

Resource Connection in the EMDR work with children.

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The therapist who asks a child to work on a problem with EMDR is presenting her with an extremely difficult task. In order to process the problem the child is being asked to face squarely his biggest fear, embarrassment, anger or anxiety. He is required to experience directly the emotional discomfort that children most often will do anything to avoid. The wonder is that so many children do have the courage to do just that. In this paper I would like to share with you a technique of Resource Connection which I have developed and found helpful in leading the child into and through the EMDR processing.

The Safe Place

In the Safe Place the standard EMDR protocol recognizes the need for a positive resource before the processing begins. This is a resource, waiting in the wings. The Safe place usually comprises an external memory which provides for child or adult the wonderful experience of a comfortable feeling, an escape route when the processing becomes too difficult. When the processing is incomplete the safe place is used as a comforting closure. For many children the safe place does its job. The child does succeed in accessing a positive memory of safety which is usually dependent on an external experience, such as being with mother.

Andrew Leeds, in his RDI which takes place in the preparatory stage of the protocol, extends the concept of Resource beyond safety. In his procedure the client is provided with a creative framework allowing him to access material relating to a wide variety of resources. Brurit Laub, has developed a procedure which she calls "Resource Connection", to be used at the beginning and end of the standard protocol. In her model, there is an unconscious connection to unique resources that exactly suit the needs of the client at the specific moment. They may relate to a number of facets, such as heroism, competency or nurturance. The resources that arise may be concrete, abstract, metaphoric or spiritual and the connection may be made before the processing of the trauma, during the process or at the end. These particular resources act as a store of containment that eases the processing.

EMDR therapists, such as Bob Tinker, Ricky Greenwald, Joan Lovett and

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Deb Wasserman have also recognized the value of relating to resources beyond safety in their work with children. My concern, here, is to contribute to the thinking around the concept of resources in working with young clients and to facilitate the connection to more authentic and meaningful INNER resources. I rely strongly on Laub's model which emphasizes the therapist's attention to the client's unconscious use of resources in all stages of the protocol.

The technique which I have developed is based on three principles:

1. Children do not usually access memories in an organized way as easily as do adults.
2. The child lives and functions much more completely in the present than do adults.
3. The child has a much more immediate and labile reaction to his present emotions than do adults.

The therapist's task is to observe closely the unique experience of the child in the here and now of the play room and watch for the appearance of the positive aspects of his being that he brings to this small segment of his life. These are his own, unique resources.

The Inner Space of EMDR processing

I like to conceptualize the EMDR processing as taking place in an **inner space** which is full of all the terrible feelings that threaten a traumatized or disturbed child. We meet him crouching on the edge of this space, usually hanging on to his defenses for dear life. He wants to play, or talk, or be quiet, or act out. We say to him "Go on in". The tremendous difficulty of doing as we ask lies in what the child does not know. He does not know that scattered among the unbearable feelings of embarrassment, fear, rage, helplessness are his own personal strengths, such as joy, humor, fun, love, knowledge. It is these which will help bring him to a new balance. If we can help him to connect to some of these strengths in the here and now, before and during the work, the plunge into the processing and its continuation to a new resolution is easier. Resource Connection, in this light, means that the therapist must be alert to any indication of a spontaneous strength that arises in the therapeutic hour, and install it immediately with bilateral stimulation. She must watch carefully for a positive resource, such as joy, humor or competency. These may arise directly, for example, as the child wins a game. They may arise indirectly, as in a body sensation or a body position. Examples might be the feeling of a cool breeze through the window on a hot day which leads to a feeling of comfort and well being,

or the flexing of her muscles as she tells how strong, or what a good helper she was when she lifted the living room rug. These kind of strengths may arise in different contexts.

The therapist should look for them:

- during the preliminary assessment or trust building period.
- while the child is processing,
- during play therapy.

The following three examples provide brief illustrations of the technique.

Roie is afraid of being blown up

Roie is a 9 year old boy who is terrified of terrorist attacks. His anxiety was intense and had generalized to many facets of his life. He didn't want to go to school by himself, or to visit friends. His fear often flung him into dissasociative reactions.

