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Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) for Cerebral Palsy

By Carol Look, LCSW, DCH, EFT Master and Zachery Larson

Abstract

Zachery, a 24 year-old man who was born with cerebral palsy, suffered from speech impairment and weakness with poor coordination on the left side of his body, plus garbled hearing in his left ear. He had physiotherapy, speech therapy and surgically-induced deafness in his left ear, all of which produced helpful but only modest improvements. His auditory processing and speech were so impaired that he was placed in classes for the hearing impaired. At age 22 he learned Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), which produced marked improvements in his abilities to coordinate the left side of his body and to communicate verbally and through sign language.

Zachery's story

I'm 24 years old and things have really changed and expanded for me in the last couple of years. Before all these wonderful things began happening in my life, I was quiet, insecure, didn't participate in many activities and it didn't seem like I had many friends.

Before I got to experience EFT for the first time, I had a lot of physical issues. I was born with cerebral palsy that affects the whole left side of my body. I cannot straighten my left arm which makes my left arm appear shorter than my right arm. My left hand was pudgy and my fingers were curled toward my palm and the left hand looked fatter, yet smaller than my right hand. I really couldn't make my left hand work well even by trying to use my right hand to help it do things. My left foot used to hook under and I had to be careful not to trip myself as I walked. I had surgery [when I was 11 years old] to properly align my left foot and ankle. Even after that surgery, I had problems with my balance and walked unevenly. I am so grateful that I can walk independently since age eleven without wearing a plastic brace 24 hours a day.

In addition to the physical difficulties, I have had multiple problems with communication – from understanding what I'm hearing, to speech and communication difficulties. I had been very frustrated trying to communicate with my family and friends over the phone and with customers in any setting, at any time. Communications have been my biggest weakness and I want to have better speech. I even learned sign language to help me to communicate, although my poor coordination in my left arm and hand made it difficult for me to use sign language as well. However, I really want to talk clearly with people that can hear and don't use sign language.

It's great that I have two languages to use, even though my speech problems still limit my communications with many people. I tap on my speech issues but still have a ways to go in improving my speech and reaching my communication goals.

I still do tapping when situations occur that makes me mad when I am trying to speak clearly. Due to the issues mentioned, I had low confidence and [have often been] unsure I could do things or that I would be listened to. In 2004, I became deaf in my left ear. The good news is that this helps me block what I used to call "junk." What I was hearing in my left ear was as loud as what I was hearing in my right ear but the content was not the same, it was grabbly grabble that was coming in from that ear. Even though I can hear out of only one ear, what I'm hearing is better and my speech has improved.

In September 2007 I was introduced to Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) and was invited to work with Gary Craig (EFT's founder) and EFT Masters in California. I am so glad that I went and learned a lot about EFT. I had great EFT Masters show me how EFT works and participated in many 'borrowing benefits' sessions, in which I used EFT on myself while watching the Masters help other people. Gary Craig is a brilliant star and has made a difference in my life through EFT. Carol Look, Rick Wilkes and several EFT Masters interviewed and tapped 1-on-1 sessions with me. These wonderful people are like an addition to my family.

At my 1-on-1 sessions with Carol Look, we really made progress with my left hand. After several rounds of EFT I could use my left hand to pick a tissue out of a box, which was a first for me. Then we tried picking up a quarter with my left hand. I did get it after several tries. Then after a number of focused follow-up tapping sessions when I returned home, I can pick up a coin usually on the first try. Now, after many EFT sessions my left hand looks like my right hand; both hands are the same size and the fingers on my left hand are straight and the left hand is working more normally, like my right hand. This is just awesome. I can now use my left hand to tap on the EFT points, especially over my head and right hand that I could not do before I started EFT. I can do most of the ABC alphabet in sign language using my left hand easily and smoothly. Some of the letters are more difficult than most, but before EFT I couldn't do any of them

Probably one of the biggest changes for me is in my confidence and ability to do things. Carol tapped with me about how I felt about things in my life and I felt better after we tapped. I found that I did get involved with many things that I may have only thought of because I didn't feel secure to even try. Now, I work with groups and want to help others often. I am still shy, but when I feel I want to talk to someone who I'm not comfortable talking with, I do tapping; then I just [open up and speak] and don't think about it. Then, if they don't like to talk with me, it is okay.

I am so happy that I don't have to worry about my CP anymore. I am not afraid to tell them about me if they see me as a different person and don't know about CP. Since 2007, I became very active in the deaf club. As the club's President, I led a number of fundraisers, yielding enough money for ten members to go on an overnight and out of state Six Flags trips. The club advisor said the presidents over the past years have not been able to achieve this or any club trip. I feel that EFT helped me break out and build my confidence and take the necessary steps to reach goals.

