

B) Making Contact

After the Coming In, the next stage of the Focusing process is what we call Making Contact. From the Focuser's point of view, this stage is characterized by beginning to come into contact with something, and allowing that contact to strengthen and solidify to the point of being really there--which prepares for the next stage.

Imagine arriving at a party, maybe feeling a bit unsure and shy, and having a stranger immediately come up to you, put his nose into your face, and ask you deep personal questions! You'd be disconcerted, to say the least. That analogy can help us understand the problem with the following imaginary Focusing session:

Focuser: "I'm starting to feel a slight heavy feeling in my chest."

Guide: "Good, so ask it what it needs."

Focuser: "It's gone."

Of course it's gone! The inner contact which will allow personal meaning to emerge, later in the session, is established now in the early stages through simpler processes of contact that are analogous to the social moves of saying hello (acknowledging) and exchanging names with someone (describing).

So from the guide's point of view, the processes which are usually facilitative in the Making Contact stage are these: Acknowledging and Describing, or Describing and Acknowledging. As for which to suggest first, that depends primarily on whether the Focuser's felt experience is faint/subtle, in which case Describing goes better first, or strong/intense, in which case Acknowledging goes better first. We will say more about these choices in the next sections.

Describing

The first Making Contact process is Describing (unless the felt experience is strong or intense, in which case Acknowledging should come first). The Focuser describes how the "something" feels right now, with special emphasis on physical awareness. Describing gives a groundedness that will help the rest of the session go well. This process clarifies that the experience is definitely felt in the body. In addition, describing helps prevent analyzing, deciding what to do, interpreting, and other more familiar (outside of Focusing) activities.

Almost always the Focuser begins to describe their awareness without any prompting from the guide. This is because there is almost no way to refer to what's there without describing it.

Guide: "And when you're aware of something, you might let me know."

Focuser: "There's a tight band across my chest."

This "tight band across the chest" is already the beginning of describing.

Sometimes, however, the Focuser tells you that they're experiencing something, but there isn't a description word. For example: "I have a sensation in my stomach," or "I'm feeling something in my chest." Now (after reflecting) you would make a suggestion for describing, using a phrasing something like this: "So be with that place, and sense what word or image would really describe how that feels in your body." Or more briefly: "You might notice how you would describe that."

So in either case, now they have begun to describe something, using words like "tight band across the chest" or "constriction" or "heaviness" or "fear."

With an experienced Focuser, giving a reflection is usually enough; they do their own checking the description, using reflection. The suggestions that follow are more likely to be needed with new people or Focusers who have asked for extra help.

Here's how to give a suggestion to check the description: "Take that word 'tightness' down to the sense and see if that feels like the best way to describe how it feels, or if another word fits even better." Or: "Maybe you could see if 'tightness' is the word that fits that place the best, or if another word fits even better." (For more than one word, you can say 'phrase', as in "Take that phrase 'tight band across the chest' and offer it to the sense....")

In this suggestion to check, we want to be careful not to imply that the word being checked is wrong. The wording I propose is crafted for this purpose, especially the words "even better."

Be careful to use the *same word* that the Focuser used.

Focuser: It feels tense.

NOT: So maybe take that word "tension" back to the body sense and notice if it describes it well.

I heard one guide say: "You might just check if I'm using the words right." I don't recommend bringing yourself into it like that; the Focuser has enough to deal with, without getting into the issue of whether YOU are right or wrong!

Remember that the sense is always more than the word or image or other symbol that describes it. This is a place where our language can confuse us, if we start referring to the place as "the tightness" or "the sadness" or whatever description the person has used, as if that is what it "is." Focusing teaches us that the sense has more to it than any description can capture. The guide has the responsibility to remember the distinction between the sense itself and the description of it. Be sure to say something like, "Take that word 'tightness' inside and see if it fits." You wouldn't want to say, "Take the tightness inside and see if it fits." The tightness is already inside! It's the word "tightness" that is taken inside, to check with the sense.

If the next word or image is different from (or additional to) the first, have them bring it gently back to the body as well.

Focuser: "It's not so much tightness, it's more a squeezing sensation."

Guide: "So take that word 'squeezing' in to the sense, and notice if that feels right." or "And see if the word 'squeezing' describes it well, or if another word would fit even better."

