

The Gift of Therapeutic Presence

By Suzanne Scurlock-Durana; guest author for John Upledger, DO, OMM

Editor's note: Dr. John Upledger has asked Suzanne Scurlock-Durana to share her insights in this month's "CranioSacrally Speaking" column.

As a therapist, wouldn't you love to have as much energy for the last client of the day as you do for the very first? Do you ever wonder what it would feel like to be so centered in your sessions that when a client's emotional issues come up, you're able to stay calm and balanced and fully deliver your therapy? Can you imagine how much more effective you'd be if you could more easily feel the subtleties of the craniosacral, lymphatic and visceral systems?

These are just a few of the gifts waiting for you when you strengthen your therapeutic presence. You see, no matter what type of therapy you perform, the outcome of any session is influenced profoundly by your ability to hold a strong healing presence – that unseen, unspoken connection you have with every single client. To be therapeutically effective as a clinician, your energetic bank account needs to stay in the black. However, many therapists often "overgive" their energy to clients because of their commitment to help others. In their enthusiasm, they end up paying more attention to other people's needs than to their own.

That's why learning to build and maintain your own reservoir of healthy inner resources has to become your first priority. This means learning how to be in touch with and nurture yourself so your presence can catalyze and foster the healing process for others. Developing your therapeutic presence in this way is one of the greatest gifts you can give yourself and your clients. The benefits in such a healing partnership are profound. Think about it. Don't you find it easier to release tension in the company of someone who's energetically full and steady? In that same way, your clients can sense when you're fully grounded and present. That's when the bond of trust forms, the walls come down, and your clients can relax much more

quickly.

As you become aware of what nurtures and feeds you, you become more stable and grounded. This allows you to more accurately honor your client's internal pace of healing as well. It also sharpens your ability to feel what's going on with your clients. Your energetic connection becomes a palpable resource; a reliable source of information that can help guide your work, moment by moment, and dramatically increase your effectiveness.

Developing greater therapeutic presence also is a potent antidote to burnout. As you learn to continually fill yourself with nourishing, healthy resources, you avoid becoming depleted when you hold a healing space for another. Finally, your own inner confidence naturally increases as you embody these skills in your practice. Therapists who apply these principles develop a deeper trust in their feelings, intuition and wisdom.

Here are some practical guidelines for increasing the steadiness and strength of your therapeutic presence before, during and after each bodywork session.

Before the Session

- Nurture the conviction that you deserve to take care of yourself.
- Take a reading of where you are on the inside.
- Connect to your healthy resources.
- Set a clear intention.
- Affirm the current realities.
- Remind yourself that you are not the only resource for your clients.

During the Session

- Hold a space of compassion and acceptance for your client.
- Be a container large enough for the full range of experiences your clients bring to the table.
- Establish and maintain clear boundaries.
- Be aware when your own emotional issues are triggered and know what to do about them.
- Listen to what your body, hands and intuition are telling you.
- Let your client's body tell you what it needs.

- Listen carefully to what your client tells you during the session.
- Honor your client's process and pace.
- Maintain a vision of your client as whole, healthy and free of physical and emotional pain.
- Help clients get in touch with their own capacity for self-healing.

After the Session

- Get feedback from your client.
- Acknowledge your client's courage and commitment to heal.
- Help your clients stay aware of the bigger picture.
- Make suggestions for supplemental or follow-up work, if appropriate.
- Take care of yourself.
- Close each session with an attitude of gratitude and acceptance.

Practicing the art of therapeutic presence takes patience and ongoing commitment. But it's well worth the effort. Our work is richest when we can be in each moment with our clients -- in that space of compassion that enables us to receive and give in every session. That's when we move beyond offering a collection of techniques and become a complete conduit for healing.

The ability to be a container for someone else's healing brings each of us into a deeper state of grace and resonance. In this paradigm, to give is indeed to receive.



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