

INNER RELATIONSHIP FOCUSING

Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin

Inner Relationship Focusing (IRF) is a process for emotional healing and accessing positive life-forward energy. It has been developed by Ann Weiser Cornell and Barbara McGavin primarily out of their own practice, based on the Focusing work of Eugene Gendlin, with some influences from a number of other methods (Cornell and McGavin, 2002). Above all, the practice of IRF has been developed over 18 years of intensive work with clients who were engaging with difficult issues such as action blocks, addiction (primarily eating disorders), depressed and anxious states, and experiences of low self-worth. In addition to these types of issues, IRF has been developed with people who wanted to make decisions that were appropriate for them and to feel more confident in their own inner sense of rightness about their next life-forward steps. Despite its application to difficult life issues, IRF is not a method that is aimed at particular problem areas, but is adaptable to any issue that a client has, including relationship issues and even the suffering caused by pain and physical symptoms.

Like the Focusing method from which it emerges, IRF can be taught to people as a self-growth skill and can be done in pairs in a ‘peer counseling’ format. Networks of people doing IRF with each other in ‘Focusing partnership’ have arisen in a number of places in the world, and since the process can be done by telephone, partners do not need to be in the same physical location in order to work with each other. Professionally, IRF can be used by therapists, counselors, and other healing professionals in conjunction with other modalities, and it can also be done as a stand-alone practice by an ‘IRF Guide.’

One of the most striking applications of IRF is how it is being taught in Afghanistan and Pakistan by Dr. Pat Omidian and her students, supported by Nina Joy Lawrence, in a community-health model.

CORE CONCEPTS

The central concept of IRF is ‘Self-in-Presence.’ *Presence* is the natural state of the Self: calm, curious, interested, and able to act in mature and balanced ways. The client is understood to be capable of being Self-in-Presence, even when that is not his or her experience of him/herself. The practitioner speaks to the client from this assumption, and may also offer suggestions that strengthen and support the client’s experience of Self-in-Presence.

Within the inner relational space thus created, felt experiences appear that are in need of the comfort, support, compassion, and empathic listening of Self-in-Presence. The role of the practitioner is to support the client in offering these qualities to the partial-self experience that is in need of them. So the primary relationship is the ‘inner relationship’ within the client, and the relationship between the practitioner and the client supports this inner relationship (see Gendlin 1984).

The IRF practitioner is particularly attentive to the possibility of the client being (or becoming) identified with partial-selves, or exiling (dissociating from) partial-selves, which precludes the experience of Self-in-Presence. The practitioner then guides the client into being Self-in-Presence with these aspects of self. This is key because when the Focuser is not Self-in-Presence, a felt sense cannot form.

Focusing is a process of exploratory attention to a felt sense. An open, relaxed, allowing quality of attention is needed for a felt sense to form. Gendlin (1996) makes the important point that a felt sense is not just any bodily sense. “A felt sense is new. It is not already there.... It *comes* freshly.... It is something you *have*, but not something you are” (p. 20, italics in original).

When what the Focuser experiences is not a felt sense, but is a bodily-felt, emotional experience which seems to demand attention, in IRF we view this as a ‘Partial-Self’ or a ‘partial-self process’. (See our article, “Treasure Maps to the Soul,” p. 41 in this volume.) Partial-Selves are repetitive reaction states that need empathic company from the Focuser as Self-in-Presence. This in turn, over time, allows a felt sense to form. Self-in-Presence is both a process of sensitive and compassionate relating to partial-selves that need attention, *and* it is the space that allows felt senses to form.

The methodology of IRF includes careful attention to language as a facilitative process. ‘Presence language’ is used when empathically responding to clients, and is sometimes taught to clients as a self-care process. The two basic components of Presence language are: “You are sensing...” and “something in you...” “You are sensing...” cultivates Self-in-Presence and supports the client in identifying with their capacity to sense their own experiencing. “Something in you...” points to an aspect of their experiencing and supports their being in relationship with it. Of course these are varied in response to the circumstances of the actual session.

A second important linguistic emphasis is the use of statements (as empathic reflections) and suggestions. Questions are almost never used. The reason is that questions are understood to be an inefficient and indirect method for facilitating a process in the client. In addition, questions can be experienced as intrusive, and can result in a shutting down of process. Questions also highlight the interpersonal dimension, when the inner dimension is the one that needs emphasis. Suggestions, on the other hand, are almost always experienced as less intrusive than questions, especially when introduced by ‘cushions’ such as “You might like to...” or “If it feels right to you, you might...” Some examples of suggestions that invite Presence are: “You might sense how it would like you to be with it,” and “See if it would be OK to just be with it.”