Do you do this forever, even if the sense keeps changing? In practice, no. After checking the handle a second time, if the sense keeps changing, we'd move on to the Deepening stage. That's probably what's needed, anyway. That would sound like this:

Focuser: "It's tight."

Guide: "You're sensing it's tight. You might take that word 'tight' in there to the sense, and notice if that feels like just the right way to describe it."

Focuser: "No, it's more like an inner pressure."

Guide: "Now you're sensing it's more like an inner pressure. You might just check if that describes it well, an 'inner pressure'."

Focuser: "Now it's elongating."

Guide: [Deepening] "Maybe you could see if it's OK to spend some time with that place, just being with it."

Sometimes the person seems to flow forward into the Deepening stage without ever saying “yes” to a particular description. This is usually because one of the descriptions was right, but they didn’t bother to tell you about it! Better to allow this to happen, than to stop their process to make the description explicit:

Focuser: “There’s a heaviness in my heart area.”

Guide: “You’re sensing a heaviness in your heart area. Just gently check the word ‘heaviness’ with that place, to see if it fits well.”

Focuser: “Not exactly heaviness, it’s more a drawing down.”

Guide: “It’s more a drawing down. See if the words ‘drawing down’ are a good fit for that feeling.”

Focuser: “I’m getting images of my father’s face.” (tears) “There’s something in me that feels unfinished about his death.”

Guide: “Oh, yes. Something feels unfinished about your father’s death. Maybe just be gentle to all that.”

NOT: “But did ‘drawing down’ fit or not?”

Checking what comes back with the body (resonating)

Helping the Focuser check what comes back with the body (also called resonating) can be done all through the session, if needed. Any time something comes in the Focuser, it can and often should be offered back to the body, with a suggestion to check if it fits there.

Checking back is done not only with the description, but any time in the session when something comes that is important to the Focuser’s process. It can be done with any reflection, incorporating the reflection either before or after the instruction to check back.

Focuser: “It feels dark and heavy in here.”

Guide: “So take that back inside and see if the words feel right, dark and heavy.”

Or: ”Dark and heavy ... and take those words inside and see if they feel right.“

Later in the same session, when the person is used to the process of checking back, you can use a shorter form, like this:

Focuser: “I’m feeling how lonely it has been.”

Guide: “So, lonely . . . and just check and see if that does feel right.”

The key difference between checking back at the description-finding stage and checking back later is whether you are checking back words or sentences. Only at the description stage would you say, “Take that word back inside.” Later you say things like, “Check that with the sense.” Just leave out the word “word” and refer to the whole meaning as “that.”

Focuser: “It’s almost like my life is in danger.”

NOT: “Take that word ‘danger’ and see if that fits.”

RATHER: “See if that fits how the sense feels, that it’s almost like your life is in danger.”

Checking back is also a good idea when the person is doubtful about what came. They may say, “This might be from my head,” or just “I’m not sure about this.” This is a flag to the guide to say, “OK, maybe you could take that down to your body and see if it does feel right.” (If they’ve been working with a specific described place, like “heaviness in the chest,” you’d ask them to check what came with that rather than the generic “your body.”)

Even when the person hasn't expressed doubt, but has just reported that something has come, it's often very helpful to do checking back. The main exception would be if you already see them having a strong confirmatory reaction to what came, so that "being with" is more appropriate than checking.

Focuser: "Oh! It really wants to protect me--it's on my side!" (tears)

Guide: "Tears are coming--you're feeling it's really on your side."

Acknowledging

"So just acknowledge that--let it know you know it's there."

"You might just say hello to that place."

"See if you'd like to say to that [heavy], 'Hello I know you're there.'"

Acknowledging begins the Inner Relationship, and helps the Focuser stay in Presence. You would usually have the Focuser acknowledge any feeling or reaction when it first comes, before doing anything else.

There is just one caveat. If a sense is delicate and faint, acknowledging may be too powerful for it. Then you would move first to describing instead.

When the sense first comes (after the Focuser's inner invitation and your suggestion "and when you're aware of something, you might let me know"), have the Focuser acknowledge it. Acknowledgment is like an invitation to be there. It says, "There's no hurry, here we are."

Guide: "And when you're aware of something, you might let me know."

Focuser: "I feel an angry, frustrated place."

Guide: "You're sensing something there that's angry, frustrated." ...

