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Safety, Connection and Rapport: Essentials for Healing

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I often ask EFT practitioners if they believe that they provide a safe space for their clients. The answer is always yes. Hmmmm. I imagine this response would be the same no matter what healing professional I asked.

This overwhelmingly positive response puzzles me because I also hear from clients and students who tell me some pretty incredible stories of what practitioners and even instructors have said to them during sessions. They feel as if they have been judged, or they did not feel listened to or felt that they had been treated with less sensitivity than they needed and were even led into directions and subjects that they did not wish to address.

These clients often continue with the practitioner for another session or two. After all, the practitioner had been referred to them or perhaps they had been impressed with their credentials. Sometimes they fell prey to the convincing marketing material and hope that they felt in considering the EFT would finally be the modality that changed things for them. Eventually they ended the therapeutic relationship, feeling something was not right and sometimes offering the practitioner honest feedback as to the source of the disconnection, but more often finding it safer and easier to just discontinue. As best as they were able to, they offered an excuse about being too busy to continue or about having financial constraints. Hence, the practitioner never became aware of why the client truly stopped working with them.

So if all the practitioners I query about this topic, respond by affirming that their sessions with their clients are ones that provide a sense of safety, are nurturing professional relationships with a strong sense of connection, then who are the practitioners that these other clients are referring to? Or could it be that there is a difference of perspective between the practitioner and the client. And, whose sense of safety is the one that really matters for healing to occur? I would say, it's the perspective of the client that is paramount.

I believe that the only reason a person becomes an EFT practitioner is for the purpose of being of service for the healing and transformation of people's lives, including their own, I truly I do. It certainly isn't to cash in on a quick and easy money! That being said, good intentions do not necessarily ensure the establishment of deep rapport with a client. So I decided to put together a list of some of my top tips for creating deep connection with a client. It is of course not an exhaustive list, but its purpose is to provoke the thought; how could you create even greater and deeper rapport and connection with your clients so they can feel even safer, faster. For without safety, real healing and lasting change does not happen.

MY TOP 7 TIPS FOR CREATING SAFETY, CONNECTION AND RAPPORT IN AN EFT SESSION:

1. Rapport begins with the first contact: Rapport refers to a harmonious relationship in which the people concerned understand each others ideas and communicate well. Realize that safety is being determined and gauged by your client right from the very beginning of your interaction which begins from how they first become aware of you. That includes the tone on your website, the sound of your voice on your voice message, the way you respond in your email communications. Maybe ask a tapping colleague to be a "secret shopper" and offer you feedback on your initial contact process.

2. Listening Deeply: There is a dance with this, in that a tapping practitioner really needs to have an understanding of where a client is coming from and what there concerns are, but at the same time, unless they are licensed as such, they are not a therapist and must move a session along into tapping. Make sure in your initial consultation and/or initial session, make sure that your client gets to express their concerns and desires for their work with you without interrupting them.

3. Your Client's Words are Better Than Yours: This one of the most important things that I can emphasize for creating swift rapport. The tendency of a practitioner to fill in the blank, assist the client with finding the right word, offering their perspective as a way of creating empathy...it often takes training to resist any of these. As Alina and I repeat over and over in our workshops..."Parrot-phrase, don't paraphrase" otherwise it is likely to be your assumption or your opinion. Repeatedly

doing this breaks rapport like the repetition of a thousand cuts that a client will feel, but rarely feel comfortable or confident enough to correct, as the practitioner is often deemed as the one who knows how to do this tapping process. A client's words are magical, meaningful, ripe with perspective, and often reveal metaphor and meaning based upon their experiences. Give silence and space for these jewels to be revealed.

4. Only Ask Open Ended Questions: Try to avoid yes or no questions as clients can feel that there is a right or wrong answer and many will feel the pressure to give you the right response. Avoid questions like Does the make you feel(fill in the emotion) and instead ask something like, Do you feel an emotion thinking about that event? What was it like for you having to face that situation? Or how does it feel to be the one who had to...? Open ended questions make a client feel free to answer without their being a right or wrong answer and make them feel as if you are really interested. Unfortunately, this for many people is a rare experience!

