

Reframing Faith After Trauma

Using Cognitive Processing Therapy Adaptations

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Faith & PTSD

- For those who have a faith system, any trauma, occurring within one's faith system or unrelated will impact one's view of God and the faith system.
- Addressing spiritual beliefs in PTSD work can help clients make healthier meaning of their trauma (Park, 2005).
- Developing cognitive flexibility after trauma has been shown to help clients endure with God (Exline, 2002; McCann & Webb, 2012).

Faith & PTSD

- The goal of addressing faith related stuck points is to help clients return to their previous level of functioning with their faith; including how they see God, themselves, and how they participate in their faith system.
- For many, addressing trauma and how it impacted their faith, enhances and deepens their faith.

Just World and Faith World Belief

- Basic Just World Belief- Good things happen to good people; bad things happen to bad people.
- Faith World Belief- Beliefs about God and what happens to His faithful followers.
 - May be part of faith tradition-taught directly or implied
 - Often over-simplified/misinterpreted versions
 - Unspoken/subconscious prior to trauma
 - Fiercely protected, defended, or denied

The shattering of Faith World Belief results in “Faith Quakes”

Trauma Shatters Faith World Beliefs

'Faith Quakes' may cause:

- Confusion
- Doubts
- Withdrawal
- Anger

These are disturbing because they threaten:

- Core identity
- Eternal destiny
- Social system

Responses to Shattering of Faith World Beliefs

Exploring options with clients

1. Fake it
2. Walk away

If neither is acceptable to client, use Socratic questioning...

3. Wrestle

Clients almost always choose option 3.

Faith Stuck Points

- Faith related stuck points can be about the why of the trauma—blaming God
- Faith related stuck points can also fall into any of the five modules within CPT: safety, trust, power & control, intimacy and esteem.

The Five Modules

- Safety-belief about ability to protect oneself, dangerousness of others, assumptions about intent of others to injure
- Trust-relying on own judgments, belief that the promise of others is reliable
- Power/Control-sense of self-efficacy to solve problems, belief in ability to control others or future events
- Esteem-sense of self-worth as well as the worth of others
- Intimacy-belief in capacity to care for one's own emotional needs, soothe oneself, be alone, and make emotional connections with others.

Modules Overview

- Basic Goal of CPT- Return to level of prior functioning
- Additional Goal-Post Traumatic Growth
- Special Considerations about Faith-Related Stuck points
 - Deeply held and wrapped up in core identity.
 - Resistant to challenge.
 - Beneath conscious awareness.
 - Must be handled with gentleness, patience, and respect.

Elements of each module

Each of these Five Modules addresses the following issues:

- Prior beliefs about self, others, God
- Prior experience
- Associated symptoms
- Stuck points
- Possible Resolutions or reframe for the stuck points

Tasks of the Therapist

- Build a strong therapeutic alliance
- Learn about and respect the client's theology
- Help clients explore incongruent, over-simplified, or extreme beliefs.
- Gently encourage and support clients as they wrestle

Case Example: Sally

- Young Adult female from Christian background
- Presenting Trauma: Raped on a first date
- Historical Trauma: molested as child by relative
- PCL-5: 69

Case Example: Sally

Previous Beliefs

- God is good.
- God causes all things to happen.
- If you make good choices to follow God's plan, good things will happen to you.
- God uses people who make good choices.

Faith Stuck Points

- God wants me to suffer.
- It happened because I am being punished for my sins.
- It was God's will so there was nothing I could do to stop it.
- If I had been more faithful to God this wouldn't have happened.
- It was inevitable. God told me it would happen.
- I can never be used by God because I am dirty.

