Restoring the Wholeness of Being -
the Focusing-Oriented Therapy
Perspective

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Theoretical and philosophical
background of FOT

- FOT is a therapy that lets “that which arises from the focusing
depths within a person define the therapist’s activity, the
relationship, and the process in the client” (Gendlin, 1996)
- Focusing process or the felt-sensing method is its distinctive
element
- The continuous experiential contact with the client’s
unfolding process, for both the therapist and the client, is
the key factor in the change → multilayered relational depth
- FOT therapists actively facilitate the clients’ awareness,
acceptance and relating to their own experiencing → to find
the steps of their own change process

Experiencing and the body

- The body is seen as an
‘interactonal living process’
and totality of being
- Existence is pre-
conceptual, bodily felt,
imPLICIT and more intricate
than any conceptual
understanding
- Experiencing has an
implicit dimension that
points to the life-forward
direction - clear steps
towards adaptive
functioning
Main aspects of FOT

- Relational task – providing optimal conditions for the unfolding of the client’s process
- It emphasises the client’s directly felt experiencing - body focused felt sense
- The change-steps arise from the felt sense, in the zigzag process of sensing, symbolising and resonating

Understanding trauma from a FOT point of view

- FOT sees the individual in terms of interaction & process
- Trauma involves emotionally overwhelming experiences and a severe or complete stoppage of the life-forward process, leading to multiple disturbances in functioning
- “Every living body organises, implies and – if it can – enacts the next steps of its own living process. If it cannot enact the next step, the implying of it continues. This may be painfully experienced over and over again” (Gendlin 1996, p.215).
- “Nothing that feels bad is ever the last step and is potential energy toward a more balanced way of being if you give it space to move forward” (Gendlin, 1981).

Healing Trauma from a FOT point of view

Phases of the therapy process:

1. Stabilisation phase – Safety, developing of a therapeutic relationship, ability to pause and regulate the emotional intensity
2. Elaboration phase - Remembering in safety
3. Transformation of trauma
4. Integration phase - Reconnecting with life, important others and moving forward
Stabilisation – Safety phase

- The therapist’s relationship with the client mirrors and supports the client’s inner relationship of openness, compassionate curiosity, and direct sensing.
- Regaining the holding ground → Clearing a space practice → ability to be present to one’s experiencing with connected, and optimal distance.
- Developing the ability to ‘pause’, allow a felt sense to form.
- The client develops ability to hold compassion and curiosity toward his inner experiencing.

Elaboration - Remembering in Safety

- FOT has a unique, safe way of dealing with trauma; approaching it through the felt sense, and preventing re-traumatisation by not confronting trauma directly.
- When a felt sense forms, there is already a change in how one ‘has’ the problem.
- Remaining in a state of grounded Presence, neither over-identified nor dis-identified from all aspects of our experience → the client is with something he feels.
- Trauma re-telling follows the rhythm of pausing → felt sensing → processing → completing → pausing.

Approaching traumatic experience safely

Myth of Perseus and Medusa
- symbolic process of trauma transformation
- Medusa – traumatic experience – stopped process that turns life into a stone.
- Perseus shield – a felt sense.
Transformation of trauma

- Change in the FOT process happens through many incremental, observable bodily felt shifts
- Following the bodily felt sense is like catching the thread in the complex tapestry of traumatic experience, then trailing its rhythm and its revealing
- The ‘knowing’ of what was wrong and what would be right instead emerges and the past is re-understood
- Healing trauma involves the re-integration of lost or fragmented aspects of our essential self that have been split by trauma → **restoring wholeness and the life-forward movement**

Transformation of trauma

- Restoring the wholeness of our being lies in our ability to integrate the functions of our organism and our brain
- During the Focusing process, all parts of the brain are activated

The Focusing process helps that integration with the simultaneous holding of broad attention to the whole body (right hemisphere) and specific, detailed attention to a felt sense, what is symbolised and articulated (left hemisphere).

That process re-established collaboration of different functions and in such a way overcomes inhibition of one hemisphere by the other.
Transformation of trauma

- Recognising and integrating a client’s *inwardly arising life forward direction* that is directly linked to a client’s adaptive needs, is an essential aspect of the process.
- By engaging with the feelings, associated needs and implicit meanings that were previously out of awareness, the stopped process restores its natural flow.
- *Carrying forward* is unfolding of something new → a new constellation of experiencing is forming and emerging.
- A larger process with its *natural order* of change is set in motion that has “concretely felt, self-propelled quality” and the therapist has to recognise, trust and follow it.

Integration - Reconnecting and moving forward

- The therapy process unfolds in a spiral fashion through layers and stages, following the natural order of the unfolding process while attending to anything that feels incomplete or stopped.
- The therapist supports the client in experiencing “what should have happened” and “what I want to happen now/next” in a bodily way, which results in a new resource of inner strength and resilience.
- The client engages with what was implicitly there and functioning at the deeper level.
- That leads to the integration of dissociated experience, brings the sense of completion and new meanings, and reconstitutes the sense of flow.

Steps of working with trauma

- Establishing the Presence and safety
- Finding the connected, optimal distance from pain
- Approaching the traumatic experience through a felt sense
- Following the change steps that arise from the felt sense
- Allowing the process to complete its steps
- Working with both, the pain and self-alienation, and the inner criticism
- Recognising and integrating *life-forward movement*
- Receiving and integrating the bodily felt experience of “wanting.”
FOT practice prevents vicarious trauma

- The therapist is in the state of grounded Presence and flow, continually attending to her own felt sense of the client’s unfolding process that informs her.
- The therapist practices Focusing ongoingly as her own self-awareness process and in such a way she timely attends to whatever arises that needs attention and further care.
- By practicing the “Clearing a space” process before their work with the clients, the FOT therapist “puts aside” possible distractions, and is transparent and comfortable in the immediacy of the here and now.

“All we understand is that this happens if we enter in a certain way if we let a felt sense form, if we “make a space for it”, if we “stay with it” with our attention, and if we honour the little steps that take place. We do very little. Notice how little! But that little seems to be crucial, and it is understandable and teachable” (Gendlin, 1996 p.149).

Resources:


http://www.focusing.org