

Emotion Regulation Handout
(problem solving exercises for other parts of the psyche)
vol. 17: HOLES and Portals

A wave of mind-independent collective absence rolled over us all. We watched, transfixed by its immensity. Meanwhile, it moved against, under and through us. Unseen, unfelt, unsmelt. We were shaken to our very bones, unable to find the words, unable to even begin to fabricate a story.

In our society we tell ourselves stories in order to live, so obviously we faced a problem: why go on, when further on is nothing? The lack threatened to consume us. At a loss for what to do, we figured we may as well at least try talking about it...

Testimony 1

OK, so, we were walking on a bright afternoon, and then she pointed and said “Look! What is that?” and suddenly, I was only seeing total darkness, a blackness so deep it was worth opening your eyes to look at it. I was... like seeing something but at the same time, not seeing anything... just shivering in terror beneath a shadow cast by... try to imagine a shadow cast by something you can’t see, like something behind a high wall.

Meanwhile, there was silence. Not a peaceful silence, a disquieting one, cos I’d even stopped hearing the sound of the blood moving around my body.

We exchanged glances. The absence was starting to shatter us, but just in time, there on the ground, I caught sight of it, the shape of some sort of matter covered in dark matter. It wasn’t revolving, just sort of turning in on itself, it was really extremely black and I knew that underneath, inside, they were naked, and had passed away. There was something present within this terrible absence, as with the unseeing eyes of the dead. Something where there should have been nothing, where there was nothing.

She and I watched a while longer in spite of our reservations, and then slowly came to a silent agreement that it would be better not to see it. It took some work but we wrenched ourselves away. Bathed in a cold sweat we saw nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing of the nothingness. We only shivered a little under the weight of resisting its gigantic silent emptiness.

Testimony 2

We were walking, hot, hungry and looking for a place to eat. And then, suddenly darkness flew up and out, across the cloudless sky, from east to west, sort of uh, like the glimmering black lights when you pass out. I pointed, I was like, “What’s that?” And then it was all around, enveloping us. I held my breath at the presence of this unhomely property, at the sight of it, un-seeable and yet concrete.

Well, initially she was concrete, but then she seemed to spread and transform, “she” turned into “they”. They still formed part of the same body of total darkness, like... fluttering like... something torn, frayed, like that idea of a social fabric? As they moved along the horizon, they became threadbare. I shouted and he came running out but it was too late. From the look on his face it was clear he’d seen it too, yet he doubted. I alone knew I’d seen it, or at least that was how it felt...

Later, I heard it had landed somewhere and then vanished without a trace. I mean really? These gigantic shapes, one with a mole on the lower left-hand side of their back just vanishing? There wasn’t any gossip about it, and literally none of this ever appeared in the press.

Oh, one other thing to add: maybe it’s nothing, but before they vanished I think... I think they snatched something from me... I dunno, like my consciousness? Well, probably my own fault, I sort of laid myself bare, just staring you know? I did worry that they might have accessed my account, my data. Possibly, hopefully they only took my face, I mean a photo of my face, but maybe... maybe they took my soul? Maybe it’ll be used for something? Maybe it doesn’t matter. Or maybe it could be like used in the future to like... trap me....? And that I would be unconscious of that?

I swore to never stop looking.

Step 2

Check the Facts to be sure you have the right problem-situation.

If the facts are correct go to step 3.

If the facts are not correct go back to step 1.

- Are you dreaming? Have you gone mad? Did you take a drug? Maybe you are in a virtual reality game? Are your eyes closed? Could you perhaps be dead?
- Let’s say that your eyes wide open. If your rods and cones are not stimulated then what? Are you dead? Could you perhaps be dead?

Testimony 1

I asked them several times, him, and the others who follow my account, if they had seen the situation in the street. “Bad vibes” said one, “could get us in trouble” another added.

So, we worked hard at unseeing it. I worked hard to make these new “facts” correct. I published them and “liked” them. Everyone else “liked” them too. The thing that no one wanted to see, became a thing that no one could see. But rubbing it out left a tear, and behind that we could see another heap of dark matter...

