

EFT, Weight and Body Image

This article describes the journey taken through a series of EFT sessions with a client who has suffered chronic weight issues since childhood. It concludes with important points to remember when dealing with weight issues; and is written so that individuals and practitioners can use the information to aid and extend their use of EFT. The article also assumes a working knowledge of EFT; as such it details the journey itself, rather than the particulars of the EFT phrases used.

The client is Annie (named changed to maintain confidentiality), a 59 year old woman who currently weighs around 230lbs. She has a complexity of thoughts, feelings and behaviors around weight including associations with power, avoidance, self punishment and shame. There is also a strong resistance to really addressing the above, in addition to the resistance she feels to releasing the weight.

To begin, we focused on Annie's resistance. It seemed reasonable to think that once this was addressed the other existing issues would likely be easier to tackle. This follows the reasoning that the resistance was [at least partly] responsible for keeping the other issues locked in place. It was also likely that the resistance was protecting Annie from the core issues around her weight.

Our first session was centered on resistance. The first part of the session focused on why she resisted looking at the weight. This yielded the issue that the past was potentially scary. We used EFT to bring Annie's SUDS to a 0 and then continued to explore this issue further. The following was uncovered and tapped to 0:

Comments made by her mother made her feel she was not good enough and never would be.

A religious upbringing made her feel she had to be perfect to be accepted by Jesus.

Because of her mother's comments she knew she would never be good enough for God and that thought was abhorrent to her.

Because of this, she believed she disappointed God. She believed that she had failed God. She believed that she had failed her parents. She believed that she still wasn't good enough.

We tapped on all of the above in turn until each had been brought to a 0, using a combination of the movie technique, tell the story technique, garbage and gold phrases and exploring the 'writing on her walls'. I tested our results by asking Annie specifically about the thoughts around her weight. She was able to talk freely about her upbringing and how, as a very young child she had felt alone and not good enough. The thought that she was not good enough for God had made her feel physically sick, ashamed and deeply afraid. She stated that looking at this was 'like looking at the deepest,

darkest fear that had been secretly kept for over 50 years'. To look upon this secret for Annie surely meant humiliation, shame, annihilation.

Yet now, Annie was able to speak freely and easily. Her voice was calm. She tested 0 for SUDS. I used muscle testing just to make sure we'd really gotten to the bottom of the issue.

We then moved on to the second part of the session; addressing the resistance to loosing the weight. We started off by using EFT to address this issue globally; using a few rounds of EFT as an alternative to making a list of bothersome aspects regarding this issue. As expected this exercise yielded various aspects; one of which was that the weight meant power. As Annie had believed she wasn't good enough she gained her power by being 'bigger'. As the initial belief had been resolved, the idea that the weight meant power now seemed ridiculous to her and yet it still triggered a reaction. We tapped on this before going on to the next aspect; that the weight meant strength. And the next, that the weight meant she did not have to interact on a deep level with other people, regardless of her relationship with them. These aspects had lost some of their distress due to the clearing of the underlying belief. However, we tapped them all to 0 and tested by my asking Annie questions and monitoring her verbal and non verbal communication as she answered. I also performed some muscle testing to verify the dissolution of these aspects and to demonstrate this to Annie.

Our second session began with my asking Annie about the feelings of shame, avoidance, self-punishment, power and strength. She was easily able to describe how her upbringing had meant that she did not feel good enough. This in turn had led to hiding behind her weight. The weight had meant she did not have to interact with others. The weight had also given Annie [a false sense of] power and strength. These issues were diminished and Annie was surprised she'd ever felt that way. However, Annie had still been eating compulsively since our last session and although this behavior had reduced somewhat, she was still overeating several times a week.

We explored this in connection with the work we had already done; perhaps there were additional aspects we had not addressed. In this regard we looked at eating in connection with not feeling good enough, power, strength and avoidance. What resonated with Annie was the idea of avoidance although specifically: eating as pleasure instead of finding the pleasure of interaction. We tapped on eating as a false sense of pleasure [this was true as the eating Annie was describing left her overly full, frustrated and feeling hopeless]. We also tapped on: eating as an avoidance tactic for engaging with her husband, with her children, with other members of her family, with friends, with her colleagues, with people in general. Basically, because of the belief Annie had had of not being good enough, she had feared getting too close to anyone, for fear of them uncovering her 'secret'. We went on to tap specifically about this fear. Once all SUDS were at 0 and had been tested, using the same methods as the first session, we went on to discuss Annie's feelings

about her 'secret'. Another aspect which came up was needing to punish herself for not being good enough; although she did not see the compulsive eating as punishment, she realized that the punishment was in the avoidance of relationships.

After the above had been tapped to 0 and tested, we then moved onto Annie's behaviors around certain foods. I had asked Annie to make a note of any foods she either craved or had compulsions to overeat. There were several that Annie had identified, namely chips, pretzels, cookies and hard candies. As we had already identified *why* she used these foods we tapped on the foods themselves and Annie's relationship with them. We tapped on each of the foods in turn, her inability to know when she's had enough, the over stimulation of neurological receptors with these foods. And the false beliefs that each of these foods gave her benefits (of self punishment by avoiding interaction with others). We also tapped on the parts of her that would not feel safe if she did not overeat.

