

# ***Cognitive Behavior Technique***

Metaphor Counseling  
Through  
Clean Language

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## INTRODUCTION

Metaphor Counseling, developed by Morris Berg, is a way of working with blocked feelings, traumatic memories and of accessing inner healing and helping resources.

There are two main ways of using metaphor in counseling: one is to tell the client stories, anecdotes, tales or case histories which illustrate the ability to change, find new solutions, and reinterpret situations in new ways. This form of metaphor counseling is widely taught to hypnotherapists, and is rooted in the ancient use of parables, teaching tales and folklore. Essentially, the counselor is supplying analogies and metaphors within which the client might find new meaning for his subjective experiences.

The breakthrough made by counseling psychologist David Grove was the discovery of an untapped level of symbolic meaning that is already underlying problems and symptoms. Information about the past can be held in the body, not only as feelings (e.g. pain, tension) but also as metaphors. (For example, a pain in the stomach like a sharp knife.) By skilful questioning, a number of metaphors or symbols relating to the problem may be uncovered which were not previously available to the conscious mind. These metaphors or symbols contain the seeds of memory and of change, but they need to be 'brought alive' by the counselor's skills before they can be used for change. Each person has a unique metaphor system, comprised of various objects or symbols which, in the language of the unconscious mind, are located in or around the body space (e.g. a yoke around the neck).

While preverbal trauma requires symbolic memory, sometimes an early childhood event cannot be recalled because the victim became unconscious or dissociated at the time of the event. Nevertheless, the event will leave a pattern of metaphor that can be uncovered and worked with. The pattern of metaphor can change over the years, and so the presenting problem may bear little relation to the nature of the event, (e.g. digestive upsets or eating disorders which mask early trauma). Both emotional and physical hurts can leave a metaphoric or symbolic pattern.

The Grovian 'clean language' method has the specific merit of enabling the clients to identify his/her own metaphors without the 'demand characteristics' evoked by the counselor. What is important about this change is that the process becomes very 'right brained'.

***Touch your finger to your nose.*** How did you do that? You may be surprised to learn that nobody really knows.

A neuroanatomist can tell us the area of the brain where the first nerve impulses fire to begin that movement. We can also trace the chain of nerves that conduct impulses from the brain to the appropriate muscles. But no one knows how you go from thinking about touching your nose to firing the first cell in that chain. You just decide to do it and you do it, without having to worry about the details.

Thoughts are not just psychological in nature, they are *physiological* - electrochemical triggers that direct and affect the chemical activity. When given an electrical command - a thought - the brain immediately does several things: It responds to the thought by releasing appropriate control chemicals into the body, and it alerts the central nervous system to any required response or action."

Shad Helmstetter

### ***Now make yourself salivate.***

You probably didn't find that as easy, and you may not have been able to do it at all. That's because salivation is not usually under our conscious control. It is controlled by a different part of the nervous system than the one that governs movement. While the central nervous system governs voluntary movement, the autonomic nervous system regulates physiologic functions, such as salivation, that normally operate without conscious control. The autonomic nervous system doesn't readily respond to ordinary thoughts like "salivate." But this does not mean that it cannot be controlled.

Relax for a moment and imagine you are holding a juicy yellow lemon. Feel its coolness, its texture, and its weight in your hand. Imagine cutting it in half and squeezing the juice of one half into a glass. Perhaps some pulp and a seed or two drop into the glass. Imagine raising the glass to your lips and taking a good mouthful of the tart juice. Swish it around in your mouth, taste its sourness, and swallow.

Now did you salivate? Did you pucker your lips or make a sour face when you imagined that? If you did, that's

because your autonomic nervous system responded to your imaginary lemon juice.

**Imagery** [symbols of meaning: metaphor] **is a thought process which can initiate what are normally automatic processes - and thoughts, as we have seen, have power.** Imagery is a flow of thoughts you can see, hear, feel, smell, or taste. An image is an inner representation of your experience or your fantasies—a way your mind codes, stores, and expresses information.

In the last twenty years, we have learned that imagery is a natural language of a major part of our nervous system. Critical to this understanding is the Nobel-prize-winning work of Dr. Roger Sperry and his collaborators at the University of Chicago and later at the California Institute of Technology. They have shown that **the two sides of the human brain think in very different ways and are simultaneously capable of independent thought. In a real sense, we each have two brains.** One thinks, as we are accustomed to thinking, with words and logic. The other, however, thinks in terms of images and feelings. And both types of thought have the power to make things happen with the body.

