



*Sexual Healing:
Transforming the Sacred Wound*

Peter Levine, PhD

Session One

Tami Simon: Sounds True presents *Sexual Healing: Transforming the Sacred Wound* with pioneering trauma therapist and author Peter Levine. Now, “Session One: The Body as a Container for Feelings and Sensations” with Peter Levine.

Peter Levine: Even by conservative estimates, worldwide one in every four persons has been sexually assaulted in childhood. If you're a woman, the chances are even greater. Of course, many people have been assaulted as adults. If you've experienced sexual trauma as you walk down the street on any ordinary day, you can be sure that you're not alone with that experience—that many of the people that you meet share a similar story.

Now, sexual trauma and sexual abuse can wound us at a very deep level, leaving scars in our physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual bodies. Because these wounds are so deep, they may seem irreparable to us. But in my 30 years of working with people who have been traumatized and sexually abused, I've developed a number of principles and exercises that have helped people in their recovery towards wholeness. In this program, I would like to share these with you.

All sexual trauma is about violation. It's about violation in the form of an intrusion into our deepest, most personal inner sacred spaces. It's about the rupture of personal, emotional, sexual, and energetic boundaries. It's also about feeling deep, unexplainable shame and guilt; about not being able to form deep, sustaining relationships. At the core, it's about feeling frozen and shut down or feeling overwhelmed by emotions such as rage, fear, hate, terror. Also it's about not feeling connected—not connected in one's environment and to the human race and

ultimately to one's self. It's about that devastation. These feelings of violation may seem insurmountable to you, but the tools and the resources that I want to share with you here can increase your capability to overcome them.

There are different kinds—different levels—of sexual trauma. For example, being raped by a stranger certainly has different ramifications than incest. I also want to make it clear that there's a fundamental difference between sexual trauma that happens in adulthood and sexual trauma—sexual abuse, molestation—in childhood. The dynamics of childhood sexual abuse are more complex. The violation is deeper because there's the betrayal and also the confused attachment; whereas in adulthood, the confusion is not nearly as strong. We feel violated and deeply hurt and feel many of the other symptoms, but you don't experience this additional violation and confusion as much.

The reason I'm telling you this is because there's a spectrum. Some of us have experienced a sexual trauma in our adulthood and others of us have had prolonged, confused abuse in childhood, and some of us have had a mixture. Know that if sometimes it's more difficult to work through something with these exercises that there are good reasons for that.

This program, while it can be tremendously helpful in healing sexual trauma—sexual violation—is not a substitute for therapy. It's likely that as you do some of the exercises, difficult feelings or pictures—remembrances—may arise. They generally emerge as you feel more supported and more at home in your body. If these feelings seem too difficult, know that there's not a substitute for working one to one or even in certain kind of groups with a therapist. It's important to pick a therapist that's appropriate for you. I'll give some guidance for that at the end of the program.

As we move forward in our work together, I'm going to give you a spectrum of possible symptoms and signs that occur with sexual trauma and sexual abuse. These symptoms don't mean that you have been abused or have had sexual trauma. Many of these symptoms can come from other sources. You'll find as we go along that it's not always the most important thing to know where the trauma came from but to be able to work with the effects that it's left on our bodies, on our minds, our psyches, and our spirits.

Quite frequently, people who have experienced sexual trauma often have physical symptoms—physical illnesses that don't seem to be able to be diagnosed, that they're not due to any organic cause like a virus or something wrong with the organ system. These kinds of

physical symptoms are sometimes called “somatization.” Basically, the experience of the trauma is playing out in the theater of the body.

Another common symptom of sexual trauma and trauma in general is an impairment in what's called affect regulation. It means in other words either that we're overwhelmed by feelings, that we feel flooded by feelings, or that we feel numb and shut down. I'll say that another way. We don't have feelings. We go through life more like robots without feeling. Often, these will change back and forth with one person at different times.

The symptoms can play out in the arena of relationships. For example, most people who are traumatized—I would say all people to some degree have distorted relations with other people. Sometimes, it's in one particular area. Other times, it's just almost blanket. If we've had sexual trauma, it almost certainly will have a distortion in our physical, sexual relationships. It's possible to have distortion in those relationships with other kinds of trauma as well.

Other symptoms of chronic abuse and chronic trauma are abuse of drugs and alcohol, nicotine—these are all drugs—and overwork. Often, men have symptoms which are more related to overwork and drinking and sometimes to violence, whereas women more frequently have symptoms related to emotion—although of course either can have either as well. It's just a tendency.

Eating disorders frequently are associated with histories of sexual abuse. Again, please: I don't want people to make the mistake of thinking because they have an eating disorder, that means that they been sexually abused or sexually traumatized. That can be both incorrect and harmful.

Self-mutilation is a symptom that, again, is associated with usually severe trauma and abuse, where people will injure themselves or cut themselves. There can be more general feelings or more general signs or symptoms like loss of a sustaining belief. It can be a spiritual belief, a belief in goodness of people, a religious belief. The person doesn't have something that helps them move through life the way other people do.

Two symptoms that are also very strongly characteristic of sexual trauma and trauma in general are amnesia and dissociation. Now, amnesia can be an inability to remember a specific, particular traumatic event, but it can also be a blanking out of a whole part of one's life. Sometimes, traumatized people are not able to remember anything under the age of five or six or even under the age of 10. It's as though that part of their life never existed. Amnesia can also be a

tendency that people have to just not remember things in the present. That also can be a form of amnesia.

Dissociation is a common symptom. We think of that as when the person is not in their body, when they go outside of their body. That is an important form of dissociation. Frequently, a person will actually experience themselves severing from their body and it's as though they're floating out above their body and looking down at the accident or the surgery or at the child being molested. They may feel sorry for the child or it may be a neutral perception, but it doesn't seem like it's them. There's a disconnection there.

Again, these kinds of things like dissociation is what allows us to survive what would be unbearable. It makes it bearable because we're not really there feeling it. That's meant to be a temporary thing. In traumatic symptoms, it's become a preferred mode, a chronic thing that we do. We dissociate and we should then re-associate. That would be the healthy thing. But what happens is we don't know how to get back and we remain disconnected. That can give rise to feelings of unreality, of feeling depersonalized, not like a real person, or like being in a dream. Dissociation could also be more subtle. We can remember part of experience, but little pieces of that experience may be blank.

Or dissociation can be a disconnection between different parts of the body so that our arms and our legs don't feel like they're connected together. When we walk, we don't feel a sense of rhythm. It's disjointed and disconnected. That's a bodily manifestation of dissociation. Sometimes a whole part of our body feels blank so that we can't really feel anything in our gut, and sometimes people purge so they can get some feeling in their gut.

Feelings of helplessness, hopelessness are quite common. This is because we were at one time helpless. We may experience what's called "hypervigilance." In other words, we're always on the alert. A lot of times, people can't sleep because of that because they're always on the alert. Look, if you're in a situation where there could be danger or threat, you want to be alert. You want to be hypervigilant, but you want that to tune down when the actual threat passes.

Taking these as a whole, knowing that we may be experiencing one kind of symptom at one time, another kind at another—but more importantly that in any symptom we have is already the seed of a healing process.

About 30 years ago, I started to ponder and research the question of why is it that animals in the wild are rarely traumatized even though their lives are threatened on a routine basis,

whereas people are easily traumatized often from a single event where they felt threatened. If animals in the wild were easily traumatized—that is to say if they started developing these kinds of symptoms that I mentioned to you—then they wouldn't survive and the species wouldn't survive. They have to regain their equilibrium after threat. They have to have a way of coming back to balance.

What I discovered is that animals do have a mechanism like that in their nervous system and we have the same mechanism ourselves. But for different reasons, we have lost the ability to use it. We've forgotten it in certain ways. We've become self-conscious about certain feelings that are associated with it. We are frightened by some of the sensations that are associated with these restorative healing processes.

In this program, I'm going to use some of the basic things that I've discovered, putting them in forms of exercises that you can use to help you restore that natural process that is intrinsic to being a human animal but also into the parts of us that are especially human—some of the feeling, spiritual, interpersonal parts as well. This, I find, is the key to healing sexual trauma.

However, there is one critically important difference between adult animals and humans. With most young mammals, rather than running away from threat, they will run towards a source of adult protection—usually to the mother or to other adults. Similarly, human babies, infants, and toddlers will cling to their attachment figures when they feel threatened. In fact, humans of all ages seek the comfort of others when we're fearful or stressed. I think you can see that a dilemma of profound consequences is set up if the people who are supposed to love and protect us are also in fact the ones that hurt, humiliate, and violate us. This way, our whole sense of safety and stability in the world and our interpersonal relationships become undermined by childhood abuse because we carry these deeply conflicted survival patterns into adulthood.

The strength and persistence of these feelings and behaviors is in part due to the effect of what's called “neoteny.” “Neoteny” means the way we humans carry into adulthood many of our behaviors from childhood. This is one of the mechanisms that distinguish us from other animals. Now, this fact of life also has a magnificent advantage in healing from abuse in that we also retain the innocence, spontaneity, and creativity which are the wondrous blessings endowed to children and which enrich our adult lives.

For these reasons, we will begin by finding a way to access some of the safety and self-trust and spontaneity that we need for our journey. The way we're going to do this here is through the powerful resource of our bodies. Even though we may think that our bodies have betrayed us or even that they have become our enemies, we can find islands of safety there that we may begin to bridge together, forming stable landmasses of safety. Doing this step by step can help us get a foundation of being even if we were deeply undermined as children.

You may find that this body-oriented focus is a little different than that of other approaches that you might be familiar with. If I say something that doesn't make sense or that you find objectionable or that offends you at first, I only ask that you try to listen with an open mind and a hearing heart.

One of the symptoms that we just talked about is the symptom of feeling helplessness. This often goes together with the feeling of shame. In working with helplessness and shame, we'll find that they're actually bodily states. That's why it's been often very difficult to work with them with words and talk therapy alone. This first exercise is to give you an idea of what that's like in your body and to give you some tools to actually move through those states. One of the reasons that I put this exercise right at the beginning of this program is so that when you meet these feelings of helplessness, of collapse, of shame as we go on with the other exercises, you'll have tools to work with them at that time. These physical exercises are more than just physical exercises. They really form the basis of how we experience ourselves internally and in the world. You actually may be feeling less of this collapse and helplessness and shame.