A few months after returning from California, I received the first Northwestern Connecticut Community College (NCCC) Student Employee of the Year Award and the next year I received NCCC Student of the Year from Collegiate Education for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing program at NCCC.

Recently, I had the opportunity to see and work with Carol 1-on-1; it was great seeing her and working with such a gifted EFT master. The progress we made nearly two years ago is still holding. How

amazing is that! When we reconnected that afternoon, one thing we did tap on was speaking clearly. With several EFT rounds, I was speaking clearer and more slowly.

This year I am transferring to Rochester Institute of Technology in NY to get a Business Management B.S. degree. In May, I graduated from Connecticut's Northwestern Connecticut Community College (NCCC) receiving a Business & Management Administration, A.S. degree. Several years ago, I also received a Computer Business Applications Certificate from NCCC. I was very active with the deaf and hard of hearing community at college and held the President and Treasurer positions of the Northwest Deaf Club while at NCCC. I was also a cast member of the American Sign Language Drama Club for two years.

Summary of medical reports

Full term pregnancy, birth weight 7 lbs 6 oz.

University of Connecticut Health Center 10/3/86

"This is a 20-month-old evaluated today for failure to walk or talk by 20 months...

...a normal pregnancy. Labor was complicated by 24 hours of ruptured membranes followed by induction and forceps delivery... Zachery went home with his mother on the third day and seemed to be in good health... He has never had a central nervous system infection, significant head injury or seizure-like activity... He was referred to the ophthalmologist in 6/86 [age 16 months] for an evaluation at Newington Children's Hospital... and diagnosed decreased eye-brain coordination... He had a global decrease in his growth from what was reported to be the 80th percentile down to the 10th percentile for all parameters... He has favored the right side over the left from birth...

...His language development is definitely delayed, while his gross motor development is far behind and most dramatically delayed. He is performing at about a 10-month level in gross motor activities. His cranial nerve examination was remarkable for left hemianopsia [loss of vision in half the visual field] and a left central facial droop, most revealed by his asymmetric movement of mouth on smiling and asymmetrical palpebral fissures [upper and lower eyelids]. His motor examination shows a congenital hemiparesis [weakness in one side of the body] as evidenced by decrease in the nail and digit size on the left foot and hand. He has increased tone and decreased voluntary power in his arm more than his leg more than his face. Although he uses his left hand mostly as a prop hand, it is clear that his good hand is his right hand, and that the spastic weakness on the left side is an impediment for him. His left foot turns out, is slightly inverted and is plantar flexed consistent with a spastic posture...

Impression: This is a child with left hemiparesis with an associated left hemianopsia. He has had associated delays in all spheres of development, but particularly noted in gross motor development and to a lesser extent in language.

University of Connecticut Health Center 10/3/86 (age 24 months)

...he has begun physical therapy... and has begun to open his left hand more... He has also been getting some orthopedic in-pat from Newington Children's Hospital and now walks with his left foot flat on the floor... since the last visit...walking independently for ten steps... He still prefers his right hand... His language has increased to six to ten single words but none together...
...his weight is 23 lbs, which is down to the 5th percentile...

A static right brain lesion as indicated by his CT scan of 10/22/86...demonstrated focal prominence of the atrium of the right lateral ventricle and a calcification of the atrium of the right lateral ventricle with resultant left hemiparesis...

Speech Pathology and Audiology 7/27/88 (age 3 years 6 months)

...He displayed a limited attention span of one to two minutes for structured table/chair tasks. He was very distractible and required frequent verbal redirection to maintain on-task behavior... Zachery was often difficult to understand and his father assisted in glossing his verbalizations...

...Verbal ability Age 2 years, 0 months...

...significant weaknesses in auditory comprehension skills...

...significant deficiencies in expressive language abilities...

Impressions: ...severe receptive and expressive language disorders...

Connecticut Valley Radiology 6/24/02

...The ventricles are somewhat prominent with an area of encephalomalacia [softening of the brain] of the temporal extent of the right lateral ventricle which appears to be old and based on patient's CT scan report from Hartford Hospital was likely present in 1985. I suspect this may be a neonatal or prenatal infarct with resultant encephalomalacia...

Impression: Right sided ventricular anomaly likely prenatal, or neonatal infarct with encephalomalacia with no acute intracranial abnormalities and no evidence of acoustic neuroma. Normal posterior fossa structures.