5. Be Their Seeing-Eye Dog: As practitioners doing EFT, unless you are licensed, this work is peer-to-peer work, client-centered and client-directed. I like the analogy of acting as the service animal or seeing eye dog for my client. It is their responsibility to decide in what direction and towards what location they wish to go, while it is my responsibility to try to get them there and to make sure they get their safely. That may look like pausing the client when they get sucked into the high velocity of the trauma pull and I have to pause them or slow them down. It may mean I don't let them talk and talk about trauma to trauma and instead educate them on the nature of working slowly with trauma. Just because they start to step off the curb into an intersection does not mean that I jump out there too. It also means I don't run after rabbits that I want to chase if the client hasn't offered it as a subject of interest.

6. Safety means Going Only as Fast as their Slowest Part Can Go: If there is one practitioner question I hear that to me is like the sound of fingernails on a chalkboard, it is "When was the first and worst time this ever happened to you?" This is especially true when I hear it was asked during the initial session. Yes we know that early traumas, especially before the age of six are the greatest source of negative beliefs, but please go slowly. Please let these memories arise organically, proffered by the client who feels safe and ready enough to allow their subconscious to bring these forward. Please establish safety and rapport first. Please work on recent events first that enable the client to feel confident and resourced by their first tapping session. We have just seen far too many times, with the best of intent, practitioners ask questions like this and then found themselves amidst an emotional meltdown and even a serious abreaction.

7. Empower Your Client to Tap on Themselves ASAP: This is critically important in a first session. It is our belief that all EFT practitioners should be teaching their clients how to tap for themselves. That means that when possible, allow the client to tap on their own points and empower them with the skill of self-regulation. If the practitioner is doing all sorts of advanced tapping techniques that the client cannot easily self replicate, then I believe we are not doing all we can to empower them to feel competent in tapping for themselves in between sessions. For that reason, both Alina and I do our very best to keep the EFT techniques simple for our clients in the initial session. In that way, clients are more likely to follow through in doing their own tapping homework. They then do not rely solely on the experienced practitioner, as "they" know how to do it better and then simply wait for the next session to do any further tapping. Clients learning what to safely work on themselves and what subjects to leave aside to work in conjunction with their practitioner (I am specifically speaking

of Big T traumas. If you do not know the distinction, please consider the [Tapping out of Trauma online training](#))

So my question to you is this: when you have experienced working with a tapping practitioner, what may have been done...or not done...that made you feel guarded, defensive, or perhaps especially vulnerable? Were you able to sense it when it was happening or not until later when you reflected upon it? Were you able to honestly share how you felt about it? This is extremely important for you to be aware of as an EFT client and as a practitioner as you have the right to choose relationships that make you feel safe and you have a responsibility as a practitioner to always seek out ways to make your clients feel as safe as possible in your presence as a healing practitioner.

Further Explorations in Creating Safety, Connection and Rapport in a Tapping Session

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I received such wonderful feedback from my first blog on Safety, Connection and Rapport; Essentials for Healing, that I felt the urgency to expand and add several more tips that may be helpful for tapping practitioners who are looking to establish tools and protocols for creating even greater safety in their client sessions.

Tip #8: Make sure to ALWAYS have a new client fill out an intake form and always review it in advance of the initial session. This applies whether it is a paying client, a swap partner, a family member or friend...any time that you are the practitioner holding space for healing to occur. Have some sense in advance of why they are coming to see you, what their expectations are, whether they are currently dealing with a mental health diagnosis and/or under the care of a licensed provider. People coming in for EFT tend to have emotional-related issues. That's typically why they resonate and seek out tapping. So you need to be responsible and professional enough to know your scope of practice and have very clear boundaries for what you do and do not work with and know when you should work in tandem with a counselor/therapist or when to simply refer out. Having had the opportunity to clarify any questions that you may have with your client in advance of a session, if at all possible, goes a long way towards creating what is best for a client, what is safe for a client as well as what is best for you and your practice. Personally, I do not work with clients without having a 15 minute phone consultation, followed by reviewing their intake forms, all before their first session. If I do not receive their complete forms at least 24 hours in advance, I let them know that their session will need to be rescheduled. If you wait until you are amidst a first session and find out a critical piece of information, whether it be regarding them having recently had suicidal ideations or mental health diagnoses beyond your scope or skill, that puts an awful lot of pressure on you to take appropriate action in the moment, which is not always easy to do.

