

**Introduction to
Integrative Body Psychotherapy (IBP) Sessions
by Jonna Fries, M.A.**

This article summarizes the theory and application of IBP by describing what an IBP therapist does in the initial and subsequent sessions. The primary goal of IBP therapy is for the client to experience an awakening of the core self as an embodied experience and reliable inner guide. The client then learns to sustain his or her wellbeing and core self by resolving the body/mind interruptions to core experience as they appear. IBP integrates the body and breath work with talk therapy. Breath, visual awareness, and movement practices are used to awaken aliveness, bring unconscious patterns to the surface and to then develop a sustainable sense of constancy and wellbeing in the body.

IBP Seeks to Resolve Entrenched Dysfunctional Patterns

Most people develop ways of being, feeling and thinking in response to their developmental fetal/infant/early childhood environment. Many repetitive patterns that once served a useful purpose now work against us. Preverbal developmental experiences become unconsciously ingrained and are difficult to access, identify or change with talk therapy alone. IBP is designed to access and resolve dysfunctional psychological/physiological holding patterns developed throughout the lifespan. The mind and body are one. Our automatic psychological-relational-emotional repetitive patterns and traumas are stored in the body/mind. Therefore IBP implementations are designed to release body/mind holding patterns both psychologically and physiologically. IBP is effective in resolving psychological and practical issues for self, interpersonal relationships, and existential themes.

Beginning Therapy with an IBP Therapist

Overview

Working with IBP from the beginning of the intake, the therapist tracks the client's somatic and verbal expression. Guiding the client to sense somatic expression provides access to an authentic and profound inner guide. The client is discouraged from speaking tangentially and is encouraged instead to delve deeper into one or more of the following: the current event, primary scenario, psychological arenas, transference relationship, existential themes, and somatic integration. Presenting problems can be understood and resolved by further exploration of these themes. While ongoing sessions take place the client is forming a deepening level of trust and transference with the therapist. The therapist is guiding the client toward a profound connection with the Core Self and the ability to sustain this Core Self experience of well-being, inner knowing and trust.

Initial Sessions

The first session presents an opportunity for the client to disclose reasons for seeking therapy and often to release pent up energy regarding the self-identified chief complaint. The therapist uses body/mind interventions such as talk, boundary work, and breath to access the larger and more deeply underlying body/mind processes that may be producing the current dilemma or the client's overall state. The therapist reframes the

'problem' in a workable model. While establishing an energetic bond of attunement, the therapist notices how the client approaches and makes sense of relationships and the current dilemma. The therapist observes verbal and non-verbal cues expressing the patient's presence, contact, sense of self, constancy, and the nature of breathing and holding patterns in the body. IBP body/mind experiential tools are used in this initial assessment.

The second session usually involves gathering a history using an IBP genogram called the Primary Scenario. The third and fourth sessions are often used to explore the psychological arenas of character style and self-agency along with beginning charge breathing and presence exercises.

Gathering Information towards Case Conceptualization

The following concepts are used by the IBP therapist to conceptualize client's case: for this purpose can you use another word as 'case' is perfect professionally but people don't want to think of themselves as a 'case' it can feel distancing and objectifies the client. I don't think for this purpose you can call a person a case.

Primary Scenario/Genogram: Following the initial session, the therapist completes a thorough intake including a physical health history in order to understand how the client makes sense of their experiences and identifies past and current trauma to the body/mind. The therapist takes a client's relational history in the form of a genogram to determine the client's developmental injuries and conditioned patterns. This reveals the client's generational, perinatal, early childhood, interpersonal, and attachment themes. It allows the therapist and the client to track family history two generations back and forward if the client has children and grandchildren. The therapist looks primarily at the generational theme of bonding and attunement. They identify from whom the client and his/her mother and maternal grandmother received physical affection (bonding and attunement). Themes of interpersonal relationship, trauma, loss, sexuality, gender prejudice, family mental health, etc. are tracked.

