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The Couples Flutter Technique: For Reducing Activation Levels To Perceived Threats

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*Adapted from Phil Manfield's "The Flash Technique" which is an emerging modality that helps cure trauma for people resistant to EMDR (and can be a technique to do before doing EMDR with clients with Trauma).

Page 5 is a one page summary of how to do this that you can use once you and your couples understand how to do it. The following 4 pages go into more detail.

The Couples Flutter Technique

- 1) Therapist has the client describe the newspaper headline of their trauma/idea that triggers their nervous system. Examples:
 - a. He fucked his co-worker in Berkeley.
 - b. He must be cheating now since he didn't answer his phone.
- 2) Therapist uses a metaphor that helps the client see the "threat idea" as a story that is separate from themselves.
 - a. Ex: The Idea I use now is: "Imagine that this is a thumb drive. And in this thumb drive there is a folder. And in this folder there is a Word 97 document. And in the Word document is a Story. And the Story is about the "Threat" / aka "The story of when he fucked his co-worker in Berkeley. It has all of the emotions, feelings, reactions, overwhelm, "how could he!", etc. There is a 300 page story there. And that thumb drive is not plugged in to the computer. And the computer is not on. And the monitor is broken. But nevertheless, in the thumb-drive, which we are NOT reading, is a story about 'how he fucked his co-worker in Berkeley!'"
- 3) The Therapist shows the client how to do bi-lateral stimulation with orchestrated intimacy.
 - a. Have them sit across from each other.
 - b. Have the anchor person lovingly look in their partners eyes.
 - c. Tell him to squeeze one hand and say, "I love you".
 - d. Tell him to squeeze the other hand and say, "I'm here."
 - e. Tell the anchor person to maintain a lovingness in their heart, maintain eye contact whether the other person is looking at them or not, and rotate squeezing their left and right hand every 1.5 seconds with every once in a while whispering or saying, "I love you", "I'm here."
 - f. Sometimes the word "I love you" or "I'm here" can trigger their wounds being activated. If that is the case then change those words to something else. "You are precious, I'm here" "You're worthy, I'm here" Make sure the replacement words are 3 syllables or less (which allows for a good squeezing cadence).

4) The Therapist explains to the client how to hold a preferred experience in their mind's eye. The client is instructed that a preferred experience is anything that if they were to think about would make them feel good. The more evocative of an experience the better. If they have a strong relational preferred experience, I prefer using those. Examples of preferred experiences some of my clients have used include:

- a. A beautiful sunset.
- b. A loved one holding them.
- c. A video of their child learning to ride a bike.
- d. Sex
- e. Drugs
- f. Rock and roll
- g. a debaucherous experience at a party where a friend was acting silly,
- h. a spiritual resource (Jesus or Mary or Buddha holding them),
- i. surfing,
- j. performing a concert,
- k. Grandfather (dead now) holding them as a child,
- l. Going for a walk with a friend, etc.

Tip: Feel free to change what preferred experience you are using if it gets the client stuck into accidentally dwelling on the content of the USB drive. For example, I had to switch an internal resource from having a Hippy Jesus hugging me to a beautiful experience of nature for my partner to help me clear something in my nervous system because for some reason feeling Jesus's love triggered my USB trigger because the content on my drive had to do with not really believing my partner was really going to be there for me (love). So, since "love" as a resource was sticky for me, we just found another resource and then The Couples Flutter Technique was successful.

5) The therapist instructs anchoring partner to continue to squeeze "I love you", "I'm here" taps every 1.5 seconds.

6) I let the client know that there is a difference between a memory and a pre-cursor memory. In a memory, we feel and are impacted on what we experience and with a pre-cursor memory, we are subconsciously aware without being consciously impacted.

- a. a memory takes .5 seconds to activate
- b. A pre-cursory memory takes .2 seconds to activate.
- c. We want to activate a pre-cursory memory, so we use a technique of having the clients "flutter" their eyes quickly and not think about the fact that the USB drive exists. We want to pay special attention that they do not accidentally start thinking about the trauma memory. There is nothing magical about fluttering the eyes, but is a physical mechanism for getting them to be aware of something without thinking about it.

7) Instruct the anchor person to help their partner stay in their preferred experience while continuing to do the bilateral stimulation of "I love you, I'm here" squeezes.

