

Emotional stress and body organization

by Ralph Strauch, Ph.D.

Feeling states and body organization are closely intertwined. Your body amplifies your emotions in the same way your stereo amplifier amplifies music. When an emotion arises you subconsciously organize your body to amplify that emotion, and what you actually "feel" is the changed organization. Imagine you're frightened, for example, and notice yourself contract. Imagine sudden anger, and notice how your body responds. Your feeling experience is an ongoing flow of constantly changing body organization.

What happens, then, when you experience trauma — childhood abuse, a physical or emotional assault, a life-threatening accident? You try to shut off the experience, or at least attenuate its flow. You fight to close down the amplifier, tightening your body against its manifestation of the trauma. You are at least partially successful, but at some long term cost.

The cost is that the rest of the experience, the part that you successfully closed down, remains locked in your body. (More precisely, perhaps, it remains locked in patterns in the neurological patterns that control your body). The body organization that locks it in becomes a forbidden place, a way-of-being you must always avoid to keep the trauma suppressed.

The key element here is disruption of the natural feeling process — defining feelings as "not OK" or "not me." The source need not be traumatic. Indeed, any parts of yourself that you refuse to acknowledge and own can be a source of disorganization — the feelings you walled off as a child because "nice girls don't feel that way," or "big boys don't cry," for example, the fear of not living up to what is expected of you, the stresses of day-to-day living.

When you suppress part of your experience, for whatever reason, you create tensions in the body to block the feeling

process. Keeping it blocked requires continual ongoing subconscious work, draining energy that could otherwise make your life easier, happier, and more productive. You may experience lethargy, fatigue, stiffness, low level pain or other physical manifestations, but the underlying source of the difficulty rests with the blocked feeling process and resultant disrupted body organization. Whatever road you take back to health, its effectiveness will be limited unless both the disorganization and the underlying denial of feelings that caused it are acknowledged and dealt with.

Functional Integration[®] provides a highly effective tool to facilitate this process. Blocked areas of body organization are opened gently to allow controlled access to suppressed feeling states. The safe supportive environment allows these states to be experienced and acknowledged, thus dissipating their heavy emotional loading. This in turn reduces the need for the body defenses, supporting integration of improved body organization and movement toward a more positive, integrated experience of self.

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