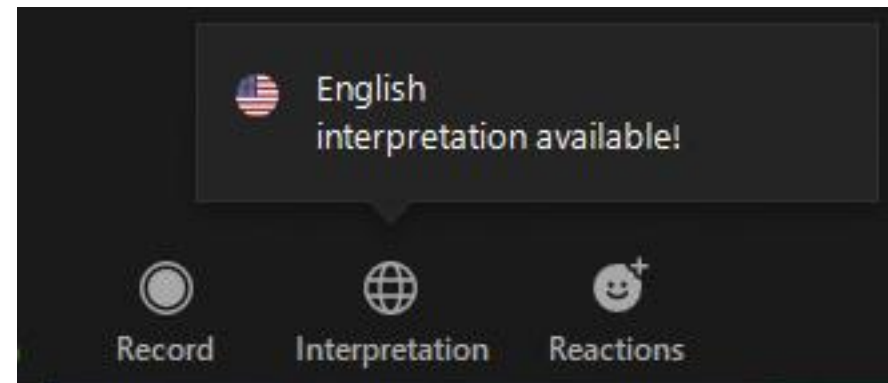


Dealing with Feelings of Powerlessness When Working with Newcomer Youth Who Have Experienced Trauma

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Dealing with Feelings of Powerlessness When Working with Newcomer Youth Who Have Experienced Trauma

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Summary

1. Why and when do we feel powerlessness?
2. The importance of knowing and understanding the problems facing traumatized newcomer youth.
3. Principles and possible solutions of support
4. Dealing with feeling of powerlessness

1. Why and when do we feel powerlessness?

- Lack of knowledge on the issues
- Lack of training on the support plan
- Active identification/personal involvement

2. Better know and understand the issues:

2.1. The experiences of violence lived by children of war

- Violations of their right to security and protection: danger of death, injury.
 - Exposure to scenes of violence: killings, corpses, injuries.
 - Multiple separations.
 - Human and material losses.
 - Failure to meet the most basic needs: food, hygiene, health and education.
-
- In certain collective violence
 - Recruitment by armed forces, forced or early marriages.
 - Physical and sexual abuse, exploitation.

(Papazian, 2004; Hassan, 2015; Sirin et Roger-Sirin, 2015)

2.1. The experiences of violence lived by children of war

➤ Weakened mental health

- Sleep issues
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Anxiety
- Depression

(Cantekin & Gençöz, 2017; Hadfield, Ostrowski et Ungar, 2017; Javanbakht et al., 2018)

2.1. The experiences of violence lived by children of war

➤ In the context of war:

- some parents are unavailable and stressed;
- some young people are parentified;
- others are deficient and in developmental arrest;
- some children are without a childhood, their lives are on hold and the future is uncertain.

2.2.Definition: Who is a refugee?

Refugee:

A person (adult or child) who has been forced to flee his or her country for a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or of his political opinions (Geneva Convention, 1951).

A person being forced to flee his country following wars and massive destruction.

Refugee child

Definition: who is an asylum seeker?

People who enter a country on a regular or irregular basis and apply for refugee status in the country where they are.

They must prove that they cannot return to their country of origin.

Experience marked by ruptures, dangerous situations, uncertainty and anxiety

2.3. What is trauma?

- A **natural, adaptive** reaction of any individual to a traumatic event: physical, sexual, psychological violence, natural disasters, wars, attacks, torture, persecution, unexpected discovery of bodies, exposure to scenes of violence, forced or brutal displacement, etc. .(Papazian-Zohrabian, G. 2015)
- The trauma linked to violence perpetrated by man on man is different from that linked to a natural disaster, for example.

2.4. Trauma: a shaken inner world

- The encounter with death: the unrepresentable (Barrois, C. 1988)
- The unspeakable experience: silence (Abraham et Torok, 1975, Bokanowski, Th. 2002).
- Breaking the protective barrier (Freud, 1920, 1926; Winnicott, 1974)
- The disruption (Barrois, C. 1988)

The encounter with death

- The encounter with death: despite the inescapable evidence of death, the abrupt transformation of death into immediate givenness, the "sudden intimacy" of death has a traumatic effect (Barrois, C. 1988)
- However, death is not represented in the unconscious, the encounter with death would therefore be of the order of the unrepresentable, the unnameable. Hence the unspeakable.

