

**Handout to accompany
“Resolving Anxiety and Other Strong Feelings” DVD**

“Your task is that of altering, not abolishing”—Milton H. Erickson

Spinning Feelings
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This process can be used successfully with a wide range of clients with anxiety, panic attacks and phobias, and also with OCD, anger, jealousy, PTSD, and other very intense feelings. I have not yet found an example of an intense feeling that it did not work with. Sentences in italics and quotes provide what to say to a client. Before using this process check for congruence:

“Does this feeling have any positive function? If this feeling vanished, would you lose anything, or would you just be happy not to have it?”

Watch and listen carefully for any nonverbal incongruence that might indicate a positive function. If you detect incongruence, explore this until you are satisfied that the client is congruent about making the change.

1. Elicit the feeling *“Put yourself back into that situation, and notice the feeling that you have now.” . . .*

2. Notice the path of the feeling *“I assume that you have felt this feeling in a variety of different situations. I want you to close your eyes so that you can attend more completely to your feelings. When you imagine being in one of these situations now, where do you first notice the feeling physically in your body, and then where does the feeling move to? Please gesture with your hand or fingers to indicate that.” . . .*

This changes the client’s attention from the kinesthetic feeling to a visual image of its path through space, and provides the overall *path* of the movement of the feeling. This path may be entirely within the body, or part of it may be in space outside the body.

3. Color *“And what color is the feeling?” . . .*

This directs attention to another aspect of the visual image of the feeling.

4. Shape of the feeling *“As the feeling moves along this path, what is its shape? Is it thick or thin, round or flat, solid or hollow, etc. Gesture with your hands to show me the shape of the feeling as it moves along the path.” . . .*

This directs attention to additional aspects of the visual image.

5. Direction of Spin along the Path *“Open your eyes, and notice whether the feeling spins in a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction as it moves along this path.” . . .*

As I say this, I gesture with my finger in both directions to clearly indicate what I mean. Sometimes the client may be uncertain. When this is the case, you can ask them to try it both ways, and to notice which feels most *familiar*. “*Imagine it spinning one way, and then the other way; Which feels most familiar?*” After they identify the direction of spin, I ask them to close their eyes again.

6. Reversing the Direction of Spin “*Again put yourself back into that situation, and notice what changes when you begin, now, to spin that feeling in the opposite direction, change the color to one you like better, and add some sparkle to it.*” . . .

Reversing the direction of spin is the key change, but it is amplified by changing the color and adding sparkle. Allowing the client to choose the new color is respectful of their individuality, and allows their unconscious mind to contribute to the process. Adding in sparkle strengthens the visual image, and intensifies the client’s response to the visualization.

7. Results “*What do you experience when you do this?*” . . .

Typically the feeling either vanishes entirely, or becomes much less intense. When the client has run through this exercise a few times, the direction often automatically changes and the old pattern is not there in the same way that it was.

a. If the feeling vanishes or changes completely, check for congruence:

“*Is it fine with you if you no longer have this feeling in the future in this kind of situation?*”

b. If the feeling persists—wholly or partially—ask them, “*When you spin it even faster in that (opposite) direction, what else do notice about how it begins to change, now?*” . . .

c. If the feeling still persists, check to find out if having some part of the feeling is useful in protecting them from some kind of danger or threat.

“*Would it be useful and appropriate for you to retain a small part of this feeling in order to alert you to some potential danger in this kind of situation?*”

8. Testing “*OK, now when you try to think of this as you used to, what are you noticing that is different?*” Usually the client will find it impossible to get the old feeling back, which confirms that the change is stable and lasting.

Additional Resources

Andreas, Steve. Client session with follow-up. “Resolving Musical Performance Anxiety” DVD Real People Press (Free sample excerpt with follow-up on YouTube)

Books, CDs and DVDs can be found at the following web sites:

NickKemp.com SteveAndreas.com RealPeoplePress.com (You can sign up to receive Steve Andreas’ blog on the lower left of the home page, where this handout first appeared.)