To begin this first exercise, please find a comfortable place to sit—a chair that you like or some pillows. But, I think a chair is best for this. As you sit in the chair, I want you to notice a couple of things. First of all, how the chair supports you—how the bottom of the chair supports your bottom, how the back of the chair supports your spine, and I invite you to feel that support in a direct, physical way: to literally feel the back of the chair straightening your spine. When you have that—that sense—and it may not be strong, it may just be very vague. Don't worry about this. Many times you do these exercises over and over and you get more each time.

As you feel that and begin to notice the front of your body. And generally if you've had trauma, you'll feel a weakness in your solar plexus, around your diaphragm, perhaps in your chest as well. It's literally a feeling of collapse or sinking.

Then, when you feel that, switch back to the perception of how the chair supports you so you know that's there. Now, as you feel this area of weakness, I want you very slowly and just a little bit to actually exaggerate that, so your body goes more into that collapse state. You may feel your head and your shoulders coming forward and drooping down. You may feel yourself bending into your solar plexus or wherever you feel the weakness. Just do that just a little bit just to get the sense of it, and then slowly move back up. Feel your spine straightening, feel the support of the chair on your bottom and your back. As you have that awareness, then shift to the awareness of your abdominal area or the area which is weak and collapsed.

Again, slowly just collapse into that at this time a little bit more, feeling yourself collapse into it and how that feels—what the sensation of that is. Then again slowly come back up, feel your spine straightening, feel the support of the chair, and just notice what else you're noticing—what other sensations, feelings or thoughts you might have.

Let's just do it one more time. Again, you can practice this exercise any time. You're feeling the support and you feel the weakness. And again, you collapse into the weakness, feeling actually the sensation of collapse, falling into it. Falling into it a little bit deeper this time, feeling what that's like.

Now, when you're ready, slowly begin to straighten back out from the collapse. Slowly come back, taking your time, letting your spine uncurl, straighten. Feeling your neck become straight, your head come up completely. Feel your shoulders, feel how you're sitting, and again noticing anything else that's in your field of awareness: thoughts, sensations, other sensations, feelings, a picture that may have come into your mind's eye.

Now, there's one more part to the exercise, and that has to do with really opening that area of where there was the collapse, and maybe now there's less collapse. What you're going to do this time is focus on that area and we're going to vibrate into that area with the sound. The sound that we're going to use is the sound “voo.” When you make the sound, you imagine vibrating it right in that area, probably somewhere in your solar plexus or abdomen where you felt the collapse.

Allow your breath to go completely out with the sound and then at the end of the sound and the end of the breath, just allow the next breath to come in and make the sound again. Here, I'll do it with you. Voooo. That's right, and let all the air out. When the air is out, just allow then next breath to come in. Voooo. One more time, allow the breath to come in and just allow your

jaws to relax a little bit. Voooo. Just rest and feel your belly or feel the area that you were vibrating into, and just noticing what you feel there, what you sense there, what kind of changes have happened. You may have the sensation of some of kind of energy. It may feel comfortable. It may feel unusual. You may feel it spreading from your belly up into your chest and your face and arms or other parts of your body; your legs. Just notice and follow.

You do this exercise any time that you want. Sensing those feelings, those sensations and the releasing of energy that's beginning to happen, and sensing if there's a beginning of some of that energy that's been stuck, because that's going to be our emphasis here—on moving into these feelings, these energies just a little bit at a time, so that you feel more comfortable and more strong in your body.

Indeed, this way of working with trauma is what I call a naturalistic way. It's based on an understanding of why animals in the wild aren't traumatized even though their lives are threatened on a routine basis. What is it in the natural environment that allows animals to be relatively immune from the effects of trauma? Because if they were easily traumatized by being threatened, they would lose their edge and they would be eaten summarily for lunch by some predator animal, and they wouldn't survive and the species wouldn't survive.

We have in us innate mechanisms—instinctual mechanisms—that allow us to move through trauma. The idea here is that our bodies know what to do. They've been designed through millions of years of evolution. So, the body has figured out what to do—how to restore itself to equilibrium when we've been threatened, when we've been aroused.

Now, why is it that this doesn't seem to work so naturally for us? I think there are a number of reasons. The first reason is that we're unaccustomed to these kinds of sensations. They feel alien to us because we're not used to involuntary things happening to us. A lot of times we think there's something wrong with us or we're going crazy or something like that because we don't realize that it's our body trying to reset itself.

The other thing is because there's an intense energy that's associated with survival—because this is the same energy that allows us to escape from a predator—when we experience them, we may be intimidated by their power. Again, that's one of the reasons why we're doing it in a slow process: so that you can access these energies and feel them as strengths and as resources.

The other reason I think why it's been difficult is these survival energies have the intention to defend our lives either by fighting or by fleeing. We often become afraid that if we feel this energy and feel the feelings of rage, of wanting to counterattack, that we'll hurt somebody or hurt ourselves. That can be a very deep fear, so we keep a strong lid on it. Of course you know what happens if you put a strong lid on a sensation or a feeling—especially an instinctual feeling. Well, it pushes back up, and then you have to push back down, and then it pushes back up, and then that energy just exhausts you. That's what is really driving so many of the symptoms that you may be having.

When we can gradually allow that energy to move out of this stuck, compressed state, the energy then doesn't drive the symptoms. The energy is available for the movement and direction of our life. I think this is the essence of this approach—that it's very much in the body, and it works with how our body has reacted to all of the trauma.

Again, we're not looking for all the different things that happened to us and exactly how it was done and what we remember and what we don't remember, but in accessing and making available to us our energies of aliveness, passion, and a focus. As we develop the capacity to feel bodily sensations as they are—because that's what takes us to our energy; that's what takes us to those innate responses—this empowers us by creating a resiliency in our nervous system and in facilitating self-soothing.

Again, as I previously mentioned, one of the common symptoms of trauma is the nervous system is so aroused that the person can't sleep, can't concentrate. When we begin to get this restored in ourselves, we also enhance the capacity to self-soothe. This is so important in healing these wounds of sexual abuse.

In trauma, we are overwhelmed by feelings—by sensations and emotions. In some of the older therapies, there's been the idea that you have to get all of these emotions out. Get out all your anger, get out all your hatred, and tear up pillows and beat on mattresses and so forth. In some ways that can be of some use in helping to express feelings, but really ultimately what we need to do is build a bigger container to hold our feelings so they don't seem so overwhelming. Some of you may have the idea that what you need to do with emotions is keep expressing them—and some expression can definitely be helpful. Even more fundamental than that is we want to build our capacity to feel without being overwhelmed by those sensation and feelings. To do that, we have to have a container, and that container is our body.

In these next series of exercises, you're going to get the sense of that container, which is also our boundary. So, that will help us when we start working with boundaries and with interpersonal relations.

So, we start with something that seems so simple, but step by step it actually leads towards very important skills that we need to overcome sexual trauma and be competent and content in our lives.

So, we come back to our seat or favorite comfortable place to be, and take a few moments to get comfortable. The idea here is to be able to feel your skin and your muscles as boundaries to your sensations and feelings.

Now, in trauma, we spoke about dissociation. In dissociation we really leave our bodies in some way or another, or our bodies are disconnected. So, it's important to begin to come back into the body, because we can't win if we're not in our bodies. So, this tapping that I'm going to describe to you—the tapping in this exercise—will number one, help you begin to come back into your body, and number two, will start to begin to help you form a container for your feelings.

So, let's start by gently, gently tapping the palm of your left hand with your fingers of your right hand. So something like [*tapping noise*]. And then notice the sensation in the palm of your hand. What do you feel? Do you feel tingly? Do you feel vibration? Do you feel numb, hot, cold? Just notice whatever you feel and maybe even look at your hand and say something like, “This is my hand. My hand belongs to me. My hand is a part of me,” and any other words that help you get that idea of ownership and of these parts belonging to a greater whole.

So, then you can turn your hand over and begin tapping on the back of your hand. [*Tapping noise.*] And again, notice the sensation on the back of your hand. Follow it for a moment, notice how it changes. And so again say something like, “This is the back of my hand. I feel the back of my hand. The back of my hand belongs to me.”

And I'm not going to lead you through every part of the body. I'll let you do that. It will take at least half an hour. But I want you to take as much time for this exercise—or as little time—as feels right for you at that particular time.

So, you may be tapping your arms, the outer part of your arms, and saying, “These are my arms. I can feel my arms. I feel tingly in my arm. My arm belongs to me.” Then tapping the shoulder. “This is my shoulder. I can feel my shoulder. My shoulder and my arm are connected.

My shoulder and my arm are part of me.” And then you can go and again feel the connection between that and your hand.

So, notice anywhere that you feel some sense of connection. You can gently touch and pat the top of your head, your forehead, your chest, abdomen, your legs, pelvis, your knees, even your feet. And each time, say something like what I've suggested to do. But your words of course are going to be much better than my words, most likely.

Now, another version of working with this is what I call “the shower exercise.” This involves going out and purchasing a pulsing showerhead. They don't cost too much. So, adjusting the showerhead to a comfortable temperature and a comfortable level of intensity, put your hand up to the shower, feel the pulsing on your hand, and again, say something like, “This is the palm of my hand. I feel the palm of my hand. It belongs to me. It's part of my body.” Then turn the back of your hand to it and again repeat the exercise. And do that with as many parts of your body as you want to do at that time.

Now that you've gotten some sense of the skin boundary of this container of the skin, I'm going to suggest that you learn about a deeper container—a deeper boundary—and those are your muscles. So, take your right hand and put your right hand on the back of your left upper arm, and squeeze the muscle gently but firmly so you can really feel it in the muscle. Say something like, “This is my muscle. This is part of me. This is a deeper container for my feelings and my sensations.” Then go to maybe your shoulders. Squeeze that a few times. Squeeze. Feel the tension when you squeeze, and then let it go. Again, find your own rhythm of squeezing and letting go. Then, again, you can say these affirmations that we've gone over.

Now it won't change in one time. It can change a considerable amount in one time, but really to get the benefit of this, it means doing these exercises over time and doing these exercises along with the other exercises that you will be doing. So, in doing these exercises and building a sense of container, you'll find that you have a greater capacity to feel some of these uncomfortable sensations and feelings—to be able to tolerate them.

