

## **WHAT IS FOCUSING AND FOCUSING-ORIENTED PSYCHOTHERAPY?**

**by James E. Strohl**

Focusing is an innovative technique developed by Eugene Gendlin in the 1960's. The earliest origins of Focusing are found in Gendlin's collaborative relationship in the 1950's with Carl Rogers, the Founder of Client-Centered Psychotherapy. By 1970 Gendlin was recognized by the American Psychological Association as the Distinguished Professional Psychologist of the Year for his contribution to experiential psychotherapy.

Early on, Gendlin and his colleagues studied why some clients succeeded in therapy and many others did not. They found that improvement in therapy had very little to do with a therapist's therapeutic orientation, specific techniques, or with the type of problem being addressed. Instead, the important element of positive change had to do with "how" clients processed their experiences internally.

With further study, Gendlin eventually identified the specific internal activities that facilitate successful problem resolution and positive change. Gendlin also discovered that these internal processing skills were teachable. Over many years, Gendlin refined the specific instructions needed to teach people to perform the crucial components of this natural, effective method of internal processing (Gendlin, 1982). Because this process allows one to bring an unclear, vague, inner sense of a problem or situation into clearer focus, Gendlin named it Focusing. Focusing is then a way of approaching a problem or situation with a special internal processing strategy that increases the chances of a positive outcome.

Focusing allows access to deeper levels of awareness, wisdom, and self-guidance that reside inside each of us. Through an easily learned, step-by-step process, Focusing teaches how to turn our attention inside our bodies where we carry all our personal experiences, memories, sensations, emotions and feelings. This place of refined mind-body awareness contains an unlimited source of knowledge that provides us with the capacity to solve problems and achieve personal fulfillment. Simply stated, Focusing allows us conscious access to that which often remains unconscious or subconscious, due to the fact that most people do not know how to access it.

Focusing principles and strategies have been successfully incorporated into the counseling and psychotherapy fields (Gendlin, 1996). One of the greatest strengths of Focusing is the ease with which it can be integrated with other therapeutic approaches. Focusing does not supplant any established therapeutic methods but instead serves as a crucial supplemental element for other approaches to improve their effectiveness. The Focusing process can be implemented as a formalized, step-by-step, stand-alone approach. It can also be implemented more informally as a focusing-oriented, integrative approach whose interventions flows naturally from the emerging client's experience, therapeutic framework, and relational interaction.

There is ample research suggesting that the strongest predictors of positive outcome in therapy are (1) the quality of the therapist-client relationship, (2) the personal characteristics of the therapist, and (3) the resources the client brings to therapy (Hubble, Duncan, Miller, 1999; Wampold, 2001). "Client feedback" has been specifically identified as the most important relationship factor for decreasing dropout rates and improving therapeutic outcomes (Miller, 2004; Miller, Duncan, & Hubble, 2004). An exceptional feature of Focusing is it's elaborate methods for routinely

“checking in” with a client. Furthermore, as a client-informed therapy, Focusing incorporates sophisticated means for helping clients identify, honor, and express their personal realities and inner truths. Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy assists one in removing the judgments, doubts, and fears that block one’s access to their innate wisdom and self-understanding.

Since Focusing-Oriented Psychotherapy comes out of the Client-Centered tradition, Focusing therapists can be expected to create a safe, supportive environment; and to listen in a patient, nonjudgmental, refined manner with deep respect for the competence and full potential of each individual. The Focusing therapist’s expertise at contacting their own inner senses and processes will assist them in helping others find their own creative ways of tapping into deeper levels of awareness and wisdom, and achieving greater happiness.

### References

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