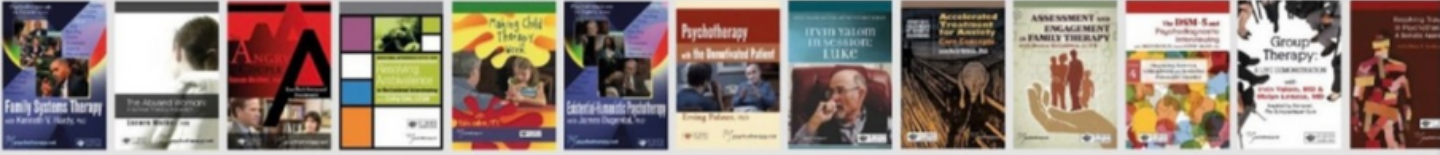


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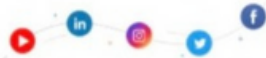


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Instructor's Manual

# EFFECTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH MEN

with  
Ronald F. Levant, EdD

by  
Randall C. Wyatt, PhD  
&  
Erika L. Seid, MA







The *Instructor's Manual* accompanies the DVD *Effective Psychotherapy with Men* (Instructor's Version). Video available at [www.Psychotherapy.net](http://www.Psychotherapy.net).

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*Instructor's Manual for Effective Psychotherapy with Men* Ronald F. Levant, EdD

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Instructor's Manual

# EFFECTIVE PSYCHOTHERAPY WITH MEN

with Ronald F. Levant, EdD

## Table of Contents

Tips for Making the Best Use of the DVD	7
Session-by-Session Discussion Questions	9
Reaction Paper Guide for Classrooms and Training	1
Suggestions for Further Readings, Websites and Videos	0
Session Transcript	1
Session One	1
Session Two	1
Session Three	2
Session Four	2
Session Five	2
Session Six	6
Session Seven	3
Video Credits	0
About the Contributors	47
More Psychotherapy.net Videos	3
	49
	5
	50
	3
	9
	4
	5
	2

# Tips for Making the Best Use of the DVD

## 1. USE THE TRANSCRIPTS

Make notes in the video **Transcript** for future reference; the next time you show the video you will have them available. Highlight or notate key moments in the video to better facilitate discussion during the video and post-viewing.

## 2. SESSION-BY-SESSION DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Pause the video after each session to elicit viewers' observations and reactions. The **Discussion Questions** provide ideas about key aspects of the therapeutic work that can stimulate rich discussions and learning.

## 3. LET IT FLOW

Allow the sessions to play out some so viewers can appreciate the work over time instead of stopping the video too often. It is best to watch the video in its entirety since issues untouched in earlier parts often play out later. Encourage the viewers to voice their opinions; no therapy is perfect! What do viewers think works and does not work in the sessions? We learn as much from our mistakes as our successes and it is crucial for students and therapists to develop the ability to effectively critique this work as well as their own.

## 4. SUGGEST READINGS TO ENRICH VIDEO MATERIAL

Assign readings from **Suggestions for Further Readings and Websites** prior to viewing. You can also time the video to coincide with other course or training materials on related topics.

## 5. ASSIGN A REACTION PAPER

See suggestions in **Reaction Paper** section.

## 6. ROLE-PLAY

After watching the video, organize participants into groups of three. Assign each group to role-play a session with a man working on learning to identify and express emotions. Each role-play shall consist of one therapist, one client, and one observer. After the role-plays, have the



groups come together to discuss their experiences. First have the clients share their experiences, then the therapists, and then ask for the comments from the observers. Open up a general discussion on what was learned about treating men in psychotherapy using this model. Note that the client should exhibit some difficulty in showing emotions, but should not be so emotionally blocked that it is impossible to show some movement in the role-play when the therapist effectively intervenes.

An alternative is to conduct a single role-play in front of the group with just one therapist and one client; the entire group can observe before discussing the interaction. After a while, another participant may jump in as the therapist if the therapist gets stuck or reaches an impasse. Follow up with a discussion that explores what works and does not work in psychotherapy with men around the issues presented.

## 7. PERSPECTIVE ON VIDEOS AND THE PERSONALITY OF THE

**THERAPIST.**  
Psychotherapy portrayed in videos is less off-the-cuff than therapy in practice. Therapists or clients in videos may be nervous, putting their best foot forward, or, conversely, trying to show mistakes and how to deal with them. Therapists may also move more quickly than is typical in everyday practice to demonstrate a technique. The personal styles of therapists are often as important as their techniques and theories. Thus, while we can certainly pick up ideas from master therapists, all participants must make the best use of relevant theory, technique and research that fits their own personal style and the needs of their clients.

# Session-by-Session Discussion Questions

Professors, training directors or facilitators may use a few or all of these discussion questions keyed to certain sessions or those issues most relevant to the viewers.

## SESSION ONE

1. **Using the Client's Worldview:** How does Levant use Raymond's social beliefs of masculinity to help him engage in his own therapy process? Do you think it works well here?
2. **Therapist Gender:** Would a female therapist need to do anything different with this client to build a therapeutic alliance?
3. **Issues of Resistance:** Raymond is high functioning and has only minor resistance to therapy. What if his defense style was more confrontational? More passive-aggressive?

## SESSION TWO

4. **Action Versus Emotional Empathy:** Why use action empathy as a way towards building emotional empathy? Do you find the concept of action empathy to be a useful one?
5. **Identifying Feelings:** What do you think about Levant asking the client to identify the feelings of others as an intermediate step towards identifying his own? Is this necessary?

## SESSION THREE

6. **Male Socialization:** How does the belief that showing vulnerability is a sign of weakness reinforce male alexithymia? Do you think this can or should be changed with psychotherapy?

## SESSION FOUR

7. **Homework Completion:** What would be the most productive way to address Raymond's lack of homework completion? Why would you take that approach?

#### SESSION FIVE

- 8. Vulnerable Feelings:** Does Levant do a good job in demonstrating that it is acceptable for men to have vulnerable feelings? How would you have approached this situation?

#### SESSION EIGHT

- 9. Crying in the Session:** Why does Levant interrupt Raymond's crying when he is talking about his father? Would a more traditional approach of letting him cry it all out have been better? What are your thoughts?

#### SESSION NINE

- 10. Inventing Questions:** Can you imagine other situations in this client's life where inventing questions might be a useful way to access emotions?

#### SESSION TWELVE

- 11. And You?** How would you feel having Levant as your therapist? Do you feel an alliance could be made and that he could be effective with you? What would the strengths and drawbacks of his approach be with you, or perhaps a man you know?
- 12. Levant's Approach:** What do you think of Levant's extensive self-disclosure and his bonding with the client in a man-to-man way? How effective do you think Levant's psychoeducational approach, specifically regarding how men are socialized, would be in working with men? Or, do you think it is too much information for therapy?

# Reaction Paper for Classrooms and Training

- **Assignment:** Complete this reaction paper and return it by the date noted by the professor or facilitator.

- **Suggestions for Viewers:** Take notes on these questions while viewing the video and complete the reaction paper afterwards, or use the questions as a way to approach discussion. Respond to each question below.

- **Length and Style:** 2-4 pages double-spaced. Be brief and concise. Do NOT provide a full synopsis of the video. This is meant to be a brief reaction paper that you write soon after watching the video--we want your ideas and reactions.

**What to Write:** Respond to the following questions in your reaction paper:

**1. Key points:** What important points did you learn about this method of treating men in psychotherapy? For example, how is the alliance developed? What stands out in how the therapist works?

**2. What I am resistant to.** What issues/principles/strategies did you find yourself resisting, or what approaches made you feel uncomfortable? Did any techniques or interactions push your buttons? What interventions would you be least likely to apply in your work? Explore these questions.

**3. What I found most helpful.** What was most beneficial to you as a therapist about the model presented? What tools or perspectives did you find helpful and might you use in your own work?

