
USE OF ELEMENTS OF HAKOMI THERAPY WITH SERIOUSLY EMOTIONALLY DISTURBED ADOLESCENTS

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Hakomi therapy has been most noticeably associated with individual and adult group therapy. (Though do confirm the Summer 1984 edition of the Hakomi Forum for articles on couples therapy and multiple impact family therapy.) Carol Taylor was one of the early students of Ron Kurtz who immediately began experimenting with Hakomi therapy in her work with seriously emotionally disturbed adolescents. The following article is a brief account of how she applied a couple Hakomi principles and techniques with a particular student. It might seem overly simplified and overly miraculous to those not familiar with Hakomi therapy. She has a wealth of other similar clinical experiences, though not ones which happened so fast and directly, that hopefully will eventuate in a full length book. The article is offered here to alert readers that work is being done with Hakomi and adolescents and to encourage others to share their experience with various groups and settings. Carol is a therapist for the Lane School Programs, an educational and treatment program for seriously emotionally disturbed adolescents operated by Lane Education Service District in Eugene, Oregon. Prior to her work at Lane, she created a program for treating emotionally handicapped persons in the public school setting at Sam Barlow High, Gresham, OR. Those interested may contact Carol by writing her at 581 Brookside Drive, Eugene, OR 97405.

For the past ten years, I have worked with adolescents who are certified under the guidelines of Public Law 94-142 and Oregon Administrative Rules as being "Seriously Emotionally Disturbed." These young people do not succeed in the public school setting without extra educational and behavioral help. The population is made up of "deprived" individuals--deprived educationally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. In many cases these youngsters live in situations which are both "handicapped" and

"handicapping".

How could a method like Hakomi fit the needs of such a population in the institutionalized setting of the public schools? Actually, it is a natural fit--so natural that its healing ability far transcends any of the methods I have observed in my 20 years of working with young people.

In the beginning, the therapist must realize that the S.E.D. adolescent clients have already, for what they believe to be very legitimate reasons, learned to be defended. Many of these defenses represent some of the reasons these students simply don't fit in public schools. Their defenses are the most likely reasons they were LABELED. Step one is to provide an environment which is so safe that for perhaps a moment they can drop their suspicions and allow the therapist in for a brief interlude. Establishing their trust is "trick." The truly disturbed adolescent is certain that there is no such thing as a trustworthy adult. Getting under their defenses is the number one challenge. I have observed that many emotionally disturbed young people have developed keen intuitive senses. Once genuine regard is perceived through this sensitive screening, the therapist will be given the needed access.

Creating a mindful state within that person becomes the next great challenge. Why should this population be mindful of anything--least of all themselves and what is going on within them? Mindfulness has meant to them much pain and futility. They know pain, and they don't need a vehicle to provide more of it. I attempt to create a "bridge" thought that mindfulness can lead to positive growth and a way out of some of the pain.

I will share with you an example of the importance and application of these two basic Hakomi concepts in my work with Todd, a 13-year-old referred to me by a school counselor. Todd knew pain. He was the only child in a home with mother and step dad. Step dad

was an alcoholic and mom was seriously depressed. Todd came home one day to discover that mom had committed suicide. He was sent back to live with "real" dad. "Real" dad chose not to keep him and sent him back to grandmother (mother's mother), but "real dad" kept the boy's possessions. Todd was harassed in school and was referred to me when he was discovered lying on the football field, taped and bound, as a sort of "freshman initiation rite." Todd was angry, hateful, vindictive, foul-mouthed and impossibly rude in classrooms. According to his teachers, he was failing all of his classes, and they simply wanted him out of their classes as he was ruining learning opportunities for the students who wanted to learn.

When I first met with Todd, he stated that he was not interested in working with a counselor--as a counselor in the past had "gone behind his back" and repeated things he had said to other adults. I did a lot of listening on that first visit, and the outcome of that visit was that we made a decision to see each other again and signed a contract that anything we said would only be shared with each other's permission.

Our second visit began on a much different note. Todd appeared to be pleased that I was there. Our previous contract had been main-

tained. I believe there was an atmosphere of trust and safety. After a brief period of mutual sensory scanning, I asked him to close his eyes and simply be very quiet. I then gently offered the probe, "What happens when I say,...'I'm here for you.?' " Those four words opened the flood gates and Todd and I began a ride on the wildest rapids imaginable. Here was a kid who blamed himself for his mother's death, who hated his step dad and also blamed him for her death, who could not believe that his very own father would steal from him--let alone not want him. Here was a boy who, every time he looked in the mirror, wanted to take his own life; a kid who tortured himself with these painful thoughts.

Four simple words, "I'm here for you," unleashed this torrent of feelings. Things are much happier, now. Grandma joined our counseling sessions and began a strong and stable support system. The school counselor "in-serviced" the teachers in such a way that they were able to view Todd differently, and Todd began to make amazing improvement in his classes. This was viewed by the staff as a miraculous achievement. The key to opening the doors for potential success was the regard for safety, mindfulness, and a simple probe, "I'm here for you."

