

May 8, 2007 Nof Ginosar, Israel International Focusing Conference

Domain Focusing and its function of Self Empathy:

1. Orientation to Domain Focusing
 - A. Sometimes, DF can be jolting to people.
 - B. Phases are on the left side and should be familiar if you learned Focusing via Gene's 6 steps. Reviewing.
 - C. Domains can be thought of as thinking, feeling, empathy. OR as Issue, Felt Sensing, Self-empathy. OR, for philosophy of the implicit, as VII, VIII, and HELP. OR as modes: 1. regular thinking-feeling-talking mode, 2. felt sensing mode, 3. empathy mode.
2. Orientation to Self-Empathy. It comes out of Gendlin's work on critic and on the "focusing attitude". My question for years was: "what is the underlying function that the work on "critic" and on "focusing attitude" is serving?" I will elaborate on how SE helps in the different phases of focusing.

DIDACTIC

Basic Functions of Self-Empathy in Phases of Focusing

Phase 1 (parallels Clearing A Space, Gendlin Step 1): Getting Started—self-empathy is an unusually strong domain for starting from. It is good for when someone is in a bad place. It is good for when someone wants to work on something particularly challenging. Starting from SE tends to make sessions go unusually smoothly. Make sure to try each of the SE getting started questions a few different times so you have a variety of ways to choose from.

Phase 2 (parallels Felt Sense Formation, Gendlin Step 2): Domain Linking: SE (self empathy) helps when the linking to felt sensing is difficult or doesn't work. Linking to SE before trying the linking to felt sensing, can help the subsequent linking to felt sensing. Linking to SE can be an alternate path when the felt sense does not form. Be sure to learn that SE questions can receive the answer "no". Can I be kind to myself in this situation... "no" is a possible answer. Also be sure to learn that what we are looking for, is a kind of self empathy which is accessible easily. For example, "can I be accepting of this depressing felt sense? . . .the answer "sort of" comes in response (not necessarily in a verbal way).. . . . but 'sort of' means you do NOT have easy access. Look for a simple response of "YES".

Be sure to notice the special method for difficult SE— For example, suppose you have tried "kind", "tender", and "gentle" and each one has failed to bring a simple "YES". Then you try this special method, "Can you appreciate the difficulty of changing something when you cannot be kind, cannot be tender, cannot be gentle with it? Remember you can work with SE toward the FS (felt sense) OR toward yourself in a particular situation.

FS formation implies sufficient SE. Sufficient SE implies FS formation.

Phase 3 (parallels Gendlin step 3 and 4—handle and resonating): Entering: When entering through the felt sense does not work or the felt sense does not move or budge, SE becomes a way to loosen the FS and get it moving or as an alternate entry path. It is possible to spend lots of time on entering the felt sense.

Phase 4 (parallels Gendlin step 5 and 6—Asking and Receiving): Shifting. A shift implies more self-empathy. More self-empathy or just right self-empathy implies shifting. You can use SE toward getting a shift or getting more of a shift. Self-empathy also means making room for the insight and new possibilities which come a bit after shifting but are included in that phase.

Phase 5 (parallels a mythical Gendlin step 7 on Action Steps): Acting into the Situation. Self empathy in this phase means protecting the shift from contraction, abandonment, rejection, critic etc. It means enjoying the changes which have come, it means taking the time to let the shift cross into your full knowing in situations. It means taking the time to get a truly right action step.

Having 20 or more words or phrases representing different kinds of SE is important. *Kind, gentle, generous, soft, accepting, firm, tender, tolerant, compassionate, tender, loving, understanding, grateful, friendly, welcoming, curious, interested, empathic, caring, receptive, supportive.....* is a beginning list.

