


What are the benefits of the Focusing steps and how do we help clients to focus?

In brief, Gendlin's original "six-step Focusing" (1978) protocol includes:

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1. Clearing a space
 2. Getting a felt sense
 3. Finding a handle
 4. Resonating the handle
 5. Asking and
 6. Receiving.

Clearing a space sets issues at an imaginary distance. Distancing can help when emotion overwhelms a client. Being overwhelmed may mean they cannot work. This helps the focuser/client to dis-identify with the issues or problems they are carrying and realise they are not their problems. It allows them access to a deeper self, separate from their difficulties.

Often clients feel lighter and the cleared space allows them to turn towards their concerns and choose one thing to work on rather than feeling confused or overwhelmed. Asking 'what does this whole thing feel like' or 'what sense do I get of all of this' and just waiting (ie not answering with what you already know) provides a way for the *felt sense* to form and opens the door for more to be known about it.

The felt sense of an issue carries with it life-forward movement and its own healing solution. The *Handle/symbol* helps a felt sense carry forward especially when we check the handle, that is, *Resonate the handle*. This allows the client to get an inner sense of what is authentic and true. *Asking* deepens an inner connection with oneself, between the 'I' and the 'it'. What unfolds is within each person's embodied knowing. *Receiving* allows our inner wisdom and solutions to be heard (Rappaport 2009 p. 45).

If we are open to, and aware of, when a 'felt sense' happens we can point our client in that direction and this may help. Focusing happens in moments and we can use it as we move in and out of other ways of working.

Some of the indicators of a 'felt sense' are:

- Slowing speech, becoming quiet
- Looking down
- Groping for words, for example, saying this is 'hard to put into words'
- Gesturing towards the middle of the body
- Using words like 'kind of' or 'something' or 'it's here'.

When these moments present themselves, we can stay with them. Whenever a client pauses and gropes for words and searches inwardly for the right words, they are on the edge of a felt sense. We can help unfold their 'felt sense'. For example, the client says "there's something tight in my stomach" and the counsellor says, "you are sensing something there in your stomach that is tight, maybe just stay a little longer" (Weiser Cornell 2013, pp 51-53). This sort of thing is done in EF work. The client may then say, after staying longer, "Oh, it's kind of like a wall". This is a fresh metaphorical image. At this point, we may want a client to experience and express this emotion or we may want them to unfold this into a felt sense.

If we want them to unfold their 'felt sense' we may say, "You are sensing something that is kind of like a wall". Maybe you can see if it is OK to just be with that for a while. This allowing of space and coming into relationship with the 'something' tends to open up a process and often more will unfold, a different word, an image, a memory. This can bring new information and relief. (Weiser Cornell, 2013, p xix and 7). I imagine EF therapists already do this without naming it focusing. If we choose to, we can encourage it.

In helping clients to focus, it is useful to have words that invite them to find their 'felt sense' more easily. We want clients to slow down, pause, make space, say hello and turn toward what they find with kindness or if not kindness curiosity.

Some examples of guiding suggestions when a person is on the edge of a 'felt sense' are:

- "What is in the way of feeling all OK now"? or

- “Perhaps you can get a fresh feel/sense for this whole thing (eg about your father)
- “Perhaps you could just be with that something you are sensing that’s like anger” and see if anger fits or what might fit better or “I am going to say those things back to you, so you can sense how they fit”.
- “Perhaps you could ‘keep it company’ or say ‘hello’ or “stay with it a bit longer”. (The therapist is also holding the space and can let the client know)
- There is “something about” this whole thing that gets you eg upset.
- You might want to sense how it feels “from its point of view” or ask it “what it wants or needs” or ask what “it doesn’t want” or
- Check if it has an “emotional quality” or
- Sense “what the crux of it is” or
- “What is the worst of it” or
- What is a “forward step”.

These questions can be asked at anytime to create a mini-focusing moment.

There is something about allowing, acknowledging and simply ‘being with’ the ‘somethings’ that come that brings relief. It is a worthwhile process to do in and out of the therapy room (Weiser Cornell 2013 Ch 4).