Now, at least in the beginning, some of you may need to have more pressure to get the feeling, but the idea is to just do enough pressure to get that sense of your muscle. So, as you feel and squeeze those parts of your body, you're beginning to actually feel the containers and the boundary of sexual feelings. This, again, is very important because as you'll see later, that has

been one of the places where people who are traumatized and sexually abused have a lot of issues and a lot of problems.

Take as much time as you need to go over the parts of your body, to squeeze them, to feel them, to get to know them, to reacquaint yourselves with them. This is something you can practice while you're standing in line at the check out counter or at the bank, you can fold your arms and squeeze the outside of your arms with both of your hands. So this is, again, something that you can do to remind yourself over and over again that you have a body, that the body has boundaries, and that the body contains sensations and feelings.

Now, doing these exercises will help you to be able to contain the difficult sensations and feelings and emotions that are associated with trauma and abuse. You may find, over time, that as you learn to tolerate them more, they actually will shift and change into other sensations and possibly even sensations that are pleasant or even pleasurable.

Also be aware if you are experiencing any particular resistance to that. If you experience that resistance, really just note it, because when we've been traumatized, so frequently it feels so alien to have pleasurable sensations—or we connect the pleasurable sensations with the things that were done to us. So, this is also a way of beginning to uncouple and free our body from its being molded by past experience and allow it to be the container in the present.

So, we're leaning to contain not only unpleasant feelings and sensations but pleasant ones as well. This is really where we want to be going because healing sexual trauma really is about restoring our capacity to feel pleasurable sensations and feelings, and to bring that into our lives and into our intimate relationships.

Session Two

TS: “Session Two: The True Role of Memory in Trauma.”

PL: The role of recovering traumatic memories and healing sexual trauma has been one of the most contentious, controversial, and polarized in the whole field of treatment of sexual abuse. What I'm going to present to you now is a summary of how I understand the role of memory in the formation of trauma and in the healing of trauma. It may seem disturbing to you, but I only ask that you listen with an open mind and with your heart reaching towards your healing.

First of all, the science of traumatic memory is only in its infancy. The crucial concept of body memory is just embryonic. Yet, one of the fiercest and mostly highly politicized debates surrounds the subject of trauma memory—or as some falsely call it, “false memory.” As you go on with this exploration, I think that you may discover that memories are neither true nor false, but rather something more fluid and shifting.

What is most important in healing trauma is not remembering per se, but “re-remembering.” Re-dash-remembering. The Egyptian goddess Isis did just this with the disembodied parts of her husband Osiris and, briefly, this is the story. After slaughtering and dismembering Osiris, his enemies cut up his body into pieces and buried these parts around the countryside. Isis, his wife, then searched for and dug them up from the cavernous places where his enemies had buried them. She then joins these dismembered parts together and brings into life a rebirth of her husband into a coherent, whole being.

Now, we shall see as we go on that traumatic memories are often neither true nor false, but something more fluid and shifting. What's most important in healing trauma is not remembering a specific thing that happened to us, but rather re-remembering as Isis did with her husband Osiris and bringing ourselves into a sense of wholeness and integration by bringing the dismembered parts of our experience back together in a coherent wholeness.

So, how does this apply to our healing? Well, healing ourselves involves gently coaxing our disconnected, disembodied parts back together and then to begin to feel them, to tolerate the sensations that once overwhelmed us, so that we too can bring them together and be remembered.

Now, the first exercise of building our container—that you can see is the first step in being able to bring those parts together because we can't do that without a container.

Now, when we learn to tune in to the promptings of our body's own inner language, when we have that container, we then begin to remember our wholeness. This is the Holy Grail in transforming traumatic experiences, and learning that we can move from fixity and fragmentation to flow and coherence, we may come to find that it is possible to let go of difficult feelings and images that have long haunted us.

So, what we'll be doing now is exploring a little bit more of the phenomenon of memory and re-remembering in particular. We'll then come back to the difficult sensations which we had to split off or fragment from because of overwhelming experiences and see how we can begin using the container idea and the container that we started to experience in our bodies to be able to begin to process these difficult sensations and move through them to completion.

Now, when our bodies remain in trauma we have the compulsion to search for the cause of our distress. In other words, we're feeling bad. We're feeling unsettled. Feeling ungrounded. Feeling like we don't belong. Feeling shame. So, our natural tendency, if you like, is to look for an explanation for that, a reason for that.

In primitive times, when we were walking in the forest, if there would be a rustling of bushes we would stop what we were doing and look to see what was going on there because it could be a hungry stalking bear that could be snapping us up for lunch. If we localize the bear, we can either run and escape or try to defend ourselves in some other way. But if we hear the noise and our nervous system gets alerted but we can't find out where that stimulus came from, then we keep searching. That biological mechanism is in a way what keeps us searching for our memories. We're not looking for the bear outside but we're looking for that source and we see that that source could be a memory—that if somehow we could remember it, we would then not be in this traumatic state.

But it doesn't work that way. So, we frantically seek attribution and find it often where it doesn't belong. We grasp at fragments of experience, trying to explain them to ourselves by remembering instead of allowing the time for our bodily experience to be re-remembered.

Now, because we have experienced intolerable sensations and feelings in the past, our tendency is to actively avoid them. Mentally we split off or dissociate these feelings. Physically

our bodies tighten and brace against them. We seem to live under the assumption that if we feel those sensations and feelings, they will overwhelm us forever.

Then in an attempt to manage them, we come to rely on medications, food, drugs, and alcohol to make these sensations and feelings go away. We've lost the confidence that we can learn to tolerate to contain them without outside help. The fear of being consumed by these terrible feelings leads us to believe that only not feeling them will make them go away.

This assumption simply is not true. Fighting against or hiding from unpleasant or painful sensations and feelings will generally make things worse. The more they are avoided, the more energy is spent in keeping them at bay—energy that should have been used for feeling alive and open to new experiences. What is not felt remains unchanged or gains an inward pressure.

This forces people to step up their methods of avoidance and defense. This is the sort of vicious cycle that trauma creates. Abandoned feelings call out for attention and instead of being able to stay with the sensations and feelings and move through them, we then start looking for the memory. That's what stops the process and doesn't allow us to re-member.

Now, what many people are not aware of is that when we focus in a particular way on our uncomfortable sensations and feelings for only a relatively short period of time, they shift and change. By learning to use our felt sense—that is the capacity to increase body awareness—these sensations inevitably evolve into new ones—usually ones that enhance feelings of the deep self that promote re-membering. This basically is how we move from frozen fear to awakening and flow.

So, basically what we need to do is develop a methodology that allows us to be present with our sensations and feelings in a way that enables us to move through them and that we're not fighting against them, repressing them, or being overwhelmed. Again, we're containing them in our bodies.

When we're under threat, we respond primarily not through thinking but through action. Our bodies attempt to do something. So, if somebody's coming towards us that's threatening, we tend to retract, to stiffen, or to attempt to flee or get ready to fight. Now, if while our body is preparing to do those kinds of things we're overwhelmed, then that action becomes frozen. Now, that action has a tremendous amount of energy behind it. It's the same kind of energy that allows a 100-pound mother to lift the car up and pull her child from underneath. So, if we're preparing

to defend ourselves by fighting, by fleeing, by retracting, by ducking, and we don't get to complete that, our bodies get locked in that cycle. We don't complete the cycle.

Now, that's really what a body memory is about. When it comes to trauma, those are the memories that count. So, a lot of the re-membering—as with Isis—comes by being able to complete these movements, discharging the large amount of energy that's held in their body in preparing to defend ourselves. What we need to do is gradually welcome that energy back—that energy which is energy of aliveness; which is energy of passion, engagement, and energy of sexuality.

This is what I mean when I say that trauma is fixity—that we're stuck in this response. We feel the same sensations and feelings over and over again, and if we keep feeling them over and over and over again, it won't help. If we won't have anything to do with them, that doesn't help either. What does it is being able to move through them, move out of fixity and into flow.

Now, much therapy for trauma has revolved around talking. The talking cure—Freud's legacy. People are more comfortable with talking because that's a language that we understand. We also can use it to avoid things fairly well. In this approach, we're learning to listen to and to speak in a very different language—a much more direct and immediate language; the language of the body. This language speaks to us in sensations. It speaks to us in images. It speaks to us in feelings. It doesn't speak to us in a logical way and it doesn't give us memories that are necessarily accurate. It gives us mixes of sensations and feelings and images that may be related to certain feelings and sensations. In other words, they're like metaphors. They're containers of a certain feeling. So, you may see an image of a dismembered body like Osiris. It doesn't mean that you necessarily saw a body chopped up, but it may mean that you felt that way.

Now, many traumatized people know that their bodies keep the score. Often these are the people who go from doctor to doctor, with thickening medical charts, with many different diagnoses, often treated generically for some kind of psychiatric diagnosis and who usually get little help for the symptoms that they seek treatment for. These body symptoms can be things like migraines, spasms in the neck and the back, extreme PMS, abdominal discomfort, irritable bowel, gastrointestinal problems of which an actual organic cause can't be found. Underneath these symptoms are the kinds of physical sensations that we've been talking about—the physical sensations that have become blocked, that are incomplete, that are holding that survival energy. Of course they play out in the theater of the body in this often dramatic way because these are

sensations that are blocked, that have a lot of energy associated with them, and that play out as symptoms when they are unable to complete.

So, very often people come in with a certain symptom and what we see is that the body bears the burden of these incomplete responses but those energies are waiting for us to liberate them so that they can move out of pain, out of distress, into sensation and then out of fixity into flow and availability. So, what I want to do now is begin to engage you in the accessing of these energies within your body. We're going to start by finding that there are places in the body where we can feel relatively safe even if we've had a large amount of traumatic experience.

This exercise is about finding safety or islands of safety in the felt sense experience—in the bodily experience. Because the language of sensation is alien to most of us, I'm going to give you some examples of different sensations that you may observe. You've already of course dealt with some of the sensations when you did the tapping and squeezing of the muscles.

Now, some common sensations are—and this is by no means an exhaustive list—tension, constriction, openness, spaciousness, cold, hot, cool, warm, vibration, tingling, itching, calm. Now, the way that you distinguish a sensation from an emotion or from thought is by being able to locate it in your body and experience it in a direct, physical way.

