

FOCUSING DRILLS

Adapted from TI-1001 (2010) Traumatology Institute Manual

Although most people believe this is a relatively straightforward skill (being able to focus one's attention is second nature isn't it?) However, you will notice throughout these series of exercises this is a skill of some merit. Descillo (1997) points out how focus can be lost:

think of a time in the last week when you had something to communicate to someone, who reacted to what you said, which in turn caused you to react, with the result that the original communication was never resolved (p. 7).

The next three drills give us the opportunity to practice attention holding or the manner in which we lose our focus. By becoming aware of what triggers us or creates reactivity helps us to be more aware of our focus and how to maintain it. If you work with others who are sharing stories of loss, grief or trauma and become triggered by this material it keeps you from maintaining your focus on the client and you become inner directed. At that point you are focusing on your own wounds or reactivity no longer connected and attending to the needs of your client.

Focus Drill #1

In this drill you will take the “drill position” which is face-to-face sitting in front of your partner close enough so your knees almost touch. The object is to hold with position remaining aware of the other person, with our eyes closed and our body still - feet flat on floor and hands on lap. We are to remain aware of our partner as opposed to the wandering messages in our mind or physical aspects of our own bodies.

Focus Drill #2

Holding the same position as above open your eyes and focus on your partner. The goal is to remain attentive and still giving your attention to the other person while releasing personal internal dialogue and physical discomfort. In order for us to work effectively with trauma survivors we need to establish a solid ability to be with others despite any internal discomfort we may be experiencing. With trauma work, as many responders/clinicians can attest to this is mostly about our own terror of encountering trauma in our own lives or the triggering of emotions with reflecting upon another's loss, grief or trauma story.

Focusing Drill #3

Again we maintain the “drill position”. This time the dyad has two roles the “learner” and the “trainer”. It is the trainer's responsibility to run the drill and teach the “learners” the drill objectives.

1. Objective 1 - “Begin a drill by telling your partner to start. If the student reacts or needs correction for an error, give a time out signal, saying time out and tell the student what the mistake was. And then tell the student to start again.

2. Objective 2 - Repeat whatever caused the reaction. Or, in later drills, have the student repeat a phrase [or action] that caused the reaction (Descillo, 1997, p. 9).”

The goal of this drill is to reduce “reactivity” and enhance ability to remain “intentional”. This will allow us to decide that we are prepared to do trauma work and truly listen and then be able to follow through as we are no longer susceptible to random “triggers”.

Descillo (1997, p. 10) explains the drill as follows:

The trainer starts the drill by saying ‘start’ or ‘begin’. The trainer ‘baits’ the student by doing or saying some simple thing, like sticking his tongue out at the student. If the student laughs, the train gives the time out signal, saying ‘time out, you laughed. Begin.’ Once the student [is] completely composed, the trainer will again stick her/his tongue out. If the student again laughs, the trainer will again give the time out signal and message as above. The trainer will continue to stick his/her tongue out at the student until the action no longer provokes a laugh.

Preparing ourselves to be aware of reactivity allows us to monitor our internal triggers and respond in a manner that we choose. This works both for silliness, as above, and the very serious nature of post-trauma work.

ATTITUDE ADJUSTMENT DRILL

This drill trains the dyad to add control to our tone of voice, facial expressions, and body language. When working with trauma/disaster survivors we must recognize that these individuals have learned that the world is NOT necessarily a safe place. Even less so if they learned that people are not to be trusted as well. If our client feels judged or used in any way they will likely withdraw as they tend to be highly attuned to nonverbal or unconscious forms of communication. It may have been a useful way of protecting themselves when dealing with danger in their environment. Since in most cases this hyperawareness has been adaptive we need to adjust ourselves not our clients.

Descillo (1997, p. 11) astutely points out that during a potential conflict “a raised eyebrow or a condescending tone of voice could certainly escalate a situation that was already preciously balanced.”