In most people, the **left brain** is primarily responsible for speaking, writing, and understanding language; it thinks logically and analytically and identifies itself by the name of the person to whom it belongs. The **right brain**, in contrast, thinks in metaphors, pictures, sounds, spatial relationships, and feelings. It is relatively silent, though highly intelligent. The left brain analyzes, taking things apart, while the right brain synthesizes, putting pieces together. The left is a better logical thinker, the right is more attuned to emotions. The left is most concerned with the outer world of culture, agreements, business, and time, while the right is more concerned with the inner world of perception, physiology, form, and emotion.

The essential difference between the two brains is in the way each processes information. The left brain processes information **sequentially**, while the right brain processes it **simultaneously**. The left brain uses words to describe the parts and the right brain uses patterns, analogies and metaphor to describe the whole.

The ability of the right hemisphere to grasp the larger context of events is one of the specialized functions that make it invaluable to us in healing. The imagery it produces often lets a person see the 'big picture' and experience the way an illness is related to events and feelings you might not have considered important. You can see not only the single piece but also the way it's connected to the whole. This change of perspective may allow you to put ideas together in new ways to produce new solutions to old problems. A right-brain point of view may reveal the opportunity hidden in what seems to be a problem.

The right brain has a special relationship not only to imagery but also to emotions. This is another of the major strengths it brings to the healing adventure. Finally, the right brain is the one concerned with symbols instead of words - metaphors which often cannot be articulated clearly since the right brain has only limited language. Metaphors or, more precisely, analogies are the human method of organizing information. We learn by discovering that one thing is analogous to another - by seen patterns in our environment. And we often 'chunk' information into an analogy [this is like that] - which often get changed into metaphors [this is that] as a means of giving meaning to our world.

Metaphors are ubiquitous in our lives and often hold the key to information that is 'unsayable'. The cognitive process is often oriented to helping people say the unsayable, and Metaphor Counseling is oriented toward that end. However, the responses of the counselors often have the result of having the client alter his/her metaphor before it even becomes clear. That is where '**clean language**' come in.

### **The Art of Clean Language**

In the early 1980's, David Grove wondered what it would be like to fully preserve and honor a client's experience with minimal interference. He achieved this by identifying a number of very simple questions with a particular syntax and a unique delivery method. He discovered that the more he used **Clean Language**, the more clients naturally used **metaphor** to describe their symptoms. When Clean Language questions were then directed to the metaphors and symbols, unexpected information became available to the client, often with profound results. He found that the *less* he attempted to change the client's model of the world, the *more* they experienced their own core patterns, and organic, lasting changes naturally

emerged from 'the system'. By interfering with a client's description of their symptoms, Grove asserts that well-meaning clinicians can rob clients of the very experience needed to resolve their unwanted behaviors.

### **Information-Centered**

The aim of **Metaphor Counseling** is for the *client* to gather information about his/her own subjective experience, not necessarily for the clinician to understand it. Attempting to understand the client's experience is replaced with tracking the inherent symbolic process and structure.

The counselor asks questions *on behalf* of the information sources, staying strictly within the metaphor or the client's 'inner symbolism' instead of their 'inner logic'. Thus, this process is not client-centered, it is information-centered.

The reason that clean language is so valuable is that we seem to be biologically programmed to attempt to make sense of whatever another person communicates. For example, when we are asked a question we have to 'mentally do' whatever is asked before we can answer. To do this we have to presuppose or infer much more information than is given in the 'surface structure' of the question. When another person makes even minute changes to a client's words the implications can be significant. Clients often have to go through additional translation processes and mental gymnastics to reorient themselves to the other's presuppositions. Thus, the process subtly goes in a direction determined by the counselor's map of the world.

In Clean Language, the clinician aims to ask the question the client's information suggests to be asked. Each response is then utilized by the counselor in the next question. Thus, the counselor follows the natural direction of the process rather than leads it.

### **Unclean Language**

To illustrate how easy it is to unwittingly interfere in a client's process, let's explore an example. A counselor could respond in a number of ways to the following statement:

**Client:** I'm stuck with no way out.

**Counselor 1:** Have you got the determination to walk away?

This intervention uses very unclean language as it:

- implies the solution for the client is to be away from their current condition
- imposes determination as the resource required
- assumes the client will 'walk away' (rather than leaping, soaring, melting, evaporating, etc.)

