

Traumatic emergency-reaction and puppetry

Antje Wegener



Not every bad experience is traumatizing. But in the special case of an acute emergency-reaction, perception, reaction and behavior seem confusing.

What happens in the case of an acute traumatic emergency-reaction?

I AM OVERWHELMED AND CAN DO NOTHING TO PROTECT MYSELF.

Now an automatic, biologically hard-wired emergency-reaction is set off:

- Mobilizing the preservation of physical strength as escape, fight and thanatosis, inhibits the intervention of rational thought.
- Impotence – without any power
- Helplessness – alone
- Freeze – prevent any impulses
- Atony – Separation of perception

What results from this?

All physical resources are focused on survival. Consciousness is turned off or is only a distant witness without influence on the situation. These experiences are recorded as a pattern of vision, sense of smell, sound and emotion under the tab "ALARM!". It stays in the body's memory as an effective response. It cannot be filed as a conscious memory until rational parts like understanding, words, time and place are integrated again.

What is helpful?

Turn off the emergency reaction and renew the normal connection between thinking, feeling, body and relationship. Make the "Here and Now" tangible. Notice the difference from the past.

1. *I have to get out of danger.* Create a safe space and make a clear difference between safety and danger. Speak out: "Here you are safe!... "
2. *I need control of the situation.* Ask. Create options. Make offers and accept the answer "No".
3. *I'm longing for solace and emotional support.* Be there! Show empathy. Take care of.
4. *I need new faith.* Create transparency and predictability. Say what you are doing and what will happen next.
5. *I want to break free.* Enable movement and action.
6. *My mind wants to gather and needs new food.* Enable expression and new images. Talk.
7. *I need self-understanding in this uncanny situation. I am normal.* Explain the automatic emergency reaction.
8. *I want to feel completely, here and now. Everything is going to be all right.* Live for the moment! Welcome humour!

What about re- traumatizing?

Triggers provoke flashbacks: the past appears as real. The formerly effective Alarm-reaction is fully running without a real reason and in this way disturbs the present. The affected person can lose insight (dissociation) or become strongly resistant.

Actively breaking away from this exhausting situation and giving safe support are essential:

- ✓ Loudly address them. Ask simple or paradoxical questions. Re-orientate:
Hey! We are here at the theatre! When is your birthday?
- ✓ Give diverting demands and body actions: *Stand up and put the puppet in the air!*

- ✓ Give strong stimuli to the senses, like sound or smell : *a bell, music, brewing coffee, opening the window, menthol, perfume, hedgehog-ball for massage.*
- ✓ Touching – only if it has been agreed before! *Give me your hand*

What does puppetry do?

Playing is an agreement based on safety and confidence. *Create a safe space and use "STOP"!*

The puppet is a *safe offer of relationship and proximity*: another ME, another YOU. Face to face

The *animated* Puppet needs and provokes empathy, this is safe company.

Puppetry distances: *Playing* makes everything possible, while the actor and observer stay safe. Create a *clear stage*! Separate playing and real spheres by using creative tools.

Puppet- fates work out emotions in a way that is not dangerous. The worst outcomes and highest hopes become *material stuff*. They are *handled* and moved in a physical manner.

Everything is under *control*. The puppet has a lower status than me. I dictate what's going on, who will join in, if I take part, how it ends... I am omnipotent and in control and self-efficient! *To be the director!*

Storytelling connects traditions, my own experiences and visions. It builds *identity* and *community*. I am not alone.

Role play in a puppet-mask enables a *change of perspective*, *entering the point of view* of perpetrator and victim. Get control. Reunion of thinking and feeling.

Dramaturgy is the art of *impact*. Narration, structure, happenings, bringing order into chaos and weaving safety nets to provide guidance. The handling of objects/puppets enables *adjustment*.

The animated object gives a *point of focus*: it jars. The brain tries to fill the gap, *works to make sense of this unusual phenomenon*.

Puppetry strolls *between* the worlds of life and death, of animation and the material, of being subject and object. It is *transformation*. It is a parallel perception of Being and Make-believe. Puppetry makes the impossible possible.

Playing is Make-believe, but the emotions are real. The brain does not differentiate between images of memory, of dream or of current sight. It is able to construct images! Puppetry is *active imagination, alternative reality*. Puppeteers control these images and emotions.

Puppetry occurs in the moment *here and now*. It is permanently *moving forwards*.

Puppetry combines action, thought, words, feelings, emotions, imagination and relationships. It is *multimedia and holistic*.

This all happens in a performance or a workshop as well as in free play settings with objects/ figures/ puppets.

The basic principles of puppetry correspond to trauma-sensitive stabilization very well.

Play with the puppets, give vitality and laughter and normality!



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education@unima.org
www.unima.org/education