Accessing the Core Self: The therapist works with the client to identify a sense of essence that is outside of time, then helps the client locate where this sense of self is most felt in the body. This is rather universally identified as located high and in the center of the upper chest. -IBP therapists work to heighten this awareness. And, for internal support the therapist encourages the client in developing a comfort in turning to this profound internal experience of Self and well-being.

Basic Fault: The therapist, with the client, identifies the client's Basic Fault, the main underlying unconscious theme from which he or she acts. This 'fault' creates a crack or instability that consistently undermines one's sense of self and well-being. The embodied feeling of discomfort or pain harks back to the earliest occurrence of interruption or emotional injury to the bond of attachment and attunement to the primary caretaker. This is usually a generational theme. The thoughts that accompany the body feeling resemble how the client as a child made sense of these ruptures, "I am unwanted," "I am unlovable, not good enough," and "I am alone." These faulty themes, when carried through life, undermine our sense of self, well-being and inner constancy. The Basic Fault is most often the primary underlying activating factor that sustains other more superficial presenting problems and battlegrounds. It is similar to the concept of negative self-talk, however it can be better understood as the feeling tone or root message of all

negative self-talk. The client acts and believes as though the Basic Fault is true and approaches intrapsychic and interpersonal events from this stance. We tend to use our Basic Fault to find fault with others and ourselves.

Character Style: The therapist identifies a primary way the client has learned to protect the self from injury. Character Style is a protective rebellious stance that supports our false self. It stems from emotional injury in our earliest relationships. It is formed in response to interpersonal relationships themes of abandonment *or* inundation, and for most of us, from a combination of equally high abandonment *and* inundation anxieties. It is often a generational theme. This tends to cause distancing in relationships and undermines a sense of self personal growth and well-being.

Self Agency: Self Agency is an inborn function developed to recognize and act upon self-generated experience. This provides an authentic inner guide to care for one's self. This function for many is lost by a need to become the primary agent for the well being of others. It is not the care giving that is the problem: it is the self-abandonment. Emotional Agency toward others becomes a self-abandonment in the body because it diminishes a somatic awareness of self-generated desires and entitlements. In order to please or take care of others an agent becomes hyper-vigilant of their target's needs. This deadens access to Self Agency experience in the body. Self-abandonment can cause people to feel betrayed and alone and Self-Agency allows clients to care for self while feeling close to others. The shift from Self Agency to Emotional Agency toward others is due to unresolved early attachment themes.

Secret Themes of the Primary Scenario: The therapist assists the client in identifying long term themes that are often unacknowledged yet dominate the client's view of self in relation to others. Some are Generational Themes such as Gender Prejudice and Phantom Lover. Others are Birth Themes such as being the Wrong Gender or Unwanted Child. These stem from pregnancy and early infancy. Secret themes are brought into awareness throughout the sessions.

Bringing it Together

Coherent Narrative: Our inner story is used as our inner guide, thus it is important that we become conscious of our story. Only then can our inner guide become authentic and trustworthy. To begin the process the therapist guides the client in tracking the early family history that forms our story. Key is uncovering the development and nature of the Basic Fault. It is imperative that the client comes to realize that his or her Basic Fault is linked to a primitive emotional injury that extends back generations, and does not represent the true nature of current events or an accurate evaluation of self. This allows the client to connect the faulty mood and affect in the present to a generational theme of imperfect bonding and attunement. A more coherent narrative is one that expresses that the inner feeling is due to the "way any little child would feel who had a mother who had a mother who didn't receive and therefore couldn't give bonding and attunement." Antidotes to the childlike negative fault narrative formed by the child, are offered in the IBP Good Parent Messages and Self Agency Mantras.

Somatic Psychotherapy

The second phase of therapy creates an environment for deeper therapeutic work. In these later sessions, the therapist may ask the client what he or she wants to work on

during the session. Current events are worked with in conjunction with an awareness of the clients underlying themes and what emerges from ~~the integration of~~ somatic implementations in the session. Some physical caveats to consider before engaging in breath work are client history of asthma, epilepsy, fainting spells, physical illness, or panic attacks.

