

# Emotion-focused therapy: The Transforming Power of Affect

Leslie S Greenberg



[www.yupc.org](http://www.yupc.org)

[lgrnberg@yorku.ca](mailto:lgrnberg@yorku.ca)

# Overview of Therapy Process

## **Process:**

- Empathic Attunement to clients' emotional meanings or feelings
- Communication of relational attitudes
- Facilitation of particular modes of emotional processing and meaning creations at particular times

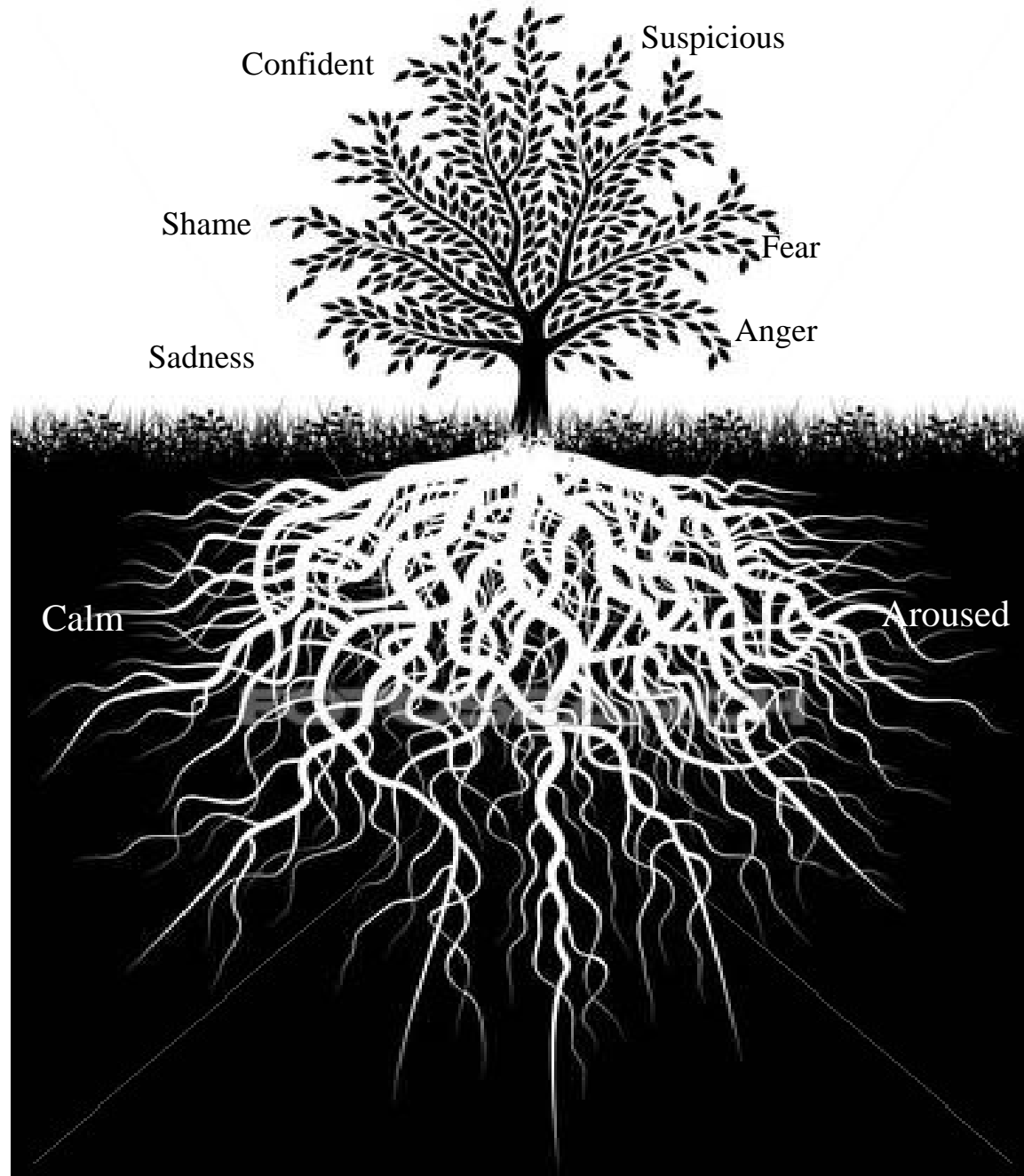
## **Goal:**

- Self-reorganization of emotion schemes and personal meaning

# Emotions: Fundamentally Adaptive

- Emotions tell us what is personally important & whether things are going our way (information)
  - Emotions help us to survive by providing an efficient, automatic way of responding rapidly to important situations
- Emotions prepare us for action:
- Emotions involve wishes/needs, which generate action
- Emotions integrate experience; give us meaning, value & direction
- Basic concepts: Emotion Schemes; Emotion Assessment. Emotion Change Principles

