



FREAA

FINDING RECOVERY & EMPOWERMENT FROM ABUSE

Why Use Energy Techniques for Sexual Abuse?

"I've been in talk therapy for the past 20 years, and it never really worked for me....."
Sara, abuse survivor.

How many times have we heard this from our clients?

Traditional talk therapies use the power of speech to better understand our experiences. The theory is that *how we think affects how we feel*; and so we can train ourselves to feel better by challenging and changing distorted thinking patterns. By talking about our feelings, issues and experiences, we can learn to reframe our experiences, develop new ways of viewing things, and are able to consider new possibilities.

While this sounds good in theory, for many survivors, traditional talk therapy ---- cognitive therapy ---- has been less than effective. Some survivors of child sexual abuse have been "in therapy" for many years; and show little or no progress. Ironically, cognitive behavior therapy IS "evidence based" as documented by reams of research, and can be effective. But in actual practice, for many people, much of the time it is not.

Just talking about our problems does not change how we feel or behave. And challenging "cognitive distortions" --- the heart of cognitive therapy ---- is a rational, intellectual approach which is not effective for some, and turns many people "off." It also requires many sessions of practice, and remembering to "use the tools;" which, when feeling stressed or upset, many folks forget to do.

While it feels good to talk and be heard, *just talking about our problems does not necessarily create therapeutic change*; and the "old tapes" just keep on playing their old messages of pain, shame, anxiety and unworthiness. For some people, talking and re-hashing painful experiences can reinforce the old limiting beliefs and patterns; and their problems can feel even worse.

Our brains have different parts; and *the part that thinks is different from the part that feels*. We think and make decisions with the frontal part of the brain called the PFC (pre-frontal cortex); while our feelings occur in the emotional mid-brain ---- the limbic system, consisting of tiny organs called the amygdala, thalamus, hypothalamus and hippocampus. When we're under stress ---- think fight or flight response ---- our brains divert more blood from the PFC to the limbic (feeling) system; and we are not able to think rationally. Psychologist Daniel Goleman calls this "emotional hijacking;" when we feel stressed or upset or threatened, the limbic system "hijacks" our rational brains, and we literally "cannot think straight" ---- or make rational, intelligent decisions¹.

Talk therapies focus on cognitive (talk) strategies in the frontal part of the brain, where we think and make decisions; but they ignore the emotional limbic system ---- where feeling occurs. You've probably witnessed arguments where one person is trying to discuss things "rationally", but is emotionally shut down --- with another person who is feeling emotionally, but "cannot think straight." This is because these two systems ---- the "rational" thinking system and the emotional feeling system --- can inhibit and block each other. *Thinking shuts down our feelings*; and talk therapies, based on cognitive strategies, usually do not change how we feel or behave effectively or permanently.

A Breakthrough in Treating Trauma

FREA was started by a group of therapists and healthcare professionals who use energy techniques in their practices. These energy therapies (also called 'Energy Psychology') refer to a family of techniques *which change how we feel by stimulating the body's energy system*. Just as we have a physical body with nerves and blood vessels, so also we have energy pathways in our bodies, called acupuncture meridians. The basic principle underlying these methods is that *emotional symptoms are caused by blockages in our energy system*. These blockages impede the free-flow of energy, (called chi or qi), causing fatigue, emotional distress and 'dis-ease.' Tapping acupressure points, just like in acupuncture, stimulates these meridian channels and restores the free flow of energy through our bodiesⁱⁱ.

"Qi is the fundamental life force that permeates all things. Qi connects and animates everything in the universe. When the flow of qi is impaired, there is fatigue and dis-ease. When the flow of qi is free and unimpaired, there is abundant energy and radiant health." Master Hong Liu.

When we feel "stressed," it is because our body's innate Fight or Flight response has been engaged. Our hearts beat faster, lungs breathe deeper, blood pressure rises, blood flows from the internal organs to our arms and lungs, and we prepare to Fight or Flee. While this adaptive response saved our ancestors' lives eons ago facing threats and predators, it is no longer adaptive when the "threats" we face now are deadlines, demanding bosses, traffic jams and buzzing I-phones.

The energy therapies are somatic (body) techniques, rather than cognitive (thinking) techniques. They directly influence our body and our limbic (emotional) mid-brain. They reduce stress by "down-regulating" the Fight or Flight response. When we're no longer feeling "stressed" and all "revved up" by Fight or Flight, we feel calmer, more balanced and relaxed, and better able to make good decisions and communicate clearly.