Testimony 2

So, it was a fact, we had to admit that it was there, present, because even as we erased it, it hung in the air next to us, around us. I lost followers, I didn’t even care, I posted: “feelings are shit, the real trick is to disappear”. I was in a hole. I needed to solve the problem.

Step 3

Identify your goal in solving the problem. Identify your escape behaviors.

Testimony 1 & 2

While we were still working hard at not seeing it we’d felt a twinge as it moved upon the face of our depths. We’d sensed we’d handed it everything, like, all our data: our eyes, our voices, our mannerisms and everything we and everyone else had ever imagined, created, and done. In return the thing, the shape, made a to-do list for us, and a meal-plan using all the left-overs languishing in our broken fridge. Then it made a cheeky surrealist poem, it gave us 7 bullet points for how to cope with death and a handout of guidelines for Self-Respect Effectiveness using the anacronym F.A.S.T. (Fair, don’t Apologise, Stick to values, Truthful). We were comforted but also unnerved.

Step 4

Brainstorm lots of solutions.

Think of as many solutions as you can.

1. What kind of mindset do you have? Why not try writing a list? You could make a to-do list. Or a voice-note describing all your problems?
2. Find an index card, use the back of an envelope, or other disposable piece of paper.
3. Devote 10 minutes (600 seconds) to defining your To-Do List for the day.
4. Your Daily To-Do List is made up of things you want to do that are not part of your typical schedule but that require a special investment of time and effort to complete.
5. Limit your list to no more than 2 - 5 items. When in doubt, err on the side of fewer items rather than more—you can add more later.
6. Define tasks in specific, behavioral terms or actions that you can “do.”
7. Running or some other kind of physical exertion is a great task, it always helps.
8. Have you seen them? Have you seen him? Have you seen her?
9. Never stop looking until you find him, them, her, until you find their bones, their remains if not their corpse, if not their body.
10. Set a realistic time frame to spend on each task.
11. Use your Daily Planner to find times in your day when you will make an “appointment” with yourself to perform each task.

Step 5

Choose a solution that fits the goal and is likely to work.

- If you are unsure choose two solutions that look good.
- Do pros and cons to compare the solutions
- Choose the best to try first.

Testimony 1

We prepared the meal of left-overs and began filling out the worksheets, ticking things off the lists as we ate.

I broke off from my list and asked if we should a search for bones, I asked again if the real trick might be to disappear. Or was it too late for that?

Testimony 2

I made an exasperated huffing sound. “I’ve chosen to focus on my daily planner, you’re free to do as you please” I announced. I went into the other room.
I felt sick.

Maybe it was the left-overs?

Step 6

Put the solution into action

- Act – try out the solution
- Take the first step and then the second.
- Remember: Many emotions and actions are set off by thoughts and interpretations of events, not by the events themselves.
- Disappearing “the trouble” is one of the most effective and research-backed approaches. Vanishing tricks work by addressing the unhelpful thoughts and behaviors that fuel negativity, teaching individuals’ healthier ways to react in frustrating situations. By helping individuals recognize their triggers, by challenging their distorted thinking, steering them away from a situation and towards long-lasting strategies to reduce feelings and prevent outbursts.

Testimony 1

Now that she was gone I felt beside myself.
I decided to choose exercising. I hoped that might purge it, I could sweat it out, work it out. I felt my muscles tensing and releasing. I felt body obeying me and I felt reassured.
Afterwards I collapsed on the floor and masturbated.
I wondered how she was getting on. I went to the other room, only to find she had gone out.

Step 7

Evaluate the results using the solution.

- It worked? Yeah! It didn’t work? Go back to step 5 and choose a new solution to try.

Testimony 1

I watched a butterfly bouncing on the wind.
Maybe it didn’t work?
I smiled.
I enjoyed the feeling of my breath upon my upper lip for several hours.