

## **Table-talking: Verbal Interaction – The Missing Piece in Bodywork**

*Words can be friends bringing practitioners and clients together. Our words and our client's words can make more conscious the interactions that happen through touch. Words can be messengers that bypass tissue barriers. Words can companion the sensations that arise from the body. Words can help retrieve information buried deep within the body. Words can elicit feeling tones that help the client listen. Words can be codices that help us translate the language of the body. Words can lend coloration to changes that occur as awareness grows. Words can be comforts and supporters in places of pain and fear. And words can be trail markers as we mutually discern the path of the session.*

The central assertion of the article is that verbal interactions that relate directly to bodily responses are helpful in releasing holding patterns and are essential to educating our clients. Bodyworkers know from experience that the body doesn't lie. We also know that most *verbal* therapies rely upon communication that is *not* rooted in felt experience in the body. Bodily sensations, unless they are pleasurable, are considered irritations and punishments. Most people carry stories about their bodies into a session. Learning to feel and listen to the sensations of the body, we encounter the emotions, thoughts, and experiences associated with feeling, sensation, and insight.

Part of our role is to companion our clients as they discover that their body did not betray them or that their body is not the source of their guilt or fear. In fact, the body is a good and loyal servant to each of us – it reflects back to us exactly what we are dealing with internally. It is a communicator extraordinaire. If we feel love, our body gives us signals that feel wonderful even when accompanied by pain. If we feel anger, guilt, or fear, our bodies reflect those emotions as uncomfortable sensations. As bodyworkers, we are constantly listening to the language of the body with our hands and from our informed experience.

One of the steps in raising clients' consciousness about their bodies occurs when we verbally address those bodyparts we are touching by describing in non-judgmental language what we are doing and what we are feeling with our hands. This introduction to the body's language draws the client's conscious awareness to the site upon which we are focusing; a very important piece in bodily awareness is awakened. We can also ask the client to experience that bodypart when our hands are removed, feeling the echoes of our work. As the client has this felt sense of that part of the body, symbol and meaning arise. The client may have visual or auditory experiences arise as well. When a bodypart is consciously explored, the client usually becomes aware that other non-painful sensations occur at that site. Then the practitioner asks the client to use words to describe the sensations that he or she is experiencing. Those words, when mirrored back by the practitioner, help clients become more and more refined in describing what they are feeling.

There have been many debates and much legislation passed about the scope of practice of the bodywork professionals. As a latecomer to the field of professional caregiving, bodywork has been carefully, and sometimes jealously, scrutinized by each of the other caregiving professions. Our territory, professional certification and scope of practice have been drafted carefully so as not to encroach upon other's realms. Bodyworkers cannot diagnose, we cannot prescribe, and we cannot do psychological work with our clients. Yet we all know that when we are one-on-one with clients we are expected to treat our client's symptoms. We are expected to counsel with our clients and to make recommendations for their continued well-being. Some of this can be legitimately done if the practitioner's training and licensure includes such interaction.

I hope that this article fosters an appreciation and respect for verbal interaction that derives directly from the body-referenced experiences of the client and practitioner. Everything that arises in a session or in-between sessions has a bodily component to it. All symptoms: physical, emotional and mental are accompanied by a felt sense, a set of sensations that are accessed directly through the body. The language of the body is full of metaphor and symbols that may inform the process. And awareness that is anchored in the present moment can be used for healing. Bodyworkers can train their hands and words over time to be skillful listeners, mirrors, guides, and companions. What we're talking about is a new school of verbal interaction; one that is derived from within the profession itself and has its own intrinsic wisdom and systems of interaction; one that is intimately focused upon the language of the body, the mind, and the self-conscious being that resides within.

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