

Chapter 4

What Will We Talk About?

Have you ever apologized to a therapist for walking in with nothing to talk about? Has a therapist ever told you this can lead to the best sessions? In this chapter of Plain Talk about Talk Therapy, we'll explore how walking in with things to say in therapy can impair your progress. Conversely, how walking in with nothing to say can lead to profound insights. If you know what to do with this state of mind. Do you know? Let's see.

Arriving With Things to Talk About

I once had a therapist ask me if I would be willing to do less in therapy. In effect, she was asking me to let her do more of the work. What made her ask? She never said directly. I came to realize though that she was referring to the fact that I came in every week “well prepared” for therapy. Translation. I arrived each week with an agenda. An already chosen plan for what we'd talk about. My response to her? “You're right. I don't want to waste my sessions.” So what's the big deal. A lot of people do this. Is this really such a bad thing anyway?

The big deal is, without realizing it, I was limiting what we spoke about to predigested life events. Stories I either already understood or felt on my way to understanding. This meant I pretty much always arrived with the session content

The 12 Categories of Blocked Needs Markers (How Emergence Personality Theory Identifies Wounds)

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The following list of twelve experiences comprise the master list for psychological symptoms. Thus whenever you encounter one of these experiences, you will always find a set of blocked needs associated with it. Along with a startling event or events.

Category One:

Vivid Visual Recall of a Painful Event

Category Two:

Being Unable to Picture a Common Childhood Event

Category Three:

Hating an Ordinary Life Event

Category Four:

Under-reacting to a Loving Event

Category Five:

Under-reacting to a Violent Event



Category Six:

Feeling You Have No Choices

Category Seven:

Feeling Urgency During an Ordinary Life Event

Category Eight:

Feeling Abandoned During an Ordinary Life Event

Category Nine:

Feeling Trapped During an Ordinary Life Event

Category Ten:

Repeatedly Making the Same Painful Error

Category Eleven:

Feeling Markedly Older or Younger During an Ordinary Life Event

Category Twelve:

Feeling Compelled to Do Ordinary Acts



already in progress. Before we even spoke word one.

Was this such a bad thing though? Yes, in fact, it was. Why? In essence, it meant I never had to expose too much of myself. At least none of what I had yet to prepare answers for. I also got to avoid facing all of the more shameful material in me. The stuff I felt no one could help me with. Or accept about me. Along with the stuff I was yet to feel ready to see in myself. And feared I might never be ready to see.

The point is, by always arriving with things to talk about, I never had to face a lot of things in myself. Of course, at the time, I did not realize this. Quite the opposite, in fact. I even remember thinking that my having things to work on made me a good client for her. Not too boring nor too difficult to work with and at the same time, willing to self examine. The thing is, by arriving with my sessions already under way, in actuality, I was being a terrible client. Well maybe not terrible. But certainly misdirected. And definitely well defended.

Now the kicker. Years later, while thinking back on all the therapists I'd ever worked with, I remembered this woman. And while I recall her as being a warm, kind, and supportive woman, she was not a very dynamic therapist. Certainly nowhere near up to the task of getting a "too smart for his own good" man like me to open up. So what was I really hiding? The fact that I did not believe she could help me.

What am I saying? I am saying that while being kind and supportive has it's place in therapy, a therapist also needs the courage to speak up. The courage to ask downright ballsy questions, in fact. Why? Because the best therapists face this discomfort by asking risking questions. Unfortunately, this question about my arriving at therapy "too well prepared" was about the only risky question this therapist ever asked me in my entire four years with her.

My point? For four years, I treaded water. And she helped. And while I certainly gained a few insights during that four years, I also managed to avoid most of what was really troubling me. Not the least of which was my unconscious need to take care of a therapist whom I feared was not up to the task. Ergo my arriving with predigested session material; a mother bird client feeding a baby bird therapist, if you will.

In other words, her question to me that day was probably the best piece of therapy she did with me. It certainly was my stuck point in therapy for that whole four years. Moreover, because she never could help me to see my way past it, inadvertently, I felt compelled to take care of her for whole four years. Why? Because I could not face the fact that my therapist, a woman whom I was really fond of, was not able to get me to do the real work.

