



COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES
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BECOMING THE OTHER

Maryhelen SNYDER, 9672 Farmside Place Vienna, VA 22182, USA, ph +1 703 759 3168

Definition: Teaching clients to dialogue empathically with another person, speaking 'in that person's shoes' expressing that person's view and experience.

Elements:

The therapist asks: *'If you'd like to learn to listen deeply, could you describe an emotionally important memory (up to 3 minutes)?'* The client tells this. The therapist may say: *'If it's OK, I'd like to speak now as though I'm you, .. trying to enter your world and feel what you feel. I won't interpret or analyze but may use words you didn't when I try to speak as you. I'm not actually you, so please interrupt if what I say doesn't fit exactly for you'*.

The therapist guides the client to:

- *'Listen carefully in order to experience another person's feelings, values, intentions, and growing edges'*.
- *'While listening, set aside analysis, judgment, your perspective; instead, welcome the other's experience into your consciousness'*.
- *'As you practice "becoming", allow yourself to deepen what the other person has said. .. to be moved'*.
- *'If you're interrupted (even by a facial expression that something doesn't fit), you can say, "I didn't get that quite right, did I? Can you help me?" (or "Let me try again").'*
- *'When you stop, you can ask "Does that feel right? Is there anything you'd like to correct, or add?"'*

Clients & couples practice 'becoming' the other person within and between sessions, starting with minor, and later major, conflict areas. At follow-up couples who're 'blocking' can have booster sessions.

Related procedures: Active listening; expressed empathy; internalized-other interviewing; two-chair dialogue

Application: In individual, couple, and family therapy, and in training and supervision.

1st use? Of 'Becoming', Snyder (1995)

References:

1. Scuka R (2005) *Relationship enhancement therapy: Healing through deep empathy and intimate dialogue*. New York: Routledge
2. Snyder M (1995) "Becoming": A method for expanding systemic thinking and deepening empathic accuracy. *Family Process*, 34: 241-253
3. Snyder M (2009) Becoming each other: A single case example of relational consciousness in couple therapy. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 37: 190-199

Case Illustration 1 (Snyder unpublished)

Ron and Janet attended their 4th weekly session where each spoke to the other from their own experience, listened attentively as though inside the other's skin, and accepting corrections with grace and without argument. Janet told Ron her differing view about their argument the

previous night, without being mean or critical. Ron's face reddened with rigid neck tendons, protruding veins, and clenched jaw.

Trying to empathize with clenched teeth without feeling attuned to the speaker doesn't usually work, so the therapist asked Ron if he'd like the therapist to answer empathically and then allow him to express his feelings. Ron replied "I might speak as you showed us in our last session" (see Elements above. Clients can learn empathic skill after just once speaking "in the shoes" of another person. Ron spoke as Janet while looking at her: "Last night when we talked I wanted so much to have you understand why I don't feel heard by you, but I couldn't explain it right. It was one more time when I didn't feel I was getting what I felt across to you," and relaxed as he did this. Janet cried and said through tears, "You understood me better than I understood myself." Ron added, "Until now I could never get why you felt as you did." They listened while "becoming the other" to dialogue *with* rather than *against* each other.

Case Illustration 2 (Snyder 2009)

After couple therapy with several therapists, before starting with Mel Snyder Jean and Adam decided to divorce once their daughter finished high school the next year. Jean saw Mel practising 'becoming' as a visiting presenter, practised 'becoming' as an intern, and invited Adam to learn 'becoming' with Mel to help them understand each other. By their 8th 2-hour couple session with Mel they had practised "becoming each other" at home, and wanted coaching.

Jean: (turning to Adam) 'You say you're a "creature of habits" which sometimes seem more important to you than I am so I'd like to understand more what you mean.

Mel: *'Is it OK if I become you, Jean, and ask Adam about that somewhat differently?'* (Jean assents. Mel moves a chair beside Jean to also face Adam). *'I long for more closeness with you. ..Your habits - watching TV, reading the newspaper, being alone when you get home - seem to take you away from me. I miss you. Might being a "creature of habit" be about fear? I want more of you. I get lonely.* (Adam's body relaxes; Jean appears moved).

Mel: (to Jean) *Does that feel right? Is there anything you want to change or add?*

Jean: Yeh, that's right. I feel vulnerable. I want to add something. (To Adam) Saturday morning we usually each do our own thing, but last Saturday I broke the mold and it felt scary. Instead of going to Starbuck's - a habit of mine

Adam: (smiling) Ding.

Jean: (laughing) ..'I thought "I'll see if Adam will come with me to our second house to work on the garden." Your saying "yes" meant a lot because gardening is my thing. You came and seemed to enjoy it.'

Adam: 'Can I be you?' (Jean nods). 'I want us to be closer. I get lonely when you withdraw into the comfort of TV or newspapers. I wonder if you're afraid. Saturday, when I risked asking you to come with me and you did and we had a good time, made me happy.

Jean: (nodding assent through this) Yip

Adam: Mel's modeling getting to your pain about this was very helpful.

Jean: Yeh, I could feel the shift. ...

6 months after ending therapy Jean and Adam still often 'became each other' when they felt disconnected.