# Affect/Emotion/Feeling



Feelings  
are the  
leaves

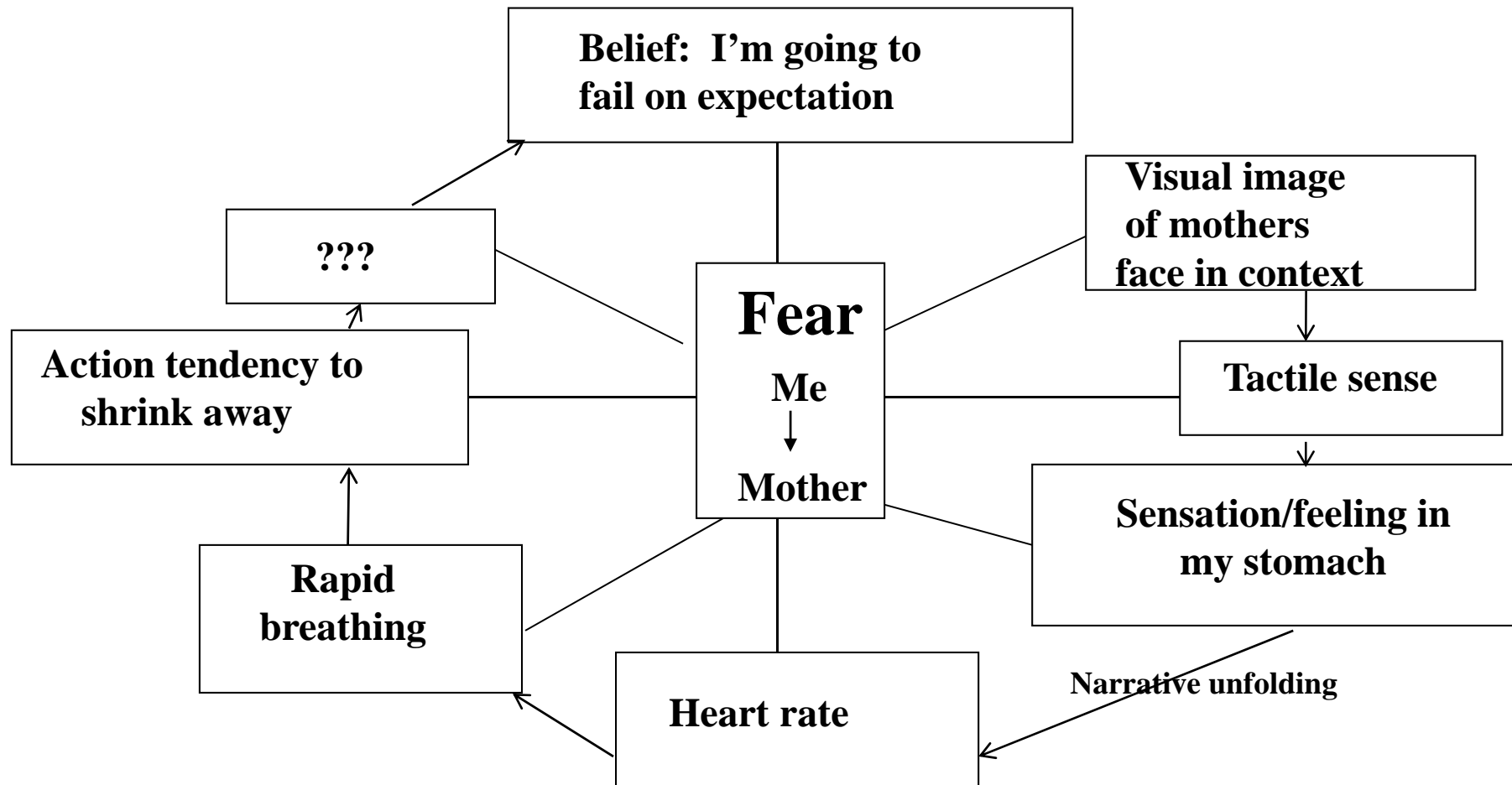
Emotions  
are the  
branches

Affect is the  
trunk and  
roots

# Emotion Scheme Concept

- Scheme is a pattern of mental organization.
- Provides implicit higher-order organization for experiencing
- Experience and action producing
  - a plan of action not for action
- Self-organizing processes, not things
- Consists of component/elements linked together in a network