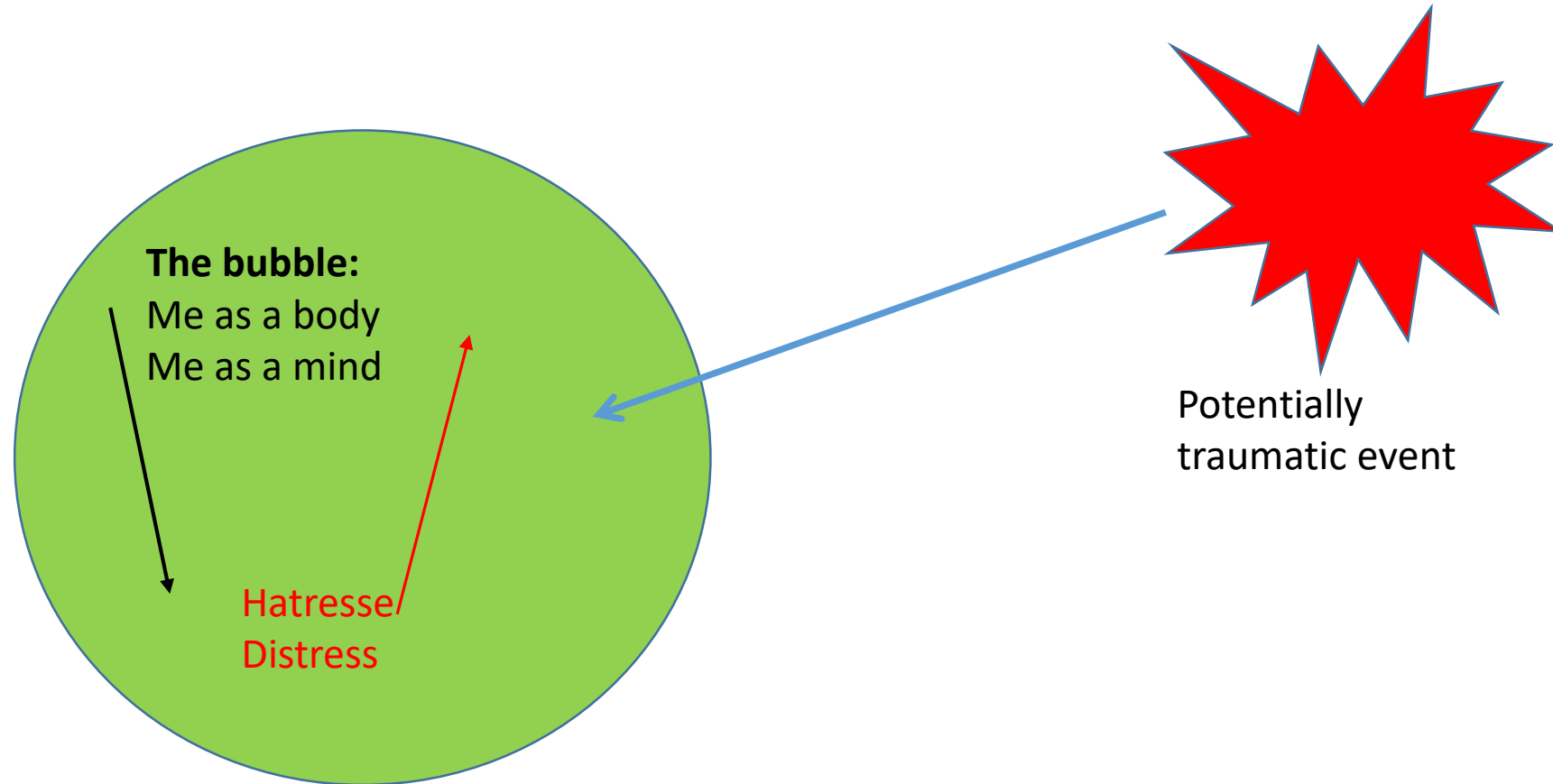
The unspeakable



Psychological trauma explained by psychoanalysis

- There is trauma when there is a breach of the protective barrier of the Ego.
- The psychic trauma is the result of an overstimulation of the drives (especially hatred).
- It causes significant anxiety that cannot be discharged by motor skills or creativity, and cannot be managed by defense mechanisms.
