

Supporting healing processes with words and sounds

by Dr. Maren Pohl-Hauptmann

Words convey information. But that information does not only depend on the word choice, but also on the emotions that are conveyed with the sound of our voice. Ultimately, it is our inner disposition that gives the words their meaning. Body language and mimic are indicators of whether what I am saying is authentic. However, how my counterparty receives the words depends on his or her current status and prior experiences. In a therapeutic setting (as in any other interpersonal encounter) it is therefore important to consistently observe what reaction my words trigger in the other, and how these, in turn, affect me. It is important to be aware of this interplay at all times.

Sound makes many words superfluous

Experiences from working with Peter Hess®-Sound Methods show that sounds make many words superfluous. The self-examination that develops through deep relaxation during a sound massage corresponds to a "self-healing trance" (cf. hypnotherapy), in which many people become aware of their fundamental conflicts. In my opinion, it is important to allow these processes to happen and to step back as a therapist. Many clients report that they look at their own problems and their lives from "a higher vantage point" – from a neutral perspective – and thereby gain valuable insights.

Few, probing words and an orientation towards the patient's actual goals and desires can "work wonders" in my experience. Whenever we create the feeling of hope and trust, it triggers a variety of reactions in the patient, which, for example, lead to endorphins responding to exactly the same receptors as conventional medicine's morphine preparations, but without side effects. More than 30 years of experience in sound massage show that the sounds naturally elicit positive feelings of wellbeing, confidence, trust, and security in most people. These go hand in hand with corresponding physical relaxation reactions: breathing is softer, heartbeat slows, blood pressure drops, and capillary perfusion increases. When we can confidently breathe in, a calming, deep expiration follows, and we relax. We thereby activate our parasympathetic nervous system – our resting nerves – and regeneration can begin. Kevin J. Tracy (The inflammatory reflex – published in

Nature 2002) discovered that the messenger substance of the parasympathetic nervous system, acetylcholine, reduces chronic inflammatory processes. This is of special significance because there are increasing indications that many chronic diseases, including fibromyalgia and even coronary heart disease, are caused by silently progressing, latent inflammation. Here, relaxation with sound can be effective preventatively as well as therapeutically. Some physicians and scientists like University Professor Dr. Klaus-Felix Laczika go as far as to say that true healing can only occur in the vagal tone, i.e., in a state of relaxation.

Words create reality

We have all experienced that words create reality – this can happen both in a positive as well as a negative sense. Unfortunately, everyday medicine is often characterized by time constraints and stress. There is not enough time for attentive, positive interaction with patients, and sometimes there is simply no awareness of the importance of such interaction. Many of us are familiar with stories from our circle of friends and acquaintances, for example when the orthopedist says: "Your back is in shambles" or the oncologist remarks: "You have three months to live, go home and enjoy the few good days you have left." Such statements cause anxiety and panic and, through activation of the sympathetic nervous system (the "working nervous system" and counterpart to the parasympathetic nervous system), exactly the opposite of what would constitute healing. These words have incredible power as they "do something" to the recipient. The patient whose back is reportedly in shambles may hang his head and droop his shoulders and believe he is now old and has to live the rest of his life in pain. The change in internal and external attitude then has a high probability of affirming the orthopedist's verdict. This phenomenon of the "self-fulfilling prophesy" was described in a very humorous way by Paul Watzlawick in his book "The Pursuit of Unhappiness" (1983). On a scientific level, this phenomenon is explored in so-called "nocebo research" – as opposed to "placebo

research" – which examines not the positive, but the negative effects, e.g. of word choice or language used on an "information sheet", of a medication. Results underscore the importance of language that elicits positive feelings in people. They also show that trust in the treating physician or therapist significantly impacts the healing process.

What does this mean for the sound therapist?

Whenever we are successful in building trust and hope, processes that promote healing can occur. There are many wonderful ways that sound can provide support in this effort. The sounds of a sound massage help to create a "safe space". The sounds demolish the facades behind which we keep our real selves hidden. They can uncover deep-seated conflicts, worries, anxieties and insecurities and bring them to awareness.

This requires a sensitive therapist who can recognize this and provide support. It is important that this process not be interrupted or influenced by personal expectations or views of the sound provider. Because only then can a type of "healing idea" (which represents inner drive) to develop and shape the healing process oneself emerge.

