

Chapter 54

Phase Eight Topics

Successfully Discharging Clients

It is not unusual for clients with complex trauma to begin the therapy process with the presenting issue being a specific issue, crisis, or unmanageable trauma symptom. It is great when clients can engage in comprehensive trauma treatment and work until they have largely reset their nervous system. Or, they may work for a while until that presenting issue starts to settle and they may self-discharge or request discharge. It may take a few months or years before the next layers of the onion that is complex trauma start resonating, and they may need to return to therapy. This is relatively common and okay. This was true in my own recovery. I keep discovering new areas where complex trauma caused issues in my internal world, functioning, or relationships. I keep returning to therapy to resolve the next layers of the complex trauma onion and it is the process of living that often surfaces the next layers. Personally, I am not hopeful that I will find the little green sprig at the center of my complex trauma onion. I may never fully meet the self that I long to be, but I am certain that every day I am getting closer. Healing from complex trauma is the work of a lifetime. There are effective strategies, but there are no brief approaches to psychotherapy when wounding is complex.

Frequency of Future Templates

How often should you be doing future templates? As often as you can. I find that most EMDR therapists I consult with do not consider future templates often enough. See Chapter 48: The Elegance of the Future Prong for more guidance.

When Clients Resolve Some Memories but Aren't Getting Dramatically Better

A client with severely complex trauma who is 47 years old has probably occupied a pervasively traumatized nervous system for 400,000 hours. That is a lot of deeply salient learning and reexperiencing. The lessons from that type of learning aren't meant to be shifted with ease. It can take three years of weekly sessions to help many clients with pervasively traumatized nervous systems reset their nervous systems. This assumes that we are doing reprocessing work in many of those sessions.

Here is the good news. If we are seeing a client one hour every week, we are seeing them one hour out of 168 hours in a week. If we are working with them for three years and they are largely able to reset their nervous system in those three years of work, they will have done that in fewer hours than there are in one whole week of their life. Said more clearly, it is possible for a 47-year-old client to process 400,000 hours of difficult existence in less than one week of actual treatment time. That is remarkable. That is an efficient way to work, but it is not brief as defined by insurance companies and other service gatekeepers. Understanding this is key to understanding why clients with complex trauma do not get better immediately or even in the short term. It will allow us to advocate for our clients more effectively. It will help make sure that we are at least dying on the right hill. As EMDR therapists who treat complex trauma, we should stop referring to EMDR therapy as a brief approach to psychotherapy when most trauma globally is of the complex type. We should simply stop it. It confuses clients. It confuses trainees. Brief is the wrong word. It is deceptive, even if it is unintentionally so.