- Psychic trauma leads to narcissistic injury. (Why me?)
- Trauma is a psychic concussion that is “an unexpected, unprepared and overwhelming clash” between the external world and the internal cue system, acting as an “anaesthetic”.(Freud, S. 1920, 1926; Brette, 1994)

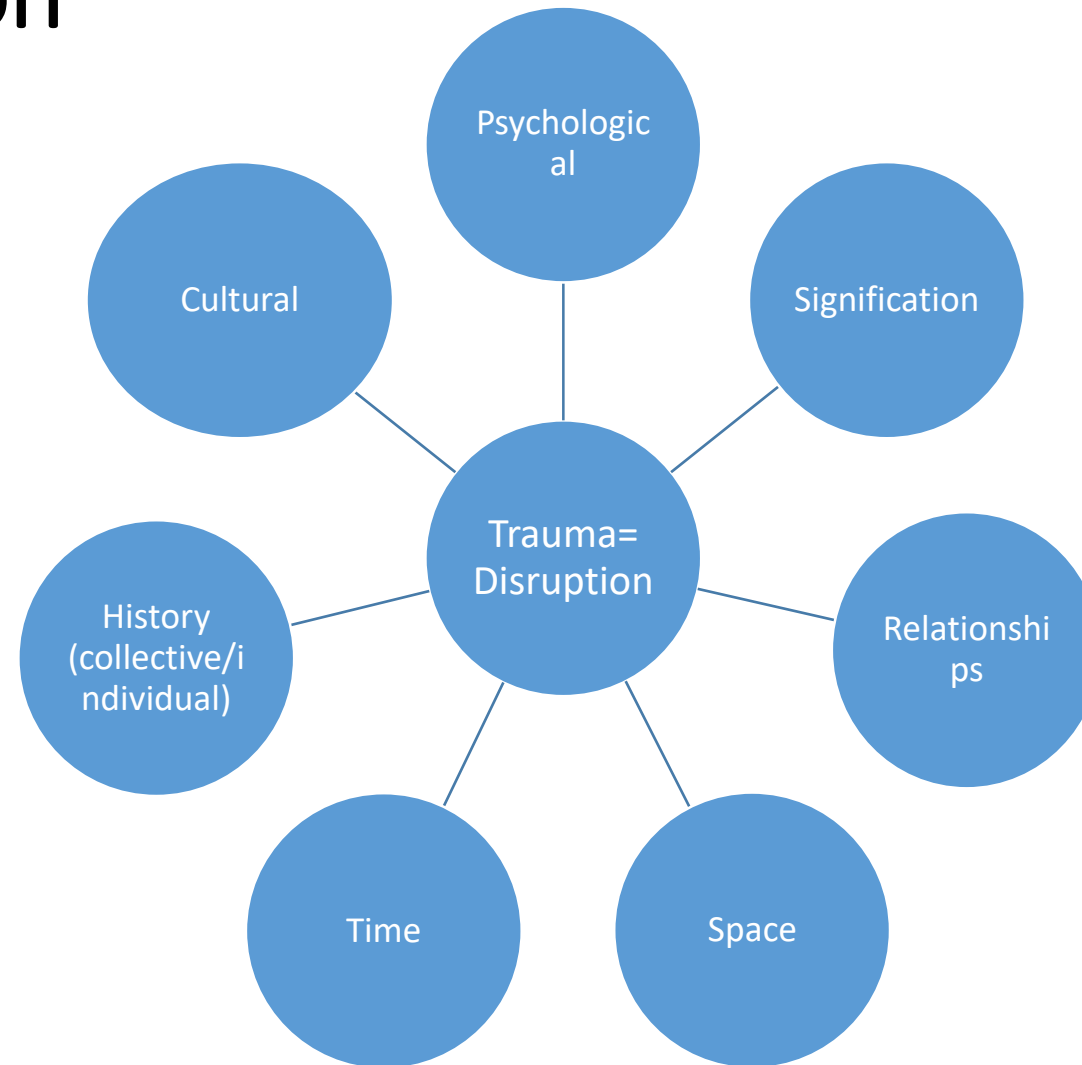
Breaking the protective barrier



Definition of Barrois (1988)

