

***Heart to Heart,
Hand in Hand***

How to Trade
Holistic Peer Counseling

Amara Karuna

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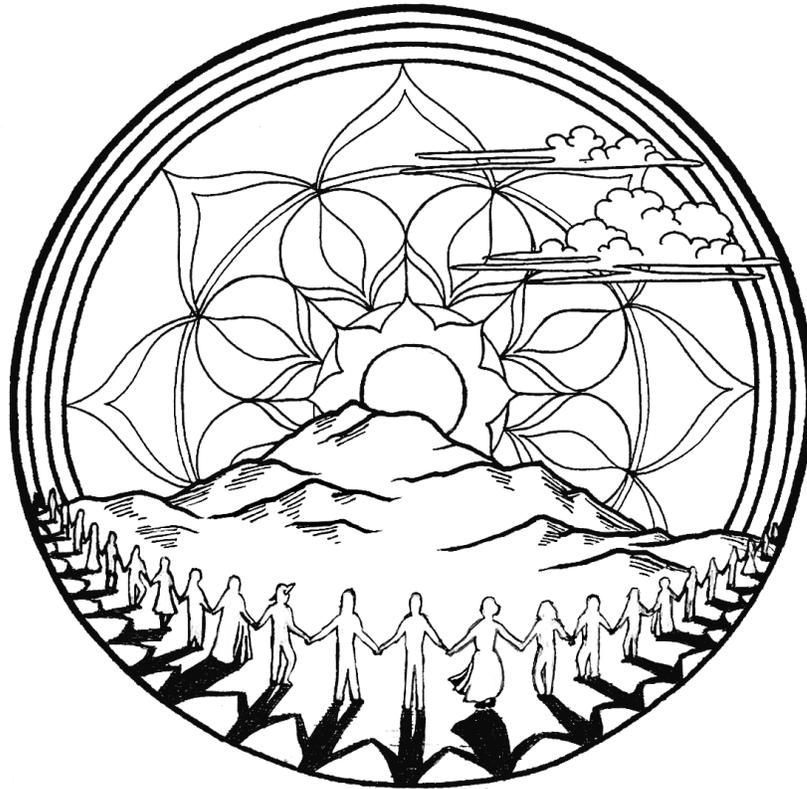
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DEDICATION

Dedicated to all my amazing teachers and students on this journey to emotional awareness, fluency and intelligence.

To my mother Jane who listened to me when I was an upset child, and who gave comfort to so many people.

To the dedicated students who have become dedicated teachers and passed this work along in their own way.

To the vision of our world becoming more sane, loving and healthy.

And to my daughter Heron who inspires many.

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“One by one, everyone comes to remember
We’re healing the world one heart at a time...”

(song by Michael Stillwater)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I appreciate all my teachers and the dedicated people around the world practicing and evolving Re-Evaluation Co-counseling. They offer classes and videos and written materials. The first chapters of this book are summaries of *The Fundamentals of Co-Counseling Manual* and *The Human Side of Human Beings* by Harvey Jackins. Other sources from RC are listed in Notes. See www.rc.org

I learned how to ground and center myself and be psychically sensitive at the Berkeley Psychic Institute around 1979. This work is very interwoven in HPC and has been helping me my whole life. A good book from that school of teaching is *The Psychic Healing Book* by Amy Wallace and Bill Henkin.

I deepened my skills by studying with Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks, who published a number of books on Body Centered Counseling, including the wonderful *At the Speed of Life: The Power of Body Intelligence to Create Transformational Magic*.

Thank you to Teri Ciacchi in Portland OR (who wrote the foreword), Henry India Holden, Kristen Rawson, Jim Barker and Nekole Shapiro in Seattle WA, Karima Alison Halderman in Eugene, OR, Aniko Willoughby and Tracy Matfin in Hawaii, among others for teaching this work and for evolving the ideas in their own way, creating the updated name for this work, and inspiring people to heal.

These resources are listed in the Notes section.

Thanks to my amazing, detail-oriented partner Michael Holwell for editing this book.