Also the client might well presuppose they have insufficient resources of the determination required, because if they had enough, they would have already applied it, wouldn't they?

**Counselor 2:** What would happen if you could find a way out?

This is cleaner language as it mostly uses the client's words. However, you may have noticed the embedded command, 'find a way out'. The counselor has assumed the solution of 'finding' on behalf of the client. While this may produce a useful outcome, does the counselor recognize s/he has just imposed a model of the world on the client?

You may also notice in both of the above examples *the client's perception has been subtly ignored*. The client has said there is no way out of being stuck. Experience indicates it is highly supportive to begin by fully validating the client's 'current reality' through the use of Clean Language. Perhaps the deepest presupposition in both of the above interventions is that being 'away' or 'out' is good for the client, and many *counselor's outcome expectation* would be to facilitate this.

Grove assumes that if a client is 'stuck', then there is valuable information in the stuckness. If being 'stuck' is not honored and explored, the client may well need to return to being 'stuck' at a future date. This may explain why some apparently successful interventions can have a short-lived effect.

## Clean Language Questions

The aim of Clean Language early in the process is to allow information to emerge into the client's awareness by exploring *his/her* coding of *his/her* metaphor.

Let's revisit the above example, this time using **Clean Language Questions**:

**Client:** I'm stuck with no way out.

**CLQ:** And what kind of stuck with no way out is that stuck with no way out?

**Client A:** My whole body feels as if its sinking into the ground.

**Client B:** I can't see the way forward. It's all foggy.  
**Client C:** Every door that was opened to me is closed.

This gives the client maximum opportunity to describe the experience of being 'stuck', and therefore to gather more information about their representation of the present state.

Another Clean Language question you could ask would be:

**CLQ:** And when you are stuck with no way out, where are you stuck?

**Client D:** It's as if my feet are frozen to the ground.  
**Client E:** I'm in a long tunnel and there's no light at either end.  
**Client F:** I see myself wrapped up like a mummy.

This question works with the client's metaphor of stuck, and only assumes that for something to be stuck it has to be stuck somewhere.

When the counselor is in rapport with the metaphoric information, questions like the above make perfect sense, and the client's responses have a quality of deep introspection and self-discovery. New awareness of their own process 'updates the system' and the original neural coding will automatically begin to transform; albeit in minute ways at first.

Clean Language questions are then asked of each subsequent response and each symbolic representation is explored. The process ultimately accesses conflicts, paradoxes, double-binds and other 'holding patterns' which have kept the symptoms repeating over and over.

As the process moves beyond this point, symbolic resources naturally emerge which resolve, at a symbolic level, that which the client has been unable to resolve at an everyday level. *When the metaphor evolves, behavior changes in the client's 'real world'*. There is a correlation between the two. When we say that the metaphor evolves, what we mean is that the client is encouraged to give voice [language] to the symbolic nature of the metaphor. At each step, s/he is asked to articulate what is going on which requires that s/he go deeper into his/her own nonconscious to select the words to use to describe what is occurring. This process enables him/her to identify 'unsayable' right-brained thoughts in a way that is not contaminated by the thinking of the counselor.

Clean Language has three components: The **vocal characteristics** when delivering the language patterns, the **syntactical structure** of the language and the **questions** themselves.

## Voice Qualities

Grove deliberately 'marks out' his use of Clean Language through changes to his normal way of speaking:

- The speed of his delivery is slower than half normal pace
- He uses a slightly deeper tonality than normal speaking
- He often uses a distinctive sing-song rhythm
- There is an implied sense of curiosity and wonder in his voice
- The client's *idiosyncratic* pronunciation, emphasis, sighs, etc. are matched

## Syntax

The syntax of Clean Language is peculiar and would sound very strange if used in normal conversation! It uses ***pacing and leading*** in a particular way. For example, all the questions begin with "***and***" and are oriented to the clients '***perceptual present***' or 'inner symbolism'. The generalized syntax, in its full form, comprises 4 components:

"And [repeating the client's words]  
+ And as/when  
+ [question]  
+ [refer to this particular experience]"

For example:

C: I've gone blank.

T: **And** you've gone blank. **And when** you've gone blank, **what kind of blank is that** blank?

OR

C I'm getting confused.

T: **And** you're getting confused. **And as** you're getting confused **is there anything else about** getting confused **like that** ?

