

How I Sustain Hope and Resilience

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The profound changes I witness in my clients give me hope, not only for them as individuals but for humanity and the resilience of life. I have observed my client's capacity to survive in even the harshest of conditions in my psychotherapy practice. When conditions change, through the support, understanding, guidance, and encouragement they receive from me and others in their lives, I have the pleasure of seeing them shift from surviving to thriving.

I have observed clients change dramatically in what they will and will not tolerate in their relationships. They have changed deeply ingrained patterns of depression, deprivation, anxiety, addictions, people-pleasing, and emotional repression to live with greater self-care, calm, appropriate expression, and even self-respect and self-possession. I have the honor of assisting people in moving from surviving through will and experiencing a desire to die from despair to finding their tender, vulnerable, fierce wish to live.

My clients have benefitted from a combined focus on working with their bodies to release chronic tensions, blocked expression, and careful analysis, including understanding their early childhood experiences. In my training, these early experiences (often out of their conscious awareness) form the basis of their knowledge of themselves, patterns in relationships, and expectations of life. As a result, my clients have shifted significantly in their bodily experience to greater relaxation. In addition, they have expanded in self-respect, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.

The work with their bodies includes changes in their nervous system and beyond to include shifts in their chronic tension patterns, which inhibit breathing. Unconscious breathing patterns form the basis of a person's energy for life. For example, a person who suffered significant painful rejection from caregivers in their early childhood generally tends to breathe very shallowly. Shallow breathing keeps them from feeling the heartbreak and pain of this rejection. They need support to breathe more fully, which begins with tolerating their childhood pain within a supportive therapeutic relationship.

Similarly, a person who experienced deprivation as an infant tends not to take in much air. They learned that their unmet hunger for more only causes pain. They need help to own their needs and wants, starting with their desire for more oxygen. Someone who experienced regular intrusion by an overbearing parent generally tends to hold in their breath, not daring to let out any emotion that expresses their differentiation. Those that lived with a seductive parent or caregiver breathe in their chest but not their belly, protecting themselves from the painful intrusion on their individuation.

Shifting deeply ingrained body defenses requires understanding the psychological reasons for the adaptation, physical exercises to address it, and a safe environment for clients to explore new patterns. It takes time and repetition as the adaptation developed in the context of fear, childhood dependence, and survival. Learning a new response can come only from direct experience, not only through talking about it or a mental process alone.

Combining body-based tools and focusing on careful analysis to help people in this way provides me resilience for the necessary patience this type of profound change requires. In addition, having tools to address both a person's body and mind helps me tolerate the inevitable resistance to change which emerges.

My ongoing work with myself (including a history of many years of personal therapy and excellent supervision) gives me access to my most valuable therapeutic tool - my body-based intuitive awareness. Being in tune with my body (and mind) allows me to trust when to gently encourage a person to move through fear to try something new and when to back off, respecting their boundary. In addition, staying in contact with myself helps me tolerate the inevitable setbacks and sometimes jerky progressive and regressive work of profound growth and change.

I also assist my clients in this process by modeling self-acceptance and self-respect as flawed, imperfect human beings with failures and inevitable shortcomings. My expertise derives from years of experience following the wisdom of my own body. Daily practice with grounding, opening my breathing, and allowing emotions to move through me keeps me on track. Through this combined body/mind work, I have the good fortune of guiding my clients to live with as much joy, aliveness, self-expression, and vitality as possible. My hope comes through this work!

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