CAUTIONARY NOTE

These techniques and processes are intended for peer to peer counseling. In cases of severe trauma or psychosis, it is recommended to seek the help of professionals. Sometimes cathartic emotional release work is not appropriate for some individuals, and it could bring up too much emotion too fast. There are those who could be helped better with other styles of healing.

This book is a detailed handbook of collected and summarized resources and techniques to be used when being trained by a skilled teacher. It is not intended to give a thorough training in professional therapy.



FOREWORD

The Roots of Holistic Peer Counseling

Holistic Peer Counseling saved my life. I frequently find myself saying this to people who are asking me what Holistic Peer Counseling (HPC) is. While it might be a form of dramatization (see page 79) to attribute my continued existence to HPC, it is true that I would be a very different person with a very different life if I had not begun practicing peer counseling in my late 20's. Amara Karuna was my first Re-Evaluation Co-Counseling (RC) teacher and I attended my first RC classes with her in the early 1990's.

I had co-founded an intentional community called Duma in Eugene, Oregon with nine other people ranging in age from 21-35. Our nascent community had reached a point in our group development when it became clear that, if our various communication styles and layers of interpersonal conflict did not receive outside support, we might disband. We were already using the techniques of Marshall Rosenberg's Nonviolent Communication, which I had learned from my graduate school training in Social Work, but those were not enough, on their own, to help our community members clear the traumas from our families of origin and our socialized patterns of oppression.

Learning and practicing RC helped me realize that my feelings were not reality. I learned how to safely access my bodily sensations and emotions. I learned that expressing feelings would not destroy me or those around me. RC taught me to be able to clearly distinguish psychological trauma and catharsis from societal oppression. RC taught me how to free myself and others from the fear of expressing feelings by taking timed turns: a) providing listening with deep presence and b) learning to physically locate, identify and release the energy of emotions in a safe container. RC offered a clear and intersectional understanding of social oppression; acknowledging that the first oppressions are adults dominating children and encouraging them not to express their feelings about being dominated. I became aware of how the patriarchal, oligarchic racist supremacist hegemonic culture we were born into teaches us to fear our internal experiences and emotions. RC techniques

ask us to stop complying with our own repression. RC teaches: how to create consent-based group agreements based on rational thinking, how to become allies with those who experience oppressions that differ from our own oppressions & how to form affinity groups with those who share similar oppressions. RC encourages us to become liberated from both small internal psychological blocks and larger socially patterned behaviors.

I left Duma after two and half years of social experimentation, preferring to live in the smaller chaos of dyads and triads. I cannot remember now if all of the members of our Duma Community participated in those first RC classes, but I do know that several of us are still holding peer counseling sessions, of some kind, on a weekly basis, thirty-two years later in 2023.

Amara and her teachings kept evolving, and I kept studying with her. She developed her own form of peer counseling called Wholistic Peer Support which maintained the roots of RC but then included her training from the Berkeley Psychic Institute, Reiki, massage and the body centered therapy of Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks. I studied with her as an assistant teacher in 1995-1997 and with her encouragement and role modeling, I developed and continue to teach my own form of HPC which I now call Cascadia Holistic Peer Counseling (CHPC).

As I continue to grow and transform, my work follows suit. Each new decade brings new technologies and fields of study to the surface of human awareness. As leaders of liberatory pedagogy, we strive to stay abreast of and integrate these new fields of knowledge, skill and inquiry. HPC initiates and calls to new participants who then become assistant teachers who then, by design, "hive off" and eventually co-create their own version of HPC. I have taught many people the ever-expanding matrix of peer counseling that Amara transmitted to me as Holistic Peer Counseling.

While living in Seattle from 2000-2012, I continued to learn about and teach new psychological awareness of trauma, somatics and

brain science and wove them steadily into my HPC curriculum.

