

Emotional Freedom Techniques:
Tapping with Adolescents in a School Setting

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Abstract

Adolescents are expected to participate effectively in school and learn the skills needed to become a constructive member of society after graduation. However, there are many things such as problem behaviors or emotions that can get in the way of a student's learning. Interventions are needed in the school system to provide immediate relief of these feelings. School counselors do not have much time with students before they are expected to get back to learning. The Emotional Freedom Technique of tapping with self-affirming statements has been found to be an effective therapeutic technique in the reduction of negative emotions. The process of tapping includes addressing the current emotion which will activating the energy disturbance in the body and the client will then performing repetitive tapping on different points while speaking a self-affirming statement. Through this process, students can explore their emotions, leading to the removal of any energy disturbances that may be causing distress. Tapping can be taught and performed quickly resulting in immediate and long-lasting relief of negative emotion. By using this technique in school, students will be able to return to classes and learn more effectively and confidently.

Keywords: Tapping, Emotional Freedom Techniques, School Counselor, and Emotions

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Emotional Freedom Techniques:

Tapping with Adolescents in a School Setting

While at school, students are expected to learn valuable information they can use to become a productive and profitable member of society. However, sometimes their ability to learn is hindered due to social, emotional or behavioral stressors. These stressors have the potential to generate feelings of disengagement from school as well as potential to engage in high-risk behaviors. Approximately 30 percent of high school students engage in multiple high-risk behaviors, such as substance use, sex, violence, depression, attempted suicide, etc., that interfere with school performance and jeopardize their potential for life success (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor & Schellinger, 2011). Other behaviors and emotions that might arise during school are bullying, anger, low self-worth, family stress, academic performance, general emotional distress and many more. The symptom severity fluctuates on a student-by-student basis, but each emotion has the potential to have a great impact on his or her ability to learn while at school.

Support systems and interventions are needed for students in the school system. School counselors can and should promote students' social and emotional development. One way to facilitate effective therapy as a school counselor is through the Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) of tapping while using self-affirming statements. Through this process, students can explore their emotions, leading to the removal of any energy disturbances that may be causing distress.

Literature Review

Negative emotions can influence overall emotional and behavioral problems in adolescents (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve & Coulter, 2011). These emotional and behavioral

problems can relate to school success and have a large impact on a students' ability to learn or make friends. School is a unique setting in that children have the potential to receive mental health attention, assuming the school has a counselor, social worker, or therapist offering support to his or her school in some way. It is important to note that some schools may have more support than others. However, students have the ability to seek out support in times of need. This resource has the potential to provide effective therapy to enable adolescents to seek help in time of need and be sent back to class with the ability to focus and learn, which is the ultimate goal of school. Sometimes there are problems with emotions or behaviors that inhibit a student from learning and this paper will explore a type of therapy that can be used with those adolescents. This therapy would teach the students' to recognize and regulate his or her emotions.

School Related Concerns in Adolescents

A number of problems can arise while a student is in school, or even at home, that can leave a student feeling strong emotions during the school day. Garnefski and Diekstra (1996) reported that factors such as lack of parental support, peer rejection or disliking school have unfavorable effects on an adolescent's well being. Adolescents with both problematic peer relationships and a low relationship with his or her parents demonstrated the highest level of delinquency later in life (Garnefski & Diekstra, 1996). Relationships aren't the only concern with adolescents, but are a large one especially because clients are developing a sense of self and strengths of relationships can influence self-esteem during this time.

Bullying is another school related concern that can largely impact how a student feels while at school. Sexual orientation has consistently been linked to school bullying (Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve & Coulter, 2011). Victims of school bullying report lower school performance and school attachment demonstrating that the occurrence of bullying can be related

to psychological concerns (Schneider et al., 2011). Prevention methods are needed to address bullying and its relationship to school performance and ability to increase overall mental health and well-being. Bullying experiences also have the ability to have a connection to overall academic success due to problems of concentration and self-worth.

One final category of school related concerns addressed in this paper include high-risk behaviors. Alcohol consumption and early initiation of sexual intercourse can have devastating consequences for adolescents. Aspy et al. (2012) have shown that, “school is very much a part of the lives of youth and therefore the relationship they have with their school experience is important and may influence their involvement in high-risk behaviors” (p. 4). Feeling connected to school can help to protect youth from these high-risk behaviors. A couple of themes existed within the potential school related concerns: negative emotions, social relationships and the feeling of school connectedness.