A third linguistic point is the preference of adjectival descriptions over nouns, to support the maximum ease of change. “Something in you which is *feeling afraid*” is preferred to “the fear,” and so on.

Finally, and perhaps most important, is the quality of ‘radical acceptance’ that is offered and invited by the practitioner to all aspects of the client’s process. Notably, the experience of an ‘inner critic’ is not pushed away, but is treated as another partial-self to be

related to as Self-in-Presence. Experiences called ‘thinking’ or ‘distraction’ are also included and respected as meaningful aspects of client process. The practitioner is careful to protect the client’s process from manipulation or domination by any partial-self aspect. Experiences are understood to be present in the way that they need to be right now. The result is an overall atmosphere of respect and inner acceptance in which steps of life-forward change can easily occur.

This overview of the core concepts of IRF cannot begin to describe the extent of the supportive processes and methods that have been developed. For a more extensive treatment, see Cornell and McGavin 2002, and for even more detail on specifics, see Cornell 2008.

EXAMPLE

Several excerpts from an actual session of Inner Relationship Focusing will allow the process to be illustrated. Comments will be added *in italics* within the transcript. There are many pauses in the session. Pauses of at least 15 seconds are indicated with ellipses (...) between sentences.

The excerpts are from a session done on the telephone with a therapist interested in experiencing the Focusing process for himself. So he is having his first guided Focusing session. At the start of the session, the client said he wanted to work with a recent experience that he described as shocking. He decided not to tell the guide what the experience was. Before the excerpt begins, the client has been experiencing a strong sense of his body twisting, the lower part of the body being pulled forward and the upper part of the body pulling back and away, as if something there is saying (in the client’s words), “I don’t want to see this!”

EXCERPT #1

Client: I’m still really twisted. Except now it feels like... like I really feel the pressure on my heart. That’s almost like... like that’s the part that’s being squeezed.

Guide: So your attention moving now to your heart, and sensing that it’s feeling squeezed, and maybe the word “pressure” also fits. Just maybe checking how you would describe it there now.

C2: Yeah. And now it’s um... OK, it’s almost like, um... I begin to feel this tremendous sadness in there, in my heart, and uh— There’s a lot happening below it in the solar plexus and the belly. It’s moving a lot too. The heart just feels really sad.

G2: So just briefly acknowledging both, that there’s a lot going on below it, and with the heart, seeing if it’s OK to stay with that a while. How sad it feels.

We’ll see this invitation to “stay with that” repeated over and over again, for example at G5, G8, and G10 as well as here.

C3: Yeah. It really does.

G3: You may even— maybe you’ve already done this— maybe just want to put a gentle hand there, so like with your hand you’re saying, “Yes, I’m with you” to that place in the heart.

This invitation to “put a gentle hand there” is one of the moves that cultivate Self-in-Presence.

C4: I have my hand on it. It’s like, um -- “Yeah, I’m with you.”

G4: That’s it.

C5: It really is like the back, bottom part of me wants to go one way and the top part of me wants to go the other way. But my hand is on my heart, and what I’m most aware of is the sadness, it’s kind of radiating up to my throat. My eyes. It’s a really teary sense.

G5: Just staying with that.

C6: “I just can’t believe it. I just can’t believe it. I just can’t believe it.”

The quotation marks around the client’s words in C6 (and C7, C8, and C9) indicate our understanding that the client is actually quoting or speaking from an inner aspect, saying out loud what ‘it’ is saying internally. Notice that the guide responds, at G6 and G7, from this understanding of the client’s words.

G6: And the words are: “I just can’t believe it.”

C7: “This can’t be happening.”

G7: Yeah. Something in you says, “This can’t be happening.”

C8: “This can’t be happening. It just can’t.”

G8: And you’re staying with it.

C9: “It can’t be.” And now I feel kind of sick.

G9: So that kind of sick feeling comes now.

C10: Yeah, my stomach, bleagh.

G10: Sensing that in your stomach like a “bleagh.” So that’s here too. And also staying with that. It’s showing you something about how this shocking thing feels inside right now. “I can’t believe it.” And this sick feeling... your body shows you this “sick” reaction, and you’re staying with it with gentle curiosity.

The invitation to stay with a place with “gentle curiosity” is characteristic of IRF. See also G21.