Slowing Internal Voice Tempo Exercise Outline

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In the outline below, sentences in “*Italics*” and quotes give the exact language that I use, with explanatory remarks in parentheses, or in plain text.

Before using this process check for congruence: “*Does this feeling have any positive function? If this feeling vanished, would you lose anything, or would you just be happy not to have it?*” Watch and listen carefully for any nonverbal incongruence that might indicate a positive function. If you detect incongruence, explore this until you are satisfied that the client is congruent about making the change.

1. Accessing the Internal Voice “*Now I know from what you have told me that up until this point you have experienced this intense feeling on a number of occasions. I’d like you to bring one of these times to mind now, and let me know what you are either thinking or saying to yourself at these times just before you have the feeling. You can do this either with your eyes open or closed. Most people find it easier with their eyes closed.*”

Notice that this language is more immediate and associated than, “Think of a time when—” which is more ambiguous, and could result in them thinking of an experience by seeing themselves in it, rather than being *in* the experience and re-experiencing what they feel when that happens. Or they might run through a listing process, scanning across different examples, but without being *in* any of them. Either of these alternatives would make it more difficult to hear what they are saying to themselves.

Usually they are able to tell me immediately what they are saying to themselves, but sometimes they may have some difficulty. If they don’t know what they are saying to themselves, they may be too separated from the experience at the moment, and this is often visible in their nonverbal behavior—their body is relatively motionless, and they don’t look anxious. When this is the case, there are several choices.

One choice is to use my language to help them re-associate into the experience. “*When you are in that experience, what do you feel in your body? If you are sitting down, can you feel the shape, texture, and temperature of that particular chair, and your posture as you sit in it? If you are standing, can you feel how your feet contact the floor, and the position of your feet? Do you feel tense or relaxed, balanced or off balance?*” Usually that will enable them to really be *in* that experience, making it easy to notice what they are saying to themselves.

However sometimes it is easier to accept and utilize their separation from the problem experience by asking them to imagine that they could see an image of themselves in the problem context.

“If I were to draw a picture of you in one of these experiences, as in a comic book, where the artist draws thought bubbles above the character’s head, what should I put in the bubble to indicate what is being thought at that precise moment?”

Or you can use some version of the “as if” frame: *“If you did know what you are saying to yourself in that situation, what might it be?”* or simply, *“That’s OK, just make up something.”* Since I will be adjusting the tempo, not the content, the exact content of what the voice says is really not that important. It is only important that they come up with something that fits well for them in that situation.

Once they know what they are saying to themselves, I ask them to think of other situations in which they have their anxiety, and ask what they are saying to themselves in those. Typically it is either the same sentence, or one that is fundamentally similar, or has the same kind of presuppositions or implications—that they are about to die, or are in some kind of very difficult situation that they can’t handle, or that has very unpleasant consequences. By doing this, I am helping them to create a larger category of experiences in which they have the *same* feeling of anxiety. Then when I help them change the feeling in one of these, the change is much more likely to generalize to all the experiences in the category.

2. Noticing the Tempo *“So the sentence you have said to yourself is, ‘The plane is going to crash into the sea.’ When you have said this to yourself, do you say it in your normal conversational speaking voice, or do you say this at a faster tempo?”*

Here I am offering the client just two options; most will immediately confirm that they are using a faster tempo of speaking. If they say it’s otherwise, I ask them to check; to date out of the more than 600 clients I have done this with, every one has been able to notice a much faster tempo.

3. Baseline Tempo *“OK, now I am going to ask you to do three things. The first is to say or think this sentence exactly as you have done to date and notice how you feel in response to doing this.” . . .*

4. Slowing Tempo by One Third *“OK, now I am going to say your sentence, slowed down by about one third. After I have said it, I want you to say or think this sentence to yourself at this slowed-down speed and notice what’s different.” . . .*

Then I say their sentence out loud and slowed down, and then pause while they say it internally in the same tempo. In order to slow down the tempo they

have to change their physiology—slow their breathing, relax the tension in their vocal cords and chest, how they shape their words, etc.

