

How Deeply Can We Love?

Seven Keys to Effective Therapy and a Happier Life

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There are seven principles at the heart of effective therapy. Through them I as a therapist and you as a client can uncover the brilliance of your essential being. Fortunately, you can use these same principles to live a happier, more fulfilling life. As you understand them more deeply, they become resources in your everyday life. When things become challenging for you, review these principles and your perception can change. You will begin to see your wholeness instead of just your supposed failures, faults, or other problems. Then, you can return to who you truly are — a larger, wiser and more loving self that may have been covered over by reactions to the hurts and traumas of your life.

How Deeply Can We Love?

I am guided in my work and in my life by the questions,
“How deeply can I love? How deeply can we love?”

These are essential questions, and are at the heart of why therapy can be effective. I believe we are here to learn to embody love. But what does this mean? Being able to be with whatever arises. Being able to accept what is, and to know what we want, what we most deeply want.

What is your heart’s desire? The heart opens to what is most true, most relevant, most healing, most wise. All we need to do is listen. My practice is listening. My intention is to listen and to hear your deepest being with respect and appreciation for patterns, and the experiences that have required them.

Through almost 30 years as a therapist and teacher, I have come to see my work as being based on seven principles. These are: Love, Presence, Resonance, Health, Stillness, Flow, and Relationship.

I have focused my life on more fully embodying each of these qualities through my own deep healing process, facilitated through various body-centered practices, therapies, and meditation.

In our work together, my intention is to hold you with a depth of awareness and compassion born of the willingness to face the darkest corners of my own psyche. Having learned to embrace myself more fully with love, appreciation and acceptance, I can share that love with you. I invite you to join me in that embrace and discover the brilliance of your own essential being.

The Seven Principles

*Somewhere out beyond our sense
Of right doing and wrong doing
There is a field ... I'll meet you there.
- Rumi*

Love

Love is the ability to meet whatever arises in each moment with acceptance and appreciation for what is. Most of us have been taught to judge and label our experiences, as well as those of others, as good or bad, right or wrong, desirable or undesirable. Love is about going beyond that judgment to a place where these labels are irrelevant.

All is just as it is, with a reason for being, a purpose to serve, a lesson to offer. If we open to receive, each moment and each experience can enrich us and contribute to our wholeness.

While some experiences are more or less pleasant than others, it is only fear that keeps us from being at peace each moment. When we rest into the love we are capable of, the hard edges in our lives and body-minds begin to melt and we can experience the true happiness that is our birthright. Since most of us have not been taught this kind of love or had it modeled to us, how do we enter into it? One important key is Presence.

Presence

Presence is the ability to be present with what is. This ability is based on awareness of breath and bodily sensations, which give us information about the present moment.

In our modern western culture, we learn to move through life led by our thoughts and to disregard our bodies. We notice our bodies when they scream at us with pain, dysfunction or dis-ease. Otherwise, we assume they are doing whatever dirty work they were designed to do and we try not to be too bothered by their demands.

We may spend time complaining about our bodies or trying to make them look better (or younger), but we seldom pay attention to what they are actually doing or why they look and feel the way they do. Presence depends on such attention. Without it, we are carried away from the moment by our busy minds, plunging us into fears or hopes for the future or memories of the past.

While our intellectual minds and thoughts are useful to analyze and communicate about our experiences, they do not actually know what that experience is without our bodily sensations.

Our bodies are in direct contact with our environment and give us information about what we are in contact with. For example, if it is a beautiful, sunny day, I might assume that I can go outside without a sweater. When I step outside, however, I feel cold.

The sensation of cold tells me that the temperature is lower than I had thought. My intellectual mind then remembers my life experience and deduces that I need to go back inside to get a sweater. Our tendency is to be aware of our intellectual thoughts but we are often not consciously aware of the sensations these thoughts derive from, unless they are more extreme, like the feeling of being cold without a sweater.

More subtle sensations similarly stimulate our thoughts but tend to go unnoticed. As children and babies, we are exquisitely sensitive. We learn about the world through our bodies. Our senses are wide open, ready to receive information. We live in the present moment, responding fully to everything we encounter. What we are exposed to affects how our brain and nervous system develops. Neural pathways are laid down and reinforced through repeated

experience. As we learn, our responses can become more automatic so we can perform basic behaviors, like walking, talking, and eating, with less effort. This frees our attention for more intellectual thinking and more skilled physical activities. We use our minds to analyze the past and plan for a better future.