# Emotion Scheme (Narrative Structure)



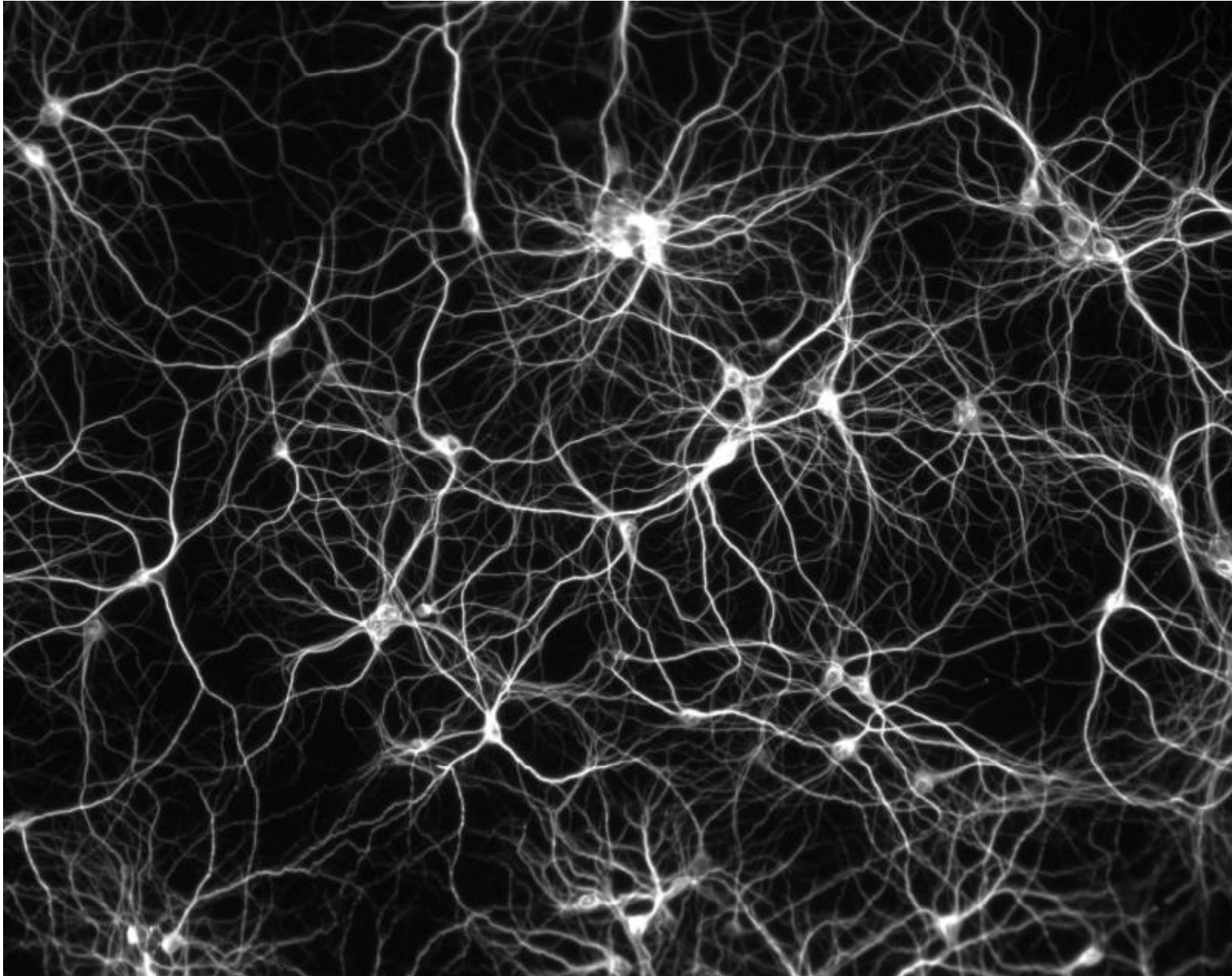
# Narrative Structure

- Emergence and an unfolding over time.
- Nonverbal or imagistic representation
- Protagonist with intentions engaged in an action with a plotline
- Beginning middle and end
- Implications and consequences

