

Lisa Loustaunau, interviewed in this article from *New Therapist*, is the Academic Director at the *Institute of Core Energetics*

Every Body Needs Some Body

An interview featuring
Jack Lee Rosenberg,
Lisa Loustaunau and
Frederic Lowen

Let's face it:

Our most archetypal attachment scripts are predicated upon a fundamental urge to fulfill the longing of every body for some body to love. Our bodies are, whether we like it or not, the vehicle of expression for a great deal of what we feel, think and confront in our daily psychic life. So maybe we psychotherapists should just get over ourselves and our obsession with the talking cure. Could we contemplate that the bodily cure might be just as powerful and important a route to healing?

We asked three prominent body therapy practitioners and writers to back us up on this body check for overly talkative shrinks. This is what *Frederic Lowen, Lisa Loustaunau* and *Jack Lee Rosenberg* had to say.

New Therapist: Mainstream psychology relies principally on verbal communication. In what ways does your working with the body supplement or extend this?

Jack Lee Rosenberg:

The body and the mind cannot be separated. They must be worked with simultaneously to help the client release somatic holding patterns, awaken, integrate and clarify the body and mind. In IBP (Integrative Body Psychotherapy) we use breath, movement and awareness work to open and release holding patterns that are both physical and psychological. We are psychotherapists working with the body with limited touch. Breath work can bring deep-rooted psychological material to the surface and intensifies it so that it is available to talk about.

We work with the energy of the body to increase aliveness and release holding patterns to create flow. We use two intertwined approaches for working with the client. To begin with, we have the client sitting up while we take a history on a large white board. We use breath, movement, presence, contact, boundaries, and awareness of history, defensive styles and many tools to bring awareness of the source of holding patterns. We also look for thought, belief and behavior patterns that support unwanted results. At the same time we track somatic energy and provide experiences that lead to energetic release.

Once trust has been established, we have the client lie down on a table. First, we track how they breathe. We want to know if they can breathe and stay present and be in contact. Can they tolerate the increased aliveness? Then, while they breathe fully to build a charge, we use several different weighted balls to help the movement of energy and for grounding. We usually have the client start lying on their back with their feet balanced on a 6-pound rubber ball. We have a number of varying weighted balls depending on the client's size and strength that can be held between client's knees to tire out the adductor muscles. This begins the process of tiring the muscles of the pelvis as a method to release fixed muscular holding patterns of the legs and pelvis. In this position the client must sustain core to balance and at the same time talk to the therapist and remain present. As the client fatigues from this position, we exchange holding the ball between their legs for a stretchable strap that fits around their legs. The client now is stretching against the strap held just above and around their knees. This tires the abductor muscles. The instruction is to push out against the strap. Remember the client is lying on their back still balancing their feet upon a ball. The final result is that this process releases specific muscles often held in the pelvis that are important for body psychotherapy and at the same time it opens and releases holding patterns of the body without touching the body, or going past the clients boundaries. The nice thing about this is that the process works very profoundly and effectively without the many problems that can arise when working with the pelvis.

Lisa Loustaunau:

Working with the body opens an entirely new dimension in the treatment room, providing a wealth of material that could take months or years to access through verbal therapy alone. Words just as easily hide or alter the truth as reveal it and, as we know, most communication is non-verbal. I am always struck by the depth of feelings and experience that my work with the body elicits which the client could not verbally or consciously communicate previously. This is much more than body language, which reveals the truth of the moment. The practice of body psychotherapy goes far beyond body language in that the body communicates the story of a lifetime and offers a direct channel to experience past and present.

When I look at a client's body I see the story of a life journey. It is a moving and vulnerable experience to receive the uniqueness of a human being in this way. The body speaks to me about their history, their patterns of relating, their gifts and strengths and innate potential, as well as of their primary defenses and repetitive limiting life-patterns, which will be important to challenge in therapy. The body gives me the direction of the work. Working physically opens deeply held or denied feelings which, when integrated, expand the individuals awareness of who they really are. The body tells the truth without all the embellishments and smoke screens that the ego mind at times constructs. Body work offers me a way to open the door to new or different energetic and

emotional experiences. They happen right there in session. We aren't figuring out what they feel or what they should do about this or that. The feelings emerge from within the body and are felt right there. It is very immediate and very powerful when clients experience themselves having feelings they didn't know they had or were able to tolerate and having them freely and honestly. I engage the person physically to effect a transformation that occurs on every level of being—psychologically, energetically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually. It is a powerfully healing expansion.

