

Why I Still Teach Deep Breathing

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Deep Breathing in the Treatment of Anxiety

- Dysfunctional breathing a strong component of most anxiety disorders
- Overlap between panic symptoms and hyperventilation
- Relaxation methods typically have breathing at their core
- Goldfried survey of CBT clinicians
 - Therapist experience correlates with panic treatment outcome and use of breathing

The Scientific Argument

- Some studies suggest that breathing instruction either
 - Adds little or no benefit;
 - May impede progress;
 - Adds less than some other component
- Not an open and shut case
- The key question is how breathing instruction can be used

The Evolution of Anxiety Treatment

- Anxiety Treatment has evolved away from reliance on coping to exposure
- Treatment reverses the anti-anxiety processes of protection and avoidance
- Exposure, good; safety behaviors, bad
- Studies which fault breathing instruction often use breathing instruction which emphasizes control and reduction of fear

Coping Technique or Exposure Tool?

- Can we use breathing instruction in a way that emphasizes exposure and acceptance rather than control?
- Can it be done in a sufficiently brief and organic way to avoid having to trade off other treatment elements?
- And also helps them to be better breathers?

Introducing Belly Breathing to a Client

- What do you do when you can't catch your breath?
- Show me your deep breath
- Mention the Rule of Opposites
- Now we have a specific breathing technique, and a powerful general rule of thumb that will both promote exposure
- We can use breathing to induce panic symptoms as well as calm them

The Rule of Opposites

- My gut instinct of how to respond to high anxiety is dead wrong
- It's wrong because it's based on treating panic as danger, rather than discomfort
- What's useful for discomfort is the opposite of what's useful for danger
- When you panic, do the opposite of your gut instinct

Common Applications of the Rule of Opposites

- Death grip on wheel • Hold the wheel lightly
- Hold breath • Belly breathing
- Resist the fear • Accept the fear
- Tense the body • Relax the body
- Stand still • Use your body
- Hide the fear • Acknowledge fear
- Be a wallflower • Introduce self
- Flee • Hang out
- Check repeatedly • Trust experience

Introducing the Anxiety Trick

- You experience Discomfort, but treat it like Danger
- For Danger: Fight, Flight, Freeze
- For Discomfort: Float, or chill out
- This has power, because what's good for Danger is the Opposite of what's good for Discomfort
- The Anxiety Trick leads you to react in ways that make the problem worse rather than better
- Undoing the Trick is the main task

References

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