Any trauma, whatever its source, is a conscious or unconscious correlate of a **disruption**, a discontinuity or a **loss**. This rupture can be experienced at several levels depending on the traumatic event and can have significant consequences on the experience and behavior of individuals.

The disruption



2.4. Symptoms of war trauma in children

(Crocq, L. 1998; Papazian, G. 2004; Taieb, O. et al. 2004; DSM5. 2013)

- Nightmares and sudden awakenings.
- Irritability.
- Aggressiveness.
- Hustle.
- Fears (darkness, animals, thieves) and phobias.
- Tics.
- Insomnia or hypersomnia.
- Dulling of affects (coldness).
- Feeling of being “anesthetized”.
- Relationship avoidance
- Revivals and reminiscences
- Hypervigilance
- Dissociation
- Frequent crying.
- Asocial behavior.
- Separation anxiety.
- Concentration difficulties.
- Memorization difficulties.
- Secondary stuttering.
- Secondary enuresis or encopresis.
- Mutism (selective or not).

2.5. Elements reinforcing or attenuating the trauma.

Attenuators

- The meaning given to the events and the traumatic events.
- Discourse on the traumatic event.
- The recognition of a criminal or violent act, the condemnation of the aggressor and the compensation of the victim. (Violence perpetrated by man on man).
- Long-term support.

Reinforcers

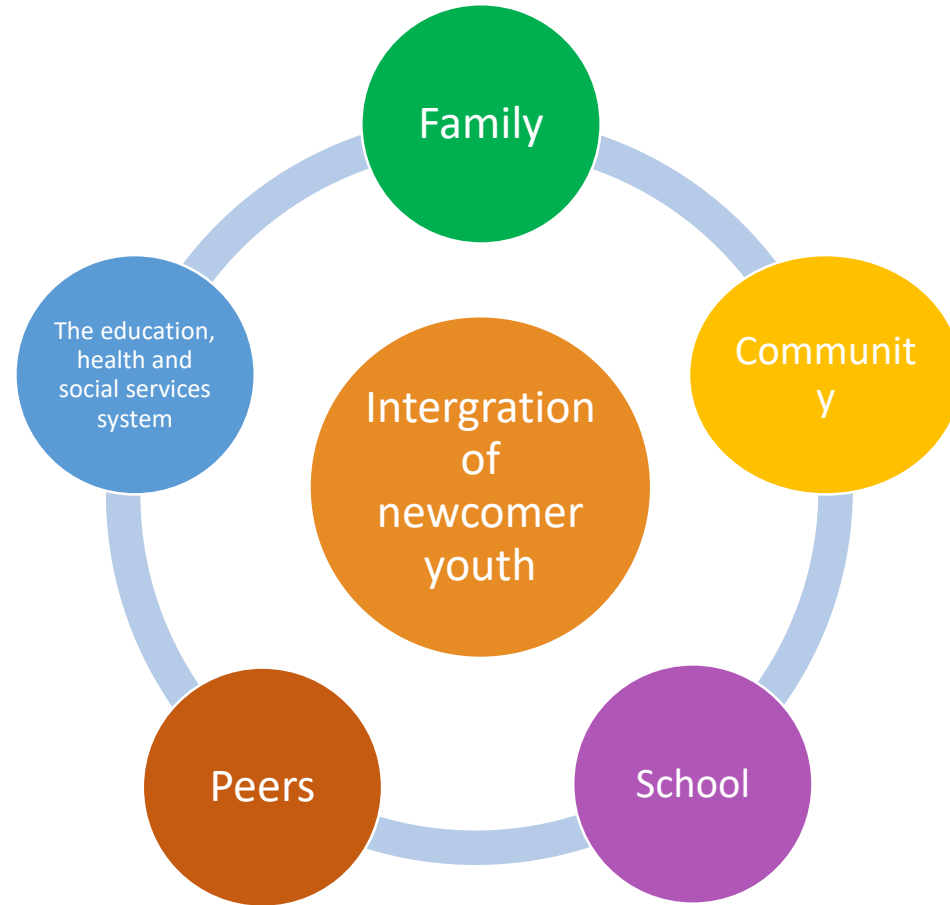
- The nonsense of the lived events.
- Silence around the traumatic event.
- Denial or denial of the criminal or violent act. The absence of negative consequences for the aggressor.
- Loneliness in suffering.
- Transgenerational transmissions.