Frederic Lowen:

The client's conscious mind is an unreliable source of usable information. Irrational behaviors, emotions, thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes are justified, defended, rationalized, and/or denied by the conscious "rational" mind. So, the value and usability of verbal communication is limited. A client's "truth" must be discerned from the motivations of a client's words, not from the words themselves. Talk therapy is like a mental chess game in which, too often, the patient is better than the therapist. Driven by a desperate need to maintain "control," present an image, or to perpetuate a relatively comfortable, seemingly safe homeostasis despite the complaint/symptom, patients present all manner of resistances; some hardened to the point that talk therapy is virtually impotent.

In Bioenergetic Analysis, the body is the focus of the therapeutic work. Like the annual rings of a tree, the traumatic experiences of the individual are recorded in the body.

Originating in psychoanalysis, and developed from the work of Freud's student Wilhelm Reich, Bioenergetic Analysis examines character and personality in terms of the energetic processes of the body. An individual's energy is expressed psychologically in thoughts, beliefs, and (motivations for) behavior, and physically and physiologically in form, structure, and movement. The self comprises both, as well as the psychological unconscious and the autonomous physiology. Like two faces of a coin, each face may be radically different, and neither face is the whole coin.

To an experienced Bioenergeticist, the body is an expression of a person's self. Unlike the mind's rational verbal exchange, the body does not lie to the knowledgeable, aware therapist. All of us in the developed world, to varying degrees, have been restricted in fully expressing our feelings and our selves. To a point, this is necessary for social cohesion. But when our feelings and the expression of those feelings are rejected, suppressed, humiliated, threatened or denied, especially in childhood, the energy of those feelings becomes "frozen" into structure, subsequently restricting the motility of our bodies.

This frozen structure and the quality of expression: the inability to express, or inappropriateness of expression, are the elements used in Bioenergetic Analysis diagnostically and directly in treatment, hugely leveraging the value of verbal communications in uncovering and integrating trauma, and relieving the conflict between conscious and unconscious energies. In addition to improving integration of conscious and unconscious, and mind and body, body work enhances physical and physiological health.

NT: What, in your opinion, can we not access through verbal communication?

Frederic Lowen:

In Bioenergetic Analysis, or body-psychotherapy, direct body work improves the effectiveness of time in therapy. Theoretically, all traumatic material is available verbally. Practically, for reasons discussed above, direct body work is a reliable means to by-pass the “monkey mind” of consciousness, and access the unconscious and autonomic systems directly.

Motivated by unconscious desires to maintain homeostasis, with effects of transference and countertransference, willful verbal exchange often thwarts the therapeutic process. Even in seemingly successful cases, the patient’s conscious mind can feign progress, or offer false leads to protect the fearful self from painful realities and truths associated with the trauma the therapist is attempting to uncover or evoke. In contrast, the body does not lie.

Bioenergetic Analysis normally begins with simple exercises and stress positions designed to increase a client’s energy level, and highlight the distortions and blockages of energy flow, evidenced by chronic tension and muscular tightness. Most usually, these tensions have been held so long, they are outside of conscious awareness; that is, they are unfelt.

The exercise and stress positions make the areas of chronic tension apparent to both therapist and, more importantly, to the client. Restricted or disturbed breathing patterns, lack of alignment or balance, collapsed or inflated chests, weak legs and feet, poor ground contact, skin tone, muscle tonicity, facial masking, eye contact, voice expression, arms and hands, rigidity of pelvic movements, tightness of belly, are some of the common indicators of unresolved trauma, and the fears and constraints the individual lives with.

Together with the verbal history and the client’s perceptions and awareness of his issues (to the extent he can articulate them), the body evaluation guides and confirms or refutes the therapist’s lines of inquiry. For the client, the bodywork enhances energy by improved breathing, and re-connecting to the natural energy flow in the body as tensions are perceived in a new way.

