Working with Extrinsic Constraints; A Clinical Case Study from the Perspective of Bowen family systems theory and NeurOptimal

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Extrinsic Constraints

“anything that biologically, physiologically, chemically or relationally interferes or constrains the optimization of neurofeedback training.”
Key Triangles and Reactivity Patterns
Hypothesis:

if the chronic anxiety in this man receded, his functioning would pull up. I surmised he would have better access to his cognitive processing and that he would have more exploratory behaviour, be more creative and flexible.
# Pre-training checklist:

- “cannot look for a job”  
  (10)
- Feeling anxious and excessive worry  
  (10)
- Problems with skin  
  (10)
- Difficulty falling asleep and waking up  
  (10)
- Unease in going out  
  (10)
- Unease in ability to talk with people  
  (10)
Presenting Issues:

- High anxiety in a social setting
- Avoidance of anything that makes him uncomfortable
- Anguish at “not knowing what I want to do”
“if you know the disconnected areas, you will know the problem and if you know the problem, you will know the disconnections.”

“all chronic problems reflect disconnection among clusters of brain cells.”
Family Projection Process & Neural Development

Family Projection Process:  
Anxiety in the mother  
Father sensitive to mother’s anxiety  
And supports her view; helps her in her  
effort at mothering  
Child responds anxiously to mother  
Which is misperceived as a problem in  
the child  
This reciprocal process reinforced and  
contributes to symptom development  

Neural Development:
Family Projection Process & Neural Development

Family Projection Process:

Neural Development:

neural structure determines potential but experience gives it form

nature and nurture are not opposites; they interact in an interdependent process and are inseparable

biology determines what is possible; experience shapes the developing mind
Family Projection Process & Neural Development

stress has its roots in close relations

gene×c factors and the way they are expressed are particularly sensitive at critical periods.

gene×c potential plays out on a background of specific experiences that impacts the way neurons interconnect
Homework:

- A **cursive writing journal** (not printing and not keyboard) – a sentence or two every day.
- **Draw and Sketch** AND to gradually add what he **felt**, don’t seek perfection
- **Dream**, cursive write a dream down.
- to do some with **eyes closed** ; to “see it” internally, to **“Invision”** on **unlined paper** so as no constraints.
- Meditate, thumb and finger touching, to “**feel grounded in his body**”.
- To generate and **plan and sequence** with the therapist...”let’s think it through, step by step, let’s write it down.: (anything from preparing a grocery list to strategizing around a work challenge)
Management of Self as Therapist:

• Work together more than instruct
• Be gentle about the process
• Avoid all criticism!
• Learn how to back-up; backtrack!
• Manage my disappointment
• Never replace or become surrogate parent
• Stay light and curious
• A gentle steering
Work with Father:

• Shift from “lazy” and “unmotivated” to appreciating how hard it is for his son to set a direction and complete a goal.
• Appreciate that his son is very smart and that the family is fortunate he is accomplishing as much as he is.
• To support father in his deep caring for his family
• Affirm his son and summon his patience
Work with Mother:

• Begin to identify some responsibilities her son could take on and that she could “go alongside on” versus direct or do herself.
• Relate to his strength and appreciate his advances
• Modulate her tendency to take over
• To affirm her deep caring for her son and how she can be a resource to him toward more independence
Changes in client:

- Readily makes eye contact, laughs and engages.
- Made curry from scratch
- Initiated changes in his diet
- Working full time; three times promoted
- Participating with (somewhat) greater ease in social settings
- Readily described his feelings around his grandmother’s fall and decline in her health
Parting Words:

“this client can make it through; but has some catching up to do”

Dr. A.B.