Presence requires using our minds in a different way. With their excellent analytical abilities, our minds can help us to track and describe our present experience, but they must learn how to do this. Because our training growing up has rarely included this practice of mindfulness, we tend to go through our lives unconsciously acting out the patterns we have learned. While some of these patterns, like walking and talking, serve us well, others are no longer useful to us. For example, I may have learned as a child that asking for what I want leads to being put down or made fun of. I may have then developed a pattern of not thinking about what I want so I can avoid the pain of others' reactions. As an adult, I then put up with whatever I have, don't ask for a promotion at work, a hug from a friend, or respect from a lover. I may then wonder why I feel dissatisfied or lack enthusiasm. I might go to therapy or a life coach and learn ways to feel better about myself and my life, but the pattern remains. Without constant attention, things seem to slip back into being not quite right.

Lasting change requires presence. This awareness of the moment enables us to catch ourselves as we begin to slip into old patterns. We can then make different choices. Each time we do something different from the old pattern, we weaken its hold, freeing ourselves to live more creatively in the moment.

Resonance

Resonance refers to a vibrational similarity between two things, including two people. Examples of resonance in our world abound. A tuning fork demonstrates resonance when its vibration stimulates a piano string of the same frequency to vibrate with it. Heart cells placed together in a laboratory dish will synchronize the rhythm of their beating, even though they are not touching and had different rhythms before being exposed to each other. When two people experience resonance, they may feel a sense of connectedness, harmony and understanding as they enter into a "resonant field" together.

In our work together, I have an intention to foster and support such resonance between us. Through settling my own nervous system when I am with you, my presence reminds your system of its own ability to settle. When I maintain a larger perspective no matter how seductive the drama or pain of the moment may be, you can also remember that the current issue is just one aspect of the whole and need not be so overwhelming. Within our resonant field, you can more easily access your inner wisdom and resources.

Stillness

*This restless dancing world,
Flag in the wind.
Spirit, see the wind.
Now look
For the great stillness
That holds*

*The wind.
Everything else
Is gone
Gone,
Already gone!
-Rumi*

Stillness is a place of rest amidst the movement of life. It is a place where life can rejuvenate itself. In our modern western culture, stillness is rare. We live our lives at top speed, rushing here and there, multi-tasking, rarely having time to even think much about what we are doing, let alone feel it. This is not, however, what we are designed for. I have heard it said that we are “human beings,” not “human doings.”

In our fast-paced lives, we depend on our sympathetic nervous system to function. This system is intended for dealing with fight or flight emergency situations. It is designed to speed us up just long enough to meet or escape the source of danger. Then, our bodies need to relax and release the stress we have just experienced. Our parasympathetic nervous system then helps us regain our balance and return to important life-giving functions, such as digestion and sleep. Without rest, we burn ourselves out. Our health deteriorates and our sense of well-being diminishes. Although we may have a high standard of living, physiologically we are living in survival mode.

In more traditional cultures, life is much slower and more spacious. There is not only time to “be” instead of “do,” but being and doing are often not separated. People engage in their many activities the way we might enter into meditation. Most spiritual traditions also support stillness. There is a day of rest or a time to be quiet and pray or meditate. This kind of stillness is essential to our well-being. Without it, we are denying an important aspect of who we are.

Life involves movement. The movement, like breathing, is not always in one direction. There is a pulsation in life. There is an opening and closing, an extending outward and a retraction in, a reaching out and return to the source. In our modern world, we have excelled at the outward phase of this life breath, but at the expense of the in-breath. It is as if we constantly exhale, but never stop to take a breath. In this extended fight-flight mode, our organs are literally deprived of oxygen. We need to stop to replenish ourselves, to fill ourselves, so that we can enjoy our lives in balance.

In our work together, I support you in slowing down and settling into an often long-forgotten place of stillness. In that state, you can remember what is most important and essential. Your body rejoices as you return to the health that has been patiently waiting for you.

Health

Our bodies are always aiming toward health, which is our natural state of being. For example, if you cut your finger, your body immediately starts the process of repair. If you have ever marveled at your body’s ability to heal itself by quickly repairing a wound, you have witnessed the miracle that we are.

Many people, however, are confused about health and may consider it an idealistic objective. Allopathic medicine (that which treats symptoms) defines health as the absence of disease. With that definition being prominent, it can be challenging to even think about what real health might be.