Increasing energy to the client’s homeostatic state brings emotional material and related memories in the unconscious up towards, and into consciousness. For the therapist who is unaware of this dynamic, the client may engage in increased “acting-out,” or other patterned behavior with renewed energy and vigor. However, for a Bioenergetics therapist, it is an opportunity to focus the client’s higher energetic state on these issues, and accelerate the appearance of repressed or suppressed traumatic material.

Upon release of the tension and trauma, integration is necessary. Verbally, and consciously, the client gains intellectual understanding of his story. The client’s ability to relate his traumatic experiences, feelings, and memories to how his body felt and responded to the trauma allows integration into the body and the unconscious, thereby eliminating the associated psychic conflict and enabling better alignment of 1) unconscious motivations with conscious desires; 2) the client’s self-image with the reality of his body/self.

Jack Lee Rosenberg:

We cannot access the deeper holding patterns of the body/mind. IBP breath work is used to change the balance between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous systems, allowing a sense of wellbeing to unfold in the client's body/mind. There are certain emotions that cannot be known by the mind alone: such as love, trust, erotic sexuality.

We cannot access holding patterns stored in the body without some form of manipulation of the body. Therefore we must use a number of techniques for working using minimal physical contact and yet still opening or releasing fixed muscular patterns held throughout the clients' body.

Verbal communication alone does not access early, emotional, relational limbic memory upon which our foundation is built. And yet, it is vital to get to the roots of holding patterns for healing. Also, when the body is tight, particularly in the chest, it shuts down access to the energetic feeling of love, causing love to remain a less satisfying mental construct or idea. This is a particular problem between parents and their children.

Simply talking doesn't reopen the body to core self agency functions.

Without this opening clients remain disassociated from core experience and just learn more effective coping strategies rather than accessing their authenticity. Most profoundly, the awakening of the body allows the emotional heart to feel and connect with others. It also allows access to deeper wisdom. If we remain in our heads talking, life remains flat. Awakening the energy of the body brings deeper, truer emotions, essence of being and meaning. Emotions available without grounding in the body are usually re-enactments of old archaic emotional injuries and are impervious to change.

Lisa Loustaunau:

We cannot access verbally what the unconscious intends to disown.

In body psychotherapy we see the unconscious not as a vague psychological sphere but as located in areas of the body where energy is being managed or blocked. In Core Energetics we see energy and consciousness as unified, so if you repress energy you repress consciousness.

If you block pain, you block pleasure.

How this happens in the body is through the formation of what is known as armoring, set patterns of muscular holding. A tight jaw prevents us from crying or expressing our anger, vacant eyes caused by chronic tension in the intra-ocular muscles protects us from the intimacy of contact. These are some examples of how our unique pattern of armor serves to protect us from particular feelings or experience. Armor (often called blocks) develops as a process over time as a result of repetitive significant experiences during critical formational periods in early life that the psyche was not able to handle. Better said, the armor in the body is the way the psyche handled the developmental frustrations.

What is significant is that the same armoring which originally served an adaptive purpose—protecting us from knowing and feeling what would have been too painful to fully experience at the time—keeps us living and acting as if those early realities continue, and thus we find ourselves repeating certain patterns over and over. These patterns contain what in Core Energetics we call an “image,” a fixed belief.

Let me give you an example of an “image.” Someone who was deeply frustrated around needs may develop an image that goes “if I allow myself to need then I will be disappointed, if I don’t need then I can’t be disappointed.” In this case closing off consciousness of real needs would become the solution to the frustration. This may never have been formulated as a distinct thought, the wound having been experienced before this thinking was possible. It would however be revealed in the body. You can see it in a sunken chest that takes in little breath, (refusing the energy and sustenance), and in de-energized arms that have difficulty reaching out toward what is wanted or needed. The body having formed itself in such a way as to literally close itself off from needing too much by a contraction of the receptive centers in the front of the body.

The experience of embodiment, the way a person feels and breathes and inhabits their body, needs to be changed in order to really transform a life issue. It is impossible to challenge the physical component of the defense with words alone.

NT: To what extent to you use touch in your work with clients and how do you implement it?

Frederic Lowen:

Touch is not necessary for Bioenergetic work. However, the use of touch can improve effectiveness materially. In the Bioenergetic work I do, I use touch cautiously and with consent. I most commonly apply pressure on the client’s chest with my hands, while using the Bioenergetic Breathing Stool*. This helps a client deepen their breathing and experience a rigidity of the chest and constriction of their breathing they were not fully aware of.

