

SomatoEmotional Release: A Whole-Person Treatment

By Alice D. (Ali) Lindsey, MS, LMT, CST-D

A growing body of evidence supports the theory that body tissues are capable of holding memories and emotions. Those of us who practice manual therapies – including physicians, massage therapists, physical therapists – often discover that emotion arises spontaneously in our client during a hands-on treatment. However, our training doesn't normally prepare us to support this emotional releasing process. We are taught to leave emotions for mental health professionals to sort out.

However, since physical touch is often enough to trigger emotions and memories, is there a way for us to support the client's emotional releasing process?

Fortunately, each person has an inner wisdom that knows exactly what to do when emotional releasing begins, and the touch therapist may simply follow its instructions. Even better, when our clients process and release these emotional memories, the conditions that caused them to seek touch therapy will often improve as well.

SomatoEmotional Release (SER) is a therapeutic process developed by Dr. John E. Upledger, DO, OMM, of Palm Beach Gardens. Advanced CranioSacral Therapy (CST) and SomatoEmotional Release® (SER) therapists use these techniques to facilitate the client's self-healing process.

When a therapist uses CST and SER, he monitors changes in the CranioSacral rhythm. These changes indicate significant thoughts or body positions for the client. Using the rhythm as a guide, he acts as a facilitator, leading the client physically and verbally in the direction indicated. Remember when you were a kid playing a blindfold game where you yelled "hot-hot-hot" when the person was getting close to the goal, and "cold-cold-cold" when they were going the wrong way? Well, something like that happens when the person is remembering something significant or that the body is in a significant position. It's the change in the CranioSacral rhythm that gives clues to the therapist. Also, what's right for one client is not for another, so there is no set protocol for a treatment session; the therapist merely

monitors the rhythm and watches for signs that restrictions are releasing.

In the current health care model, we are expected to fix things when patients and clients come to see us. However, it turns out that rather than directing the healing session, we can just let the client's own body tell us how to proceed. Once an emotional releasing process starts, we can step back and act as non-directive, non-invasive facilitators to allow the person to heal himself. We ask questions to guide the client to experience the events and emotions fully and to process them in whatever way is appropriate to the client. It takes an open and loving attitude on the part of the therapist, as well as trust in each person's inner wisdom.

The SER often begins with physical work, and the body tissues seem to provide a starting point for the SER process. However, the SER is a whole-person event, and its conclusion normally encompasses body, mind, emotions, spirit, and all energy systems. For example, accessing and releasing the memory and emotions surrounding a childhood fall may resolve a long-standing shoulder complaint even without the therapist's actually treating the shoulder.

The SER session may be verbal or nonverbal. However, it's usually more powerful if the therapist and the client dialogue out loud. Even when the memory is preverbal, a part of the client is usually able to describe and explain the significance of the memory to help the client heal any dysfunction and integrate that part of themselves that had been walled off from the consciousness. In dialoguing, the therapist asks questions that assist the client to fully re-live significant details of the memory and to resolve it in whatever way is appropriate for the person. Again, the magic is that the CranioSacral rhythm indicates when the client is on the right track to resolve the issue.

The client will usually experience relief from pain and other symptoms during the session, but he will continue to process the session on multiple levels, sometimes for days. Deeply accessing and integrating emotional memories leads to profound improvements in health and well-being.

References:

Upledger, John E. *SomatoEmotional Release and Beyond*. Palm Beach Gardens: UI Publishing, Inc.; 1990.

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