

Chapter 16

Why Attachment Resources Are Often Needed

EMDR therapy allows old stuck information to connect to and metabolize into existing adaptive information. If there is any magic in EMDR therapy, it is in the speed and depth of the complete transformation of stuck information into adaptive information. As we have seen elsewhere in this book, Shapiro is clear that there must be enough of the needed adaptive information for the difficult information to connect to and be metabolized into (thus the Boat and the Whale metaphor, the Mount Everest metaphor, the Marathon metaphor, and others).

How do people develop adaptive information? We develop it by having learning experiences that are different from the learning that occurred in the trauma. We develop it the same way that we heal from trauma, by having experiences that disconfirm the expectation in the bad memories. An excellent way to develop a large amount of adaptive information is to have a great life that includes a protected and attuned childhood. Absent that, we need to get it somewhere. It is entirely possible that many clients with complex trauma will have never had experiences where they felt protected, where they were able to express needs and get them met, where self-compassion was promoted, and where appropriate roles were modeled. Many people that we work with are fully grown adults who hold many of the same beliefs about themselves, about their traumas, and about the world that they held when they were young children. All parts of them believe all the same lies. These are remarkably difficult case presentations for a psychotherapy that depends entirely on your parts system holding somewhere in it enough of the disconfirming information to unlock the trauma. In short, some part of you must already hold the right answer for you to unlock trauma and heal in EMDR therapy. When no part of you does, we need to construct experiences that generate and strengthen this information.

Psychoeducation can play an important role, but when it comes to corrective information about human needs, clients need to have corrective experiences. We can't quickly and sensibly send a client with a pervasively traumatized nervous system out into the world and expect them to have

different or disconfirming experiences with others. If we do, they will interact with others and experience it through their traumatized nervous system and are likely to have experiences that reinforce past wounding.

Parts work can help with the task of developing adaptive information experientially. Parts work is a way for client parts to have relational experiences with other parts that disconfirm the expectations in the bad memory. It's a way for parts to begin the process of self-reconciliation, self-listening, self-development, and self-nurture. Many of the various approaches to parts work can be helpful here. Or, a well-developed and well-practiced attachment figure resource is an expedited way to do parts work that addresses the specific developmental and informational deficits that are relevant to doing EMDR therapy well.

A well-developed attachment figure resource borrows slivers from any actual relational experience of kindness, support, validation, nurture, protection, attunement, or assistance from anyone in any developmental era of the client's life. It can be borrowed from teachers, neighbors, friends, partners, family members, coworkers, or anyone who interacted with the client from a position of genuine care. When the client has deficits of positive experiences, we can borrow from media like movies, books, or television series. When we can't borrow from media, we borrow from imagination.

On the top line, we develop attachment figure resources because we anticipate that clients will get stuck when working on attachment wound memories, and these resources allow us to end sessions in ways that are not horrible. They are a powerful fire extinguisher that puts out the radioactive fire of existential childhood loneliness by bringing the activated child state a hug, nurture, and helpful information.

The attachment figure resource also models for the most resourced parts how to be kind and extend empathy to the activated child parts. The most grown-up parts can witness a kid part getting its needs met, even if in imagination, and the world does not end. When the most grown-up parts observe someone treat their kid parts with kindness and compassion, it is easier for those parts to replicate what was demonstrated to them. Often the attachment figure resource creates the mental construct of self-compassion, which makes it easier for the grown-up parts to subsequently execute. The attachment figure resource initially creates a small deer path between long-estranged and dissociated parts and development eras. Repeated use creates a road, highway, and eventually an interstate wide enough for attachment wounds to transit. A well-developed and well-practiced attachment figure resource may be the first instance for many

clients to have concrete experiences of self-compassion and effective self-communication.

We develop an attachment figure resource when the most resourced parts aren't healthy enough, hold strong resentments toward the child states, or lack the adaptive information needed to metabolize the information in the traumatic memory. The attachment figure resources are a proxy or substitute that models what the most grown-up parts can't currently do. As soon as the most resourced parts are healthy enough, we allow the trauma stuck in parts of you to connect to the adaptive information held in other parts of you through EMDR therapy.

As you will see in my attachment figure script in the following chapter, my preference is to put all of the needed qualities into one figure. Other trainers may help clients develop multiple figures where each one brings a specific quality, like protection or nurture. I combine them into one figure because that more closely matches what we actually needed—one person who was able to meet our needs consistently enough. Also, Parnell (2013) and others are fond of developing an Ideal Mother attachment figure resource. My early clients were consistently unable to develop an Ideal Mother attachment figure resource, because imagining a replacement mother triggered memories of their actual mother, the same way that trying to develop an uncle-like attachment figure can be triggering if the client's actual uncle was a monster. Most of my clients develop attachment figures of "a mother" who lives in a house in the neighborhood. Others use a grandfather-like figure or some other relational slot.

We anticipate that the attachment figure resource will be difficult to develop for many clients. For clients who are phobic of attachment or connection, we can try to use the Dip Your Toe In Attachment Figure Resource described in that section of the book. If the client has difficulty, we can always pause and let things settle. We can try resuming it in subsequent sessions. A well-developed attachment figure resource can bring up a substantial amount of grief. If grief appears, help the client identify it as grief and encourage the client to experience it with the expectation that it will move through them like a wave.

As with all resources, encourage the client to practice this resource at their baseline, rather than practicing first during their periods of high distress. Let the resource become identified as something that we do to calm down on purpose in quieter times, before using it as a way to regulate during an emotional catastrophe.