I will also manually adjust a person into specific exercises and stress positions. Occasionally, the application of pressure with hands or fingers to the musculature of the jaw or the neck, in conjunction with vocal expression, helps tire the muscles. It is necessary to stress and tire musculature to reduce it’s ability to retain its tension, thereby allowing the streaming flow of energy, which is evidenced by visible tremoring, or vibration.

Many Bioenergetic therapists use these and other techniques of touch. Examples include deep tissue massage, Rolfing, or other massage; tender contact through a timely hug can be hugely effective; providing support through contact with the client’s back as he faces his issues (“got your back!”) can be a new experience for those who lacked that support; and the common issues people have with boundaries can be made real using their arms and hands to define their space and gently challenging them physically to both defend their space and to contain and maintain their own energy within their space.

In group work, participants often pair up for various forms of physical interaction. One of the important aspects of such activity is to encourage people to explore and recall the childhood pleasure and fun of physical interactivity and games.

** The Bioenergetic Breathing Stool is a 24" (60 cm) high kitchen stool, with a rolled up blanket, on which the client rests his back, keeping feet flat on the floor, allowing the stool to take the full weight of the person. This is simply a more extreme position that one takes when stretching across the back of a chair while sitting.*

Lisa Loustaunau:

I use touch every day, though not with everyone and never gratuitously. There are of course many kinds and uses of touch. I might use touch to direct the breath, to bring awareness to a part of the body, or to support the release of energy and feelings from a tightly defended area. Touching generally "charges," adds energy to, the area being touched. A client that has an area of the body that is energetically "undercharged," lacking energy, indicates that feelings are being avoided there. Adding energy through touch will focus the clients awareness and make it more possible for them to make contact with feelings in that area.

A different use of touch would be adding pressure to an area of the body that is "overcharged," meaning too much energy is held and over-contained thereby creating a block which prevents the flow of energy into another part of the body. This condition distorts sensation and perception in the location of the block and prevents awareness of feelings in the area that the block is protecting. Using touch, such as squeezing or pressing, would increase charge in that part of the body to encourage a movement of energy into another area of the body that is being defended. In this way the client can become conscious of split-off feelings.

Some clients who were not touched enough during early development have difficulty regulating their nervous system. Touch is very important for them until they are able to self-regulate and self-nurture. For others touch is difficult to tolerate, painful or invasive, so it is essential to explore touch as part of session work. Touch is our most primitive form of communication and how we receive it speaks volumes to our early holding environment.

Jack Lee Rosenberg:

We use limited touch. The more the therapist touches the client during a body session, the greater the possibility to set up a possible problem, particularly a dysfunctional or misunderstood transference relationship with the client. The client can begin to feel dependent on the therapist for functions the client needs to develop such as wellbeing and problem solving. The client can feel inundated and/or touched inappropriately, especially if the client has been abused.

Yet, touch is very important for the wellbeing of human beings. Sometimes we hold a patient's hand to help the client not feel alone. If touch feels like too much for the client we may use a strap or rope held both by the therapist and client. This can also be helpful to help a client make contact and remain present. We teach self release techniques rather than touch so clients will feel self-empowered.

We often hold the clients wrist pulse. This is a very sensitive process. It places the therapist in contact with the very soul of the client and the client feels equally touched, known and connected.

NT: Do you think that the real value of body work is in diagnosis, in treatment, or in both?

Lisa Loustaunau:

The value is in both. We have already established that diagnostically the body imparts a wealth of information about our history, how primary needs were handled during developmental stages, patterns of relating, challenges, as well as character strengths and gifts. This is all discernible by carefully observation or sensing of the body, not only its shape, but how it moves, how energy flows, posture, where energy is blocked etc. All these blocks affect our vitality, our emotional and physical wellbeing and our ability to love.

The same blocks that were created as an attempt to avoid pain also diminish our pleasure and our life force. Every block is essentially a NO to life.