Finally, we looked at another benefit she got from her overeating – that of protecting 'Annie time'. We therefore tapped on this as well as the fear that she would not be able to have her alone, restful time without the bingeing. When Annie's SUDS were at 0 we ended this session. Annie stated she felt lighter and more inclined to call her family.

The third session with Annie began with testing the work we had done the previous two sessions. As a result of these sessions Annie continued to feel lighter. She had also lost 4 lbs, was enjoying daily walks and was eating smaller portions – all easily and without much effort. She was no longer eating compulsively and was slowly deepening her relationships and spending more time interacting with those around her. Furthermore, Annie reported feeling in a 'completely new place' with how she viewed herself and related to others. She felt on par with everyone else, a peer rather than beneath them; just as able rather than unable.

This session then, was to focus on how Annie viewed her, still rather large [226lb] body. She had stated she was in that new space regarding how she viewed herself, emotionally and mentally. However, she also stated that she would catch a glimpse of herself in the mirror or see her image on a photograph and be taken aback by how fat she actually was. As we explored this issue Annie suddenly declared that an image of herself as a young girl flashed in her mind. She was quite young, about 8 or 9 and she was wearing a dress that showed her rolls of tummy fat. Although Annie could not access any thoughts or feelings as she was then [which may be the case as the underlying beliefs had already been addressed], the image disturbed her peace of mind. She just did not like the rolls of tummy fat, how it looked, how it showed underneath her dress, how evident it was, how much fatter she was than anyone she remembers at that age. We tapped on each of these aspects until a 0 was reached in every case. And then we moved onto the feelings around Annie's body image as it was today. As Annie stated it was the sight of her that shocked her, it was as if her body was

almost alien to her. Furthermore, she could not think of herself in any way other than being this large; so there was a disconnect in the way she thought of, and saw herself. Basically, she just did not want to own up to being the size she was – that would mean work to get rid of the weight. It would mean hard work that she may not keep up; that she might fail at. It would mean constantly monitoring herself around food, focusing on it, counting it, depriving herself. It would mean a change in behavior. It would mean acting differently around food. It would be a hard slog to get to her ideal weight. Ironically, she could not imagine herself at a lower weight. I reminded her that she had already lost 4 lbs and was taking exercise and eating smaller portions already. That this had occurred as a result of the clearing we had already done in the past couple of sessions. We then tapped on the issues that had arisen in regard to thoughts of what it would take for her to lose the weight.

Once we'd tapped through these aspects I asked Annie to stand in front of a mirror and tell me what she saw and how she felt. As she stood there, looking at her reflection tears started to roll down her cheeks. This was the first time she could remember totally accepting her image, her size, the rolls of fat and the wobbly arms, the heavy thighs and thick ankles. She could see her weight clearly and yet there was an acceptance of how she was right now. Yes she was aware that she needed to lose weight, but she was accepting of the woman she was. In fact, she could pick out things she really liked about the image, albeit being overweight. Her face looked shinier, lighter. Her voice was calmer, gentler. She had a loveliness about her that we both noticed.

At this point we shifted gear and began to use the Choices Method to imagine herself as a more slender woman. She noticed the eagerness within herself to do this; all resistance was gone, the core beliefs were gone, the disconnect was gone, the beliefs around weight loss had gone. She was accepting of herself, as she was right now.

Using the Choices Method we tapped on continued acceptance of her shifting body shape and size as the weight continued to drop off. We incorporated 'What if' statements into the Choices Method: What if she automatically began to make healthier food choices? What if the weight just dropped off naturally, easily and effortlessly? What if she could find herself physically beautiful at each step of the way? What if she could allow herself to eat foods in a natural and healthy way without feeling the need or desire to overeat? What if she could savor each bite and stop just before she felt full? What if she felt really excited about losing weight? What if she really enjoyed doing a little bit of exercise every other day?

Our next step was to move onto Annie's ideal weight. We used an image of the 'more slender Annie' at the ideal weight [140lbs]. Again, using the Choices Method we tapped on reaching and being the ideal weight and of being comfortable

at that weight. Annie stated that as we tapped her self-image at 140lbs became clearer and more acceptable. After several rounds, she was not only accepting but excited by this new possibility.

We ended this third session with Annie feeling 'on top of the world'. What's more, I checked in with Annie a few weeks later. She had lost an additional 8 lbs, was walking every other day and was doing some gentle stretches every morning. Even better, she had always wanted to learn yoga and had never felt comfortable to do so. She had recently found a class for beginners [women only] and had signed up! Go Annie!

To conclude this article then, let's run through a synopsis of the progression the sessions took:

1. Address any resistance to looking at core beliefs responsible for the overweight; as well as resistance to losing the weight. If resistance is not addressed first, progress may be slowed or even hindered.
2. By addressing the resistance, core beliefs were uncovered. These included beliefs which maintained the weight (and likely created the weight gain).
3. Tapping globally on resistance to losing weight yielded beliefs about the benefits of being overweight.
4. Explore the patterns around eating. Include the purpose food is given, relationship with particular foods, cravings/compulsions for those foods and overstimulation of neurological receptors.
5. Explore the protection of overeating and vulnerability of not over eating.
6. Consider body image in the present and [if comes up] the past.
7. Address the anticipation of losing weight.
8. Use the Choices Method and What If statements to bring about a new relationship with food, body image and ideal weight.

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