We established a safe place, his room at home, and began working on his fear that he might be blown up. He became so anxious that he asked to stop and move around the room. He began to shoot darts. He was good at it and his involvement in the game allowed him to move away from his fear. I noticed his pride, joy, and excitement when he hit a high number. His facial expression, his glad cry "yesh" (in Hebrew the equivalent of great!) and his open body position. I realized that I was looking at Roie's unique resources. These were the kind of resources that we all need in order to continue living in the face of uncertainty. This was certainly a frightened, quivering boy, but he also had within him the ability to feel competency and joy as he played.

Resource Connection:

Identifying the resource and Naming the feelings, sensations and thoughts

When he hit a high number and jumped up and down joyfully, I would call "Freeze" and ask him as he stood still as a statue: "Where do you feel the "yesh" in your body? Roie answered: "In my hands and my feet". I asked: "What feelings do you have?" He said: "happy". What do you think of yourself now?" He said: "I'm pretty good at this" "I can do stuff." "This is fun".

Installation

“Think of all those feelings in your body and how you’re pretty good at having fun and shooting darts, and look at my fingers”. I continued watching his game and calling freeze when he succeeded. By the time he had hit the 100 mark on the target five times, and had undergone five installations of his feelings of competency and pleasure, he was ready to continue processing to a positive and appropriate cognition. “Ima (mother) doesn’t let me go to dangerous places”.

Lidor is afraid to leave home

Lidor, age 10, had been attacked viciously by a dog. Since the attack he had changed from a sturdy, assertive child to a boy who clung to his mother and was afraid to leave the house by himself. The processing was looping around the picture of the “dog’s teeth” and “nothing” He was able to continue the processing only after he had connected to feelings of direct anger, power and competency.

Identifying the resource and naming the feelings sensations and thoughts.

I noticed that one of his feet was moving back and forth against the chair leg. I suggested that he let his foot kick the chair leg hard as he could, harder and harder. “How does your leg feel when it kicks?” Lidor answered: “strong”. “How does your body feel?” He said: “kind of mad” “Now really mad”. “I can kick hard” “I got a goal in football”. I asked him to think of all those things and follow my fingers. We could then continue the processing through his anger at the dog and the “stupid kid” who let him off the leash to a resolution where he could talk about carrying a stick when he went out and also say that “I really like dogs. Most dogs are nice”.

According to our conceptualization children, such as Lidor and Roie can usually access, a variety of emotions in their here and now experience, as they react to the material in the therapeutic session. These are their own unique resources, but also the resources of most children who, even as they exhibit symptoms of emotional disturbance, still have a natural attraction and interest in the here and now of life, a pride in and drive towards competency, a joy in new experiences, a striving for fun and, in most situations, an experience of nurturance. In this conception the therapist helps the child to identify and, harvest these resources as they appear. They can thus be utilized in the service of the processing and the reaching of a new balance.

This technique of Resource Connection for children touches on several conceptual frameworks:

1. Narrative therapy aims to identify and validate the past, present and future resources which are called Unique Outcomes. The therapist is searching for and emphasizing incidents different from the usual dysfunctional life story of the client.
2. Hypnosis aims at the utilization of resources in the service of the unconscious healing process. It also refers to the concept of anchoring as a way of accessing, as does NLP.
3. Interactive therapies, such as Kohut's self model, or object relations models use positive mirroring and reflecting to allow the child to progress to new stages of development.

Therapeutic Connection between the Child and the Therapist.

The fact that the therapist validates the child's resource throughout the session and highlights his positive qualities, strengthens the therapeutic connection and the child's optimism. It is easier to trust such a person as a safe, containing, hopeful helper who can bring him through the difficult journey of processing his problem.

Alon gets to know dinosaurs.

I have chosen to describe in detail the following case because it illustrates particularly the dramatic change which a resource connection can engender. I met first a frightened, nervous little boy, suffused by his anxiety, unable to focus. The resource that emerged in reaction to a language slip of the therapist was a roaring laugh and his organized, age appropriate sense of humor. Once this resource was stressed and installed, he made a strong interpersonal connection with me which enabled him to begin the EMDR work, to weather a difficult abreaction and to complete the processing to resolution.