So, for example, if I ask you what kind of sensation you're experiencing and you would say, “I feel anxious,” then the question that I would ask you to is, “When you feel anxiety, how do you know that you're feeling anxiety?” In other words, where in your body do you feel it and exactly what is the physical sensation? Is it tightness? Constriction? Is it a knot? Is it a flutteriness? Is it your heart palpating? Is it butterflies in your stomach? You see, all of these are sensations that a person might call anxiety.

If you said, “I feel good,” then again I would ask you the same question. When you feel good, how do you know that you're feeling good? You might say, “Well, I just feel good.” Of course, I—being the nag that I am—will say something like, “OK, but let's look in your body. Let's go inside of your body and see where that feeling of goodness comes from.” Then you might say, “Well, I feel kind of like a warmth in my stomach, and I feel an openness in my chest, and I feel a tingling or vibration in my hands.”

So, the trick in finding a sensation is it has to have a locus in the body, it has a size, it frequently has a shape, and it has a specific physical quality like tightness, like spaciousness, like constriction, like heat or cold or vibration, tingling, and so forth. So, that's the key.

Then if you notice yourself thinking and trying to figure it out or trying to attach some kind of significance to it, just notice that. “Oh, I just had a thought. When I have a thought, what do I begin to notice in my body now?” So, in other words, you're kind of bringing yourself back to your body and you can even notice the thought that you're having, but notice that it's a thought.

Now, what can happen is if we don't realize that it's a thought and we feel the sensations—that we feel tightness—and then you have the thought (“Something bad is going to happen to me”) then all of a sudden the tightness gets more and then you're feeling fear, anxiety, panic. But what caused that was the particular sensation—tightness in the belly—and the thought “Something bad is going to happen to me.” Then that kind of set up a vicious cycle, like a snowball rolling down the hill. So, the more you had the thought, the [tighter] you got. The [tighter] you got, the more you thought, “Oh, this must be really bad.” The more you thought, “Oh, this must be really bad,” the tighter you got, and so forth.

So, one of the keys in moving through trauma is learning to separate out the sensations, the feelings, the thoughts, the emotions. Let's begin by doing the exercise that will help to bring us some sense of safety because when we've been traumatized, the body doesn't feel like a safe place. It feels like the real dangerous place. So, when we go inside, we immediately want to jump out because we don't have a place in there that feels safe.

So, in this exercise, I think that you'll find that you'll be able to begin—some of you right away, some of you more slowly, and sometimes it'll be different. Sometimes it'll be real easy. Other times it won't be so easy to find out how we can begin to find these places, these regions, these spaces, these islands of relative safety, of relative ease. Remember: if you're feeling really tight and constricted everywhere in your body, there's still going to be a part in your body where you're feeling less constricted, less tight, and so forth.

So, let's find a comfortable place—your favorite chair, maybe a place with some pillows on the floor where you can nestle up like a nest, wherever you feel the most comfortable. I prefer that you start by sitting rather than lying down because sometimes if you lay down, the sensations and feelings can come up more quickly and be more difficult. Please, never when driving a car.

This exercise is designed to help you discover your own pacing and inner rhythms, and to trust in your own innate capacity to regulate and to heal. Slow down or stop if the sensations

begin to get too intense, and remember that your tolerance will build gradually as you continue with these kind of exercises.

So, begin by bringing something into your space—the place where you're going to be sitting for this meditation, whether it's a chair or whether it's some cushions in the corner of your room. Bring something that brings you a sense of comfort. This might be something that's special to you. It could be a stone, a crystal, a flower, a pet, a favorite picture, a photograph. It could be a trusted friend that you want to just sit there and just be quiet with you there—anything that brings you a sense of nurturance and support.

Feeling the support of the chair, how the back of the chair supports your back. But feel it physically now. Really get in there and feel the support. Then feel how the bottom of the chair holds your bottom, how you can allow your weight to be given into the chair, noticing physically how that feels.

And then you may be aware of your clothing on your skin. And you may also be aware of some of the muscles underneath your skin, some of the muscles that you familiarized yourself from the last exercise.

So, again, your eyes are still open. You're sitting in the room and you're feeling as comfortable as you're feeling right now.

You may want to take your shoes off. That may feel more comfortable to you—and if it does, notice how it feels more comfortable.

Now, feeling your feet on the ground and the earth below, even though there's a carpet, but underneath the carpet is a wooden floor, and the wooden floor is connected to a foundation. The foundation is connected to the earth.

So, feeling the support your body is offered from the chair—and that may take a little practice—then gaze at your object of safety. Slowly going back and forth between your body and what you see with your eyes. So, if you have a certain stone in front of you, look at the stone—and your bodily experience is kind of in the background—and then shift your awareness so the image of the stone in front of you recedes and you become more aware of your bodily experience. So, you're asking yourself if this rock makes me feel more solid, or more centered, or more grounded. Where in your body do feel that sense? And what is the physical sensation of it? Shifting back and forth at your own rhythm between the object and the sensation in your body and the object. And back and forth.

Now, allow your focus to shift to an inner sense of where the comfort is experienced in your body. Take some time now to really explore the nuances of these sensations. For example, if you're looking at a color that delights you—maybe you brought in a photograph or a painting or a flower, whatever it is that delights you—notice again how that translates in your internal world and lets you know that the light is more than just a pleasant thought.

Where does it all begin? Perhaps it begins as a realization that tense muscles begin to let go. Or there may be a sense of spaciousness around your heart or warmth in your belly. Perhaps you are feeling anxious initially and this feeling has changed in some small way. Remember again: “anxious” feels like what? What's the sensation?

Then follow these changes. Be patient. It might not feel like much is happening at first, or it might feel like too much is happening. You can adjust your experience to fit your need by shifting focus between your sensations and the comfortable object or image you chose as a resource. You are in control. And remember, only *you* know what is too much or too little.

Now, in your mind, I want you to recollect a time in the last few days where you felt most like yourself—where you felt OK, you felt maybe some pleasure, or less anxious. As you think of that time—and you may have a picture of it or it may be more of a thought—I want you then to notice what your bodily experience is. Again, without judging it, without thinking, “Oh, I'm not feeling a good feeling. I should be feeling a good feeling,” or, “I'm feeling a bad feeling when I'm thinking of something that felt good.” Try not to judge it, but just to notice it. Just maybe make a mental note of what that time was or what that situation was.

And then shift back and forth a few times as you did just a little while ago—between that picture, that image, that thought, and your bodily sensations. Just move back and forth like a pendulum; shift back and forth rhythmically. Maybe that gets a little bit more clear, maybe not.

Now, think about something that happened in the last week, more or less, where again you felt best—where you felt more like yourself, like who you really know that you are or how you want to be; where you felt some pleasure, some sense of accomplishment or relief. Again, just shift your awareness back and forth between the remembrance or the picture of that time during the last week and your bodily experience, whatever it is. Just sit with that for a bit, shifting your focus back and forth between the picture, the remembrance, and your bodily sensations. Shifting back and forth, and just noticing the process.

Now, I want you to think of a time or a place or a situation in the last month or so, where you felt best—where you felt most like yourself, like you were more the way you want to be. As you think of that time or have that image in your mind's eye, again take time to shift back and forth between the image, the picture, the thought, and your bodily sensations. Just shifting back and forth.

Pendulating back and forth, feeling the rhythm of your awareness shifting from the remembrance to the sensation, from the sensation to the picture or the remembrance, feeling your body, feeling more and more of your body, becoming more aware of the totality of your experience right now. Feeling the sensation grow, the experience grow. And as you feel that in your whole body, I want you slowly to begin to think about opening your eyes—just to think about it—and coming back into the room.

And when you're ready, I'm going to ask you to slowly open your eyes and gaze at that object that you brought in—that special object. Just look at that object or whatever it is again, and shift back and forth between your observing of the object out there and your internal experience. Again, just feeling the rhythm of it—feeling your body; seeing the object, the specialness; feeling the feeling inside, whatever the sensation is.

And as you're coming out into the world, you might want to squeeze a few of those muscles with your hands. You can do both sides at the same time if you want. You may want to tap gently some different parts of your body and know that's your body and that you are remembering your body.

TS: This concludes Session Two of *Sexual Healing* with Peter Levine. Our program continues with Session Three.

Session Three

TS: Sounds True presents *Sexual Healing*, “Session Three: The Importance of Pendulation” with Peter Levine.

PL: In the last session you began to learn about the possibility of finding islands of safety in your body. And maybe at first they were very, very small, and seemed almost nonexistent. But then as you continued the exercise and did it on different occasions, you probably are finding that these islands are starting to grow and become a little bit more stable—something that you can rely on.

Now, at the end of the exercise, you started to scan between parts of your body that felt relatively more comfortable or strong or open, or in some way more secure—or more of a resource for you—and areas in the body that felt less good, that felt anxious, that felt fearful, tight, constricted. And in going back and forth, you're beginning to experience what I call “pendulation.”

Now, we are always experiencing biorhythms. For example, we have rhythms of sleep and wakefulness; rhythms of hunger and satiation, of satisfaction. And in trauma, we notice that all of these rhythms get disrupted. They get stuck in some way, but they are still there in their original healthy form—the form that they're meant to be.

And when we start to experience pendulation, these rhythms begin to restore. When we start to experience that our body can move—that it's not stuck—all kinds of other things begin to happen. It's kind of like a bottom-up effect. It just bubbles up into many different areas of our lives. We feel more regulated, we feel more in rhythm, we feel more connected to our outer environment.

This concept is very key, and it's experienced in a very direct, physical way in the body. And in the last session, you began to develop some of the tools that allow you to feel safe enough to have these islands of safety where you can now begin to go into your bodily experience, find an area where there is some degree of pleasure—or less tension or less anxiety—shift back and forth between that area and other areas in your body as you did, and notice that you actually move between them. You might even have an image of a pendulum swinging to the tight part, then swinging to the less tight part.

As you're able to experience that, you will probably notice that during that day, you'll notice, "Oh, I'm feeling expanded. Oh, I'm feeling constricted. Ah, that is—I'm feeling stressed." Because again, we go through these rhythms. We may not notice them. But as we become attuned to them in our body at the physiological level, then the rhythm begins to restore.