**4. How I would do it differently.** What do you think you would have done differently than the therapist in the video? Be specific in what different approaches, strategies and techniques you might have applied.

**5. Other Questions/Reactions:** What questions or reactions did you have as you viewed the therapy in the video? Other comments, thoughts or feelings?

# Suggestions for Further Readings, Websites and Videos

## BOOKS

Levant, R. , & Brooks, G. , (eds. ) (1997). *Men and Sex: New Psychological Perspectives*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Levant, R. , & Kelly, J. (1989). *Between Father and Child*. Viking.

Levant, R. , & Kopecky, G. (1995). *Masculinity Reconstructed: Changing the Rules of Manhood-at Work, in Relationships, and in Family Life*. Dutton.

Levant, R. , & Pollack, W. , (eds. ) (1995). *A New Psychology of Men*. Basic Books.

Pollack, W. , & Levant, R. , (eds. ) (1998). *New Psychotherapy for Men*. John Wiley & Sons.

Pollack, William (1999). *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*. Owl Books.

Pollack, William (2001). *Real Boys' Workbook*. Villard.

Pollack, William (2000). *Real Boys' Voices*. Random House.

## WEB RESOURCES

**www.drronaldlevant.com** Ronald Levant's website

**www.apa.org/divisions/div51**

The Society for the Psychological  
Study of Men and Masculinity

**www.apa.org/journals/men** The APA journal *The Psychology of Men  
and Masculinity*

**www.williampollack.com** William Pollack's website

RELATED VIDEOS AVAILABLE  
AT [WWW.PSYCHOTHERAPY.NET](http://WWW.PSYCHOTHERAPY.NET)

**NET** *Angry Couple: Conflict-Focused Treatment*  
– Susan Heitler, PhD

*Down Every Year: A Demonstration of Depth Oriented Brief Therapy  
(Coherence Therapy)*  
– Bruce Ecker, MFT

*Mixed Anxiety and Depression: A Cognitive-Behavioral Approach*  
– Donald Meichenbaum, PhD

*Psychotherapy with the Unmotivated Patient*  
– Erving Polster, PhD

*Time Limited Dynamic Psychotherapy*  
– Hanna Levenson, PhD



# Complete Transcript of Effective Psychotherapy with Men

with Ronald F. Levant, EdD

## INTRODUCTION

**Levant Commentary:** *The new psychology of men is very young. We still have much to learn about the unique socialization and developmental influences that shape the personalities of men and how these influences affect men's life experiences. And yet, aided by feminist-inspired scholarship, we have begun the enormous task of deconstructing the body of work, which assumed that the psychology of men was the same thing as the psychology of mankind. With specific reference to men and psychotherapy, a lot has already been accomplished. New literature has found that men's needs from psychotherapy are actually increasing. Although women continue to have more reported psychological distress, men have, in fact, been closing the gap over the past few decades. In addition, this new literature has also shown that psychotherapy as traditionally practiced does not serve men particularly well. In this regard, it should be recalled that psychotherapy was originally designed by men to treat women. In recent years, feminist psychotherapists have pointed out the flaws in these assumptions and have offered corrections. The next step is to design psychotherapy for men.*

## SESSION ONE

**Levant:** Why don't you have a seat?

**Levant Commentary:** *This program illustrates some of this new work showing new techniques for treating what I have called "normative male alexythymia," which I define as the inability that men have, as a result of traditional gender role socialization, to know much of what they're feeling and to put those feelings into words. This inability is fairly widespread and stands as a major obstacle, preventing many men from effectively utilizing psychotherapy.*

**Levant:** So why don't you tell me why it is that you've come here to see me.

**Raymond:** I've come, basically, to find out why I don't feel a whole lot right now while my wife is pregnant and having a baby, and she feels it's unusual that I, her husband, am not excited about having a baby.

**Levant:** What is your wife's name?

**Raymond:** Caroline.

**Levant:** Caroline.

**Raymond:** It's not that I don't want the baby; that's not the case at all. It's a case where we've agreed to have a child. We're going to have one, and I don't feel a whole lot, which I'm not even sure that's a problem. But she feels that it's unusual, and she even said... She pushes my button when she says, "It reminds me of your father," because that gets...

**Levant:** What is it about that that pushes your button?

**Raymond:** The fact that when my wife makes that kind of a comparison, it's usually... My father was a good man in a lot of ways, but there are certain traits that I don't want to repeat because it didn't feel that good being on the receiving end of that and I don't want to do that.

**Levant:** What kind of traits?

**Raymond:** Distant. Maybe a little bit aloof, maybe. So when I'm not showing that much excitement about the birth of the child, my wife thinks, "Well, you're just like your dad," because, uninvolved in some way. And that...

**Levant:** How do you feel about that?

**Raymond:** Obviously, it bothers me at some level because I'm here. She... When she said that... I don't want to be that way.

**Levant:** You don't want to be that way.

**Raymond:** No. I do not want to be that way.

**Levant Commentary:** *I'm not concerned about whether Caroline's view is correct or not, but rather with how Raymond feels about the situation.*

**Raymond:** So I wonder, is that the way I am? Because I don't feel

anything.

And she's pointing out that it's unusual, that I should be excited. That

her friend's' husbands are excited. So it just made me think, you know, is there, am I fathering, following in my father's footsteps?

**Levant Commentary:** *Note the slip. Raymond says "fathering" instead of "following." This may indicate his anxiety about himself as a father-to-be or his feelings about his own father.*

**Levant:** I think I get it. Let me just see if I understand. This is not unusual for you, not to feel very much, but as your wife points out, this is sort of like the way your father was, and there's something in you that, for which that just doesn't sit right. But you're not sure exactly what you can do about it because, on the one hand, this is you. Is that kind of how it feels?

**Levant Commentary:** *This is a summarizing statement used to check if I'm on track with a client, and also to set the stage for the next step in the assessment.*

**Raymond:** Essentially, that's it. I mean, should I feel more? Why don't I feel more? Yeah. That's essentially it.

**Levant:** **All** right. Well, let's look at, sort of, how you do experience emotions. Maybe that's a good place to start.

**Levant Commentary:** *In initial interviews with men like Raymond, I attempt to assess their ability to experience emotions. I follow a particular protocol in which I inquire about their experience of different categories of emotions and their awareness of discrete emotions.*

**Raymond:** I'm not one to fly off the handle. I get angry, here and there, but essentially, I'm not an emotional guy. I'm not nearly as emotional as she is, and that's just the way I am.

**Levant:** You do get angry from time to time. What are the circumstances under which you tend to get angry?

**Raymond:** Sometimes it's little things. Sometimes it's a mix-up at work. Traffic. You know, things that upset you.

**Levant:** Annoyances.

**Raymond:** Annoyances. There's a lot of little annoyances in life and... This isn't an everyday thing, though. I mean, it's not like I'm getting set off everyday.

**Levant:** Oh, I understand that.

**Raymond:** At times, I lose it.

**Levant:** And how do you lose it? What happens when you get really angry?

**Raymond:** I mostly keep it in. I don't hit people. I don't throw things. I just know I'm angry and...

**Levant:** You know you're angry but it doesn't... You don't express it outward.

**Raymond:** I, I might get a headache. I might feel tense. I might feel a little tension. But I don't, I may yell once in awhile, but that's really not my style. I would say in general...

**Levant:** All right. We've been talking about anger. Let's explore some other emotions. Do you often feel the feeling of sadness when appropriate?

**Raymond:** I don't have time. I don't have time to feel sad. I mean, life is what it is.

**Levant:** I'm not sure exactly I understand what you mean. In other words, there's too much to take care of. You can't dwell on things that don't go right. Is that what you mean?

**Raymond:** I'd say that's essentially it. I guess sometimes I feel bad about things, but in general, I haven't had any recent tragedies. It's not that I've had to sit down and feel sad for a while. That's not. . .

