

In the spirit of helping you to foster your own practice, here are some great tips for Focusing Alone, from Sharry's monthly email newsletter.

Center Yourself In Presence

When *Focusing* solo, it can be tempting to just plop down anywhere and begin immediately sensing for what's there. Oops! Please consider giving yourself the same luxurious attention and preparation you would offer a *Focusing* partner or friend.

Sit in a supportive, private spot (perhaps with pen and paper handy).
Take a few conscious breaths, noticing where your body feels open and comfortable. On especially busy days that can be a bit hard to find. Sensing your hands is a good place to start. Notice how your hands feel and what they are touching.

Give yourself a gentle "lead in."

One Minute Lead In (taking full deep breaths as it feels right)

I'm bringing my awareness into my body.
I'm noticing the contact I'm making with what I'm sitting on
And feeling the support that's there.
I'm letting myself relax even more deeply into that support.
As I'm ready, I bring my awareness inward,
Noticing my throat, my chest, my belly
Letting my awareness rest in that whole inner area,
I wait, wondering, "What wants my company now?"

All this will take several minutes, but (if we want the inhabitants of our inner world to feel welcome and safe) it's worth it. This physical centering establishes our Self-in-Presence - that accepting attitude of objectivity and compassion that is willing to "know it all." No judgment. It's the essential first step in making contact with something.

As I was finishing up this newsletter, I "lived" the perfect example to share. I chipped the temporary cap on my tooth. (The dentist put it on this morning and told me not to eat sticky or hard foods. She hadn't mentioned Nut-Thins *specifically*.) It happened 2 minutes before my *Focusing* partner, Nancy, called. It was her turn to *Focus*, so I briefly filled her in on my tooth worry. I was *trying* to be there with that part in me who was feeling stupid *and* the part that was calling it stupid *and* find my timer *and*....but it wasn't working. (Are you surprised?)

Nancy gently asked me, "Are you in Presence?" No. No I wasn't. We both laughed.

There you have it - the circumstances that lull us (or drive us) into skipping that essential step. No time for a lead in? Just ask yourself gently, as Nancy did, "**Am I in Presence?**" Feel your feet, feel your bottom, take a conscious breath.

And use Presence language: "I'm sensing something in me..."

Use the *Language of Presence* as a Touchstone

Sometimes when we are *Focusing* on our own, we forget the magical quality of Presence language. If we do, we're like the pianist who's forgotten the "C" scale or an artist who has forgotten red, yellow and blue.

Please take a few moments to try something with me:

Say, "I'm really stuck here," and then notice how that feels in your body.

When I say that, I feel a bit of tightness in my stomach and something scratchy in my throat.

Now say, "I'm **sensing** something that feels stuck." When I try those words, my chest opens up. I can feel more air coming in and a sense of "open." What happens for you?

I hope you can feel the difference made by those simple words, "I'm **sensing**..." If so, it won't be hard to convince you of the transformative power of that phrase.

Who or what is transformed? *You* are transformed from someone who is stuck to someone who is *with* something that feels stuck. You are bigger, maybe like a loving older sister or brother to that place that feels stuck. You are still you, of course, but the larger YOU that can be with that place.

And the stuck place? It is also transformed. Something that was alone is now receiving care and attention. It has an empathic listener.

I reminded you above of the value of centering yourself in Presence - that warm, accepting, empathic, curious YOU, that's bigger than all the partial selves we carry inside. Now I remind you to begin your solo session with the *language* of Presence, the actual words: "I'm **sensing**..." These words, used again and again as you make greater contact with what you find inside, will open more doors than abracadabra.

Listen for Bias

While *Focusing* have you had a thought like this: "That part is just too intense!" or "That part is really mean." If so, you have encountered bias, siding with one part (or partial self) against another. When you are *Focusing* alone, you can listen for bias in the language you're using or thoughts you are having.

Here's an example: my friend (I'll call her Jen) studied *Focusing* in hopes of understanding why she gets so emotional when she sees an animal in distress.

"*Focusing* just doesn't work for me," she said. "When I try *Focusing*, I always feel fine. That upset part won't come out!" We talked a bit more, and Jen expressed disappointment because she just wanted to find out what was wrong and *fix* it. She told me, "I hate feeling so emotional."

Can you see what was happening? It was another *partial self* that was bothered by those strong feelings, and Jen was merged with it. As Jen reestablishes her Self-in-Presence and turns toward the part that hates feeling emotional, she finds that *it* feels scared. As she listens, Jen learns more and more about what this part is worried about, things like being out of control and feeling ashamed.

As Jen begins to notice her bias and consistently returns to Self-in-Presence, she is setting the stage for all parts to feel safe enough to communicate.

I invite you to **listen for bias** in your solo sessions. From Self-in-Presence you might describe something as “strongly opposed.” If, instead, you are calling it “obstinate,” you can be quite sure a partial self is making that judgment.

If you believe something is too needy you might want to wonder, *Who is saying it’s “too needy?”* Self-in-Presence wouldn’t describe a part as *too* anything.

Focus on what feels good

When doing a solo *Focusing* session I usually *Focus* on what’s feeling unsettled, incomplete - maybe downright awful. Is that true for you also?

It makes sense. We are biologically programmed to notice what’s wrong. We probably have zero cave ancestors that ignored trouble. Pain, rightly, gets our attention, and *Focusing* is one of the best ways to respond when we are feeling bad.

But when the day is flowing smoothly and you are enjoying yourself, why interrupt that by pausing to *Focus*? *Focusing* is used in order to get that flow going. If we’re already there, no worries: chop wood, carry water, right?