So, we know that if we feel like we're getting tight, constricted, and fearful, we begin to know not just by our minds, our heads, but by our whole organism. Our bodies feel it and we know it in this internal, organic way. So, if we feel a constriction, we know, "OK, it's feeling more constricted. I feel tighter."

Then you ask yourself the question: "And when I feel tighter, what happens next?" And then you'll notice the pendulum begins to shift, and you feel just a little bit less of that discomfort, that restlessness, tightness, fear—whatever it was. And you start to shift, and you start to begin to expand.

Now, there may be also some fear from your mind on the expanding part because we're not used to that—because we've survived in a way by constricting, by holding in, by creating an armor in our bodies. A protection, really. And as we start to feel this pendulation, that armor starts to let go.

Now, it's possible, because we're in a more open state physiologically, that feelings that we may not have felt may start to bubble up and emerge. But because we're doing these exercises in a successive way, step by step, that should make it more easy to handle these. We're doing it a little at a time.

Again, if you feel overwhelmed at any time, look around, get up, look out the window, look at your power object. And when you're ready, go back inside again. If it becomes a thing that you feel like you're too stuck, please get help. We'll say a little bit more at the end of the next session about that.

The other thing that you may experience in pendulation is your body may do things like shaking or trembling. It could be very fine and you could feel it just as a tingling or an inner vibration, and somebody sitting there probably wouldn't even see it. Or, your body may shake more fully. Your hands may shake and tremble. Different parts of your body like your shoulders, your pelvis, may shake. Your jaw may shake.

And these are good things because in pendulation, you begin to release the energy that was bound in the trauma. Remember: in the first session we talked about how our animal

instincts are so important both in how trauma is formed and how it can be released because the animals move through that, and they move through it with that kind of shaking and trembling.

So again, if you do it in this stepwise way, hopefully the sensations of shaking and trembling won't be alarming to you. You'll be able to just notice that and remind yourself, "Oh, this is my body discharging my energy—energy now that's becoming available for how I want to direct that energy.

Now, the exercise for pendulation is really just an extension of the exercises you did in the last session. And the main difference is that you really start to become aware of the pendulation itself. So, when you were shifting to parts of your body that felt more stable, more resourced, more secure, more open, more pleasurable or pleasant; or less constricted, less anxious—as you started to shift your awareness between those, you are beginning to pendulate.

As you become more adept at this when you're in a situation, or you're sitting around, and all of a sudden, you feel this tightness, this uncomfortableness, this anxiety, rather than do a thing maybe that you normally do or have done in the past (let's say go to the refrigerator, get something to eat, or turn on the television) maybe this time you'll begin to tune into that sensation and notice that as you follow it, even though it gets more uncomfortable at first, it shifts back in the other direction. Because as long as we're alive, we have pendulation.

So, the next phase in the exercise is: find a comfortable place to sit as you have before. And when you do go into your body—when you feel safe enough to do that—then notice a part that calls for your attention. It doesn't matter whether it's a part that's uncomfortable or comfortable. Focus on it in a soft way.

It's sort of like if you were in a garden. You're sitting out in the garden and there's a nice fountain, and different flowers, and trees, and grass, and weeds, and so forth. You just observe those things. You don't say, "I don't like weeds," or, "I really like this tree, but I don't like this rose over here." You're just looking. And that's kind of the stance that really works to reestablish pendulation and aliveness—is to be able to just actually look at our experience, not to be locked onto it or not to be spaced out from it, but to just sit there and observe it.

And when you do that, you'll find some part of your body that calls to your attention, whether it's a constricted part or an open, more spacious part. It doesn't matter. Your awareness will probably shift to different parts in your body as you do the exercise. But, focus softly on that one area. Observe it as you're observing a garden—because this is really your inner garden. And

then notice how it changes. If it gets tighter, say to yourself, “I feel that tension in my neck, my jaw, my shoulders—whatever—and it's getting tighter.” And as it gets tighter, ask yourself the question, “And what happens next?” or, “What happens now? It's getting more tight, and I don't like that.”

So, then you observe, “I feel it getting tighter. I feel more constriction, and I have the thought that I don't like it. And what happens next? What happens now? What else do I notice?”

Because the whole trick here, again, is to move things along in time—to move out of the stuck-ness. And as you do this, you'll start to feel the pendulation. And as you feel more of the pendulation, that will constantly tell you, inform you, that you're not stuck—that you're not back in that situation then. You're in the here and now. That's the key in being able to put these things in the past and then know that you can be flexible and fluid in the present.

Pendulation is not a matter of going from a positive thing to a negative thing. That's one way that can help you learn about pendulation. But, pendulation simply is our rhythm of life—our rhythm of being.

Now, if a particular tension or uncomfortable feeling feels stuck—feels like it won't change—here's a thing you can do to help kind of coax it along a little bit. Let's just say you feel a tension in your left shoulder. Then notice that tension and notice what that tension wants to do. So, if it got more tense, what would it do? Well, it might bring your shoulder up towards your ear. So, what you can do is very slowly allow your shoulder to come up just a little bit and then just let it go back down again. So, you can feel what the tension wants to do and then that the tension, again, can release. So, this is another tool that you can use to help get unstuck and to return to pendulation.

And when you're pendulating, as I said before, you may notice shaking or trembling. You may notice a resistance to the expansion. You also may see a picture. The picture may be a pleasant picture, maybe a neutral picture. It may be a disturbing picture. What I'm asking you to do as much as you can is to be able to just notice that image—and maybe shift back and forth between that image and whatever sensations and feelings you're having in your body. Again, if it gets too uncomfortable, come back into the room, look at your objects, and maybe again tapping gently different parts of your body—your shoulders, your arms, whatever—or squeezing the muscles a little bit so you feel more of your life back in them. That can help you get unstuck.

The next topic I want to talk to you about is another central part in understanding trauma and then healing trauma. That's the idea of boundaries. Boundaries are a universal quality of being alive. You can't be alive without boundaries.

Think of an amoeba or a cell in your own body. It has a membrane, and that membrane holds in the contents of the cell—the different things that are responsible for making energy, protein building blocks, and so forth. We couldn't do any of that without a boundary.

And that boundary also keeps things out—the things that are bad for us, that could poison us. And that's what a healthy boundary does. It also allows certain things that happen inside to go out. So, in other words, waste materials, things that we've used up and no longer need or would be poisonous to us—would be toxic to us—we ship outside. But we also let in nutrients from the outside, because we need the nutrients to live. At the same time, we want to block out the toxic things that are outside.

Now, that's called “a semipermeable membrane.” Big word. But it means that it lets in the right thing, lets out the right thing, and it does it in a way that supports the life of the cell.

Now, we have boundaries in every part of our self, starting from our cells to our personal relationships. You know—somebody says to you, “I need to borrow your car,” and this is a person who actually has been a little irresponsible in the past. And you don't want to give your car to them, but you have trouble saying, “No, I'm sorry. I like you. But I don't feel comfortable loaning my car out.” That's a boundary.

When we're traumatized sexually, many of our boundaries shatter. It's like a spear comes from the outside and it just comes into us and tears a hole in that boundary. That's part of why sexual trauma is such a deep violation. It's because our boundary has been broken. And it's an intrusion in the most extreme sense. That's why in some ways, [as] I mentioned before, that experiencing a very rough, insensitive gynecological operation or even abdominal surgery can be as intrusive as being raped because something tears into us and goes into our vital space where it doesn't belong or it's not wanted. Our boundary couldn't keep it out.

So, we get these holes and we try to change them. We know that people are taking advantage of us' or alternatively, we make a boundary that's so rigid, it's like a brick wall that nobody can get in. Neither of those boundaries work. One, we're alone, we're lonely, we're alienated. The other, we're continually intruded upon. It's like the poisons from the outside are

coming through our cell membrane, and we can't do anything about it—and our energy is leaking out of us.

So, we've got to find some ways to begin to heal those boundaries—to shore up those boundaries, to mend the boundaries. You can't just do it by active will. In other words, we try to think, “OK, the next time this person asks for my car, I'm going to just say, ‘No, I'm sorry. I am not loaning my car out.’” But then, the next day the plumber comes in and he was supposed to come in the following day. You realize that he's there a day early, and he doesn't want to leave. He said, “Well, look. I'm scheduled to do this. It won't take long.” And he walks in and starts fixing your pipes. You realize you have friends coming over and he just really has ruined the space that you wanted to create with them. But, again, when it happens, it's like we're not there. It's like we dissociate. It's like we just don't have our wits about us.

So, just trying to change our boundaries mentally by active will can be an important beginning because we recognize we need to do that, but if we don't actually feel it physically in our bodies, physiologically we don't really get that boundary to form in a reliable, spontaneous way—in an appropriate way. We're not always trying to will to do it. And it's like fighting against the world. It's exhausting. It adds to our stress.

To do the next exercise, you're going to need some props. What you'll need for this exercise is a roll of yarn—reasonably thick yarn, not a thin thread—and a pair of scissors. Just lay them on the side where you can reach them as you begin to do this three part exercise, which will give you a sense of what boundaries are like at an internal physical level.

Now, for the first part of the exercise, be sitting in your favorite chair or favorite place to sit, feeling the support of the chair or of the cushion. Then, as you feel the support, as you feel your body—again, you may want to gently tap your body if you don't have a good awareness of your body right now, or squeeze some of the muscles. In your imagination, construct an egg-shaped boundary around you. Imagine yourself sitting in the center of that egg.

Now, reach out and imagine touching the boundary at different parts. Begin to explore some of the other sensations that are going on in your body. Your hands may be stretching out and coming in until you feel that sensation in your shoulders and your hands. But then maybe you feel something in your belly or in your legs, and note that you're inside this protective membrane that's holding things out that are toxic, and containing your energy and your feeling as you sit inside of the egg—inside of the boundary.

And just notice: maybe there are some parts of your body that really feel bounded now. Maybe there are parts of your body where you really feel where there's a hole. And again, notice that. Don't try to change it. If it changes by itself, that's fine because as you notice again the boundary around you, that part in your body where you feel the hole or the rupture might change a little bit. Again, there's no right way, there's no wrong way. Simply exploring the experience that you have of boundary right now.

