

A Clean Coaching Process to Explore / Manage Fear



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This handout is intended for those who have had a minimum of 3 day's Clean Language training (or equivalent) and have listened to or watched the webinar Managing / Exploring Fear with Angela Dunbar on 13th May 2020 – delivered as part of the Webinar Series: **Supporting Yourself and Others in the Time of COVID 19: Clean Language approaches to difficult times.**

To register for free access to the entire series, organised through the [Clean Language Institute](https://CLI.regfox.com/clean-language-covid19-webinars), click here: <https://CLI.regfox.com/clean-language-covid19-webinars>

Where this process has come from

This is a Clean Coaching process I have created from David Grove's EK techniques. It arose in response to a question from a group supervision attendee around holding space for fear, who was asking "What can we offer our coachees around this?" Another supervisee added "What can I contribute to this situation? I feel I am waiting for the picture to emerge". In response to "What

would you like to have happen?” the common theme to ‘explore fear’ emerged. And, of course ‘explore fear’ is not strictly speaking an outcome, but (in Clean Language terms) a **proposed remedy**. However in this instance, it seemed important to allow time to reflect on and honour the emotion of fear before attempting to focus attention on what happens next and the ultimate outcome that could be reached should this remedy be applied (eg “When you manage fear, then what happens?”).

I improvised with some of David Grove’s EK questions to create a structured Clean exercise to explore this unwelcome emotion in a safe way. In the current unprecedented and global scary situation, I had been hearing many clients, colleagues and friends talk about fear in various metaphoric ways. For instance, personified as either a friend or an enemy. Or, described as a journey or path that needed to be travelled along or through. And sometimes as a Pandora’s Box that holds the key to destruction, disintegration and ultimately hope. All these threads were, I expect, part of my rationale in how it might be helpful to focus attention on fear, in whatever guise it appears for each individual, and allow them the time and space to see *through, beyond, and/or around* it to what might be on the *other side*.

When I did this exercise for the first time with a group it was almost entirely content-free. Each person went through their own process silently, the only verbal sharing was right at the end (replying to the last two questions out loud, in turn).

It seemed to be very helpful for everyone in the group, and some have gone on to use the exercise with their own clients and have shared that it worked well.

I have also used it one-to-one with a coaching supervision client who came with an outcome around “holding space for others feeling fear – and not getting ‘caught up’ in it myself”.

In this example, the client in question shared out loud their response to most of the questions. However it is not necessary for people to do so.

In both the group and one-to-one example, the entire process took around 15-20 minutes.

Clean Language Principles - Please read first!

For those new to Clean it’s worth reminding you of two important principles of Clean, to bear in mind when using this process to support others. I am using the term ‘client’ to refer to anyone you are working with using this process, be it a coachee, a supervisee, a colleague or anyone else.

1) Focus on the outcome, not the problem

Generally, the safest and most helpful way to use Clean Language is to focus your questions on what your client wants, not what they DON’T want. The question “***What would you like to have happen?***” focuses attention towards an outcome rather than the problem. You can then ask further questions that help the coachee know more about that outcome.

In this exercise there is some focus on what might well be a problem (eg fear or some other unwelcome emotion). Please note that this is because the process follows David Grove’s Emergent Knowledge framework, not Symbolic Modelling. Following David Grove’s EK principles, the difference between an outcome and a problem is less cut and dried. David Grove said that any

statement of an outcome contains within it the problem anyway, as they are two sides of the same coin: when you want something, the implication is you don't have it.

Whenever I facilitate, my overarching aim is always to leave a person in a better space than before we started. And by addressing a problem and attending to it, I don't want to make it appear bigger or worse than it was before. To prevent that from happening, this process (like all EK exercises) has built-in safety features and it's important that you follow the process and ask all the questions exactly as they are written and in the same sequence, and that you don't add or change anything.

The safety features include, for instance, inviting the client to put things down on paper – which helps them to disassociate from any potentially unpleasant sensations that may be attached to an unwelcome emotion. They can look at it from a physical – and psychological – distance. Additionally, the use of predetermined, clean questions in a rigid structure also helps to contain the problem and create safety.

Finally, this exercise starts and ends with focus on the client's own outcome.

2) Follow your coachee's lead / language

Again on the face of it this process may seem to disregard this vital Clean principle. Let's be clear, the intention is NOT to bring fear into the conversation when the client has not explicitly mentioned it themselves. As you have read above, this process came about as a response to many clients bringing the topic up. I have since been using it to explore other unwelcome emotions such as doubt and uncertainty and it appears to work well for those too.

Please use this exercise to work with **whatever your client has actually said** they want to explore, look at or discuss, particularly if what they have said sounds like it is an unwelcome emotion of some kind and refer to it using their description of it, not yours.

You will also note that unlike Symbolic Modelling, at no time do you repeat back the client's own words, except for their initial description of the unwelcome emotion. You are not developing metaphors in the same way, but rather allowing the client a completely clean space to follow their own flow of experience, in whatever way is right for them.

