

Get In Your Body!

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What? You may be saying, “I have a body, of course I’m ‘in it’”. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. I’ve learned that when I am out of my body I feel anxious, skittery, unsettled, jagged, or I can feel confused and disoriented, like I don’t have my wits about me.

How does this happen? Coping patters, fear, pain, or shocking traumatic events can lead to leaving our body. These events can be smaller every day kinds of events or something much bigger. Sometimes people spend a good amount of time out of their bodies, or disassociated – as psychology would refer to it. It can be difficult to identify if you are “in or out” of your body – especially if you spend most of your time in one or the other place. It is useful to consider...How often am I embodied?

Let me give you some examples. Some time ago, I was driving late at night, looking for my little puppy who had escaped from my back yard. I was driving slowly and calling her name. A vehicle coming in the opposite direction, going very fast passed me. There was a loud explosive popping crack as glass went flying everywhere. In that instant my primal, body response took over, my head turned to the side – shielding my face and I felt my energetic body jump to the side of me, while my physical body continued to steer the car. I realized my windshield had been hit with a bolder or brick thrown from the passing vehicle and I was covered in glass.

I pulled over, burst into tears, began shaking and called 911. I felt shaky, vulnerable, confused and my mind was dulled. This soon turned into a tired spaced out feeling. I was having trouble finding the necessary papers for the police and was glad I only had a couple of blocks to drive home.

The next day I continued to feel very upset emotionally and jagged in my emotional and energetic body. I realized I had a natural trauma response with the shaking and disorientation (1). I also realized I was not fully in my body; I was disassociated from my physical body.

Less extreme examples might include: reporting that you are “fine” when really something else is going on inside you which you ignore or stuff down. Or you might numb out your body or distance yourself from your emotional experience, just to get through the day.

More habitual examples might include: disconnecting from your body or the environment when you feel overwhelmed, when there is too much chaos, or when there is too much stimulation. I know a man who learned as a child to tune out his sister who had a disability and talked non-stop, this was a coping strategy at the time. However, it has become a habitual or “stuck” way of responding to life. Now he has feedback from his children that they feel he is emotionally cut off and not available to them.

Why be more embodied? What we don't realize is that in shutting down, distancing our self from our felt sense or from our emotional experience we are severing a deep and natural resource. Sensory information through the body (i.e.: I feel a knot in my stomach) and the emotional response we experience (i.e.: I want this to stop) give us vital information for our safety, personal boundaries and well-being. When we are in our bodies and tuned in, we are getting information all the time. This embodied knowing is a deep well of resource and guidance.

This same system of embodied living is also a rich and valuable therapeutic skill. As we become more aware of what our body is experiencing and we become curious about it, we are given the opportunity for conscious choice. As we practice this in our own life we can draw on this resource in therapeutic work. We become more sensitive to the nuances in us and to those of our client. We begin to use our embodied-ness as a resource.

Research supports the value of being tuned into our body and is showing that we are naturally wired to come into resonance or to entrain with others. Heart researchers call this coherence (2) and brain researchers call this limbic resonance (3). As we become more aware of our bodies, more embodied, we can draw on our sense of well-being and offer this to our clients just by being with them and they may experience this well-being within them selves. Many counselors do this without realizing it. We can also use our embodied awareness to sense what clients are feeling in their bodies. This inborn resource is available for our own well-being and in service to others.

How might I become more embodied? Brining awareness to the issue is a great starting place. Here are some additional things that are helpful as well:

- Practice grounding meditations daily, sending a grounding cord from your tail bone and feet down into the core of the earth and feeling the connection
- Do physical things, move, walk, swim, play, laugh, be outside and feel the sun on your body
- Bring your attention to your breath
- If you are disconnected from your body, or disassociated, all these things will help, also noticing where your hands are, notice what colors you see, look into the eyes of another person who can be present with you
- Practice noticing what your body is telling you, physically (cold, tired, hungry), emotionally (sad, scared, excited) and sensory wise (prickly hands, numb lips, fluttering in chest) and attending to it with kindness
- Love your body for the amazing resource that it is, regardless to it's size, shape, compromises, aches or pains

Resources you might enjoy

Haddock, D. *The Dissociative Identity Disorder Sourcebook* (2001). McGraw Hill. New York, NY.

Stout, M. *The Myth of Sanity: Divided Consciousness and the Promise of Awareness* (2001). Penguin Books. New York, NY.

References

- (1) Levine, P. *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma* (1997). North Atlantic Books.
Berkeley, CA.
- (2) Hannaford, C.
- (3) Lewis, T., Amini, F., Lannon, R. *A General Theory of Love* (2000). Vintage Books.
New York, NY.