AND yet, there is something highly rewarding in inviting good feelings to more fully unfold. Here’s an example: As I finished my favorite chocolate cake recently, I took time to sense what I was feeling in my body. After about thirty seconds I became aware of a lovely warmth. That became a feeling of comfort flowing through my whole body. This was different from the pleasure I’d had from the taste of the cake - related but much more full-bodied and deeply satisfying.

It doesn’t have to be chocolate. Try *Focusing* with sunsets, Bach, or your child’s sleeping face. Embodied Life teacher, Russell Delman, reminds us that we are receiving a “constant shower of blessings.” *Focusing* on these blessings can add great richness to our life.

----PART TWO---

Focus Spontaneously!

Last Friday, unexpectedly, I had forty-five minutes free and realized I could write this month’s Solo *Focusing* tip. But instead of feeling a sense of “Yes!” I found something in me pulling away in panic.

This was the perfect situation for me to *Focus* spontaneously.

I took a minute to really sense the contact I was making with my chair and feel my feet on the rug. Aah. Now I could feel myself as larger than the issue.

I checked: is *panic* just the right word? No. It was more like *anxious excitement*. Starting to write was like starting a new grade in school, interesting but scary.

It took only a few minutes to listen and be with that scared place. By taking the time to *Focus*, there was a real shift in my feelings. I enjoyed writing this month's e-zine rather than struggling with something that needed to be heard.

As soon as you become aware of something - panic, glee, anger, sadness, or any emotion strong enough to grab your attention - consider taking a few minutes, right then, to *Focus*.

Actively choose to *Focus* solo

"It appears to me that we often think of solo Focusing as something we do, or can do, when we don't have a partner available. In other words, that it is a second-best alternative to Focusing with a partner. I prefer to think of it as focusing with the difference. Here, too, a felt sense can guide us... 'Do I want to Focus alone, or do I want to Focus with a partner?'"

The observation above by Charles Herr (a Focusing Oriented Psychotherapist and Director of Psychological Services at Gouverneur Healthcare Services) got me wondering about how we decide to Focus alone.

What draws you to choose a solo session?

Perhaps you can go deeper without a time limit?

Or the element of complete privacy appeals to you in this situation?

You might not know why you want to work solo; you just know that it feels right?

I often choose to Focus solo because, working on my own, I enjoy a sense of self-reliance. And since considering Charles's statement, I've started to more actively choose myself as my Focusing companion. Something in me really likes that.

But what about those times when you might answer, "I want to Focus with a partner, but one isn't available." I suggest you say "hello" to the place that might be missing another person's company. "It" might need some special props, perhaps a picture of someone you love placed in view of your Focusing spot. When "It" has been fully heard, you may find something inside says a definite "Yes!" to your solo session.

Overwhelmed? Try taking inventory

I was feeling a vague sense of anxiety and overwhelm. I couldn't say exactly what was troubling me but I most certainly was *not* in the Flow Lane! Here is what I did that helped.

I began by sensing my feet on the floor. Since I was barefoot, I could feel the texture of the rug. Hmm. Nice. Then I noticed the contact I was making with my chair under me and behind me. I sensed my breathing. I was already feeling more settled. What I did next was a variation on Gene Gendlin's suggestions for clearing a space. I call it taking inventory.

I got my paper and pen. Since I knew most of what was pressuring me, I began this way: "There's that whole thing about my back," I said (out loud) and drew a box on my paper. In it I wrote "back." I took a moment to feel it in my body - something concerned about my back - and give that place heartfelt acknowledgment. Then the next one: "There is that whole thing about X not having time to hear me." Again I wrote this on the paper and took a bit of

time to feel it and acknowledge it.

I continued this way, listing each issue (there were eight!) until I felt complete.

I ended by thanking my body, which now felt comfortable and clear. I had a good list of items to work on in a more formal *Focusing* session, and I felt ready to move forward into my afternoon.

When You Can't Find Presence

Sometimes we feel so stuck that being in Presence is not even an option. Or at least it feels that way to the unhappy (or angry) part with which we are identified.

This happened to me recently. All I wanted to do was go to bed.

My teacher, Russell Delman, says that even if our awareness is as thin as a piece of paper, it can be all we need. In my case it was time for a scheduled Focusing exchange (my session). I didn't even want to do *that*, but there was that paper thin awareness saying, "Do your session." At some deep level "I" was awake.

In my case this sliver of awareness led to doing Focusing as scheduled, which shifted the energies inside. But what if you have no Focusing partner? Write this down: **Presence is there even when you are not in touch with it.** Ask for Inner help even when you doubt. Wait. Listen for the moment when you have a glimpse of *any* next positive step. Perhaps it is an impulse to take a walk. Or the phone rings and you make the conscious decision to answer and talk with a friend. Presence has many ways of reaching out to us.

Notice If You Have An Agenda

My friend Angela called recently about her solo session. The topic of her session had been "not wanting to clean the house." She said she had ended with a list of things that would make cleaning more fun and interesting (since she had to do it). She wanted to know what I thought about all that. Since she asked, I said:

1. She could take each suggestion and sense how it felt in her body. Thoughts or ideas *can* be part of Focusing as next steps. AND...
2. The Focusing process is about listening to all parts of us, not about changing them.

As we talked further Angela realized that she had gone into the session expecting to pick up her dust wand and magically love cleaning. One part of her just wanted that feeling of dislike to go away.

We discussed how the value of Focusing is not in having things go the way some part of us wants it to go. The value is in creating a listening, caring relationship to all parts of ourselves: the part that wants the house clean *and* the part that doesn't enjoy the process. There may even be more.

Angela then remembered a thought about feeling guilty and perhaps punishing herself for not earning any outside income. She decided that she had not finished listening fully to that "whole thing" about cleaning the house. Now that she was aware of her previous agenda, she was ready to listen without one.