**Levant:** Okay. What about fear? Or in its various forms, like apprehension or worry, or . . .

**Raymond:** Apprehension. Did I tell my client the right thing? Did I give them good advice? Are they second guessing me? I second guess. So it's kind of an apprehension. It's kind of..., I'm in a job that I'm dealing with people's finances. I'm dealing with people's fortunes, in some cases. I'm dealing with their futures.

**Levant:** Okay. Well, continuing along with the different emotions, let's turn to the positive spectrum. What about joy? Do you experience feelings of joy or exuberation?

**Raymond:** I'm happy when things happen, I guess. A good day at work, I guess. I'm trying to think: joy. I'm trying to think of the last time I was

ecstatic, I, I don't know.

**Levant:** It's hard to remember.

**Raymond:** Yeah. But I'm not walking around down in the dumps; it's just that I'm not jumping around for joy.

**Levant:** Yeah, okay. Let's go back to a statement made earlier. When we were talking about anger, you said that you experience headaches. Could you tell me a little bit more about that?

**Raymond:** I guess I feel tense. I'd often feel the tension in the shoulders, and then I've got a headache and sometimes it's intense. It's intensely... but I know where it comes from. It's, I'm under pressure. I have a lot of things on my mind, and it's just that it's part of my life.

**Levant:** Part of how you respond to stress?

**Raymond:** It's one of the results.

**Levant:** Okay. Well, now, you're under a lot of stress.

**Raymond:** Yes.

**Levant:** Do you experience any other kind of bodily sensations or symptoms when you're particularly stressed out?

**Raymond:** The usual: upset stomach, m. Maybe a little tightness.

**Levant:** Tightness in your stomach or elsewhere?

**Raymond:** More shoulders.

**Levant:** Now in the midst of this, we're talking about some specific feelings like apprehension or anger and such. Do you find that you have an ability to sort of readily identify the exact emotion that you're feeling?

**Raymond:** Pressure.

**Levant:** Pressure, okay. Most of the time it is pressure that you are feeling.

**Raymond:** Yeah. Things are building up and I have six different things to do at the same time, so basically I'm feeling tense.

**Levant:** Yeah, tense. Okay. Now sometimes it sort of helps to sort of put one's feelings into words. Do you tend to do that? Do you tend to try to put your feelings into words?

**Raymond:** I'm not sure what you mean. Like what...

**Levant:** Like if you're feeling tense, to say, if only to yourself, "Boy, I'm really feeling tense about...", "whatever it is you're feeling tense about."

**Raymond:** I don't think I would... Unless I was telling somebody.

**Levant Commentary:** *The assessment reveals that Raymond tends to experience a lot of tension and pressure, which may be the result of emotions that he is having but he tends not to express it.*

**Raymond:** You know, . . . I've got a headache or I wouldn't...

**Levant:** You wouldn't attempt to put them into words.

**Raymond:** No. I feel what I feel.

**Levant:** Alright, Okay.

**Levant Commentary:** *Raymond exhibits signs of normative male alexithymia: the inability to express one's own emotions that many men develop as a result of the male emotional socialization process.*

**Levant:** . . . interview is to kind of get also a sense of your family history, in order to just better understand you as a person. So tell me a little bit about your marriage. So you've been married now how long?

**Raymond:** Fifteen years.

**Levant:** Fifteen years. And why is it that you've waited so long to have a child?

**Raymond:** The time was never right in the sense that I used to be an insurance adjuster for a large firm and I moved a lot. So we'd be a couple of years in one place and then a year here. And we didn't feel it was time to start a family when I was that unsettled.

**Levant:** Sometimes, people postpone having a child because they're not sure of the stability of their marriage. Was that ever an issue for you and your wife?

**Raymond:** I think we have a pretty good marriage, as far as marriages go. We have our disagreements, but I'd say it's pretty solid. It's lasted 15 years. I'm not going anywhere.

**Levant:** In this day and age, that's a heroic achievement.



**Raymond:** Yeah. So I don't think that would be a key factor.

**Levant:** Now during all these years of moves and such, Caroline was working?

**Raymond:** Pretty much. She's not in the kind of business I'm in, but she's always had some kind of job.

**Levant:** So she would, you know, when an opportunity to move came along, it would be in response to a change in your situation rather than hers?

**Raymond:** Yes. Oh, yeah.

**Levant:** So she would follow along, like if you had a new job or something or relocated or whatever the case might have been.

**Raymond:** Sure. I'm the "breadwinner," so to speak.

**Levant:** Though she does work, you earn much more of the family income.

**Raymond:** Yes.

**Levant:** Okay. Now I'm going to ask you a little bit about the family you grew up in. Are your parents still alive?

**Levant Commentary:** *Raymond has younger twin sisters, one of whom is divorced with a handicapped child. His mother is alive in good health and lives nearby. His father died of a heart attack in his late 60s.*

**Raymond:** I take care of my family and I'm proud of that.

**Levant:** Yeah. As well you should be. Let's talk about what we're going to do. Basically, you're coming here because you're about to start a family and you're not feeling a lot. And while you're not sure that that's such a problem, you're willing to look at it.

**Raymond:** Is it a problem? You tell me.

**Levant:** Well, it is and it isn't. It isn't because a lot of us men are basically like you: We don't feel very much. We basically do what we have to do. We take the responsibility for our families and we carry it out, and if we had to stop and think about every little nuance of what we were feeling, we probably wouldn't get our jobs done. But on the other hand, the world is changing. And men's roles are changing and family roles are changing

and there's more there for us men than we realize. And there's a lot for us, there's a lot to be gained in starting to open up our hearts a bit and become more aware of the emotions that we're feeling. Now from talking to you, I get the sense that there are a lot of little emotions that are going on inside of you that you're not aware of that finally make their appearance as stress. Or sometimes as anger. And that as a result of this, you sometimes get headaches. You sometimes get gastro-intestinal upset, and sometimes you get tension in your shoulders and your neck. The process we're going to undergo will help you begin to develop the skills to become aware of those little emotions as they're happening. And more than that, to put them into words. And see if that doesn't allow you to open up your heart to experience more of what's happening with your family.

**Raymond:** So what you're saying is that I'm going to, to use that phrase, "get in touch with my feelings" or... I like the idea that you say I'm going to open up and feel better. If that's possible, I like that idea. I'm not 100% sure how I'm going to do that, but...

**Levant:** It's not so much a matter of opening up as it is of learning skills, something I think is probably very comfortable to you. I mean, I think along the way, you've picked up many, many different skills and what essentially you'll be doing is you'll be learning a set of emotional skills.

**Levant Commentary:** *My mini lecture here begins the process of psycho-education, a combination of didactic teaching and skills training.*

**Raymond:** And you're saying I didn't pick these up in my life. In other words, this is something I missed?

**Levant:** This is something that most men miss. The way our generation grew up, and I think this is starting to change, it was thought that boys should be prepared to be emotionally stoic, to be aggressive, to really, to not be cry babies and to not be fearful, and as a result, we were basically given a lot of messages to not attend to those emotions. You know, "big boys don't cry." Or, I don't know if you were an athlete or not, but coaches used to say, "learn to play with pain." So as a result, and this isn't just you, but this is really a lot of men, we grow up to be men who really are genuinely unaware of what it is that we're feeling. We know we're feeling something because we see it in other forms. We get a headache or we get angry or the like. So we're going to look at... Basically what we're going to

do, Raymond, is we're going to kind of go back and pick up the skills that 9 year old girls learn as a matter of course.

**Raymond:** And that's a good thing, I guess.

**Levant Commentary:** *After normalizing Raymond's difficulty in experiencing emotions and giving him a context for thinking about developing emotional self-awareness, I introduce the concept of developing psychological skills.*

**Raymond:** How long does something like this take? Is this something that I get the skills, I learn them, I apply them, and I say good-bye to you or... What are we looking at here?