Center for Communication Disorders, New Haven, CT 10/25/06

...seizure disorder which is managed with partial success with Tegretol... poor speech discrimination in...left ear. Initially, he wore an ear plug in his left ear to aid in speech discrimination in his right ear. More recently, Zachery underwent a surgical procedure to disrupt the ossicular chain in his left ear, resulting in a deliberate left conductive hearing loss to facilitate speech discrimination in his right ear. Zachery received special education services since the age of three, which have included resource room support and speech and language therapy. Both of Zachery's parents reported that their son's speech intelligibility has remained the same even with speech therapy. In 2005, Zachery discontinued weekly 15-30 minute speech and language services he was receiving at college. He is currently enrolled in a Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) work study program. Zachery lives in a house with several roommates who are deaf and hard of hearing with whom he communicates via American Sign Language (ASL), which he began learning three years ago. He noted that at school he uses both speech and sign to communicate as well as to understand lectures. Zachery relies on an interpreter approximately half of the time during lectures and on reading his professor's lips the other half of the time... Zachery has an independent tutor and a note-taker for his English class.

Conclusion: Zachery presents with a severe speech and language impairment characterized by mild receptive and expressive language difficulties, severe speech production difficulties, and auditory processing deficits secondary to cerebral palsy and auditory processing impairment. While Zachery is a personable and actively engaged communicator, his communication impairment places him at risk for being misunderstood in school, the workplace, and other social settings. Zachery's impaired understanding of spoken language results in difficulties in following verbally presented material. Speech and writing has helped Zachery communicate with family and friends but is inadequate for all communication situations including speaking on the phone and with listeners unfamiliar with ASL or his unique speech patterns.

Prognosis for improved speech intelligibility is guarded given the nature and severity of his speech impairment. Prognosis for Zachery's ability to learn compensatory communication strategies including use of speech-generating device is good given the findings of this evaluation, client motivation, and home-based support.

EFT interventions by Carol Look, LCSW, DCH, EFT Master

Emotional Freedom Techniques is a meridian based energy psychology treatment which combines theories from ancient chinese acupuncture and the basics of psychology. Instead of using needles,

EFT practitioners use a light tapping motion on the client's acupuncture points on the face and body. Practitioners combine this tapping with focusing on a defined emotional conflict and affirmation statements. The treatment appears to release stored blocked energy in the meridian pathways.

I have been practicing EFT for more than 12 years, and have had extensive experience in working with pain control and relief of presenting symptoms from medically diagnosed diseases. My focus is on helping clients identify and clear the underlying emotional issues that have contributed to pain and ailments.

Zachery Larson is the 22 year-old son of Sally Larson, a 52 year-old woman who had a remarkable recovery with the help of Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) from serious residual symptoms of her traumatic brain injury that had occurred six years earlier (Craig, et al. 2009). Zachery had been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy (CP) at birth, and attended the week-long EFT intensive workshop led by EFT founder Gary Craig with his mother in September, 2007. Zachery attended seeking relief for some of his life-long symptoms from CP.

Zachery identified the following presenting symptoms to work on during the intensive EFT Retreat:

(1) Communication Skills:

- a. Slurred speech from the CP
- b. Talking felt like very "hard work"
- c. Zachery felt extremely frustrated when others didn't understand his speech.
- d. He learned sign language in order to communicate with the hearing impaired, but still experienced frustration because of his inability to control the movements of his left hand.

(2) Impairments in Mobility from CP

- a. Zachery's entire left side and especially his left hand were "weak."
- b. He couldn't pick up items with his left hand
- c. He complained of feeling "numb" on his left side
- d. He said his muscles "didn't work;" it felt like he had "no arm"

(3) Dragging his left foot and leg

(4) Confidence Issues

- a. Zachery was hesitant to socialize and self-conscious.
- b. He had low self-esteem and isolated himself.
- c. He was sometimes angry about his CP and what he has to deal with

(5) Easily Overwhelmed in a Crowd

- a. Zachery was deaf in one ear
- b. He would tend to lose his balance when in a crowd, due to intolerance for stimulation from multiple sources.
- c. He felt emotionally and physically overwhelmed with multiple stimuli and had difficulty keeping his focus on a conversation when there were other auditory or visual stimuli that distracted him.

I used EFT with Zachery on the above identified issues. Tapping setup statements were designed to help Zach feel more relaxed in his body in spite of the rigidity and lack of balance cause by his CP. Below are a few samples of the many statements we used.

Even though I have this frustration showing up in my body, I deeply and completely love and accept myself...
Even though I have these emotions showing up in my left side...
Even though the CP gets in my way, I accept who I am right now...
Even though I don't talk as clearly as I want to, I accept who I am and how I feel...
Even though it's hard to communicate well, I accept who I am and how I feel...
Even though I feel nervous about being around people...
Even though my left side is weak...
Even though my left side doesn't work right, I accept who I am and how I feel...
Even though I don't feel very confident, I choose to feel good about myself now... I love confidence...I love feeling confident...
Even though I'm afraid they won't understand me...

Zachery's frustration with his speech was decreased dramatically after three days of EFT sessions. On the third day, he spoke to his sister over the telephone. She immediately remarked that she noticed an improvement in the clarity of his speech. