

Sydney Conference 2010
Embodied Spirit

As a counsellor what do we mean when we think of embodiment? How does this connect with our faith.

The dictionary says Embodiement is,
to give body,
to give/ have concrete expression, and even
to provide a spirit with bodily form.

It is the ability to ground our experiences and to give expression to what we are experiencing.

This is at the very heart of counselling because as Michael White says we cannot say 'goodbye' till we say 'hello' the work of good counselling is to make a safe place whereby the client is enable to say hello, connect to and give a voice to their experiences and feelings.

As a Christian what do I mean by the phrase Embodied Spirit

God's word in John 1:14 tells us that the 'Word became flesh and dwelt among us' His word even His Spirit was embodied in the person of Jesus, so that we could touch, see, hear, feel and taste of the bread of life.

This same Holy Spirit dwells in me teaching me to listen to God's word, encouraging me to listen to the 'still small voice' within. Enabling me to give witness to my experiences in the moment. Finally I learn to listen to the other giving witness to their experiences and helping them find the way forward.

How can we link the work we do with the work of the Holy Spirit?

I believe that the body plays an important part in our journey of unlocking our experiences and helping us connect to the deeper places within to find our healing.

Western culture generally ignores the body, punishes it, pushes it, staves it. Some religions even place it as the home of the devil.

In recent years we have began to reconnect to our bodies in the belief that it houses our spiritual truth and have been searching out how to listen to the gentle whisper within.

I am going to give you a little exercise to help you listen and connect with the deeper places in your body

How many of you have woken up from a dream, the dream is still with you but you don't remember what it was about. You have lost the content but you can still feel the residue in your body.

Or
Imagine walking down the street and meeting someone you know. You forget her name and you are left with a strong sense in your body of knowing it but are unable to bring it forward.

These are simple examples of what it is like to be paying attention to your embodied spirit. I am going to share with you how you may connect to the deeper places in your experience inviting you to discover and explore with me what it is to notice, respect, listen and pay attention to the deep knowledge that is carried, often unnoticed in your body using the model of Focusing

History of Focusing

Eugene Gendlin a philosopher and contemporary of Carl Rogers, developed Focusing in the late 60's at the University of Chicago.

His team of researchers asked the question,

“Why do some psychotherapies work and others don't.”?

In the process they found that success didn't lie with the method used but with the person's ability to access their moment-to-moment experiencing. This ability to focus on their inner world correlated with their success in psychotherapy. They also discovered that it is a natural process that some people have intuitively and others can learn, by paying attention to it and allowing yourself to experience the process in his six steps. Focusing is the name Eugene

Gendlin gave to this process; and from this beginning it has now become a worldwide network.

What is Focusing?

First of all I want to say that we all have the ability to Focus and most of us do it naturally

Focusing is a formalized process that enables people to pay attention to a kind of inward bodily “felt sense.”

It isn't about being in touch with feelings, emotions or figuring things out in your head.

It is a way of getting in touch with the deep knowing of the body that Gendlin called the “felt sense”. A felt sense of how you are in a particular situation which embraces our feelings and our body felt sense. This may be unclear and vague at first, but if you pay gentle attention to it, it will open up into words or images that often lead to small steps of changed action and new thoughts.

Even as God has opened up the way for the Word to become flesh so the body offers us a way of transcending the mind's distinction of right or wrong and helps us connect to a deeper sense of purpose and direction. Getting out of the mind is the ability to go beyond the rational linear thinking process through identifying all the ‘chatter’ associated with analysing, planning and problem solving

Gendlin discovered there is meaning beyond words and this meaning is known and carried in the body. Some people would call this a ‘gut knowing’. Interestingly enough Greek philosophers held that the seat of knowing was in the belly the central point of our bodies.

This ‘gut knowing’ or ‘gut brain’ is bigger than most creature's brain and is the second biggest collection of nerve cells in the body. It allows the gut to operate without cortical involvement or awareness, and controls most below the diaphragm.

This ‘gut brain’ among other things controls

Digestive functions

Nausea and vomiting

Digestive enzymes

Stomach acids

Gall bladder

The difficulty with this sort of knowing is that we are dependent on our vocabulary to share and record the way in which we experience life and we find it hard to put into words.

We say things like 'I was stabbed in the heart' , 'I have a knot in my stomach ' , 'a tightness in my chest', or 'butterflies in my stomach' clearly demonstrating we know something via our bodies.

It is bodily felt and often beyond words. So the retelling of our experience is difficult.

Words of reason don't fit, logic dries up but deep gut or body hunch remains.

Gendlin suggests that the unconscious that Freud talked about "Is the Body"

The body felt sense is the deep knowledge of things beyond words. This Body Sense houses intuitions, hunches, meanings, and sureness, things that fuel our behaviour sometimes unconsciously.

Our bodies know things as well as our mind

In this workshop we will begin to learn to pay attention to and be more conscious of

(The 'felt sense' embraces a wider initially nebulous meaning that is 'felt' rather than

conceptualised in our awareness. It is called 'felt' because it is felt in the body. It is called

'sense' not like the five senses but more like the 'sense of something', or 'he makes good

sense'. 'Sense' here is a meaning word. It is a meaning that is felt as yet unclear and vague.

