

The Logosynthesis® Method¹ for processing fear and trauma

Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) has by now found its place in mental healthcare. The Dutch Trimbos-institute, that distributes scientific knowledge in mental healthcare industries, calls EMDR “one of the most likely intervention candidates for PTSS” in a survey with guidelines for treatment of anxiety disorders (Velde, 2003). The Logosynthesis® method, of which the effect is comparable to EMDR, is far less known. Ineke Kersten, Logosynthesis practitioner and trainer, tells about this effective method to treat fear and trauma.

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Two months ago, Mrs. de Jong² has suffered a heart attack and is now recovering in hospital. She is referred to me by the physiotherapist because her recovery has stagnated. She tells me that she is still scared and that because of that, among other things, she's fearful of driving her car. She imagines herself being chased by an ambulance with screaming sirens whilst driving. At home too, she regularly hears ambulances drive past. Because of all this, she keeps reliving the moment of the heart attack, lying in the ambulance, sirens screaming, on her way to hospital. After a few more questions, she indicates that the sound of the sirens causes more fear for her than actually seeing an ambulance drive past. I apply Logosynthesis to 'this sound of screaming sirens'. The next session she tells me that she's driving again and that she's happy to be able to get places.

What happened in the presented case? In Mrs. de Jong's case it was a single, obtrusive occurrence over a very acute situation of life and death. In such acute situations of survival, we often see people temporarily quell their emotions. Later on, when the acute situation has passed, these emotions resurface, 'come back to life'. Feeling scared as a reaction to a life-threatening situation is a normal phenomenon. What isn't, is these emotions controlling and restricting everyday life, as happened with Mrs. de Jong. The acute situation has long since passed, yet the fierce violent emotions stay. This is called trauma, among other things, because of the reliving of the event, the flashbacks, the avoidance and the *arousal*.

Emotions as byproducts

In Logosynthesis all these physical, emotional and behavioral reactions, with the accompanying limiting thoughts are considered 'merely' reactions to an aggravating situation. We never delve into these. Clients always start their story with these, and it's a good way to build a working relationship, to make contact and acknowledge the burden the client experiences. In Logosynthesis reactions aren't the focal point, instead focus lies on sensory perceptions. Emotions are byproducts of the activation of old perceptions. That takes some getting used to for us relief workers. For we are used to delve into emotions and thoughts. Logosynthesis leaves these for what they are and goes in search of the damaging trigger, the cause that leads to these reactions.

Identify – localize – neutralize

When suffering from a trauma, clients experience a situation, with accompanying reactions, as if it is still a current event. In finding the trigger we ask how these people experience said situation in the here and now. The threatening event has passed, yet they still perceive something, to which they react. What do they see happening, what do they hear, taste, smell or feel? All senses tell us something about the reliving of the trauma. You name this trigger, as in Mrs. de Jong's case 'the sound of screaming sirens', whereupon you ask where this sound originates: from the left, from the right, from the back or front, from above or below? Mrs. De Jong saw the ambulance in her imagination in the rearview mirror, so to the back, with flashing blue lights and she hears the sound of sirens. These sounds of sirens incite the most tension in her. Finally, you let your client rate the burden of the trigger, on a scale of zero to ten: 0 = no burden at all and 10 = it can't get any worse.

¹ Translated by Suzanne Bakker

² This is not her real name.

The specific Logosynthesis-work is done by speaking the three Logosynthesis-sentences. If people want, they can close their eyes. This helps them focus on the words you offer and they repeat. After the sentences you have them drink water. Mrs. De Jong spoke the following sentences, while she imagined the sound of sirens approaching her from the back:

1. I retrieve all of my energy, bound up in the sound of sirens behind me, and return it to the right place within myself in the here and now.
2. I remove all energy that does not belong to me associated with this sound of sirens behind me out of all my cells, all my bodies and my personal space and send that energy to wherever it truly belongs.
3. I retrieve all of my energy, bound up in all of my reactions to this sound of sirens behind me and return it to the right place within myself in the here and now.

After saying these sentences, you ask in a neutral tone of voice: what happens when you speak these sentences? Or: what are you experiencing now? In Mrs. de Jong's case: what are you hearing now? Usually the perception has changed, or a new sense has been brought to the forefront. The score of the burden, expressed in a number between zero and ten, can be rated higher afterwards, according to this changed perception. Then you name the new trigger and again have your client repeat the three sentences, with the adjusted trigger.

If the score has been reduced to zero, work for this specific trigger is done. Sometimes earlier traumatic experiences resurface, often linked to the previously treated trigger. If this happens, you keep on working with this new situation. You find the trigger – identify –, you ask where someone perceives this situation in their space – localize –, you have them rate it and speak the sentences with the client – neutralize.

Letting go of the past

Traumatic events can freeze our (energetic) system. Past, present and future have become indistinguishable from one another. By applying Logosynthesis we can literally and figuratively let go of the past and put it behind us. This letting go is often instantly visible in clients that let the sentences do their job. They might yawn, or have a shift in posture, their cheeks may become flushed.

When debriefing, ask your clients how they imagine the future, now that the burden of the trigger has been lessened or neutralized. Clients often have extraordinary statements. Limiting beliefs have changed, they behold the situation or other person with a wider view, and feel more open to react in a different, more appropriate way. Neutralizing aggravating memories to facts that happened; the memories are no longer charged, thereby diminishing or ending emotions, limiting thoughts and physical reactions to said memories.

Magic

Logosynthesis isn't magic, but is firmly grounded and points us therapists and people in general to reality. Reality isn't always nice to face, but will get you further than clinging to wishes, expectations, fantasies and all sorts of other limiting beliefs. Logosynthesis allows one to perceive the here and now as it is and react in an appropriate fashion. It is a beautiful model, a very effective, efficient tool in any therapist's toolbox. It is easily passed on to clients, so they may apply it at home on smaller themes.

Exercise

Imagine a person with whom you don't feel comfortable. What physical and emotional reactions does this entice? And which thoughts or convictions does this person call forth in you? Rate this burden on a scale between zero and ten (0 = no burden at all and 10 = it can't get any worse).

Now work out what exactly it is in this person that causes tension in you. Is it something you see (facial expressions, body language), hear (what this person says, how someone talks), smell (body odor, aftershave) taste or feel in/around this person. And where in this space do you perceive this person: to your front or back, around you, left or right, above or below you? How far away or close by do you perceive this person?

'Name' or 'label' this trigger that you perceive. Try to name that specific thing of this person, that causes tension in you (not just 'Tracy' or 'father', but for example '... dark eyes'). While you perceive this person, say the three Logosynthesis-sentences. Give every sentence time to do its job, drink water between sentences. You don't need to understand the sentences; it's all about the speaking of them. Speaking them is what makes it work.

1. I retrieve all of my energy, bound up in ..., and return it to the right place within myself in the here and now.
2. I remove all energy that does not belong to me associated with this ... out of all my cells, all my bodies and my personal space and send that energy to wherever it truly belongs.
3. I retrieve all of my energy, bound up in all of my reactions to this ... and return it to the right place within myself in the here and now.

Determine after these three sentences how big the burden of perceiving this person now is. If the burden has dropped to zero, you can conclude the exercise; the reaction to this perception has been neutralized. If it hasn't you proceed by determining the next trigger: what are you perceiving with which sense? And where in this space am I perceiving it? Thereupon you repeat the sentences, with a newly formulated trigger.

Finally, ask yourself, how will it be if I encounter this person again: what would happen? Has anything changed?

References

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