I taught the following people who went on to develop their own versions of the work: Jim Barker also known as Jim Divine of Divine Hand Palmistry who teaches Holistic Co Counseling. Kristen Rawson developed Deeper Relationships and a system titled as Holistic Peer Support. Henry India Holden developed Inner Wisdom Counseling, now Wise Peer Communication. Nekole Shapiro took courses and co-taught them with Kristen for a few years.

By 2009 I thought I had finished teaching Holistic Peer Counseling as I was so much more interested in developing my newly formed church Living Love Revolution and was consumed with developing an LLR Priestess body to help me hold Aphrodite Temples. I offered the name Holistic Peer Counseling to Nekole Shapiro, who was passionately engaged in developing her own classes called Holistic Peer Counseling for Birth which then went on to expand as HPC for Bodies and HPC for Sex. She wrote a brilliant handbook available on Amazon (see Resources, page 186). In 2012 I officially moved to Portland Oregon, and building community inherently involves teaching people to support each other in psychological self regulation, interpersonal communication and peace making. So the cycle of teaching began again.

As Above, So Below. As Within, So Without.

Developments in the field of Quantum Physics, Brain Science and Trauma have led to a deepening and expansion of what is considered therapeutic and therefore what skills are useful to transmit in peer counseling. Simultaneously, we are trending away from specialization in fields of knowledge and towards integration. One such trend apparent in the development of HPC systems is the acceptance and use of “psychic skills” as they become reframed as Somatics. Training techniques in “extra-ordinary” perception, once siloed in esoteric lineages, have been steadily translated into “useful techniques” in the fields of Somatics, Ecology, EcoPsychology and trauma work. Formerly the exclusive domain of Mysticism and Magicks, the ability to use proprioception (an internal process of identifying physical sensations within one’s body) to locate and express emotions as energy has slowly and surely become the business of science and psychology.

Exercises that Amara learned in her training at the Berkeley Psychic Institute in the 70’s are now reframed as EcoSomatic exercises in my CHPC courses and those of my students. Gay and Kathlyn Hendricks’ work woven into the curriculum by Amara continues to inform HPC courses. The Hendricks’ somatic psychology practices, groundbreaking in the 70’s, and brilliantly exemplified in their book *“At the Speed of Life”* starting being broadcast through the Shift Network and its Body Intelligence seminars in 2012. Thus spiritual energy practices, originally found in Buddhist and Hindu religious practices, are providing benefit in the “every day lives of ordinary people” as well as being preserved in our HPC lineages.

Amara Karuna, Jim Barker and I have continued to collaborate and have taught several versions of HPC & CHPC as well as advanced courses and weekend workshops based on HPC materials. Along the way we have continued to network with other teachers including Nekole Shapiro and we made an agreement in 2016 or so, for the sake of continuity, to have all forms of this branch of peer counseling to include the term Holistic Peer Counseling, HPC. Amara has been kind enough to offer to put links/contact information for each teacher of the HPC lineage in this book.

Amara and I keep reconnecting and cross pollinating. It seems natural to both of us as our spiritual callings are aligned and our life “work” have emerged from and remain influenced by our relatedness. We support each other as women who cherish the same values, hold earned spiritual authority and are dedicated to human evolution and liberation. We enjoy holding space for the experience of Immanence. We create events carefully intending to provide an environment (set and setting) most likely to allow for the possibility of communion with the Divine to arise within. All of this begins with the simple act of peer counseling. Holistic Peer Counseling: one person providing a deep listening presence, and thus becoming a safe container for another person to express their emotions without judgment.

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INTRODUCTION

When I was 20 in 1977, I was in Berkeley, California, living with friends and learning about healing. I was fairly physically ill and struggling with compulsive patterns of eating that were unhealthy. I attended the Berkeley Holistic Health Center to learn about many kinds of healing such as Reiki. I got a massage license then as well, and became fascinated with the intricacies of the body. I also studied at the Berkeley Psychic Institute, because I didn't feel like I had any particular psychic talent, and I wanted to see if someone like me could actually learn to be more sensitive intuitively. As it turns out, I could. Their teachings on grounding and psychic self management have been helping me my whole life, and I have since taught numerous classes sharing them. After Berkeley I pursued my passion for healing in Santa Cruz, CA, studying acupuncture and Chinese medicine with Michael Tierra. I gradually began to heal and understand myself.