C11: So it’s almost, I almost just had a sense of um, my body just sort of asking me, “Do you really want to know? Do you really, really want to know?” It kind of angrily asked me that, as if it were saying, “Do you really want to know? I know you don’t want to know.”

G11: As if there’s some kind of history of something in you not wanting to know.

The guide suspects the existence of a partial-self which is not being acknowledged when the Focuser finds a part that is angry at him, saying “I know you don’t want to know.” The part that is angry was not the unacknowledged part, but the fact that it was angry pointed to a relational history within the client and the possibility that a ‘part that doesn’t want to know’ was still there. This will be followed up on further at G18.

C12: Right, like “I’ve tried before.”

G12: And maybe there is something in you that doesn’t want to know... like the top half of your body... So there’s no need to say Yes or No to that question, but just to say, you’re acknowledging something in you that’s asking, “Do you really want to know?”

When a person is addressed directly by a part there is a strong tendency to respond in kind, yet responding would mean leaving Self-in-Presence and identifying with a partial-self. When the guide says “So there’s no need to say Yes or No to that question” in G12, she is supporting the client in remaining Self-in-Presence.

C13: Yeah, something in me wants to know if I want to know! Or it wants to tell me... something in me wants to tell me that it doesn’t think I want to know.

G13: Right. That’s what gets acknowledged now.

C14: It’s not happy about it. It’s afraid to think — It’s afraid to hope that maybe I’ll want to know. It doesn’t want to hope that.

G14: Oh! So there’s been some kind of past history where it’s been disappointed perhaps.

C15: Right, exactly.

G15: And now it’s angry. And you’re sensing that it would like to hope that you’d want to know, but...

C16: Yeah, it really would, it would like to hope, but it’s given up. It’s like a teenager, “You know how Mom is.”

G16: “Whatever.”

C17: “Whatever.” Yeah, exactly. “Whatever.”

G17: But underneath that, there’s a hope.

C18: It would love it if it could dare to believe that... Like it wants me to say, “I really want to know, tell me, I really really do.” And it would probably say, “No you don’t.” “No, I really do!” So it’s like that.

G18: So probably what needs to happen is to really acknowledge the part of you that doesn’t want to know. We think that’s probably still around here somewhere.

C19: Yeah.

G19: So that you’re turning toward that part that doesn’t want to know as well, including that also.

Notice this relational language, how the guide supports the client in “turning toward” and “including” this part.

- C20: That’s really interesting, because that’s the part I wouldn’t... I wouldn’t be proud of not wanting to know something. I would fancy myself someone who would want to know things.
- G20: So it’s harder to acknowledge that that’s there.
- C21: But it **is** there.
- G21: And yet if you pause and acknowledge, you can feel that it is. Just saying, “Hello I know you’re there too,” to something — And that’s something also to be curious about. We don’t know yet what’s really going on for the one that doesn’t want to know. So for now, just hello.
- C22: That feels really good. That felt *really* good. A lot of relief.
- G22: Good, take time to have that relief feeling, let it be there.

EXCERPT #2

The next excerpt begins just a little later in the same session.

- C23: I want to find the part... It’s like now I’m kind of curious to make contact with the part that doesn’t want to know.
- G23: So just letting your awareness be in your body. Feeling the support of the floor, and especially sensing in that middle area, in that throat, chest, stomach area. It could be anywhere though. And just saying, “I’d like to get to know better the one that doesn’t want to know,” and wait.
- C24: I hear that, and it feels really good to know that it’s OK to wait. And I’m going to wait a while.
- G24: Yeah.
- C25: It’s a little suspicious still. It’s kind of saying, “Yeah, I’ve heard that before.”
- In order to know that “it” is suspicious, the client has to be sensing it. This is what the guide picks up on to affirm in G25 and G26.*
- G25: So it sounds like you’re already sensing it. That’s really great.
- C26: Yeah, I’m sensing it.
- G26: It’s already communicating with you. And what it’s saying right now is that, “Yeah, it’s heard that before.” And letting it know you hear that.
- C27: It’s not trusting.
- G27: And you’re hearing it’s not trusting.

Notice the contrast between saying back “It’s not trusting,” a simple reflection, and what we show here: “And you’re hearing it’s not trusting,” which is Presence Language.

The guide hears and supports the whole relationship, between “you” and “it,” and implicitly reminds the client of his role: to hear that place inside.

C28: I hear that.

G28: Very good, yeah.