Experiential

Starting from Self Empathy

Note references to Self-Guiding Domain Focusing Large Form

I=Issue Domain, FS=Felt Sensing Domain, SE=Self Empathy domain

Phases: Getting Started, Domain Linking, Entering, Shifting, Acting Into

- A. Life Context. What is your life context now?
- B. What would be a good way to be with yourself given your life context? (SE#4.)
 - a) Can you sense that as a FS?
 - b) Can you give it a handle?
- C. What issue is good to work on from here? Issue Domain Linking (I#7)
- D. Can you name it succinctly? Issue Entering (I#9)
- E. What is the whole of that _____(issue)? FS Domain Linking (FS#6)
- F. What is a feeling word for describing? FS Entering (FS#11)
- G. Specifying further? FS Entering (FS#19)
- H. Shifting? FS Shifting (FS #20-24)

Partnership exchange after the guided exercise.

DEMONSTRATION

Focusing with Difficult Feelings in an Applied Focusing Session

Didactic in Preparation for Demonstration

With difficult feelings or problems like rage, obsession, addiction, anxiety, grief, depression, dissociation, disorientation, trauma, lovesickness, and social isolation, it can be very hard to do focusing. The feelings are too intense. Rather than getting a felt sense of the whole of the situation in a way, from outside the situation, you get a feeling of the intensity of the situation—a possible entry to felt sensing but not necessarily a felt sense (a feeling of the whole). The intensity or strength of the feeling overwhelms what little felt sense is there. For example, rather than getting a whole sense of the depression which necessarily brings hope, you feel the spreading devouring all encompassing intensity of the depression and just feel more depressed. Rather than feeling the whole of your issue with anxiety which is, by definition, “more than” the anxiety, and which, by definition, brings the promise of a way forward, you only feel accelerating debilitating anxiety. This is NOT felt sensing, but it can be quite challenging to make the distinction.

It is challenging because entry into the intensity CAN be a route into felt sensing, a preparation for felt sensing. However, the intensity can dominate and then rather than getting to felt sensing you just get into the hopelessness of the anxiety for example.

“Obsessive-compulsive” tendencies are another good example. If you are working on a kind of compelling non-productive repetitive circle of thinking/feeling, the effort to enter felt sensing may easily just trigger the compelling non-productive repetitive circling rather than triggering the way forward (characteristic of felt sensing).

One method for checking if you are indeed felt sensing, is to consider how familiar the feeling you are exploring is. If it is exactly the problem you have, if your exploration of depression brings a depressive feeling, it may confirm you are indeed exploring your depression, but it also confirms you are not yet in the area of true felt sensing. True felt sensing, is always characterized by having “more than” what you know in it. If the feeling is only what you know, you are not yet in felt sensing territory. Moreover, you may not make it into felt sensing territory, because difficult feelings by definition, tend to trap us.

Solution is a special series of SE moves which take particular account of this tendency to get trapped in the feeling.

