

THE HEALING PARTNERSHIP

A MANUAL FOR SPLITTING TIME

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INTRODUCTION

This manual is a guidebook to taking good emotional care of ourselves and each other in the way that we are all naturally equipped to do. When we dare to make a significant difference to someone, and open ourselves to letting them make a similar difference to us, we discover a healing power beyond anything we had imagined. The bedrock of splitting time is the special kind of relationship that you can build with another person when you make the courageous step of loving each other wholeheartedly, and when you hold out to each other the highest expectations for your healing from the pain that has weighed you down.

This manual covers a large amount of material, which you'll want to take time to digest. I recommend moving gradually through the techniques, practicing the concepts in sessions as you go along.

You'll find that the skills in this manual are sometimes also useful in situations that are not formal healing sessions, where people are explicitly or implicitly asking for your assistance.

All of the skills described in this manual are generalizations. Sometimes I will recommend a certain technique you'll find that it's ineffective with the particular partner with whom you're splitting time. Trust yourself and your partner, not me. The ultimate measure of any approach to splitting time is whether for you, your co-counselor, and your healing network.

For some suggestions on how to choose a person to split time with, see Section VII, "Taking Charge of Your Own Healing."

SOME TERMS YOU'LL NEED TO KNOW

Splitting time: Diving time with another person, either on the phone or in person, where one of you listens for the first half, then you switch roles and the other person listens for the second half.

Co-counseling: Means the same as "splitting time"

Healing partner, or just partner: The person you're splitting time with

Co-counselor: Means the same as "healing partner"

Speaker: The person whose turn it is to speak, the one who receives the attention

Client: Means the same as "speaker"

Listener: The person who is in the listening role, giving attention to the other person

Counselor: Means the same as "listener"

Session: Whenever you split time with someone else, that's a "session" or a "healing session" or a "co-counseling session," regardless of its length. You could be splitting ten minutes or two hours.

Mini-session: A session that's pretty short, say not more than about twenty minutes total, ten minutes per person; when doing a mini-session, shorten all the phases of the session that I describe in this manual

Full session: Turns of 50 or 55 minutes for each person

Distress patterns or just **patterns:** The lasting effects of our emotional injuries, which leave us chronically feeling bad or behaving in ways that aren't that great

Emotional release: This term is highly specific in this manual, meaning experiences of laughter, crying, raging, and releasing fear (trembling and scared noises), which are our inherent body-based emotional healing mechanisms. These are explained in great detail in *The Joyous Recovery*. (When I use this term, I'm not referring to other experiences that may also bring a sense of emotional release, such as exercise.)

GENDER LANGUAGE IN THIS MANUAL

To keep this manual as readable as possible, I have moved more or less randomly between "she," "he," and "they" when I'm talking about an individual.

SECTION I

THE KEY ASPECTS OF EFFECTIVE HEALING ATTENTION

The purpose of splitting time is to use the power of our undivided, loving attention to assist each other to think more clearly, to take necessary initiatives in our lives, and to heal deeply. Through this process we help each other to get free of the effects of hurtful experiences from the past.

I'll begin by summarizing the key skills and guidelines to follow when you are in the listening role.

PAY CLOSE, LOVING ATTENTION

The most important tool for any listener is the undivided, delighted, loving attention you pay to your client. Reach at all times to be completely present, while still remaining relaxed and natural. Keep your eyes on the speaker's eyes, whether or not she is making eye contact with you. Strive to lay your own concerns and distresses aside, including things that her issues remind you of about yourself.

Focus on your client as a human being, as opposed to focusing on the person's wounds or patterns. Pay attention to her strengths, her goodness, and everything else that you appreciate about her. Remember that with your assistance this person can do the healing that she needs to do.

When you sense your client's attention wandering, or notice that she is drifting off into feeling alone, say "hello" to her to gently re-focus her on the fact that she has your caring attention.

ALLOW AND ENCOURAGE DEEP RELEASE

Give your whole-hearted approval and encouragement to laughter, crying, raging, and the other inherent emotional releases. When your client is crying, for example, be calm and supportive. Don't rush in to show concern and help the person "feel better," but at the same time don't act congratulate them for crying. Focus instead on paying calm, caring attention without a trace of pity, and observe the client's healing.

Although this attitude toward emotional outpourings may feel uncomfortable at first, you'll find rapidly that it becomes second nature, as if you were rediscovering something you had known all along.

If you notice your client cutting off his own crying, gently encourage him by saying something like, "You're doing exactly what you need to do," or, "There's plenty of time — you can keep right on feeling that."

APPRECIATE AND APPROVE OF THE SPEAKER

Remind your client often of what a good person she is, and of specific things about her that you have noticed that you like or appreciate. It's next to impossible to appreciate someone too much as long as you do it in a simple and sincere way.

Let your client know how well you think she's done, given the challenges that life has sent her way. Celebrate her valiance and her triumphs. Remind her that she has survived, and that healing awaits her.

Sometimes your client may dispute positive things that you say about her. Don't let this bother you; given a little time you will discover compliments that she can hear. For now, don't argue with her about it, though; you can just gently say, "Well, I see you in a different way" and then let it go. Arguing with people about their negative views of themselves tends to push them more deeply into that negativity rather than lifting them out.

You don't need to support or pretend to agree with anything you find offensive. Remember, though, that these are distress patterns talking, and that the human being inside is still fully good and deserves your approval. (If you do run into any important disagreement, keep it out of the session if you can and set aside some time later to discuss it. A session is not a good time to try to convince someone of something.)

USE SESSIONS FOR HEALING

Splitting time can have tremendous power when you use sessions for the purpose of healing. There are rich rewards for being disciplined about this. Resist temptations to use sessions for chatting, exchanging information, pursuing intellectual insights into your injuries, and other purposes that don't take full advantage of the power of undivided and structured attention. This manual will explain many ways to use a session for maximum long-run benefit.

BE HUMAN, BE YOURSELF

The more co-counseling you learn, the more you may be tempted to use a flood of different techniques. Remember that the techniques of co-counseling are tools in your hands, but the most important thing is *you*. What counts most are your essential human characteristics: your capacity to be loving, your commitment and patience, your energy, your authenticity.

Work to be hopeful, so that you can better offer that hope to your client. When it's your turn, you can allow yourself to feel the parts of you that are in despair (we all have those parts inside of us). But while it's the other person's turn, you are the anchor; your hopefulness is what provides safety for her to feel her despair and work through it.

Love your client with all your heart and apply your brilliance to helping him have a good session. Treat him with kindness and tenderness, reaching to soothe the hurt spots still burning inside of him (as they are in all of us).

BE SINCERE

Push yourself to be present and to love your client, but don't push yourself so hard that you're not you anymore. Be sincere and honest. Your client will sense the genuineness of your appreciation and will be touched by it.

TRUST YOURSELF

You have the power at this very moment to make a great difference in your client's life, if you're willing to go forward with confidence in your best thinking. The more you learn about co-counseling the more effective you'll become, but you know enough already to guide someone toward a good session.

SOME MISTAKES TO AVOID

There are a few errors that co-counselors commonly make, particularly when they are first learning. Strive to avoid these, but remember also that slipping up once in a while is no big deal.

Don't Solve Problems for Your Client

Your client will be able to figure out for herself what action she needs to take once she gets an extended opportunity to think while absorbing your aware attention, to feel what she needs to feel, and to release feelings that have been trapped inside. So avoid giving your client advice or trying to direct her toward particular insights or solutions. Give her small bits of accurate information in cases where she says something that you know for sure is not true, but otherwise stay away from problem-solving unless your client specifically asks for help with that.

The temptation to give advice comes from largely not trusting that the client will be able to develop her own clarity, and not trusting ourselves that we'll be able to assist that clarity in coming.

Don't Refer Outside of Session to Anything Your Partner Said During Her Turn

Complete confidentiality is of course a prerequisite for building trust. In splitting time, though, we *extend* the concept of confidentiality in an important way: once a session is over, we don't bring up any issue from that session *even to the client*. The client is in full charge of her issues and her deepest feelings, and she gets to retain complete control over when they get talked about. (This is true any time we split time, even if it's just five-minute turns over the phone; the confidentiality of a mini-session is to be respected just like any other session)

The desire to connect around similar distresses or to express concern or sympathy outside of session is understandable, and it can be a tough habit to break. But the more carefully you follow this guideline the safer your co-counselor will feel to work on issues that

make her feel particularly exposed or vulnerable, knowing that you won't be bringing the subject up to her later on. The bigger risks we feel safe to take as clients, the more we get out of our sessions.

Remember that when anybody takes their turn to speak at an open support meeting or at any other Peak Living Network gathering, that time should be treated the same way you would treat a co-counseling session, even if it only lasts a few minutes. That means that it's all completely confidential, and when it's over, it's over; we don't mention anything the person said unless *they* choose to bring it up.

If something that your client works on triggers you, so that you feel the need to process your own feelings about it, it's okay to go ahead and work on it during your turn; however, *don't refer to the fact that your feelings were brought up by her session* (even if it's kind of obvious). In other words, eliminate the words, "When you said ...," from your vocabulary during your turn. This will help your counselor not to get cast back into the feelings she was working on during her turn, which will also help her to remain fully present for you.

Finally, if you are splitting time with a friend of yours, don't bring up any issues from your sessions while spending social time together. Similarly, don't work on issues from your friendship while co-counseling with that person unless you have discussed it ahead of time (*before* the session) and have both agreed that it's okay to bring those issues into your co-counseling. In short, keep your social relationship and your co-counseling relationship completely separate. If people follow these guidelines, they can even split time with their intimate partners without creating problems.

Don't Appreciate Someone for Expressing or Releasing Feelings

Congratulating your client for crying is akin to praising someone for sweating while she's exercising or telling her what a great job she did growing a scab. It's best not to turn people's healing experiences into accomplishments, especially since we live in a world that has become far too focused on making everything we do into an accomplishment. There are many things to appreciate about a person which have more to do with *who she is*, and such appreciations will mean more to her.

