

Goals and How to Work with Polarizations

Toni: Welcome back everyone. We're going to continue in this segment talking about how you work with clients, how you actually go in and begin to work with managers that have become polarized. In the last segment you did a two hand polarization meditation exercise where you worked with two of your own polarized parts. The way that we work with our clients is very similar to that exercise and you can even use that exercise with your clients, I've done that many times. In the slide you'll see this illustration of two parts in conflict with each other. Down at the bottom of the slide you'll see that round circle that says self. We're going to assume at this point that in this conversation if this client had a part that had a lot of anxiety about this conflict that the part that was so anxious has now been able to step back and allow the self of the client to become the mediator in this conflict. We're going to pick it up at that point.

There are, I want to talk a little bit about the goals of working with polarized parts and the first one is to unblend and depolarize the two parts so that the self can become the leader in the system and the self can step in as the mediator between these two parts. The second is two goal is to help the client access self energy toward both parts and how do we do that? Say the very same way that we've been asking you to try on in your offices which is to ask the client, "How do you feel toward both parts?" This is where you will begin to hear and find out whether the therapist has a part that is polarized with one of the internal parts of the client.

Sometimes what you'll hear is, "Well I really understand part a but part b has got to go." Then you know that the client is not in self toward both parts. Hopefully that makes some sense to you. You're going to do unblending until you hear, which you often will the client begin to say, "I really do get both sides of this and I really am able to be present to both these voices in my head" or sometimes you'll hear, "I really know this one but I don't really know that one." Again we're just going to help the client unblend until there's enough self energy to be able to be present to both. Then what I like to do is to really encourage the client to listen for the non extreme message of both parts of this kind of polarization.

If you remember that I talked about mine which is work or ride my horse, both parts, both of these parts that get into conflict with each other very, very frequently have something important for me to know. When they get extreme like for many, many years my over worker always won out against they go outside and be in nature. That's not the way it is now. It's quite balanced out but before that happened, the working one was much, much stronger. That part was so afraid that if I just kept running outside to play I would never get anything done and there would be a lot of negative ramifications for that. The part of me that has been a really hard worker all my life was exhausted and

Goals and How to Work with Polarizations

overworking but a really, really necessary part for me. I want my clients to begin to listen to the benefit of both of these parts. Now of course it's not a far cry to understand how going outside and being in nature and playing would also really support me.

I really needed to listen to both of them. They both needed to know that I was listening for their non extreme message. Then I would like to encourage people to really validate that. In other words for me to be able to really validate that my hard worker was not going to get exiled. We were going to help balance out the system in a real way and to help the part of me that really wanted to go outside and be in nature and play understand that the working part was, even though it had taken over for so many years, it was still necessary. We really, really want to validate and also for these parts to begin to hear that the self of the client can validate both sides of this. Then we want to start to negotiate with these protectors and to start to hear why they're holding onto their jobs so hard.

We want to begin to see if one will step back so that you can work with the other and find out what exile it's protecting. Sometimes those protective parts, one will say, I'm so exhausted from this other part. My part that likes to play would say yes, go and help that part that works all the time so that part would be willing to relax so that I could spend some time with this part of me that was really over working. Then as I began to work with that part what I began to recognize the exile that it was protecting that had to do with my self esteem and my feeling like I was a worthy person in the world which made a lot of sense to me. We want to negotiate with one to see if we can work with the other and then there are times when neither one will step back and so we want to have the self of the client begin to mediate a conversation between the two parts just as we would in couple therapy.

I am going to go back and review those steps, that was a lot of information and when we're in the trainings, this is a place where we really need to slow down because it's such an important, it's such a critical step in learning this process is how you work with more than one part at a time because it is highly unusual that there will ever, ever be just one part that is in the field to work with. I'm going to go through the steps again. Number one is to help the client get in touch with the conflict and to ask if those parts would step out in front. This is one of those places where I encourage people to ask the parts to step out in front. As you watched me work in the last six months or you heard me talk about my cases, I often work very close into the body but this is a case where I will encourage the client to ask the parts to step out. This way the energy of the conflict is, it helps to unblend the energy of the conflict so the client can get more curious and bring more self energy to the system. It also helps the

Goals and How to Work with Polarizations

therapist when the client begins to unblend from the conflict.

Then we want to ascertain whether there's a part that's anxious or trying to figure it out or trying to fix it and help that one unblend as well. Unblending is the very first step to all this and helping your client listen very, very, very carefully to what the conflict is so they begin to understand it from an unblended position as opposed to a blended anxious position. Then we also want to find out if the client is able to unblend by asking them to step out in front by asking the question how do you feel toward the parts. If once the anxious part that's trying to fix it or mediate it has stepped back, we want to go back to the two polarized parts and ask the client how he or she is feeling toward them and start to hear some of those words of self energy. I'm open. I understand. I'm curious. I love that aspect of self curiosity because sometimes when there's a very strong conflict on the inside, curiosity will be the only aspect of self that a client can access in the very beginning of that.