SE MOVES for Difficult Feelings

- I. Is it ok to be exploring this issue (or feeling)? Possible responses, are No, Maybe, Yes. “No” may be absolute or it may permit some delicate exploration.
- II. If yes, continue. If maybe, ask if it is ok to find out what the danger or problem in exploring could be? For example, if exploring depression, I could get more depressed. If exploring overeating, I could trigger overeating. Then ask, “Is there a way to explore this _____(e.g. depression) without getting more depressed?” If this question is working as it is intended, the client will be quiet for a while—15 seconds to 5 minutes. This question is to your intuition, your higher self, executive self, to you as the person in charge of your life. If there is a yes or even an implied Yes (the client continues exploring) then I am careful to follow. If there is a NO, I ask if it is an ABSOLUTE NO or a No which might be changeable. If an ABSOLUTE NO, I stop or I help them change the issue they are working on. If the No might be changeable I ask them if it is ok to talk about the danger of exploring this issue; i.e. is there a way to tell me about the danger without getting into the danger. If there is not a way to tell me about the danger without getting into the danger, I suggest going to a related issue which isn’t as dangerous. It could be one aspect of this issue/situation, it could be a different slant on this issue/situation. I call this method of finding related, but safer to explore issues, SLIDING. At some point with a changeable NO we either get back to an ABSOLUTE NO or we get to a MAYBE where there is some notion of the danger in exploring. Then I proceed with the “Is there a way to explore without triggering the _____(danger)?”
- III. Patience and understanding the importance of the approach. Rather than being anxious to get a felt sense, we are quite content to be finding a place where felt sensing could be possible. Within a session, this may mean that felt sensing only happens at the very end of the session, if at all. Within a therapy, it may mean that felt sensing only happens after lots of things creating the possibility. For example, felt sensing seems to imply a sense of self and personhood which some people seem to not have access to so easily. Even though, this access seems to be innate, in that it can be present at any place in the lifespan, it also seems to be able to be less accessible at any place in the lifespan as well. Accessing this personhood which allows felt sensing, could be quite a long drawn-out process.
- IV. With physical reactions to exploration (sweaty palms, palpitating heart, cold feet, tightening shoulders, top of head sensation), or other acceleration of something difficult—terrifying, depressing, anxious interrupt and move into the questions above
- V. In demonstrations I move between the chairs representing the domains unless this becomes too distracting to the client. Ideally, this helps the client by cueing them in bodily way about what I am looking for, it helps the audience follow the focusing process and not get lost in the trance of a focusing session or lost via not connecting the experiential in the session. Thirdly, it helps me hold the whole of the process and to know what to do next.
- VI. Outtakes/Commenting during the demo. During the demo I occasionally turn to the audience and make a comment. Ideally this also serves 3 purposes. For the client, it gives them a break from the spotlight and lets something happen in the body/whole which might otherwise be blocked by the spotlight. Secondly, it points to something for the audience to notice which is much clearer in the moment than retrospectively. Thirdly, it helps me find a next step by articulating something in the present. The audience should understand that they should not respond to these “outtakes/comments” even if they come in the form of a question.
- VII. Focusing is intrinsically non-mechanical. Consequently, it CANNOT always work. Only mechanical things ALWAYS work. A demonstration is an exploration of a process, they do not always work for getting a shift, or even getting a felt sense. It helps if the audience and the client and myself understand this going into the work.
- VIII. Discussion after the process is not about the client, it is about the focusing process AND/OR about my listening, moving between chairs, and intervening. Discussion after the

process should avoid addressing questions to the client. It should also avoid giving feedback to the client. After the demo, the client should have no demands whatsoever—that includes sharing positive things and how moved you were. Share that with the group NOT with the client directly. I interrupt comments which inadvertently or directly interfere with the post-demo protective bubble for the client. Please forgive those interruptions. The client is free to ask questions or make comments in the discussion but are never expected to do that. Observers should be careful NOT to take participation in the post-discussion by the client, as freedom to ask them questions or give them feedback.

- IX. 3 person 3 hour (3p3h) applied focusing sessions are sessions where I work for 30 minutes or so with each person and there is discussion afterwards. These sessions are taking an increasing role in my teaching. They are the most effective/compelling introduction to focusing for someone completely new to it. They are more effective than 1:1. They are relatively low in “time expenditure”. They are part of an alternate “level 1”. One 3p3h + four 1:1 partnership coaching sessions with a trainer can substitute for a 12 hour level 1 focusing course and permit entry into a 10 month course Launching Focusing as a Practice. 3p3h applied focusing sessions are a powerful adjunct to this 10 month course, accelerating and deepening the learning. I am starting to build them into the course for this reason. 3p3h applied focusing sessions are essential for people learning to use focusing professionally. It is the model for professional application. It is important for the professional-in-training to learn how to receive interventions—in contrast to focusing partnership where it is important NOT to have interventions. 3p3h applied focusing sessions are very relevant for very advanced focusers—professionals with many years of experience applying focusing. Experienced focusing professionals can learn to do/lead 3p3h applied focusing sessions. Knowing Domain Focusing and learning to let movement between the chairs help you/your client/and your audience, is an integral part of 3p3h applied focusing sessions.