When you're ready, begin slowly, at your own pace, to begin to open your eyes and come back into the room, bringing with you some of the protection and the support from the boundary. Perhaps looking at the window frame and how you can look out of the window at the trees or whatever is outside, feeling yourself looking out into the world from your boundary.

As we come back into the room, we're experiencing still some of that feeling of boundary-ness in our own bodies. There are probably parts that feel very clear and parts that feel like holes and parts of your body that feel like rigid walls—concrete walls. And for this part of the exercise, I'm going to ask you to sit on the floor with the yarn and the scissors, and to become aware—as much as you can—of what the boundaries feel like in your body right now.

There may be areas where you feel a good boundary, other areas where you feel a hole—maybe a small hole, maybe a gaping hole—other parts where you feel like your boundary is really strong, and other parts where it feels like the boundary is rigid. Around your body, sort of the way the egg was, I want you to lay the yarn to represent your boundary.

Let's just say in front you feel a reasonably good boundary. Take a piece of yarn and make an arc of that in front of you—or whatever shape it is. Then maybe a little bit off to the right you notice, “Wow! I really have a good strong boundary here.” Put the one arc of the yarn and then another arc right beside it so you know that you have a strong boundary there. If there's an area where you feel really rigid—like maybe you're feeling your boundary in your back is like a rigid spine—then place three layers of yarn behind your back so that you have a circle or something like that around you. Some parts of the circle are one piece of yarn, some sections are two layers of yarn, and some sections are three layers of yarn. This is an image of your boundaries in your body right now.

There's probably good reason why your boundaries are the way they are. If you were attacked from behind or if you felt like somebody came and backstabbed you in some deep way of betrayal, then maybe you have a rigid boundary in the back. Maybe you were in a close

relationship with somebody and they left or died. Maybe you feel a hole in your boundary in the front. Maybe it's because you were in love with somebody and they violated that trust. Maybe you feel a hole in your heart. Maybe because of a rape, you feel a lack of boundary in your genital area or in other areas.

It doesn't matter. We're not going to try to find out why the boundary is the way it is. There are reasons for it. But simply to notice how the boundary is in the moment, and then we'll begin to do things to allow those boundaries to normalize—to come back to how they should be, to optimize your ability to be flexibly open in an appropriate way and in a way that supports your life.

In the next exercises, we're going to begin to learn to have experience of a boundary which is more complete—does not have as many holes or rigidity in it—so that you can have a boundary that's more flexible and that allows you to have a more full life of sharing and exchanging.

Now that you have that sense of your boundary, you see it outside in front of you, and you feel it also in your body to some extent, imagine now that the door opens and somebody you know comes in the door and starts walking towards you. I want you to imagine saying to them, “These are my boundaries. You're not allowed to come into the boundary unless I invite you in.” And when you imagine saying that, again notice the sensations, feelings in your body—thoughts; whatever goes on—to be the observer of your experience. You may want to try it again. The person comes in and you say, “These are my boundaries. You are not to come in unless I invite you in.”

Imagine what happens when you say that to the person—what they do, what their reaction is, what their response is—and also how it feels to have said that—how it feels in your body when you say that. Again, at first it's almost certain that you'll have problems with this exercise—that it'll be in some way difficult or confusing. And as you practice it more than once, several times, I think you will get a much better handle on what boundaries really mean and how they feel.

Now, you may want to rearrange some of it if it's changed. Perhaps you're beginning to learn that the boundaries can change. They can become more fluid and flexible where they're overly rigid, and they become stronger and more of a barrier where they've been breached and where there are gaps or ruptures.

When you imagine the person coming in, you may have felt threatened. You may have felt guilty when you've said, "These are my boundaries." You may have thought, "I'm hurting their feelings. I need to take care of them." Whatever experience you have, that's what this learning is about. You start to get an idea of the things that do interfere with your boundaries.

You probably have noticed that when the imaginary person came into the room, something happened. In some way, your boundaries may have changed. You also may have noticed that when you said, "This is my space. I want you to stay out unless I ask you in," that you may have somehow judged that as being a bad thing to do or something that you'd be punished for or hurt for. You may have felt guilty to tell the person that they couldn't come in to your boundary unless you asked them in. Or you might have felt powerful in making that statement. All of these are possible, and no one is right. No one is wrong.

This exercise also helps us to learn another very important part of being a human being, and that is that it's OK to make boundaries, and that you're the one who has the choice of when a person can come in or not. Again, it may be very weak at the beginning, but as you practice it more and more, I pretty well can guarantee that it will become more reliable and instinctual for you because boundaries are an instinctual process.

In doing this exercise, you're beginning to get a sense of choice, which all traumatized people lose because trauma is about not having a choice. Having a choice is, again, another antidote to the traumatic victim stance—that you know that you can make choices.

For this next exercise, you'll need a partner. And the partner should be somebody who you feel relatively comfortable and safe with. You need a reasonably good-sized room to do it. Or you could do it outdoors if there's a park or an area where there's not a lot going on.

So, you'll switch roles, but I'm going to first describe it for you being the experiencer. What I'm going to ask you to do—of course, you'll be doing this after these instructions. I think they're fairly simple. But, what I want you to try to remember is when you begin the exercise to first get a feeling of your body. Let's go through it together first and then you do it by yourself or your partner can also help you with that as well—to remind you about the things to become aware of.

So, starting by becoming aware of your feet even though they're in your shoes—if they are in your shoes—of how they're contacting the ground and the physical sense of your feet pressing the bottom of your shoes or the carpet or the ground or the grass—whichever it is. And

then to feel your ankles. Maybe you'll sway a little bit or make your knees open and close a little bit. So, you feel your balance on your ankles and you feel your feet on the ground, allowing you to move around their support. And then the connection through your knees into your thighs, into your upper legs, and how the thighs support and hold the pelvis, maybe almost like an arc. Also, imagine your spine like a straight but flexible rod that comes up from the back of that bridge—the back of your pelvis from your sacrum. And, goes up into your neck and into your head. So, you feel your balance around the spine, and you feel your spine supported by your pelvis. Your pelvis supported by your legs, by your thighs. That's supported by your lower legs, your knees, your ankles, and your feet touching the ground.

Also feeling in your abdomen where your center of gravity would be. So you may kind of rock slowly from side to side, shift your weight from one foot to the other, or sway a little bit front and backward. So, you feel where that center of gravity is—and that's your center.

Now, after you've done this and have that feeling in your body of the support in your body, then I'm going to ask you to become aware of the front of your body—particularly of your abdomen and your chest from the area of your genitals all the way up into your mouth, your face. This is the part of your body that's the most vulnerable. So, if there's going to be some kind of a change in your body—a reaction—you'll probably feel it there. But, you could be feeling it anywhere.

What you're going to do is you're going to stand at one end of a room or at a comfortable distance. I would say at least 15 or 20 feet for your partner. And they're not to move. When you sense your body in this way—the grounding, the center, the vulnerable part of the front of your body—when you're ready, you're going to ask them—and they're not to come until you ask them—to begin to move towards you. They'll come at a slow but not too slow pace towards you.

Now, as soon as you feel any change in your body—it'll probably be first in the front part of your body in your abdomen and genitals up to your chest, your face. As soon as you feel any change whatsoever—any more like an abrupt change or a noticeable change—what I want you to do is put your hands out in front of you and kind of push them out as though you were forming a barrier or as though you were pushing something away. So, your palms of your hands, your fingers are straight, and they're facing your partner. And your arms are out, but not locked. So, there's a little bend in the elbow so you can feel that bend. And you say, “Stop.” You say it both with your hands and with the word, “Stop.”

So, as soon as you feel that change—as soon as you feel something in your gut, in your chest, in your genitals, your face, or anywhere in your body when you feel it change—you say, “Stop.” And there the rule is that they have to stop because that's your boundary for right then.

Now, at first you may find it difficult to actually bring your hands up. You may not realize that something has changed until they're almost right in your face. Or you may be able to do that, but as your arms go out, you may find that in some way part of you just leaves your body—that you're not really fully there. It's almost as though you've drifted off to the side, above your body. And if that happens—because again, the person is going to stop; that's the rule—try not to judge it. Remember: that ability to leave your body in threatening situations is what probably saved your life. It's what got you here.

Now, the trick of, course, is to have some control over it. But this is the way we're going to get the control—by simply being aware of your body leaving, of observing it leave, or observing the situation from up where your consciousness is—however it is for you. And then allow the time to come back and be in your body again. You'll find that you will come back into your body in a more embodied way. Simply by doing this several times, you actually start to heal that disassociation.

Now, when you do this you may find, for example, the first time you do it that as soon as the person moves just one step towards you, you want to say it and you say, “Stop.” But then, when you do it a second time or a third time, you find that they can get closer and closer and it feels comfortable enough.

Other times, your partner who's walking towards you comes right into your face before you've realized that they've gone over your boundary. Then, maybe the second time you do it, you find that as soon as they take one step, boom. You feel the feeling and then you stop them right there. That's good. Then perhaps the next time they make a few steps closer towards you. And this can go back and forth. But each time you do it, the key is not simply to do it like an exercise, but to do it with a full awareness and allowing time for the experience to integrate. And so it becomes more embodied. Then that way the sense of boundaries becomes an organic thing, rooted in your body.

One thing you can do to make the game more fun and interesting is every time you set a boundary with the person, have them drop a different colored pencil so you can see which one was first, second, and third. You can notice then the pattern of how your boundary shifts. Again,

this is so important because when we've been overwhelmed and lost our sense of boundaries, we really need to learn about it again. A lot of times, we're constantly shifting our boundaries. We need to be self-aware of our responses and needs as well as the other person's.

After you've done it several times and really got a feeling for how that is—and starting to feel more comfortable with your boundaries and curious about them—then switch with your partner. Then they do the experiencing part and then you move towards them. You can also modify it by walking very, very slowly and notice what affect that has. Walking more quickly or walking with an aggressive stance like with your body leaning forward like you're coming into the person with an intent of going through their boundaries. But even that will get easier.

When you begin physical contact—sexual, sensual, erotic physical contact—because of the arousal, because of the need, because of the desire, because of other feelings that it brings up, it's again sometimes difficult to know where the boundary is. So, it's really important to negotiate that with your partner—and they with you—so that when you are beginning to feel overwhelmed that you can say just as you did with the boundary, “Stop for a minute, please,” or, “Stop.” That then allows you to process through that sensation and allows it to move to completion so it doesn't get stuck.