C29: You know it’s saying, um— It’s funny, it really is just like a teenager. It’s saying, “If you knew what it was, you wouldn’t even be thinking about wanting to know.” And so I’m saying to it, “I hear you think it’s so overwhelming...” ... I just want to ask it again, you know, “Whenever you’re comfortable, I wonder if you would just let me know where you are.” ... It’s like... what comes is sort of a tightening around the mouth, you know, kind of like “urggh.” Kind of like pursing your lips, like “You can’t drag...”

G29: So what it’s showing you is that tightening the mouth, pursing the lips...

Notice that “what it’s showing you is...” is another form of Presence language. Contrast with a reflection without that phrase, for example: “What comes is a tightening of the mouth, pursing the lips...” What the phrase with Presence language adds is the explicit relational dimension, and supports the client to stay as Self-in-Presence.

C30: It really really wants to tell me! I can just feel how much it wants to tell me.

G30: Yeah, so it really wants—

C31: It wants the relief of telling me, but— (laughs) It’s exactly like people are.

G31: Yeah, so it wants the relief, and it also wants to be sure there’s a safe reception.

C32: Yeah. It kind of wants to punish me for not— it wants to punish me.

G32: Yeah, it doesn’t want you to have it easy now.

C33: No, because I have— It thinks it’s my fault. Yeah, it does, it thinks it’s my fault. So I’m thinking, this is about... I’m thinking about being born. It’s like this part is sort of saying, “This is your fault, that we were born. This really shouldn’t have happened.” I don’t know why that came up but it did.

We would like to point out several interesting features in C33. First, although the client says twice “I’m thinking,” this is clearly not what is usually called thinking. It is more like the coming of a further piece of the process. The guide ignores the word “thinking,” and treats the segment as if the client had said “sensing.” Second, what comes is not logical in the usual sense. Nothing in the session so far is about being born. This is a good sign! The guide has no idea where this birth theme comes from or how it makes sense. Very importantly, the guide does not worry about not understanding. To protect the coming of this new piece, the guide will be trying to make sure the client also doesn’t worry about trying to understand the logic of this yet. So when the client says, “I don’t know why that came up but it did,” the guide takes that as a signal to invite the client to check with the place if what came fits for it. This directs the process away from trying to understand and back to sensing within.

G33: Well, maybe check with it if that's right, that it's like it's saying, "This is your fault that we're born."

C34: Yeah, it's saying, "Yeah, you got us into this mess. You got us born. We don't want to be born."

G34: So just let it know you hear that.

Invitations like the one in G34, which you will hear often in this session, are a key part of IRF, because they complete the sequence of awareness, supporting the client in hearing what the partial-self is saying, seeing what it is showing, sensing what it is feeling, etc. Importantly also, this kind of invitation protects the process from something less facilitative happening, like analyzing or responding in a 'helpful' way.

C35: OK. "I hear that you didn't want to be born, that you think I made you be born. I hear that you're still really afraid. Tell me what it is that happened." ... I'm just waiting now, and I want to say, I want to say I need some help. I don't know where you'd care to go but I feel kind of stuck.

We appreciate that the client felt relaxed and trusting enough to ask the guide for a process suggestion in C35.

G35: Well, you know, it sounds to me like a time when waiting can be really valuable. So I wonder if there is a part that's impatient or has trouble believing that it'll be OK just to stay with this.

The guide suspects that the client's inability to wait (less than 20 seconds had passed) is connected to being identified with an impatient partial-self. This could also be inferred from the client's saying, "Tell me what it is that happened," which is not pure empathy. It was spoken very kindly... but it could be experienced by a partial-self as rather pushy.

C36: Yeah, there is that part.

G36: Yeah, so we're saying Hello to that too.

C37: Back to just being.

G37: So back to just being, and trusting that, you know, what's needed here is for trust to be built. And trust takes time. Just being.

C38: [one minute silence] There's a... yeah there's a voice in there that truly doesn't trust, doesn't believe that— There's a voice in there that's almost mocking, and it's saying, "Ha, ha, see this doesn't change anything."

G38: Yeah, you're really sensing how deeply untrusting it is.

It's great that after a silence of as long as one minute, the client does begin to sense more from the part's point of view. The guide sees her job here (G38 and beyond) as gently holding the client in an inwardly empathic stance.

C39: Oh, totally. It doesn't trust that healing ever comes. Ever. No matter what.

G39: So just giving it your empathy for how that is for it, to not trust that healing ever comes.