## The Nine Basic Questions

There are nine [09] basic Clean Language questions. Two [02] questions request information about the symbol's attributes and two [02] ask for location information. There are two [02] questions which reference the past and two [02] which reference the future (from the client's perceptual

present). This leaves the odd-one-out which offers the client the opportunity to make a lateral and, therefore, metaphorical shift in perception. The nine basic Clean Language questions are:

- And is there anything else about .....
- And what kind of ..... is that .....
  
- And where is .....
- And whereabouts?
  
- And what happens next?
- And then what happens?
  
- And what happens just before .....
- And where does/could ..... come from?
  
- And that's ..... like what?

Where '.....' is (some of) the exact words of the client.

Clients often report that counselors seem to understand their predicament at a very deep level, and that this in itself is valuable. Actually this is only true at the symbolic level - at an everyday content/cognitive level counselors know much less about the client's issue than most traditional counselors.

Perhaps the most noticeable benefit is that the client gets to increase his/her awareness of his/her own process. They become observers of their own repeating patterns. They make connections between the symbolic pattern and their everyday lives. This separates them from their 'stuff' and allows new perspectives and insights.

At a certain stage the process 'takes over' and both counselor and the client are led by the information. When this occurs profound shifts take place. The client is taken by surprise at the turn of perceptual events as long-standing patterns transform themselves into more useful ways of being and doing.

### **Example Transcript**

You may notice in the following transcript, once the opening question was asked, the whole process required just *two* Clean Language questions ... a clear example of "less is more!"

The Counselor [called C in the transcript] walks up to a participant [called A in the transcript] who has just been doing an NeuroLinguistic Programming exercise, Circles of Excellence, for the first time.

C: How did it go?

A: It didn't work because the circles won't stand still.

C: And the circles won't stand still. And when circles won't stand still, what kind of circles are circles that won't stand still?

A: Well, the light keeps moving (gestures high up with right hand).

C: And, the light keeps moving ... And, what kind of light is a light that keeps moving like that? (repeats gesture).

A: (Talking increasingly fast) It shines down and I can't catch up with it. Every time I attempt to step into the light it's not there - it's moved. I'm trying to catch up with it and ... I want to stand in peace and I can't.

C: And you can't stand in peace and you want to stand in peace ... And when you want to stand in peace what kind of stand in peace is that stand in peace?

A: I relax.

C: And what kind of relax is relax like that, when you stand in peace?

A: Deep.

C: And when you stand in peace ... and you relax ... and deep ... and then what happens?

A: I stop.

C: And you stop. And, when you stand in peace and you relax ... and deep ... and you stop ... then what happens?

A: The light ... shines on me. (pause) It's not that I couldn't step into the light ... it's that the light couldn't catch up with me.

C: And now the light has caught up with you ... and the light shines on you ... and you relax ... and a deep relax ... and you stand in peace ... and the light shines on you ... then what happens?

A: (Shakes head, eyes fill with tears, looks down)

C: And what just happened?

A: It's amazing. I'm standing on a stage and a spotlight is shining on me and I'm perfectly still ... and I'm not saying anything ... and there are people (gestures toward 'audience') who have come to see me. (long pause)

C: And take all the time you need, to get to know what it is like, now that you're standing on a stage ... and a spot light is shining on you ... and you're perfectly still ... and not saying anything ... and people (gestures) have come to see you ... and take all the time you need.

In the pause the counselor walks away. For the remaining two days of the workshop the participant repeatedly said that she couldn't remember feeling so relaxed in years.

Clean Language questioning is at the heart of Grove's approach and appears very simple. However, to gain a degree of elegance, we have to learn a whole new set of skills and a radically different approach to counseling. We will also need to keep our ego in check for our desire to demonstrate our own skills is, in this case, a hindrance.

In essence, we have learned a new way of conscious thinking. ***We have learned to think consciously about our symbolic thinking.*** And symbolic thinking is as different to process thinking, as process thinking is to content thinking.

### **Clean Language Without Words**

*"We know more than we can tell."*

M Polanyi

One of the most fascinating aspects is the use of Clean Language to communicate directly with a client's non-verbal expressions.

While we communicate through what we say and how we say it, we also communicate through what we do with our bodies and non-verbal sounds (such as sighs, coughs, clicks). Non-verbal communication is a natural, universal and mostly out-of-awareness process in which we 'cannot not' engage.