To begin breath work, the client is asked to lie down on a massage type table. The initial table session always begins very gently with the client taking only a few breaths, breathing through the mouth using the upper chest only. The first task is to see how much self-enlivening charge the client can tolerate and not split off. It is common to disassociate from core self experience and contact with others at the first sign of inner awakening. It is up to the therapist and client to uncover and resolve underlying body-mind psychological impediments to self-integration.

Then high charge breath and movement work can be used to enliven the body, to enhance presence and contact, to heighten and bring core issues to the surface and to release body/mind holding patterns. This establishes an embodied sense of somatic integration, wholeness and well-being. Once the client is grounded and present in this way, life is seen through a new lens.

After taking 5-10 breaths, the therapist asks, “What are you aware of (thoughts, sensations, emotions)” Then, “Where are you experiencing this in your body?” This shifts the client to the work of interiority, joining the underlying messages of the body with conscious thought. The therapist works to support the client to sustain his/her sense of self and well-being during the uncovering and resolution process. Once the primary material held in the body-mind has risen to the surface and therapeutic resolution has taken place the client will feel closure with the themes of the past and a freedom of aliveness in the body.

When the client can do the breath work while tolerating higher charges and remaining present they are often ready to practice an IBP sequence of body movements. This practice is known as the Sustaining Constancy Series, designed to facilitate the release of holding patterns in the body. The client may utilize the sequence daily to open, integrate and balance the body/mind.

Transitioning Out of Sessions

At the end of an IBP session, clients often experience feelings of well-being in the body. The client is directed in noting where in the body they feel this sense of aliveness and well-being. This further anchors the feelings in the body and mind. The client is asked to slowly sit up and place their feet on the floor. The therapist may have a mirror for the client to make eye contact with the self. This further anchors self-awareness, presence, alertness, and a connection to the Core Self. Before the client leaves the room the therapist ascertains that the client is present and grounded for reasons of safety. In order to empower the client to regain and sustain a sense of aliveness in the body outside the therapy room, the therapist may suggest instructions for homework.

The Benefits of IBP

In addition to the body-mind breath work IBP simplifies and makes practical the skills for resolving psychological process, encumbrances, and impediments. IBP teaches an effective mental health system so that we can better live with our humanity.

What happened to us (Primary Scenario), how we learned to protect or defend our self (Character Style and Agency), our Core Self, and universal Existential/Spiritual themes are often recurring. These clusters of themes, emotions, beliefs and behaviors form arenas and impact how we act, think, and feel. They can sometimes knock us down into what we call fragmentation. IBP provides steps out of these arena fragmentations. When we have feelings of anxiety or depression, something has activated this state and the steps out of fragmentation can reinstate our innate integrity. The IBP client begins to learn that fragmentation is a malleable state and that this faulty fragmentation state causes us to see our selves, others and the world through a distorted or negative filter. Clients learn to shift from negative emotional states to feeling authentic, grounded, and present.

IBP provides a body mind guide for authenticity and support that is established over a period of time. Students and clients are able to tolerate and enjoy the intensity of life, emotion, intimacy, and sustain a sense of well-being with the tools they learn. Because they are more able to differentiate false self illusions from authentic core self-awareness and desires, they have a more reliable inner guide to deal with practical issues of life. With a journal they can use the IBP mental health skills to sustain well-being and resolve fragmentations and other difficulties. They are encouraged to practice the Sustaining Constancy Series and meditation to sustain the awakening of the body and sense of well-being. With this combination life is lived with new hope. The client begins to understand that early childhood wounds go back generations; are stored in the body during a preverbal period and influence the client's current events; and can be released in sessions with a therapist, at home, in a journal, through cognitions, talking, and physical movement.

IBP theory and implementations are an integration of Object Relations, Gestalt, Analytical, Reichian Therapies and Eastern practices and philosophy. Dr. Jack Lee Rosenberg is the founder and he and Dr. Beverly Kitaen Morse are the primary IBP theorists.