(Papazian, G., 2004; Rousseau, C. et al. 1999; Lin, J. 2009)

3. Principles and avenues of intervention

- Create a safety net around the young person and their family.
- Propose a framework and a benevolent listening.
- Promote cultural mixing: create opportunities and carry out intercultural encounter activities
- Encourage the elaboration of bereavements and traumas through symbolization activities: artistic or verbal

Create a safety net...



3.1. For educational practices

- Propose a school climate and reassuring educational relationships
- Allow work of elaboration, of symbolization.
 - Collective activities: verbal (speaking groups), artistic (Sherpa workshops: arts and stories, games in the sand, theater-plurality) and symbolic (symbolic games, puppets).
- Go against disruption through activities: past-present, life-death, country and society of origin-country and host society, etc. (ECR, History, Geography, Languages)
- Try to increase protective factors: systemic intervention (school-family-community)
- Promote activities allowing a discharge: sports activities.
- Develop a sense of belonging (class-school-community-society): social and educational activities.
- **Avoid** considering trauma as difficulties of adaptation and do not rely solely on the self-regulation of emotions and behaviors.

3.2. Principles of Clinical Support

- The conversation on loss: individual or group meetings, discussion groups.

The main tool: listening

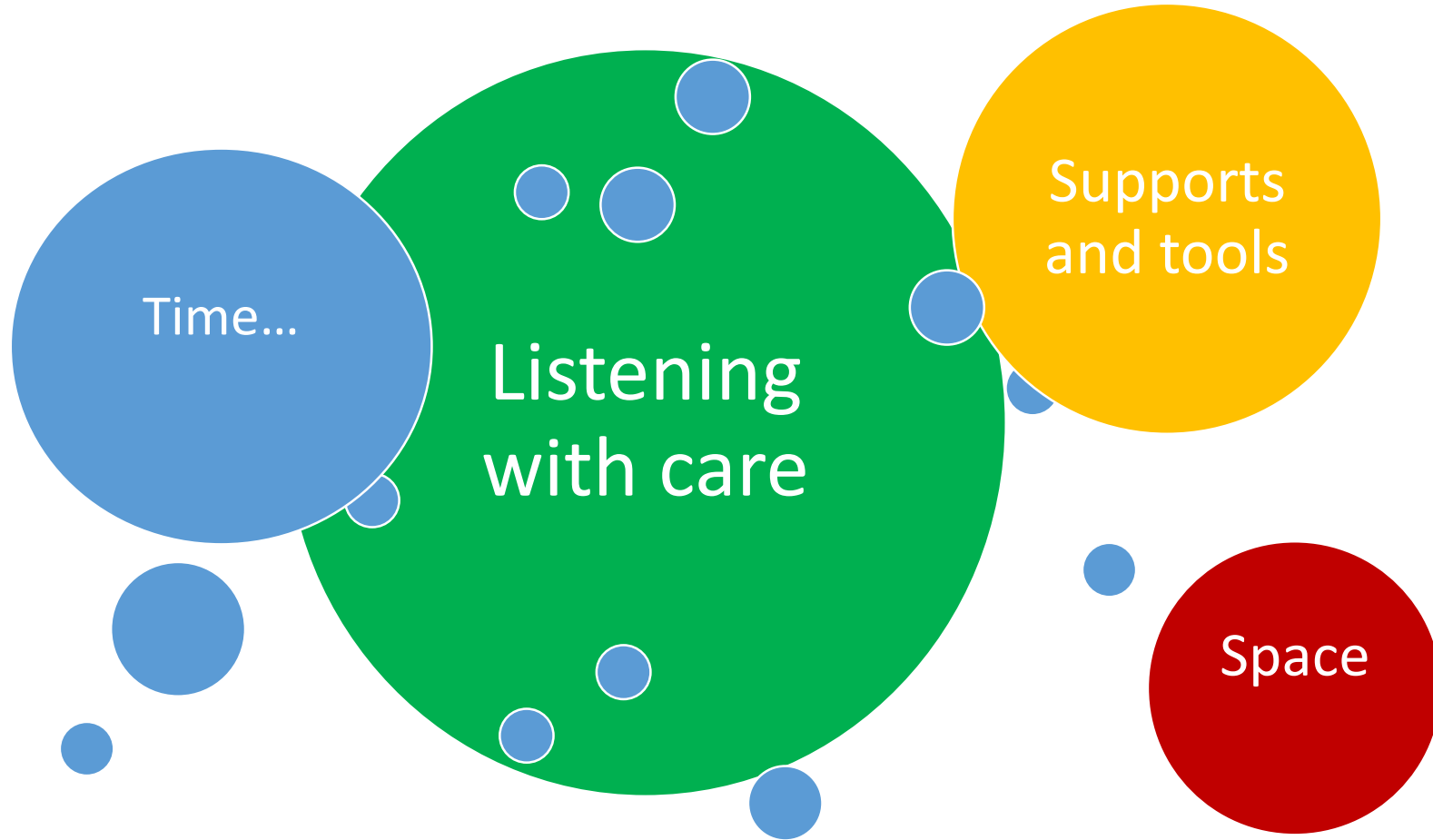
Instructions: talk about what you have lost

- Artistic expression: drawing, music, theater.

Main tool: artistic technique

Instruction: Freedom of expression and emotion.

3.3. main measures to put in place



3.3. Collective art and free expression activities (discussion groups)

- Promote the symbolic expression of trauma.
- Support the grieving process.
- Facilitate the expression of suffering to prevent acting out.
- Encourage the expression of emotions, especially hate and anger.
- Foster the development of relationships.
- Foster the development of empathy towards others.

Artistic Expression Workshops

- The creative process itself can be therapeutic.
- Art is a means of non-verbal communication.
- Art brings people together: sameness and diversity.
- Art is a fun and relaxing activity.
 - Less threatening/indirect
 - Materials (stories, pastels, fabrics, musical instruments...)
- Art allows for symbolization and the projection of emotions.
- Artistic skill is not necessary.

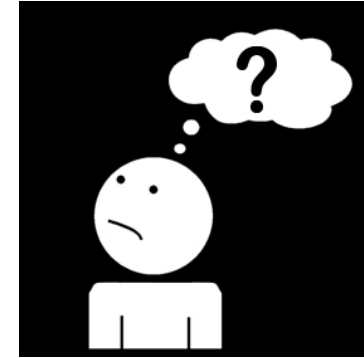
Any intervention that aims at **weaving** links, **creating bridges between the past and the present**, life and death can be a rehabilitation and integration activity

