

PRESENCE

presence: a turning of one's whole person toward the other, together with a turning away from being preoccupied with oneself; a viewing of the other in his or her unique otherness; a staying with and honoring of the direct experience of the individual; a way of being, an existential stance, not a technique.

Discussion:

Presence cannot be forced. One makes oneself available and it comes through grace. Presence can be overwhelming for some patients, particularly the narcissistically vulnerable individual, and must be modulated so that it is not experienced as an intrusion or a danger. (Yontef, 1993b, pp. 219-20, 274-5; Hycner and Jacobs, 1995, pp. 16, 224) This relational stance is in contrast to the classical psychoanalytic model of neutrality, distance, and the presentation of the therapist as a "blank screen" for the projection of the transference.

Illustrative Quotations:

• **Buber:** "All real living is meeting." "Nothing is present for him except this one being," (1958, pp. 11, 32) "...all true healing takes place through meeting." (1957/1990, pp. 93-97) "genuine and unreserved communication." (in Yontef, 1993b, 34; Buber, 1965, ch. III)

• **Zinker:** "Presence means 'to be present' as one's self with nothing added or missing, in order to allow the client ...to emerge, brighten, engage and be assimilated. While presence is easy to point at in the moment, it is difficult to describe in words; it is both a psychological state and a spiritual openness; it is the openness of the eyes and ears, but an openness of the heart as well. We become 'self-as-witness'...."

"When we speak of the presence of therapists, we mean that they communicate another dimension of self beyond verbal interventions.... The vision of therapists in a state of presence is peripheral and diffuse. In a silent and subtle way, they are grounded and slow rather than light-headed and rushed. In this state our breathing is deep, full, even. Our sense of time is slow and measured. Our body is self-supported and aware. The therapists' silence as they listen and attend is as important...as the words they speak. The silence of presence evokes liveliness in the system. ...When therapists are distracted..., their presence and effect are diminished."

"When I experience another's presence, I feel free to express myself, to *be* myself. To reveal any tender, vulnerable parts, to trust that I will be received without judgment or evaluation." (1994, pp. 32-33 158-9)

• **Yontef:** "In the dialogic relationship the therapist is present as a person, and does not keep himself in reserve as in the analytic stance nor function as a technician." "Regularly, judiciously, and with discrimination [the Gestalt therapist] expresses observations, preferences, feelings, personal experience and thoughts. Thus the therapist shares her perspective by modeling phenomenological reporting, which aids the patient's learning about trust and use of immediate experience to raise awareness." "The therapist's active presence is alive and excited (hence warm), honest and direct. Patients can see, hear and be told how they are experienced, what is seen, how the therapist feels, what the therapist is like as a person. Growth occurs from real contact between real people." (1993b, pp. 35, 127, 147)

• **Rogers:** "...whenever or however the therapist makes an object of the person – 'whether by diagnosing him, analyzing him, or perceiving him impersonally in a case history' – he stands in the

way of his therapeutic goal. The therapist is deeply helpful only when he relates as a person, risks himself as a person in the relationship, experiences the other as a person in his own right, 'Only then is there a meeting of a depth which dissolves the pain of aloneness in both client and therapist.' ” (in Friedman, 1985/1994, p. 48.; Rogers, 1951/2003)

• **Hycner and Jacobs:** “Being fully present can be a powerful experience. In fact, for those individuals who are not used to having another person fully present to them, or whose sense of personhood is tenuous, the other being fully present may be experienced as overwhelming. ...[Presence] is never...imposed upon another. There needs to be a sensitivity to how this presence will impact this particular individual. If it were imposed, it would be the application of an abstraction, or a technique. True presence precludes both of those.”

“Therapists must be willing to allow themselves to be touched and moved by the patient. ...presence means also that the therapist is willing to be open to a kind of contact in which the patient can touch the therapist’s subjective experience, both directly and indirectly. ...at crucial points in the therapy, for instance in efforts to address serious disruptions in the therapeutic relationship, or, at certain developmental thresholds, the patient may be intensely interested in and require access to the therapist’s experiencing. Self development proceeds not only through the experiencing of attunement to the patient’s otherness, but through the experience of that attunement coming from a discernable, personal other.” (1995, pp. 16, 220)

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Stephanie Sabar, MSW, LCSW
Website: stephaniesabar.com