So, anything we can do that allows us to have more fluidity and more flow, more completion—not of the act per se, but of our sensations and feelings—allows us a fuller sexual capacity. In other words, we get to be a bigger container for sexual feelings as well—and to maybe even have a ground rule when you start. At first, it's just hugging or touching or holding hands, and that you both agree to go no further at that time. Then, again, you can successively move in the direction that you want to move in, but only after you feel a safety and choice and competency at each step along the way.

As you're able to do this and you take the time, you may find all kinds of deep feelings. I mean, some of the deepest feelings. And really, it's in this kind of gradual moving together physically, with boundaries intact, that allows these feelings to come up and also allows for the deepest healing—because really, it's with each other that we can go to a deeper level of healing our own sexual wounds.

Session Four

TS: *Sexual Healing*, “Session Four: Echoes into the Next Generation.”

PL: In doing the boundary exercises in the last session, you were beginning to repair the breach from the rupture of trauma. Now, the reason that boundaries are the key in healing sexual trauma is it first allows us to feel the feelings that are associated with our trauma, to feel them and to process them, because it's the membrane, really, that gives us a sense of being complete and bounded the way a cell is bounded by its membrane.

But it also is the way that we relate to the outer world, because those same boundaries that we experience in our body are the boundaries that are elaborated in interpersonal relationships, that allow us to relate with other people, to deal with conflict, to make decisions together, to cooperate together. And it's also the basis in forming close, enduring, intimate love relationships because especially in a close, physical, intimate relationship, we all have fears. We all have things that we're ashamed of. In order to find a healthy sexuality, we need to be able to express our needs, to express our feelings, to feel that we're a separate person from the other person even though we have times of merging. So, we don't stay completely separate and we don't get into those fused, confused relationships that are often the kind of relationships that traumatized people find themselves in.

So, boundaries [are] something that we need to know about in this physical way—being able to sense it in our bodies—and to keep practicing it in different situations to be able to communicate to other people what our feelings are and what our needs are because a lot of the frustration that we have when we're traumatized is we have these feelings but we don't communicate them in a way that will be heard because obviously we couldn't do that at an earlier time. So, it's healing those patterns of relationship and communication as well. And in being able to feel and sense boundaries in your body, you are beginning to heal the effects of sexual trauma.

We've been on quite a journey together. I began by talking about how widespread sexual trauma is in the world and about the deep suffering that it creates. I emphasized that you're not alone—that this is something that affects many, many, many people. You also learned that the magnitude of the symptoms that you may have been experiencing are part of a normal reaction that's become prolonged and that this is a reaction that has a biological imperative to complete.

Even though these things have happened to us, our bodies know how to complete and how to move through them—not to deny them, but to be able to put them in the past where they belong.

Now, some of the symptoms may have made you think that you were going crazy, but they are simply the body's way of storing this energy that you had mobilized to protect yourself at an earlier time but you were unable to act on, you were unable to mobilize. These reactions, these symptoms, are a way of dealing with the physical and emotional pain and the anguish that you have experienced and that you couldn't really feel at that time because it would have been too much. So, it was a way of kind of holding those feelings in a safe place to feel at a later time.

You also learned that the scope of violation ranges from childhood incest and molestation to adult rape, and even to some invasive medical procedures. No matter what the source or cause of your pain, the possibility of healing that lies in bringing your conscious awareness to the inner sensations and feelings in your body.

We then examined the idea of traumatic memory and we learned that whatever happened to you that the remembering of that was not the critical thing—and in some cases can interfere with the healing of trauma because we try to interpret, and understand, and explain it to ourselves before the process inside of us has come to a completion. So, we discovered that it's not the reliving or the remembering that was the key, but the discharging of the energies that were stored in our bodies.

So, you started to begin to be able to bring together the fragmented parts of your experience through the body sensing. In doing that, you were able to re-member instead of trying to find a memory, to grab at a memory, to explain your inner state of distress—that the healing of the fragmentation was the important thing.

When you first went into your body with your awareness and you were able to find these little islands of safety (these are islands in a sea of chaos, of feelings that felt overwhelming or feelings of being shut down and being numb), your body didn't feel like it was connected. The important thing that you learned was that by being able to follow these sensations, to be able to release some of these energies that were held in your body, and sometimes that came in the form of shaking, trembling, tingling, warmth, other bodily sensations, that your body came to feel more fluid and more connected.

Remember: that's what Isis did when she found the parts Osiris, and she brought them together out of her love to make her husband whole again. That's what we're doing with

ourselves: is finding a way to bring those fragmented parts together so that we feel our wholeness—a wholeness that's been there in its original form, the flickering flame of the deep self that's been there no matter what kind of trauma or abuse we've experienced in our lives.

Now, we've found that one of the tools that allows you to re-member, to find greater coherence in your bodily experience—actually the central experience that allows you to do this—is pendulation. You began building a skill in learning how to feel sensations in a slow way by discovering these islands of safety, and then pendulating—shifting—between those islands and areas of less safety, less goodness, less OK-ness. By pendulating, you were able to make the islands larger. You were able to bridge the islands together.

In doing that, you found that your rhythm was unique and that it's a rhythm that really takes you into deeper integration of sensations and feelings. You began to learn that when you would feel a difficult sensation or feeling, when you could contact it through the sensation—through the felt sense—that it would move, that it would not be stuck, because pendulation is the antidote for stuck-ness. You can't have pendulation and stuck-ness at the same time.

So, through pendulation, we learned the basic process of moving from fixity to flow. This has brought us into boundaries, and the ability to be with our internal experience, but also to be in the world and to be a complete person both inside and in relation.

This takes us to the last segment of the program, which I call “Echoes into the Next Generation.” Now that you've begun to work on your own healing, I want us to think about the web of our lives: the legacy of our families, of our parents and their parents, and how there's a connection—how the traumas tend to repeat themselves in generations, how they play out in the different generations, and also the connection of strengths and powers that we have from our relatives, from our ancestors. This is important both if you have been sexually abused in your family or if the abuse comes from another source because if you already have children or are planning to have children, you want them to have the most healthy lives and the most healthy sexuality. So, this next part: we're going to talk about transforming that legacy, about the echoes from the last generation and the transforming of that legacy into the next generation.

One of the realities that we need to be aware of is that we live in a sex-negative culture. In other words, a culture that really doesn't promote, enhance, support the development of healthy sexuality. Of course, this is a gift that we can give to a large degree to our children, but to know also that we are influenced by our culture around us. I think I became more acutely

aware of that when I began to teach abroad some years ago and had the experiences in many different cultures—for example the Scandinavian cultures and the South American, the Brazilian culture. I saw how differently sexuality was treated and was experienced and was shared in different cultures.

Sometimes, it's hard for us to see, really, the effect that that has on us. I'm just mentioning that so you have a perspective that your trauma is not just related to your individual trauma and to your family legacy, but it's in a milieu—a cultural milieu—that is not particularly supportive of healthy, creative sexuality.

At this time, before we go on to our next section, I want to say something about forgiveness. This is an issue that comes up for most people who are healing from traumatic experiences in their past. The idea of forgiveness can be confusing because we can think, “Well, we should forgive our parents,” or we decide that we're not going to forgive our parents. The deeper reality of the situation is that forgiveness isn't something that we do consciously. We don't decide to forgive somebody and forgive them.

Forgiveness is much more part of the process of healing and it's like a state of grace. When we experience that inside, it's part of the compassion that we show to ourselves and it's a compassion that has a deeper understanding—that doesn't say it's OK that you did what you did, but that has an understanding not from the mind, but from inside. It's an inside insight that knows more about the other person's pain and how they were driven to do what they did and how they didn't have the kind of tools that we have.

But again, that's not something that we can set out to do in a deliberate way. It's something that's part of our own healing, and that it may or may not come out in that specific form.

So, as you find yourself healing from your sexual trauma, you may feel forgiveness to yourself for being so hard on yourself all these times, for the suffering that you went through that you didn't need to if you had been able to heal earlier. I mean, those kinds of things. But you don't just think about it that way. It comes sometimes like a wave of inner compassion, and sometimes that wave is directed out to the people who are the perpetrators.

It's not that you condone what they did to you or to anybody, but you have a deeper compassion for the human condition for the suffering that we're all in. You can be angry at them at the same time sometimes. It doesn't necessarily make sense logically.

Also, you can feel complete forgiveness and compassion, and then you go home for Thanksgiving and you feel like killing them, and wondering why in the world you ever went home. But that's part of life, and that's part of more learning and greater capacities, and sometimes hard decisions. So, we need to be patient and we need to allow it to develop at its own time. We can want it. That's fine. We can say, "I don't want it." That's fine. But it's the process that really takes us to where we need to go.

With that said, let's turn our attention to what sexuality looks like in the family setting—and particularly, let's look at two critical stages of child development. Somewhere around the age of five, children feel a special bond and attraction to their parent of the opposite sex. Daughters will fall in love with their fathers and boys with their moms. This is normal. It's a healthy stage of development. During this time, children will flirt with the parent of the opposite sex. They give them gifts—a picture that they drew in school or a flower that they picked, and they give it to the parent, and it's just filled with love. The parents usually love this and enjoy it. This is part of promoting that stage of development.

Again, it's more towards the parent of the opposite sex and there's a quality of flirtation to it. You see the kids kind of walking and swaggering a little bit. Now, it's not flirtation in the adult sense, not at all. It's a practicing. If this is negotiated in a healthy way—if this sexual unfolding is promoted—it then leads into a more healthy adolescent flirtation with peers and how boys and girls start to get to know each other as boys and girls around adolescence—as young men and young women.

This is the time when little girls or boys will tell their fathers or mothers something like, "I love you, Daddy," or, "I love you, Mommy and I want to marry you and have a baby." At this delicate, vulnerable stage, what's needed to foster healthy development and to support this sexual emotional unfolding is when the child—let's just say the girl, the daughter—says to her father, "I love you, Daddy. I want to marry you and have a baby," that the father be able to say something like—and mean it—"I love you too, sweetheart, but Daddy's married to Mommy. When you grow up, you can marry someone special just for you. And if you want, you can have children with him." Or in the case where the parents are divorced, it's even more important that the parent be able to do this in a clean, loving, supportive way because the parent is having to hold the role, in some ways, of both parents.