Grove goes further:

*In every gesture, and particularly in obsessional gestures and tics and those funny idiosyncratic movements, is encoded the entire history of that behavior. It contains your whole psychological history in exactly the same way that every cell in your body contains your whole biological history.*

Just as every word or phrase used by a client has a purpose, contains meaning and has an array of associations, so all non-verbal behaviors are connected to a vast well-spring of knowledge. We consider repetitive non-verbal communication a pointer to, or a source of, a client's recurring (mostly unconscious) patterns.

What types of information do we encode non-verbally? As well as the more obvious kinesthetic experiences (touch, feelings and emotions) and proprioceptive processes (bodily position, movement and balance), we also use the non-verbal to encode: perceptual space; pre-verbal, preconceptual and idiosyncratic knowledge; traumatic incidence and amnesic memories; meta-comments (responses to our words and actions); family lore, genealogical traits and cultural codes; spiritual connections and life purpose - to name but a few examples. Perhaps Isadora Duncan knew more than she could tell when she said "If I could say it, I wouldn't need to dance it!"

## **Non-Verbal Aspects of Clean Language**

Honor and utilize the way clients communicate non-verbally through their ***Perceptual space***; ***Body as metaphor***; and ***Non-verbal sounds***.

### **PERCEPTUAL SPACE**

We illustrated earlier how metaphors of space are pervasive in language and are a universal and fundamental component of experience. We have a 'mind-space' which acts as a 'theater' where we 'see,' 'hear,' 'feel' and 'act out' our perceptions. The configuration of this mind-space is revealed by our use of spatial metaphors. In addition, how our body has learned to orientate in space is essential to how we make sense of the world and understand our place in it. Said another way, *cognition is an embodied experience*. When our mind/body-space contains symbolic content we call it a **Metaphoric Landscape**.

You can think of the client having a perceptual space around and within themselves. Their body will indicate where symbols are, in what direction they are moving, and how these symbols interact. It is the *relationship* between the client and their Metaphoric Landscape that prompts their body to dance within its perceptual theater.

Given the chance, clients unconsciously orientate themselves to their physical surroundings in such a way that windows, doors, mirrors, shadows, etc. correspond to symbols in their Metaphoric Landscape. By asking clients to choose where they want to sit in a room and where they want you to sit, they will align their perceptual and physical space and place themselves where they feel most comfortable and safe.

### ***Aligning to Client's Perceptual Space***

Since you want to keep the client mindful of their Metaphoric Landscape, it is vital that your marking of space aligns with *their* perceptual space and not

yours. Therefore, it is important to notice how clients consistently use their body to indicate the location of a symbol so you can refer to it *as if* it existed in that place. When the client follows your hand gesture, glance or head point they should be led to the precise location of their symbol. This is making your movements congruent with *their* perceptual space. For example:

Client: It's scary.  
Therapist: And it's scary. And when it's scary, where is it scary?  
C: [points down to his right.]  
T: And when scary [point down to client's right], whereabouts [point down to client's right]?  
C: Down there [points with right foot].  
T: And down there [looks where right foot pointed]. And when down there, whereabouts down there?  
C: About 6 inches away.  
T: And about 6 inches away. And when scary is about 6 inches away, that's scary like what?  
C: Like standing at the edge of a sheer drop.

To keep your language 'clean'. it is preferable to reference a client's behavior non-verbally until they have converted it into words. This encourages symbols to lay claim to their own patch of 'perceptual real estate', as Grove sometimes refers to it, and in this way the client's space becomes 'psychoactive'.

### ***Lines of Sight***

Grove's clinical research suggests that the direction, angle and focus of our eyes are often correlated with the perceptual viewpoint experienced in a memory or symbolic representation.

By noticing where clients look and the focal point of their gaze you can gather information about the location of symbols inhabiting their Metaphoric Landscape. How does this work? Imagine a child who, having just been beaten, looks up in vain to search a father's face for a sign of love. This incident may remain 'imprinted' as part of a 'state-dependent memory'. From then on similar feelings of being unloved may invoke the same posture and upward gaze. Alternatively, looking up at the same angle and focal length may access similar feelings or the memory. Over time the 'line of sight' becomes evident as an habitual part of the client's symptomatic behavior.

Lines of sight are most easily observed when the client fixes his/her eyes in one particular direction (such as staring out of a window), or at one particular object (eg. a mirror, book, door handle), or is transfixed by a pattern or shape (eg. a spot on the carpet, wallpaper motif, shadow) or gazes de-focused into space. Even a momentary glance into a corner or over the shoulder is unlikely to be a random or meaningless act, but may be a response to the configuration of their symbolic world.

