

**Use of the Trauma Account in Cognitive Processing Therapy
for PTSD: Tips for Using CPT +A
Gwendolyn (Wendy) Bassett, LCSW-R**

**Appendix 1:
Extra Therapist Tips for Processing the Trauma
Account in Sessions 4 and 5 of Cognitive Processing Therapy +A**

Before the client reads the account

- Provide them with a reminder of the rationale for the trauma account: face vs avoid; access and feel natural emotions (remind of soda bottle analogy); identify and address stuck points of self- and other-blame and undoing about the trauma
- Explain that you want them to feel their emotions, to not interrupt or come out of the story. There will be time to process the account when they are done reading.
- Explain that you will only interrupt if they are speed reading or numbed out.

During the account reading

- Therapist sits still and quietly and bears witness. This is important to convey respect and model that we can tolerate their trauma and its details.
- Allow them to feel emotions without interrupting. Supportive sounds, comforting words, or even handing a tissue can inadvertently interfere with emotional processing.

While listening, note to yourself:

- Have they done the assignment? Are they telling a story from beginning, middle and end? Is it in past tense? Have they included sensory details?
- What is happening with their emotions? Are they numbing or holding back emotions? Make a note to yourself so you can ask later when processing.
- Are there pertinent negatives? Are there areas of the story missing? If it doesn't make sense to you and you can't follow the story, there is a good chance avoidance has them glossing over important details. Make a mental note so you can ask Socratic questions around those parts of the account when processing it together.
- Where might the stuck points be?
- If this is the second writing, what is different this time? Are there more details? Are they more or less emotionally engaged? Did they avoid less, or more? More lines or fewer? Are there new stuck points evident?

After the account

- Praise their bravery for facing the trauma memory.
- Support their accessing and feeling natural emotions:
 - Ask them how they are feeling right now.
 - Ask where the moments of most emotions were or where they were the most numb when reading to you.
 - Ask about emotions when working on it at home.
 - Ask about emotions they felt at the time of the trauma. Consider having them make a note in the narrative in the margins if they didn't write the feelings in the original account.
 - Engage their curiosity in determining what may be the natural emotions they need to experience vs. the manufactured emotions.

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- Example Socratic questions: *“At the time of the trauma where were the moments of most terror?” “Most horror?” “Most powerlessness?” “Did you allow yourself to access those emotions when working on it at home, when reading it to me?” “When reading to me/working on it at home, where did you feel the most sadness? The most anger?”*
- If this is the second writing, do they think they felt more of the natural emotions this time?
- Look for stuck points. Are they aware of new stuck points? Where did they draw a line? Where are the moments of most shame or guilt? Are they aware of the stuck points connected to those moments and those emotions?
- Ask about what is missing from the account. Are there areas they most wish to avoid recalling? Explore what they were most avoiding: thought, details, feeling, image. Use Socratic questioning to ask for the missing details and thoughts and feelings about these details. These details will need to be included in the next version of the account they write. If this is the second writing, do they think they added more details this time, the same, less? What was different this time?
- Identify and challenge assimilated stuck points together. Did they find new stuck points to add to the log? Engage in Socratic dialog to address most painful, most stuck assimilated stuck point. Use the pertinent worksheets to assist in addressing stuck points in session and for practice.

Keep assigning the writing of the account each session until they get all the details into the account. Keep assigning daily reading until emotions dissipate. Clients can actually become bored reading the account daily. That is one of the goals! That, and a lowering PCL are two ways we know they are done reading the account daily.

*******If they didn't do the account** at either session 4 and/or session 5, explore why; address avoidance and relevant stuck points that fuel the avoidance ASAP. It may end up being an assimilated stuck point that is most pulling them to avoid. And, then, in order to not allow avoidance to win, ask them to verbally recount the event. Use the tips above to process their verbal account. Don't use session time to have them write it in session. Keep moving forward with the protocol without adding sessions and reassign the account.

Resick, P.A., Monson, C.M., & Chard, K.M. (2017). *Cognitive Processing Therapy: A Comprehensive Manual*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Resick, P.A., Monson, C. M., & Chard, K. M. (2014). *Cognitive processing therapy: Veteran/military version: Therapist's manual*. Washington, DC: Department of Veterans Affairs.

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