**Levant:** Well, it's hard to say. You know. Therapy is a little bit more of an art in some ways than a science. Ballpark, I would say, we're probably talking about somewhere around six months, plus or minus a couple. We're just going to have to see how it goes. But we'll start with the skills and that will probably take us, you know, 4-6 weeks, something like that. And then we'll see what happens.

**Raymond:** Okay, I like the idea.

**Levant:** Let's start off by looking at your emotional vocabulary. Most of us men, you know, not being schooled in the arts of emotion, actually have rather limited vocabulary for emotion words. So what I'd like you to do during the course of the week is to try to write down as many words as you can think of for emotions, for different emotions. We've talked about some of them here today. We talked about fear, apprehension, anger, sadness, joy. So I'd like you, during the course of the week, just to kind of, whenever you're thinking about it, try to think of as many words as you possibly can for emotions and bring that in next week.

**Raymond:** Just any word I can think of that applies to emotion...

**Levant:** That describes emotion.

**Raymond:** That describes an emotion.

**Levant:** Is that okay?

**Raymond:** I... Sure.

**Levant:** All right.

**Raymond:** I mean, I don't know that there's a whole lot of them. I'm a fairly articulate guy, but whatever comes up, I'll write it down.

**Levant:** Okay. Very good. All right. So...

**Raymond:** You want a certain number by the end of the week or...

**Levant:** Well, I'll leave that up to you. As many as you can come up with.

**Levant Commentary:** *We've begun the first step of a four step psycho-educational program, in which the client is given the homework assignment to develop his emotional vocabulary.*

## SESSION TWO

**Levant Commentary:** *The next three steps are learning to read emotions in other people, learning to read emotions in oneself, and practice.*

**Levant:** Did you have a chance to do the homework?

**Raymond:** Yeah, I did it. I got it here.

**Levant:** Good.

**Raymond:** Want to see it?

**Levant:** It looks like you came up with quite a number of words. Why don't you read them to me?

**Raymond:** Stressed. Pressured. Annoyed. Pissed off. Burned out. Overwhelmed. Apprehensive. Burdened. Heavy. Worried. Resentful. Furious. Zapped. Happy. Depleted. Pissed off. Uneasy. Disturbed. Pleased. Disappointed.

**Levant:** Wow, that's quite a list. Quite a number of words. Were you surprised that you came up with so many words for emotions?

**Raymond:** Yes, I was. Stress was easy,; pressure was easy,; and next

thing

you know, I got rolling there.

**Levant:** Yeah, you were on a roll.

**Raymond:** I did three different times.

**Levant:** Three different times you sat down to write the words.

**Raymond:** Yeah. I just noticed here, I realize "pissed off" here I put twice,

but...

**Levant:** Well, that's okay. We'll give you credit for both of them. Well, I noticed that a number of the words really related to symptoms of stress, which is not at all surprising, given what you told me last week, that you are under a lot of stress and you carry a lot of burdens. So you have words like "stressed," "overwhelmed," "zapped," "depleted." Things like that. I also noticed that you had a number of words for anger. Again, this is kind of consistent with what you told me about your experience, so your vocabulary seems to kind of relate fairly well to your experience. You have words like "furious," "pissed," "resentful," "annoyed." You have fewer words for what I call "the vulnerable emotions." I think you have "disappointment" on there and do you have "worried?"

**Raymond:** I have both: disappointed and worried.

**Levant:** Disappointed and worried. So you have a couple of words, and maybe a few more, for the vulnerable emotions, which are the emotions that I think make us feel vulnerable, like sadness and fear. You know, disappointment and hurt. And you had a few emotions for kind of the happy end of the spectrum. I think you said "happy" and "pleased." But not a lot of words about caring, like "affection," "fondness," and such like that. So this probably, too, reflects the work we need to do, that your vocabulary is a reflection of the kind of words you commonly use to describe your experience and as your experience grows, you'll have more words. I would encourage you to keep that up. Maybe, you know, continue to try to add words to your list, and maybe think about the vulnerable end of the spectrum as well as the caring end of the spectrum.

**Raymond:** "Vulnerable," you mean... Give me an example.

**Levant:** Words that make you feel vulnerable. Like "sad." "Sad" is a word that usually makes a man feel pretty vulnerable. Or "fear." Or "hurt." Or "lonely." Or "abandoned." Things like that. So those are what I call "vulnerable" emotions. Those kinds of things.

**Raymond:** Right. Okay.

**Levant:** Now, I thought what we might want to do is kind of return to some of the things you talked about briefly in the first session, Raymond. You had mentioned, you know, initially that your father may represent a

sort of hot button for you and I'd like to get a little bit more information about your father. Could you tell me a bit more about him?

**Raymond:** Good man. Hard working man. Kind of the strong, silent type. Did his job. Took care of the family. I admired him. I respected him.

**Levant:** What kind of work did he do?

**Raymond:** My dad was a publisher. He started a newspaper in Minnesota when we moved there, and built it. Built the a business; built the a paper. Worked a lot. Busy. Not real talkative.

**Levant:** Man of few words.

**Raymond:** Man of few words. There were times I didn't see a whole lot of him. Not because he didn't want to be...

**Levant:** Was he at work?

**Raymond:** I don't know. He was working. That was basically it. People would come over to the house, the sheriff or the councilmen or whatever, because in that community, it kind of revolved around the newspaper. So obviously, my father being a publisher...

**Levant:** So he was home, but you wouldn't get to see him because he would be busy with other people?

**Raymond:** I guess he's what you'd call a "newspaperman" in the old style.

H And he lived his newspaper, and spent a lot of time on it. If he had an interest, it was World War II. He was...

**Levant:** World War II?

**Raymond:** He used to talk about that probably with the same energy he talked about doing his newspaper. And I guess that time in his life was a heightened experience. He used the expression, "hanging in the butt-end of a bomber." And with these flyers flying around...

**Levant:** What did that mean, "hanging in the butt-end of a bomber?"

**Raymond:** Basically, he's back there with a machine gun. These enemy planes are flying around and he's trying to shoot them down. And when he talks about that, he talks about an experience that I can only somehow imagine. When he would talk about the war and his experiences in it, he'd have a sense of, his eyes would light up. Almost as if he were back



there, and I sometimes think he wished he wished he was back there. You know, it wasn't like he said, "I don't want to be here." I'm sure he loved my mother. And I guess he was a good father. We were raised. We had food on the table.

**Levant:** How close did you feel to him as your father?

**Raymond:** Well, my dad's not a guy you get close to. So we didn't have like a close, buddy-buddy, go to the ball game kind of relationship. He did his job. He provided for the family, but just wasn't, he wasn't a warm guy, kind of. I respected him, you know, but I wouldn't say "close," but not because we had a problem between us. He just wasn't someone you get close to.

**Levant:** I get you.

**Raymond:** Anyway, that was him.

**Levant Commentary:** *I pursued this line of inquiry about his father's unavailability and emotional remoteness because in the first session, he demonstrated a level of reactivity that indicated that these issues were somewhat accessible. As with many of the men I've counseled, he was much more sealed off about his mother.*

**Levant:** We're running close to the end of the session. I want to spend a few minutes talking about the homework assignment for next week. Basically, as you know, we're working on developing emotional skills, and we're going to build on the exercise you did this last week of identifying vocabulary words for emotions. And we're pointing toward the goal of being able to identify your own emotions. But I've found that there's a very helpful intermediate step, and that is to learn to identify the emotions in other people. Now this could be people that you're interacting with or people that you see on TV or in a movie. The idea is to try to infer from their tone of voice, from their facial expressions, you know, from the way they're carrying their body, what it is that they're feeling.