Know this happened years before I became a therapist. Not that this would have helped. You see, not once during my years of training was I ever taught

to watch for this. Whatever the case, in the end, we both lost, albeit, I am still grateful to her for her kindness and non judgment. In these areas, she was an excellent therapist.

Why mention all this? Because twenty plus years later, this skill; knowing when a client is trying to take care of me, has become one of my more valued skills. This and telling people I like it when they come in with *nothing* to talk about. Which, whenever this happens, always reminds me of how I used to come into therapy in just the opposite state; with *too much* to talk about. All so that I would not hurt my therapist's feelings by exposing her inabilities as a therapist.

Obviously, for me to be mentioning this, I must have, at some point, healed this wound. The proof? I now love the very thing I once felt compelled to avoid; having nothing to talk about in therapy. Perhaps this is why, whenever someone comes in apologizing for having nothing to talk about, I fondly remark, I always find these sessions are the best. And they are.

What makes these sessions the best? As my father used to say, "they've got potential." And they do. Especially if you know how to ask ballsy questions. As well as where to find these questions, something I call, the 12 Block Markers. The twelve categories of risk taking healing questions.

What are "Block Markers?" And how do they help people heal? Let's look.

The 12 Block Markers Introduced

What I'm about to show you is the twelve categories of risky questions with which I find peoples' wounds. Straight to the heart, definitely risky, but powerfully charged questions. Know their power lies in the fact that the person can be symptom free and they still find wounds.

Now without further ado (and setting aside for another time the theory which underlies these 12 categories), here they are. My twelve core strategies for locating wounds.

- [1] Vivid Recall of a Painful Event
- [2] An Inability to Picture a Common Childhood Event
- [3] Hating an Ordinary Life Event
- [4] Under-reacting to a Loving Event
- [5] Under-reacting to a Violent Event
- [6] Having No Choice
- [7] Feeling Urgency During Ordinary Life Events
- [8] Feeling Abandoned During Ordinary Life Events
- [9] Feeling Trapped During Nonviolent Life Events

- [10] Repeatedly Making the Same Painful Error
- [11] Feeling Markedly Older or Younger During Ordinary Life Events
- [12] Feeling Compelled to Do Ordinary Acts

Let's start with the obvious; what is a Block Marker?

A Block Marker is a sort of mental pointer to a time during which you were once startled into blankness by a painful event. After which you have a sort of psychological "hole" in your ability to picture, something which results in a feeling quite similar to how knowing a pothole is in a road impairs your ability to drive.

Literally, we all have these blank spots in our minds. Psychologically speaking, anyway. More important, finding these holes is the single most empirical method for finding our injuries.

Am I being too vague? Let me offer an example. When I was a boy, two little girls in my class were standing in front of a store on a busy highway. A tractor trailer lost its brakes and hit and killed one of them right in front of the other. No surprise that the little girl who was six at the time could not remember this happening. But because of what happened, she also had a blocked ability to picture tractor trailers. She literally could not bring one to mind ever when asked to make one up.

Of course, most of us will never have an event this terrible happen to us. Even so, we all have certain things we have lost the ability to visualize. Psychological potholes in the roads in our minds so to speak. Moreover, this blocked ability to even imagine these things is the one thing all human wounds have in common. We cannot picture something about the event. Even if we know with certainty this thing happened to us. And even if we are asked to simply make this thing up.

Still confused? What I'm saying is, while human beings, by nature, prefer to use logic to explore their suffering, real healing lies not in logic but rather in exploring these visual blank spots. The places wherein we can no longer picture life even when asked to make it up. Ironically, we never notice the significance of this inability let alone that it is the single most important feature in all of talk therapy.

Know we'll explore this visual paradox in depth in later chapters. For now it is enough to know that these twelve categories of lost abilities to picture life exist. And that they are simply the best way to locate mental / emotional injuries.