As well as lines of sight indicating the location of a symbol, a client may orientate their body and view to *avoid* looking at a particular space. For example, a client entered the consulting room and sat at the right-most end of a sofa. He crossed his legs and angled them to his right. His shoulders inclined right as well. For most of the session, he had his left hand beside his left eye, like a horse's blinker. When his hand momentarily dropped away and he glanced to his left he was asked "**And where are you going when you go there?**" [looking along the client's line of sight]" He looked to his left for a few seconds and a massive sob emerged from deep within. When he had recovered his breath he said "Oh God, there's something there (glance to left) and I don't know what it is. I haven't seen there in a very long time. If I look there I will be trapped and it will be compulsive viewing." Later the client realized that wherever possible, in meetings, walking down the street and at home, he would arrange to have people he was with on his right.

Given the choice, where a client sits will likely be determined by their dominant lines of sight. Investigating these can reveal information that would otherwise be unavailable to the conscious mind.

### ***Physicalizing Metaphoric Space***

Some clients' relationship with their Metaphoric Landscape is such that they prefer to explore it by moving around, rather than by sitting and describing it. They may need to walk around the room, occupy the location of symbols, or enact elements from a scene. By 'physicalizing the space' the client can access information, gain further insights and derive a better understanding of the structure of their perceptual space.

In addition to utilizing the space of the consulting room, Grove also encourages clients to find physical surroundings that have symbolic significance for them. As a consequence, he has conducted sessions on hill tops, on lakes and at every time of the day or night in order to synchronize the client's symbolic and physical terrains. Clean Language is used at all times, even in the most obscure of environments.

## BODY AS METAPHOR

As well as delineating and interacting with their perceptual space, client's bodies communicate all sorts of other symbolic messages. Sometimes information may *only* be available to them when they adopt a particular position, or move part of their body in a specific way. Alternatively, it may be that certain words can only be expressed hand-in-hand with certain actions. Any part of a client's body, or their whole body, can be a living non-verbal metaphor:

- Facial expressions  
(grimacing, pouting, grinning, frowning, blushing, mouthing, yawning, etc.)
- Body expressions and idiosyncratic movements  
(tics, twitches, shudders, shrugs, tremors, unusual breathing, etc.)
- Interactions with own body  
(holding, rubbing, nail biting, thumb sucking, brow wiping, hair curling, etc.)
- Interactions with physical objects  
(rearranging clothing, pillow hugging, pen chewing, twiddling with jewelry, etc.)

The counselor should see the clients' behavior as an ***expression of symbolic patterning***, rather than as 'body language' to be read. By making the body expression the focus of a Clean Language question (usually resulting in a metaphorically equivalent verbal description) this patterning can be explored.

For example, at his first session a client delivered an unbroken hour-long description of his predicament. He ended with "So that's how it is" and looked expectantly. **"And so that's how it is. And when that's how it is, that's how it is like what?"** He looked away, his head turned to the left, chin pointed up high. While he was considering the question his mouth started to open and close in a rhythmical fashion without sound. He was still deep in thought when asked, **"And [matched angle of head and mouth movement]. And when [repeated non-verbal] that's [repeated non-verbal] like what?"** The client returned to the mouthing movement a few times and said, "I feel like a goldfish coming up for air in a de-oxygenated pond." He had captured his predicament in a single paradoxical metaphor. And his body had acted it out before he knew what to say. Now he could work with the metaphor rather than swimming round and round, suffocating in the detail of his description.

Sometimes clients cannot describe their experience in words because it was encoded pre-verbally, or related to an unspeakable traumatic event or connected with a mystical experience. In such cases, Clean Language can be an effective means for direct communication with non-verbal behaviors without the client ever needing to express themselves in words.

## **NON-VERBAL SOUNDS**

We make a distinction between the vocal qualities used to convey words and the expression of other sounds. Whenever a word is spoken, both the word and the way it is pronounced carry information. The word is the point of reference, because the vocal qualities used to produce the word cannot easily be addressed separately. In contrast, non-verbal sounds (such as sighs, in-breaths, throat clears, coughs, blows, clicks, groans, grunts, gurgles, laughs and non-verbal expressions or exclamations such as oh-oh, ah, uhm-m-m, etc.) act as both the point of reference and the carrier of information.