My training in Biodynamic Craniosacral Therapy has helped me shift this perspective. In this work, I often feel as if I am holding a tiny embryo in my hands. I feel the wholeness of this little being, fluid in its movement and full of potential. Its cells have not yet fully differentiated to define its form.

Embryonic cells, like stem cells, have the potential to form any kind of cell in the body. As the body takes shape, cells become more specific in their functions and usually lose their ability to function in other ways. For example, a nerve cell is different from a muscle cell. The little embryo I feel in my hands is still largely unformed. The embryonic forces that form us continue to flow through our bodies throughout our lives.

Craniosacral therapists who are trained to palpate such subtleties can easily detect this flow. Experiencing it in this direct way has helped me to understand the imperative toward health that is always present within us. When obstructions are removed or dissolved, we naturally return to health. This is an innate tendency to be celebrated and honored, rather than denied.

Flow

Flow is an expression of the inherent health within us. Psychologist, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, has defined a state of flow in which a person is fully immersed in an activity and experiences a sense of joy, fulfillment, competence, and timelessness. In such a state, the person's body moves in a graceful, flowing manner. I once watched a tow truck driver working with my car. I was amazed at the grace in his body even as he handled his heavy equipment. Recognizing a state of flow, I asked him as we drove to the garage, if he enjoyed his work. The rest of the trip was filled with his enthusiastic response, expressing the joy and fulfillment typical of a flow state.

Flow is our birth right, available to all of us. Our bodies are composed of between 60 and 95% water, depending on our age and health. One characteristic of water is flow. Fluidity implies movement, but water, including the fluidity in our bodies, can also freeze and stop flowing. An encounter with overwhelming trauma or shock, for example, may send us into a freeze state, like an animal playing dead.

Whereas animals stand up and shake off their trauma once the attacker leaves, we humans tend to interrupt that process with our conscious, controlling minds. Instead of allowing our bodies to process what just happened, we often just get back to our busy lives. Children who have been traumatized are often not supported in resolving their trauma. We learn to suppress our bodily reactions like the adults around us. What has been frozen then tends to stay that way.

Many of us walk around with our shoulders pulled up and our breath held as if we are still in the midst of a startling event. In those held areas, the flow is impeded. Instead of movement, there is rigidity. This is an expression of our bodies' tendency to wall off unresolved trauma or memories of it to protect ourselves from the associated pain.

Our psyches can also become rigid. We may build psychological walls to protect ourselves from the kind of experience that hurt so much. As children, we learn defensive strategies that effectively protect us from what is unsupportive in our environment. While these strategies have enabled us to survive as children, they often create suffering later in life. We find ourselves repeatedly feeling isolated or unhappy in relationships, unable to acknowledge or express our deepest feelings, and longing for something though we may not quite remember what it is.

Rigidity may have developed as a way to cope with intolerable experience, but as it impedes our flow, it makes us less resilient and responsive in our lives. I am committed to helping you gently thaw out the frozen aspects of your body-mind, so you can experience more fully the

flow of the powerful life force within you and share your love and life with others in a deeply satisfying way.

Relationship

Relationship is the connection developed between two people over time. As social beings, our learning is dependent on the relationships in our lives. Babies deprived of touch can become sick and die. As little ones, our brains and nervous systems develop through interaction with our caregivers. When we are adequately met by those around us, we thrive. Deprived of loving contact, we struggle to survive. We have less energy available to fulfill our potential.

Generally, our psychological wounds have occurred in relationship. Resolving them often requires contact with another person. In our relationships in life, we tend to look for this resolution, another example of how we are always seeking health.

Despite this seeking, our relationship behaviors are usually driven by unconscious patterns, learned early in life. Without awareness of how these patterns act, we continue to repeat them throughout our lives. Generally, our awareness and options remain limited unless we are exposed to a different kind of contact.

The therapist-client relationship ideally provides aspects of the kind of relationship we all needed with our parents as little children. In an environment of love, appreciation, respect, and safety, you can return to the sensitive awareness of a small child, combining it with the experience of your years and the wisdom of your heart.

In our work together, I meet and hold you in reverence and respect, trusting your inherent wisdom and drive toward health. I support your awareness of old patterns while helping you access the resources you need to go beyond them. I meet you with an intention to model the kind of loving contact and relationship we all need, providing an environment in which you can change, grow and thrive. Together, we then have the opportunity to celebrate your arrival, as you are born into the life you came here for. In this setting, we discover how deeply we can love.



References

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