Role of the School Counselor

A school counselor has the ability to be a “first responder” in cases where it has been recognized that a student has experienced strong negative emotions, poor support within relationships and low school connectedness. This recognition can come in the form of self-referral, teacher or staff member referral or another outside source. Regardless of who made the referral, it is required that the counselor offers his or her support in some form of counseling.

Counselors offer social support through praise, empathy, and attention in a clear and consistent manner. This is a precursor to a sense of belonging, which leads to increased engagement and academic motivation (Aspy et al., 2012). Higher levels of school connectedness can decrease high-risk behaviors, but there are cases where a relationship alone will not be

enough to create change and therefore EFTs can be used to regulate and change negative emotions into positive, constructive emotions.

Emotional Freedom Technique Development

EFT is a technique that works with the body's energy system as well as the mind. The process of EFT as a therapeutic technique began in 1970 and was developed after George Goodheart explored clinical observations regarding clients' muscles as an indicator of states of health and sickness in the body (Mollon, 2007). Tapping emerged from information on acupuncture. Dr. John Diamond joined Goodheart's group and began to explore the connection between stimulating a particular acupuncture median and uttering particular emotional affirmations. This result was that the client would experience relief from the distress that moments before had troubled them (Mollon, 2007). Fox (2013) reported that Psychiatrist Dr. Callahan extended this theory further and formed Thought Field Therapy (TFT) because it appeared that a person's thought is expressed not only in the mind, but also in informational energy fields that can be assessed through the traditional meridians known in acupuncture.

At this time in the 1980's Callahan was the only therapist practicing this therapy and it is important to note that this theory was not based on theory, but on observations of reality (Mollon, 2007). Gary Craig, a professional performance coach, used Dr. Callahan's techniques to launch EFT in the form of a free manual and inexpressive training materials through his website. This manual provides a simplified universal tapping sequence for every problem (Craig, 2011).

Emotions

Gonick (2015) reported that all of our negative emotions, like anxiety, hurt, anger, shame and so on, are related to meridians within our energy system. These energy disturbances are

linked to memories of painful events. It is not the memory itself that is painful, but yet how that memory is experienced. Once a client thinks of a memory, the energy disturbance is activated and therefore an experience of a negative, painful emotion. EFT works by intentionally activating this energy disturbance though purposefully thinking of a painful memory or feeling. Once these emotions are activated, tapping begins in order to clear out the energy disturbance. Once cleared, negative emotions will be gone (Gonick, 2015). This technique is long lasting and clients have the ability to think about the memory or experience with no painful emotional reaction.

Tapping Procedure

As mentioned, there are ten acupuncture points that must be learned to increase effectiveness of EFT: top of the head, eyebrow, side of eye, under eye, under nose, chin, collarbone, under arm, inside of the wrist, and the outside of the pinkie which is called the karate chop point (Gonick, 2015). These ten points address all 14 meridians because some points are located at an intersection of two points. During the tapping procedure, all points are tapped. This is helpful because then it is not necessary to know which specific meridian is connected to a specific behavior.

Tapping takes a few minutes to learn and each round can be performed in under a minute (Mercola, 2015). While it is important to tap the correct area, there is not a large need to be absolutely precise, as tapping the general area is sufficient. Tapping is done with the client's fingers. Which fingers are used can vary based on therapist recommendation, but there is no need to be consistent every time. However, often an index and middle finger are used (Gonick, 2015). It is important to use fingertips, not finger pads as there is more meridians. If a client has long

fingernails, finger pads should be used. It is also important to tap solidly, but not so that it hurts. The client should hear a “thunk” noise.

Each outlined tapping point will be tapped 5-7 times, with the actual number not being especially critical as long as the client can say his or her affirming statement a couple times. The time spent tapping should also be the equivalent of one full breath (Mercola, 2015). The order of the tapping points preceded down the body to allow clients more ease in memorizing the process. Mercola (2015) reported that unlike TFT, the exact sequence of the tapping points is not especially critical as long as all are covered.

