

## **Bonus 11**

# **Advanced Master Program on the Treatment of Trauma**

## **Somatic Interventions to Help Repair Relationships After Trauma**

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## Why Having a Trauma-Informed Perspective Is So Crucial

**Dr. Ogden:** I always think that everyone comes to therapy with some trauma in their history, as well as developmental and relational injuries. And when I say trauma, I don't mean that everyone has PTSD, but I've never met someone who didn't experience a trauma, whether it's a car accident, a skiing accident, a fall, a mugging . . . COVID-19 is a trauma, 9/11 for Americans was a trauma. So all of us have experienced trauma. Not all of us are traumatized, but still that trauma has an impact on us and it interfaces with our relational history.

“Everyone comes to therapy with some trauma in their history. Not all of us are traumatized, but still, that trauma has an impact on us and it interferes with our relational history.”

**Dr. Buczynski:** That was Dr. Pat Ogden. And what she just said is important to keep in mind. Because whether it's direct or indirect, trauma impacts the lives of so many – and it can affect so many of our relationships.

## How to Effectively Implement Parts Work in a Couples Therapy Session

And here's the thing – relationships also offer us a different way to approach a patient's trauma . . .

**Dr. Ogden:** Relationships offer an opportunity to directly work with those hurt parts. In one-on-one therapy, for example, I would talk to a child part. I would say, "It's not your fault whatever happened. You're just a little child," and I would help them understand reality.

So in a couple, when the child part is triggered, you can also often use the other couple, the other party, to work with that child part.

**Dr. Buczynski:** So to get a sense of how you might do this in a session, let's look at a case study . . .

**Dr. Ogden:** I'm thinking of another couple who also argued because he could not stand her intensity. Not even when she was upset with him, but when she had intense emotion about something, especially when it was connected to anger, his interpretation of that, that we

found out through our experiments, was that she was saying there's something wrong with him and she was mad at him. That went back to a childhood memory of his parents arguing in the other room and he always felt it was his fault, that there was something wrong with him.

“Couples often come to therapy expecting their partner to take care of them and heal their wounds. And sometimes their expectations are simply unreasonable, because it has to do with unhealed child parts of the self.”

So if this were individual therapy, with that memory, I would be speaking to that little boy. But in this case, I had his partner talk to that little boy. So we set up an experiment where I asked him if he could sense that child and get an image of that child and he could. Then I asked her, after checking out with her if it was true, that she wasn't blaming him, that she didn't think there was anything wrong with him – because it has to be true for her. So she said, "That's true. I don't think there's anything wrong with him." Then I said,

"Okay, so tell that little boy that there's nothing wrong with him." And his job was to watch that little boy. So as she talked to that little boy, directly to that child, he started to open up and relax. And that can really deepen a connection, when you can use one part of the couple to really work directly with those wounded parts of the partner.

**Dr. Buczynski:** So as Pat just illustrated, a fundamental first step here was to help her patients identify the child parts of themselves that might be triggered during conflict.

Recognizing and working with these child parts can be critical for some couples, so let's look at another example of how to do it . . .

**Dr. Ogden:** Couples often come to therapy expecting their partner to take care of them and heal their wounds. Many couples have a buildup of resentment and anger and years of conflict that they're not so willing, or able even, to do that. And sometimes their expectations are simply unreasonable, because it has to do with unhealed child parts of the self.

So for example, with one couple that I worked with, they had had so much conflict, had been in therapy for years, considered divorce, were considering divorce at the time of the session. He had worked through his rage, which he used to direct towards her, and now he just withdraws to avoid acting out on his rage. And she is just fed up and doesn't trust him, is

angry herself. And the work with them, what he got in touch with was a child that was really neglected, and that when she didn't take care of him, he got so rageful at not getting the care that he needed. And the only way he knew how to handle that rage of that child was to just withdraw and pull away. And he felt this child in his belly.

And she couldn't reach out to him, she didn't want to make any contact with him because she was so resentful of the years of strife that they had had. So I helped him get a sense of that boy and have his adult self-nourish that boy with his touch, with his hands on his belly, he was kind of stroking his belly, and with his words and the words were, "It's going to be okay." So he soothes that part of him and she started to relax. She said, "I really love seeing that," that he can take care of that dysregulated upset part of him.

"There's that fine line between couples nourishing each other and being able to take care of themselves to a degree so that they can be in contact."