Grove recognized that these sounds are as much a source of symbolic information as words or pictures. Furthermore, non-verbal sounds usually encode knowledge which is out of the client's awareness. The sound can be regarded either as a symbol itself, or as an 'entry point' to unexplored areas of the client's Metaphoric Landscape.

### ***Matching sounds***

In NLP matching a client's words and pronunciation is a way of acknowledging their experience, encouraging them to remain focused on their perceptions and gathering information about the structure of their experience. The same applies when matching non-verbal sounds. However, if you wish to inquire about a particular sound, make that sound a 'noun-phrase' within a clean question. Thus, a client who precedes a statement with a big sigh might be asked:

- C: [big sigh] I give up.  
T: And [replicate big sigh] you give up. And when [big sigh] what kind of [big sigh] is that [big sigh]?  
C: [sigh] I don't know.  
T: And [sigh] you don't know. And when you don't know [big sigh], is there anything else about [big sigh]?  
C: I can't find the words.  
T: And you can't find the words. And when you can't find the words about [big sigh] is there anything else about words you can't find?  
C: They're locked away.

You may have noticed that the clinician acknowledged both the non-verbal and the verbal responses and in so doing validated them as equally appropriate and useful. Through developing what s/he knew about the metaphor 'locked away' the client found a way to unlock the words so that s/he did not have to 'give up' anymore.

### **Making Use of Time**

Another way to utilize a non-verbal sound is to regard it as a temporal marker. You can ask questions which 'move time forward' or 'move time back' by using a non-verbal sound as the point of reference. An example of moving time forward is "And [replicate sound]. And when [sound], then what happens?". An example of moving time back is shown below. The client periodically took in a breath through her teeth. This made a suction-like sound which in and of itself was not particularly noticeable. However, over a period of time the sound directed our attention to ask:

- T: And [replicate sound]. And when [sound], where could [sound] come from?
- C: [Long pause] My God, that's the sound my grandfather used to make when he was angry and his teeth became loose.
- T: And that's the sound your grandfather used to make when he was angry and his teeth became loose. And is there anything else about that sound?
- C: It was terrifying. I used to stand behind my mother.

Although this habit of making a sucking sound had been pointed out by others, she had never made the connection to her grandfather or realized its significance. Clean Language enabled her to explore and transform her 'hiding from confrontation' pattern that was symbolized in a grandfather's long-forgotten false teeth.

Symbolically speaking, everything a client says or does is information about the structure of their experience and, therefore, who they are. Modeling a client's non-verbal behavior with Clean Language acknowledges their way of being, provides *them* with information about how they make sense of their perceptual world, and enables *them* to establish a Metaphoric Landscape within which appropriate change can take place. Once this has happened, their Metaphoric Landscape will go on working for them long after they walk out of your consulting room.

Clean Language can work just as effectively without words as it can with words. It provides a method for using non-verbal expressions directly, or

indirectly by eliciting a metaphor for the non-verbal behavior. Either way, Clean Language is invaluable for entering the "universe of behavior that is unexplored and unexamined".

## **Guidelines for Utilizing Non-verbal Expression**

### **Refer to non-verbal symbols by:**

- Selectively matching non-verbal sounds and body expressions as long as doing so supports the client to remain in their process and attend to their perceptions.
- Using your physiology to denote location in perceptual space in ways that are congruent with the configuration of the client's Metaphoric Landscape.
- Asking clean questions of particular non-verbal sounds and body expressions by using them as noun-phrases in the standard syntax of Clean Language:

"**And** [repeat client's expression]. **And when/as** [repeat client's expression], (ask clean question)"

### **Use the following Clean Language questions to:**

#### **Ask for a metaphor**

- And ... that's 'X' like what?

#### **Ask for attributes/qualities**

- And ... is there anything else about 'X'?
- And ... what kind of 'X' is that 'X'?

#### **Ask for location**

- And ... where is 'X'?
- And ... whereabouts?

#### **Move time forward**

- And ... then what happens?
- And ... what happens next?

#### **Move time back**

- And ... what happens just before 'X'?
- And ... where could 'X' come from?

### **Use the specialist clean question to 'enter' via a Line of Sight**

- And where are you going when you go there [look or gesture along line of sight]

### **METAPHORS:**

- are generated entirely from within the client's experience
- are represented as an internal construct within Visual, Auditory and Kinesthetic (VAK) modalities and submodalities
- are coded with symbolic attributes which are containers of meaning and significance for the client

For example, if a client says "I keep running up against a brick wall", then the **attributes** of that wall (how high, how long, how many bricks, what the bricks are made out of, etc.) will be highly significant and correlate with the characteristics of the presenting problem. In addition, the **location** of the wall in relation to the speaker, the direction of their run, and the **sequence** of events within the metaphor will also be part of the inherent structure that keeps the behavior repeating - or, as Grove calls it, the replicating mechanism.