Then we want to help the client validate the fears of each side of this conflict and understand the job and the role of each one and to understand and validate the fear of the other part. This is something that you really want to help your client listen very, very carefully to. What is the fear, what is for instance I've been talking about my own polarization. What does the part of me that works so hard afraid is going to happen if I listen to the part that wants to go outside. We really want to help our clients listen to that fear because that is where we will start to understand that there is an exile or there are exiles underneath this conflict. Once you're able to do that then you'll either ask one part of the polarization to wait while you work with the other one and we do this in couples therapy. We'll ask one partner to soften and wait while we work with the other. If they're unable to, we will help the client from self mediate the conversation.

Often my clients will report to me they are listening and they do understand, do they have to like each other. I just want to say to you right here they do not have to like each other. The goal of working with two polarized parts is not to get them to like each other necessarily. One of the outcomes of starting to work with parts like this and it can be a very, very moving part of the process is when these parts that have been so polarized and so entrenched and hating each other so much and trying so hard in a forceful way to gain power in the system, understand that the other part is actually trying to do the same thing, that the work that they're trying to do is both in service of exiles and in service of the client. When we begin to understand that the part that they have been in such a struggle with for so long is actually trying to do the same thing just in a different way, it can really soften the system very much.

Goals and How to Work with Polarizations

These are the steps of working with polarizations and polarized parts. You've also had an opportunity to work with your own so I'll be very curious to see what it's like when you take this back to your offices. The last thing that I want to talk to you about in this segment is your parts, my parts, our parts, all of our parts. It is extremely easy for the parts of the therapist to become polarized with parts in our clients. How you know that that's starting to go on with your client is when you start to hear that the client has a part that's taking sides, right? You know just like in couple therapy we say, Bowen says, don't take sides. We're not, when you hear your self taking sides even when you start to listen that you're taking sides with a polarized part of your client, that is a place for you to begin to take a pause. The other parts of you that might get activated here are parts of you that feel urgent or anxious.

If you start to feel like I have to help them figure this out, in other words if I have a client who comes in and presents with a part that has decided to leave their relationship and I know somewhere deep in my self that there are many other parts that have a voice but the client's part is very, very urgent and very, very adamant I might have a part that's going to start to go well I have to help them figure this out. I'm going to have to figure this out or I've already decided that they should leave their partner or I've already decided I have a part that has decided that they should stay with their partner. My parts are starting to get anxious because now I'm polarized. This is some of the red flags for you to really begin to listen to your own body, paying attention to your body.

If you're starting to get anxious because the conflict is not being resolved and remember that if somebody comes in has to make a very big decision like leaving a marriage or leaving a partnership, this isn't going to be one session. This is potentially going to be many sessions and there are going to potentially be many polarizations within the polarizations. Being able to slow down and have patience and just allow, keep encouraging the client to do the inner exploration may take a little bit of time and may take a lot of patience on your part. I did mention this but the other thing is if you notice you're starting to push your agenda and when we have parts that get frustrated because somebody can't make up their mind about something, don't we just all have a part that wants to tell them what to do. Well, I do. I have the answer so let me just tell you what to do. That's another signal to you that you're getting blended with a part that has an agenda.

The other one is the really well meaning self like care taking parts of the therapist that want to help the client to stop struggling. I want to say and it may sound very counter intuitive to you but that struggle that those parts are in is part of this process for the client. It's really not up to us. We're not driving this bus. Our clients are on their own path. Sometimes struggling is what needs to

Goals and How to Work with Polarizations

happen in order for the next piece of growth to happen. If you start noticing that you're feeling sorry for your client, you're feeling sad, you want to take care of them, you want to help them out, it's a lovely wonderful part of being a therapist but it can interrupt the process. We want to just take care of and notice the difference between care taking and the compassion and the courage of self energy. That's a very different energy, care taking and courage and compassion.

To end I want to read you another thing. This is Chinese poem, a story, it's a Chinese story and the author is unknown but it really speaks to the different parts of us and what they do. An elderly Chinese woman had two large pots. Each hung on the ends of the pole which she carried across her neck. One of the pots had a crack in it while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water. At the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily with the woman bringing home only one and a half pots of water. Of course the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishment. The poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection and miserable that it could only do half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be bitter failure, it spoke to the woman one day by the stream. I'm ashamed of myself because this crack in my side causes water to leak all the way back to your house.

The old woman smiled, did you notice that there are flowers on the side of the path but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw so I planted flower seeds on your side of the path and everyday while we walk back you water them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate the table. Without you being just the way you are, there would not be this beauty to grace the house. Each of us have our own unique flaw but it's the cracks and flaws we each have that make our lives together so very interesting and rewarding. Thank you very much, see you next time.