

The FUTURE Series - XI

Family Unification Techniques: Unique Relationship Enhancement

Barry Bricklin, Ph.D.

Gail Elliot, Ph.D.

HOW A CHILD CAN BE HELPED TO FEEL COMFORTABLE IN EACH PARENTAL HOME

In our paper on *Representation Enhanced Psychotherapy* (see www.drbarrybricklin.com under “Articles”), we present the research background for the facts and suggestions that follow.

1. Every thought or image or perception that comes into your brain is accompanied by a tendency to move toward, away from or against the object presented. You may not be consciously aware of this “motor tendency.”
2. The brain representation may be of something outside of yourself (as a result, say, of your looking at a tree) or it could be the result of something you’re hearing (music; another person talking), or the result of something you’re tasting (ice cream; bitter medicine). However, note that the brain representation could also be from something already stored inside your head, for example, *any of your memories*. The result is the same: the representation will be accompanied by a motor tendency to move toward, away from, or against the object represented. The tendency may be strong and very much in your awareness, for example, the tendency to move away from—to pull back from—the taste of bitter medicine,” or it could be subtle, for example, to move toward a beautiful painting. Even when you seem to be in a “neutral gear” toward something—aware of this “something” but your body is quite “still”—this neutral gear will be flavored by one of these motor attitudes.
3. The “toward” movement is accompanied by weak to strong feelings of pleasure and a positive sense-of-self. People want to move “toward” things and people they like and/or believe will be beneficial and/or pleasant (food, water, great art, physical attraction). The movement “against” is a manifestation of fear mixed with anger, and is accompanied by mild to strong feelings of those emotions. The “away from” tendency will result from things your organism finds disgusting or frightening. The feelings you experience will reflect these emotions.
4. The best way to live a comfortable and pleasurable life—and the way to feel comfortable *wherever you happen to be, including each parental home*—is to learn how to create or look upon or convert each and every situation in which you find yourself into a “toward” situation. (We need to offer a technical caveat here. At a scientific level, we must distinguish between *what* is being represented in the brain, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the overall experience, including one’s body feelings, that are elicited by

what is represented. At a level of subjective comfort, the “toward” stance is to be directed at the bodily experience elicited by the mental representation not *what* is represented. Suppose you create an image of a hated enemy or a despised historical character, say Adolph Hitler. Our intention here is not to say that to be subjectively comfortable you must want to move “toward” Hitler. It *is* to say that you would want to have a positive stance toward the bodily experience that arises from this representation. It would take us too far afield to fully explain the reasoning behind this mental strategy. A long explanation would involve the fact that human perceptions and feelings are a problem only when they create a problem. The classic human problem is what we call a “toward-away from-against” situation—a situation that is difficult if not impossible to solve because the person is unable to resolve the situation by moving in any “real” or psychological way that creates a resolution. An example may be what to do about a hated spouse who must be dealt with—he or she will not go away AND there is no clear way to kill, or retreat from, this person on a continual basis. A solution must be found that blends the psychological attitudes required into a “motor-disposition” useful in the real world for such situations. This blend may require a way to create neutral emotions and a capacity for creative, win-win strategies. Now for the short explanation for the “toward” disposition needed for uncomfortable bodily states. Humans are far less capable of the creative mental activity required to come up with such blends when they are conflicted about their own internal representations of the world. Multiple-perspective taking, which is at the root of all therapeutic solutions, is impossible to achieve when one has phobicized (or become conflicted by) one’s own body feelings. Stated another way, solutions to life problems are best found when one is most “comfortable” with any and all of one’s own inner states, including states of confusion, fear and rage. The “toward” attitude fosters this comfort, and along with it, the creation of solutions which reflect all of the information available on any given subject.

5. The “toward” emotions are all positive. Making a list that ranges from “strong positive” to “weak positive” (but note that each position mentioned is positive) we would find: intense physical pleasure, positive excitement, intense interest in, strong curiosity, moderate involvement, modest interest, acceptance of what “is” at the moment, and so forth. Your MHP can help you learn how to generate these psychological states. *You can learn to be in a positive frame of mind and body, ranging from strong to modest to weak, wherever you are.*

6. Let us discuss what *is* likely to be clearly in your awareness, since many of the toward, away from, against motor tendencies will *not* be all that clear. And even when they *are* clear, they will likely not be experienced as motor tendencies. Let us say you see a friend you really like a lot. You *will* feel something in your body, some feeling that if put into words might be: “Gosh! I’m really glad you’re here!” You will experience a warm, positive, glad-to-see-you surge of emotion within yourself. That *is* the motor tendency we speak of, even though you may not seem to be physically moving. These feelings will be especially clear in certain cases. On the positive (toward) side will be people you feel very comfortable with, and with whom you have shared good times. Equally clear will be physically dangerous things like a rotting corpse or an uncaged tiger (away from).

On a more subtle level you can picture a traffic light as representing a signal-center of feeling in your body. Anything represented in your brain, of external or internal origin, will create a feeling either representing green, "It's okay to move toward it," or yellow (or amber) "Be cautious, this may be an away-from or against," or red, "This is definitely a hit it or run from it."

Your best bet for a comfortable *and effective* life will result from learning to access the motor-disposition ("emotional stance") of "toward" towards all of your own bodily states. "Toward" lessens fight-flight paralyses and panic. Even a body state that signals "medical attention is quickly required" will be dealt with in the best way possible when you are not terrified (away-from stance) or enraged (against) or conflicted and in panic mode (simultaneously trying to go toward, away from and against) the bodily signal.