

WALKING THROUGH THE ROOMS OF YOUR HOUSE

Preliminary Understanding and Rationale

The intervention of *walking through the rooms of your house* enables engagement with memories, emotions, beliefs and our own *inner child*; it supports the client in gaining insights, developing self-awareness, and processing emotions.

As an intervention, it fits comfortably with Cognitive, Psychodynamic, Gestalt and Person-centred approaches. It can be used when a client feels stuck, or to deepen the work.

It draws on the understanding that:

- 1) traumatic and unresolved memories remain in the body and brain at a subconscious and unconscious level (implicit memory), whilst still impacting our sense of self, our emotions, core beliefs, behaviour, sense of wellbeing, and our nervous system.
- 2) through the process of neuroplasticity, the brain can re-wire, creating new understanding, beliefs, and perspective.
- 3) using interventions that involve right-brain processes, as well as left-brain processes, enhances the process of neuroplasticity, including the ability of the unconscious brain to experience imagery and visualisation as if it were reality.

Why or when, might this intervention be inappropriate?

It is important to have established a strong therapeutic relationship and have confidence that your client is able to ground themselves or be grounded by you when accessing childhood memories, and/or flooded by emotion. Therefore, it is unlikely that you would use this intervention early in therapy, in short-term therapy, or single session therapy.

Following the steps outlined here, and experiencing and practicing the intervention yourself will give you confidence and competence. Other training in working with pictures and visualisation, in grounding techniques, and in trauma will also support you and your client.

STEP ONE: Preparation

Consider the information that you might want to know from your client as you begin. This may include:

- Where did they live as a child (or teenager)?
- What is their earliest memory of the house they lived in?
- Did they move house during childhood/teenage years?
- Were there other houses that they remember, e.g. grandparents, foster home.

INVITE YOUR CLIENT TO CHOOSE THE HOUSE THAT THEY ARE GOING TO EXPLORE.

- Maybe because it has some happy memories
- Or, because something significant happened there, e.g. separation of parents, death of a family member, abuse
- Or, because it relates to a time or experience, you are working on with your client.

STEP TWO: Talking about their house

Invite your client to talk about their house, to briefly describe what they remember of it. Talking about their house helps the client to attune to the feelings they have, which they may be familiar with, or which may be new or unexpected. And, gives an opportunity for practicing or teaching grounding skills.

Notice the way your client talks about their house, the emotion. You are attuning to the client, listening for signs of distress or pleasure. You are beginning to tap into right-brain functioning (intuition, emotion, and holistic thinking), as well as left-brain functioning (language and analytical thinking).

STEP THREE: (OPTIONAL) Drawing their house

Invite your client to draw their house – from the front, or one floor, or one room, it may be the garden, or the attic. Offer a large sheet of paper, at least A3, and a variety of felt pens.

Encourage your client to annotate their drawing, labelling significant features, adding feelings and speech bubbles. Consider a feelings title and write this too. As your client draws and writes, notice what they feel and believe, about themselves, others and the things that happened there. What did they learn?

STEP FOUR: Using visualisation

Invite your client to close their eyes (or find a place of soft focus), you might suggest they begin by standing at the front door, or ask where they would like to start. If they are observing at a distance, encourage them at some point to *step into the scene and be there.*

Ask your client where they would like to go, encouraging them to pause, to notice, and to listen to the child within. Notice how old they are? *If not a child, then is there a younger self in the house? Do they know where? Do they want to go and find her/him?*

Where do you want to go now? What are they feeling or believing? What do they need, and from whom? Is there a safe person, room, place, or object there? *This is an opportunity for providing restorative experiences. What/who does she/he need?*

Ask how they would like to finish, allowing time for this, and possibly connecting with the safe person, place or object to ground or anchor them. (Look at STEP SEVEN – Resourcing the Inner Child)

Your will have gained a sense of the places within the house that may be easier or harder for the client, Stay attuned to them and, if they become overwhelmed by emotion, or are dissociating, then gently but firmly ask them to open their eyes and help ground them; then talk about what was happening.

STEP FIVE: (OPTIONAL) Working at greater depth with the memories

An intervention sometimes used by Deep Release practitioners (and others) and called *Working at Depth* involves the client lying down, on a sofa or the floor, whilst engaging in the guided visualisation, in this case walking through the house. *Training and practice are advised before using this intervention, as it has the potential of taking clients to very deep memories and feelings that neither you nor they were expecting.*

STEP SIX: Debrief

Towards the end of a session, and at the end of each step, allow time to listen to how the client experienced the intervention. You might want to consider:

- What did they notice, what was significant to them.
- Did they learn anything new about themselves or the situation.
- Has there been anything that has unsettled them, or distressed them.
- How was it for their Inner Child and for their today/here & now self.
- What do they need now.

STEP SEVEN: (OPTIONAL) Further work

This will vary depending on your preferred modality, other areas of training, and competence. However, it may include:

- Having done a drawing: consider visiting other rooms or parts of the house; if there is change needed then consider a second drawing of the original room, a Chapter 2.
- RH-LH dialoguing, which can extend to letters between the child (HC/WC) and the today you (NP/Adult).
- Working with the Core Needs and/or Roles Played in Families cards. (Resources and training available from www.deeptime.org.uk)
- Safe place imagery – drawing, collage and/or visualisation
- Resourcing the Inner Child within the time and place that they are as they ‘walk through the house’ e.g. What did the child need? This resourcing can be provided by returning to the drawing, and or the visualisation. It may include:
 - bringing a safe ‘other’ person into the room, which might be their adult self, another person (e.g. family member or friend), an imagined person (e.g. superman), or a person with a special role (e.g. a social worker);
 - expressing emotions, verbally (aloud or in the mind), or through action - as the child, or the safe ‘other’ person on behalf of the child;
 - taking any other action that is needed;
 - talking about ‘what should have happened’, and then visualising, and or drawing that alternative, appropriate, healthy scenario.

At the end of any such resourcing work, consider how the child needs/wants to end the session – maybe returning to you in the here and now, or maybe finding a safe, pleasant place to go to (consider safe place imagery).

A few thoughts on **GROUNDING** a client in this work:

1. Ground them in the **imagery** – a safe person, place in the house, object, or memory.
2. Ground them in their **body** – feet on the floor, a holding object, back against the chair, breathing, counting.
3. Ground them in **time** – tell me how old you are, the date, what you did this morning, what you will do when you leave here.
4. Ground them in the **room** – what do you see around you? The oldest/newest, smallest, biggest, favourite, least favourite, something pink, soft, growing, above you, outside etc.