How do they work exactly? Let's take the first category. **Vivid recall of a painful event.**

Okay. Ask yourself, can you vividly recall any painful event? I can. Imme-

diately. I can vividly picture myself, fourteen years old, mindlessly pacing the open bays of a small town Shell gas station. It was Sunday and my father had decided to skip Mass and hide out in the gas station. I can even picture the dirty white walls with fan belts hanging from metal hooks, and the dozens of new tires stacked high on shelves.

What happened next is what injured me. Bored with watching my little sister, I inched over to the half open office door to peak in. At which point, I heard my father tell the whole group of old Italian men that I would never amount to anything. At which point I froze in shame and shock and then had my mind suddenly go blank.

Obviously I have amounted to something. This I know. Not only because my father, who died last year, was fond of telling me this but also because I have healed this block and can now picture past this point; my sister asked me if I was okay. Before healing this wound though, I literally had trouble picturing myself being successful at anything. And even when I was successful, I still could not picture myself in the scene.

Vivid recall of a painful event. My number one way to find peoples' injuries. Exploring this scene, in fact, was my way into a very large and painful category of wounds in my life. As well as my route to healing these wounds.

Now let's take another. Category number twelve. **Feeling Compelled to Do Ordinary Acts.**

Here, my first memory is of coming home from a vacation to an already perfectly clean house, only to within minutes be screamed at by my then girlfriend for cleaning an already perfectly clean stove. Yes, she was being mean. However, she was right. I felt compelled to clean already clean things. A painful compulsion left over from my childhood. And a first class pot hole in my psychological life; I literally could not see already clean things as being clean.

Shades of TV's Odd Couple and Felix Unger, eh? Imagine how hard I was to live with. Today, I no longer feel ashamed of minor clutter, nor of incomplete projects, nor of undone laundry. All once symptoms of a wound which for years compelled me to live a life in which cleaning already clean things took precedence over connecting with the people I loved.

Feeling Compelled to Do Ordinary Acts. This block marker is how I found this injury in me. Vividly recalling it then enabled me to heal it, by noticing where my mind went blank.

Now let's look at one more category, the sixth category; **The Experience of Having No Choice.** Here, the first thing that comes to mind for me is a scene from when I was in fifth grade. In this scene, a teacher is complimenting me at the expense of the other kids. After which, I felt no choice other than to hide any and all signs that I was smart, lest this make other kids mad at me.

In other words, prior to my healing this wound, whenever someone said to me that something I did or said was smart, I felt no choice but to convince them they were just as smart. Even if they had no ability in this area, and even if my telling them this belittled their compliment to me to the point of hurting their feelings.

Again, by using a block marker; the experience of having no choice, I was able to find this wound. And eventually heal it. Even to the point where today, I rather like being told I'm smart. No big ego, mind you. Nor the need to make someone else feel good. Just a little boy's lit up smile. The kind I might have felt back in fifth grade if I had not been wounded that day.

The 12 Block Markers in Detail

Now allow me to voice these twelve categories of therapist's risky starting points as sentences I might actually say in sessions. Starting with

Category One: *Vivid recall of a painful event.*

Can you vividly recall any painful event from a prior time in your life? A life event you have never forgotten? Something which may feel like it just happened to you yesterday? You'll find additional starting points in the following:

- the moments in which you first experience a great personal loss, such as the moment in which you are told that someone close to you has died, or the moment in which you realize you are being fired from a job you love;
- the moments in which you realize you are about to experience genuine violence, such as the moment right before a car accident when you see it coming, or the moment right before you get struck by a falling object when you hear it falling;
- the moments in which you realize you have failed to accomplish something important, such as the moment in which you realize someone else got the promotion, or the moment in which you recognize you have made a serious mistake; and
- the moments in which you take on a painful belief, such as the moments in which people first identify themselves as stupid or ugly, or the moments in which parents first realize they wound their children.

Category Two: *An Inability to Picture a Common Childhood Event.*

Can you picture your first day of school, a birthday party, or a gift you once received? Can you remember, visually, being home sick from school, or being on a vacation, or being taken to a doctor's office? Other possible events to explore

would be:

- having no memory of a family member before a certain age, for instance, being unable to remember ever seeing your father before age seven.
- being unable to recall details of having been in school before a certain grade, as in, being able to remember any of your teachers before fifth grade or being unable to recall your first day at a new school.
- having no sense that one's parents have ever been angry, such as never having seen your parents angry at each other.
- having no memory of a major childhood life event, as in being unable to remember ever having a birthday party before age ten or being unable to recall anyone ever taking care of you when you were sick.
- being unable to recall one's accomplishments. for instance feeling you've never really done anything important.

