.”

Patterns as problems

Emile Chartier:
“There’s nothing as dangerous as an idea when it’s the only one you have!”

Patterns as problems

12-step saying
Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.
Changing the Pattern

1. DE-PATTERNING
   ✓ Find and alter repetitive patterns of action and interaction that are involved with the problem

2. RE-PATTERNING
   ✓ Help clients establish a new pattern in place of the old one
   ✓ Find and use solution patterns of action and interaction
Breaking the post-traumatic pattern

- Find any regularity in the post-traumatic experience
  - Neurological/physiological
  - Perceptual
  - Behavioral
  - Interpersonal
  - Frame of reference
  - Focus of attention
- Find any place to make a small or dramatic change in the pattern that is under your or their influence
  - Find the exception/solution pattern
  - Find a substitute that wouldn’t be so harmful or upsetting

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Neurological interventions for resolving trauma:
The fast track out of trauma
Neurology works rapidly
Recent trauma treatments
EMDR
TFT/EFT
Controversial but clinically effective

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Perceptual interventions for resolving trauma

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Reconnecting interventions for resolving trauma

Trauma can disrupt connections
• Initial disconnection is normal
• But if it persists, then PTSD often ensues
• Discover natural places or ways of connection
• Help people reconnect or connect in places or ways they haven’t before
Connection can help reduce PTSD

- Being with someone else during an earthquake is protective against PTSD


- Post-traumatic stress disorder sufferers in group treatment recovered at a significantly higher rate (88.3%) than those in individual treatment (31.3%).


Maryann Burns, Cantor Fitzgerald
Missed her train the morning of 9/11

The only place I felt like myself was work. I needed to be around other people who’d been where I’d been. I didn’t want to have to explain myself. In groups of other people I often felt detached, you know? Work made me feel sane. I wanted to go to work every day.

Pathways to Connection

✓ Soul/spirit/core self/intuition
✓ Body/sensory experience
✓ Another being
✓ Community/groups
✓ Nature
✓ Art
✓ God/universe/higher power/bigger picture, meaning and purpose

Assessing the 7 pathways

✓ Discover the natural connections people have
✓ Help them reconnect where they have disconnected
✓ Help them find and create new connections
Connective Rituals
✓ Regularly repeated activities
✓ Reconnect one to self, others or something beyond
✓ Give one a sense of continuity
✓ Restoring previous rituals
✓ Creating new rituals

Four major approaches to resolving trauma briefly and respectfully
1. Connect the traumatized person to a future with possibilities
2. Validate/value and include all aspects of the person
3. Change the pattern of the post-traumatic problem
4. Reconnect the person in places where he or she has been disconnected (from self, others or the world)

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