**Levant Commentary:** *We have now begun the second step of the four step psycho-educational program: learning to identify emotions in other people. I provide didactic instruction on how to read non-verbal communication and teach Raymond to build on what is natural for many men, what I call "action empathy," to develop emotional empathy.*

**Levant:** Basically what I'm building on here is a strength that I think a lot of men have, and that is of being able to sort of see things from another person's perspective. We don't often tune into the emotional level. In fact, we're very good, I think, at sort of seeing things from another person's point of view and figuring out what they're going to do. That makes us very good in business and sports, and that sort of thing. In fact, I call this "action empathy" as contrasted with "emotional empathy," which I think is more easy for women.

**Raymond:** I'm not sure I'm clear on the difference between "action empathy" and, I don't think I know what either one is, so... Exactly.

**Levant:** Empathy is the ability to see things from another person's perspective, and show them that you see it. But because of the way in which we're socialized, which we've talked about before, we tend to emphasize the realm of doing things, and we're shunted away from feeling about things. And the opposite is true for females who are socialized to be very aware of feelings. So males and females develop on separate tracks, and we both develop this skill of empathy, but in different ways. Our skill is to kind of, is to see another person's perspective and figure out how they're likely to respond. But by learning this to apply emotion words, you're going to be building on your skill in action empathy to develop emotional empathy.

## SESSION THREE

**Levant:** So how did the homework go last week?

**Raymond:** Very interesting. Illuminating. I'll give you an example: a woman at work, I've been working with her everyday for the last nine months. Every transaction I make is filed through her. I know the woman. She comes in one morning, and I'm so into identifying feelings that I identify on her hurt, sadness, pain. It turns out that the night before, her son gets involved in some incident with the police. He's brought into jail. They don't know what's going to happen. She's confused. She's sad. And when I hear this, I say to myself, "That's what I identified." Levant: Well, I don't know why you'd be surprised, though. I mean, it seems like step by step you've been building these skills and learning to identify emotions and now picking them out very clearly in other people.

**Raymond:** And when I do that, it gets me thinking. I mean, I see this woman and I see her sadness, and then I start to think, “What about Caroline? What is she feeling sometimes?” And I look at her and I think, “How does she feel?” If she’s all excited about a baby and I’m, I’m me. I’m what I am, and I’m not feeling anything, therefore what can I identify in Caroline that she’s going through that maybe I’ve been missing. So it’s kind of like, once you start looking for things, you’re finding things.

**Levant:** You find some things and you’re starting to learn some things, and this is all starting to make a lot more sense to you.

**Raymond:** Yes. Yeah. It kind of made me think of something that happened to me—this is years ago, I’m going back, in college—but I had a sweetheart, love, whatever, in college and I mean, I fell for her. I was flat out, crazy about her. And I pursued her. I, as far as I know, what love meant then, I loved this woman. And we talked about marriage. We were very close, and she would say that I wasn’t communicating. That I wasn’t...And I never quite got what she was talking about, but I look at it in the context of my marriage now and I see parallels. I see that I’m there. I’m with her. I love her. And yet, she’s missing something. Or I’m missing something. That somehow I’m not communicating, and I’m not sure... Not only am I not sure if I’m communicating, I’m not quite sure what Greta, back in college, wanted, nor do I really know what I’m supposed to communicate to Caroline, but I get the sadness in Caroline sometimes that wasn’t a whole lot different from what I’m identifying. I mean, it’s a little confusing, except...

**Levant:** Are you confused about what women seem to want from you? Is that...

**Raymond:** Totally. Completely. Greta left me because I wasn’t giving her what she wanted; I didn’t know what she wanted in the first place. Now, here’s Caroline.

**Levant:** She wanted some big thing called “communication,” and you probably thought you were communicating.

**Raymond:** I thought. I mean, I was, I feel close...

**Levant:** Yeah, when did you feel most connected to her?

**Raymond:** When we made love. I mean, And I don’t mean, I’m not saying

that I just feel totally connected to her physically. I feel close, closest to Caroline, and closest to Greta, for that matter, in the physical act of love. I almost feel like there's a soul or a heart to heart connection in that physical act that somehow is missing for Caroline when we're communicating. It's not... It's not as strong. I don't feel it, and I think what I'm seeing now is I see a sadness that's not there when we're not in bed. So I can't just rip her clothes off and make love on the spot, because she doesn't want that, anyway. She wants something else.

**Levant:** She wants something else and that's what you're puzzling about, and just what is that. And I think what it is, and I think that, you know, in some ways, this is not just unique to you, Raymond. I think a lot of men are struggling with this these days, that what women seem to want more from men, is for us to be able to share with them verbally what's going on in our lives, what's going on in our hearts. To kind of express some of those emotions that we're feeling, that they can so easily express to us.

**Raymond:** And they're not going to think I'm a weakling because I'm, I mean, in a woman, that's what they do: They talk about "I'm feeling this. I'm feeling that." If I do that, I mean, Caroline sees me as the strong man of the house.

**Levant:** And you are.

**Raymond:** So why do I want to start telling her I'm not so strong?

**Levant:** I see. So that's your fear, that, you know, she depends on you and if you were to sort of reveal your worries or your fears or whatever it is, maybe she would worry that you're not strong enough to carry the burden? Is that what...

**Raymond:** That. Begin to doubt whether she made a good choice as a husband, if this guy is, can't handle his emotions, can't keep himself... But so, I don't know. Is that what she's asking me to do?

**Levant:** Well, I can understand your fear about it, because I think that's sort of what we've learned to believe, that, you know, we're supposed to be stoic and trustworthy and reliable and strong and carry the burdens, which I think you do very well. And I also think that because of our lack of familiarity with emotions, you know, we don't make a lot of distinctions. You know, there's a big difference between having an emotion and talking

about it and being overcome by an emotion. Or for that matter, having an emotion that affects us physically and bypasses our thinking processes.

**Levant Commentary:** *With his developing awareness of emotions in other people, Raymond has become aware of his wife's sadness. The idea of an intimacy based on sharing his emotions makes him worry that he'd be letting his wife down by not appearing to be rock solid.*

**Raymond:** So I'm not losing her respect, from your perspective. I might be gaining her respect by doing that?

**Levant:** I haven't met your wife, but from what you've said and from what I hear from dozens of other men talking about their wives, is that this is really what women want more from men today. To be able to be soul mates, you know, to be able to share on that level of deep emotional communication, and not just in bed.

**Raymond:** I want to be able to do that because I don't want to lose Caroline. I'm not talking about a college sweetheart here. I'm talking about my wife.

**Levant:** I understand.

**Raymond:** Learning how to do... So I mean, I'm willing. I want to do that.

**Levant:** You've already taken a number of steps along that line. You're ability to empathize with your fellow employee and to see her sadness so clearly is a very significant step in that direction. And the next exercise that I'm going to suggest that you do, will take you much further in that direction. I'm going to ask you to keep an emotional response log during the next week. Basically, I'd like you to get some 3x5 cards, Raymond, that you can kind of just carry in your shirt pocket. And whenever you feel either an emotion or, you know, a bodily state that you know is kind of connected to an emotion, a headache, a tension, a twinge in your stomach, or pressure, then try to pick it out a little bit more. You know, jot down whatever it is that you're aware of, then go through the exercise of figuring out who is doing what to whom right now and how does that affect you. And then go back over your vocabulary list and try to find the word or words that seem to match that. Or any other word that might occur to you, that might, in fact, not even be on your list yet.

**Raymond:** All right, so, essentially I'm identifying in myself what I've been

identifying in other people. I'll tell you, when I'm feeling upset, the last thing I want to do is think about it. I want to get through it. I want to get on with things.

**Levant:** I understand what you're saying. To a lot of us, when we're feeling upset, the last thing we want to do is dwell on it, but by sort of running away from that feeling, we're actually allowing it to sort of take place elsewhere in our body, elsewhere in our psyches. When you have a strong emotion, you have a strong emotion. And there's much more value in trying to verbalize, put that emotion into words, than there is in allowing it just simply to take its course.