For me the goal of treatment is to support the client to reconnect with the fullness of their energy so they can walk in the world as they really are. Working through the blocks that keep us limited or stuck requires energy—at least as much as it took to create them. I believe the best way to mobilize and harness energy for this transformative process is by working with the body. Clients that have done a lot of work on themselves are often struck by the power and directness of this work. It takes more than just thought, or observation, or mindfulness to change the way we inhabit ourselves and walk in the world. Core Energetics is a very powerful process, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Dr. John Pierrakos, founder of Core Energetics, who is now deceased, always said that all our blocks and defenses were blocks to the heart. For me the real value of body work is that it opens our hearts.

Jack Lee Rosenburg:

You must have an accurate diagnosis in order to have a competent treatment plan. Both are needed.

When a clients sits and talks with us, they tend to talk about rather superficial issues, such as “he said . . . or she did . . .” And they have little deep insight. If we awaken and open the body, whatever memories, thoughts, sensations, emotions, images that are most relevant to work on inevitably come to the surface. The depth of insight that becomes available along with the corrective experience of the therapist/witness leads to both a more genuine diagnosis that can be understood and worked with. With this opened awakening the results of treatment become embodied more reliably than with talk therapy alone.

Frederic Lowen:

In Bioenergetics, the value of body work is not only in diagnosis and treatment, but also as proof of therapeutic progress.

In childhood, we are all subjected to the feelings, behaviors and words of our parents, both rational and irrational. As discussed above, when children's feelings and expressions of feelings are suppressed, humiliated, threatened or denied, the energy of those feelings becomes "frozen" into the body structure in the form of contracted musculature. Just as an experienced woodsman can tell much of a tree's history from the annual rings, an experienced Bioenergeticist can sense, see, hear, and feel a client's energy "economy;" that is, their energy level and how they manage their energy: whether it is held, out-of control, totally controlled, split, or scattered. Additionally, the structure and form of the body is always telling. The alignment, posture and shape of one's body speak volumes. A mis-alignment in legs, torso or neck and head, where one part of the body does not appear to match the rest of the body, may indicate a psychic conflict or a split in personality.

The posture tells much of the quality of an individual's contact with the ground, which mirrors one's contact and connection with their environment, social and natural. It can also indicate the burden one carries, or the lack of maternal fulfillment, or the quality of one's relationship with one's father. In conjunction with the shape of the body, an attitude of superiority may be discerned, as the body exhibits a person who is "stuck" up, cutting themselves off from the fullness of life.

Similarly, the facial mask many wear, a mask and pose adopted to protect the child from the anger or humiliation by a parent, becomes structured into the face as the automatic smile; or an irrational situation may create the knitted brow and angry countenance of a confused individual; or the jaw is thrust forward and rigidly held in defiance and determination; etc, etc, etc.

Most basically, breathing is one of life's most important functions. It is the autonomic function we have the most conscious control over, so it is a common starting point for both diagnosis and treatment. The fear and anger we have all experienced growing up, and the socialization of individuals within developed countries, has created widespread breathing disorders. Commonly these are not problematic, or even recognized until advanced age. However, they can be seen by a Bioenergeticist. Whether standing at ease, or in a Bioenergetic stress position, the quality and freedom of chest and abdominal movement in breathing tells us something of the fears, the energy, the spontaneity and the history of the person.

Just as the inability to express feelings has been structured in the body, so too can those feelings be accessed by direct body work in treatment. Of course these feelings and memories need to be subsequently integrated into the personality. Body work focused on grounding, boundaries, and energy/feeling containment, enables deep integration in mind and body, thus completing the therapeutic process more effectively than verbal therapy alone.

Finally, positive therapeutic progress can be visibly seen in a person's body in changes in shape, form, demeanor, and enhanced aliveness.

NT: Would you agree that psychotherapists tend to shy away from body work and, if so, why do you believe this is the case?

Frederic Lowen:

Aside from a lack of knowledge of body psychotherapy, therapists struggle with a modern society that is not supportive of the work. The values of the body are antithetical and are in opposition to the power objectives of the status quo.

Wilhelm Reich studied and wrote extensively on what he called the “emotional plague.” Subsequent to his inter-personal psychiatric work during and following his years with Freud, Reich turned his attention to understanding the sociological forces that determine collective behavior.

In my understanding, the cumulative dysfunction in individuals is reflected in the social mores, laws, and policies of society. Disconnected from the reality and grounding of their bodies and true undistorted feelings, and thereby from nature, individuals and populations are subject to any seductive or threatening force applied to their ego.