A meaning prior to symbolisation. It is a primitive, preverbal knowing that comes to us

before pictures and words, like a child who knows and tunes into more than they can speak about. (Bio Spirituality p24)

Focusing moves inward drawing on information from the deeper wiser self.

When a felt shift or bodily release occurs, usually within ½ min or so (although sometimes it can take more) the right steps will unfold opening up new directions to take.

This felt shift often reflects the whole brain knowing of the two brain cerebral hemispheres, of right and left. The emergence of a step forward on a problem and the simultaneous physical sense of relief suggest a sudden knowing in both hemispheres.

So what is this inner Body Felt Sense?

I'm going to invite you to get a feel for the felt sense. So make yourself comfortable, close your eyes if it helps or leave them open, which ever you feel most comfortable with.

Allow your attention to come down into yourself.

CLEAR A SPACE

If you are aware that you have some 'things' that are upper most in there, say hello so you can clear a space.

I would like to invite you to think of a friend whom you would like to see now.

Stay with that and just notice what is happening.

What does it feel like in your body to be with this person?

What is your body sensing?

What is it feeling?

Where are you feeling it?

What else are you noticing?

When you are ready say goodbye, and thank you body for what it has told you.

You might want to take a minuet to write down what came.

Now I would like to invite you to imagine someone you would intensely prefer not to see today.

What does it feel like to be with this person?

What are you sensing?

What is it feeling?

Where are you feeling it?

What else are you noticing?

When you are ready say goodbye.

Now see if you can go back and find the positive person and notice if it is the same or different now.

There are no right answers. Just see what it is like to be re united with this person.

Choose a partner, compare the difference and share your discovery.

De brief Exercise

There are few different models for learning this skill, but for the sake of our limited time I am going to introduce you to Eugene Gendlins Six Steps

Overhead/Handout:

Six Steps

1. Clearing a Space
2. Getting a Felt Sense
3. Getting a Handle
4. Resonating
5. Asking
6. Receiving

Characteristics of Focusing

- **Making the implicit explicit**

Focusing helps to make the implicit explicit. It helps us find words to express what is unclear and vague. Things I know but can't yet put into words.

- **Gentle listening**

Focusing gives us a way of listening with gentleness and compassion, encouraging acceptance, rather than judgement. What is true in our relationships with others is true of our relationship with ourselves. Nothing will come forward if it feels judgement. A willingness to accept what is there allows it to appear and be named.

- **A Natural Process**

Focusing is a natural process and skill not a therapeutic technique that is learned. We all in different situations and places, Focus. What we want is to recognise and encourage this way of being, to be present more often.

- **Consulting the body's Inner Wisdom**

Focusing gives us a way of consulting our body's inner wisdom about what is right for us.

Focusing can help us unveil an inner spiritual resource, which is compatible with the unique teachings and goals of most world religions and philosophies.

Focusing offers a way of connecting to your own inner process and bodily felt experience unlocking the wisdom of what is already there and allowing you to follow it as it changes. It offers a way of talking from the inner sense rather than about it.

Focusing is a process of turning your attention within to your body felt sense. It gives you away of accessing your body's wisdom that is held in the body, as you put your attention to the unclear felt sense allowing the embodiment of images, words, memories, that once named allow the healing to unfold.

Reading Recommendations

- Johnson Susan. (1996) *Creating Connection. Practise of Emotionally Focused Marital Therapy*. Brunner and Mazel
- Gendlin Eugene. (1997) *Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy*. The Guildford Press
- Campbell and Edwin M Mahon (1985) *Bio-Spirituality. Focusing a Way to Go*. Loyola University Press
- Elliot, Watson, Goldman and Greenberg. (2003) *Learning Emotion-Focused Therapy*. APS. Washington
- Gendlin Eugene. (1981) *Focusing*. Bantam Books
- Gendlin Eugene (1996) *Focusing-Orientated Psychotherapy* The Guildford Press
- Gendlin Eugene (1997) *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning*. Northwestern Press
- Greenberg Leslie and Sandra Paivio. (1997) *Working with Emotions in Psychotherapy*. The Guildford Press.
- Greenberg Leslie, Jeanne C Watson, and Germain Lietaer. (1998) *Handbook of Experiential Psychotherapy*. The Guildford Press
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- Johnson S. (2002) *Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy with Trauma Survivors*. Guilford Press.
- Johnson S. (1988) *Emotionally Focused Therapy for Couples*. Guildford Press
- Levine Peter. (1997) *Waking the Tiger*. Berkeley, CA: Alanta
- Rothschild Babette (2000) *The Body Remembers*. W.W. Norton Company Inc.

Web sites: www.focusing.org
www.creativeedge.com.au
www.focusingaustralia
www.focusingresources.com

Focusing Weekend

Two day workshop at Somers on the Mornington Peninsular in May 2010, for more information contact, maureen_ireland@bigpond.com