Grovian metaphors are idiosyncratic and very personal to the client, and, require no interpretation by either the clinician or the client. 'Real' memories and imagined memories are treated the same within the Metaphor Model. It's the symbolic meaning of their representations that is important, not whether they really happened. People cannot produce images, sounds and feelings that have no symbolic meaning - even if they try! Often the more a client is surprised by their own metaphors, the more valuable the information embedded in the symbols.

For this process to be successful, it is not important to have any idea whatsoever of the *meaning* of these symbols, only that they were deeply significant for the client. The Metaphor Model can work without the client describing real events. You may notice how valuable this can be for people who have suffered 'unspeakable' trauma.

For this intervention and all interventions that are used to work cognitively with a client, it is vital that the counselor work within the client's sphere of thoughts; his/her inner logic or inner symbolism. It must be held as a principle of the intervention that the information the client is conveying is

**true** to them, and we will never be able to understand that truth, until we understand the logic/symbolism behind that belief.

## **CONCLUSION**

During the process any of the following may happen:

- (1) hidden memories may surface
- (2) contact may be made with the inner child, which is encouraged to grow and merge with the present
- (3) traumas may be re-enacted symbolically, as a fantasy, rather than by re-living them. For example, a client may experience her rage as a storm cloud about to burst. This procedure enables traumatic incidents to be resolved without re-experiencing the events in detail.
- (4) for adolescents and young adults, regressions to childhood can also occur in which the client finds the power to confront those who have hurt him or her and redress the balance.
- (5) the client can contact inner spiritual resources and reclaim lost energy.
- (6) The client can contact positive resources which will lead to behavior change.

It is common in sessions for clients to experience surges of energy and personal power, and feelings of freedom, as the metaphors are transformed. Spontaneous spiritual experiences may also take place, usually if the client has previously been engaged in some spiritual work.

The process of metaphor counseling works with the client's own spontaneous images, not images imposed by the counselor. Everything that happens in the session arises out of the client's own experience - unlike various methods of guided imagery; the counselor does not suggest any 'scene' or tell the client what to see. Some people cannot form pictures in their heads - the method can still work with them as they can 'sense' or 'know' what is there.

Metaphor counseling is usually practiced in sessions of about 2 hours' duration, including time for counseling before the 'metaphor work' and questions and explanations afterwards. Weekly sessions are recommended.

Metaphor work is not like classical hypnosis - no induction is used. However, since it is an altered state of awareness in which the client is focused on mental events and feelings, it can be regarded as a form of indirect or Ericksonian hypnotherapy.

The method can be applied to any issue which the client feels 'blocked' or 'stuck', to deep feelings of anger, shame or guilt, and for victims of trauma, abuse or post-traumatic stress. Like many of the newer forms of therapeutic counseling, this way of working is continually evolving in the light of clients' experiences and discoveries.

Children are usually more able to deal with the 'fantasy' of the experience and are more spontaneous in the sessions. Sometimes an adolescent or young adult may have initial difficulty in allowing the spontaneous flow of metaphor, because the logical and rational mind keeps active and the client keeps analyzing their thinking in rational terms. **Role reversal** may be used to help such clients get in touch with inner metaphor.

In this method the counselor plays the part of a client and acts out a spontaneous metaphoric resolution to the client's type of problem in response to questions by the actual client (The counselor can prompt the client with questions to ask). This provides the client with a model of how the process works, and it is much easier for the client to then contact their own imaginative and metaphoric world. It should be noted, however, that this methodology violates the clean language process and creates demand characteristics for the client to address.

Some of the latest innovations in Grovian metaphor counseling are taught to professionals by Penny Tompkins and James Lawley of The Developing Company, under the title of Symbolic Modeling. New applications of metaphor work include its integration with informal counseling and interviewing, educational applications and the use of metaphor for corporate development and management training. Metaphor work is moving from the therapeutic area into the realm of personal growth, where the focus is, instead of revealing the unconscious symbol system behind a problem, to develop new metaphors for resources, whether a corporate or project identity or mission, or a state of competence or excellence.