Then at around 25 years old, I joined a small intentional community that was egalitarian in structure and involved income sharing. Living, working and eating in one house created an emotional pressure cooker from all the intimacy. I noticed where it was not working well. The members had various levels of emotional skillfulness and awareness. I became aware of a pattern where someone who was emotionally upset, and not taking responsibility for their feelings, would use the group meetings to process all their emotional problems. This was very draining and time-consuming for the group, and eventually led the group to dissolve.

This experience led me to seek ways that people could live together in harmony, and work out emotional difficulties. It was clear to me that emotional issues and unresolved pain are the main reason we are struggle to take care of our bodies, our relationships and our world. Emotions can interfere with our ability to make kind, rational choices.

I studied and practiced many different group processes and therapies, and the two I have found most useful for community are Nonviolent Communication, or NVC, and peer counseling, also known as co-counseling. I got involved with Re-evaluation Counseling and taught it for 5 years. I loved the grassroots ideas of helping each other to

get free of our programs and habits, without having to pay huge amounts of money to professionals (although professionals are needed sometimes). At some point I felt the creative inner urge to teach a form of peer counseling that also included other forms of healing and awareness of psychic energy and meditations.

I was really emotionally reserved as a young adult, and it was a revelation that emotional releases are deeply healing when they are welcomed, held in a safe space where no one is hurt, and allowed to finish. I had to learn to feel deeply again. I learned that when someone has a sudden injury or emergency, we can allow the screaming or crying to happen, so that the energy does not stay stuck in the body and healing can happen fast. And when two people are in conflict, we can give each a time individually to blow off steam and explore what in their past is getting triggered. We can heal much farther and faster together than we could alone.

How to use this book

This information is progressive, starting with the basics. Reading this is informative, but learning the skills requires practice, so it is best to study with at least one friend, and try the exercises together.

There is information interspersed on both inner meditation and energy healing skills and counseling.

Exercises are highlighted in bold. I have included a few articles, and testimonials in between chapters.

Think for yourself, spread this information

In all of this book as you learn about these ideas and try the practices, think for yourself about what works for you. Take what you like and leave the rest. You are empowered to create your own way of using these ideas and sharing them. If you share material from this book, give credit to the sources.

As we each become free of old fears and blocks, and open into our own unique, beautiful power, we can more effectively create a new and healthier world.

Amara Karuna

PRINCIPLES OF HPC

Peer Network - we are all equals, even if we have different skills, resources, educations and bodies

Co-creation- we trade counseling time equally, each taking the role of client and counselor alternately

Radical Self Empowerment- We have the power to heal from our wounds, with help from others.

Holistic- we use effective healing techniques from many sources, including psychology, bodywork, breath work, energy healing and mediation.

Societal Programming- Many of our mental and emotional habits are installed from cultural norms, and can be examined and dissolved

Emotion Positive- Emotions are natural, healthy waves of energy that give life and vitality

Trust in our Human Inner Goodness

Trusting the Natural Process- When emotions are intentionally honored and given attention and space to be, they naturally heal and transform

Emotional Mastery and Rationality- emotions can be felt fully in a safe container, without having to act on them, and this leads to clearer thinking and decisions.

Process Principles:

Client centered- the sessions are directed by the client with help from the counselor

Consensual- all activities are co-created and verbally agreed on by the people sharing time

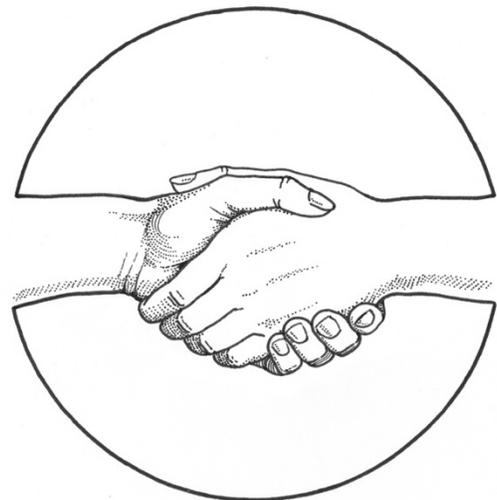
Radical and skillful honesty and transparency - Revealing feelings and thinking that have been hidden or suppressed is inherently healing, when done intentionally in session