Case Example: Susie

- Middle Age female whose father was a pastor. Childhood abuse for not being the “perfect pastor’s daughter” and Dad’s fear of losing his job because of her.
- Presenting Trauma- Raped at age 16 by church deacon

Case Example: Susie

Previous Beliefs

- God is a mean judge, not a loving father
- I am bad and deserved to be punished
- I have to perfect for the benefit of God and others
- I am not allowed to have needs or feelings

Faith Stuck Points

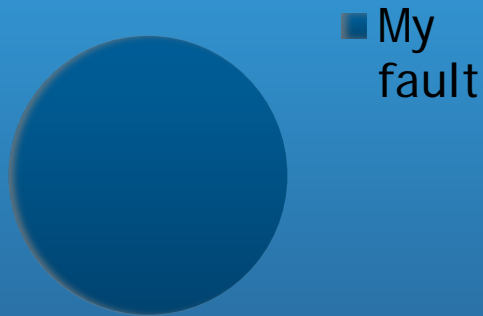
- All Church leaders are abusive
- I caused the bad things to happen by not being perfect.
- My needs don't matter
- I have to do what others want me to because I don't matter.

Understanding the Client's Beliefs

- Before working on Faith Related Stuck Points, it is important to gather information about what the client's previous faith beliefs were.
- Helpful Questions:
 - 1) What did you believe about God's role in causing/allowing events to occur before your trauma?
 - 2) What did you believe about God's nature (good vs. punitive)
 - 3) What did you believe about God's heart toward you before the trauma?
 - 4) What did your faith offer you before your trauma?

Responsibility Pie Case Example

Stuck Point



Factors Leading to the Rape



Responsibility Pie Questions

- Helpful questions:
 - Where is God's/Higher Power's role in the responsibility pie you made?
 - What or who else may play a role in the trauma according to *your* faith system?
 - Common answers:
 - Role of evil
 - Consequences of sin

Addressing the Role of “Evil”

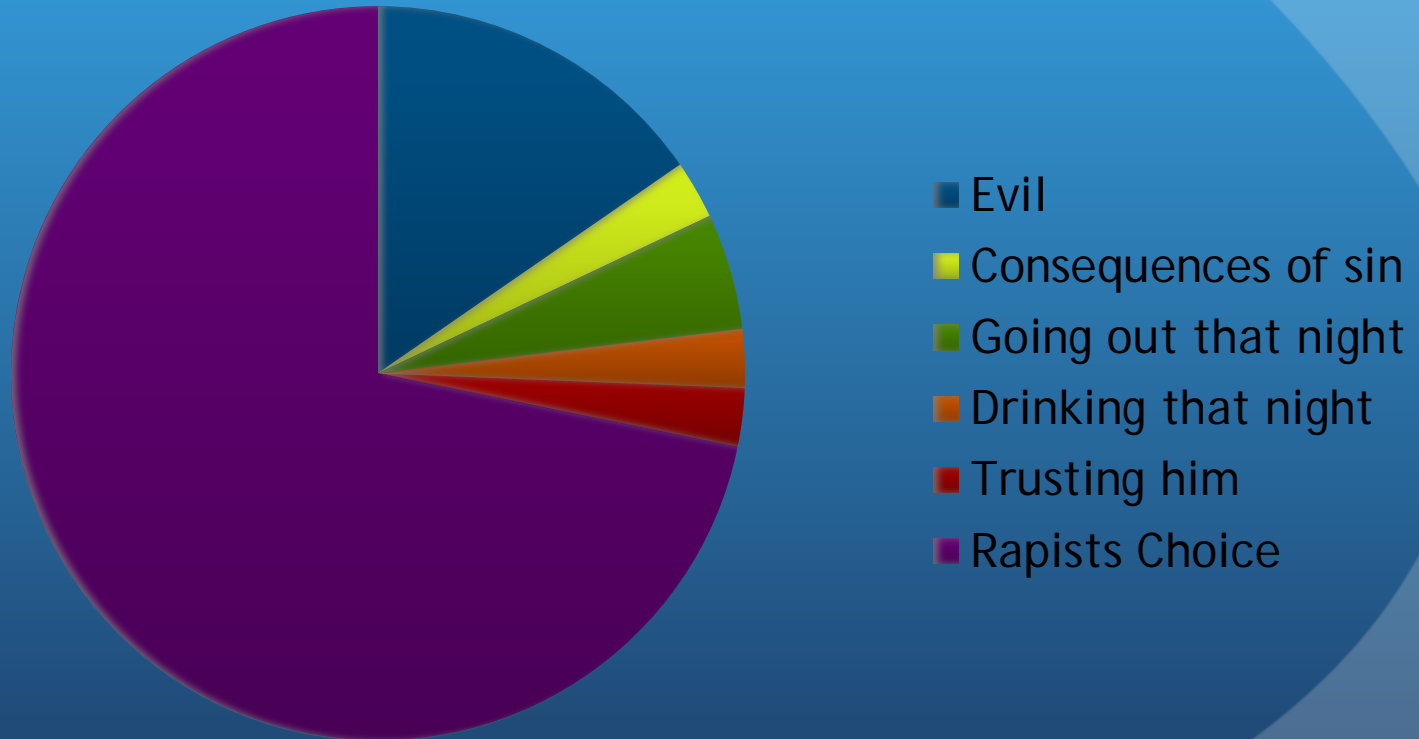
- For those who do identify through the responsibility pie the role of “evil” as a causative factor in their trauma, it may be helpful to discuss the difference between the will of evil vs. the will of God *according to their faith system*.
- Reflect back on their previous beliefs.
 - If they believed God was good, did God change? Or did trauma interrupt their view of God?