5. Even Slower Tempo “OK, now I am going to say the same sentence even slower, and when I am done I want you to do the same, and let me know when you have done so.”

I then say the sentence out loud, and slow down the tempo dramatically, to demonstrate exactly what I want them to do. I allow at least two seconds after each word, often matching each word to their breathing out, so that each word is paired with the relaxation that naturally occurs when breathing out.

I watch them carefully to observe their increased tension as they anticipate when they will hear the next word, so that I can say the next word somewhat *later* than they expect. I pause even longer between the last two words of the sentence—at least double the length of the previous pauses. Then I pause to give them time to say the sentence internally in this slowed down tempo, and wait for them to tell me when they are done. . . .

6. Testing “OK, now when you try to think of this as you used to, what are you noticing that is different?” Usually their feeling of anxiety will be entirely gone; sometimes it may be greatly reduced. The tempo shift deconstructs the meaning of the old sentence, and changes their response. Very rarely it may not change much—or at all—and I follow with the visual variation below.

Visual Variation Another way to do the same exercise is to ask them to *see* the sentence in front of them as they say it to themselves, translating it from the auditory to the visual.

“Now I want you to see that sentence out in front of you, and notice what the sentence looks like in detail. Tell me how far away from you it is, what size the letters are, whether they in bold face, italics, or regular type, etc.” . . .

“Now I want you to begin to stretch the sentence apart, creating longer spaces in between the words, first noticing the new locations of the words, and then to attending to the spaces in **between** the words, rather than the words themselves.” . . .

This is a figure/ground shift of attention. If I don’t see a dramatic shift in their breathing and posture, sometimes I ask them to put space between the *letters* as well as the words. “Now I want you to separate the letters in each word. Put spaces between the letters, and then pay attention to the spaces between the letters, rather than to the letters.” This further changes the meaning of the sentence, and is also a demonstration that they can voluntarily change their feeling response.

If the sentence has a negation in it, like “I can’t—” I have sometimes suggested that they, “Remove the apostrophe and the *t* in the second word of the

sentence,” being very careful not to say the word. This reverses the meaning of the sentence entirely, and they find themselves able to do what they previously thought, “I can’t.” The same kind of deletion can be used with any other word that causes a problem. When doing this it is important to not say the word, but only refer to it indirectly by its position in the sentence “the third word,” or “the next-to-last word, etc.”

Kinesthetic tactile variation An additional variant is to ask the client to reach out and *feel* the words and letters in front of them, as if they could touch them with their fingers, translating from the auditory or visual to the kinesthetic. Then I ask them to use their hands and fingers to spread out the words—and then sometimes to also spread out the letters—and to feel the empty space between them.

In some cases I will ask them to run both the auditory and visual versions of this exercise at the same time, or to add in the kinesthetic aspect as well.

To date I have used this with around 600 clients and in a single pass, no client has been able to get back their original sentence with the original response.

After doing this, it is imperative to do a thorough congruence check again, by carefully rehearsing and testing the new response in all the different contexts in which they previously had the old response. Any concerns or objections need to be respected and satisfied in order to preserve any other useful outcomes that may have been served by the old response. This could include keeping the full anxious response in certain contexts, to maintain protection, or a small part of it as a signal that something needs to be attended to. Usually an even better solution is to elicit or teach some kind of coping behavior in those contexts that were still perceived as dangerous, so that they no longer need the anxious response at all.

This handout is excerpted from the e-book, *Help With Troublesome Voices, volume I*, chapter 2, Real People Press, 2009, and it appeared earlier on Steve Andreas’ blog.

Additional Resources

Articles, Books, CDs, DVDs can be found at the following web sites:

NickKemp.com

SteveAndreas.com

RealPeoplePress.com (You can sign up to receive Steve Andreas’ blog on the home page.)