Emotional Responsibility- We take responsibility for healing the traumas and hurts that we have accumulated, and can learn to have choice about when we are triggered

Getting to the Root Injury- Finding the root memories of old trauma and allowing conscious awareness and acceptance brings healing

Affinity groups- When people with similar experiences meet together, they can be very effective in healing.

- By Henry India Holden





1 HUMANS AND EMOTIONS

Why does life seem so unsatisfying at times?

Why do emotions just suddenly arise?

What happens when we decide to be partners and build family with someone, and after a few months or years the rosy glow of our idealism wears off and it seems to become so much more difficult than we imagined?

Why do we find ourselves arguing, feeling jealous, greedy, and uncooperative?

It seems if the other person would just do it our way, and stop being so unreasonable, things would work out great!

How do we communicate what we want without being controlling?

How do we stay connected when our needs seem to be conflicting with others?

Why do we keep trying to stop drinking, smoking or eating too much, and find it such an ongoing struggle?

Emotional problems between people are the primary reason for breaking up relationships, businesses and communities.

Because our Western culture is so emotionally repressed, most people have no models for how to handle their own emotions in a responsible and healthy way. We go through life hoping for peace and pleasure, and if we get triggered or have our “buttons pushed,” we tend to blow up out of control, and then try to get out of the unpleasant emotions as fast as possible, without really understanding where they came from or why they are so intense. Emotions are messy, physical things that involve lots of movement, sounds, inner chemistry, and body fluids.

The shadow is any part of the psyche that is unpopular and judged as undesirable. Shadows

exist because of an accumulation of past hurtful experiences. We can see our own shadows in the places where we find ourselves compulsively doing things that we have already decided we do not want to do, such as indulging in addictions. It is also seen in chronic illnesses that we can't seem to heal. Or where we feel blocked in moving forward toward the things we want to create in our lives.

Shadows, or patterns, live in our unconscious, so by their nature they are hard to see. It is far easier to notice something you do not like about another person, thus projecting your shadow on to them.

The problem with shadows is that no matter what attempts are made to control or ignore them, they keep popping their ugly little heads up in the most inopportune and embarrassing moments.

This is because they want healing, and they want to be honored and acknowledged. The longer they are pushed away and repressed, the more energy they build up, until they really seem like monsters lurking somewhere under the thin veneer of our "nice" conscious personalities.

The good news is that shadows and old emotional distresses can be cleared and permanently resolved, with loving help from others.

This book is intended as a resource for people who would like to help themselves, their friends and their families to feel more deeply satisfied with life and relationships.

We can use this on different levels

Some people have sessions occasionally just to blow off steam in stressful times.

Some set up regular sessions which provide a deep long term therapy, systematically removing the blocks that keep them from realizing their dreams.

What is peer counseling, and why do it?

Peer counseling is aimed at teaching lay people how to be effective in helping themselves and others with emotional issues, and in regaining our innate goodness and intelligence.

It is based on observation of what really works in practice, not on theories of what ought to work. Re-Evaluation Counseling evolved from the experiences of thousands of people over years.

Re-evaluation Counseling is a world wide network of non-professional counselors, who trade sessions for the purpose of clearing emotions, dissolving rigid patterns of behavior and recovering the ability to be present and think clearly and rationally. It is a people's liberation movement that started in the 60's and has spread all over the world.

RC has spawned many permutations and offshoots, such as Co-Counseling International, the National Coalition Building Institute, and Holistic Peer Counseling.

