

## **Process Language for the Seven Channels of Experience For Transformative Couples Therapy™**

The purpose of Process Language is to engender safety, connection and intimacy as we share our experiences throughout the workshop and in working with clients and especially couples. Through these ways of generating more conscious and “vulnerably owned” communication, we aim to reduce the tendency of social language to evaluate, judge and interpret.

Although using this language may feel awkward or unfamiliar at first, I encourage you to try it on. My experience is that this method of communicating is highly effective at creating access to the richness of “bottom-up” experience that lies beneath our social habits of interaction and provides a means to give witnessing that is more deeply received and taken in. This way of accessing somatically constructs new experiences, which change the brain productively. These skills apply to our intimate relationships, and to expanding the capacities of therapists and couples to connect safely and more deeply within the self and one to another.

### **Key Points:**

Speak in “I” language.

*Social Speech Example:* During the morning of the workshop, a member of the audience of therapists wants to give support to the couple who has just done some moving work in the session. “You are so good at saying what you feel. You really know how to stay with your partner and reflect each other in a great way.”

While this statement is “positive” and generous, it is also an evaluation, and can only leave the couple members with the option to accept this “praise” as true about themselves, or to reject what the witness is saying, depending on how they judged themselves. Both options take them out of core affective experience.

*An Alternative:* “I feel so humble, as I see you with your partner. As I hear you make statements that reflect her, I feel myself relax into a deepening of my sense of trusting you myself. I feel inspired”

With this statement, the group members are not invited to agree nor disagree with the witness's comment, because the witness is speaking solely of his/her own experience. The group members are held on level footing with the therapist who is speaking, and are free to take in this reflection and explore their response to having touched the therapist who speaks in this way.

### **Use present tense.**

This one can be a little bit of a mind-boggler, but it's worth it! This part of the language comes out of the Authentic Movement tradition. Here we can bring forward the intension to activate the portions of the brain and the body that have the experience in the present moment, even if that moment is brought forward as a memory from the past. This brings greater aliveness and intimacy into the sharing.

*Social Speech Example:* During a moment when a participant shares with the whole group, "I had a really hard time earlier in the group in staying present. I just wasn't getting it and I touched into some old shame I had about being deficient."

This is a vulnerable share, and certainly leaves room for empathy and contact. However, speaking (and tracking the body) in the present creates the opportunity for everyone in the room to come into the experience with the speaker. When we speak in the present, like we would when sharing a dream, we invite others into our immediate embodied experience.

"From the first moments in the workshop this morning, I find myself struggling to feel as like I am getting this work. I feel flooded and confused a lot. I feel myself contracting...as if I should know all of this already, even though I know that a lot of this feels really new to me."

Also: "As I slide back in time to when this Process Group session begins, I am struggling to get the experience freshly with an open mind. Now I feel relieved that I am being in the moment."

Also: "I'm imagining I am sitting in the therapist chair (where David is sitting) and I realize I have no idea what to do. I'm totally stumped and feel this wave of anxiety rising right up from my belly to my heart. I get this same anxiety in therapy sessions in my office."

## **Speak from Bodily Experience. (Seven Channels of Experience™ practice)**

Using David Mars' Seven Channels of Experience™: Sensation, Emotion, Energetic, Movement, Auditory, Visual and Imaginal: notice, identify and share from your immediate experience in "I statements". (See the Seven Channels attached below if you want more detail.)

*Social Speech Example:* In dyads reflecting about the experience of seeing the videotaped trauma treatment session in the morning, "I really agree with what is happening in the session. It's like there's a beauty in how effective this is."

An Alternative: "As I hear David's voice quality (auditory channel) I feel a speaking that somehow gets to my heart (energetic/emotion and/or sensation channel).

Also: "I'm actually aware of heat (sensation channel) in my heart. This heat feels like it carries a kind of expanding energy (energetic channel)" that moves outward (movement channel)."

"I'm feel appreciation (emotion) for how the couple meets each other in this part of the session. I hear something telling me (auditory/imaginal channel) that there is something real here."

"I feel a bittersweet feeling...happy and at the same time shrinking away from you (combined emotion and movement channels) as I say this out loud."

Rather than talking about evaluation and thinking, the conversation shifts into a vulnerability of inner reflection that reveals how both people are relating to an experience of stretching beyond the habitual that is "edgy".

## **Generic Wording (Tactical Defenses): It, That, They, We, & You versus I**

*Social Speech Example:* During a large group sharing on the day before the arrives: "It seems like we all want to help our patients...when you just ache with how much you can feel their struggle and want to be of help. It's one of the beautiful and challenging things about this work."

While this person is in touch with some very meaningful experience, she is subtly distancing herself from the immediacy of her experience by using the ingrained social speech of "you", "we", "that" and "it" instead of "I". She is also

blurring into attributing her experience to the whole group, which may or may not be true for other members.

*An Alternative:* "I'm aware of how much I want to help my patients, and I feel this ache in my heart for how much I feel so transparent in this work. I'm opening in new ways here today. I am grateful to be feeling so much compassion. I am also a bit over my comfort level about all of this."

Also: "I feel confused and stuck in my head with all this language stuff. I feel restricted from being spontaneous and I just want to say what I want to say the way I speak! This feels a bit too-much-all-at-once to me"

### **"The Way I Feel You in Me"**

We have the opportunity in this workshop to "dream into" being the therapist, the male partner, the female partner and the therapist. Rather than talking about "them", the workshop participant feels into how each person is experiencing the other "within" him or herself. This is going beyond empathy and toward unitive experience. (Adler, 1995)

"The therapist in me feels...(this provides a way for the witness to step into his experience in the context of the therapist )...the courage to be vulnerable and confident at the same time."

"As I put myself in the shoes of \_\_\_\_\_ who just took this stretch just now, I am noticing that I feel so free to speak the truth of what I am saying...kind of experimentally and yet with what feels true to me."

"As I hear you say \_\_\_\_\_, the therapist in me feels a little contracted and yet determined to trust my impulse in the moment. "

"As (female partner's name) I am aware of my eyes gleaming in response to being recognized by my partner reaching out and touching my hand."

The above is just a brief introduction to these ways of perceiving, receiving and expressing with Process Language. I hope you will find yourself playing with going deeper into accessing and expressing new experiences with fresh reflections to go with them during the workshop. These are all ways to bring forward stretches of bottom-up experience into your work with individuals and couples and your somatic connection to your self and anyone else with whom you communicate.

© 2013 Written-up by Jessica Wolk-Benson, MFT in collaboration with David Mars, Ph.D. and Karen Pando-Mars, MFT.

\*The Process Language model and the Channels of Experience™ have been developed by David Mars, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Transformative Therapy. The sources of his work are Charlotte Selver, Janet Adler, John Weir and Arnold Mindell and from empirical research in affective neuroscience by, Bud Craig and Jaak Panksepp, Colwyn Trevarthen, Allan Schore and many others.