Category Three: *Hating an Ordinary Life Event.*

Is there a food you hate eating? Any task you hate doing? Is there a phrase you hate hearing? Is there a style of clothing you hate seeing? You'll find other good starting points in the following.

- In its simplest form, this Block Marker can consist of anything which causes us to have an acute awareness of any of our five physical senses. Here examples would be hating to be touched, the taste of liver, the sight of blood, the sound of chalk on a blackboard, or the smell of mold. This Block Marker can also manifest as an acute awareness of any of our emotional / intuitive responses, such as hating to cry, feel angry, sense you are about to be afraid; etc.. Thus we can hate feeling sad or feeling excited as much as we can hate being touched on the head or smelling leaves in the fall, and even these seemingly insignificant responses indicate scenes wherein a wound exists.
- any negative prejudice towards people or towards nonviolent beliefs or ideas, etc. . Obviously, human beings can hate just about anything. Common examples would be hating religions or religious people, politics or politicians, countries, nationalities, men or / and women, children, people who are old or young, teachers, poor or rich people, etc.
- hating compliments, for instance, needing people to stop saying them.

Category Four: *Under-reacting to a Loving Event.*

Do you go blank when someone says you look good today? Do you find

yourself unable to acknowledge help? Other possible areas would be:

- the inability to enjoy a major portion of a relationship, such as being unable to enjoy making love, or being unable to enjoy learning from a partner;
- the inability to experience gentle attention consciously, such as going blank when you hear the words “I love you,” or zoning out when you see people being affectionate;
- the inability to be grateful to someone who does you a favor, such as when a friend watches your children for you and you see it as “just what friends are supposed to do for each other”;
- the inability to experience the value in a gift, such as when you fail to feel good when someone is thanking you for a gift you gave them;
- the inability to see the worth in one’s accomplishments, such as getting an “A” on a test and feeling it is “nothing really”;
- the inability to recognize when someone is trying to help you, such as when friends ask if they can help you and your first thought is “why would they want to help me”; and
- the inability to experience the awe in life, such as failing to see the wonder in the birth of a child or in the experience of nature.

Category Five: *Under-reacting to a Violent Event.*

Do you feel blank inside when someone yells at you. Do you respond to peoples’ suffering with cold, hard facts? How about offering casual advice to the broken hearted? Or cliches to those who recently lost a loved one? How about being verbally abused and saying it’s no big deal? Additional things to look at would be:

- the inability to experience the suffering present in ALL addictions; such as the alcoholic who denies he is suffering despite obvious consequences, or the gambler who continues to bet despite her losses;
- the inability to experience grief, such as when a young widow seems “fine” only weeks after her husband’s death;
- the inability to experience fear while in the presence of danger; such as when people stand too close to the edge of a cliff and feel no fear, or when people casually put their hands into a dangerous zoo animal’s cage; and
- the inability to be mad at someone who violates you, such as when you have been robbed and are more worried that the man who just robbed you may go to jail than that you will get your money back.

Category Six: *Having No Choice.*

Ever found yourself offering this sentence as an excuse for having done something you knew you shouldn't have done? "I had no choice?" Really. You had no choice? Some other possible situations in which you might do this would be:

- the inability to say "no," such as when people cannot deny people's requests for money, or when people can not say no when asked to have sex even when they have no desire (people who were sexually molested as children often have this one);
- the inability to set limits on the amount of help you offer people, such as when people feel forced to help others at their own expense (many therapists, when they begin working, have this one), or when people feel obliged to contribute to the needy even when they, themselves, are just as needy; and
- the inability to feel entitled to stop working, such as when people feel guilty when they have to quit before finishing an important job, or when people must be told to go home when they are sick.

