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Compassionate Indifference

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Compassionate Indifference

Cover Page Footnote

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Compassionate Indifference

By Judith Sullivan, ZB Faculty

Whether you are a body worker, therapist, coach, or friend you may find this information relevant to you.

A Not-So-Good Zero Balancing

The worst hands-on or remote treatment sessions that you ever give will probably have one or more of these components.

- ◆ Wanting to impress your client with your amazing skills
- ◆ Wanting them to see how great your modality is
- ◆ Really, really wanting to help them
- ◆ Being fearful that they won't like what you are doing
- ◆ Worrying, being angry or sad about something in your personal life
- ◆ Tension in your body, mind or spirit

Compassionate Indifference

What is similar in the above examples? They all have to do with you. Your focus is on you and not on your client. The best sessions are done when you, the practitioner, are neutral and relaxed. Neutral with a side of curiosity and a shot of humor (when appropriate) works best. It is also important to work with a sense of a compassionate indifference. Almost everyone resists the word indifference because they think it means that they don't care (*see Really, really wanting to help them*, above). Other good words have been suggested, such as compassionate neutrality and compassionate care, anything but indifference. But I choose indifference because when you hear it, it wakes you up. "What is she talking about?" "It sounds like I don't care." If you hear the words compassionate neutrality, there is a temptation to ignore it, to think, oh yeah, I know about that. But compassionate indifference needs to be unpacked.

Indifference is about detachment, being OK with whatever the result is. Compassionate indifference is about being present, being curious and listening with your whole being, without judging. Is your intuition important here? Of course. Is your thinking mind important here? Of course. With compassionate indifference, you can look for the core of the problem. Curiosity is

part of your package of skills. That being said, compassionate indifference, takes some practice. It takes being aware of the tension in your body, mind and spirit; additionally it takes practice to learn how to relax.

Tension

For both practitioners and clients, tension can come from our mind, emotions, or spirit in addition to our bodies. Mind, emotion and spiritual tension, if not processed, will end up as physical tension. Let's look at this a bit.

Mind Tension

Mind tension can be about making decisions. All the myriad little decisions we need to make daily, as seemingly insignificant as 'Maybe I shouldn't have said that'. 'Will they be unhappy with me'. These questions are normal, but if you keep asking yourself, or telling tension filled stories to your self that don't resolve, you are experiencing mind tension. This tension turns into chemicals which concentrate in the muscles and fascia of your body.

Emotional Tension

If conscious or non-conscious feelings of anger, sadness and fear keep coming up constantly, you are experiencing emotional tension. As a practitioner, you need to leave your issues outside the door. During a session, your client can easily pick up your emotional state. You could look at this as a type of malpractice. For example, I was working with a client after an extremely unpleasant phone call with my mother. Internally I was in a turmoil. After the session the client was in a turmoil because she had received my tension and stopped seeing me. A few months later she made an appointment with me, not for a session, but to talk with me about it. I apologized profusely and I treasure that conversation, not because it was easy for me, but because I really learned what can happen if I am not at peace internally. She started seeing me again soon after that.

Spiritual Tension

This has to do with internal conflict or going against yourself or your internal ethics. Guilt and worry are spiritual tensions, 'what did I do wrong'? 'Is this intuition or paranoia'? Any dogma that you have ends up as spiritual tension because there is no room for argument.

All of these tensions, if not resolved, or processed, end up in the body. Sometimes even if you have cleared issues on a mental, emotional or spiritual level they will still be in the body. As a Zero Balancing practitioner I have received many referrals from psychotherapists because their clients are 'stuck'. When tension is removed from the body, the client has more access to all their feelings and progress is possible. Sometimes our clients have cleared out trauma in the mental, emotional and spiritual levels, but if during the session, there is a big emotional release with no apparent content, it seems to me as if the mental work has been done and the physical body just needed to catch up. If we remember to stay observant, neutral, and compassionately indifferent, the releases of the client can be more profound.

In summary, as a practitioner, the more personal pain we have processed in our lives, the more deeply we can be relaxed which strengthens our ability to listen.

Relaxation

There are two kinds of relaxation, 'rag doll', which is the relaxation we want our clients to have on the table. Secondly, there is 'conscious relaxation' where parts of the body that are not working, are relaxed. For instance, as we work, some of us keep tension in shoulders, neck, buttocks, or even curled toes. It is important to be mindful of these tension spots and relax what you are not using when you work, even when you are simply sitting. When I relax I can feel more deeply into my client's body because I am not feeling my own tension. The tension in my body creates barriers to sensing and feeling with my hands.

The practice of relaxing our bodies and releasing our mental, emotional and spiritual tension allows us to bypass the ways we are not present with our clients; It is what helps us to inhabit the state of compassionate indifference.

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Judith Sullivan

As an expert practitioner and teacher Judith Sullivan has over 40 years experience helping adults, children and infants heal from many painful physical issues. She bridges the healing arts and science by using precise touch for profound results to heal the body naturally. Combining Zero Balancing, CranioSacral Therapy, and Visceral Manipulation, Judith treats the whole body/mind matrix of each individual to correct imbalances and restore optimum homeostasis in the body.

Judith began her work life in speech pathology. She discovered that movement and hands-on work significantly helped kids improve. Following that lead, she shifted focus to bodywork, her true calling. She is a Certified Diplomate of CranioSacral Therapy and taught CST 1 and 2 for Upledger Institute for 13 years before focusing her teaching on Zero Balancing. She began her study of tai chi nearly 40 years ago and began teaching in 1984 with the international School of Tai Chi Chuan Inc.

Judith Sullivan, NCTMB, has been a certified Instructor of the Zero Balancing Touch Foundation since 1989, teaching Core 1 and 2, Alchemy of Touch, Geometry of Healing and Freely Moveable Joints. She *developed Zero Balancing Expanded: Addressing the Viscera* (formerly *Spirit of the Organs*), *ZB Kids*, *Zero Balancing Expanded: Addressing the Skull* (formerly *Secrets of the Skull*), and *Fabulous Fulcrums*. She has just completed editing the fourth edition of the *Core Zero Balancing Study Guide*. Her textbook is *Zero Balancing Expanded—The Attitude of Awaiting a Fish*, published by the Upledger Institute in 2014.

Judith lives in Charlottesville, VA where she takes True Story and Improv classes whenever she can. Her secret power is relaxing while she works. Her next working incarnation in this life is to be a storyteller. Storytelling is her big love. Her stories come from her students, her clients, her children, and her life.