I find that people are especially tempted to congratulate men for crying, which just tends to cast them back into being self-conscious about crying. What helps men the most is when you act as if the fact that they're crying is totally normal and no big deal, and you get neither excited nor nervous about it; the more you can act like this is just ordinary life, the better the chance that he'll be able to keep crying.

Our own difficulties with releasing feelings can lead us to feel impressed when other people do it, but it's only a matter of time before we recover our own healing mechanisms.

SECTION II

THE BASIC STRUCTURE OF A SESSION

Splitting time most commonly involves two people; one person is counselor and the other is client for the first half, and then we switch roles for the second half. A session can be of any length, short or long, but we have found that a 50 or 55 minute turn for each person allows the client enough time to be able to work into feelings at a useful and powerful depth, without being so long as to exhaust both counselor and client. We typically take a short break between turns. Co-counselors also do “mini-sessions” in pairs, either in support meetings or over the phone, where the turns may be as short as five minutes per person.

The decision of who is to be client first can be decided by any method; a flip of a coin, one person expressing a preference to go first (or second), or by simply alternating from session to session.

“NEW AND GOOD”

A session begins with five or ten minutes where the counselor asks the client to talk about positive news from recent life. The client talks about things that are going well, events that he is excited about, or successes that he has had. This is a time to celebrate triumphs and tap into sources of pride.

Don't rush the “New and Good” phase of a session. Our habits tend to lead us to focus on things that we're hurting or frustrated about, and to overlook causes for hope and joy. If we carry that perspective with us through the counseling session, we can't develop the kind of balanced outlook that leads to healing. Celebrating and digesting what is good gives us the strength and safety to work on the hard things.

MINOR CHALLENGES OR UPSETS

Next we spend a few minutes on recent pressures, upsets, or irritations that we've had that are bothering us a little but aren't the main issue we want to focus on that day. By giving them a few minutes of quick attention, we are more able to clear them out of the way, freeing us up to attack the larger issues that are affecting us.

THE HEART OF THE SESSION

The bulk of the session we then spend working on some issue that we particularly want to make progress on. The counselor can help focus this section by asking at this point, “What do you want to work on today?” or “What's on top?”

Much of the time the client will choose to get at a particular set of feelings, and release distressing feelings if they are ready to come out. The inherent releases, meaning the healing mechanisms that we come into the world biologically programmed to use, are:

crying, which primarily heals grief

laughter, which primarily heals lighter fear and anxiety

raging, which primarily heals outrage and anger

trembling and yelping, which primarily heal deeper fear and terror

yawning, which is a bit of a mystery but is interwoven with the other four releases

The word "primarily" is important here, because the reality of these emotional releases is complex. Crying plays a role in healing rage, raging plays a role in healing fear, and so forth. As you may have observed, people have a tendency to get into laughing fits at funerals, which they then feel guilty about later (but they shouldn't actually feel guilty, it's totally natural). These releases are heavily interwoven.

Don't ever stop releasing emotions in order to go on to other things. Other things can wait, and emotional release is precious and powerful.

There are many other healing ways for the client to use session time. Some days it's best just to work on doing some thinking and reflecting that you need to do, which tends to go much better when you have someone's loving and aware attention on you while you do it. Some days you might just need to sit quietly and have your counselor hold you; that's not only completely legitimate but on some days is absolutely the most valuable thing you could be doing with your time. Once in a while you might want to spend the time on what we call "guarded rest," where you lie quietly or even sleep with your counselor's caring attention.

When you're in the counseling role, it's not your job to decide what is the best way for the client to use her time. Your job is just to make sure that she's *choosing* how to spend her time, and not just riding a certain direction from habit; and you do this simply by asking, "What would be most productive for you to do today?" In the Peak Living Network we never presume to know better than the client what is best for her to be doing.

Most of the techniques that you will learn in the pages that follow are ones that you'll apply during this main part of the session.

GUIDING THE CLIENT BACK TO THE PRESENT MOMENT

Finally, when there are about five minutes left in the session (less for a mini-session), the counselor gently informs the client that it's time to "get his attention out," or "focus on present time." These are the expressions we use for the process of turning our attention away from our pain and emotional disturbances, and putting it back out into the world. If the client is in the midst of a deep release, you might want to let him continue for a couple of minutes until he is at a breathing point, and then gradually begin bringing his attention out.

Strive during these few minutes to refocus your client's attention on positive aspects of reality, such as things that he's interested in and things that he looks forward to. This helps the client to continue his day unfettered by the weight of what he's been working on, and makes it more possible for him to live outside of his distress between session.

"Present time" or "attention out" techniques you might use as the counselor include:

- asking the client entertaining or trivial questions
- directing the client's attention to smells, sights, and sounds
- looking at books of photographs or books that are funny
- asking the client what he is looking forward to
- anything else that is light or fun

You'll have an easier time getting your client's attention out if you avoid referring to his issues (such as saying, "you went into some really deep places today") or congratulating him for his work in the session. Professional counselors sometimes do these things, but we discourage them. The last few minutes are for looking forward into life, not backward into the session that is now ending; we're striving to leave all that behind until the next time we *choose* to open it up.

I want to be clear that I'm not promoting the denial of what's hard in life in the way that some "positive thinking" philosophies do. But it works better to attend in focused, *intentional* ways to our hard issues at *consciously chosen* times, rather than to go through life stewing in them. In other words, we want to totally dive into the painful spots, and then totally dive into life, while avoiding stumbling around in an in-between zone that neither works well as healing nor as living.

Although five minutes is usually about right for this "present time" phase of the session, give it as much time as it takes. If your client is having difficulty getting his attention out of his distress, you might even get up and play physically or run around together for a few minutes to really shake it off. This is especially valuable if your client was feeling intense fear during his turn.

WHO IS IN CHARGE OF THE SESSION?

The client and the counselor share responsibility for the progress of a session. The counselor takes charge of the session, moving it through its different phases (explained above), asking directive questions, and keeping track of the time. The client is the boss, but until he or she speaks up about wanting to do something different, the client runs the show.

That means that when you're in the counseling role, be decisive and don't hold back; it's up to the client to tell you if they need something to be different. Play a strong but flexible role, and remember that ultimately the client knows what is best for them.

THREE-PERSON SESSIONS

Sessions can be done with three (or more) people. Simply divide the time equally among the three of you. Each person decides during his turn which of the other two will be his primary counselor, with the other one acting as coach. I have found that the success of each turn depends on this appointment of a primary counselor, so that the client can focus primarily on one person and so that someone takes clear responsibility for doing the counseling. The additional person (or people) provides extra caring, thoughtful attention, and steps in as counselor when they have a strong idea they'd like to try.

SECTION III

FUNDAMENTAL COUNSELING TECHNIQUES

The techniques you'll learn in the pages ahead will allow you to jump into being an effective counselor. And even as you become more experienced you'll return to these basic skills over and over again. Over time you'll develop an intuitive sense of which of these to try at a particular moment; don't overthink it, just try things and see what works.

VALIDATION

Validating your client's feelings is one of the first steps to all meaningful healing work. Validation can be as simple as saying, "That must have been a very painful experience for you," or, "You had every right to be upset." Simple human compassion is a powerful tool.

Another way to offer validation is to try to reflect back succinctly in your own words what you've heard your client say, which lets her know that you're grasping what she's expressing. For example:

***Counselor:* So, it sounds like you could just never feel sure what your father was going to do next, and that created anxiety for you.**

This reflection also gives your client an opportunity to explain the feeling again if you didn't get it quite right the first try.

EXPRESS INTEREST AND ACCEPTANCE

Ask questions that show that you want to learn about your client's experience. Let your client know that you grasp the feelings she is describing; and if you don't understand yet, express your interest in learning more. You could say, for example:

***Counselor:* I'd really like to know what things have been like for you.**

During a time when your client is quiet, you might ask:

***Counselor:* What's the thought you're having?**

If you think your client is censoring something, encourage her to go ahead and share the thought. Reassure her that you won't think less of her from learning the difficult things about her.

APPRECIATION

Let your client know the things that you appreciate about her. Notice the things that she does well, the ways that she thinks clearly, and the things that she cares deeply about, and reflect those things back to her.

Be alert for cues from your client about the ways she feels self-critical, and provide a contradiction. For example, if a client is emphasizing how badly she handled some situation:

***Counselor:* You're a very good person, and you don't deserve to beating yourself up about things. You did the best you could in incredibly difficult circumstances.**

GUIDE YOUR CLIENT TOWARD SELF-APPRECIATION

Your client can benefit from appreciating herself, in addition to hearing appreciations from you. Taking pride out loud helps her to notice her own strengths, and contradicts the societal taboo against feeling good about ourselves. Encourage her to tell you about the things she is good at, the people she has loved well, the things she is physically capable of.

Encourage your client to take complete pride in herself. She has done incredibly well in the face of the challenges the world has presented her with, even though she may not feel that way today.

TAKE STANDS

Although being critical of your client is to be avoided, positive judgment plays an important role. In particular, you need to let your client know what you believe about the way the world should be and the way people deserve to be treated. For example, when someone describes something that happened to her that was clearly unjust, you can say:

***Counselor:* You should never have been treated that way; that was completely wrong.**

Notice when your client blames herself for things that happened to her, and point out that those events were not her fault. (As I said earlier, though, if your client disagrees with a stand you take, don't fight her on it; continue caring about her and know that she will be able with time to heal from her self-blame.)

In cases where she did actually cause the bad circumstances, you can still remind her that she would never have done so if she hadn't already been badly hurt and confused by earlier experiences, so she still doesn't deserve blame. You can say for example:

***Counselor:* It's perfectly understandable that you did that, considering what had happened to you.**

Sometimes you might go further and tell your client how things should have been, as in:

***Counselor:* People should have been there for you, and they should have listened to you about what was happening to you.**

I've seen examples where the client was deeply moved by having the client speak in this way about right and wrong, and about what kind of world the client deserved to live in.