Category Seven: *Feeling Urgency During Ordinary Life Events.*

Have you ever felt urges to yell at a waiter for your meal coming too slow. Especially when you were in no hurry and were not starving to death. Other possibilities are:

- eating quickly when there is no need; i.e. gulping, forcing food down, cutting meals short for no reason. Almost all people have this to some degree, and it is the single most useful key in healing eating disorders. Unfortunately, most people never notice this symptom consciously and so, continue to try to change "what" they eat rather than "how."
- rushing to get out what you have to say even when encouraged to take your time, having people tell you to slow down and still speaking quickly, speaking so quickly you run out of breath, experiencing great anxiety when having to wait your turn to speak, etc.
- hurrying to physically move past any person, place or thing while not in the presence of violence, especially when you know it is safe (parks, dark spaces, closets, bridges, tunnels)
- feeling anxious when you can not avoid some person, place or thing especially when you know logically you are in no danger (avoiding bullies, bosses, former lovers or friends, etc.)

- feeling pressured to complete any task when no actual deadline exists (having to finish homework or a project on your job when you have weeks to complete it and no one is rushing you, feeling you must please someone, sexually, by being smart, strong, etc.)

Category Eight: *Feeling Abandoned During Ordinary Life Events.*

Children feel abandonment. Adults feel betrayed or annoyed. Thus, the essence of this category is feeling a young child's panic when there is no danger and nothing wrong. Other ways of saying this are:

- any adult who experiences a childlike neediness during an ordinary life event. For instance, panicking when someone is late to pick you up, feeling terror when you get separated from a group while on a trip or when shopping with a friend shopping, or having an anxiety attack when you are home alone in a storm, etc.
- any adult who feels physically smaller than their actual physical size. This feeling often occurs to people during times wherein they are being confronted, such as by a boss or by a spouse. Or at times, just from hearing some one say "we need to talk." And especially when what they anticipate this talk needing to be about involves feeling guilt and or shame.

Category Nine: *Feeling Trapped During Nonviolent Life Events.*

Have you ever felt unable to leave a classroom to use the rest room, even to the point of worrying you'll burst open any minute? Additional ways in which this wound appears are:

- any reaction wherein an adult feels compelled to escape from an ordinary life situation. Here examples would be experiencing panic during a train or bus ride, experiencing great fear while in a closed elevator or a room without windows, and experiencing terror while in small spaces (closets, hallways, etc.)
- freezing up during an ordinary life situation, such as freezing up during public speaking, being unable to sing in front of people, being unable to directly share your spiritual values, etc.
- feeling cornered when someone stands near you, or stands in the exit doorway, or walks behind you at a distance, or stands up in front of you while you are seated, etc.
- an inability to leave an unrewarding career or relationship; such as when a boss or spouse is cruel or unusually demanding but you can not even

picture leaving despite the desire.

Category Ten: Repeatedly *Making the Same Painful Error*.

Ever find yourself repeatedly fighting the same fight in a romantic relationship? Day after day. Year after year. This despite promises that you'll never say or do these things again? If so, know you are not stupid. You are simply blocked. Here, other examples would be:

- repeatedly feeling romantically attracted to or becoming involved with people who rage, drink alcohol and or take drugs addictively, gamble or spend money compulsively, work so many hours you have little or no time with them, etc.
- repeatedly doing a painful behavior when you have sworn to stop and know better, such as when people promise to stop arguing or bickering, to stop criticizing, to stop drinking or drugging compulsively, to stop gambling or spending money compulsively, to stop fidgeting or doing some obnoxious nervous habit, to stop avoiding some responsibility like doing homework, paying bills, fixing the house, etc. and despite these promises, repeatedly fail to keep them.
- the inability to enjoy a major portion of a relationship despite the desire and efforts to do so, such as being unable to enjoy making love, or being unable to enjoy learning from a partner.

Category Eleven: *Feeling Markedly Older or Younger During Ordinary Life Events*.