This spreading of information was encouraged by Harvey Jackins, the founder of RC, because of his generous attitude that the more people who know and practice their own healing, the faster the world situation will improve. You can see the original organization at www.rc.org, where you will find many resources for learning the skills.

This chapter and the next give a summary of some of the basic ideas from Re-evaluation Co-counseling (RC), because it is a really useful groundwork on which to base our work in Holistic Peer Counseling, which also includes energy awareness and psychic skills.

If you have not yet been trained as a co-counselor, these chapters are important. (They were previously printed in the *Heartbeat Nurturing Therapy* book by the same author. Heartbeat therapy specifically addresses the inner child and the distress we acquire in infancy).

Human nature and intelligence

What are human beings really like? Underneath all the programs, conditioning, expectations and hurts that we get, what is our true basic nature? Our assumptions about this make a huge difference in how we approach healing.

What would you be like if you were really free to be your true self? What are young children like before they are socialized?

For this work, we see that healthy human beings are naturally intelligent, energetic, loving, communicative and cooperative. We are emotional and also rational. We love to be close with each other, and we love to share. We love to create things. Our inherent nature has a vast capacity for flexible intelligence. Each of us is whole and complete, unique, and with limitless potential. Nothing can permanently damage our real nature, but many things can cover it up.

When our thinking process is working well, when we are relaxed and feeling normal, information from our environment comes in mostly on a subconscious level.

Most of what is happening at any time does not need our conscious attention, such as sounds, sights, smells, temperature of the air, etc. It gets evaluated, processed and sorted, and then filed in our memory to be recalled at will later.

When we are healthy, we can respond to each new situation with an appropriate, new and creative response.

How we get hurt

Why don't people always act according to our true inner nature? If we are so cooperative and loving, why are we killing each other and the planet?

Through the natural process of living, we get hurt. We get hurt physically, mentally and emotionally on all levels, and frequently. This is a

normal part of life, and we are naturally equipped to deal with it, if we were allowed to.

Trauma, or wounding, can be described as an experience that was too intense for our nervous systems, our emotional development or level of understanding. It was an experience we could not integrate or stay present with.

It might have been too much sensation or stimulation, or happening too fast, or happening too soon for us to be ready. Or it might have been that there was not enough of something, like not enough understanding or support or safety. In those situations where we are not able to stop the experience, our conscious awareness changes.

When we are being hurt, our normal thinking process shuts down, or seems to work very differently. People do not usually think well while hurting or in trauma. The forebrain, which holds the more evolved part of our brain and the capacity for rational thought, becomes less dominant. The more primitive reptilian brain area takes over, inducing feelings of fight, freeze, faint or flight.

Did you ever try to think or make decisions with a headache or while you are very upset?

During a painful experience, the input of information from the environment is still pouring in, but it's not getting processed or evaluated as usual, and a kind of mis-storage occurs. All the sights, sounds, smells, etc., emotions, as well as the experience of being unable to think clearly get stuck together in one big recording/ memory.

This distress recording is like a videotape of the incident, which is stored for later processing, perhaps at a safer time. A stored hurt creates a rigid, inflexible spot in our mind. The recording seems to take up space; to use up some of our capacity for intelligence. All the information seems to be stored in one big lump, like a recorded movie. Separate bits can't be remembered individually as they can when it is

stored normally. It becomes a place where we can't think well, and that we avoid remembering.

Why? What happens right now when you think about something that was really a hurtful event?

Most people re-experience the hurt. It's all still right there, and so we try to avoid remembering it.

Practice: Scan your Triggers

Take a moment and think of times when you have acted like that. Maybe write them down for further reflection. This behavior indicates a place here you have been hurt, and still carry the scars of that hurt.

The recordings wait in our subconscious storage vault, like a booby trap. When anything later happens which is similar enough to the original hurts, we experience that unpleasant phenomenon known as being triggered. The new situation may not even be a hurtful event. It may just be similar in any way to the old event.