The “mind-body split,” which I contend is widespread, is the fundamental cause of a world torn asunder by the pursuit of the “ego values” of wealth, power, security and status, aka greed. It serves the purpose (function) of the powerful and wealthy to stimulate the population’s pursuit of the “ego values.” The reason for this is simple: the pursuit of ego values is unfulfilling, thereby stimulating consumption.

These forces, and the understandable fascination we have with our ability to think, reason, build, and create, have converged to present the human race with its greatest challenge: how to employ our intellect to bring miracles to life without losing our humanity. With god-like technological powers, and an ability to accumulate “more money than god,” where is the humility to recognize we are not “masters of the universe?”

The humility is missing because it is a “body value,” not an ego value. Like vulnerability, empathy, and love, humility is just another talking point for the ego. In reality the body values are unfelt and in-operative in the pursuit of wealth, power, security and image projection.

The lack of body work in therapy is just one of myriad ways the modern status quo maintains its control and restrictions on our imaginations, creativity, and life. Modern psychiatry is an extreme example of how a profession has betrayed its patients’ interests in favor of the pharmaceutical and financial companies. The psychiatrist knows precisely which drugs to match to which symptoms while minimizing legal liability, regardless of “side-effects” or patient history.

To introduce bodywork into therapy is to go against the entire trend of our ego-charged narcissistic culture. Yet, body work is clearly an under-utilized, effective resource for psychotherapy. As said about us Americans: we will always do the right thing, but only after trying everything else. In psychotherapy, body work is the right thing.

Jack Lee Rosenburg:

Although bodywork is becoming more mainstream, we agree that most therapists do shy away. This may be due to differing issues. For some it is simply because they have no experience as to the profound results and have not developed techniques. Others may feel uncomfortable with the level of exposure to emotions, old traumas, intimacy and mutual attunement that arises with somatic awakening. Still others may relate more to a purely intellectual stance and regard somatic psychotherapy as unconventional.

There is a lot more available to deal with in working with the body. Working mind and body together makes the client more vulnerable and allows the therapist more access. This means that the therapist must be well trained to not inadvertently take advantage of this.

Therapists may shy away from working with bodywork because they do not know how to deal with transference and how to work without being physically invasive to the client. This is a major way in which psychotherapists get into trouble. The more access therapists have, the more they must have completed their own embodied personal work. When a client is awakened and integrated somatically, they have access to a sense of truth. They are more aware of the therapist's authenticity. This may be intimidating to the therapist. This is especially true if the therapist is not grounded in a positive foundation for a sense of self, wellbeing and constancy. Without this, the client is emotionally and energetically left alone. Empathetic attunement and boundaries become limited.

Lisa Loustaunau:

Most mainstream psychotherapy has reflected the cultural split between mind and body where the body has been considered secondary to the mind—the primary object of interest and the territory to be examined in sessions.

Reich's visionary work with the body and energy were discounted for decades in the aftermath of his political and legal imbroglios. I remember learning about Reich's theories as a psychology student when they were only briefly mentioned and somewhat disparagingly at that. Even now I sometimes hear from practitioner trainees concurrently enrolled in graduate programs that very little if any consideration is given to Reich's contributions. The body is still not considered or it is under-considered in mainstream psych programs. Training in body psychotherapy remains the purview of specialized institutes in very few locations around the world which train therapists to work with the body.

Add to this double whammy of cultural touch-a-phobia and the extraordinary litigiousness of our society, in the US at least, and it's no wonder that psychotherapists are going to shy away from working with the body. Psychotherapists trained in traditional settings here are told to, under no circumstances, touch a client or they may face a potential lawsuit.

So essentially body psychotherapy is still considered an unconventional or "alternative" therapy, one that fortunately is gaining in leaps and bounds thanks in part to the work that has emerged from the field of neurobiology in the past 10—15 years (with its funding) substantiating so much of what body psychotherapists have known and been doing for years. Every day more therapists are becoming

curious about how we work and are paying more attention to the body in their sessions, even if in limited ways. Reich must be smiling (at least about this).

NT: Are there body work ideas or practices that you might recommend for psychotherapists to incorporate into their own work?