The stands you take will validate for your client what she herself knows deep down to be true, though it may be covered over with self-doubt. Model this kind of trust in your client's goodness even when she is unable to trust herself.

REFLECTING REALITY

Another way of looking at your appreciation and validation of your client is that you're simply pointing out what you believe to be the truth about the kind of person she is. Thus you are reflecting reality to your client.

Reflecting reality also means telling your client what you believe to be true about the world. Reflect the sources of hope that you are aware of, for there are important reasons to be hopeful about the potential for each person's life to improve, and for the overall state of the world to become much healthier.

Get in touch with those sources of hope and share them with your client. To do this you may have to push through some of your own despair, especially given the irrationality of so much of what goes on in the world today. *The more you are able to get in touch with your own hopefulness, the more safety there will be for your client to feel and work through the sources of her own despair.*

Reassure Your Client that the Situation Is Safe

The person speaking may need periodic reassurance that nothing bad is going to happen to her in the context of the session, and that you are not going to criticize or abandon her for expressing whatever she is feeling or for telling the truth about what has happened to her.

She also may need reassurance that her feelings will not be too much for you to handle; encourage her to go ahead and feel whatever's there, even if it's scary or appears overwhelming. Let her know that you'll stay by her and that you aren't worried about her, that you know she'll be fine.

You can help your client work through memories that are making the situation feel unsafe, by asking questions such as:

***Counselor:* What feels scary about this session today? What feels like it might happen?**

Another great question to ask a client who is feeling very unsafe is:

***Counselor:* What do you need me never to do or say?**

Once you ask this question, of course, you'll need to honor the trust she puts in you by answering.

Remember that people feel unsafe because of ways that they were badly hurt or violated, often by people that they trusted. So you want to look for ways to draw a sharp line between the present and the past, helping the client to feel the difference between the current safety and the past danger she lived with.

See Your Client as a Survivor and a Thriver

Rejoice out loud in the fact that your client made it through treacherous challenges with which the world presented her and is now here, enriching your life and enriching the world. Given what she's already endured and accomplished, there's every reason to believe that she'll continue to reclaim her true power in the world and to heal her wounds, both old and new, along the way.

Express this confidence in your client. While she works through difficult feelings, for example, tell her that you know she'll make it to the other end of that dark tunnel. Help to give her the strength to stick to her healing path when she feels tempted to give up because the painful feelings look so vast. Remember that being hopeful about your client is *realistic* and *makes sense*; there is every reason to believe that things are going to get better for her.

Lay Your Own Feelings of Despair Aside

For the length of your client's turn, put your own negative feelings aside and hang on to the reality that is outside of your distress. Communicate this reality in your facial expressions and in your tone in the most sincere and open way that you can. You'll get a chance when you're the client to work on your own hopelessness, and it will be the other person's turn to hold onto the hope.

PHYSICAL CLOSENESS AND AWARE TOUCHING

Closeness is essential to effective counseling. Sit near your client, and hold one or both of his hands unless he specifically prefers that you not.

The more you can work through any blocks you have to being physically close to someone in a loving and non-sexual way, the more effective your counseling will become.

Watch for your client's cues that he needs to have you sitting closer, needs you to put your arm around him, or needs to be held. Conversely, be aware of times when he needs more distance from you or needs not to be touched at all. The signals in either direction are usually there if we pay close attention.

As you develop an ongoing co-counseling relationship with someone, discuss explicitly with them what kind of closeness feels comfortable to them when they are client, and what will be the most helpful.

Not everyone needs to move in the direction of being more physically affectionate. For some people, particularly those who have been abused, their healing direction may be

towards being *less* physically close to people, at least in the short term, and more able to choose to touch or be touched only when it is exactly what they want.

Holding On Is Often Necessary for Deep Emotional Releasing

When someone is beginning to cry really hard or go into other deep releases, especially in grief or in fear, it's often helpful to her to hold onto you very tightly. This physical closeness and safety will sometimes make it possible for her to just pour pain out like a dam breaking. You might even encourage the person push her fingertips gently into your back. Notice if your client is holding onto her own hands behind your back -- a common habit among people who have faced heavy abandonment -- and ask her to let go of herself and hold onto you.

The experience of letting old pain just flow out of us, completely unfettered, is a wonderful aspects of human experience, as we feel ourselves healing through this profound mixture of pleasure and pain. These moments come most commonly when someone is holding us.

Don't Soothe Your Client During Emotional Release

While you want to give reassurance and a feeling of closeness through touching or holding the person you're splitting time with, you don't want to send her "Don't feel" or "Don't cry" messages. The best way to avoid this is by not stroking, rocking, or patting your client while she is pouring emotions out; just *hold* her, being still.

ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS

Asking questions is the key way to communicate to the speaker that we care about what he has been through and are eager to hear and learn more about his experience. Work steadily on developing your ability to ask questions that communicate caring, that show that you are really thinking about what the speaker is saying, and that help to draw him out.

FLEXIBILITY

While all of these techniques are helpful when the moment is right, continue to use your own imagination and intuition. You'll come up with ways to make a difference to your healing partner that don't appear anywhere in this manual. Use your humor and your playfulness, for example; if you can get your partner laughing and keep him laughing, you've given him a terrific session. Use silence too; for your client, sitting quietly with your loving and tender attention might be the most soothing and transforming thing in the world.

I've had people who I was splitting time with do some surprise things sometimes during my turn. I've had them start to sing to me. I've had them draw a quick picture for me. I've had them create a little story, such as playing a part where they are an adult who comes along when I was a little boy and asks me what's really happening. All of these efforts have made me feel so loved, and have outwitted my injuries in ways that allowed me to experience some powerful healing. Use your creativity as a counselor.

SECTION IV

TECHNIQUES TO ADD AS YOU GET MORE COMFORTABLE

This section introduces a further set of counseling approaches that you might begin to work on after you've done a few co-counseling sessions and are feeling more comfortable with the basics. Don't hurry to develop a huge tool box; just add a little something from time to time, experimenting and learning as you go.

OFFERING THE SPEAKER PHRASES TO SAY ALOUD

Try proposing a phrase or a sentence for the speaker to say aloud, reaching for words that you think will help them to capture the essence of what they have been describing about their experience. Often the counselor invites the speaker to try repeating the phrase a few times over, to see what that makes happen inside the person. We try to design a phrase that runs counter to the client's emotional injuries, and so helps move feelings and blocks inside of them. What follows is a few examples of how we might do this.

1) Talking to Absent People

A common use of a phrase is to have the client speak out loud to someone in her life as if that person were in the room. For example:

***Client:* What my mother did was so unfair!**

***Counselor:* What do you wish you could have told her at the time?**

***Client:* I wish I could have yelled at her to leave us alone.**

***Counselor:* Okay, so how about you try yelling at her loudly now, exactly the things you would have wanted to say, as if she were here.**

Here's a different scenario:

***Client:* There are so many things I never got to say to my mother before she died.**

***Counselor:* What do you most wish you could have said?**

***Client:* I wish I had told her how much I loved her.**

***Counselor:* Talk to her now and tell her.**

Talking aloud can counter feelings of powerlessness that we felt during hurtful events or periods in our lives, and counter the lonesome feeling that we had because no one knew what we were going through. It also contradicts injuries we have from times that we felt forced to remain silent or couldn't find a way to have a voice.

Short, succinct phrases typically work better than long statements. The client can also direct the phrase to you if she wants to, using you as a stand-in for that person.

2) Clear Statements of Emotion

You can also give your client phrases to say aloud that you think might succinctly and powerfully capture some feeling or experience from the past that he's been describing. For example:

Client: My family never took any of my opinions seriously.

Counselor: That must have really hurt. How about saying forcefully now, "Someone should have listened to me!"

A phrase might also address a current feeling that your client has, as in:

Client: I tend not to let people see how things are really going for me.

Counselor: Then how about saying to me now, "I'm going through a really tough time these days."

Client: *(Tries the phrase)*

Counselor: Okay, try saying it again now, with even more force.

Reach for a phrase that sums up something that your healing partner is feeling, but that also might give him a sense of power or connection. You might offer phrases that he can say with pride or defiance, phrases that break long-held silences, or phrases that name the truth about wrongs that have been done. Ask him to repeat the phrase several times over (5-10 times or even more), pausing between each time to observe any feelings that are coming up.

3) Phrases That Point the Client in the Opposite Direction

You can offer your client phrases that are actually the opposite of how he is feeling, especially when he feels hopeless or bad about himself. For example:

Client: I'm a walking disaster area these days. Everything I get involved with gets messed up somehow.

Counselor: Try sitting up proudly and saying, "I am an exceptionally competent person."

Client: *(Tries the phrase a few times, laughing each time)*

We call these kinds of phrases "directions," because they point the client in a direction that is counter to the way the distress pushes him. In this example, we are reminding our client that in reality he is very capable, but we're doing so in a playful way so that he can release stress through laughter.

Here's a different example:

Client: I'm feeling so isolated at the moment.

Counselor: Try saying, "I'm surrounded by love right now," and see if you can imagine what that would feel like.

Again, *the goal is not to deny the reality of how the client is feeling*; what you're trying to do is help her play with her imagination of how different things may feel at a future point in life, and then see if that image helps to create any inner shifting for her in the present or leads her to crying or other emotional releases.

Asking for the First Thought

After your client tries saying a phrase aloud, you might ask, "What was your first thought after saying that?" This technique can help to get past patterns of self-censorship or blocking, leading to the key feeling or memory that is underlying an issue.