- 8) After the person clearing their activation nods to acknowledge that they are enjoying being in their preferred state (while the alternating squeezing continues), say to them, “When I say the word ‘Flutter’, flutter your eyes to acknowledge the USB drive exists without thinking about anything on it.”
- 9) Every 4-6 squeezes, say the word “Flutter” and monitor what is happening. Make sure that
 - a. The person clearing her activation is not accidentally revisiting the trauma / activating memory when they are fluttering.
 - b. Have the anchor partner say, “I love you, I’m here” while squeezing after the person flutters
 - i. That is helpful because it can distract them from accidentally starting to think about the trauma.
 - c. Encourage the anchor to cheerlead the person clearing their trigger’s preferred experience. Encourage them to be genuinely loving in their heart when they are squeezing their partners hands.
 - d. After 5 rounds of this (after the person flutters their eyes after 4-6 taps), then have the anchoring partner to encourage their loved one to take a deep breath and come back into the room together to have a conversation about what happened.
- 10) Then you ask the person what their SUDS is (Subjective Unit of Disturbance).
 - a. You educate them that when you are asking them to self-assess their state you are NOT asking them to determine how awful their story is on the USB drive. Ask them to scale it 0 to 10.
 - i. This sometimes takes repeating because people often will say they have a level 1-3 when they actually are not disturbed at all. So, if that happens, re-educate them the difference between their own nervous system and the story on the USB drive.
 1. I might give an example like, Trump getting elected is awful but my nervous system right this minute is calm. Or I am aware that the Holocaust is terrible, and right this minute while I am aware of the horror of it, I feel relaxed.
 - a. Sometimes having those extreme examples are helpful because people often have unhelpful rules internalized which presume they can only really care if their nervous system is jacked. It is the same type of logic that couples have that cause them to stay in escalation mode (ex: “If I am calm and loving instead of in a state of raging then he won’t take the affair seriously.”)

11) Ask them what their SUDS would have been an hour ago if they were aware of the USB drive content.

- a. This sounds like it is a unnecessary step, but it is actually essential if they are to practice this at home. Since the material is not consciously processed (such as in therapeutic interventions), they do not have a cathartic relief. So, in order to be motivated to do the exercise that clears their triggers, they need to revisit and consciously affirm the fact that it works.
 - i. Client needs to be able to say to you, "An hour ago, when I thought about this, I would have been at a level 7 or 8, and right now, I'm not disturbed at all."

12) Provide a little psycho-ed on how/why this works:

- a. By having a loving resource (their partner being loving with the eyes, touch, and words), combined with a preferred experience that they are fantasizing about, while at the same time activating a pre-cursor memory to a triggering event, they are providing the context for the triggered memory to go from being stored in the amygdala (fight or flight part of the brain) into the pre-frontal cortex which is capable of love, compassion, and the types of emotions they experienced in their preferred experience. Let them know they still have the same memory but it is stored in a different (preferred) location in the brain and that is why they are not triggered anymore.

13) Congratulate them and encourage them to make lists of triggers and clear one a day.

14) Proceed to do couples work how you normally would. For me, I follow the EFT model complemented with Hakomi enactments and R-CS sense of self being affirmed.

15) Their SUDS will go down. Sometimes all the way to 0. Sometimes it will go from a 10 to a 7. Then you do it again and it may go from a 7 to a 5. Then you do it again and it goes from a 5 to a 3. Almost always you get it cleared or substantially cleared.

The Couples Flutter Technique

Cliff Notes Version: After couples know how to do it and do it a few times successfully, you can give them this handout as a reminder of the steps. Or use it as a reminder of the steps the first few times you do it.

But given you've experienced our session, in a nutshell:

- 1) Make sure Client can access preferred experience.
- 2) have them squeeze partners hands 1.5 seconds apart with affirming words like "I love you, I'm here"
- 3) Have them flutter their eyes an awareness of the threat (using a metaphor of it being in a book or on a usb drive but not having to go into the story).
- 4) Have them flutter their eyes every 4-6 hand squeezes while they are in preferred experience without leaving the preferred experience.
- 5) Have them do that 5 times.
- 6) Have them consciously assess their SUDS (Subjective Units of Disturbance) This is different from how awful their story is.
- 7) Have them compare their SUDS to what they would have been 2 hours ago.

HOW TO DO IT WITHOUT A PARTNER:

You can show them how to do this without their partner. To do this yourself, you simply tap your knees left right 1.5 seconds apart instead of getting your hands squeezed with doses of love.

Let them know that if they do it by themselves to watch out for making sure that they don't think of the trauma when they flutter, simply be aware of the existence of a flash drive without even saying the word flash drive. Also almost always when people do it by themselves, they have a tendency to speed up the taps when they flutter their eyes. So tell them that after they flutter, stay in their preferred experience and intentionally slow down their tapping to 1.5 seconds.