# Neuroscience

- Neurons are interconnected within complex networks
- Most emerge in the first 3 years
- Functional units for different tasks-distinct areas of brain are active during specific tasks
- Located on different hierarchicl levels
- Networks and pathways can change





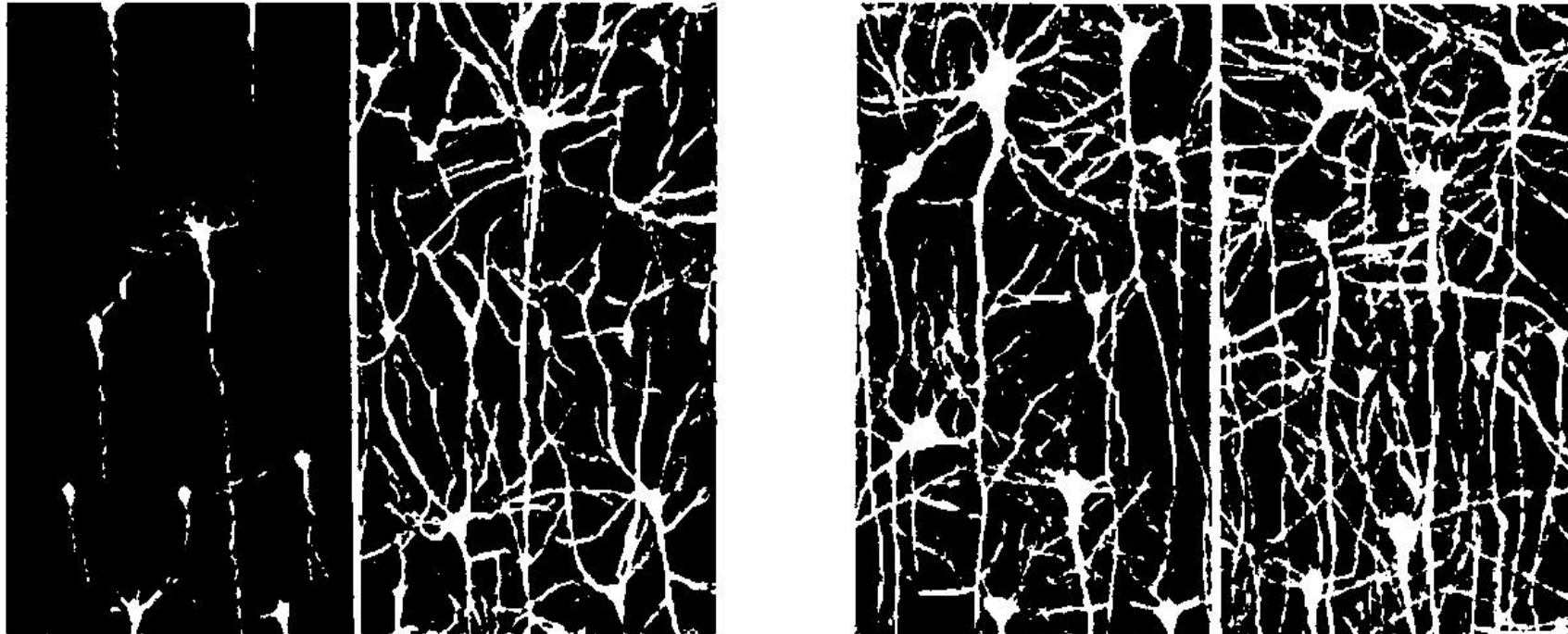
Real Network Structure in the Human Brain.

Birth

3 months

15 month

36 months




*Figure 3.* Emergence of the Neuronal Interconnection System in the Infants' Brain

## Emotion Schemes

1. Represent internally our emotional reactions plus the evoking stimulus situation.
2. Later we represent our conceptual learning and beliefs associated with our emotional experience
3. Result is a “high level” synthesis which when evoked provides our sense of things such as feeling unsure, confident, vulnerable or “on top of the world.”

# Assessment

1. Primary 
  - Biologically adaptive
  - Maladaptive
2. Secondary
3. Instrumental

# **SIX MAJOR EMOTIONAL CHANGE PROCESSES**

## **A) Accessing Emotion**

### **1. Increase Emotional Awareness & Symbolization in the Context of Salient Personal Stories.**

Symbolizing emotional experience in awareness in order to make sense of one's experience. What am I feeling?

### **2. Express Emotion.**

Expressing changes the self and changes interactions both by mobilizing and revealing self. Overcome control and inhibition. Completion of expression. Neuro-chemical changes.