We call this being "re-stimulated" or "triggered." It's also commonly known as getting your buttons pushed, or overreacting. When the old recording starts to play, it feels like a replaying of the old incident. We feel the same feelings, find ourselves saying the same words or compulsively doing the same actions. It takes us out of the present and into the past. Our nervous system goes into high arousal, and activating chemicals are released by the brain.

A person acting out of an old distress recording will do things that don't work, say things that are not pertinent, and fail to cope effectively and gracefully with the present situation. They will feel old uncomfortable feelings that may have nothing or very little to do with the present situation.

We can tell we've come across this emotional residue in someone because they're acting frozen, nonsensical or rigid. They become irrational and

"not themselves." They may get memory flashes of the old situation. "Temporary insanity" is a classic description of being triggered.

Whenever someone is triggered, and they have failed to cope effectively with the new situation, so that moment also becomes a new hurtful experience. It gets recorded on top of the first one with all its new feelings, sensations and thoughts. Thus new situations are added on to the old ones, and the distress recording gets bigger, adding more layers.

This means the booby trap has more triggers. It takes up more of our free thinking space, and there are less areas of experience in life that are not upsetting to us. The person becomes more disposed to be upset by more situations, and more deeply upset, and for longer times.

We get hurt early in life and often. We get hurt by accident when we are babies; we get bumps, or get cold, hungry, frustrated or scared. We might be abused or neglected.

But by far the greatest cause of our hurts is from contagion from irrational adults, who are unaware and acting from their own distress. For example, when a child runs outside naked, and the parent (having been punished by their own parents for exactly the same thing) gets upset and yells at the child, telling them how bad and embarrassing they have been acting. Then the child carries guilt, shame and fear about their body as a distress.

Types of Distress Patterns

When there has been enough re-stimulation, and when the same hurts happen over and over, they form patterns, which become incorporated into our personalities and even reflected in our body structure. They color our beliefs and effect every part of our lives.

Latent Patterns: Most emotional patterns are latent, and so you do not feel the distress all the time, but it lies inside waiting to be pulled out by a similar event. We see these as our

"problems." We know that we get triggered by certain things. "Oh, I always get mad when someone is late for anything." "I hate to talk in front of a group."



Chronic patterns: These are created when we are hurt so frequently over a long time, that the feelings become pervasive, and we think "that's just the way I am." These are seen as idiosyncrasies of personality, or as your viewpoint on reality.

Practice: Scan Your Beliefs

What kinds of chronic patterns have you seen in yourself and others? Take a moment and write down the basic ideas about life and this world that you base your actions on. What do you believe about yourself? About the world?

Chronic patterns are constantly triggered; they play all the time. They are like colored glasses through which we see the world. They can be identified in a person's posture, speech, emotional attitudes (like pessimism), and ritual rigid behaviors (like compulsions and addictions). See Chapter 17.

Control Patterns: These are inhibition patterns that form from our training not to release emotions. They block our ability to express feeling.

Inhibitions are learned early. We are told "don't cry," and get lots of patting, rocking, threats, or humiliation: "Big boys don't cry." Or "I'll give you something to cry about." Soon the inhibitions become internalized as control patterns, and we stop ourselves without having to be told. See Chapter 14.

The natural healing process

Emotions are natural waves of energy that arise in response to a stimulus, and if they are allowed to flow and are not repressed, they naturally resolve themselves. It is natural for a child to get angry if another child steals a toy, or if they are denied a food that they really want. The emotion can be validated and allowed space to be felt, and yet not be the deciding factor in how the situation is resolved.

Hurtful things happen to us as a natural part of life, and our emotional responses to them are our natural way of healing the hurts. A child who is sad about not having another cookie can be allowed to cry, and have the feeling acknowledged in a respectful way. They can be given empathy, and allowed time to finish expressing their feelings (but not another cookie), and soon the tears will wash through and the child will feel happy again.

In our lives, in this culture, we experience many disappointments and moments of neglect, abuse and not having our needs met. If we are not given loving empathetic attention around the emotions stirred by these hurts, they tend to get stored in our subconscious shadows. In an ideal situation, as soon as the hurtful event is over, the person would be able to release the hurt and heal.