Here, the event could be anything, from talking in front of people to being asked to sing a song. Class reunions and family functions are a good place to find these kinds of blocks. More questions could come from asking about:

- the experience of feeling and or acting like an adult while still a child, such as when people report never having felt young or never having had a childhood, i.e. "I always felt like the oldest person in my family."
- the experience of feeling or acting significantly younger than your age while in public places, such as when you will not go out to the mall alone, drive on the superhighway without a passenger, go out to a restaurant or a movie alone, etc. because you feel scared to go alone. Or when you hear your voice or style of speaking suddenly become much younger unintentionally.
- the experience of feeling physically smaller, shorter, or less powerful than you really are, especially when in the presence of authorities such as policemen or teachers, or medical doctors, or therapists.

Category Twelve: *Feeling Compelled to Do Ordinary Acts.*

Here we have the source of the dreaded Felix Unger disease. As well as a whole lot of other insidious relationship breakers. The basic list is:

- feeling compelled to clean things, such as feeling compelled to clean your house or your car when it is already clean, feeling guilty when you momentarily leave dishes in the sink, feeling embarrassed when someone visits unexpectedly and you notice dust on a bookshelf or have a magazine on the kitchen table or have a few clothes on your bed, feeling urges to clean someone else's home when you visit them, etc. .
- feeling compelled to help people in need, such as when therapists feel they must help their clients, or when people donate money they do not have, or when people who are still hungry give their food to others when these others have already eaten, or when people offer rides to strangers, etc.
- feeling compelled to eat when you are not hungry, drink alcohol when you have no desire, exercise when you are sick or injured, spend money you do not have, have sex when you have no interest, go to church when you get nothing from it, read the newspaper because you must know what is going on in the world even when you have your own personal problems to face.
- feeling compelled to speak, as in talking during movies when asked to be quiet, filling in the silences in conversations when riding in the car, interrupting the conversations of others even when asked not to, offering advice even when asked not to and so on.
- feeling compelled to be silent, as in feeling afraid to speak even when you need something or when you see someone about to be or being physically hurt, being afraid to ask for directions, etc.
- feeling compelled to not move, such as feeling afraid you'll be punished or hit or die if you move.
- feeling compelled to move, such as when you pace, fidget, experience attention deficits during school or work, etc.

This Chapter's Session Notes

Have I just overwhelmed you with all this data? If so, I am sorry. Please know though that there is no need for you to memorize any of this stuff. In fact, once you've successfully used something from each category once, these categories will usually come right back to you. More so if you do not feel the need to parrot them back to anyone.

How could you begin to learn these categories then? Pick one and try it out on yourself. For instance, pick category number three, *ordinary things you hate*. Now ask yourself, is there any ordinary thing you hate? Eating lima beans. Listening to opera. If so, spend some time visually exploring in a scene in which this thing is present. To do what? To determine how much of this thing you can and cannot bring to mind. Visually. Not logically.

In other words, you are not merely looking for the missing mental details, mind you. Nor what you can remember. Rather, you are looking to discover how much of this thing you cannot picture on the screen of your mind. The pothole in your psyche, so to speak.

Know this can be especially potent in times wherein you cannot picture something *even when you ask yourself to simply make it up*. Can't imagine a single example? Then you have a blocked mind.

What's the goal here? For now, it's to create a personal library of what I call, "representative events" for each category of Block Markers. Personal examples with which to easily bring to mind these twelve categories of starting points with which to explore both your own wounds and the wounds of others.

One more thing. Pay special attention to my language here. What I'm saying is, I have voiced everything in these categories in other than therapist's jargon. Why? Because talk therapy voiced in jargon is one of the worst errors a therapist can make. An outright oxymoron, in fact. After all, aren't we seeking to learn how to better connect to others? Including to our inner selves.

My point is, plainly spoken words are the truly best medicine here. Plain talk about plain old hurts leads to good old plain healing. Nothing wrong here. Know it does take courage to speak about hurts straight out, without the professional distancing which jargon creates. On the other hand, anything you put between you and your healing will hurt your chances get a better life.

Finally, on this note, can you imagine what it would be like if therapists' professional literature, books such as the DSM-IV R (the psychologist's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) described human suffering in this kind of everyday language. Wow. What a concept. Understandable names for our psychological wounds. Can you imagine?

I myself would love for this to happen. How about you?

Until the next chapter then.

I hope you are well,

Steven