4. Curbing the feeling of powerlessness

The feeling of powerlessness may be the consequence of a counter-transference

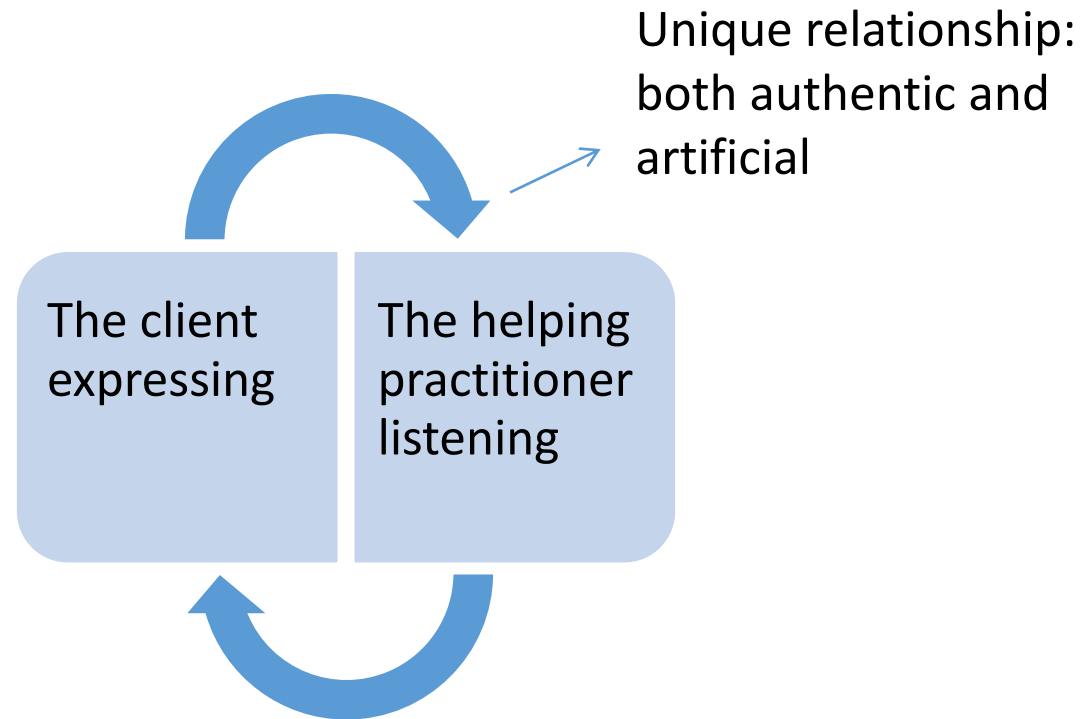
The feeling of powerlessness may be related to a vicarious trauma

Warning! (or when to worry?)



- Helping relationship = real relationship
- Lack of authenticity
- Antipathy
- Extreme sympathy or strong attachment
- Young people in our dreams and nightmares

A helping relationship



Counter-transference

Countertransference is:

