

Working with Emptiness

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Emptiness may be defined as a generalized feeling of apathy, boredom, and social alienation. It is often accompanied by dysthymia, depression, hopelessness, or feelings of intense loneliness. It is the total of embarrassing and painful experiences and frustrations containing what is negative of the personality. The feeling of emptiness is part of the natural process of grief.

There are different types of emptiness depending on the disorder presented. Clinicians who learn to differentiate and work with the emptiness using EMDR make a big difference and are able to offer good integrative work that gets to the origin of the symptoms.

Many people feel emptiness, research has found that even non clinical population feel empty in different moments of life. There are special clinical populations that relate to emptiness in a particular way such as Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and some eating disorders (ED). In BPD, the feeling of emptiness is so devastating that people resort to all kinds of destructive behaviors in an attempt to fill it up. In ED, emptiness may be confusing, since clients may not be able to distinguish between a feeling of emptiness related to hunger and an emotional emptiness, thus resorting to food to fill it up and soothe it.

But, what is behind the feeling of emptiness? What is it connected to? In many cases, the emptiness contains everything that the person is unable to see or assume. To delve into the emptiness is to delve into the pain of what the person cannot accept, that with which is hard to connect.

Recognize and know emptiness may help us understand and effectively treat one of the most persistent symptoms in BPD and one that increases the resistance to behavioral change in EDs.

Learning objectives:

1. Participants will learn to identify and recognize the feeling of emptiness and the different dysfunctional strategies they try to get rid of it.
2. Participants will learn to differentiate and work with the different types of emptiness and apply the right treatment of each one.
3. Participants will learn specific psychoeducation to help patients understand emptiness and its origin.
4. Participants will learn the relationship between emptiness and dissociation.
5. Participants will learn to conceptualize the work with the emptiness and move it towards the processing of different related traumas.
6. Participants will be able to describe the integrative outcome of working with the emptiness in therapy.

Program

Understanding the Feelings of Emptiness

- What do we mean when we talk about feelings of emptiness
 - What causes it
 - How does it manifest itself
 - Feeling of inner emptiness
 - Need for others to fill the void
- Dysfunctional compensations to fill the void
 - Consumption of substances
 - Problems with eating
 - Self-harm
 - Dysfunctional sexual behaviour
 - Abuse of new technologies
 - Compulsive shopping
 - Persistent search for interpersonal relationships

How to Identify Emptiness

- Difference between fertile and sterile emptiness; normality versus pathology
- The vacuum in the different disorders:
 - Emptiness in BPD
 - Emptiness in Eating Disorders
 - Emptiness and dissociation
- Characteristic beliefs that accompany emptiness and help therapists recognise it

Intervention, how to work with Emptiness

- Psychoeducation for dealing with emptiness
 - a. Feeling empty inside
 - b. When others are expected to fill the void
- How to work with emptiness
 - a. Identifying the void
 - b. Naming the void
 - c. Adverse experiences and trauma that make up the void
 - d. Parts that may be involved in emptiness
 - e. Emotions that trigger emptiness
 - f. Processing the void
 - g. How to integrate the void