

# Unfocussed Listening and Developing your Intuition

## Teleseminar 5 – Mind Level Membership programme.

Unfocussed listening is a skill that requires some insight into the self and some courage. This first principle of this teleseminar is about why we can find it so difficult to break through our impasses with our clients, that sometimes even our usual supervisors, can't seem to help with. Much of our impasse is simply our own fears and anxieties standing in the way of knowing how to manage our particularly challenging or tricky client. If we can have insight into our own blocks, we are ¾ of the way to resolving it.

The second principle of this teleseminar will be about how we can listen in a much more encompassing way with our clients, taking in our feelings, our thoughts, the effect our clients are having on us and using all of those senses to feed back to our client and create a shift in their behaviours. It is a very challenging way of working but an essential way if you want to be a thoroughly competent and confident therapist.

### What is unfocussed listening?

It is precisely what it says: unfocussed. That means, I'm no longer listening to the words, or the content, but I'm soaking in a range of the following styles about my client:

- Their mannerisms and how they make me feel
- Their turn of phrase: their repeated use of self put downs for example
- The way they keep referring to how it looks to other people
- The way they keep sighing every time they mention their husband/wife
- Their foot tapping, or hand waving when they talk about certain issues
- The feeling you get that they are just taking too much responsibility for everyone in their lives.
- The feeling you get that they approach everything with extreme caution....what might happen if they didn't?
- The certain knowledge that they spend most of their time on their own...did they realise that they might be feeling a bit anxious and disconnected if they're not with others? What fears stop them being with others?

As you can see, the list is endless. This is more about you starting to observe words and patterns in your clients behaviour and presentation.

I may focus on how I feel when this client walks in the room. Here you need your own self awareness: you might ask yourself the following question after the session (not during please! The session is about your client not you)

- What is it about this client that makes me feel this way?
- When else have I felt this way?
- Which of my deeper fears is this client agitating for me? (Wine glass analogy)
- What is my resentment about? What might happen?

- What is my frustration about? Who else do I feel like this with?
- What are my fears about?
- I'm feeling a palpitation in my chest with this client. Do they suffer with anxiety or is the anxiety mine?

You will need to keep a journal for a couple of weeks after this teleseminar. You need to understand what is driving you and where your fears come from. Use your sessions with your clients to drive this writing and don't stop writing until you have explored it as thoroughly as you can. After a couple of writing sessions read back through your notes and look for your own patterns. They will be there. And they will be being fed by something that you haven't yet fully addressed from your own past. It doesn't mean anything other than identify it, own it, embrace it and use it in your therapy sessions. It will help you identify with your client instead of reject them for reminding you of your vulnerability.

**Exercise 1:**

Think now of a client who you know or knew who you are getting nowhere with. Sit quietly for 15 seconds and just think about them. What feelings do you get with them? What was their presenting problem? What didn't you say to them that, if you'd had the courage you would have? What particularly irked you about them? Was that your feeling? Or is it something your client is complaining about...for example, are they complaining that everyone is selfish, and then they seem incapable of being honest with you? (making you selfish of course because you can't guess what's in their mind) Or are they complaining they have no friends, but their style is very abrupt and snappy with you making you afraid of challenging them....befriending them? Or is it that you are programmed yourself to feel affronted by certain styles...perhaps styles you never managed to win with in past experience?

Write down here some of the mannerisms, behaviours, language and habit patterns you have identified with this particular client:

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Now describe below the blocks you had with them. Were they fears, frustration, aggression, sadness, sympathy, a need to rescue? What were you feeling with them?

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You may need more time than I can allow on a live teleseminar so please feel free to go back over this and write in peace and quiet in your own time.

As you look back over those notes, you should begin to see how perhaps they've been rubbing up against your issues and that it's been difficult for you to separate your own stuff from theirs.

All the while we remain unconscious of our own fears and anxieties, the more likely we are to project them onto our client. We disown our own vulnerability because it feels threatening, and instead we tell ourselves that this is a particularly tricky client to work with. For example, one of my supervisees realised that the reason she was particularly anxious about one of her clients was because he had the same arrogant swagger about him that her father had. Blinded by her fear of being as helpless in this relationship as she was with her Dad, she felt he was an impossible man to work with. I encouraged her to confront her own fears in the session with him, and even to share the effect he was having on her so that he should gain some insight into his own effect on others. This turned out to be a revolutionary step forward for her and changed her practice profoundly. She realised that people were just people trying to get well and happy and that her fears were her own emotions that she had to first of all identify, and then do something about.

This required her to listen in an unfocussed way. She had to step back from the situation, identify her own fears, realise that he did in fact have an effect on people that was quite intimidating and that that was half of his presenting problem.

### **Which listening skills should we use for unfocussed listening?**

Go back to stage 1 and 2 of your listening skills audios:

- Reflecting feelings and meanings
- Immediacy

- Summarising
- Advanced empathy

These are all skills that fit perfectly with unfocussed listening. They are essential skills for developing the ability to listen impartially, without getting hung up on the words, and listening really with your heart to feel fears, using your eyes to observe behaviours, and your ears to listen for patterns.

## **Developing Intuition**

Developing our intuition with our clients, is really nothing more than becoming profoundly conscious of our own humanity.

That means we acknowledge our own fears and anxieties, frustrations and anger, and we use it to relate to our clients. How do we use it? By developing the energetic space to allow our clients to play out their dramas, while we observe and feedback on what they are doing and the effect they are having on us and therefore on others. The process of being able to do this competently requires us to acknowledge our deeper humanity and our own vulnerability. Sharing that sacred space with your clients builds rapport really fast. It bridges the huge gap that most of our clients feel between themselves and the larger environment. Most neuroses and psychoses are born of being isolated: either by practical reasons or by a set of beliefs that cause us to cut off from others. If you are cutting off from your clients and suffering performance anxieties, you need to reach out and connect up with other therapists, or engage in a self development programme that gives you a ticket to belong to a larger community.

## **Empathy**

You can develop empathy by using unfocussed listening skills, knowing yourself really well, and developing your intuition. However, do not confuse empathy with sympathy. Sympathy is the club where everyone commiserates together against the big bad world out there, and we all dissolve in mutual back rubbing and tear wiping. Empathy however, is where you remain quite centred in the therapists chair and allow yourself to profoundly relate to your client without getting sucked into sympathy. Sympathy will cause you to try too hard to rescue them. Empathy will just create the energetic space where it's ok for them to feel bad and disenchanting. Sympathy will create a sticky client who may be difficult to shake off, whereas empathy will create a bridge of healing between you and them which can remain in the professional arena.

You will only get sucked into sympathy if you don't yet accept your own fears and vulnerabilities and you're subconsciously looking for people to save to make you feel effective. There is no problem with having a desire to remove another person's suffering. The question is, how do you do that effectively. And that is by knowing yourself and your fears and vulnerabilities profoundly so that you know that when your client is distressed, it's ok for them to be there and to work it through with a competent person who can hold that space for them while they do so. How does hypnotherapy fit into that? Excellently. In say, 8 sessions of hypnosis, you will probably find that at least 2 of them are best spent in this kind of counselling relationship just so that your client can have that space to not have to perform and produce results for you, let alone themselves. In my opinion, the desire in the client to spend time talking instead of in hypnosis is a sign that you are doing an excellent job of supporting them while they break through their barriers to wellbeing.

Remember to check regularly for Open Mind's live events and book yourself on one. I focus on experiential so that you get the opportunity yourselves to breakthrough into new concepts of who you are and how you practice. It requires of course, for you to be open minded and ready to grow. I really look forward to working with you on a live course sometimesoon.