



Getting Unstuck with Brainspotting

As we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give others the permission to do the same.

—Nelson Mandela

How is your light shining this season? What can you do to enhance the light within and stay connected with the healing process for all of those you help? Let's discover what Brainspotting is and how to use Self-spotting as a tool to stay in the flow.

Sara came to me for help with anxiety. She stated that she was a mess and continued to have meltdowns. After years of therapy and lots of medication, she still felt lost. It is common for Brainspotting therapists to begin seeing people who have had years of therapy and still express feeling stuck. It is also common for therapists to come for Brainspotting consultation because they themselves feel stuck with clients and/or feel burned-out. Key elements and basic foundation principles in the Brainspotting process allow for access to these “stuck places.”

Brainspotting, developed by David Grand, PhD, in 2003, is a brain-based therapy. Brainspotting focuses on finding relevant eye positions based on the client's desire to process deep subcortical material and to come into a state of peace. David Grand, PhD, has spoken about Brainspotting as having four key elements:

1. The Relationship: Research has shown that the therapeutic relationship is the primary component to a successful outcome to therapy. In Brainspotting, we harness this fact and have made the relationship a primary element of the work. We say Brainspotting trains clinicians to relate differently to clients. We accomplish this through the way we relate in session and through the timing of interventions.
2. The Body: People come to therapy because there is something they cannot resolve on their own. They may have had previous sessions, sought out friends and relatives, and/or explored the internet or self-help books for support. Yet they still feel dysregulated. They want to acquire a state of peace as soon as possible. Brainspotting helps to heal a client by working with the body and with the therapeutic relationship when clients are connected to their innate wisdom. The therapist helps the client connect to their body's felt sense around an issue and by finding a relevant eye position for the process to take place.
 - a. Brainspotting is seen as a physiological approach with psychological benefits. I often tell my clients it is like physical therapy for the brain.
 - b. I have found Brainspotting to be different from any other mind-body therapy. I experienced Brainspotting both as a client and as a therapist because of this Dual Attunement Frame—a simultaneous relational and neurobiological attunement with one part being within the patient themselves and the other part being between the therapist and the patient.
 - c. Going back to Sara: Within the strong container of our relationship we (myself as the therapist and the invitation for her to go into her own body's “felt sense”) made it possible for Sara to feel more present as she processed things she had not yet thought of or witnessed before about herself. Dr. Robert Scaer speaks of the importance of attunement in his book, *8 Keys to Brain-*

Body Balance. He explains that “the attunement activates the mirror neurons between the cingulate and the orbitofrontal cortex (OFC), creates an empathic environment and inhibits the amygdala. This sacred face-to-face empathic attunement, is a critical environment for trauma therapy to work (just as it is in maternal-infant bonding), and this state of presence is essential for healing.”

3. The Brain: The Brainspotting therapist uses psychoeducation, helping the client understand the brain and how it is impacted by life experiences. This psychoeducation piece of Brainspotting helps to diminish a sense of “something is wrong with me” for the client. In our profession, we are learning more and more about the brain and the impact our physiology has on our state of well-being. The brain is connected to all parts of us. With this fact in mind and the client’s feedback, the Brainspotting therapist sets the frame for rapid healing to take place.

4. Focused Mindfulness: Once the frame is set (the issue to work with is defined, a body’s felt sense in relation to the issue has been found, and a relevant eye position is discovered) the client maintains looking at the Brainspot in a state of curiosity for whatever is revealed by their brain and body. The therapist sits in a relationally healing state of being while finely attuned to the client, as the client discovers their own connections. Brainspotting therapists “check” the diagnostic understanding of what the client is going through at the door, as the therapist supports the client in having their aha moments without telling the client who they are and how they need to be. This relational repair coincides with whatever the client is healing within.

The basic motto of Brainspotting as stated by David Grand, PhD: “Where you look affects how you feel.” This is based on the fact that we see with our eyes and our brains. The superior colliculus, part of our midbrain, is connected to our visual cortex in relation to how we orient in our environment. So, if you are thinking of a challenging work situation and you look to the left, you may feel different about it than when you look to the right or straight ahead. In Brainspotting we find relevant eye positions to access the deep subcortical brain. The reason being is that psychotherapy can be more effective when we access the part of the brain connected to self-regulation. When we are in a state of self-regulation, we think more clearly, and we function more harmoniously in our lives. We are able to differentiate between the past and the present. We are less reactive.

By continuing the work with Sara, she was able to slow her emotional responses, bring reason into her actions and think more clearly. Before we ended treatment, she shared an incident where someone who had been an authority bully-figure to her, asked her to do something unethical. In the past she would have been frightened and compliant. This time she was able to slow down, think things out, speak with others and plan her response in a way that kept her acting in an ethical manner. She was very pleased with herself and was able to gain self-respect from her actions. She also realized how much she grew and shifted out of her fear response.

The Brainspotting helped her recondition traumatic conditioned responses. Cynthia Schwartzberg, LCSW, is a Senior Brainspotting Trainer and Consultant with 30+ years of experience in private practice. She participates in an ongoing monthly consultation group with Dr. Grand, a close colleague who discovered and developed Brainspotting. Cynthia specializes in working with survivors of profound trauma and those challenged with relationship issues. Additionally, she does enhancement work with leaders, artists, athletes and performers. She is a national and international speaker and trainer. Prior to Brainspotting, Cynthia was on faculty with the Institute of Core Energetics, a mind-body modality.

Cynthia practices in the Buckhead area. She will be offering the Brainspotting Phase One training online, January 24-26, 2021. Other trainings and information can be found at www.cynthisis.com