For me, the essence of sound therapy is denoted by the silence that follows a sound massage, attentive waiting until the patient begins to stir, and careful listening to the patient. Principles presented in sound massage training provide helpful structures for the execution of a safe and effective treatment session. The idea of what it means to be a human being from a humanistic psychology perspective, and orientation towards solutions and resources are the guidelines for our therapeutic activities. Because thoughts and feelings of failure and deficits, which may also arise, are not helpful, and sometimes even harmful. They reinforce the patient in the role of victim, which he or she may have experienced up to now. Many people know what they don't want anymore – but what do they want instead? Autogenic training provides a variety of proven autosuggestive formulas that can be easily integrated into one's own therapeutic repertoire.

Photo: Sandra Lorenz



EXAMPLES

Autosuggestions with negative effect:

- *I don't want to have so much fear.*
- *I am only worth something if I perform.*
- *I never get what I really want.*

Autosuggestions with positive effect:

- *I am courageous and strong – or – I am calm and relaxed*
- *I love myself the way I am.*
- *I attain my goals easily and happily.*

From hypnotherapy, we know that the subconscious simply blocks out words like "not", "no", etc. Therefore, all negative forms should be avoided. For example, the sentence "I am financially **without worry** or **independent**" puts the focus on "worry" and "dependency". These words then unleash their effect and, like a magnet, pull exactly these deficiencies into our lives. If we recognize this and use positively formulated (auto)suggestions, we can respectively pull positive aspects into our lives. An orientation towards goals and desires can work like a light at the end of the tunnel and provide hope for improvement or healing.

But how does diseases start in the first place?

The singer, healer, and homeopath Rosina Sonnenschmidt writes in her series Healing of Organ Conflict (1st edition 2010, Brain and Nervous System – Blossom of Spirituality, p. 6):

"Where within the organ system a disease manifests itself is of great significance. In a status of health, all organ systems vibrate in harmony with one another, because they form synergies and follow the laws of harmonics. As in a musical piece for several voices, cellular junctions of an organ have their own "voice", meaning they have their own frequency, motility, or rhythm. The cohesiveness of all cellular frequencies (organ), emotions, and thought patterns form a human theme or potential. This can turn into a conflict or into a solution, can make you well or make you sick. Exactly where the conflict lies, there also lies the solution. It must be realized in the actual healing process. It is not enough to know a solution in theory, it must be experienced and lived so that it becomes real."

The term "person" consists of "per" for "through" and "son" for "tone". This allows you to easily see what impact frequencies can have on body, spirit, and soul. The tones and overtones of the singing bowls provide a colorful sound spectrum that fulfils us and is perceived as deeply healing by many.

And here we have arrived at the original meaning of the term "healing". The syllable "heal" is known throughout the history of Germanic, old English, Celtic and Balto-Slavic languages and signifies, in a religious sense, "salvation", "holy". However it is also often a synonym for "whole", i.e., "complete, entire" or "hale", which can signify "fit and healthy" (quoted from Wikipedia).

As a physician, it is important to me to support patients with sound and words into self-efficacy. It is not enough that patients theoretically know what will heal them. Implementation into daily life is the real healing process. One seminar at the Peter Hess® Institute is titled "Solution-oriented Conversation Guide" the so-called "miracle question" according to Steve de Shazer. Instead of fixating on a problem, the goal is to provide patients with solution-oriented impulses within the framework of a coaching process. The "miracle question" can go something like: "Assume that your problem can be solved with one miracle. What exactly would that miracle be and how would you be able to tell that the miracle has occurred?"

Reflection upon this question inspires concrete visions that can deliver important practical suggestions for objectives and the design of the above-referenced "healing idea".



Physician or therapist as resonance field

It is as Peter Hess always says: *"The most important moments of the day are those in which we are fully self-aware."* And this is how we can set a good example as sound massage practitioners and sound therapists: by treating us to a daily sound ritual, by giving each other sound massages, always seeking time for ourselves or self-reflection (for example in supervisions). By learning to calm down more, simply to exhale once in a while. We thereby increasingly adopt the attitude inherent therein into our lives and radiate it as well. This also includes the deep confidence that healing is possible until the end.

In this manner, we can honestly support our patients and provide them a resonance field in which they can immerse themselves and find support to take good care of themselves. And perhaps, with a little luck, we find the "sound of silence".



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