Although the tapping point does not need to be exact, the location is important and needs to be explained in more detail. Different researchers have different methods and locations as to what the important tapping points are and Mercola (2015) reports the following critical tapping areas. When tapping on the Top of the Head (TP), both hands are used and fingers are back to back down the center of the skull. The next step is Eyebrow tapping (EB), tapping on one eyebrow with each hand. Side of the Eye (SE) is next and involves tapping on the bone bordering the outside corner of the eye. Tapping on the bone Under the Eye (UE) is next followed by tapping on the small area between the bottom of the nose and the top of the client’s upper lip, referred to as Under the Nose (UN). Next is the Chin (Ch), which can be found at the midpoint between the chin and lower lip. This concludes the tapping points located on the face.

The remaining four tapping points are located throughout the rest of the body. The Collar Bone (CB) is the next tapping point and can be located where the sternum, collarbone and rib first meet. About four inches below the armpit is the next tapping point and is referred to as Under the Arm (UA). The client’s Wrists (WR) can be tapped using the inside of his or her other wrist. The last point to tap is on the pinky side of your hand and is called the Karate Chop (KC).

After the client has learned the location of each tapping point, the next step is to learn the affirmation statement that is correlated with the tapping.

EFT Affirmations Statements

Current emotional problems are due to painful experiences and therefore to really heal the problems in your life is to apply EFT to the source of these problems. Besides working with past memories, EFT can be effective in working with current difficult emotions, food and substance cravings, physical pain and many other problems (Gonick, 2015). “Psychological reversal is caused by self-defeating, negative thinking,” (Craig, 2011, p. 20) which often occurs subconsciously and outside a person’s awareness. The affirmation statement can help to reverse this negative thinking. Statements include addressing the emotion or memory as well as a positive statement about the client. An example could be, “Even though I have this fear of public speaking, I deeply and completely accept myself, (Mercola, 2015, p. 4). It is helpful for the client to be involved in the developing of the affirmation statement and a large number of options are available as long as it addressed the problem and creates self-acceptance despite existence of the problem.

Craig (2011) reported interesting findings in conjunction with the affirmation statements. One example is that a client does not even have to believe the affirmation, as long as they say it. Secondly, it is better to say it with feeling and emphasis, but saying it in a routine manner is also effective. Lastly, it is best to say the affirmation out loud. However, if the client is in a social situation where tapping would be effective, the affirmation may be said silently or under his or her breath and still be effective. Fox (2013) reported that the vocalization of self-affirming statements could be the primary cause of the positive effects in EFT.

The Gamut Procedure

There is a nine step Gamut Procedure that involves eye movement, humming and counting. This is not always used with EFT, but is sometimes used to stimulate certain parts of the brain (Craig, 2011). This process should last about ten seconds and nine actions are performed while continually tapping on the Gamut point, which is located on the back of either hand and is half an inch behind the knuckles of the ring and little finger. As mentioned, this step is not always required, but can enhance the probability of emotional freedom. Craig (2011) defined the nine actions in the Gamut Procedure as:

1. Eyes closed.
2. Eyes open.
3. Eyes hard down right, while holding head steady.
4. Eyes hard down left while holding head steady.
5. Roll eyes in a circle as though your nose was at the center of a clock and you were trying to see all the numbers in order.
6. Same as #5 only reverse the direction in which your eyes roll.
7. Hum 2 seconds of a song.
8. Count rapidly from 1 to 5.
9. Hum 2 seconds of a song again.

These nine actions can be done in this order, but do not have to as long as 7, 8 and 9 are always performed as a unit. Also note that the song the client chooses to hum should not create resistance and bring up separate negative memories. In conclusion, the process of EFT should start with the general sequence of tapping with an affirming statement, the Gamut Procedure, followed by the tapping sequence with an affirming statement again.

Building a Therapeutic Relationship

EFT helps clients identify and process emotions (Greenberg, 2004). EFT believes that emotion is central to how people experience life. Flanagan (2010) reported that emotions are related to humans' most essential needs. This is characteristic of the humanistic belief that an individual's behavior is a result of free will and that not all behavior is determined. Humanistic theory also believes that all individuals are unique and have an innate responsibility to achieve their full potential, which is connected to their feelings and self-concept (Maslow, 1943).

The counselor needs to develop empathic relationship with the clients as the first step. After that, there should be an explanation of how change in emotions occurs through awareness, regulation, reflection and transforming negative emotions can increase social and academic functioning. Gestalt theory focuses on the current moment, which is important with the process of using self-affirming statements in the tapping that addresses the negative emotion. Gestalt therapy demonstrated that there is mutual work by both the counselor and client to eliminate or improve the problem. Through building a therapeutic relationship and addressing emotions, the client can see progress in the development of positive emotions, which can decrease problem behaviors or emotions while at school.