Be clear with any phrase that you suggest that it's just for use within the session as a healing tool, to help your client work on his feelings associated with a situation; you are not asking him to actually say these words to anyone. In the Peak Living Network we don't tell people how to handle situations in their lives; our philosophy is that if we give people loving support and help them get opportunities to heal, they'll be able to figure out the right course of action for themselves.

WORKING ON CURRENT SOURCES OF DISTRESS

The particular situation or event that your client wants to work through may be from the present rather than the past. Current issues can be harder to work on than old ones in some ways, because they are so live and because the solutions sometimes feel impossible to find. When we can't get distance from a challenge, it can be challenging to get any kind of balance in our perspective so that we can do productive healing work.

One way to get these challenges unstuck is to look for connections to the person's past. We can, in a sense, see present pain as an opportunity to get free from the effects of the earlier hurts that it brings up. Here are some of the questions we might ask at such a time:

"What does this remind you of?"

"When was a time in the past when something like this happened to you?"

"What's the earliest memory you can think of when you felt similar to how you're feeling now?"

When your client seems burdened by negative messages, you could ask questions to explore where those messages might have come from. Here are some examples:

"Who first told you to believe these bad things about yourself?"

"Who sent you the message that nothing in life can stay good for long?"

"Who taught you that life is unfair?"

While sometimes questions about the past will elicit a clear link, other times your partner will explore a few memories but not be able to identify one that feels like it's really "the one." In these cases it's best before long to just choose one to focus on. You might ask, for example:

***Counselor:* Which of these memories do you feel the closest to in your gut?**

If your client still can't come up with any past connection that seems useful to him, go back to the present issue and explore it some more.

RECLAIMING POWER

Each person is a potential fountain of true human power, by which we mean the power to create, to defend herself against harm, and to set things right in her own life and in the world. I contrast this creative power with inhumane, abusive "power", which is the "power" to control other people or to destroy, and which is inherently unsatisfying and addictive.

There are various ways to help your client feel powerful; these techniques are particularly helpful in dealing with aspects of life where she has felt victimized.

Tone of Voice, Posture, and Volume

Ask your client to try sitting up straight and speaking in a clear, proud tone of voice. This can be particularly important when she is trying phrases like the ones I gave examples of above. Encourage her to speak forcefully and even loudly, especially if she is expressing anger or outrage.

After she holds this direction for a minute or two, have her relax and see what feelings the effort brought up. Sometimes you won't even have to ask; for example, clients who are expressing anger will sometimes spontaneously burst into tears.

Going Back to the Past with Power

You can have your client imagine being back in the painful situation, but this time acting with complete power. Again, posture and tone are important. Encourage him to imagine what it would have been like to stand up strongly for himself at the time, and have him speak aloud as if he were back in the past, but now using a tone of voice that is commanding rather than pleading. Encourage him to try to imagine what things would have been like if he'd had the power to set the situation right.

Standing Up, Stomping, Pounding Pillows, Pushing

Using our bodies helps us to feel powerful. You can ask your client to yell an angry phrase while pounding a bed or a pillow, for example. Standing up can help the client to feel less victimized, and makes it possible for her to stomp her foot. You can also have her push against your hand or your shoulders, or grab you by the shoulders and shake you, while she yells out the things she wishes she could have said.

CREATING IMAGES FOR YOUR CLIENT

Your imagination is a powerful tool in counseling. One use for it is to create images for your client that run counter to his wounds. If you have poetic abilities, so much the better.

Recreating the Past

Suppose that your client has just told about a time that he got hurt playing, and no one helped him or took his hurt seriously. You might say something like:

***Counselor:* Imagine what it would have been like if someone had come along and noticed how hurt you were. Picture them carrying you home, laying you down on the couch, and bringing ice to put on your knee. Picture them stroking your hair while you lay resting there.**

This imaginary person who enters the scene might actually intervene in an event of mistreatment. For example, you might say to your client “Let’s imagine that I come into the room,” and then say:

***Counselor:* (Loudly, and as if people were present in the room.) You stop joking this second about what happened to Victor – he’s really hurting!**

It can be moving for the client to hear this acted out, so that he can imagine what it would have been like if an ally had intervened on his behalf and interrupted the coldness and insults he was being subjected to.

Shouldering Burdens

Another image that can be surprisingly powerful is to “hold onto things” for your client. If your client is anxious about the number of things she has to keep track of, for example, you can say:

***Counselor:* For the next hour, I’ll keep track of everything for you, so that you can just focus on the things you want to work on in this session.**

You aren’t literally going to take care of anything for her, of course. But imagination is powerful, and the agreement that she is leaving her burdens on your shoulders for an hour can have more of an impact than you might think, even though it’s actually just symbolic.

Similar examples include telling a client that you will “hold onto the hope,” and then give her permission to feel as completely hopeless as she truly feels; or telling a client who is weighed down by sadness that you will “hold onto part of her pain for a while” so that she can rest.

FOLLOWING CHANNELS WHERE THEY GO

Any of these techniques, besides causing valuable stirring and processing to happen inside of the person you're counseling, can also lead to eruptions of emotional release. Don't be surprised if your partner starts to laugh hysterically, or sob with lots of tears, or have other outpourings. These moments of deep emotional release bring the deepest and most lasting healing of any activity we can engage in, so never interfere with releases that are pouring out. Remain loving, calm, and supportive, and allow – in fact encourage – the person to keep releasing that old pain for as long as he can.

SETTING GOALS

Near the end of a session, but before bringing your client's attention out, you might ask her if she want to set any goals for the week ahead. The goal could be to take a specific action, or it might be simply to maintain a particular emotional stance or mindset in a way that breaks a pattern for her.

For example, suppose your client has worked some on how she tends to take on too much responsibility and has trouble asking for help. At this point in the session you decide to ask her if she would like to set a goal for the week ahead, and she says yes. One of you (it doesn't matter which) proposes that she set a goal that during the coming week she will ask someone else for help at least three times, even if (or perhaps especially if) she feels uncomfortable doing so. She commits to taking this goal on.

It's a good idea for the counselor to check in with the client about the size of the goal; is this a realistic challenge to take on right now? Avoid shooting too high – she doesn't want to set herself up for failure -- but don't shoot too low either, because a degree of discomfort is crucial to growth.

Next, you might ask her, “Is there anything you can think of that might get in the way of carrying out your goal?” If she perceives possible obstacles, the two of you might strategize together for how she could address those.

If she wants to set a goal that focuses more on attitude than on action, she might decide for example to concentrate during the next week on remembering that her friends and family are happy to assist her with things, and that she has a right to expect help from people. With this kind of goal, your client tries to operate from a more accurate set of assumptions than her usual ones.

To assist in goal setting, you can ask questions like:

Counselor: What would be a good next step for you right now regarding this issue? What direction do you want to keep in mind over the next few days?

By “direction” here I mean a positive or powerful outlook that she wants to point herself toward.

It’s fine for the counselor to propose a goal or a direction, as long as you don’t give the client advice about how to handle specific situations. Design directions to break patterns rather than to “solve” problems, thereby allowing your partner to do his own thinking.

This leads us to a key Peak Living Network principle about the setting of goals and directions: We never criticize our co-counselors, nor do we express disappointment, when they don’t follow through on a goal that they have set for themselves. Focus instead on helping the person succeed next time, by asking questions such as:

Counselor: What got in the way of doing what you wanted to do? What do you think would have made it possible for you to succeed? How should we change the plan for next time to make it more likely to work?

For example, perhaps he needs an extra check-in during the week, such as a mini-session on the phone, to help propel him through places where he gets discouraged or loses his nerve. When people feel like they’re failing, they tend to do even worse next time; so we want to break out of that way of thinking and instead design plans that will succeed. (See the complete guide to doing goal work in *The Joyous Recovery*.)

TECHNIQUES FOR WORKING THROUGH HEAVINESS AND NUMBNESS

Some memories can be so painful that we may feel ourselves sinking under the weight of it all when we attempt to tell about what happened or process the surrounding feelings. We also all have days of exhaustion or discouragement, when it’s hard to get in touch with any place inside of ourselves that feels powerful or hopeful or when we feel numb and distant from any feelings at all. Here are a few suggestions you might try as the counselor if your partner is in one of those heavy, stuck-feeling places.

Telling a Third-Person Story

Your client can get some distance from an overly painful story by telling it as if it happened to someone else. For example, he could start a story from his childhood by saying, “There once was this little boy, and he...” and continuing the story in that way. I have watched this technique be surprisingly powerful.

A similar technique is to have the client tell his story as though it had happened to an animal, as in, “There was once a little puppy and this puppy had a very cruel teacher.” Telling the story this way had the additional benefit that often leads to laughter, which can play a potent role in getting us unstuck.

The Use of Detailed Memory

Telling a story from the past in minute detail can puncture layers of numbness and forgetfulness, bringing memories to life. For example, you can help your client open her feelings from a memory by asking her to try to remember what color the walls were in the room she was in, what she was wearing, what the odors were in the house, or word-for-word specifics of what people said.

Imagining the Missing Pieces

In cases where your client is unable to remember some important details of an experience, or can't remember any of what happened, ask him to guess what might have occurred. If he can't even guess, ask him to invent a possible scenario without worrying whether it's accurate. *We sometimes can do profound emotional processing and healing using made-up stories.* Don't worry whether the events really happened or not; the painful feelings that are coming up for the person are coming from *something* that really did happen, and the story is creating an opportunity to heal them.

Sometimes the processing of feelings from an invented story will lead genuine memories to crystalize over time. I have experienced this process myself and have observed it in other people, especially in cases where the person releases feelings deeply about the imagined event.

The Client Speaks to His or Her Own Young Self

Your client can try to picture himself as an adult entering a scene where his young self was in pain, and speak to the child to encourage and comfort him. You can offer to join your client in this effort, as in:

Counselor: So this little boy is walking home from school alone. Let's catch up with him and talk to him.

Through this image your client can picture the child's isolation being broken, and gets to say to the child the precise things he wishes someone could have said to him at the time.

Pleasant Memories

Ask your client if she can think of a happy memory to tell you about. If her mind goes blank (which can happen to any of us when we're feeling "sunk" and we try to think of something positive), give her suggestions for categories of pleasant memories such as:

A time when your family went to a park or a beach

A time when you made a new friend

A time when you had fun with friends doing something you weren't allowed to do

Happy memories you have involving your pets or other people's pets

Happy memories involving favorite relatives

You can think up additional categories of your own. Even people who are in very dark places emotionally can remember happier times if you narrow down the question in this way. Once the positive memory comes up, ask her to tell you every single detail that she can remember about it.

Items of Current Interest

Another approach is to have your client tell you about something that is a particular interest of hers. For example, if you know that your client makes quilts, ask her to tell you all about quilting, including why it means so much to her.

Embarrassing Stories

There is endless fun to be had from reviewing embarrassing stories. And the client tends to reap a double benefit, because not only does telling those stories lead to a lighter mood, he'll also end up doing some emotional processing while he's at it, because these stories make us laugh and shiver.

Cuddling

You can ask your client if he would like a hug or would like to just hold onto you for a while. Sometimes it helps the client to hold on tightly, perhaps standing up or lying down so that he can hold on really well.

Present Time Techniques

All of the usual techniques that I described earlier for getting a person's attention out of distress at the end of his turn are also useful for lifting someone who has sunk into oozy feelings. You can draw your client's attention to sights and sounds in the environment, put on some music, get up and walk (or run) around the house or yard, play a word game, or anything else you can think of that is fun or sensory.

COUNSELORS CAN ASK FOR HELP!

You are always free to ask for help when you are feeling like you don't know how to counsel someone effectively. *It's particularly important to ask for help if your client is in a crisis that is giving her the urge to hurt herself or other people.*

Let your partner know that you feel the need to talk to someone, and decide together who that person will be. It might be another person from the Peak Living Network or could be a mental health professional. If your client won't give you permission to speak with anyone else, you will need to break her confidentiality against her wishes if she is talking about harming herself or someone else.

Don't stay isolated with a burden of responsibility; it will not be good for you and it won't help your client. (See also pg. 30, "Report Backs and Supervision.")

SECTION V

A FEW ADDITIONAL CO-COUNSELING CONCEPTS

IF SOMETHING WORKS, KEEP DOING IT UNTIL IT DOESN'T

When you discover a technique or a statement that has a powerful or useful effect on your client, repeat it again when the effect starts to wear off, and use it over and over again until it stops working.

For example, if your client says a phrase aloud and then begins to laugh, have him say the same thing again when he stops laughing. And if it makes him laugh again, have him say it a third time.

I've had counselors use the same technique with me for an hour. I remember a time, for example, when I was splitting time with a friend and he said to me (referring to a really hard time I had gone through that I was talking about), "When those feelings were going on for you, you were doing great to just be able to keep putting one foot in front of the other." Every time he said that, I would just start bawling and go on for five or ten minutes. When I stopped, he would look at me with a loving sparkle in his eyes and say the same thing again. I cried like a baby for practically the whole hour, and was a new person for about a week after that.

You may get an idea that you think will deepen the experience even more for your client, and it's fine to try your idea out. For example, a person who is crying will often cry more deeply if you place your hand on her arm or if you hold her. However, if you try that (or try anything new) and she seems distracted by what you did, or if she was releasing feelings before but now she stops, discontinue what you *are* doing and go back to what you *were* doing.

A technique may not only work repeatedly within a session, but also through many sessions over time. For example, a dear woman named Kathleen with whom I split time every week for many years created the following scenario while counseling me:

Counselor: Okay, so let's say it's back then [I was describing events from when I was nine years old] and there you are, sitting in the backyard by yourself and no one in your family is noticing what you're going through. But now I come walking along and I see you sitting back there, and I walk over to you. And I say, "Hi there, little guy. I can see that you're sure feeling sad today. How about telling me what's going on?"

And I would imagine what it would have been like for me if this loving stranger had come up to me and said these things; and I would cry my eyes out. Whenever I stopped crying, Kathleen would gently start saying roughly the same words to me again, and I'd go back to bawling. Over the years we would periodically return to this image to see if it was ready to work its magic again, and often it was. I unloaded so much accumulated childhood injury through the hours of crying that this one scenario brought me.

REMIND YOUR CLIENT THAT THE PRESENT IS NOT THE PAST

Our distresses often cause us to have trouble distinguishing emotionally between the past and the present. Draw your client's attention to this r client of this distinction whenever it's appropriate. For example:

Client: I felt so totally alone after my sister got married. There wasn't a soul in the world for me.

Counselor: I get it that that was a really hard time. Things are very different now, though. There are so many people who care about you now.

Remember, though, that we draw these distinctions to help the client process and release his feelings, *not* to convince him not to feel those feelings! This is a crucial distinction between the PLN approach and some other "positive thinking" philosophies.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE, DON'T FIX IT

I've explained that healing processes, including the inherent emotional releases, move best when part of our awareness is on our emotional distress and part of it is on sources of strength that are the opposite of what the distress is like. So what should you do if your client is blurting out, "I'm a horrible person!" over and over again while he steadily sobs his heart out? *Don't do anything!* Just keep loving him and let him go. Do not argue with success; for example, fight the temptation to say to him, "No, no, that's not true about you," which will just interfere with his powerful crying. What is giving him the strength to sob so deeply? We don't know. Probably it's just his awareness of your loving presence, and the fact that you're letting him feel what he feels (this is crucial -- it may be such a relief to him to be with someone who stops trying to talk him out of his feelings, and that may be why he's able to discharge so deeply!).

He might also be someone who has rarely had the opportunity to tell the truth about how things have really felt for him, so that the truth-telling in itself is a huge source of strength at the moment.

SPEND THE SESSION ON WHATEVER IS MOST HELPFUL

When it's your turn to be the client, there are many useful ways to use your time. So don't spend your time trying to fight your way into deep feelings on a day when you can tell they just aren't going to come. Instead, enjoy your counselor's loving attention while you:

- Accomplish something that's you've been having a hard time doing by yourself, such as making a difficult phone call or tackling an overwhelming pile of bills (yes, this is a *completely* legitimate, in fact excellent, way to use session time to propel your life forward)
- Think through a challenge in your current life that you need to figure out.

- Share about something large or small that's important to you, such as a book or a movie that meant a lot to you, or an interest that you have in life; tell about activities in life that you feel passionate about or that bring you joy.
- Celebrate successes you've had, whether recent or far in the past
- Tell the story of your life (I believe everyone should undertake to do this at some point, though it will take a few sessions)
- Sit quietly and be held
- Listen to your counselor sing to you (I've had a few co-counseling partners who loved to have me sing to them during their turn)

TAKE RISKS

The fear of making mistakes can lead you to be an overly timid, conservative counselor. If you have a hunch, try it out, and don't worry about proposing something that at first may seem a little unusual (such as pulling out a box of crayons and asking your client to draw a picture, or seeing if your client wants to listen together to one of his favorite songs during his turn, or anything else that your gut tells you might get things moving inside him). Creativity in counseling is great. There's no harm in proposing things to try; your partner can simply tell you if she doesn't want to try your idea.

Finally, learn from other people but counsel in your own style.

HELPING MEN CRY

Many men have been heavily conditioned to perceive crying as shameful and unmanly, and may go years at a stretch without crying at all. If a man brings up his inability to cry, here are some things you can have him try.

- 1) Have him explore his childhood memories of times when people laughed at him, hurt him, or threatened him for crying, and encourage him to take time to process his feelings from those memories.
- 2) Encourage him to tell stories from his past in a lot of detail and just let his feelings be whatever they are. Men tend to be more likely to cry when they aren't trying to.
- 3) If he keeps shifting the subject into ideas, try to guide him back to telling you how things have felt to him.
- 4) Men can often benefit from just sitting quietly, and should be invited to take some session time to do so.
- 5) *Don't get excited if he starts to cry*, which is almost guaranteed to stop the tears. Instead, act like his crying is the completely normal and unsurprising. And don't congratulate him for crying; that will just make it harder for him to cry next time. Just love him.

WOMEN AND ANGER

Women tend to cry more easily than men, though they are still likely at first to have trouble allowing themselves to cry *hard* for any length of time. What you may find more pronounced is that women are conditioned not to express or release anger.

When you see your female client back off from a point of anger, support and encourage her to go ahead with it and let it come out in its full force. She will often find it frightening to do so, and it can be helpful for her to review the experiences that taught her that it's not safe to be angry.

Women are also conditioned to feel responsible for other people, and so to feel that it's mean or unfair to express anger or outrage. You can help overcome this block by reminding her that she is a valuable person, and that she has a right to her anger and to other bad feelings toward people. She doesn't owe it to the world to 'be nice.'" Remind her also that the person she's expressing rage towards isn't even there at that moment, so how could it hurt to let it out?

Encourage her to give physical form to her anger by pushing or wrestling you. She may want to alternate between times of pushing you away and times of pulling close to you again; as her feelings move between anger and fear.

THE CLIENT IS YOUR BEST SOURCE OF GUIDANCE

It isn't up to the person in the counseling role to always have ideas about what to try next. Your partner has a wealth of information about herself, and often she can figure out what would be most helpful for her if she takes a moment to think about it. Don't hesitate to ask questions such as:

***Counselor:* What do you need from me right now? What would be helpful to hear me say?**

***Counselor:* Where do you think you need to head now in today's session?**

***Counselor:* Is there something you need to say aloud to this person you've been talking about?**

Trust your client that she knows what is best for her, and follow her lead.

I don't mean by this that you should become a passive counselor, though. Stay active and communicate with your partner about what she needs.

