

WHAT IS BONDING PSYCHOTHERAPY, AND HOW CAN YOU BENEFIT FROM IT?

*By Ginny Hurney, LCSW-C
Bonding Psychotherapy Counseling Center*

Bonding Psychotherapy (BP) is a powerfully dynamic therapeutic process that produces significant breakthroughs in a relatively short time. BP, done in a group setting, works well with people who want more pleasure in their lives, better relationships with friends and family, career success and satisfaction, improved health, and less depression and anxiety. The five aspects of BP described here- group process, emotional release, bonding, cognitive restructuring of attitude and behavior, and secure attachment, provide a window into how the process works and highlights the benefits.

FIRST: GROUP PROCESS

Many of us grew up in families that were unable to give us the support and love we needed to be happy, successful, and form secure relationships. BP group provides a way to re-experience the family in a safe environment built around the love and support of the group members. Offering a sense of community and connection, the group can become our ideal family. The clients who are part of the group become the member's siblings, and the therapist becomes the good parent whose job is to support and help each group member grow. Working with basic human emotions – pain, fear, anger, happiness, and love- the members are constantly learning about themselves through this relational process.

SECOND: EMOTIONAL RELEASE

When we are unable to express our emotions, we become “bottled up” and cannot fully experience and enjoy life. Holding onto or stuffing unpleasant feelings takes its toll on the body creating tension, increased cortisol levels, changes in hormonal functioning, and resulting in disease and illness. These feelings also cause us to form negative attitudes and behaviors toward ourselves and others. BP provides members with an opportunity to release and express held in emotions. Emotional release of pain, fear, and anger directly affects our chemistry, allowing the body and mind to make positive changes. Through emotional release we feel more relaxed; adopt a more accepting attitude toward ourselves and others; and feel more joy, happiness, and love. Emotions become manageable, available and appropriate.

THIRD: BONDING

Bonding is a basic biological and psychosocial need in all mammals. Bonding, being emotionally open and physically close, is essential to our happiness and health. The group provides a safe place to get our bonding needs met, through non-threatening, therapeutic touch. When there is a

heart connection of giving and receiving love, along with safe holding, the transformation to feeling lovable and good takes place.

FOURTH: COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING OF ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOR

Emotional release and bonding cannot by themselves ensure that we make positive changes in our lives. Cognitive restructuring must occur. Cognitive restructuring is changing old attitudes, beliefs and behaviors into positive, more useful ones. The group provides a safe, supportive environment where we can try out new attitudes and behaviors, and through bonding, we can have the visceral experience of being lovable and accepted as “good enough.” In the group we practice changing old beliefs into more functional beliefs such as “I am good enough, I am lovable, I don’t have to be perfect”. These new beliefs are validated and supported by the group members. Repeating these phrases and experiences builds new, positive neural pathways in the brain. The new beliefs serve as the foundation for developing new behaviors that enable us to make decisions and act on our own behalf.

FIFTH: SECURE ATTACHMENT

Our attachment style is formed in the first three years of life through our relationship with our caretakers. If we experienced a secure attachment with our caretakers, we will be secure adults and have success with relationships. Those who do not experience a positive attachment often struggle with relationships and go through life feeling lonely, unfulfilled, and deprived. Research shows that attachment style can only be changed experientially through the body. BP allows this change to happen by enabling the release of early fears of intimacy and rejection, and allowing a new experience of feeling accepted and cared about. Movement toward secure attachment occurs through the peer support of the group process, emotional release of unpleasant feelings from the body, safe bonding and holding, and cognitive restructuring.

WHAT CAN YOU EXPECT FROM A BONDING PSYCHOTHERAPY GROUP?

People in BP make significant breakthroughs in their life because the changes occur through an integration of the body and the mind. Change occurs on a deeper level than in talk therapy, because of the added physical and emotional release. BP moves clients towards happiness; helps transform anger into love, alienation into intimacy, and loneliness into belonging. Once unpleasant emotions are released and new attitudes and behaviors are developed, people are able to and make significant changes in their lives.