**Levant Commentary:** *This begins the third step of the psycho-educational program. I first provide didactic instruction on emotion and the differences between letting an emotion overtake us, letting it go underground, or having it and being able to experience and talk about it. The experiential part takes place through a homework assignment, which will require that Raymond wrestle with the process of putting his own emotions into words.*

**Levant:** Well, you know, you probably have this experience, I don't know. A lot of men do. They have the experience that their wives tell them that they know what they're feeling before they do.

**Raymond:** Oh, yeah.

**Levant:** Because there are three parts to any emotion: there's the bodily sensation, there's the awareness in mind, and then there's the play on your face, as you saw with your co-worker. And very often, when you're having a strong emotion, it's playing on your face and your facial expression. Your wife can see it. She can read it. And maybe you're feeling it in your body, but you, it's not in your awareness. So what we're trying to do is build those linkages so you now can have it in your awareness.

## SESSION FIVE

**Raymond:** Oh, this one. [reading] My car won't start. I call the garage. They don't show up. I get to work late. I miss an important crop report. I get in too late to do anything about it. And I wrote down "anger," "frustration," "stress," "anxiety." Then —

**Levant:** Hold on. Let's not leave that one so quickly. Let's explore that in a



little bit more detail, if that's okay.

**Raymond:** Sure.

**Levant:** What was it that you were angry about?

**Raymond:** I was angry about the garage telling me they were coming to fix the car, and they didn't come.

**Levant:** You counted on them, and they didn't show up.

**Raymond:** Exactly. I do a lot of business with them, and...

**Levant:** You expect better treatment.

**Raymond:** Yes, I do. And I was angry.

**Levant:** And maybe even feeling a little bit let down?

**Raymond:** Yeah, I was let down. I did feel let down. I felt like I deserved to be treated a little differently from them.

**Levant:** So would you say that you might have felt disappointed?

**Raymond:** Yes.

**Levant:** Yeah, okay. The reason why I've asked you to focus on this is I wanted to, you know, and as uncomfortable as this may be, wanted to kind of illustrate how it is that anger often replaces our vulnerable feelings. You know, you felt let down. You felt disappointed. You counted on these folks. You've given them a lot of business. You expected, you know, better treatment, and they let you down in such a very big way, and you got angry. Now we men learn as kids to transform our vulnerable feelings into anger. It's much more powerful to feel angry, and it's harder to acknowledge that we feel vulnerable. Disappointed is a vulnerable feeling.

**Levant Commentary:** *I paid particular attention to helping Raymond identify the vulnerable emotions underneath the feeling of anger. This is a very important part of helping men develop emotional self-awareness.*

**Raymond:** And not being able to fix it myself didn't feel so good. I felt a little bit, I don't want to say "helpless," but you know the feeling...

**Levant:** You were at their mercy.

**Raymond:** I was at their mercy.

**Levant:** And feeling... Well, it is helpless. It's like you're at their mercy, and a man doesn't like to feel like he can't take care of things himself.

**Raymond:** Because I can take care of most things.

**Levant:** Yeah, so this was a unique situation which you really didn't feel like you could take care of it and that added to the feeling of vulnerability. You know, so you, this was something you couldn't take care of. You were counting on them and they let you down big time. Let's see if we can do the same thing with the next word on your list. I think it was "stress."

**Levant Commentary:** *Stress is not an emotion, of course, but when you ask men to identify their emotions, they often mention stress and related phenomena.*

**Levant:** What was the stress about?

**Raymond:** Stress was about having to be somewhere and not being able to get there. And knowing the consequences of not getting there, and it just mounted. And the stress of not knowing what to do: wait for them, go. Stressful.

**Levant:** Knowing you had to be there and not knowing what's going to get you there.

**Raymond:** Yes.

**Levant:** But you mentioned the consequences. Tell me about that.

**Raymond:** The major consequence is you don't miss opportunities like I missed that morning and to stay in this business.

**Levant:** So maybe underneath that stress, here's some apprehension,

some

worry, maybe some fear?

**Raymond:** Fear of my client's reactions.

**Levant:** Yeah, okay. So we've figured out that fear is apart of your stress. What else might be there?

**Raymond:** Feelings of not meeting my responsibility. I have a responsibility. I pride myself on that, and it's kind of a, I didn't do the job. I didn't fulfill my role. So that's kind of hooked in there with the consequences, but I take pride in what I do. Yeah, I do it because I need to earn a living, and you know...

**Levant:** So you've taken a little bit of a hit on your pride there. It's like you let yourself down somehow.

**Raymond:** In a strange way, it's like I did to my client what the garage guy did to me. And it's not a clean analogy, but I didn't...

**Levant:** Well, it seems like a pretty good analogy: You counted on your garage and they let you down. And your clients count on you and you let them down.

**Raymond:** That's what I did. And I... So I was, maybe, angry at myself in some way.

**Levant:** Okay. So a second emotion in the stress is that you're sort of angry at yourself. You're not happy with yourself at what happened.

**Raymond:** Right. You know, if I would have done things different... What could I have... I replayed it over and over, and why didn't I get there when I should have got there? Well, maybe, I didn't handle it right. I didn't come through.

**Levant:** Yeah, you let them down. You didn't come through. You didn't do what your... It's like you sort of have to take yourself down a notch in your own self-appraisal somehow.

**Raymond:** It's embarrassing.

**Levant:** Yeah. Maybe even shaming.

**Raymond:** Yeah. It's... You don't even like to admit it to yourself because I'm a problem. I don't do this. And yet, I did it.

**Levant:** Well, so we see that the stress really kind of, like the anger, but in its own unique way, represents very discreet, vulnerable feelings: fear, feeling you let your people down, a feeling of embarrassment. And so point one of this lesson is that as we kind of continue the process of the emotional response log, to not just simply stop at stress or pressure or anger, but ask the kinds of questions I've been asking you. Now I have to say in advance, I know that this is hard. You've been struggling with this and one of the reasons this is so hard is because it sort of is shaming to us men to admit vulnerability. You know, we've been told all our lives that we're supposed to be strong and invulnerable and to acknowledge, even to ourselves, that we feel let down and that or we feel afraid, makes us

feel ashamed. Just that very act of saying it. Now I've been telling you it's healthy to be able to put these emotions into words and we sort of have to go against a little bit of the grain. We have to kind of challenge some of our ideas about what it means to be manly in order to do this kind of work. That it's not shameful to acknowledge what it is that we really feel.

**Raymond:** Beyond the anger...

**Levant:** And underneath the anger.

**Raymond:** ...and underneath the anger.

**Levant:** Yeah.

**Raymond:** That it came from my feeling, I guess, inadequate in some way. And that's not easy for me to broadcast to the world.

**Levant:** And it's not easy, probably, for you even to say that to me.

**Raymond:** It's not easy. And yet, you're saying that by saying it and identifying it, some of the pain goes away and if you talk about headaches and I had all three that morning. I had the headache, my...

**Levant:** And you were left with all that, and what I'm suggesting is that as you learn to brave the shame and put these feelings into words, you know, you can acknowledge it and avoid a lot of these much worse reactions that you tend to experience. And I know it's hard. I know it's hard to stand up to the shame.

**Raymond:** The thing that's not quite clear to me is, if I identify these feelings, underneath the anger, underneath the stress, what's really going on, I identify it. I know what I'm feeling, but the event still happened. I still have the problems. I mean, I still did not come through whether I give it the label anger or I give it 16 labels and identify a dozen emotions.

**Levant:** That's a very good question, and you're absolutely right. No matter what, you've still got a situation to deal with. You've got, probably, angry and upset clients and you've got feelings, you know, toward yourself. My point is that you're in a much better position to deal with it when you know what it is that you're feeling. If your anger, if you stay in the anger... You know, maybe you'll write an angry letter to the garage. Maybe you'll, you know, sort of quit them and you'll spend a lot of time involved with that, and while that's going on, you're not attending to your clients, and

you're not attending to what's going on with you. So it gives you, it just gives you a better ability to deal with the situation. The situation still needs to be dealt with, you're right, one way or the other, but I think you're in a better position to deal with it, you know, when you can kind of label the feelings you're having and put them into words. Another piece of this, you mentioned Caroline earlier, and talking with her about some of these feelings may actually be a very helpful thing for you. One of the things we've found is that being able to talk about your feelings with another person helps you put them in perspective and find solutions that you wouldn't otherwise think of. Now I know this is not comfortable for you, but I've also been impressed at how willing you are to take on things that aren't comfortable.

