

WORKING WITH FEELINGS: The Negativity Session

My friends and I have an agreement that we can call each other day or night and request a “negativity session.” If the other agrees, the one who has requested it then has full permission to be *totally* negative, without fear of being judged. Nothing said in this session is taken “for real.” It all goes down the drain with a big flush!

This is the way it works: One person is a talker (sometimes more like a “ranter”) and the other person is a listener. The talker proceeds to lay it *all* out in no uncertain terms—complaints, fears, problems, everything. Genteelness is not the order of the day in a negativity session. It takes some practice to be able to say what you’re thinking and feeling without editing, but the more you do it, the clearer you become, and the faster the negativity dissipates.

The listener’s job is just to *be there*, without judging or evaluating what is being said. If the listener doesn’t hear or understand something, she will let the talker know, but extraneous conversation is discouraged. The talker has the freedom to say anything—it doesn’t even have to make sense. The listener’s responses are ones indicating that the talker has been heard and understood. The only other communications made by the listener other than acknowledgments are things like, “OK, what else?” or if the talker gets into apologizing or rationalizing or philosophizing, the listener can encourage a return to the negativity still waiting to be expressed. The agreement is that positivity is not encouraged until all the negativity is “dumped.” The listener keeps things moving, gently and unobtrusively.

The session concludes when the talker either starts laughing, or says, “Enough!” or indicates she is complete. The listener then requests the talker to share something positive that is happening or something they appreciate. The session is always ended on a positive note.

The result of using the negativity session for clearing away the unnecessary garbage of our minds has been the establishment of an extraordinary warmth and a deep trust in our relationships. The more we can realize that we are all in this together—being human—and the more compassion we cultivate for ourselves and others because ultimately our stories are all the same, the faster we can get on with living well. Having the opportunity to quickly externalize our normally hidden feelings in an environment of safety, understanding, and support, helps us to detach and laugh at our convoluted thinking that creates our unhappiness. In a very short time, the thoughts and stories that seem like huge monsters are reduced to ridiculous hand puppets and with it comes the realization that it’s our hands operating them.