C40: It's like the one that doesn't want to talk. It doesn't believe I can hear it. It wants to believe that healing comes. But it just can't. It just can't. "If you believed that and you were disappointed, it would be terrible."

G40: So yeah, wow, it's really letting you know a lot!

C41: Yeah, it is.

G41: It's letting you know it's not wanting to be disappointed. That being disappointed would be terrible. And maybe just give it empathy for that, compassion for that, no wonder.

Another key process in IRF is 'not wanting.' The guide is alert to hear when the process begins to express what is not wanted. There was no need to invite it explicitly. From the close quality of empathy that the client had been offering, the not wanting naturally began to emerge at C40. At G41, the guide reflects using the phrase "not wanting," to emphasize what is being heard. And as we see in C42, that brings a shift. Once the "not wanting" of a partial-self is heard, sensing its protective nature often follows. C42 is a great example of this. This partial-self process has gone from mocking at C38 to being protective at C42.

C42: That's another big relief, it's like it knows that— It's saying, you know, "I'd be crushed. Oh, my god, I'd be crushed." And now it's saying, "Well, you know, if I—" Kind of back to being born, again. Like if I really believed that life was really good, that would be *awful*. You would just be completely crushed when you lost it, or when— you know, to really believe it was safe to love somebody, that would be awful if you lost it. "I can't let that happen. And I can't let that happen to *you*," it's sort of saying.

G42: Wow. It's wanting to protect you from that crushing, awful loss!

C43: Yeah, me and itself. It definitely wants to protect me, it's definitely— it's still kind of... You know, it's saying all this in a kind of snappy way, but there's a lot there.

G43: You can feel, underneath that snappy quality there's this other quality of not wanting to be crushed, and not wanting you to be crushed.

C44: I can definitely feel that. It doesn't want me to believe in life, it doesn't want me to trust life, it doesn't want me to do that because it would be awful.

G44: It really wants you to hold back from trusting in life, believing in life, because it doesn't want the crushing disappointment that would come then, when you discovered life isn't trustworthy.

C45: Yes, that's it.

G45: Just give it your empathy for that, "Yes, I really hear you."

C46: "I really hear that you really don't want to be crushed, and you really don't want me to be crushed, I really hear that." And now it's mad, and it's saying, "Well, then how come you keep acting like it's possible to have a good life? How come you keep trying?"

G46: So let it know you sense how mad it is.

Without the guide's support to stay with empathy, at G46, the client might have felt like responding to the part, since he is being directly challenged. We don't want this to happen, since it would mean falling out of Self-in-Presence and into a stuck, old argument. Just a gentle suggestion at G46 keeps that from happening. G47 is also this type of invitation.

C47: Yeah I do. "I sense how mad you are, how frustrated, how much it hurts when I keep trying." Yeah, it just says, Yeah. It's like the more space I give it, the madder it gets. It's like a teenager. It says, "You're a fool, you're just a complete fool. You're never going to learn."

G47: And that's how worried it is. To the point— to the extent that it's saying things like "You're never going to learn." It's showing you that's how worried it is.

C48: "So you're worried that I'm never going to learn. You're really sure that we're going to be in this predicament forever." I want to get in better touch with that part. ... It's kind of in my throat. It wants me to touch it. ... It's afraid that I'm going to try to make it believe in life. So I have to tell it, "No, really, I'm not. It's really good to have you there, not believing in life." I don't believe that, though.

G49: So just saying to it, I really hear you don't want to be made or forced to be different than how you are.

C50: Yeah, that's good. "I really hear that you just don't want to be forced to be other than how you are. I really hear that. You don't want to be forced to believe in something." It really liked that. It asked me, "Could you say that again?" "You don't want to be— You don't—"

G50: "I really hear, you don't want to be forced to believe in something."

C51: "I really hear, I totally hear, you really don't want to be forced to believe in something." ... "I want you to know I'm not going to force you to believe in something. I'm not going to force you at all. I don't believe in forcing, I'm not going to force you." ... Boy, there's a lot in that, forcing me to believe in something.

G51: You're really sensing how much there is in that.

C52: Yeah, there's a lot. There's a lot, a lot, a lot. "Don't force me to believe in something. Don't force me." OK, now that started a whole new... There's a definite change in scene. From there it goes like really deep, deep in my abdomen, and there's like— This is really weird. There's like a pulsing that starts almost down in my sacrum and it goes all the way up to my— around my navel, and it's expanding... Wow, it's weird.