She still wasn't ready to seek proximity or receive his proximity. For her, her hand kept going to her chest, to her heart. And she said her heart had been hurt so much in this relationship. And her hand just kept going there. So I encouraged her to make that movement. And she said, "It's protection. I'm protecting my heart." And I said, "Okay, that's important. So if you make that gesture with your hand, and he makes the other gesture, and you two make eye contact, then what starts to happen?" And for the first time, they started to feel some real connection with each other.

So there's that fine line between couples nourishing each other and being able to do that and being able to almost take care of those vulnerable child parts and each couple taking care of them themselves to a degree so that they can be in contact. And I think sometimes we have to really balance that as therapists.

## How to Help Couples Strengthen Their Bond Through Somatic Communication

**Dr. Buczynski:** So noticing somatic movements and using them to guide a session can lead to new insights and progress that you and your patients may not have discovered through talk therapy alone.

So let's turn to one more case study so you can get an idea of how you might execute this in your sessions . . .

**Dr. Ogden:** This is a pretty healthy couple, but they said they're just fighting all the time. And they said it escalates from zero to a hundred like that, just constant. But they really love each other, they really want to stay together. They have a solid connection. So I asked them to remember the last time that a fight escalated so quickly, which was the night before the session, this particular session.

And as they each remembered, they started noticing their bodies. She noticed this energy coming up and this leaning forward like this. And she said it felt like panic, and she felt it just coming up. And he noticed that he got very still and didn't move, okay. So once you have a good experiment, you can study those reactions and then say, "Let's stay with it. Stay with remembering that argument. What else comes up? Just let yourself, almost as if the argument's happening right now, notice everything that's going on." And he felt . . . he didn't feel it actually, but I tracked his hand come up, just his fingers came up like this.

"I operate with the assumption that what the two members of the couple really want is connection."

His hand was in his lap but his fingers came up just a tiny bit. And if you think about that gesture, he gets very still and his fingers come up, and he's not conscious of that. And she isn't consciously registering it, but her implicit self is registering that. And you can imagine her translation, which was, "He's just pulling away, he's pushing me away." So that escalated her panic, and she got some insight that as her panic came up, it translated to anger and blame. She was like, "Why

are you doing this?" And that was a real turning point because as we studied that, "Why are you doing this?" they both could see their system, that he gets still, from his own family history – that was his response as a child. He would just get still and try to keep out the negative emotion, the negative messages from his family. And she became more desperate for connection and frustrated and angry. So now, because this couple had a solid, healthy relationship, I felt that I could shift that dynamic by asking him to make a different action.

And I operate with the assumption that I think is almost always true, that what the two members of the couple really want is connection. And connection is established by seeking proximity, which is reaching your hand out or making eye contact. So I asked her to feel that

anger and to do that motion that she was experiencing, and I asked him – just for an experiment – just to extend his hand to her and lean forward. So I asked him to do the opposite of his pulling back and withdrawing, because I felt like that was available to him and that he could do it without conflict, and he did. And her face just lit up. It was so sweet because she lit up, she just smiled. And she said, "Oh, this is lovely." And they both burst out laughing. He got exactly what he wanted, which was her backing off from the anger. And she got exactly what she wanted, which was connection with him.

**Dr. Buczynski:** So that was the first step in this couple's therapy – helping one partner meet the other partner's need for safety and connection.

But Pat still had to address the other half of the relationship. . .

**Dr. Ogden:** Then we had to address his desire from her. And he did feel a little boy that had been hurt so much. And he said that he just needed to know that she wasn't trying to hurt him, which she wasn't. She could readily give him that. Then he said he also longed for her touch. And it was interesting because she immediately wanted to touch him and she immediately reached for him and took his hand. He said, "Wait a minute." He said, "It has to be completely for me, not for you. So that you're not saying, 'Oh, I want to connect. You have to be here for me.'" He said, "It has to just be for me." And she understood. And she said, "Oh, I get it." That made sense to her.

So those simple interventions with this couple, I think because they had such a healthy, strong relationship, broke through their constant arguing. And they went home with homework, of course, because it has to be practiced. So the homework was that when it started to escalate, he would reach out to her and she would practice being there for him and that boy with her touch, without an agenda for herself.

The next week, it was funny because I said, "Well, how did it go?" And they said, "Well, we didn't even have to use it because we didn't fight." And I think they didn't fight, again, because they were healthy and they had the tools and they really wanted this to shift. So that was very rewarding.

**Dr. Buczynski:** So just like we heard with the couple in Pat's case, using physical touch can help partners communicate in new ways so that they can give each other's parts what they need.

We'll take another look at how to work with parts in the next bonus session, where we'll get into how to use the Internal Family Systems model to help patients shift out of unhealthy relationship patterns.