

E-motion: **Being with your client in the presence of intense emotion**

When we look around at our daily dealings, professional or work relationships, even family relationships: how often do we make room for our emotions? How “okay” is it to express your emotions in these relationships? How often do we give, hear and/or comply with the statement, “this is not the place to get all emotional”?

We believe that emotion is a natural part of our ‘humanness’. Too often we are taught to hide our true emotions or “manage it” away. Consequently, the underlying message we receive, and in turn also tell others, is that emotions are something to be ashamed of and that interfere with ‘daily normal functioning’.

Not surprisingly this does not serve us in the long run. Emotion is a vital part of being alive. It is a way of responding to and processing our experience in this world. By repressing this part of who we are, we not only unlearn how to fully express ourselves, but we deny ourselves releasing some of this energy in a healthy way.

Emotion can be seen as a type of energy. When we break down the word E-Motion, it reminds us of how energy needs to *move*. It is when this energy (emotion) becomes stuck, that it starts giving us problems. When it is allowed to be expressed it can transform and be released. In the safe and contained space of the coaching relationship the client can be with their feelings and emotions to the full extent they need to.

When the client finally allows themselves access to emotion and “be with” their emotion, the coach's job is simply to stay with the client and let the emotion unfold. The coach trusts that the emotion is energy that has a natural flow, it might entail awareness of the emotion, expression of that emotion and release and transformation of that emotion. This “transformation” of emotion can often be witnessed when a client gives expression to an emotion, say for example anger: As they start expressing the fullness of this emotion without trying “to do” anything with it, it often transforms into another emotion - for example sadness. As such, emotions can be seen as

different colours of the same rainbow, in a sense, emotion is an energy that is a byproduct of the way we function, experience and view the world.

When a client takes the opportunity to pause and tune in to what they are really experiencing in their emotional field it can be quite overwhelming or scary for them. The coach's job is to have the client stay connected to their feeling world and create the safety and welcoming space for the client to bring anything and everything they want/need to.

A client might feel embarrassed when they show sudden onset of emotion. It is the coach's job to welcome and normalise any emotion for the client.

Being with emotion can seem like peeling the layers of an onion: The coach does not direct or take the client anywhere. They simply stay with whatever comes up for the client. The process starts unfolding in the same way we would peel away one layer of the onion at a time. Each layer is slightly different, going deeper into the heart of the emotion.

The coach stays curious, ever asking, "so what is here now"... using a lot of silence and space for the client to stay connected to their own experience. The coach can offer metaphor or visualisation to the client so that they have another "language" to use in expressing these feelings - staying in the process of unfolding the emotion. There is no "destination" here. The process that the client follows is a natural process of acknowledging and expressing emotion. When the client starts releasing this energy/emotion it again gives rise for something new to unfold.

So let's use a metaphor of electricity energy and a light bulb to illustrate this - an elementary science class example if you will:

Imagine an electrical current (energy) that runs through an electrical wire in your home. It runs all the way to the contact point with the light bulb. At this contact point, electricity (energy) is then conducted and expressed in 2 different ways: 1) as light waves and 2) as heat. The heat waves travel to nearby objects with lower temperatures.

The light waves (energy) keep traveling and as soon as it hits an object different things can happen:

1. It can either be absorbed (and then be transformed into heat or vibrational motion energy)
2. It can be transmitted (as light energy)
3. Or it can be rejected - in which case it keeps travelling

In any of these cases the energy keeps moving, ever changing its form. Some of the energy gets "lost" into the environment by means of friction or by means of transformation (from one energy to the next).

So, emotion is much like energy. When we create a conducive container, the client can access their emotion (the contact point) to express it in a contained way (light bulb) so that the emotion (electricity) can transform (to light and heat), and be further expressed. Along the way the emotion (energy) becomes less intense (energy "lost") so that the client can include and integrate what they wish to, and express what is new for them now.

The coach "holds the space" for the client to go deeper into this feeling/emotion. The coach's question is directed towards unfolding the clients feeling more and more and invites the client into metaphor and/or link the emotion physically to the body. This helps the client to project the feeling as a more concrete and tangible construct and eases the process of staying tuned into the emotion so that it can move and transform. As soon as the client acknowledges and accepts this emotion, gives it air, if you like, it can start to transform.

At some point the client will experience a sense of "reaching the bottom of the emotion" or it will visibly transform into another emotion and/or possibly produce some sense of insight, understanding or resolution. At this point the coach can stay curious as to whether there is more to go, and/or help the client include what they have just experienced and released into their life going forward.

So why is it important to be present to our emotions?

It is not that we advocate that emotions should take priority and run our lives. We are really saying the opposite. When we allow time and space to be with our feelings, acknowledge them, accept them, express and process them, they become released energy and are less likely to run our lives! The less emotional content of unexpressed feelings we carry around with us, the less likely they are to get in the way of relationships and communication with others. In a sense you are “releasing your electric charge” so that you can be truly present and available to yourself and others.

It is when we repress our emotions that they truly get in the way (or take over) our interaction with others and ourselves.

Putting it in Context for the Coach:

Often in a coaching session there will be a specific time line and focus on a important project and the client will only need to “clear” in order to present and focus on the real topic. We are not saying just because the client is aware of emotion the whole session should be spent on that, no! However you will find that there are certain feelings the client might keep avoiding. It might be their anger, embarrassment or even sadness that they simply can’t stand to be with.

This will keep showing up for them, or be presented to them in their life by other people. Usually what the client can’t be with will be the thing that really irritates or disgusts them in others. This is where the coach can be curious as to how this emotion also lives in the client, or perhaps, how they don’t allow for the emotion ever to be acknowledged or expressed. The bigger picture here is for the client to be able to live and experience their full selves. To start including the parts/feelings that they have avoided and cut off. By slowly and surely including more of themselves into their lives they can start living more fully expressed lives.