Success in Tapping

Studies have been conducted addressing the effectiveness surrounding tapping. Fox (2013) found that undergraduate EFT participants experienced an increase in enjoyment and hope and decreased anger and shame and that overall EFT participants experienced a greater increase in positive emotions in comparison to control groups who received no therapy. Feinstein (2012) reported that EFT and acupoint stimulation demonstrates strong effects for treatment in relation to a number of anxiety-based conditions including posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

As there are a large number of U.S. military services personnel coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan with PTSD there is a large need for treatments. As a result EFT and PSTD have been studied frequently. A group of 11 veterans and families were assessed for PTSD and then treated with EFT for five days. After EFT treatment, the group no longer scored positive for PTSD and the severity of their psychological distress decreased significantly and most of these gains held over time (Church, 2010).

Not much work has been done with adolescents, but Church, Piña, Reategui and Brooks (2012) reported that in a study of juveniles are sent by court order if they were physically or psychologically abused at home, a single session of EFT, participants no longer reported intrusive or avoidant symptoms. This evidence suggests that EFT may be an effective technique in treating trauma in juveniles. More studies should be done in order to better understand the relationship between EFT and adolescents, but the field is still developing.

Discussion

EFT tapping consists of protocols that combine the stimulation of acupuncture points (by tapping or massaging them) with the mental activation of a targeted psychological issue (Feinstein, 2012). This technique has been shown to reduce a range of psychological disorders including phobias, anxiety and depression. However, like any theory or technique, speculation on if and how EFT tapping works, still exists.

Cautions and Advice

EFT tapping can be very beneficial to reducing clients' emotional and social stress, but Mercola (2015) also notes that there are some cautions to be mindful of. First, it is essential for clinicians to use specific language with EFT and this may become problematic for students who may be too low developmentally. Next, sometimes the issue of concern may be too emotionally

painful for the client and he or she may want to disconnect from the feeling. It is important that the client stays engaged and does not become distracted. A school setting may not be appropriate for exposing some deeper emotions since therapy sessions are short and the students often have to return back to class and immediately regain focus on schoolwork. While conducting acupoint tapping, it is also important to remember that clinicians are not healing their clients. The students are healing themselves and the school counselor is merely facilitating and witnessing the event. Lastly, it is important that clients keep well hydrated while practicing tapping. This is important because water conducts electricity and EFT accesses the electrical energy that flows through the body and mind.

Limitations

One limitation of EFT is the fear that recalling traumatic events will re-traumatize a client. This danger is moderated with EFT and clients typically report a steady reduction of distress, but it is something to be aware of and monitor closely to minimize risks. Another limitation is that most studies utilized self-inventories, which may be susceptible to expectancy, motivational bias and lack of introspective access to variables being examined (Feinstein, 2012). It is also generally impossible in investigations of psychotherapy to conceal the therapist from the nature of the treatment, so in cases such as this, steps should be taken to ensure those collecting data do not know if it is associated with experimental or control condition data.

Next Steps

Acupoint tapping with affirmation statements can be a very beneficial technique for school counselors to use in their work with students. To gain more knowledge on acupoint tapping, more research could be done. First of all, there is not much research using participants younger than 18. This will be helpful in demonstrating effectiveness in a school system. Also,

most of the current literature consists of studies using client self-report. In a school, it would be interesting to see how behaviors and emotions are controlled in the classroom through reports from the teachers. More research could also be done addressing the use of acupoint tapping in conjunction with traditional methods and at what stage of therapy should tapping be implemented?

Conclusion

Tapping in an energy psychology method that combines psychological exposure with the stimulation of acupuncture points (acupoints). A review of current evidence revealed that EFT and acupoint tapping with self-affirmation statements could produce desirable changes using emotions. Independent research teams have found that acupoint stimulation has met American Psychological Association (APA) criteria to be considered a well-established treatment for phobias and test anxiety and a probably efficacious treatment for PTSD and public speaking anxiety. This technique can be used to reduce social and emotional problems that may arise in school. Through this process, the student will be able to maintain focus during the school day and therefore learn more effectively and develop confidence in his or her ability to control strong emotions.

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