- Learners read through 2-3 phrases out loud as a practice only with no corrections.
- Next, trainers tell students when to begin and stop. They tell learners to stop when errors are made, inform the student of the error and begin again from the last phrase that resulted in an error. The phrases are practiced until each one is correctly performed (no reactivity shown through body language, facial expression or tone of voice).
- Using the ten phrases below the trainer and learner practice as follows:

1. You have toes like a warthog

2. If I didn't know better I would say you hadn't heard a word I have told you
3. Do you always chase flies
4. I feel like a drowned rat
5. Come closer I'll bite you
6. I feel my ears turning into cauliflower
7. I am going to inflict my ridiculous beliefs upon you
8. Must you sit so close
9. If they say it is free it must cost something
10. The possibilities are endless when you think of potato chips

ACKNOWLEDGMENT DRILL

When communicating with others we need to indicate appropriately that we have heard and understand what has been said - this is the goal of the acknowledgment drill. If we speak with someone who is cutting us off or responding inappropriately we do not feel heard and so we may feel our contact was unfinished. This can be extremely frustrating and we may try to repeat ourselves only to find ourselves once again frustrated in our efforts to be heard and understood. In fact, it is more important to be heard and understood than to have someone simply agree with our position.

Good examples of non-judgmental or evaluative acknowledgments follow:

- I see
- fine
- good
- ok
- I understand
- I hear what you are saying

Saying “uh huh” or nodding one's head is a good way to keep the communication going but is not considered an acknowledgment.

1. Both members of dyad write out a list of five phrases that they will read to their partner when in the “trainer” role.
2. The trainer begins and ends the drills in the now familiar manner.

3. The learner responds to what they heard the trainer say with one of the standard acknowledgment responses noted above.
4. Corrections are made by the trainer for errors in tone of voice, body language, inappropriate acknowledgment, poor timing (too quick or slow) or lost focus.

The drill is complete when all five phrases are responded to appropriately.

CLOSURE DRILL # 1

Descillo (1997, p. 12) recalls a favorite T-shirt worn by survivors of Hurricane Andrew that reflected the need for closure in order to move on. The T-shirt read “I survived Hurricane Andrew, but the recovery is killing me.” We all need closure in order to feel prepared to leave the past behind and move forward. Questions also require skill to bring to closure. Descillo (1997) recognizes four different types of question closure as follows and offers the following four examples below:

Response 1	answer	deserve acknowledgment
Response 2	comment	not an answer but deserving of a brief, polite response
Response 3	evasion	ignore
Response 4	concern	a concern that must be addressed before a question is answered

An Answer:

Parent: “Did you do your homework?”
 Child: “Yes, I did.”
 Parent: “Great.”

A Comment:

Parent: “Did you do your homework?”
 Child: “Your hair looks really nice.”
 Parent: “Well, thank you! Did you do your homework?”

An evasion:

Parent: “Did you do your homework?”
 Child: “It’s time for my favorite TV show!”
 Parent: “You didn’t answer my question: Did you do your homework?”

A concern:

Parent: “Did you do your homework?”
 Child: “I have a terrible headache.”
 Parent: “I’m so sorry to hear that. When did it start?”
 Child: “Around lunch time.”
 Parent: “Would you like a painkiller?”
 Child: “I took one about 20 minutes ago.”
 Parent: “All right. Were you able to do your homework?”
 Child: “No, not yet. I was waiting for the pill to kick in.”

Parent: “OK. Let me know how you’re doing later.”

Although the examples given above are simple it is clear that we have all encountered variations on each of the responses above and know that in real life these can be very complex. In this drill the goal is to return to the question in a non-reactive manner until we have an appropriate response to our question.

1. Learners select one question (i.e., “What color is the flooring?” “Can birds fly?” or any other non-essential/personal question chosen). Once a question is selected it is used for the entire drill as if it had never been asked before.
2. Trainers respond to the question in any way they chose using one of the four response options above. Learners repeat the question once they receive the response by saying “I’ll repeat the question, “can birds fly?” and again await a response.
3. The trainer starts and stops the drill based on the familiar pattern. Trainers may “bait” the learner to make them lose their focus, or exhibit inappropriate response, body language, tone or facial expression.
4. This pattern is continued until all forms of responses have been used successfully.

CLOSURE DRILL # 2

At this final drill stage, we are trying to create a flow in dialogue while attempting to arrive at closure to a question. Instructions for this drill are the same as above with the following simple changes: there is no “baiting” by the trainer however “concerns” are raised which the learner must deal with.

Descillo’s (1997, p.14) example follows below:

Learner: Is the earth round?
Trainer: I am feeling extremely tired.
Learner: When did this feeling start?
Trainer: About five minutes ago.
Learner: How many hours of sleep did you get last night?
Trainer: About seven.
Learner: It’s not unusual in doing this kind of work for tiredness to start like this. Let me know how it goes as we continue with the question we were on: Is the earth round?

Once the drill is over, participants will be able to respond to evasions, comments, concerns and answers thus arriving at closure.