**Raymond:** Where I can just tell her what's going on as clearly as I understand it, what I'm feeling. Because I find that I always want to come off in a good light in Caroline's eyes, so this is going to be a learning thing for me a little bit.

**Levant:** Yeah. I think you might also be pleasantly surprised at how beneficial it is to you in terms of being able to deal with the situation that you've got.

**Raymond:** Yeah, in actuality. Because I felt it when I first looked at the card, and that indeed that did happen. Just by talking about it. So I have some... It worked a little bit here. I mean, with you. I'm not ready to go out to the street and announce that I made a mistake, but...

## SESSION EIGHT

**Raymond:** My mother was a traditional mom. She made sure we were clean. She made sure we were well dressed. She made sure that meals were on the table. She took care of my dad. My dad came home, whatever time, she'd put something out for him to eat. That was her life, but I'm sure she had a deep emotional life. I didn't know about it. She basically was a mother. You know, she just did the things you're supposed to do.

**Levant:** Took care of everybody else.

**Raymond:** She took care and nourished us. She was a nourishing mom. My dad, much harder to read. Not that simple. Hard worker. Did what he

had to do. Took care of business. I don't think I ever saw my father, when it came to business, not show up and do what he had to do. They called him at 2 o'clock in the morning with a problem, he was there. And I admire that. And I admire what he did for a living, and when I was in school, I became editor of the newspaper like my dad. You're dad's son, you know. And I'm thinking this is a point to connect, because we didn't have a great connection. I hardly knew the guy. So I'm the editor of the paper. He's the publisher of the paper. Common ground to communicate. We could talk about the press and the duties and the rights of the press, but we don't do that. Because he's too busy. He's not there. And I even tried to set it up. I tried to set my schedule and be in the right place when he came home so we could talk. And that wasn't my job as a kid. That was his job! It was the father's job, once in awhile, to be there for the kid, and not for the kid to set it up to get the father. Isn't that right?

**Levant Commentary:** *My hypothesis that Raymond's issues about*

*becoming*

*a father have a lot to do with unresolved feelings about his own father is now coming into play. Raymond previously spoke about his father in a very detached way. Now, some quite powerful emotions are surfacing.*

**Raymond:** He must have known. How could he... How could he not know, this smart man, that his son wanted to at least talk to him once in awhile about what was going on in my life?

**Levant:** It's a puzzle that he wouldn't have picked up, you know, that you weren't just following in his footsteps in this, but were bidding for his attention.

**Raymond:** That's a good word: bidding for his attention. Trying to play it just right to get something out of this man.

**Levant:** And as you reflect on this, you're, you seem to be in touch with some anger.

**Raymond:** Yeah.

**Levant:** Is that the emotion?

**Raymond:** Yeah.

**Levant:** Now as we talked about last time, sometimes anger is sort of a cover for other emotions, and I'm wondering, as you think about this

event that happened so many, many years ago, if you're aware of any more vulnerable emotions that might be underneath that anger?

**Raymond:** Maybe... You know, I have this sense that I'm mad at him but there's also that sense of, well, maybe if I had been a little smarter and worked it a little better, I could have got something going with my dad. And even a little guilt, well, he was busy. And if he wasn't working, then how could he support the family, so am I wrong to have wanted him to stop what he was doing to be with me?

**Levant:** Yeah. So the emotions that occur to you know is that you're starting to think that maybe your demands were excessive, maybe you weren't taking enough into account about his schedule. You know, and these kinds of things.

**Raymond:** Yeah. And then I think, well, then I would get resentful of him for not being there and maybe if I wasn't... But I still think he was the father. Didn't he have a... Isn't being a father more than just paying the bills? That I shouldn't take the full blame for this.

**Levant:** You really, it sounds like you were yearning for and expecting so much more for him.

**Raymond:** Yeah, and...

**Levant:** And perhaps, disappointed.

**Raymond:** Maybe he didn't know how, but damn it, he should have tried. He really should have tried.

**Levant:** So you're in touch with some sadness about that?

**Raymond:** Yeah.

**Levant:** I've never seen you express sadness about your father.

**Raymond:** I'm sorry.

**Levant:** No, that's okay. Can you say what it is that you're feeling?

**Raymond:** Sadness. That I missed, you know, I missed it. I missed something that, right now, seems very important to me.

**Levant:** In touch with a lot of emotions.

**Raymond:** Yeah.

**Levant:** Yeah. Sounds like there's really a lot there. When we first talked about your father a few sessions back, it was kind of, sort of, a little bit pat, you know, and "he was this and he was that," and so forth. But as we talk today, I get the sense of a wealth of emotion that might be there. And I'd like to suggest a way that we could proceed in this regard, to try to get some clarity about what's going on and resolve some of these feelings. It's an exercise that I've used with men whose fathers are no longer alive and who are, you know, wanting to come to terms with their relationships with them. It involves, first of all, trying to identify the questions you have. You described your father as a man, you didn't know what made him tick. So I'd like you to spend a little time trying to formulate the questions you would ask him if he were alive today and maybe spend a couple of evenings, a half hour each time, and write these questions down on those 3x5 cards you've been using for your emotional response log.

**Raymond:** Questions I would ask my dad.

**Levant:** If he were alive today.

**Raymond:** If he were alive.

**Levant:** In the service of trying to find out what makes the guy tick.

**Raymond:** I can do that.

**Levant:** All right. And I'd also like you to bring your emotional response log into this, and when you write down a question, think about what emotion you have about that question and write it down.

**Raymond:** I can do that, too.

**Levant:** There's another little piece I'd like you to try here. And it's worked for some people; it may or may not work for you. But in addition to writing down the emotion, sometimes it's helpful to express the emotion in color rather than in words. So using some colored felt tip pens, choosing a different color for each emotion, sort of make a swatch of color on the card that expresses the emotion that you feel.

**Raymond:** Let me ask you this: I'm going to ask questions that I have never asked, most of them, but I would like to ask, if he were here. What I'm not exactly clear on is that it would be frustrating to write down questions that I would like to ask, knowing I can't ask them.



**Levant:** I think what you're expressing is that, obviously, there's something in this exercise that feels difficult, and I have no doubt that it will be difficult, but you've shown yourself capable of taking on things that are difficult in the past in the course of our work together. Of course, he's not alive. Of course, he can't answer the questions. And maybe when he was alive, he couldn't have answered the questions, either. The point of this exercise is really not so much to get specific answers to the questions, but to use that as a way to come to terms with the feelings that you have about your father.

**Raymond:** Which... So every time I write a question... It just seems like I'm going to do the exercise. I... It just seems like asking those questions is not something I want to sit down and do on a, in an evening because...

**Levant:** It's painful.

**Raymond:** ...it's painful.

**Levant:** Yeah. Yeah. I hear you. It's not an inviting task; I understand that. But as we've seen today and as you're starting to discover, there's a lot of pain in your relationship with your father, and getting to that pain and starting to see what's there and putting it into words will give you a better handle and a better way to deal with it.

**Raymond:** Worth a shot.

**Levant:** Good. One other thing: If you have any photos of your family when you were growing up, why don't you bring those in, too?

## SESSION NINE

**Raymond:** Like, did he feel anything towards me? Was he... Did he have affection? Did he ever screw up at work? It's all the same stuff. It's not knowing who you are. Who are you? What did you feel? Here's another one: Why weren't you ever there when I played ball? Why were you so distant even when you were there? If what you were doing was so important, was it more important than your family? It's all the same stuff.