Once the process is over, **keep it clean**: do not compel them to share what they may not wish to, or offer any advice or suggestions.

The Process

Ask the questions, delivering slowly and allowing plenty of space for the client to reflect.

Use the questions verbatim, eg with the words exactly as they are written. In that way you can ensure that they remain clean.

Setting an Outcome

- And what would you like to have happen?
- And can you choose an object from somewhere around you that could represent your goal?

- And can you place that object somewhere in the space around you that feels right?
- And what do you know about your goal?

Initial Set-up

- Take a piece of paper and on it, put down a representation of your fear*** (whatever word your client has used).
- Take your time and choose the right piece of paper, and the right pen or pencil(s) you would like to use.
- You can write or draw your representation in any way you want, using whatever pens or pencils you would like to use.
- Take all the time you need and just say when you are ready.
- Are there any other words, or symbols or drawings or shapes that could go on your paper?
- And is there anything else that could go on the paper as well as the words and drawings already there?
- And is there anything else?

Clean Start

(You can ask some or all of the questions depending on the time you have available and how the client responds to them. Always end the Clean Start with 'And what do you know now?')

- Can you now place your paper in a space somewhere around you that seems right?
- And, now place yourself in a space that seems right in relation to your paper. Take your time.
- Are you in the right space?
- And, is the distance right between you and your paper?
- And is your paper in the right space?
- Is your paper at the right height?
- And are you at the right height?
- Are you facing the right direction?
- Is your paper facing the right direction?
- And are you in the right position?
- And is your paper in the right position?
- And what do you know, now?
- Is there anything else you know now?
- And put that down on your paper.

Exploration

- And what do you notice about the words, the drawings or symbols that are on your paper?
- And what do you know about that?
- And put that on your paper.
- And as you look at your representation (of your *** (fear/ client's own word) on your paper now, what could be on the other side of that?
- And when you are ready, turn your paper over.

- And put down whatever needs to be there.
- And what needs to happen to your paper now?

Ending

- And can you return to the space where you started?
- And what do you know, now?
- And the object that represents your goal, what does that object know about what's on your paper?
- And what difference does knowing all that make?
- And take all the time you need to notice that difference... now and later
- Is there anything you'd like to say or do before we end this exercise?
- (Allow time for the client to come back to a normal state by asking a few conversational questions, eg ***"And how was that experience for you?"***)

What happens next?

When I have used this process, either one-to one or with a group, in almost all circumstances, the session was concluded at the end of this process and feedback from the client has been very positive, for example:

- "I feel peaceful"
- "I've grown a foot taller"
- "hope creating"
- "I started in fear and ended in peaceful well-being"
- "Feel calm and more open, lighter"
- "Turning negatives into positive"
- "I feel peaceful now. Like I've walked away from the unwanted emotion"
- "Yes it worked brilliantly. I feel I can breathe again"

But as with any Clean process, we cannot predict how the client will respond and it may be something else needs to happen for the client. The client may still feel the unwelcome emotion, but their relationship to it has shifted. Or the emotion has evolved into something else still not desirable but different. Or many other possible responses.

In this case, if the session is complete it's okay to conclude and encourage the client to continue to notice the difference over the coming days. Sometimes change happens more gradually over hours and days after a session. You could ask them "And what needs to happen to your paper now?" to help keep any learning that has emerged somewhere where your client would like it to be.

If there is time remaining in the coaching session, and the client is clearly stating they have a problem (eg I still feel x and I don't want to feel this"), then you could continue to work cleanly with the client.

We do not recommend that you continue to explore the unwelcome emotion, but instead follow Principle No. 1 highlighted above: Focus on the **outcome**, not the problem.

This means asking “And when you still feel x and you don’t want to feel this, what would you like to have happen?”. You can then focus attention cleanly on the outcome that the client has stated, given the current situation they find themselves in.

You could also refer them back to the object chosen earlier in the process that represented their goal at the start, and ask further Clean Language questions around that. This can provide a useful resource.

Another good way to end is to ask “And what needs to happen for (client’s outcome)?”

This helps the client come up with (a) condition(s) for change.

From David Grove’s EK question set, you could follow that up cleanly with:

- And how will you do that?
- And when will you do that?

These questions help to take an intangible, vague intention into a do-able action and help the client feel empowered to change. These questions are iterative in that with each answer you can drill down still further, eg: “And how will you do *that*?”

Please note, rarely does a session ever feel totally complete, there will usually be stuff remaining to be explored, possibly in future sessions, and that’s an okay place to end. If your client leaves the session knowing more than they did when they arrived, then that’s likely to be useful information that could make a difference for them.

Finally, this handout cannot cover every eventuality or replace in-depth training. Please do contact us at The Clean Coaching Centre for more information on our Clean Coaching online training.

Module One is entitled “*Gaining Insight through Movement*” and covers four basic EK question sequences, the science behind the process and most importantly, the opportunity to practice and gain feedback on your skills. Here’s a link to the full details:

<https://cleancoaching.com/training/module-one/>