

Claustrophobia reveals traumatic birth memory by Emma Roberts of the UK. Emma's upcoming workshops in London and Denver can be found at www.theeftcentre.com.

I have often witnessed a link between claustrophobia and birth trauma, and it was beautifully demonstrated to me by a client recently.

Cara presented with a classic tube phobia. In London, our underground system can run very deep below ground, and is a network of dark narrow tunnels.

Following the recent London bombings I have become sadly used to working in this area, often clearing phobias relatively simply by working with the specific memories available, usually images from the media of the carnage, which have become internalised in people. Sometimes it can be more complex, working with issues like the reality of terrorism and the randomness by which it seemingly claims lives. At worst, this can become generalised into a mistrust of the world, and possibly agoraphobia.

However, whilst Cara did report some increased discomfort after the July bombings her tube phobia had been with her all her life. She had got around it up until now travelling by car and bus, but a recent promotion and change of office location meant that unless she could get on a tube she would add over an hour to her work journey each way. She already worked long hours and this would make her life unmanageable. However, to turn down the promotion would be a disaster for her career.

So she was stuck, and very anxious. She had also tried many other therapies, both mainstream and alternative, and EFT was her last hope. We started there!

Even though this is my last hope..
Even though nothing works for me..
Even though this has to work..
Even though I don't believe it will work..

Some of the psychotherapy Cara had done meant that she already had a clear knowledge of the construct of her phobia. In EFT terms she was aware of the aspects, and what thoughts and feelings were connected, making the initial work easy.... Seemingly!

We tapped through all her earliest memories of being on a tube. She had only been on it a handful of times in her life, so this was relatively quick and the memories reduced to zero. We worked

through all the different aspects, the noise, smell, darkness, the crowds, and the associated emotional responses, fear, panic, anxiety, breathlessness, raised heart beat.

She could access all these components easily and they seemed to reduce to zero quickly. All the way through this we were testing, testing, testing. We never had to use Tearless Trauma, Cara was OK to watch the movies, tell the stories and ultimately to vividly imagine the situation... apparently!

But there was something which intuitively did not seem quite right and despite Cara claiming to feel comfortable with tubes now I was not convinced. I had noticed that when I asked her to imagine herself on a tube she would keep her eyes open. So I asked her what would happen were she to vividly imagine with her eyes closed. When she did that something strange started to happen.

Suddenly Cara began to curl up into a tight ball on the chair. She drew her knees up to her chin and said she felt like she was being 'squeezed to death and had no way out'. Her breathing was becoming shallower and she felt very very hot.

At this point I was unable to reach the face points as her face was totally hidden from me, but I knew I had to keep tapping to maximise meridian stimulation as she was experiencing whatever was happening for her. I tapped on the top of her head, her wrist and her ankle points (these three points cover all the meridians and are a quick and effective way of reducing intensity), all the time talking to her, staying with her, and matching my voice speed to her breathing. After about a minute her breathing calmed down and she began to unfurl. I asked her to open her eyes and look at me, as I kept tapping and matching the rhythm of her breath, moving to continually tapping on her finger points as soon as I could reach them.

I checked how she was feeling, both physically and emotionally, and she was fine, in fact she felt both excited and positive about what had happened. She felt she had accessed something which might be the missing piece in releasing this phobia completely. So I asked her Gary's favourite question, what did that experience just then remind her of, when might she have felt that way before? Her immediate answer was that it felt like being born. I asked her how much she knew about her birth and she said she had been born with the cord around her neck, and had been delivered by forceps as she had been stuck in the birth canal. This brought up a wave of grief, both for her and her mother sharing this trauma, which we tapped to release this for both of them.

I didn't want Cara to re-experience her birth again yet, if at all, so we began by tapping for the baby Cara, for how she must have felt, for how scared she must have been, bringing in some reframes and Choices (see Pat Carrington's Choices Manual):

Even though baby Cara nearly died
Even though she was trapped
Even though she was suffocating
Even though it was so dark
Even though she was frightened
Even though she didn't understand

Gradually progressing to:

Even though I nearly died
Even though I was trapped
Even though I was suffocating
Even though it was so dark
Even though I was frightened
Even though I didn't understand

To reframes:

I was so brave
I did survive
I was amazing
I was strong
I am alive

To Choices:

I choose to remember I was a beautiful baby
I choose to remember Mum loved me
I choose to remember I did survive
I choose to know I am OK
I choose peace instead of this

This is a similar dissociation method to the Movie Technique, but using language to distance the memory, gently sneaking up until it is safe to identify with the baby Cara fully.

When I felt confident that she was feeling no intensity at the thought of the birth trauma, and we had thoroughly tested it as far as we could from a distance, I asked Cara if she wanted to close her eyes and revisit that experience, knowing what she now knew about

it, instructing her that if she felt any intensity at any point she was to open her eyes immediately and we would tap on that piece.

We did a couple of rounds on feeling safe enough to go there and then Cara closed her eyes and vividly imagined being in the birth canal. What was fascinating to watch were the body movements as she was both pushing and being pushed, very slow stretching movements, but there was NO panic, her heart rate remained calm and the enormous heat that was there before had totally diffused.

Again, I was tapping on the three points, top of the head, wrist and ankle, whilst she experienced this, to keep some form of contact with her, to keep her safe.

But she really was 100% fine, she opened her eyes and said she had felt a little uncomfortable but that she had a sense that she was going to be OK, that she knew her way out, and she had no need to panic, she just had to relax and wait. I imagine this was very different to her actual birth.

Next I asked her to go back to where we began in the session and vividly imagine herself on a tube. This time I kept contact with her by continually tapping on her fingers, wrist and gamut point whilst she did the work. We started with an empty tube, which was fine, then progressed onto a busier one, also no problem, culminating in a rush hour tube where you are crammed like sardines in a tin, with no room to move in any direction. She didn't like the thought of that, but didn't feel the panic when she really allowed herself to go there. She said that she would rather not travel during those peak times and thought she would arrange her schedule accordingly. This seemed totally reasonable to me, and not a phobia driven response. No one would choose to travel during the London rush hour if they had a choice!

The final test was for Cara to go on a tube by herself, which she decided to do the following day. I instructed her to just travel one stop (approximately 3 minutes) and see how she felt. She was familiar with the tapping points, including the continual finger tapping, so could manage her own state if she needed to. She rang me later that day to say that she had been so fascinated by people watching that she had missed her first stop! None of the old phobic symptoms had returned, and whilst she didn't plan on travelling at rush hour this was a matter of choice rather than necessity now.

I find it so interesting that the body can remember even when an experience is outside conscious memory. Birth can be a traumatic event for a baby even without the obvious trauma Cara

experienced. The sudden shock of an extreme change of environment, and the possible loss of perceived safety of the womb may, in some babies, create energetic blocks which emerge later in life. Thankfully we now have EFT with which to easily release them!