

How Emotional CPR Can Help Persons “Be The Person They Were Born To Be”

Daniel Fisher, MD, PhD* and Margaret Zawisza, MA

National Empowerment Center, Inc. Grafton, USA

***Correspondence:** Daniel Fisher, MD, PhD, National Empowerment Center, Inc. Grafton, USA

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1. Abstract

This is a description of how the practice of emotional CPR (eCPR) helped a distressed person become aware of their feelings and feel for the first time that she could “be the person she was born to be.”

2. Introduction

In these times of the COVID-19 crisis, more and more people are experiencing the disconnection, powerlessness and numbing which is caused by trauma. In the past, we had the time to diagnose and provide psychotherapy to individuals who experienced trauma. But today the trauma of the pandemic affects everybody. Therefore, we need an approach by which one person, without having a professional degree, can assist another through a crisis, without affixing a diagnostic label.

Over the last 13 years, one of us (DF) has led a team of over 30 persons with lived experience of mental health recovery in the development of such a mutual support approach called emotional CPR (eCPR). Through eCPR we have experienced thousands of real plays (unscripted role plays) and we have learned that we all yearn to connect, especially in crisis. We have discovered that we each have our own rhythm and that we can understand our rhythm by resonating with others. As we resonate we overcome our fear created by traumas, especially the trauma of living in a technocratic world. John O’Donohue described this process: “There is a welcome for you at the heart of your solitude. When you realize this, most of the fear that governs your life falls away. The moment your fear transfigures you come into rhythm with your own self [1].” Then you feel more alive and revitalized. Also it has been proposed that eCPR could improve the person’s healing from both the psychological and physical traumas of COVID-19 [2].

3. Methods

We use the acronym CPR in eCPR to point out the analogy with physical CPR. Just as in CPR we teach the lay public simple ways to restore the rhythmic beating of a person’s physical heart, so too in eCPR we teach the public how to restart the rhythm of a person’s emotional heart. In

eCPR the C=Connecting emotionally, the P=emPowering, and the R=Revitalization. This training has been shown through research to be an evidence-based practice [3,4]. The process of eCPR is well illustrated in Figure 1.

This figure demonstrates the effects of trauma on a person. The two figures on the right are engaged in heart-to-heart and mind-to-mind dialogue. You see that their hearts are connected, which enables them to connect within, between their head and their heart. Trauma disconnects them from each other and themselves. This leads to fear, which also disconnects their head from their heart.

4. Results

The authors interviewed one of the participants, A, of a recent eCPR training in Scotland.

A is a 60 year-old female who has been suffering from chronic pain for many years. Her condition was diagnosed as fibromyalgia, but no treatment had helped relieve her pain. In her own words, she describes how one of us (MZ) relieved her pain through use of eCPR:

A said, "I am separated from others by a wall. I had to get inside [the wall] and take it apart from within. No one was getting through to me till MZ... I felt like I was inside a grenade and that I had to explode to get out of the wall and MZ helped me to do that in a nice, gentle way. MZ's curiosity made me curious about what it was that was locking me in there. I am feeling frightened, I am unwanted, I am feeling uncared for because nobody is listening. (She made a gesture of one fist striking the other hand in a confrontational manner.). I am feeling unloved, ...broken...invisible...unworthy. You led me to that just by being curious...in work

I am trying to weave it in, in a playful way...so it is not all their ball."

DF asked A, "How did MZ get inside the grenade with you?"

A said, "Instead of bombarding me with questions, MZ used a completely different approach. She was using her hands in gesture of dancing together (A illustrates this dancing motion with her hands.). She used a soft curious voice, there was no demand coming from her and immediately I knew that MZ was authentic...she was being really genuine in that moment...she was curious, playful and slow...it made me take the pin out of the grenade a little bit. I thought if she can be curious I can be curious. OK this curiosity feels safe, and your hands were really soft."

MZ: (points to her heart) "I used myself. I helped you to carry it a bit so the weight wasn't just on you (She showed hand gestures of openness, then her hands danced and she pointed to her heart.). I tried different gestures and I wondered what that was. I was trying to feel, to see."

A: "You allowed me the space to be curious...your curiosity made me curious and that curiosity allowed me to take the pin out of the grenade a little bit, and then we got inside and explored it ...I just felt so safe for the first time in my life...I felt the vibration from MZ that this was safe, I never had to have a spoken word. I could engage or not. I had a choice. We slowly clunked our way to the middle of the grenade, together to the emotion, the feelings and the walls just fell apart."