Allon is 7 years old, suffers from ADHD, a child who is extremely fearful, often confusing reality and pretend. Several months before our meeting, he watched a television program about dinosaurs. Since then he has been obsessively preoccupied with these monsters. His father described Allon. "When night and darkness fall, terror falls on Allon." He clung to his parents, struggled against going to sleep, often woke in a panic, and had begun wetting his bed again.

This anxious, jumpy little boy, refused to separate from his mother and stuck perseveratively to the topic of dinosaurs. After a short period of play, I tried to establish a safe place, unsuccessfully. Allon wanted only to talk about Jurassic Park. (In Hebrew, Park Jura). Park Jura, the place where dinosaurs, live, did not seem useful as a safe place. As Allon wiggled about, turning in all directions, I felt little sense of connection with him and he with me. His anxiety was a mountain dividing us. I considered postponing the EMDR when I inadvertently hit on Allon's own unique and powerful resource.

The word in Hebrew for Jurassic is "Jura", with a "y" sound at the beginning of the word. As I talked about the park I mistakenly said "Jura" with a hard "J". This word means sewer –the place for toilet wastes. The appeal to a seven year old is obvious. Allon connected immediately to his wonderful sense of age appropriate humor and ability to laugh.(joy).

"Jura. Jura. Jura.", he shouted. "Jura is for the toilet. Don't you know?" When I joined his laughter, the connection between us was made. It was possible to anchor that feeling of fun and connection in his body.

Identification of the resource and Installation

I asked him to think of that laughing fun we were having together.

"Where do you feel it in your body?"

"In my tummy"

"What does it make you think?"

"I like to laugh"

"Think of that laughing fun in your tummy and follow my fingers."

Th: O.K. now breathe

A: Everytime you tell me to breathe.

Th: Yes, because we want you to feel the fun all through your body.

Every time you feel afraid you can think of the laughing and "Jura"and feel the fun in your body.

He was now able to feel himself not only as "frightened Allon," but also as "funny Allon," who could share a joke. He could now enter with me the internal space where he knew his fear resided.

Th: Now you can think of the scary dinosaur and follow my finger

A: Now I'm really afraid

Th: Where do you feel the fear?

A: In my heart

Th: What are the words that fear in your heart makes you say.

- A: (doesn't answer)
- Th: Could it say "I'm in danger"
- A: Begins talking about which dinosaurs he's afraid of, their scales and teeth.
- Th: How big is the fear (shows with hands)
- A: The number is a million. No. A million and twenty
- Th: That's a lot. Follow my fingers and think of the dinosaur and the scariness of one million and twenty.
- A: I'm still afraid
- A: I still feel it a lot
- A: Shall I still think of the scary dinosaur?
- A: I'll go home and really be scared tonight (His facial expression shows terror)
- A: Now I'm afraid even more. two hundred plus a million
- A: What a fear! I can't get rid of it. (he throws his head back and holds his stomach)
- A: Now it went back to a million and twenty
- A: Now it's zero.

He finished the processing while drawing a picture of "dinosaur bones and graves" as his mother tapped his shoulders.

"All the dinosaurs are extinct" he said. He had harvested another resource, his good intelligence and wide knowledge. This, of course, was installed.

"All the dinosaur graves are far away in China" he added.

I asked: "Are there any dinosaurs in Israel?" "Well yes, he said. But only very small ones. They don't do anything really bad. They only yell"

At times even a very frightened child, such as Allon can begin processing within a relatively short time when resources are accessed. Often, though, it may be necessary to work with play therapy methods for a number of sessions, collecting the child's resources as they appear. Some children enjoy writing or drawing each resource as it emerges in play sessions and storing them in a special box to take out when needed.

Summary

The fears that each of these children brought to the playroom were mainly concerned with safety. Safety, for most children, is dependent on external conditions that do not always exist. The resources that emerged naturally as the therapist interacted with the child were his own internal feelings of strength, competence, and joy. When these qualities were identified and installed, each of the children was able to process and arrive at some resolution.

If we place these examples in the larger context of living in Israel at this time and question ourselves as to what anyone needs in order to live in a place when safety is uncertain and where triggers for activating traumatic symptoms are numerous, it becomes apparent that it is precisely a child's unique personal resources that enable him to go on enjoying and developing in his daily life. It is these internal strengths which allow Roie and Lidor to continue playing football and shooting darts, and Allon to keep on laughing.

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