

## PENDULATION

This is a concept/way of working developed by Peter Levine. He uses the technique of shifting awareness like a pendulum between one 'felt sense' and another, between positive and negative physical/emotional states. Emotions and memories are experienced and expressed in and through our bodies.

When we 'ground' a good experience in our bodies by becoming as fully aware as possible of how our body felt in all our senses in that good experience, that experience can become a resource.

When we remember an unpleasant experience we feel certain sensations emotionally and physically, shifting back and forth between the unpleasant and positive resource experiences gradually changes the impact of the unpleasant experience.

Survivors frequently get 'stuck' in very negative 'states' of being when they have been triggered. One way of understanding this is to picture the neural networks created in our brains. Our brains form in response to experience. When an experience is repeated more often, the brain pathways associated with that experience become more pronounced. Neurons fire together, wire together and survive together to form a neural net which 'encodes a representation of an event'. An experience repeated more often and intensely will form a more and more dense neural net which is less connected with other neural networks in the brain (see Bonnie Badenoch, pp. 9-10). When this is activated, (triggering) the intensity and familiarity of that experience and the lack of connections to other neural nets make getting stuck in that state more likely.

I suspect that pendulation between these unpleasant and more positive states builds neural connections creating pathways out of and reducing the intensity of these dense neural networks.

### EXERCISE in pairs

Ask partner to think of a time recently when they felt most comfortable or good in their body. Remember and describe in detail how you felt. Ask for more detail to help them ground themselves in that feeling as much as possible.

Now ask them to remember an incident recently that was a bit (but not very) uncomfortable.

Direct them to shift their focus back and forth between the comfortable experience and the uncomfortable one. What happens? There should be a lessening of the uncomfortable experience.

Reverse roles and repeat.

This exercise can be not only valuable in sessions but also resources clients with a strategy to help them gain more control over and be less afraid of distressing states. It shows the power of choosing to focus upon and remember positive experiences. Explaining the ways in which the brain works can also encourage clients.

I have also used events when they felt powerful, competent, most alive, and creative, connection to a pet

I have used this to help clients prepare for future events which created anxiety or discomfort.

For more detail on strategies like this, see *Healing Trauma* by Peter Levine, and *In An Unspoken Voice; How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*, Peter Levine (2010).

– Meryl Lee