The new energy therapies include:

EFT – Emotional Freedom Techniques
TFT – Thought Field Therapy
TTT - Trauma Tapping Technique
TAT – Tapas Acupressure Technique
WHEE – Wholistic Hybrid of EMDR & EFT.

The most popular of these techniques is EFT, developed by Gary Craig. EFT is a spin-off of TFT --- Thought Field Therapy, which was developed by a clinical psychologist, Dr. Roger Callahan.

Like many discoveries in science, Callahan made a fortuitous discovery. While working with a patient with a severe phobia of water, whom he called "Mary," during one session she noted that she was also feeling nausea. At this time Callahan was studying a technique called Applied Kinesiology, or "muscle testing." He asked Mary to tap an acupressure point below her eye, which is connected with the stomach meridian. He reasoned that as nausea occurs in the stomach, tapping a stomach meridian point might relieve the nausea, which it did. But he was very surprised when "Mary" told him that her fear was gone ---- along with the nausea ---- and proved it by walking outside to a swimming pool and sticking her toes in.

TFT is a very powerful technique ---- and a breakthrough in trauma treatmentⁱⁱⁱ. However it has largely remained in the hands of professionals. EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques), TTT (Trauma Tapping Technique) and WHEE are simplified forms of TFT.

All four techniques involve tapping points on the body. Thousands of people around the world are tapping on themselves to relieve aches and pains, fears and phobias, anxiety and depression, cravings and addictions, and many 'negative' emotional conditions. Tapping is sometimes called "the people's therapy" because it is a safe, simple self-healing technique that people can do for themselves and their loved ones.

Why use energy therapies???

Readers might ask *"Why consider using an alternative, "unproven" technique like EFT or other energy therapies? Why not stay with traditional, mainstream therapies like cognitive behavioral therapy or exposure therapy, which have been proven and are "evidence-based?"*

Numerous therapists, psychologists and practitioners have begun using energy therapies and also EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) along with, or in place of, traditional 'talk' therapies^{iv}. When asked the question above, the reasons they cite most often include the following:

- Simplicity: Energy techniques are simple and easy to use
- Efficacy: Energy methods are highly effective. Clinical experience with a wide variety of clients show that they are efficacious in treating PTSD and many forms of trauma and abuse^v.
- Talking isn't necessary: a survivor can merely THINK of the memory, while tapping to find relief.
- Speed: these methods can work much faster than traditional talk therapies^{vi}.
- Less pain: some forms of exposure therapy require you to re-view abusive and painful memories, over and over and over again. EP methods rapidly defuse the emotional charge on painful memories and experiences, and are much less painful than other methods.
- Depth: EP methods are forms of depth psychotherapy. They work on the emotional and energetic levels, which can heal more deeply than the cognitive (thinking) level.

- Safety: These methods have been found to be very safe, with few or no complications or side effects^{vii}.
- Self-care: These techniques can be done by survivors and their families at home, in the safety of their bathrooms or offices, etc.
- Self-empowerment: EP techniques can be done by survivors, and thus empower folks to heal themselves.
- Long-lasting: the relief and changes people experience with energy methods are often durable and permanent^{viii}.

Comments from therapists:

"Using EP techniques has increased the speed of my clients' recovery by approximately 300%."

"EP methods are my clients' coping methods of choice. Xanax takes about 45 minutes to provide relief. My clients now can get almost immediate relief from a few minutes of tapping, without the side effects. Also, the next time they think about the same issue, it doesn't have the same impact it had before...."

"Survivors can finally let go of the memory of the abuse in their bodies..... This has a ripple effect on their mental and even physical health, when they're no longer in a constant state of hyper-arousal....."

"I did not see the kinds of rapid shifts and changes I see now, until I began using energy therapies."

It is for these reasons that for a growing number of therapists and practitioners, energy techniques have become the "treatments of choice" when treating survivors of abuse and assault.

Disclaimer:

This article represents the consensus opinion of FREA members. Please note that there is no single approach which works best for every person. Individual results will vary, depending on many factors such as rapport,, therapists' training and expertise, client readiness, severity of abuse, etc. It is our intention to communicate our experience and a sense of Hope that 1) you are not alone; 2) alternative and effective techniques are available; 3) there are self-help techniques survivors can do to reduce their stress and discomfort; and 4) ultimately, each of us is responsible for our own recovery.

References

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