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How Feeling with an Open Heart Can Create Healing

OTs can teach their clients to feel, to be free, and then to heal.

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By Mandy Lubas, OTR/L, RYT

Feelings and emotions are important for healing. Occupational Therapists can teach clients how to feel and embrace their emotions with unconditional love for themselves in order to reduce physical and emotional pain and heal. These tools can help OTs embrace themselves for their own self-care and personal healing. Research shows that the science of emotions, love, and the heart chakra make it clear that emotions and feelings are linked. Therapeutic presence is as an avenue for a healthy therapeutic relationship between the client and the practitioner and allows the client to feel safe and grounded in therapeutic environment in order for them to connect to their emotions and begin to transform them. There are several resources for OTs to integrate this work into their scope of practice and to learn more about this important feeling and emotional aspect of healing.

The Science of Emotions

Everyone wants to be whole and we would like to have an approach that can assist us on the journey to wholeness. What exactly is wholeness? Wholeness is when an individual can fully accept themselves, accept their feelings, and accept what cannot be controlled within the external environment or society. The mind is the gate that opens and closes, allowing or preventing direct experience. What we reject is any action of the mind that blocks direct experience of feeling or being present with what is happening. What we accept is any action of the mind that allows direct experience.

As Occupational Therapists we are trained to look at the "whole" person and this includes assisting clients with their grief, negative emotions, and supporting them to feel and to even accept all aspects of themselves. Assisting them to adapt, learn to live with, and accept the disease or disability rather than going numb and be in denial can be a process or sometimes a challenge. However, through the OTs use of therapeutic presence this can occur. When an Occupational Therapist portrays therapeutic presence for their client they are being with them rather than doing to them or trying to fix them. Therapeutic presence can also be modeled during active tasks. The OT can learn to master the skills of therapeutic presence by being impartial, non-judgmental, ego-subordinate, and unconditionally present. OTs are there to support their clients regardless of any transference or counter transference that may arise to the surface. As a clinician, our focus is to merely see our clients or patients for who they truly are with a wide open heart. Emotions will most likely want to come to the surface in the client and by providing a sacred or safe place for them to be present and embrace their feelings the healing will begin. OTs can practice this presence within themselves if transference comes up as a way for their own self-care and healing. This allows the OT to be a stronger presence for their client's healing.

This is a science that needs to be spoken about and practiced in order for the feeling center to properly function. Feelings and emotions have a direct correlation to physical health. Have you ever wondered how traumatic or toxic experiences could affect our cells? This is called 'phantom memories'. It has been scientifically established that cells inside the body regenerate at different speeds. Deepak Chopra has said that all of us have 'phantom memories' stored inside our cells. What he means by this is that inside the degenerative cell lies a traumatic memory. Before the degenerative cell dies, it will actually pass on its memory to the next cell generation being born; therefore each new cell is born as an exact replication of the previous cell. As the cells keep replicating themselves the degenerative memory keeps getting passed on from one generation to the next, to the next, and the next.

Candace Pert has her Ph.D. in cellular biology and biophysics, and has laboratory experiments that support Chopra's work. She has concluded that emotions and the body are neurologically linked. That being said, whatever we put our thoughts to our bodies will respond in that manner. Therefore whatever we resist persists. If we start to suppress those unwanted emotions are cells are impacted in a negative manner which over time will cause pathology in the tissues throughout our

body. By feeling, we no longer suppress those unwanted emotions. As a result, our cells can heal if we can get in touch with our body's infinite intelligence and access the cell memory to heal. This is called cellular health. A catalyst to do this is by opening the heart chakra to a feeling state of love. To access this chakra one must observe those unwanted or uncomfortable feelings, remain in the present moment and feel the feelings wash through them. By experimenting with this exercise one can heal all the way to a cellular level and one can be set free from disharmony.

The Heart Chakra



There are seven major chakra centers, however the heart chakra is the one I am focusing on due to the important relationship it has with relieving blocks in the other feeling centers. The chakras are psychic energy centers located in the body. They are the center of energy, consciousness, and feeling. When a person blocks themselves from an experience, the mind takes over blocking themselves from the centers of consciousness and therefore the body. A person will go numb and resist change towards healing. The good news is that this tendency can be reversed and sensitivity to feelings are developed by establishing a connection with the body. Using the chakra system supplies essential vocabulary and reference points, enabling us to recognize feelings within ourselves more easily. It provides insight into how blocks in the energy systems come about, helping us deal with them more effectively. Awareness is the first step to the healing journey of freedom. Once one is aware, nurturing of the self is realized by getting in tuned with