MZ: (to A) "Lets unwrap this together." (She shows a gradual unwrapping gesture with her hands.)

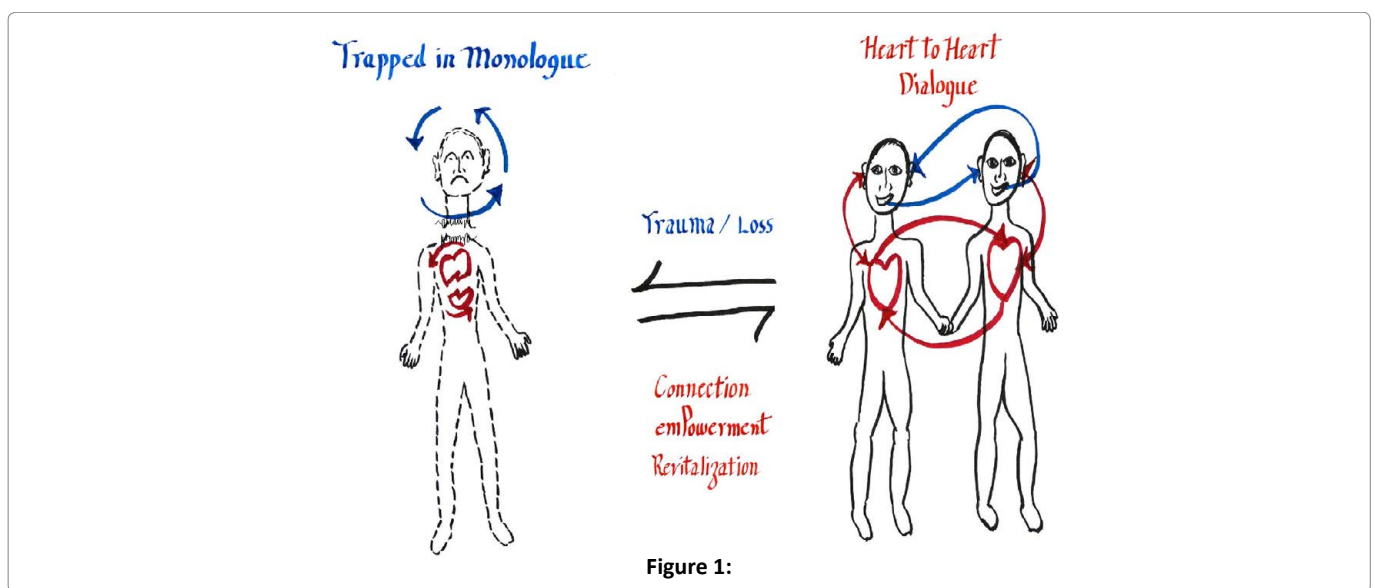


Figure 1:

A said, “And the great big grenade fell apart and it hasn’t been together since...I could not move my neck or shoulders for 40 years, fibromyalgia. I held myself like this [made two fists and raised her shoulders]...I am trying to come back to the person I was born to be before society tarnished me. MZ was a huge help to get me there...I knew my last stumbling block was my emotions. They have been terrifying me... you freed me to be me, you allowed me to be me, with no expectations or demands...everyone of us is born whole...if we can just connect with the flow and just be me...you really allowed me to be me, you freed me to be me”

A said that when she felt free to express her feelings, she was free from her pain for the first time in years.

5. Conclusion

The finding that unexpressed emotions lead to chronic pain, and that expression of these emotions reduces pain is in keeping with the highly successful pain reduction approach developed by Dr. John Sarno [5]. Dr. Sarno describes the pain as tension myositis syndrome (TMS) or muscle spasms. Here are some of his guidelines for persons with back pain:

- TMS is a harmless condition caused by my repressed emotions.
- TMS exists only to distract attention from the emotions.
- Since my back is basically normal there is nothing to fear.
- I will shift my attention from the pain to the emotional issues.

- I must think psychologically not physically at all times.

By embracing this approach and engaging in psychotherapy, he found that nearly all his patients’ back pain was relieved. We predict that as more community members, families, and community outreach workers learn eCPR, there will be fewer visits to doctors for physical pain. Just as CPR has been shown to reduce the risk of dying from a heart attack, we predict that eCPR will reduce the number of visits to doctors and the frequency of psychiatric hospitalizations due to trauma.

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