

Focusing

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You wake up depressed “for no reason”.

Your creativity is blocked.

You're looking for the God Within or attempting to nurture your Inner Child.

You've had breast cancer and want to optimize your healing.

Focusing can help with all of these situations.

Focusing is a way of going quietly inside, stilling the mind, and asking the body open-ended questions (“How am I today?”, “What's going on that makes me so sad?”, “Why does this person make me so angry?” “What is the essence of this creative ‘hunch’?”) The secret is then to *wait*, as long as a minute, for a *felt sense* of the problem to form --no words, no images, just a subtle gathering of energy in the center of the body . Only then do you look for words or images that exactly capture, or resonate with, this bodily sense.

When you find symbols which are exactly right, the felt sense will change. Sometimes you will experience just a slight tension release, sometimes an opening into deep catharsis. In either case, the way you are living the problem has been changed. New feelings, solutions, and actions will arise. The kaleidoscope has turned.

In the 1960's, psychotherapy researchers discovered that the people who benefited from psychotherapy were the people who *came in* with the capacity to refer to their fresh, bodily experience as they talked. Eugene Gendlin, colleague of Carl Rogers and a professor at the University of Chicago, decided to figure out how to teach this skill. He received the Award for Distinguished Professional Contribution from the American Psychological Association in 1971 for discovering “focusing”. His book, *Focusing* (Bantam, 1981), has been translated into over fifteen languages. The Focusing Institute in New York (www.focusing.org) coordinates an international network of Focusing Trainers.

Focusing happens exactly at the interface between mind and body. While meditation or relaxation are often the first step in clearing an inner space, Focusing then goes on to create a dialogue between consciousness, as a willing listener, and the body, as the carrier of unconscious information. When you ask open-ended questions of your body and wait for answers to arise, you will find yourself hearing from your Intuitive Genius, your Inner Child, or the God Within. Focusing brings healing energy directly in contact with parts of the body and psyche that are cut off.

Focusing, as a core ingredient of successful therapies, integrates well into other therapies and bodywork. But it has the added benefit of being a self-help skill. You can use Focusing on your own, right in the midst of emotional situations. You can take a few quiet minutes and ask “What's going on for me in this situation?” or “Why does this feeling have me so stuck?” and wait quietly for the felt sense to form.

Many people learn Focusing most easily in the company of a Listening partner. The Listener sets aside her own judgments and tries to say back the words of the Focuser, with an emphasis upon the feeling tone: "So, this and this and this happened, and it leaves you feeling frustrated." The Focuser can then check those words against the felt sense, see if they resonate, and perhaps find words or images that are even more accurate. Having an outside helper makes it easier to learn to establish such a Listening/Focusing attitude inside of oneself.

Some people choose to continue practicing Focusing in a Focusing Partnership, even though they have learned to do it on their own. They may find one long-term Listening partner with whom they exchange Focusing turns every week or they may be a part of a Focusing Community. In either situation, turns are shared: I listen to you while you focus, then you listen to me while I focus for an equal amount of time.

A group of people who meet to exchange Listening/Focusing turns becomes a Focusing Community. They support each other in many aspects of their lives. They practice more functional ways of relating and take these skills back to other relationships. Listening / Focusing norms are applied to interpersonal conflicts and group decision making process. People talk about their feelings openly and honestly and are protected by no interruption/ no judgment norms. People are encouraged to ask for what they want. They also learn to say "no" and to respect the boundaries of others. Conflicts can be worked through with the help of a third person as a Listening facilitator. Decisions are made with an emphasis upon Listening to each person's needs.

For more information on Focusing please refer to:

Campbell, P. & McMahon, E. *Bio-Spirituality: Focusing as a Way to Grow*, Loyola, 1985.

Gendlin, E. T. *Focusing*. Bantam Paperbacks, 1981.

Gendlin, E. T. *Let Your Body Interpret Your Dreams*, Chiron. 1986.

McGuire, K. *Focusing In Community (Focusing en Comunidad)*, available at Creative Edge Focusing™, www.cefocusing.com

You can find an international network of certified Focusing Trainers at The Focusing Institute website, www.focusing.org.

You can find self-help instructions for learning Listening and Focusing, and a Self-Help Package, with manual and multimedia teaching aids, at www.cefocusing.com, so that you can start your own Listening/Focusing practice group.