

Listening From the Heart *Insight and Emotional Clearing Through Focusing*

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“Focusing is a beautiful and meditative approach to psychotherapy and personal growth. It offers a deep parallel to the practice of mindfulness in a carefully developed and sensitive way.” ---Jack Kornfield

Learning Objectives:

- Gain a basic understanding of Focusing, which involves accessing and working with the subtle layers of experience that occur in the zone between the conscious and unconscious
- Understand and practice the Focusing attitude
- Practice contacting the felt sense
- Practice clearing space
- Practice being receptive to the inner process
- Practice Focusing in a round-robin
- Practice Focusing with a partner
- Consider how Focusing can be applied in therapy

What is Focusing?

Focusing is...

- Paying attention to something vague, fuzzy, not yet clear
- Felt or experienced within the body
- Distinctly connected to something in your life

- Staying with this vague felt sense with an attitude of openness, friendliness and acceptance (unconditional presence) until shifts or changes occur, not in the issue or problem, but in the way you relate to it or carry it inside your body and in your life

Focusing is...

- An open-ended process
- Never pushy (no should(s) or must(s))
- Always respectful, gentle, considerate (to self and others)
- A way of allowing whatever is there inside to “speak” to you without judgement or criticism
- Making friends with whatever comes up

The Inner Process:

- Is bodily felt
- Has a slower rhythm
- Makes itself known in images, metaphors, feelings
- Has a logic of wholes and relationships
- Moves and shifts in its own time
- Cannot be forced

Obstacles to the Inner Process:

- The “fix-it” mentality
- Fear of what is there
- The critical voice within
- Unwillingness to notice freshly how it feels right now
- Imposing values and concepts, “shoulds”
- Passing over what is there because:
 - It does not seem logical
 - It’s not important enough
 - It’s not clear
 - It’s not good enough
 - It’s not the whole answer
 - It’s unfamiliar

The Focusing Attitude

The inner process called Focusing is not possible without a warm, supportive, empathic attitude, sometimes referred to as unconditional presence.

The Focusing attitude includes:

- Openness
- Friendliness
- Gentleness
- Listening with empathy
- Allowing whatever is there to be there
- Receiving whatever comes
- Valuing the process

The Focusing attitude creates an atmosphere that allows growth to occur. Just as some fragile plants cannot survive and flourish in harsh environments without the shelter of a greenhouse, so our delicate inner process cannot unfold without protection from negative judgment, criticism and rejection.

Implicit in the Focusing attitude is a relationship to our own and others' experience which includes:

- Being with (another or yourself)
- Supporting (through acceptance)
- Keeping company (by simply being there)
- Trusting the process (resisting any urge to fix, solve, advise, judge or distract from it)

The Felt Sense

What is it?

- A special kind of internal bodily awareness
- The body's sense of a particular issue or concern
- The holistic sense of the totality of the issue

How to recognize it:

- It is usually vague at first, not immediately recognizable
- It feels meaningful but not definable
- It never feels like the same old thing. It is always new, like a breath of fresh air, like relief

How to let it form:

- Relax and turn your attention inward to the space in the center of your body between your throat and your lower abdomen
- Wait for it to form. It usually takes 30 seconds or more
- Pay attention to what your body is saying. *That is Focusing*

Clearing Space

What is clearing space?

- It is about giving yourself permission for whatever is there to be there, whether you like it, dislike it or feel neutral about it

Where can it be applied?

- It is a practice that can be used in a wide variety of contexts, such as in individual and group psychotherapy, stress reduction workshops, business meetings, brainstorming sessions, as a prelude to any creative endeavor...

Why clear space?

- To get enough distance from an issue or concern in order to see it from a different perspective (like backing up from a large sculpture in order to see the whole thing)
- To form an “I – it” relationship with an issue or problem: “There’s me here and the issue there. *I* am not the problem. I have *it* as a part of my experience.”
- To sort and prioritize internally, seeing and feeling into what’s juicy, not so juicy, to get an overall sense of what’s there
- To get in touch with a more open and alive state of being that is already whole and complete; to give yourself permission to just be there and experience a natural state of tranquility

When to clear space:

- When you are about to meet with a Focusing partner and find that your mind is so cluttered and preoccupied with concerns that you feel you will have difficulty being fully present
- When, during a session, there is so much going on in your Focusing partner’s life that s/he needs to sort out what’s going on in order to find herself under the clutter
- If an issue that your partner is working on in a session seems too close, too big, too heavy or too overwhelming, then you may offer to guide your her through the clearing space practice to help her back up a little or find some way (in imagery, if possible) to change her relationship to it (by putting it on a shelf, in a drawer, outside in Nature, or on her lap under a soft blanket if it is tender or hurting, etc.)

When not to clear space:

- When your partner is focusing naturally in a organic, unplanned way
- When the issue is right there, right now, and your partner is eager to deal with it, regardless of whether s/he feels comfortable or uncomfortable with it
- When the issue is too distant and your partner can’t get a feel for it

The Six Steps of Focusing

1. Clearing Space

- Ask yourself: “What’s between me and feeling fine?”
- Allow what comes in your body to respond to the question
- Don’t go into anything yet
- Greet each concern that arises. Put each aside for awhile
- Except for that, are you fine?

2. Opening to the Felt Sense

- Choose one concern to focus on
- Ask: “What do I sense in my body when I recall the whole issue?”
- Open to the felt sense of the whole thing, the fuzzy body-sense of it or the murky discomfort

3. Finding a Handle

- What is the quality of the felt sense?
- What one word, phrase or image comes out of the felt sense?
- What quality word fits it best?

4. Resonating

- Go back & forth between words or images and the felt sense
- Check to see if they match
- If the felt sense changes, follow it with your attention

5. Asking

- What is it about this whole thing that makes me so...?

6. Receiving

- Welcome what came. Linger there with it for a while. Now that you have touched it and have a handle on it, you can leave it and know that you will be able to find it later
- Protect it from critical voices

The Guest-House

This being human is a guest house
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,

still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

---Rumi (translated by John Moyne and Coleman Barks)

How to learn more about Focusing

Focusing Institute website: www.focusing.org

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