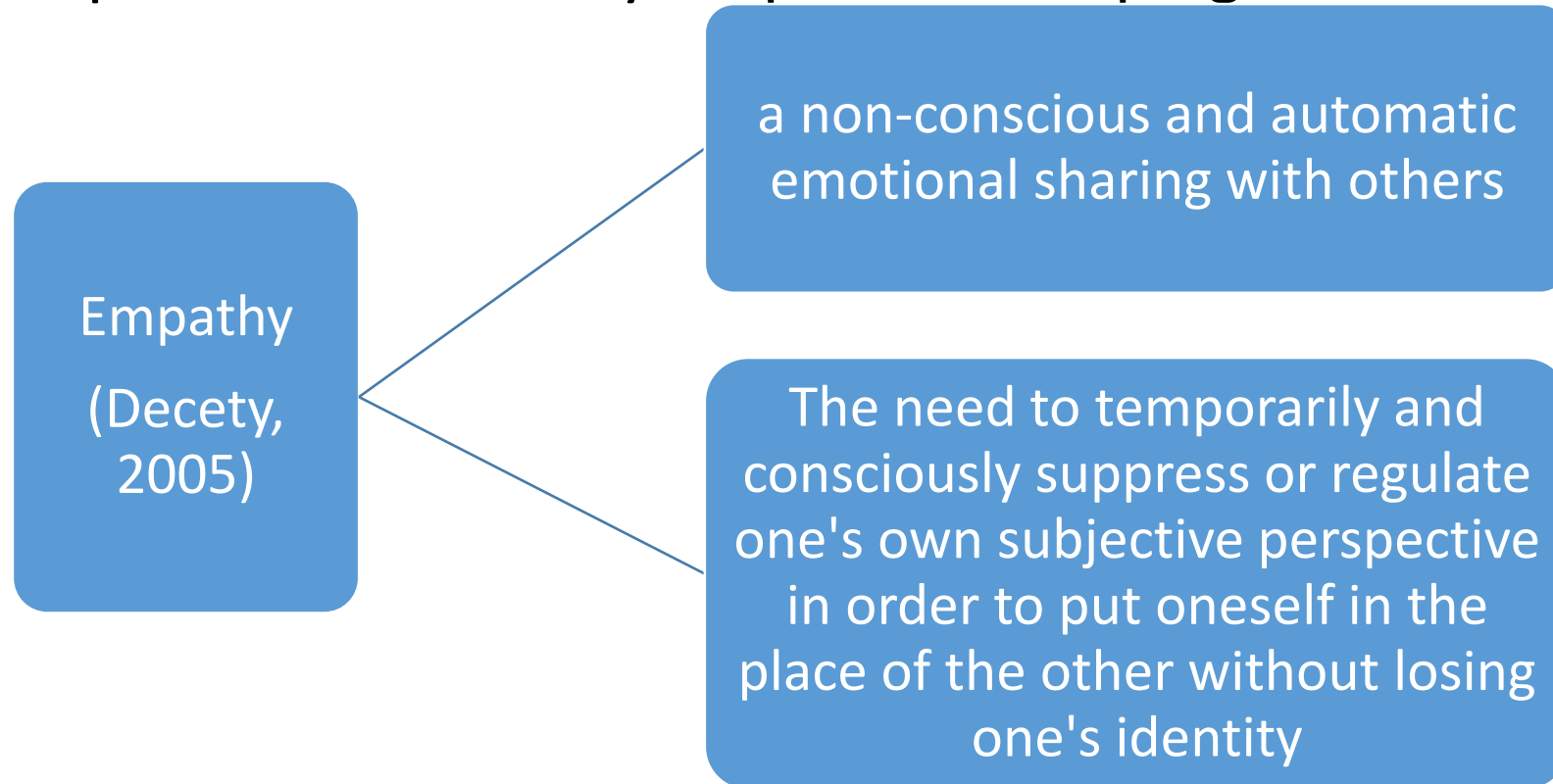
The practitioner's overall emotional reaction to the patient's or client's transference.

What affects him/her, moves him/her, annoys him/her, throws him/her off balance.

This is most likely felt by most of the people who work with the client.

4.2 Vicarious trauma

- Symptoms of trauma but less intense
- A consequence of an overly empathetic helping relationship



What to do?

Countertransference is the patient's symptom:

- Do not act it out
- Do not express it directly
- Be aware of it and use it in the relationship by putting it into words to understand the client's problem.
- Transferential relationships are at the heart of analytical therapy and the basis of all analytical interpretation.

Countertransference is both a lever of the helping relationship and a safeguard against its failure.

A stranger came to see me, he gave me *news of myself*"

André Breton

In Conclusion

Always remember that:

1. Listening with kindness is a professional act
2. Creating an alliance and a positive relationship is already creating good conditions for the young person to confide, if he/she wishes.
3. Validating suffering and anger without judging them and without placing them in a hierarchy is a professional act.
4. Creating spaces for creativity, discussion and the construction of meaning is the key to working with young people who have experienced trauma.

Thank you!

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Some Resources

- <http://www.sherpa-recherche.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Mener-des-groupes-de-parole-en-contexte-scolaire.pdf>
- <https://cipcd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Guide-pour-laccompagnement-psychosocial-en-milieu-scolaire.pdf>
- www.cipcd.ca
- <http://www.elodil.com>
- <http://bibliomontreal.com/coupdepoing/>
- <http://livresouverts.qc.ca>
- <http://www.sherpa-recherche.com/fr/recherche-pratiques/expression-creatrice/>
- <https://catalogue.edulib.org/fr/cours/UMontreal-EREFUG/>
- <https://www.edx.org/course/refugies-et-demandeurs-dasile-realites-et-pistes>
- https://fse.umontreal.ca/fileadmin/fse/documents/pdf/publications/Guide_pandemie_VF.pdf

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