Lisa Loustaunau:

I would suggest experimenting with two things. First, hold an intention to shift more of your focus to the client's body throughout the session. Hold a space of curiosity and open yourself to take in as much as you can. Notice what stands out, being careful not to label what you see. A big mistake I hear therapists make is to say things like "I sense sadness in your chest." Do not interpret or put any experience or feeling onto the client. So for example, if you notice your client is barely filling their chest with breath, you can ask if they notice what is happening in their chest. Have them describe what they are noticing physically. A client might say "my chest is barely moving, I don't seem to be breathing, I feel a weight on my chest." Ask the client to just keep doing exactly what they are doing, without changing anything, to just stay with themselves and notice what it is like for them when they... (fill in whatever they are doing). After a while, ask again what they are aware of. Keep inviting the client into a deeper awareness of their body. Whatever information is offered you can be explored. This is a simple body intervention that does not require that you be specifically trained in body psychotherapy and supports the growth of a client's perception of their energy and embodiment.

The second recommendation is that in session the therapist pay particular attention to their own body. Be curious about any tension in your body and its location. How is your energy being affected by the client? What parts of your body do you feel particularly connected to? More importantly, what areas are you NOT feeling? As a supervisor I notice how most therapists are terrified of feeling their pelvis in session. They cut off their vitality and block their energy for fear of having sexual feelings. Therapists need all of their energy in the session and to trust their containment. If we are cutting off our body we are not fully showing up for our clients. It's wonderful material to take to supervision.

Frederic Lowen:

In body-psychotherapy, the most essential step for a practitioner is to gain some understanding of the truth of their own body. Body-psychotherapy is subjective by nature, and therapists absolutely need to be able to correlate their clients' subjective experience with their own.

If a client is restricted in their breathing, a therapist cannot evaluate the restriction, or the cause of the restriction, unless the therapist has at least some awareness of his own limitations, restrictions, and causes.

Similarly, if a therapist has low energy, and is most comfortable discussing, analyzing, and interpreting, they will be unable to see the lack of grounding in their patients, and will be unable to guide them towards better grounding and connection.

So the first step is to gain body self-awareness. This is best done either in a group workshop setting where direct body work is the focus, or spending some therapy time with an experienced body-psychotherapist.

Many years ago I asked Dad what he thought the essential qualities of a good psychotherapist are. He replied: you need to know a lot, you need to know a lot about yourself, and humility.

Further reading:

Lowen, A., Lowen L. and Skalecki, W. (2003) *The Way to Vibrant Health: A Manual of Bioenergetic Exercises*. Bioenergetics Press.

<http://www.lowenfoundation.org>

Jack Lee Rosenburg:

1. Learn breath work to lessen stress and to change balance between the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems. This can bring about a sense of well being in the body as a foundation for therapy.
2. Learn to work with somatic boundary exercises with clients rather than talk about them. The exercises can inform clients of unconscious self boundaries and support authentic boundaries with others.
3. Develop good mental health practices that can be taught to clients. Create a positive personal supportive family home life. Know your own sexuality so your longings are not acted out with clients. Make sure that you are awakened to limbic energy within so that you can attune with another and retain boundaries.
4. Learn the Sustaining Constancy Series exercises for your own wellbeing. Then you can teach the series to clients. Learn to provide homework for clients so that the therapeutic process continues from session to session. (Download Sustaining Constancy Series handouts online at: <http://www.newtherapist.com/Resources/SCHANDOUT.pdf>)
5. Teach your clients to use a journal to track their wellbeing. The IBP Steps Out of Fragmentation, use of a journal and the emptying out exercise will help.
6. For those already working with the body, the use of the ball and strap for opening fixed muscular patterns of the pelvis for grounding, constancy and empowerment, is very effective. This system of breath and movement, combined with weighted balls, does not require touching and can be done at home as an ongoing practice.

Frederic Lowen

Frederic Lowen, son of Alexander Lowen, M.D., is Executive Director of the Alexander Lowen Foundation. With long term and extensive experience in Bioenergetics, Bioenergetic therapy, workshop and training attendance since 1966, Fred seeks to expand the visibility, appreciation, and use of Bioenergetics. Fred lives in Vermont, USA with his wife and daughter.

Lisa Loustaunau

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Jack Lee Rosenberg

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