

## Nurturing Resources and more Healthy Responses

In therapy, interventions which remind a client about their strengths and resources can be powerful. It can be useful for clients to learn new coping skills and give them the confidence that they will be able to cope in the future, i.e. that they are less helpless than they think. It can be empowering to learn and grow oneself out of challenging life moments and self-destructive scripts.

Insight, awareness and self-understanding are especially valuable resources which we nurture in therapy. For instance, we might explore how a client's self-destructive behaviour is preceded by feeling shamed. Therapy might then focus on helping the person manage that shame and to think about what resources can be brought to bear to help shift the self-destructive behaviour. The question to ask is what would enable a more positive/healthy and/or choiceful response?

That said, I sometimes worry that psychotherapy can foster an unhealthy dependence on the therapist/therapy and we forget clients' own creative capacities for self-healing and self-help. Sometimes the most helpful intervention in therapy is working out with the client what more 'healthy' responses look like. To this end, I find it helpful to refer to Masterson's (1988) work on the healthy capacities of the 'Real Self' as opposed to the 'False' or defensive Self.

Here is a precis of Masterson's list which I always think of as a 'manifesto' for healthy living:

- 1) **The capacity to experience a wide range of feelings deeply** i.e. not blocking/repressing feelings, being spontaneous, expressing self fully e.g. in joy.
- 2) **The capacity to expect appropriate entitlements** – To feel deserving; locus of control where we feel some mastery over our lives and there is an expectation of good experiences
- 3) **The capacity for self-assertion and self-activation** – To be able to identify one's own unique individual needs, dreams, hopes, goals and to be assertive about expressing them.
- 4) **Acknowledgment of self-esteem** – The capacity to identify, acknowledge and use effective coping skills; being able to see oneself as worthwhile and having skills/abilities.
- 5) **Ability to soothe painful feelings** – The real self can take care of the person, ensuring painful feelings are minimised and kept in perspective
- 6) **Ability to make and stick to commitments** – The real self enables us to sustain relationships and goals whatever the set backs.
- 7) **The ability to be creative replacing old unhelpful patterns with new, more successful ones;** being able to devise ways to problem-solve and find solutions from life's challenges.
- 8) **The capacity to express the real self fully and honestly** when in relationships with minimal anxiety about either the possibility of engulfment or abandonment.
- 9) **The ability to be alone without feeling abandoned by others.** It involves the capacity to manage ourselves/our feelings and not confusing aloneness with loneliness.
- 10) **The feeling of continuity of the self** – Being able to acknowledge the core of oneself as having a continuity over time and being confident of 'I'; it's about knowing and accepting one self.

Masterson, J.F. (1988). *The search for the real self: Unmasking the personality disorders of our age*. New York: The Free Press.