**Levant:** What were some of the feelings? I noticed that you've used colors to record your emotions. What were some of the emotions that came to you as you wrote these cards out?

**Raymond:** Anger. Anger. Frustration/ resentment. I guess, anger. Anger. But then there would be frustration because I'd feel sad that he wasn't there, but then I'd say, yeah, but he could have been there, so it got to be kind of resentful. I mean, it didn't just happen. It happened because he was not there. I did the exercise. The man was not there. You want more proof? I'll give you proof. You notice these pictures? That's my dad. That's my sister. My dad and my mother. No pictures of me and my dad.

**Levant:** No pictures of the two of you.

**Raymond:** None. And I looked. It's not like... There are none. Which makes me think, did we lose them all? No. There were none taken. And I'd like to know, maybe it was, maybe we were a burden to him. Here's the man from the Air Force, this exciting life, one second from death, now I've got this boring family, this wife, this kid. Maybe it was me. Maybe it was just me. Maybe he didn't like me. Maybe he, for whatever reason, or maybe it was the whole family. Maybe he just didn't, I don't know. I don't know the answer.

**Levant:** Yeah. Those questions loom very large in your heart, don't they?

**Raymond:** Yeah. They do. And I, it's more than just being sad, because it's not like something just happened and you're sad about it. He made it happen. He was not there. You know when he was there? Or wanted me there? He has a heart attack. Then he wanted me around. Then he wanted his son. And ironically, I wasn't there. I was overseas in the Army and I remember when that happened, my first reaction was: Fuck you. Fuck you. I'm too busy now. It's a family tradition. You know. We're not available. I'm just carrying on the family tradition. Men are not there. I'm not going to be there. That was my first reaction. You would think I would have felt sad or shocked. My first reaction was, I don't have to go there. The very thing I resent in him, I turned around and did it myself. It was like I wanted to get even with him somehow. Let him know how it feels. And I almost felt, I did. I felt justified, though. I felt justified. This is how, I mean, maybe that's just the way we are. Maybe that's the family curse: Men don't care.

**Levant:** Was the hope that if he knows how you feel then maybe he might come to his senses?

**Raymond:** Maybe. Maybe I wanted him to know how it felt to feel alone, to not have someone you want to be there, to be there.

**Levant:** You wanted him to experience the curse of uncaring, then. You had experienced it growing up as a boy.

**Raymond:** But it also comes up that, it was almost like when I went through that, it was almost like I couldn't care. Like there was something in me that couldn't respond and go to him. Which made me think, maybe he, maybe we weren't, maybe he just couldn't care for his family. Maybe he just... There was something in him that, that's the way he is. And maybe, I've got the same genes. I came from him. There's something in my nature that can't go that extra, whatever. Because it seemed like, even if we skirted around the edges of any kind of contact, he wouldn't get any closer. And now here, I could have got off. I could have got a leave. I could have... If I wanted to be there... [Pause] This is going to sound strange, I think, but it wasn't just resentment. It was, I wouldn't know how to handle it. I wouldn't know how to be close to my father. I mean, it was almost like I was afraid to do the very thing I wanted. I mean, I was, something inside of me couldn't take that act that would have said, "I care about you, and I'm flying here to be with you because..." So that scared me. That actual thought of being close to him or taking this, or doing what he didn't do.

**Levant:** What are you feeling right now?

**Raymond:** A little scared in the sense that he wasn't able to do it. I never saw him do it. Then I wasn't able to do it. I'm not able to do it. It's a little scary. It's a little, and even a little bit of... If he was going through what I'm going through now, the poor guy. You know. To feel something, but not be able to express it, you know, that's different than he just didn't care. And then three years later... So you know. But that's what I felt at the time. That's how it went.

**Levant:** It sounds like you are getting some questions answered as we talk.

**Raymond:** Yeah.

**Levant:** Obviously, not the same as him speaking to you but it's starting to dawn on you as you reflect on your own experience that maybe it wasn't just that he didn't care. Maybe there's something else going on underneath the surface there.

**Raymond:** It's kind of sad though, that maybe both people wanted...

## SESSION 12

**Raymond:** I went up in the attic in my mother's house and found some boxes. And in these boxes were old war journals. I found letters. I found medical records. I even found my dad's baby teeth. And I started to get a picture of the man, so I wanted to find out more. I wasn't able to get much from my mother, but I asked her was there a friend, was there anybody who knew my father. The only name she could give me was a guy named Henry. Henry was a typesetter. He worked for my dad but on a small paper, everybody knows everybody. So Henry knew my dad not just as the boss but as a friend. And I spent a lot of time talking to Henry.

**Levant:** Were you able to get any of your questions answered?

**Raymond:** My dad's father died when he was six. I think I told you that. What I didn't tell you because I didn't know it was that his stepfather was a son of a bitch. The guy was a drunk. Beat my grandmother. And evidently, this got to my dad because at some point, when he was 12 or 13 years old, he shoves this guy up against the wall and tells him, "You touch my mother, and I'll kill you."

**Levant:** Twelve years old.

**Raymond:** Yeah. I mean, tough guy. Hard guy. Hard working man. Fifteen, the stepfather died, and my dad quit school. Goes to work. Why? Because someone's got to take care of his mother. But he doesn't stop there. He goes back to school. He pays his own way through college, goes to school at night, works during the day, goes to school at night. Then he has this dream of starting a business. But again, what I didn't know is that he had a partner originally, and the partner cleaned him out. My father had nothing. Whatever investment he put in went with the partner. Again, my father picks himself up, goes back to work, starts over again. I asked Henry, what kind of a guy was he? I mean, what kind of a guy was my dad? I said what I know of my father is a hard working, not very emotional guy. Henry says he was tough. He was hard. Didn't show a whole lot of emotion.

I want to show you something. This was a picture that came out of the box.

That's my father's baby picture. It looks just like me.

**Levant:** Is that right?

**Raymond:** We could be twins. It's uncanny. And it started to make me think about a lot of things. But I kept trying to get out of Henry what made him laugh. What made him...

**Levant:** What animated him.

**Raymond:** Yeah. What got him going. Henry said he saw him cry only once. It was the time, the day I was born, my father shut down the newspaper. Everybody, everybody was at the hospital. My father held me in his arms and cried. And cried. He was so happy. [cries]

**Levant:** It's okay. Let it go. Let it go.

**Raymond:** He was happy that I was born.

**Levant:** Sounds like you found out that he really did care about you after all.

**Raymond:** Yeah. Now I know that. That was my dad.

**Levant:** So it sounds like you've come a long ways from thinking of him as somebody who just didn't care about you. Couldn't be bothered, you know, to now realizing how much he cared. How do you feel?

**Raymond:** Relief, I guess. Kind of that I was important to him.

**Levant:** It's a wonderful feeling, isn't it? I wonder... You've come so far in your understanding of your father and seeing him first as a man who obviously cared deeply about his own family, about his own mother, and who pulled himself up by his own bootstraps, and someone who really cared about you. Does that do anything to your fear of there being a family curse of uncaring men?

**Raymond:** Well, maybe it's a blessing that... I think we're a family of pretty good men.

**Levant:** Pretty good men. Yeah.

**Raymond:** Makes me feel like that whole curse is lifted. I don't have that curse.

**Levant Commentary:** *We can never know whether Henry's recollections*

*were accurate, but that is really beside the point. The important thing was that Raymond was able to get what he needed: some confirmation that his father was a caring man in order to free himself from the idea that there was a family curse of uncaring fathers.*

*Raymond was able to utilize a psycho-educational program to learn the skills of emotional empathy and emotional self-awareness, and thus to overcome the predictable and normative effects of male role socialization, namely, an emotional numbness or alexithymia. Equipped with these skills, he was able to resolve an important family of origin issue, clearing the way to more fully experience his new life as a father.*







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