G52: Take your time. It gets to be surprising if it needs to be.

The guide assumes that when the client calls this experience "weird," he is expressing surprise at how different and unexpected and hard to describe it is, rather than being critical. This was in the voice tone.

C53: Yeah. All right, so—

G53: And you're feeling it like a pulsing.

- C54: Yeah, and as I said that, I— I'm kind of spasming, I mean I literally am, I mean the muscles, it doesn't hurt, but it's kind of shifting around down there. It's... wow. Now I want to sort of walk around.
- G54: OK.
- C55: OK now it's like, there's that pulsing and now it's kind of— I wish I could explain this... This is a really hard one to talk about... It's like... Oh, man!
- G55: Just to let you know that in Focusing we like when things are hard to describe.
- C56: All right, well, that's good!
- G56: So if you're at the edge of something that's not easy to describe, it's fabulous, it just means you're in the right place.
- C57: All right, so here, this is it. It's like, uh... It's like there's my sacrum at one end, and there's my, um... whatever the other end is up there, the base of the skull, and throat, and it's as if... there's like a pulse in it, but it's very very very low, I mean low-pitched, like it were under water. Like it were way under the ocean. And it's like, "Boom!" You can't hear it, but if it were a sound, it would be like a "Boom."
- G57: Like a deep, deep boom. Yeah.
- C58: My brain is trying to figure out how we got there from before, but that's not important.
- G58: It's when that place really felt you weren't going to force it.
- C59: That's right! That's right, exactly!
- G59: That's what came right before this shift of attention.
- C60: That's true.
- G60: So now what we have is this deep pulse, this deep, slow pulse.
- C61: ... I'm going to have to sit with this.
- G61: You're staying with it. It's fine. Take your time.
- C62: ... Hm. OK, now there's something in my... just below my navel. It feels like this incredible joy, just like— I just want to laugh. Cry and laugh. It's not quite coming out, but it almost feels like it could, like... I can really feel that.
- G62: Letting that be there as fully as it wants to be. Something like incredible joy. Yeah.
- C63: Like my body is just dropping into this... this real ease.

CONCLUSION

Inner Relationship Focusing gives a high priority to the relationship of the Focuser to 'something'—the inwardly felt experience. The inner relationship is one of sensing, describing, empathy, and compassion. The role of the practitioner, guide, or Focusing partner is to support this inner relationship.

Gendlin writes of the inner relationship (1990, p. 216): “The client and I, we are going to keep it, in there, company. As you would keep a scared child company. You would not push on it, or argue with it, or pick it up, because it is too sore, too scared or tense. You would just sit there, quietly.” And also: “Focusing is this very deliberate thing where an ‘I’ is attending to an ‘it’” (p. 222).

This “it” which Gendlin speaks of can be either a partial-self experience (as in the first quote cited) or a felt sense. There is a key distinction theoretically between these two different kinds of process, although in practice, in an actual session, they may merge and blend in a synergistic way.

A partial-self process is a repetitive reaction state. IRF has developed many processes that help Focusers to provide the empathic relationship that Partial-Selves need.

A felt sense is a freshly arising sense of the whole of something (a situation, a person, a partial-self). It needs direct, impartial, open, sustained awareness which is different from our ‘ordinary’ states of awareness. The cultivation of Self-in-Presence is a crucial element in the forming of this unusual state of awareness.

It is not necessary to know which or what kind of experience the Focuser is having, in order to invite a process of being Self-in-Presence with it. Supporting the Focuser in being Self-in-Presence with their felt experience will illuminate and carry forward whatever process needs to happen at that point—either being with a partial-self or having and symbolizing a felt sense. The biggest obstacle to felt sensing is identification with emotional reactions (i.e. partial-selves). These identifications can be subtle and potentially difficult to become aware of; for example, when a Focuser says, “It’s clear I just need to get over this,” or “This is a weak part of me,” a sensitive listener can hear that this person has slipped away from Self-in-Presence into identification with another partial-self.

At any point, while being with partial-selves in an empathic way, the sense of the whole situation can emerge. IRF enables a process of relating to these aspects demanding attention, and at the same time keep holding/expanding the space where a felt sense can form. It is from the forming of and sensing into the felt sense of the whole situation that fresh steps of carrying forward can emerge.

We are profoundly grateful to Eugene Gendlin for his life’s work, the philosophy of the implicit, and for his generous encouragement of us, his students, to find our own carrying forward which could not have happened without him.

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