[Acknowledging] "Maybe you could acknowledge that, just let it know, 'Yes, I know you're there.'"

Focuser: "It's eased, but it's still there."

Guide: [Describing] "And maybe gently check if 'angry, frustrated' are the words that fit it the best."

Have the Focuser acknowledge each new part which comes, but don't have them say hello again and again--only when a part first arrives. Remember that a new quality is not a new part.

Focuser: "I'm feeling this heaviness in my chest."

Guide: "You're noticing a heaviness there in your chest. See if you'd like to say hello to that."

Focuser: "Yes, I'm saying hello to it. It's also sad."

Guide: "You're sensing that it's also sad."

[Not] "You might say hello to the sadness." The Focuser already said hello to this part, which is both heavy and sad.

One good place to acknowledge is when a Feeling about a Feeling appears.

Guide: "Maybe see if it's OK to just be with that angry, frustrated place."

Focuser: "I feel sick of it, like it's always there, it never lets me alone."

Guide: "Oh, you're sensing a part of you that's sick of it. And maybe you could acknowledge that 'sick of it' feeling, just saying 'Oh yes, part of me is really sick of it.'"

Another good place to acknowledge is the intrusion of a part which is interfering or critical.

Focuser: "My critic is telling me that I should have solved this problem already."

Guide: "Something is coming in here to say you should have solved this problem already. Maybe you could acknowledge it, let it know you know it's there."

Acknowledging when two or more things come

"I'm feeling two things."

"I have a tight place in my stomach, and a heaviness in my chest."

"I'm feeling stiffness in my face and fluttering in my solar plexus."

"Take some time to notice if it feels right to stay with both for a while, or if one of them is calling for your attention more right now."

When the Focuser reports that two or more senses are there, remember that you don't know yet whether they are related--and maybe the Focuser doesn't know either. So you don't know whether it's right to be with both or with just one. First have the Focuser acknowledge each one. This is important. Saying hello doesn't take very long, so it's possible to say hello to a number of things in not much time. (I once guided someone who had five distinct places in the first few minutes--and yes, he could say hello to each one.)

Then say something like, "Take some time to notice if it feels right to stay with both for a while, or if one of them is calling for your attention more right now." I would say it this way, rather than "notice if one of them is stronger." We don't want to assume that the criterion of being "stronger" would be the reason to be with one of them first. In fact we don't want any criterion which is imposed from without (or from the Focuser's "head") rather than being sensed from within.

This is a delicate situation, this having two parts and sensing which one needs to be first. Any hint of favoritism or of forcing the choice will reverberate in a loss of safety for the session. I used to say, "Take some time to sense which one needs to be first." The problem was, this assumed that staying with both was not an option--and enough Focusers objected to set me straight.

Sometime I say it this way: "You might stay with both, and take your time. It might begin to feel right to be with one or the other first. Just notice where your awareness is drawn naturally."

It's usually better not to ask if they're related. Answering that question takes a sophisticated type of awareness. Acknowledgment and acquaintanceship need to come first.

Then, if the Focuser feels complete about one of them before the session is over, you may want to ask about the other one.

Focuser: "I have a tightness in my throat and kind of a heavy feeling in my belly."

Guide: "So you're sensing something in your throat like a tightness, and something kind of heavy in your belly. ... Maybe you could acknowledge each one of those places, like you're saying to it, yes, I know you're there."

Focuser: [takes time, nods slightly]

Guide: "Notice if it feels right to stay with both for a while, or if one of them feels like it's 'first'."

Focuser: "The tightness in my throat is more prominent."

Guide: "So that's the one that's calling, the tightness in your throat. ... And gently notice if the word 'tightness' is just the right word for how that feels."

Focuser: "It's like a constriction."

Guide: "You're sensing it's like a constriction. ... And see if it's OK to stay with that constriction for a while."

Focuser: "It wants me to be careful in what I say."

Guide: "It's letting you know it wants you to be careful in what you say. ... Maybe you could let it know you hear that."

Focuser: "It released. It's OK now."

Guide: "Take some time to just be there, feeling that place where it released."

Focuser: [after time passes] "Yes. That's really all that's there."

Guide: "OK. So ... a while ago you were feeling something kind of heavy in your stomach. See if it would be right to check if that's still there, or if maybe something else is wanting your attention."

Focuser: "It's still there." etc.