the body through the catalyst of feeling and integrating these feelings into the living cells of the body. Through observation, self-love, self-acceptance and practices of yoga, and other spiritual disciplines one can open the energy center of the heart where freedom can be found. The heart chakra is the fourth chakra called the "Anahata Chakra". The word "anahata" is a Sanskrit word meaning "unstruck" or "unbeaten." Hence, the relationship with the heart is that it throbs, beats, or vibrates with a consistent rhythm. Our heart beats devotedly and endlessly at 6 weeks from conception until we leave our earthly body. In your human energy system, the center for unconditional love is located in the center of your chest. It governs the heart and circulatory system, respiratory system, arms, shoulders, hands, diaphragm, ribs/breasts and thymus gland. This Chakra resides in the spinal column in the inner wall directly behind the center of the chest. The color is that of a crimson color, like that of a bandhuka flower and it has twelve petals. As the picture views above, the inner region is hexagonal in shape, representing the air element. Seated in the middle of the body the fourth chakra is the balance between your body and spirit. This chakra is the place where unconditional love is centered.

Unconditional love is a creative and powerful energy that may guide and help us through the most difficult times. This energy is available in any moment, if we turn our attention to it and use it, it can free us from our worries, fears, and insecurities. It is connected with the part of the brain which is responsible for all the creative sciences, fine arts such as painting, dance, music, poetry, etc. An open heart chakra is a beautiful thing, and most of us will experience blockages in this area due to life circumstances which reside around issues of grief, hatred, anger, jealousy, fears of betrayal, of loneliness, as well as the ability to heal ourselves and others. Self-nurturing is a key component of emotional maturity. If not matured we will have this drive and yearning to seek it out in others. When we learn to nurture ourselves we no longer search for it in the external world. We can go inside to the internal world of our bodies, to our female side and provide ourselves with tender loving care with empathy, softness, unconditional love, and kindness.

How to Teach Our Clients Unconditional Love for Themselves

Our unconditional acceptance and presence models how our clients can love and acceptance themselves. We can provide a checklist for our clients to ask themselves the following questions on a regular basis and suggest that they journal their thoughts and feelings for emotional clearing. This emotional clearing will open up the pathways that have been blocked from possible past traumas that can set them free from their challenges. It is important as therapists that we follow these guidelines for our self care and personal development and learn to love and accept ourselves, as well.

*What emotional memories do I need to heal?

RELATED CONTENT

*What relationships current or past require healing?

The 'Om' Factor

Using stress-busting activities such as yoga can help veterans with PTSD achieve both inner and outer peace.

*Are my emotional

wounds taking over, causing me to try to control people or situations around me?

*Do I allow the wounds of others to control me? How do I let that happen?

*What do I need to do in order to forgive myself? Who needs forgiving from me?

* In what ways do I feel I am not moving forward in my life?

Techniques an Occupational Therapist Can Use to Promote Emotional Healing

1. Visual imagery such as imagining going through the colors of the chakra system; they are paired in three's as red, orange, yellow; green, blue, white; gold, clear, silver; and purple, pink, and violet.
2. Affirmations
3. Teaching self-acceptance
4. Meditation - Mindfulness: A powerful practice to open to and embody unconditional love is one from the several traditions including Buddhism - Metta Practice, Vipassana, Kriya Yoga, and Contemplative Christian Prayer.
5. Body Work
6. Pranayama (breath work)
7. Yoga
8. Chanting
9. Art Therapy/Visual or Written Journal of Feelings
10. Being fully present when an emotion rises to the surface, "observe" them with love and acceptance so they can naturally "integrate."

Witnessing Healing in an Occupational Therapy Session:

Witnessing a client go through transformation in a therapy session is so enriching. During the second treatment session with a new client she self-disclosed her elevated anxiety of her unresolved fears of not resolving her GI issues. The medical community provided her with drugs to treat her disorder but she declined the offer. She came to Occupational Therapy knowing that we treat the "whole" person and we provided holistic therapies. During the second treatment session she self-disclosed more of her story of how the accumulation of her poor lifestyle choices had manifested into pathology in her GI tract. She did not want the pathology to spread anymore and was eager to change her life around. By using therapeutic presence and teaching her one tool at a time she was engaged in a home practice that entailed yoga, meditation, breath work, and lifestyle modifications that balanced her nervous system which normalized her digestive tract. This is an example of how an occupational therapist evoked healing within her client by using holistic approaches. The emotional clearing checklist assessed the root problem, gaining the client's trust, coming up with a treatment plan based upon all of the information received and what was manageable for the client. This provided her with the tools and strategies she needed for the healing response to occur. This client not only nourished her own life but she nourished me, because our therapeutic interaction set the tone for everlasting healing for both of us! "Feeling both pain and joy is the gateway to open the heart and align the self for the freedom to heal at the cellular level."

Namaste!

To connect with other OTs interested in and practicing holistic approaches and to learn more, join us once a month for our holistic OT phone conversation. Ask to join the e-mail list at emmy@emmyvadnais.com to receive updates on Holistic OT. Please 'like' our Holistic Occupational Therapy Facebook Page and join the conversation online at the Holistic Occupational Therapy Group page on Facebook. We look forward to connecting with you!

References

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