A certain amount of silence in a session is valuable, by the way. Some days the stream of words from counselor and client drive feelings away instead of bringing them closer.

REPORT BACKS AND SUPERVISION

A healing partnership benefits from occasional reflection on how things are going. I recommend setting aside thirty or forty minutes for this every three months. Invite someone else from your healing network to sit in with you during the report back if there is anyone available.

Begin by each taking five or ten minutes to talk about what is *going well* for you during your turns when you split time with this partner.

Second, each of you takes about ten minutes to talk about what your counselor could do that would help you more, and what they are doing that is interfering or that you would prefer they not do.

Third comes times for either person to bring up any difficulties or tensions that are affecting the relationship. For example, this could be a time to raise issues about chronic lateness, or someone cancelling sessions often, or anything else that's bothering you or affecting your enthusiasm for splitting time with the person.

Last, finish by each sharing a few things that you appreciate about the other person and about your relationship. It's important to always end on this note.

If a third person does attend to support you and your partner, remember that the time they gave needs to be traded. You could do this by either:

- 1) Sitting in to support them the next time they do a report back with a counseling partner
- 2) Giving them a counseling turn now of 25 or 30 minutes if they would like to do that

I also recommend that each co-counseling pair agree on a third person from the network to be their "supervisor". (If this person has quite a bit of experience that's great, but it's not necessary.) You are agreeing that confidentiality will not be entirely strict with respect to your supervisor, so that either of you is free to contact the supervisor for support or problem-solving regarding issues in your sessions that you're finding difficult. The supervisor is agreeing to keep everything shared by either of you fully confidential.

I recommend that each person in the PLN network volunteer to act as supervisor for at least one other counseling pair. In that way, we can make sure that this role is shared equally by everyone, which is one of the central goals of our network.

GET GOOD SESSIONS FOR YOURSELF

Although practicing technique is very helpful, counseling is ultimately an intuitive skill. You'll develop a better and better feel for what your partner needs to hear from you, and what she needs to say for herself, the more sessions that you do.

A key to becoming a good counselor is to get good sessions for yourself regularly. You'll learn volumes about how to assist someone else by discovering what works for you. You

also become a more present and effective counselor through getting clearer of your own distress.

If you find that you are having difficulty counseling someone well, take some session time on any feelings that come up for you that get in your way of thinking clearly about that person. I recommend doing this with a different partner, as it could be quite triggering for your counseling partner to listen to you talking about what you find hard about trying to assist them!

SECTION VI

BOUNDARIES AND ETHICS IN HEALING PARTNERSHIPS

A healing partnership is a special and potentially powerful connection between two people. Because of the structure and guidelines that we are agreeing to, and because of the assumptions that we share about what humans are like and what they need, we are often able to be unusually open with each other in a short time.

This level of rapid emotional intimacy carries with it considerable responsibility, however, as it also creates the potential for people to get hurt. When we make ourselves so open to someone, bad experiences from the past can get triggered in powerful ways, as we all carry a legacy of hurts from abandonment, breaches of trust, and abuses of power.

And unfortunately some people have strong addictive pulls toward sex or power and therefore can cause harm to others, and we can't always tell immediately who they are.

So it's important for participants in the Peak Living Network to respect a clear collection of boundaries and ethics.

HEALING PARTNERSHIPS ARE FOR HEALING

My first recommendation is that you not start friendships or dating relationships with people you meet through PLN until you have known them for at least a year, and perhaps not even then. *Use the connections you make through PLN for healing*, maintaining the same kind of boundaries outside of PLN events and co-counseling sessions that a professional therapist would keep with a client.

A healing partnership develops closeness very differently from the way a friendship does; we reveal ourselves at an unusually rapid pace, and we interact in a highly structured way that brings out the best in people. This is wonderful for healing purposes, but it doesn't lay the groundwork for a successful social relationship. I have participated in a number of healing networks over the years, and have observed how quickly people's relationships tend to fall apart once they start to socialize, because of not having laid the normal groundwork. The result is that they not only end up without the friendship they were hoping to build but have sacrificed a successful healing partnership in the process.

Even in cases where a social or business relationship works out reasonably well between people who met through splitting time, their relationship still can have a negative impact on their whole healing network. Why? Because it leads people in the network to question each other's motives for participating. We all benefit from being able to trust that other people are not there to shop for friends, lovers, or clients.

By respecting clear boundaries, you can make your co-counseling sessions, open support meetings, and other PLN activities uniquely safe places to be entirely yourself, without having to be concerned with the additional responsibilities that a social relationship brings. You can share information about yourself without worrying about how it will affect

your relationship in the future. You can also take advantage of that safety to work on healing unmet needs from the past (“frozen needs”) that could be making you feel compelled to socialize or be sexual with your healing partners.

We Are All Lovable and Can Find Good Friends

A quite different reason not to form social relationships with people you first come to know through the Peak Living Network is that we want to use our healing network to make the changes that we need to make in our lives, not to avoid that work. Forming close friendships and relationships of all kinds in our lives is one of the key challenges that we face, and one that stimulates us to work on our healing and growth. To find closeness, we have to push through timidity, self-doubt, and fear of rejection. Splitting time can help us to be triumphant in this challenge. But if we rely on our healing network as a source of close relationships, we are avoiding the growing we need to do to learn how to do so for ourselves.

SEXUAL CONTACT IS INAPPROPRIATE IN THE PLN CONTEXT

It is inappropriate for people to be sexual with each other when meeting to split time, or while involved in any other Peak Living Network activity. This is the clearest and most dangerous boundary violation; everybody in our times carries significant emotional injury with respect to sex and our bodies, and thus the potential is high for people to be emotionally reinjured in the trusting environment of a healing network. Sexual contact can accentuate power issues, especially between men and women.

At the very least, sexual contact will decrease the special safety that a healing partnership can have. But often the damage is greater.

Survivors of abuse can have particular damage done to their healing process when a healing partner has sexual contact with them. Remaining distress from their abuse experiences can lead survivors to consent to sexual interactions that they do not genuinely want; and even when they successfully ward off a sexual advance, the experience can cast them back into feelings of mistrust toward others and lack of safety in their own bodies that they are working hard to get free from.

There are various ways in the splitting time to work on sexual issues that are bothering you, and to heal from past experiences of sexual injury. However, *none of these ways involves having any actual sexual contact while splitting time*. Don't trust anyone who suggests that sexual interactions with him or her will help your healing; it never works.

Let Someone Know If Your Boundaries Are Not Respected

If someone you know through the Peak Living Network presses you to have sex with them, or in other ways fails to respect your physical or emotional boundaries, please do not keep the interaction secret; let other people know, including other people in your network. This is important so that you are not left alone with the experience, and so that your local network can respond to the problem.

A HEALING PARTNERSHIP IS A PROFOUNDLY VALUABLE RELATIONSHIP

I have sometimes seen people get focused on what they are losing by choosing not to spend social time with someone from their healing network whom they love or care about. Because of that outlook, they are failing to notice how much they gain. A healing partnership is one of the greatest ways to be close to someone else.

Our lives have many different kinds of relationships, and they are all valuable in different ways: friends, lovers, relatives, teacher-student, clergy-congregation, coach-athlete, and so forth. Is your relationship with your pastor a missed opportunity because you aren't hanging out socially? Are you missing an opportunity because you aren't sleeping with your personal trainer? Of course not. Value each of the important relationships in your life for the role it plays.

In fact, my experience has taught me that it's easier to find a great friend (as hard as that is) than it is to find a great healing partner. So if you find one, treasure that relationship.

A healing network is also a particular type of *community*, different from a town, company, or bowling league. Your entire network benefits from the increased safety that comes when you maintain clear boundaries. And conversely, your entire network may be affected negatively by the tensions and disruptions that typically arise when people decide to socialize with their healing partners.

WHAT IF I WAS ALREADY CONNECTED TO THE PERSON BEFORE WE WERE IN THE PEAK LIVING NETWORK TOGETHER?

If you've already formed a significant connection with a person, adding the element of splitting time usually works fine. (This is an interesting dynamic; relationships tend to fall apart when people add a social relationship to a healing partnership; whereas moving in the opposite direction, adding a healing partnership to an already-existing social relationship, often works out great; and even if it doesn't, it rarely causes any harm to the friendship.)

So by all means split time with your friends, relatives, and lovers if they are interested in learning how. Here are a few guidelines to follow in splitting time with people who are in your life:

1) Keep the time even, just as you would with any other healing partner. If a friend asks you for a counseling turn one day and there isn't time afterwards to switch roles, put that time "in the bank" and take a turn for yourself of a similar length with that person on another day. We don't need to be obsessive, but making sure that splitting of time stays roughly even is crucial to what makes our healing relationships work.

2) Don't start a session if there is tension between you, as the session will at best be a waste of time and at worst will lead to deepening the bad feelings. If there's stuff you need to talk about, talk about it. If you have some time left after you're done talking things out, go ahead and split it; otherwise, reschedule your session for another day.

3) Keep your healing relationship and your social relationship completely separate. In other words, while you are spending social time together, don't ever mention anything that either of you has said while splitting time. Think of those sessions as still being confidential.

I wrote earlier about the importance of not making any reference to a person's session once it's over. It can get tempting to be sloppy about this principle with someone who is in your life, but actually it's even *more* important then.

Don't cross over in the other direction either; that is to say, don't bring tensions or issues from your social relationship into your co-counseling sessions. The only exception to this is in cases where the two of you have agreed in advance, *before* the session started, that it's okay to work on your feelings about your relationship during your turn that day. Apart from that exception, take your issues from that relationship to a different healing partner.

WHAT ABOUT AFTER A YEAR GOES BY?

I said earlier that I strongly recommend waiting at least a year before socializing with someone you've come to know through your PLN network. Usually what happens is by the end of that year, the urge to hang out (or date) has passed, and the two people have settled into being healing partners, and to being members together of their healing network, and want to leave it that way. But what if a year has passed and you're still convinced that the two of you would be great friends or even dating partners?