Tip #9: Forget you ever heard the phrase "First and Worst", as in a practitioner asking a client "When was the first and worst time this ever happened to you?" This is especially true when it is asked in a first session before a foundation of safety, resourcing and solid rapport has been established. To me that is akin not knowing if your client can swim and asking them to jump off the high dive. Yes, the earlier the experience or trauma was experienced, the more of a core event and

“belief-maker or world-view creator” it is likely to be. Our primary beliefs are often created before the age of seven. However, with a deeper understanding of the importance of how one works safely with trauma, one should approach these big events judiciously, slowly, allowing the client to come up with the events to be worked on. Begin with recent events and allow the older events to come up organically by them. Trying to hit “home runs” in the first session can be potentially traumatizing.

Tip #10: Create a Space Designed for Safety. When a client has a history of trauma, they are more susceptible to being more easily by small things. Different environmental cues can be sources of stimuli that can cause a hyperarousal or shut down response . People are not always aware and conscious of what in their environment is making them feel at ease vs triggered, so becoming more trauma informed you can lessen the chance of this happening. For example, in your office, does your client have options for where they feel comfortable to sit in the room? Do they have the option of i.e. not having their back towards the door, which can be very uncomfortable for a person who is hyper-vigilant. Does your office have soundproofing so that outside sounds, especially low frequency sounds, are eliminated? Low deep sounds can often trigger a feeling of needing to be on guard. Does your space have blankets or pillows that a client can hold when they are feeling especially vulnerable? Take a look around your office space and see how you could make it feel even more safe and supportive to a wide variety of clients.

Tip #11: Utilize the Tools of Interpersonal Neurobiology. Dr. Stephen Porges, the creator of the Polyvagal Theory, explains the term Neuroception, to describe how neural circuits distinguish whether situations and people are safe, dangerous or life threatening. Part of Dr. Porge’s theory explores the importance of the ventral vagus nerve and its critical functioning as part of the Social Engagement System. This refers to how our interaction with other human beings can assist our nervous system in feeling calm and safe. Much of the determination is made from the sensory input of things like: the sound/prosody of another person’s voice and the perception of another’s facial expression. So how can we as practitioners utilize this ever-present threat detection system to support our clients in feeling safe? First, we become more aware of the tone, volume and pace of our voice so as to have it be soothing, calming and nurturing. We can become more aware of how we hold our bodies and what facial expressions we use. Our compassion does not need to be effusive or with agreement. We become skillful in the art of holding space for what needs to happen and are not just conversational in the way we might be with a friend at the market. We train ourselves to become the safest of places so that when a client gets triggered, they can find their way back home to themselves by using the practitioner as a lighthouse to find their way to shore and out of the emotional storm.

Tip #12: Just Because a Client Says Something, Does Not Mean You Have to Insert it into a Tapping Round. While using the client’s words is always paramount, just because they stated it aloud does not mean you have them tap on it. Cognitive shifts happen and realizations are commonplace. While they are beautiful, positive awareness moments are just that, they don’t need to be tapped on. When you are focused on tapping on a specific event and mid round they think of another event, aka daisy chaining, stop the round...decide which event you are tapping on, get specific and re check the dominant emotion, SUDs and body location...don’t just pile it on. I see far too many sessions that have the practitioner mention up to six different emotions by the time the set up and reminder phrases are done. Having too many events, not being specific, listing too many emotions can easily overwhelm the client and cause either a plateau in the reduction of their intensity or actually cause an emotional melt down. If a client mentions something important make

a note of it, finish your tapping round and then explore it to see if it has value for tapping. Remember, the tendency of a client will almost always be to “go global” and your job as the practitioner is to assist them in staying on target, thoroughly resolving events that lead to the resolution of issues that allow them to transform beliefs and behaviors.

I hope you find this helpful and would love and appreciate your thoughts and comments.

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