Unfortunately, what often happens is that the child's behavior is handled poorly by misreading this innocent—and it is truly innocent practicing. So instead of the response being that of a parent helping the child with his or her emerging sexuality, the response sometimes resembles something more like that of a lover in promoting their special relationship, and it has kind of a seductive quality. Many of us have experienced that kind of thing in our families.

So, playful flirtations can then result in awkward and inappropriate responses by the parent. Sometimes the parent withdraws from the child at this time. They don't really know what to say, so they don't take the child seriously. They dismiss the child. It's like when the child comes with a picture they drew in school and they give it to the parent, and instead of the parent saying, "Oh, that's such a beautiful picture. I love this house," and talks a little bit to the child about the picture, instead they just kind of tack it on the refrigerator with a refrigerator magnet. These are very precious feelings, and because of our awkwardness with our own sexuality, that's what usually causes us to not be able to respond in an appropriate, supportive way.

Sometimes, because of this coquettish or coy kind of flirting behavior, adults—whether it's the parent or somebody in the family, or somebody outside; a neighbor or a sibling—respond to it with an adult sexual response. Just the sheer energy of that can be confusing and overwhelming to the child. And the child—just by that energy alone—is overwhelmed.

So, if the parent responds or somebody else responds to the child with an adult sexual energy, then that practicing doesn't go in the direction that it should go—that it's meant to go—and the child is bombarded by these sexual feelings (even if they're not acted out) that are confusing and disorganizing to them—and of course, if they are acted out, produce a deeper traumatization. This is, of course, an example of where healthy sexual boundaries are critical in promoting healthy sexuality in our children, and another reason why it's so important to be learning and practicing them ourselves.

The second stage in which our developmental attitudes and feelings about sexuality become molded is in early adolescence. At this time, the parent is confronted with a blossoming young lady or man who looks like the spouse that he or she fell in love with some years earlier, but perhaps even more beautiful and handsome. So, if the parents are not comfortable with their own sexuality, with their own sexual boundaries, and warmly erotic with each other, this sudden attraction to their teenager in the teenager's puberty may cause them to panic or to shut down—to

withdraw from the child. This is particularly so in the case of the father and the daughter relationship.

So, the father—if his boundaries aren't clear or if he's having sexual problems with his wife—is drawn to the young adolescent in ways that the possibility of acting out seems real and threatening for him, and maybe to the daughter as well. Out of this fear, he suddenly cuts off physical warmth and becomes distant and cold. Now, in this typical scenario, the daughter feels not only abandoned but also rejected because of her new and fragile sexuality. In other words, the adolescent believes inside that it's their sexuality that caused the parent to withdraw.

Think of what that message is going to mean. It tells us that if we are sexual, then we won't be loved—that love will be taken away from us. It becomes difficult then in later adolescence into young adulthood and into middle age to be in a relationship that is both loving and tender and sexually erotic because we have that fear. Then we tend to separate them in our relationships and [wind] up either in romantic crushes and relationships and relationships that are just sexual—where we feel used after a certain time or that we're using another person. We don't really feel an authentic, life-promoting relationship.

Of course, there's the possibility at this age, at adolescence and even at earlier ages that the father or the mother may have actually acted out sexually with the child. The father may have touched the daughter inappropriately or kissed her on the mouth with a more adult kiss. This could have frightened daughter and father both, and it could have gone farther.

So, again, using this information with your felt sense in different situations where these kinds of feelings may come up—to be able to renegotiate them with your new boundaries.

So, how can these awkward but common sexual feelings be handled as parents now if we don't want to withdraw our affection from our children when we have these feelings, or to repress the unthinkable feelings? Then, what happens if we do that? We build up a pressure like a volcano, and later that's felt covertly by the youngster as a tension within the family relationship. The family tends to kind of cut off from each other.

Neither of these choices—of acting out these feelings or suppressing them—is going to promote a healthy family. So, let's look at another possibility—at a refreshing approach. With honesty, compassion, and with the tools of using the felt sense and the boundary exercises that you learned earlier to help regulate these energies, let's see what we can do when these kinds of

sensations and feelings arise towards our own children and other children that we might encounter—children of friends, nieces and nephews, and so forth.

Let me give you an example to illustrate this point. I worked once with a young father who really wanted to share parenting with his wife, but when he started to diaper his infant son, he started experiencing feelings of panic and even terror. He came in and we worked on that together. I had him focus on the sensations that arose when he had the image of diapering his child. As he did this, sexual sensations—very uncomfortable, jumpy sensations—started to appear. Continuing focus on that, those sensations changed to those of anger and he actually remembered at that time being molested by his favorite grandfather as a five-year-old child. These sensations not only allowed him to feel anger towards his grandfather for the first time, but as the anger dissolved in the felt sense, tears of liberation flowed. He was relieved to know that he wasn't a bad person.

So, at home later that week, the man noticed his sensations as he watched his wife change his son. At first, he felt those similar sexual sensations, but he was pleased at how quickly he felt them change. This time, they changed to a feeling of expansion and warmth in his chest, which he felt as love and pride. Then he felt a settling in his sexual feelings—a broadening, an opening—and he felt them directed towards his wife. He was delighted at how quickly the sexual sensations that he felt—instead of turning to anger this time—became directed towards his wife. He glanced at his wife, felt those feelings of attraction towards her, and then gazed back at his little boy and the feelings that emerged were those of pride and happiness.

So, even though his child wasn't five or six, the sexual feelings did project onto the child and the sexual feelings were from an experience that he had as a child. But the key here is in being able to track those sensations through the felt sense, to be able to contain them in the body, to be able to know and to trust your own boundaries, and to allow the experience to transform so you can relate to your child in a healthy, life-promoting, salubrious way. That's true whether the child is an infant, a toddler, a four-year-old, or a pubescent adolescent.

In summary, parents and adults who are with children or who work with children can become less afraid of experiencing their own sensations—that they can practice appropriate boundaries and have an understanding of what children need to develop healthy sexuality. In this way, awkwardness and tension can turn into more comfortable familial and parent-child relationships.

Now, as part of your healing process, as part of your recovery, you're likely to be seeking aid of a therapist at some time or another. So, I want to say a few words to maybe help you select a therapist who's appropriate for you. That really is the key there: is “appropriate for you.”

Now, of course if you don't know any therapists, you need to often begin by asking friends, asking people, particularly if you know people that have had trauma in their lives, and that they seem to be functioning well and have happiness and health in their lives. That's right there a good endorsement. And if you see somebody who seems to be completely miserable all the time and it doesn't change, even as much as they laud their therapist, I think you might want to steer away from them because sometimes if we have a therapist that's not really doing good therapy, the client can still bond to them. We sometimes tend to bond to those who have similarities to the patterns of abuse of our childhood.

Now, remember, you have the right to interview a therapist. As a matter of fact, a therapist that assumes that you're going to work with them as soon as you come in, that you're committed to some kind of a program, that should be another red flag for you. And when you get to meet the therapist, at this point you have feelings that you can trust and you can also ask questions about the therapist and what their beliefs are. As long as it's not asking something that's too personal about themselves, they should be willing to share that openly.

Another thing that is a really important red flag is if you get the sense that they have an agenda. If they say something either directly or indirectly or implied,—that what you really need to do is learn to forgive your parents or that you really need to get angry at your parents, or you really need to do this, that, or the other thing (in other words if it's prescriptive)—then red flag, because you want somebody who really tunes into you and your process. Now remember, nobody's going to be perfect, but you want somebody who can get who you are and support you in your unfolding. Really, that's what the role of a therapist should be.

Now, sometimes the therapist will be firm with you and we need that. Sometimes, that's how love is shown.

Also, we want a therapist who seems comfortable in their own bodies, with their own sexuality, and we don't want somebody who's trying to do their own healing on us at our expense.

So, these are a few of the things that I think will help you to select an appropriate and good therapist—a therapist that you deserve for your healing and for your recovery.

I want to say one more important thing here. Some of you remember being sexually abused as a child, and some of you began to be aware of certain images which you think may be true in some of these exercises. One of the things that a good therapist can do is help you sort these things out. Particularly in the situation where the perpetrator is alive and maybe in a position to be abusing other children, it's important to get the support that you need to make the decision to report that. And of course, reporting that can prevent other children from being traumatized and can make you feel more traumatized. But again, these are things that really generally need to be done with a therapist because they could help guide you in areas where you might feel threatened or collapsed, and they can also help you if there are legal ramifications of this—to help support you in the reporting process itself.

Remember: when you hire a therapist, you are hiring someone to work for you, and you want to hire somebody who does the job that you want them to do. You may interview more than one therapist. When you start therapy, you have the right to terminate and to work with somebody else. You may notice that there's a pattern where you're avoiding something. But again, that needs to come from you. This is one of the most important decisions that you can make and you really have those resources that you've been developing here to assist you in making that important decision.

As we draw to a close here, the wounding from sexual trauma—whether it's from rape, from molestation, from abuse, or a mixture of that—and the developmental problems that we all deal with in our lives and our culture [has] forced us to bring our awareness to that level where the wounding is, because remember: that's really what we're doing. We're releasing that energy that got locked so long ago and allowing it to come forth—to transform into vibrancy, into aliveness, into connection.

Now, this may not happen all at once. Sometimes the road can be long and it can be difficult, but in healing our wounded-ness, in healing the effects of our sexual traumatization, we also recover the innocence of the child at those ages. Healing sexual trauma is healing a sacred wound because that process brings us into being more human—into being able to access these deep, primordial, creative and regenerative energies, because ultimately, the sexual energy is the energy of creative aliveness. This is the most sacred experience that I believe a human being can have.

TS: This concludes *Sexual Healing* with Peter Levine. Music from *Sounds of Peace*, by Nawang Khechog, available through Sounds True. For more information on the trauma healing work of Peter Levine, please contact The Foundation for Human Enrichment, PO Box 1872, Lyons, Colorado 80540, or visit his website, traumahealing.com. To order additional copies of this audio learning program or to receive a free catalog of over 400 audio and video tapes, please contact Sounds True at SoundsTrue.com, or call 1.800.333.9185, or write the Sounds True Catalog, PO Box 8010, Boulder, Colorado 80306. Thank you for listening.