Here's what I recommend:

1) Make a commitment to spending a substantial number of co-counseling sessions working on your urge to change your relationship. Be aware that you're gambling with your healing relationship, because if your social connection turns sour you won't be comfortable splitting time together anymore either. (It can get hard to even go to open support meetings together.) Make sure that this is a step you really want to take, and that you aren't just being driven by distresses and unmet needs from the past.

2) Be open about this decision with other people in your healing network, because they can be affected by what you decide. Get their thinking and support. No secrecy.

3) If you decide to go forward, *move slowly*. Don't launch immediately into spending tons of time together. If either of you starts to feel misgivings, go back to just being healing partners and network members together.

SECTION VII

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR OWN HEALING

For the process of splitting time to work well for you, it is of course important to find a partner whom you like working with, whom you can grow closer to over time, and who is open to learning how to counseling you better and better over time.

At the same time, your progress toward the kind of healing you desire depends as much on you as it does on your healing partners. So now I'm going to focus not on how to counsel other people, but on how to get the most out of your own turns and out of your participation in the Peak Living Network.

CHOOSE THE BEST HEALING PARTNER FOR YOU

Choose someone to split time with whom you like, trust, and respect, and who you think will be the best counselor for you among the available people. Avoid doing sessions with someone out of a desire to help them, or because you feel sorry for them, or for any other motivation except that you believe that *you* will get a good session. A local PLN network functions most successfully when people do not rescue each other (except for brief periods during an exceptional crisis in one person's life), and instead every interaction works for both people.

The more you love your healing partner(s) and feel inspired by him or her, the better sessions you will have. Counseling skills are important but they are no substitute for a deep mutual fondness and respect.

NURTURE AND TREASURE YOUR HEALING PARTNER

The better relationship you build with your co-counselor, the more you'll feel safe and thought about during your sessions.

Begin with honoring the basics, being responsible and consistent about your sessions:

- * Be ready to start on time.
- * Don't cancel sessions at the last minute (except for true emergencies).
- * Don't interrupt sessions for phone calls (your service should be turned off during an in-person session, and during a phone session don't respond to incoming calls).
- * Don't make surprise changes in the length of the session (as in, "Oh, by the way, I have to be finished in an hour instead of two hours today").

If you are hosting an in-person session, make the environment as visually appealing and distraction-free as possible. Both people will have a more productive session in a room that is clean and tidy, and that has some attractive and interesting things around to look at. A room that has a hopeful and positive feeling to it helps us to get into a healing state of mind.

During your counselor's turn, be fully present and be thinking about her, not about your own concerns. The better session you give the person, the better attention he'll be able to pay to you during your turn.

YOU AND YOUR PARTNER ARE A TEAM

During your turn, take the attitude that you and your counselor are *thinking together* about how best to help you.

Be aware of old wounds that can push us away from this teamwork orientation. One is the voice in our heads that says, "No one's ever going to really be there for me, so I'd better do it all myself." This pattern can lead us to resist accepting support or suggestions from our counselor, feeling that all their ideas are wrong.

Another is an almost opposite voice that says, "I'm helpless and victimized so my counselor had better help me quick, and if they don't I'll be crushed with disappointment." These old feelings can lead us to put the full weight of responsibility on our counselor and not do the work of thinking about ourselves and what we need.

We want instead to aim for a creative and synergistic process in which counselor and client put their heads together to take on the same task. Think of each turn as being a time when the two of you cooperate to help one of you (the person whose turn it is) to heal.

ASK FOR WHAT YOU NEED

Give your partner as much information as you can about how best to assist you. Ask him to sit closer or move farther away from you, asking him to repeat a particular phrase that you feel the need to hear, asking him for reassurance about issues where you are doubting yourself or feeling bad about yourself.

If you have a sense of the direction you need to go, put it out there, as in:

***Client:* I think I need to try getting really angry about this.**

That way your partner can start thinking in a specific direction to come up with ideas for you to try.

Speak up also if your partner is doing something that is distracting or bothering you during your turn, or that you think is taking you off in the wrong direction. Be open to suggestions; but at the same time, remember that it's your time and you are the ultimate judge of what you need, and don't spend a bunch of time on an approach that you can tell isn't going to work that day.

BE COMMITTED TO YOUR HEALING PARTNER

Work hard at your co-counseling relationship, and stick with it through hard times. Although you will sometimes reach a point where it does make sense for you to move on to splitting time with someone else, don't give up easily and don't disappear mysteriously. If the sessions you are doing together have stopped working for you, communicate clearly about your difficulties and seek outside help and support (see the section above, "Report Backs and Supervision"). When the time does come to move on, do so lovingly, appreciating your partner for who they are and for what they have done well with you.

STRIVE TO LIVE OUTSIDE OF YOUR WOUNDS

The quality of your time-splitting sessions depends partly on how you live your life *between* sessions. Push yourself to live with courage, to go against the grain of your distress patterns, to stay in clarity, to take good care of yourself.

Life is more unsettling when you break out of the patterns that your old wounds have pushed you into, but it is also much more satisfying, and it leads to feeling better about yourself. This process in turn helps to give you more capacity for deep healing work during your sessions, including more access to the crucial emotional release that you need.

Then, when you heal well in your session time, you feel more able to take courageous steps during the next several days, making even more change possible.

And this is the upward spiral we're looking for. Living in clarity feeds our healing, and healing feeds our ability to live in clarity. When you get this loop going, the sky's the limit.

So between sessions focus on your strengths and joys to the fullest extent you can, not on your pain and self-doubt. When your distress starts to pull at you, remind yourself that there is session time coming up to deal with it and it's okay to lay it aside for now.

Striving to live outside of distress patterns does not mean, though, that you necessarily try to do *more*. As we heal from old injuries, we find that the *quality* of what we do increases, but not necessarily the *quantity*. Remember the need for rest, relaxation, and regeneration.

AVOID SUBSTANCES THAT INTERFERE WITH HEALING

Using drugs or alcohol is not conducive to healing. Alcohol and mind-altering drugs mask our feelings, slow down our processing, and even prevent emotional release from working. For example, people can cry hysterically for hours while drunk, and nothing actually gets processed or healed (as you may have observed). I have observed the same to be true of marijuana, LSD, and other recreational drugs.

Although we don't really understand the mechanism, there appears to be something inherently distressing about being under the influence of a chemical that causes old injuries to get re-recorded as the person attempts to release them. When people cry hard *without*

the help of chemicals we see big changes happen in their lives over time, but chemically-induced emotional releases never take the person toward any growth or change.

Caffeine, nicotine, and even sugar can affect the quality of a person's attention. You can notice a difference in how fully present your healing partner seems to be just from their having had a cup of coffee within the previous couple of hours. Strive to come to sessions not under the effects of any of these drugs, and enlist the support of your healing partners in eliminating chemical dependency from your life completely over time.

(It isn't clear to what extent prescription drugs used for "mental illness" interfere with the emotional release process and other aspects of healing. Many people complain that their psych meds are interfering with even feeling their normal range of emotions, never mind being able to process or release them. But I have occasionally spoken with people who managed to do significant healing work while on a psych med. So if you're using a prescription drug, evaluate your experience in the months ahead and come to your own conclusions about whether your med is interfering with healing or not. PLN does not discourage people from using psych meds that they find helpful; however, we also support people to cautiously work free from meds that they feel are interfering with their functioning or their enjoyment of life.)

MAKE SPLITTING TIME A PRIORITY IN YOUR LIFE

Given the frantic pace at which so many of us live, it's easy to feel that it's impossible to set aside time for healing. But co-counseling sessions *save more time than they use*, because of the increased clarity, energy, and initiative they lead to. To experience the full benefit of a healing partnership, I recommend that you have a full session once a week where you get a turn of 50 or 55 minutes, and at least two additional phone mini-sessions in between.

At the same time, I recognize that some people's life situations make it unrealistic to hope for a weekly full session (single parents on tight budgets, for example). These people will need to catch time for co-counseling piecemeal here and there for now; you can still get surprising benefits from splitting time.

USE THE TELEPHONE

When distress is leaning on you and you can't seem to shake it off, or at any other time when you crave support, call someone from your PLN network phone mini-session. A turn of just five or ten minutes can make a difference in how you feel and in your ability to do what you need and want to do that day.

Times when you feel that you're just in too bad of shape to call someone, or that calling won't do any good, *are the most important times to call*. These are the moments when feelings are available and ready to be worked on, and when old wounds from hopelessness or abandonment can be powerfully healed.

MAKE YOUR GOAL TO LIVE BETTER, NOT FEEL BETTER

Breaking out of the old patterns caused by our wounds is not comfortable, and therefore a healing life is often not an easy one, especially in the short term. But if we can keep making better decisions and handling our lives in ways that are more daring and creative, our lives will get more and more *satisfying*, and ultimately that matters much more to our quality of life. A life of true connection to ourselves, to each other, and to our world, will also tend to be a turbulent life, but so worth it for how much more fulfilled we end up feeling.

PARTICIPATE IN A HEALING NETWORK

Local networks of the Peak Living Network include can include such activities as open support meetings, support groups on specific topics, Facebook groups, classes on counseling techniques, day-long special support gatherings, and newsletters on various healing topics, in addition to the co-counseling sessions that pairs are doing. Members of a network stay connected to each other through in-person, mini-sessions by phone, and attending the other network activities. In addition to having a regular partner to split time with, you may have two or three others -- or any number -- that you meet with for sessions less often, building a wider base of support and connecting further to your network in that way.

The national Peak Living Network office is here to help you grow and develop your local network, and to help you start one if none exists near where you live. Check out all of our resources at **PeakLivingNetwork.org**, including listings of local groups and guidelines for starting a group if there isn't one in your area. You can also send inquiries to PeakLivingNetwork@juno.com.