The process of storing old hurts can be reversed. Our abilities to think clearly and respond freely can be recovered, and repaired. A natural healing process is built in, and we are all born with it. If it could operate, it would allow distress to be moved through immediately at that moment. It can also be used retroactively to clear recorded distress. This emotional release process

can be called "discharge" (in the sense of discharging or draining a battery), or "catharsis."

Hurts always naturally seek release. However the safe space, time, and attention from a caring person that encourages the healing are not usually available to most of us, so the emotions and information tends to stay stuck. They will stay stuck an entire lifetime unless they are processed.

Emotional release is a natural, inherent process. Every young child does it spontaneously. It is a physical, chemical process that happens in our bodies involving complex chemicals and nerves.



Image by Robert Gluckson

When sad, we naturally cry and sob. When afraid, we laugh, tremble and have cold sweat. When angry we rage with loud sounds and large movements, and have hot sweat. When we have physical discomfort we relieve it by yawning and stretching. When we want to communicate an experience we do so with animated, non-repetitive talking. All of these are avenues of release for the emotional energy, and have a healing effect if done consciously within a safe and loving situation, with someone who wants to listen.

If the process of catharsis is allowed to finish, the stuck information in the distress

recording is released, evaluated and stored correctly. The area of our thinking around the old painful moment is restored to flexible awareness. Our locked up energy becomes free.

This is called "Re-evaluation" in RC, and is an automatic response after emotion has been discharged. It is the "Aha" feeling of resolution and understanding that comes after releasing. It can also be called integration. The purpose of counseling is to allow the catharsis process so that we can reclaim all the areas of our flexible thinking that have been blocked.

Blocks to the healing process

What keeps the natural healing process from happening? Originally it is the lack of an attentive, loving person at the moment of the hurtful experience. In painful moments, we are often alone or the others around are also involved somehow in their own pain. There is often a big shortage of people who know how to truly pay attention to someone else when they are hurting. The lack of this outer resource is important.

Do you feel like you got enough calm, loving attention while growing up?

We often grow up with a chronic feeling of never having enough loving personal attention. Or we might have been smothered with attention from someone who was trying to control us. This is due to similar hurts instilled in the adults we depend on, and also to the isolating structure of our modern society, which makes it very hard for parents to get the help they need.

Confusing healing with the hurt

Our culture also confuses the healing process with the hurt itself. We think if someone is crying, we need to get them to stop, and then they will be all better. We do not realize that the crying itself was what would make the hurt dissolve.

No form of catharsis is more important than the others. If they are encouraged and persisted with, the stuck hurt will be released in

just the right way for the client. Often you will have many different feelings about one hurtful event.

Unconsciously asking for attention

Everyone keeps trying to get attention, although not with awareness. We talk out our problems, or cry on a shoulder with friends. If you listen, much of everyday conversation is people trying to client about their problems. But it is hard to be thorough and deep with this unaware "clienting," because our conditioning not to have feelings takes over whenever the discharge gets deep. Also friends are often unskilled at listening and will often offer advice, give criticism, or just take the attention back to themselves by interrupting and talking about their own feelings.

In peer counseling we structure our time together so that we create a safe time for us each to have a turn being listened to, when the listener has been trained to listen well. In this way deep and true healing can take place. If the discharge process is allowed to operate, people can return to natural state of freedom and healthy living.

Resistance to change

Another thing that blocks the healing is lack of inner resources, or free attention. Our nervous systems need to be ready to handle the work of processing the old wounds. Sometimes cathartic emotional release work is not appropriate for some individuals with deep trauma, who could be helped better with other styles of healing.

When we really get into areas of ourselves that are old and habitual, it's common to feel an urge to avoid them, and stop doing healing work. The patterns of energy have their own inertia, and changing can feel uncomfortable. In addition, the areas of pain are not pleasant to explore, and it takes energy to face them. That's why we help each other. We can notice when we hit a block and ask for support. This chapter includes a summary of *The Human Side of Human Beings*, by Harvey Jackins.