What is Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)? How Can It Help?

Emotional Freedom Technique is one of many energy psychology methods. Energy psychology employs the body’s natural energy systems to produce improvement in mood and behavior. It integrates the client’s conditioned responses and behavioral history with stimulation of energy points on the body. These energy points, called meridian points, correspond to the acupuncture points used by Chinese and Western acupuncturists. This approach has gained new attention in light of the research of cell biologists, like Dr. Bruce Lipton, who forward the principles of quantum physics which state that it is the energy field of an organism which dictates the genetic expression and behavior of the organism, and research from the field of epigenetics which posits that it how the organism interprets the environment which determines genetic expression.

In the Emotional Freedom Technology (EFT) method the client is directed to tap on these points as he focuses on his problem. The mechanism of action is believed to be the clearing of traces of hormones related to traumatic experiences or repeated disturbing thoughts, which have built up along the meridian line. Meridian points have a lower electrical resistance than other areas of the skin. Reduced neural activation of the amygdala has been demonstrated following stimulation of specific meridian points. The points used in EFT are on the face, the torso and the hands (Craig, 2005).

The process

- Identify a specific experience or disturbing thought on which to focus.
- Identify the level of disturbance on a scale of 0-10.
- Develop a statement regarding the issue. This statement is repeated three times, while tapping on the fleshy part of the side of the hand, or rubbing gently on the chest.
- Tap gently on a number of meridian points of the head, face, body and hands, again repeating this process three times, while repeating the statement aloud.
- Reassess the level of disturbance and if necessary repeating the whole process.

What can EFT be used for?

EFT can be used in many situations and to address a range of issues (Craig, 2005; Mollon, 2008). At Chrysalis Center for Change our focus is, however, so disturbing thoughts are dealt with as internal behaviors. From this orientation, we might employ EFT to help clients clear disturbing thoughts and beliefs. An example of the use of EFT at Chrysalis is with parents who have disturbing thoughts regarding their children. For instance, parents of children with special needs frequently suffer from fears regarding the outcome for their children. We work with parents to replace these disturbing thoughts with more desirable rational thoughts. The result is not only improved mood and behavior for the parent, but also improvement in the parent-child relationship, often resulting in secondary improvement for the child.

Is it evidence based?

Feinstein (2005, 2008) conducted a review of evidence, reported that studies employing energy psychology had reached statistical significance. A brief description of some of these studies and others conducted since follows. Wells (2003) conducted a study employing EFT in the redaction of small animal phobias. A group using imaginal exposure and EFT for a single session had statistically better results than another group who had used imaginal exposure and diaphragmatic breathing alone. Waite (2003) used EFT to reduce test anxiety in college student. Benor and colleagues (2009) reported similar results with another group of college students, and demonstrated that subjects were successful at transferring skills used in EFT to other areas of their lives. Brattberg (2008) demonstrated a significant reduction in symptoms associated with fibromyalgia pain in sixty-two women age 29 to 65. Church (2009) used EFT with recently returned Iraq veterans suffering from post traumatic stress and veterans of the war in Vietnam who had suffered with PTSD for many years. In all cases, traumatic memories were reduced to manageable levels within a few sessions of EFT. In 2011 Karazias and colleagues took on a large study comparing the effects of EFT against Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR). These authors reported comparable significant effects with both methods, in reducing uncomfortable thoughts resulting from a variety of life challenges.

Disclaimer: While the principles of behavior are consistent within all of us, not everyone is responsive to EFT, or to any method for that matter. Those who might benefit most, are those who are accurate and descriptive regarding internal behavior such as thoughts, and are willing to replace disturbing thoughts with more desirable thoughts.

References