Addressing the Idea of Consequences of Sin/Wrong Doing:

- Allow the client to add consequences of sin to their pie, as fighting against this can create yet another “faith quake” for them.
- However, it will only be a “slice” of the pie—as normal have them assign a new percentage that fits in with all the other “slices” of their responsibility pie
- Helpful question- “Do all people who commit this particular sin, experience this specific consequence?”

Updated Responsibility Pie

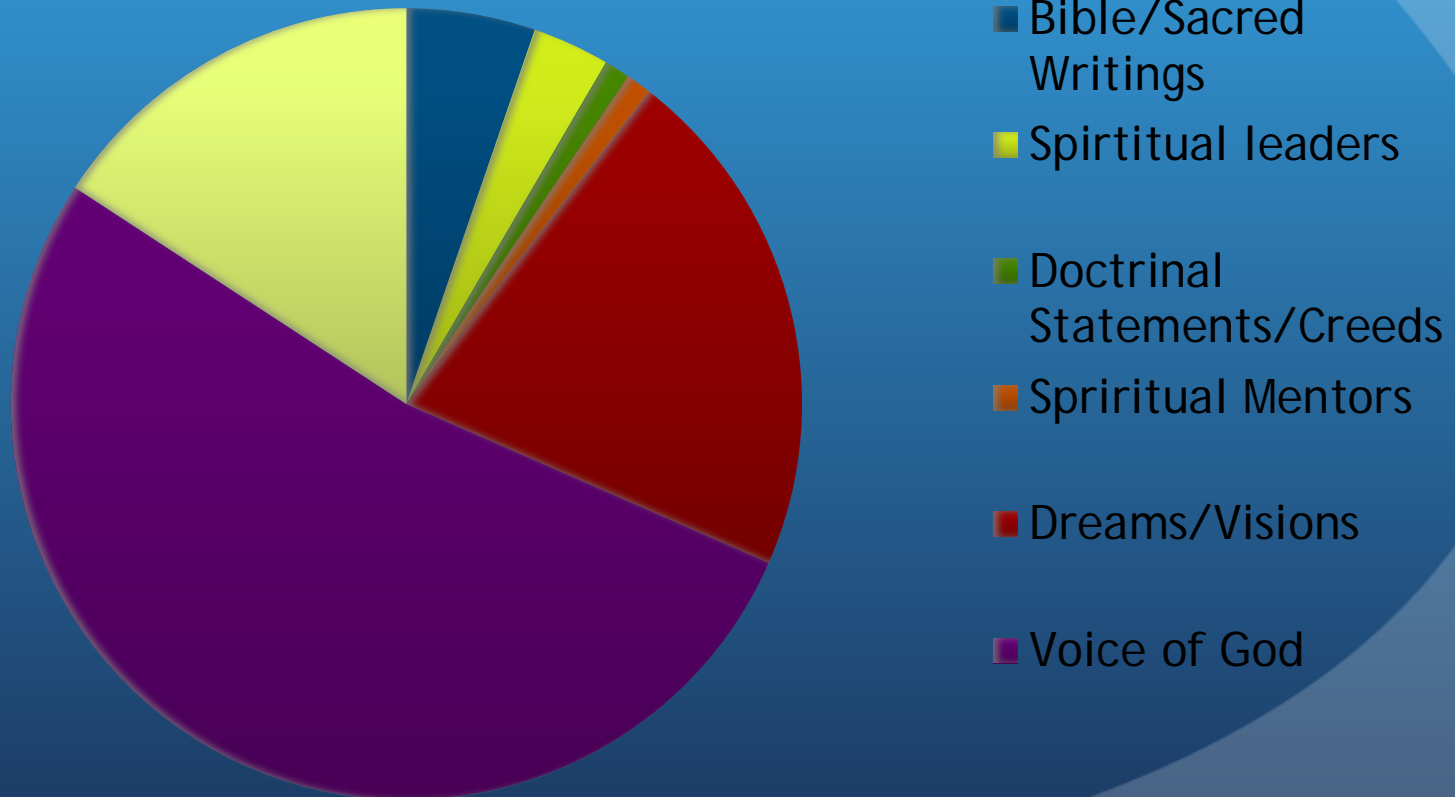
Factors



Challenging Prior Beliefs and Stuck Points

- Step One- Identify Sources of Truth

Sources of Truth



Find Evidence For & Against

- Step Two- Research
 - Interviews
 - Read books and articles on the topic
 - Scriptural search
 - Read doctrinal statements/creeds
 - Read biographies of spiritual leaders
- Step Three- New ideas
 - Notice any new ideas they read/heard on the topic
 - Incorporate new ideas when appropriate

Where Does it Come From?

- Helpful Questions to Challenge the source of the stuck points:
 - Where did this thought come from?— “God”
 - Your family's interpretation of your faith system?
 - Your church?
 - Your denomination?
 - The bible?
 - Your trauma's interpretation of God/faith system?
- Is it possible to wrestle with this and see if you add flexibility to your belief?

Coping Prayers

- Active Coping Prayers are shown to reduce anxiety when recovering from trauma or stress (Harris, Schoneman, & Carrera, 2002).
- Active Coping Prayers are prayers where one asks God to help them as they cope with the trauma. This pairs well with healthy power/control thoughts, as it asks the client and God to work together to effect the outcome.
- Examples:
 - "God/Allah/Higher Power help me to focus as I work on my CBWs today."
 - God/Allah/Higher Power help me to see and focus on the truth as I work on my stuck points."

Sally—Follow up

- Believes the rape was caused by the rapist and “evil” and was not God’s will.
- Believes God loves her and has good plans for her future and does not need her to suffer, but she may experience suffering as a natural part of life.
- Began to see the trauma was used to help her grow and be compassionate with others.
- Believes that she will be used by God and started a non-profit to help others.
- Re-engaged with friends, trying out churches, and regularly grooming.
- PCL-19, a 50 point reduction

Susie Follow Up

- Beginning to believe early trauma may have distorted her view of God.
- Researching evidence for and against her belief that God is only a harsh judge.
- Now believes her needs matter (75% true)
- When recently faced with choice to accept grave injustice or set boundaries to protect her self, she chose to set boundaries, reporting she would have never even thought of that option before CPT.
- PCL-5 scored reduced to 20, a 48 point reduction.

Summary

- Trauma deeply impacts one's view and experience of God and/or their personal faith system.
- CPT and faith related adoptions can not only help clients return to their previous level of functioning within their faith system, these can actually help deepen and enhance one's faith and/or relationship with God.

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