BALANCE YOUR SESSIONS BETWEEN EMOTIONAL PROCESSING, CELEBRATION, AND PLANNING

There are myriad ways to split time productively, as I've written about earlier in this manual. But they can be broken down roughly into three categories:

- * emotional processing, which often includes time spent pursuing deep emotional releases
- * noticing and celebrating what has gone well in the past and what's going well now
- * setting goals for the future and planning your direction

Notice over periods of weeks if you are getting to all of these aspects of the healing process, and devote time to any that are getting slighted. I recommend specifically setting aside a full session for goal work at least once every three months, in addition to spending a few minutes on it regularly in other sessions.

LIVE A LIFE THAT YOU ARE PROUD OF

The more you can live your life in a way that makes you feel good about yourself, the better sessions you will have. Work bravely to further your own interests and the interests of

those that you love. Resist oppression, your own and other people's, wherever you see it and in whatever way you can. Do at all times the very best that you can, and then forgive yourself freely for what you are not (yet) able to accomplish. Notice if you are getting caught up in attempting to please or impress other people, and return to yourself, for you are your own best guide and measure.

SECTION VIII

HEALING FROM OPPRESSION AND INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

As I explain in *The Joyous Recovery*, oppression and its relationship to healing is a profound and complex subject, especially given that the *majority of our deepest and most long-lasting emotional wounds have their roots in systems of societal oppression of targeted groups*. I find especially common the devastating effects of systematic cruel treatment that targets and dehumanizes people for being children, females, people of color, and members of the working class, but there are so many other groups that are destructively targeted.

Even most emotional injuries that people do not perceive as related to oppression tie back in one way or another to these systems, with the great unifying one being the dehumanizing, devaluing, and silencing of children by the adult world.

Oppression is not something that exists just in people's minds. Yes, we can make great strides individually in healing from the effects oppression has had on us and on people we love. But in the final analysis oppression is something that is rampant *in the world* and must be stopped *in the world*. And because our personal healing is linked to taking back our power -- we have trouble taking back our power unless we're healing, and we have trouble healing unless we're taking back our power -- we will tend to hit limits to how deeply we can heal through our sessions unless we are also actively combating oppression in other aspects of our lives.

OVERCOMING THE DIRECT EFFECTS OF OPPRESSION

The first step to healing from experiences of oppression is to tell what the experience has been like. Tell it in its full force and impact, without sanitizing it in anyway. Your choice of counselor for this work is important; people often find that they have the greatest safety if their counselor has experienced the kind of oppression that they are discussing. People of color, for example, often report that they can more effectively process the effects of racism with a counselor who is also a person of color, perhaps even someone who is from their particular group (e.g. African-American, Latino/a, Native American).

At times, though, people crave the sense of "making someone listen to what it has been like," so they prefer a counselor who is from the dominant group for that work.

Taking complete pride in yourself becomes even more important than usual when working on experiences of oppression. And it becomes crucial for the counselor to take a clear, unbending stand against the mistreatment.

If you are the counselor and your client is working on oppression carried out by the group that you're from, her statements may sometimes feel like an attack on you, as with a young person saying, "You adults just don't care about young people's opinions," or a working class person saying, "You middle class people talk to us like we're stupid." Remember that the person's work is not directed at you personally; they are trying to work through profound realities of their experience. Welcome their anger and take it as a sign that the person trusts you and considers you capable of understanding.

Remember also that you always have more to learn about any form of oppression that you yourself have not lived, including ways that you might be unwittingly colluding with it. So keep an open mind and avoid defensiveness.

OVERCOMING INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION

To undo the internalization of oppression, we have to heal the hurts that have led us to accept the oppressor's way of looking at us. For example, we all experienced as children not only the pain of being treated as inferior to adults, but also the pain of gradually coming to believe that we were in fact inferior.

This second layer of pain is in many ways even more excruciating than the first; what could be more devastating than coming to believe that the oppressive images of us were the truth?

One way to reveal the internalization is to talk about the things we don't like about members of our own group. This process tends to uncover the negative stereotypes that we've accepted about ourselves.

Another way is to say loudly and in a tone of complete pride and delight, "It's great to be a ..." (young person, woman, African-American, etc.). Either of these approaches may lead to embarrassment and other fairly light feelings, or may tap into heavier grief and fear.

We can also pursue such questions as, "What am I proud of about my group?" "How have members of my group hurt me?" and "How have I felt loved and supported by my people?"

Striving to feel pride in yourself for being from whatever group you belong to contradicts internalized oppression. As a counselor, encourage your client to notice the beauty and strength of her people.

GAINING ACCURATE INFORMATION

Because mistreatment and misinformation are woven together, we need to seek out accurate information about groups to which we belong. We need to learn who our own history, including not only how our people have been oppressed but how we have historically *resisted* oppression. This knowledge is essential both to fighting oppression in the world and to fighting its internalized effects within us.

Similarly, we need to learn the history of oppression and resistance regarding groups that we *don't* belong to, as part of overcoming our own oppressive attitudes and behavior toward that group. This information helps us be aware of ways we may act oppressively without intending to, and unfair privileges we may be gaining as a result of the oppression. This in turn assists us in building effective alliances in overcoming oppression.

Participants in the Peak Living Network can assist each other in this quest by sharing information about books, articles, movies, speakers, and other media that they have found helpful in learning about a particular group or form of oppression.

SPECIFIC SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups devoted to confronting and healing a particular form of oppression have a long history of power and effectiveness. By gathering with only members of the oppressed group present, participants feel increased safety, focus, and understanding. Support groups seem to work especially well when they include some time spent discussing and analyzing oppression, and some time for each person to take a turn as client with the group's loving attention. The support group can still mostly follow the standard PLN open support meeting structure (described on the PLN website).

Support groups can also be formed around being better allies to oppressed groups, such as "overcoming racism" or "overcoming sexism" support groups, again with a mixture of theory discussion and counseling time. Effective ways to work on these issues are below.

OVERCOMING COLLUSION WITH OPPRESSION

To the extent that we continue to carry oppressive attitudes and treat people in oppressive ways, many of which we may be unaware of, we are working against our deeper beliefs and goals. If you are interested in becoming a better ally to a group you care about, spend some of your turns on this issue when you're splitting time.

However, there is a crucial guideline here: Please don't work on oppressive things you have felt or done toward a particular group *with a member of that group as your counselor*. It is reinjuring for people from targeted groups to have to listen to other people "working out their issues" toward the oppressed. For example, men need to work on their issues about women with a male co-counselor or in male-only groups.

The first step is to do some work on your own experiences of enduring oppression. No one has escaped oppression; even the most privileged rich, white, able-bodied, adult male has been through the experience of being a child, for example, and therefore knows first-hand what oppression is like *if he recovers his memory of it*. The point of this work is not so that you can say "me too" when people open up about experiences of being oppressed. In fact, the opposite is true; it's so that you can more deeply understand the need to really listen and absorb what they are sharing.

The second step is to work on your feelings about the oppression of the group in question, both in the world and in your life. Look at times you observed the oppression taking place as a young person, or at feelings you have about current oppressive treatment that you know about. (Ironically, our unhealed pain about oppression we've witnessed or known about is one of the powerful forces propelling us unconsciously to defend and collude with it!)

Men, for example, can work on childhood memories of seeing girls or women that they loved being mistreated, and will find that this work helps them get clearer about sexism.

The third step is to work on experiences where you colluded with the oppression or perpetuated it. Discharging the guilt, shame, and sadness that you feel from those times will help you avoid the actions in the future and assist you to become a better ally to that oppressed group.

BEING AN EFFECTIVE ALLY WHILE IN THE COUNSELING ROLE

When you are in the listening role with someone who is working on their experiences of being subjected to oppression by a group that you belong to (such as a white person counseling a person of color or a male counseling a female), avoid sinking into or expressing your own guilt feelings, as this will make you the center of attention and take the focus off of the client's healing. Instead, work on:

- indicating that you see the person as whole human being, not just as a member of a particular group
- striving at all times to be your natural self and to treat the person the way you would want to be treated
- treating the person as a survivor of oppression, not as a victim of it
- not idolizing the person or being exaggeratedly nice
- not telling them stories about people from their group to whom you've been close
- not talking to them about how you are "working on" your issues about their group in your life or in your sessions

TAKE PRIDE IN RESISTANCE

Resisting oppression, whether it be your own or other people's, is something to be proud of. When you raise issues of oppression in a discussion, when you challenge people about their behavior or their jokes, when you take part in protests, you're making a contribution. Ignore signals you may get from certain people that you're being annoying for raising these issues, or that you lack a sense of humor. *In an oppressive society, a questioning and rebellious attitude is the only attitude that makes sense.* (It's worth noticing that we are carefully taught in school to honor the American Revolution but to have contempt for all other types of revolutionary activity, past or present!)

Take pride also in the creativity of your resistance; the new efforts you make, the new ways you find to get through to people so that they can hear, the new cracks that you discover in the oppressive system that create openings for change.

SECTION IX

SPLITTING TIME AS A TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS

Don't underestimate the power of splitting time. Sure, you can use the process for small goals, such as just to pursue a little extra support in your life. But you can also use healing partnerships to heal on the deepest levels and to completely transform your life. I've done it, and I've seen many, many other people do it. I have, in fact, seen many more people make large and lasting improvements in their quality of life through co-counseling than through psychotherapy (though I have certainly seen some successes there too). And I have observed this to be particularly true when people are part of a healing network.

Healing is a life-long process. And that means that you will get more and more skillful over time in how to support another person's recovery, and in how to make you own recovery move forward at the same time.

And as I said earlier, splitting time is not an either-or choice; working with a healing partner and using the Peak Living Network approach to emotional recovery will increase the depth and success of any other healing path you're on. There's no need to drop one to pursue the other.