## **B) Modulating & Understanding**

### **3. Enhance Emotion Regulation**

Explicit regulation. Use deliberate cerebral capacities to contain and regulate maladaptive amygdala reactions (especially fear, rage and shame). Implicit self soothing. Allowing, tolerating, accepting and soothing.

### **4. Reflect on Emotion.**

**Making sense of experience.** Dis-embedding. Creation of new meaning. Insight. Seeing patterns, understanding in a new way. New narrative construction

## **C) Transforming Emotion**

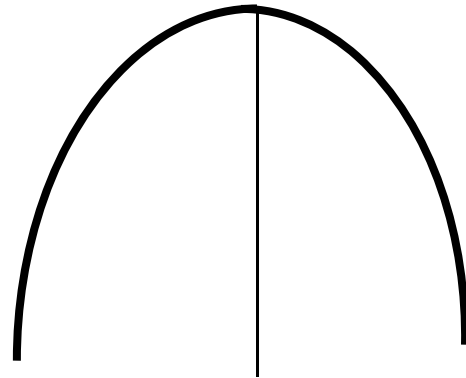
**5) Change Emotion with Emotion.** An alternate self-organization, set of emotion schematic memories, or “voices” in the personality based on primary emotions are accessed by (a) attentional re-allocation or (b) focus on a new need/goal.(c) changing interactions The maladaptive emotional response is synthesized with, or transformed by, more adaptive emotional response.

### **6. Change Emotion with New Interpersonal Experience.**

New lived experience with another provides a corrective emotional experience. Disconfirms pathogenic beliefs. Provides interpersonal soothing. New success experience changes emotion.

# Transforming Emotion

## 1. Completion/Detachment/Habituation/ Extinction



Blocked  
Needs to be unblocked.  
Let it run it's course

Arising & passing away

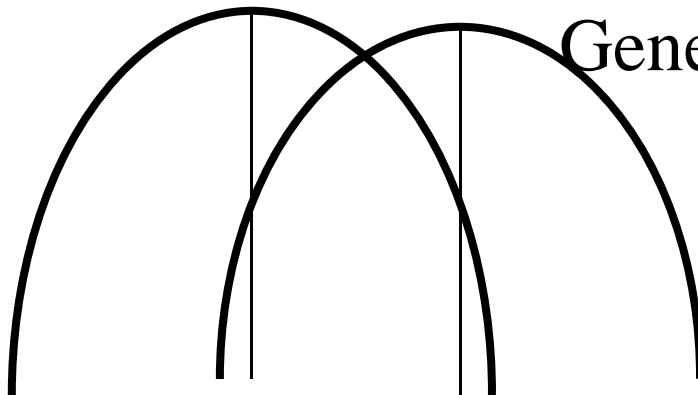
Letting go

Desensitizing/Exposure

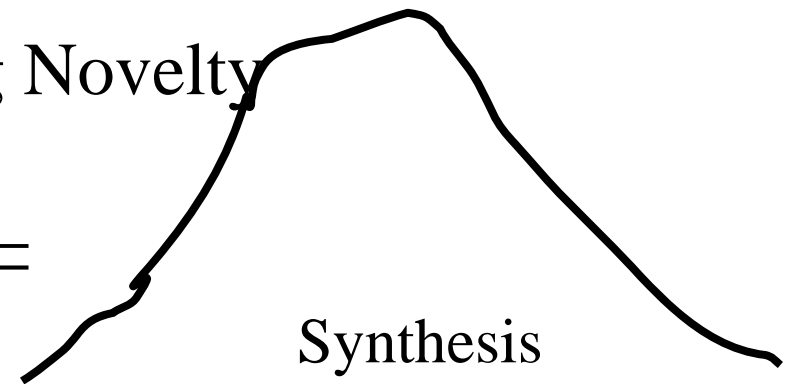
## 2. Changing Emotion with Emotion

Undoing

Generating Novelty



=



Synthesis



## **Accessing Alternate Emotion**

### **0. Empathic relationship**

**1. Shift attention to present subdominant emotion**

**2. Access adaptive need/goal and associated emotion**

**3. Expressive enactment of alternate emotion**

**4. Imagery to evoke emotion**

**5. Evoke emotion memory of alternate emotion**

**6. Mood induction via music**

**7. Humour**

**8. Cognitive creation of new meaning**

**9. Therapist expresses emotion for client**

**10. Relationship evokes new emotion**

# Basic Change Process

Secondary Distress



Primary Maladaptive



**NEED**



Primary Adaptive