

Dissolving Emotional Pain

Long ago many of us learned how to subconsciously suppress the anxiety that arises in us, and how to use our anxiety to lift us up when we felt depressed. We may have managed our anxiety by distracting ourselves with activities such as watching movies, shopping, or working out at the gym, in addition to long hours of working. As one grows older, however, and stress accumulates, the distraction strategy previously used no longer serves, and there may be times of feeling overwhelmed. The stress-induced anxiety which accumulated earlier in life, compounded with current stress, can only be repressed for so long. Symptoms, including insomnia, grief, loneliness, a feeling of isolation, and physical pain often co-emerge when the repression of anxiety is prolonged.

With good neurofeedback training, the goal will be to allow one's physiology to quiet to the point that she could feel the source of her anxiety as a physical event. While the source of physical pain is usually easy to find, emotional pain can be more difficult to localize, even though noxious emotions usually have a source in the body. If we can sit still and access the brain's lower frequencies, we can easily be taught to open up to the source of these painful feelings in the body. Common places for emotions are in the stomach, the neck, or the chest, or a whole-body generalized feeling of anxiety: but emotional pain can reside anywhere in the body. Finding the site or source of these feelings is an important step to their rapid dissolution.

A trainee might have three weekly training sessions and practice at home each day to increase her brain synchrony, which increases her diffuse and immersed attention. Experiencing localized feelings, emotions, and pain within the context of this broad and immersed attention allows her to feel pain as a relatively small, low-intensity event, which prevents overreaction. At first, after a practice session, her mind is free of noxious emotion and the body feelings of anxiety for a period of hours after she dissolves it. This pain-free period is extended with continued practice sessions. It is as if one could put down her troubles and worries for a period of time as necessary, and then pick them up when that is appropriate.

General belief holds that emotional pain is not physical, or does not cause physical pain. Emotional pain, however, is often presented as intensely physical and, in fact, some of the most difficult pain in our lives is caused by, or exacerbated by, emotional pain. Many physicians and mental health providers hold that pain crops up because the body is malfunctioning for some reason instead of seeing pain as the result of a control strategy involving efforts to mask emotion.

The stomach and intestines are extraordinarily sensitive to emotional stress and are places where we commonly feel anxiety and commonly block it. Emotional and other forms of stress may be a major source of the many intestinal ailments in our culture, from common digestive disorders to irritable-bowel syndrome, parasitic conditions and many other problems. Some researchers believe the gut possesses something like a second brain, calling it the "enteric nervous system." This nervous system is composed of a network of 500 million neurons, neurotransmitters, and proteins found in the esophagus,

stomach, small intestine, and colon. It is the only large number of neurons outside the central nervous system, considered to function as a single entity, and it has cells like those in the brain and a complex circuitry that allows it to act independently, and to learn, remember, and produce what we call “gut feelings.”

Training with neurotherapy can awaken repressed gut feelings, but it normally does so in a mild and gentle way that people feel they can handle. As with physical pain, when emotional pain becomes part of the larger awareness of an open focus attention style, it is much easier to accept and diffuse. By simply learning to shift our attention, we can melt into our physical or emotional pain and dissolve it. With neurofeedback, as one’s focus continues to open, deeper, often unacknowledged physical and emotional issues that have been long repressed can surface into conscious awareness. Because opening our attention focus promotes a physiologically neutral and broadly inclusive state, feelings and emotions usually surface gently. More intense “release phenomena” do occasionally occur and can be both pleasant and disturbing. These can come in the form of tingling sensations, muscle tremors, pains, aches, perspiration, and spontaneous feelings that seem to have no specific source, like waves of pleasure or emotionally charged memories. These feelings, emotions, and sensations appear to be the result of the body partially letting go of tension and repressed pain. Open-focus attention strategies gained from brain-training, are ideally suited to dissolve these release phenomena as they arise without producing a reaction. Even long-standing anxiety is elegantly discharged.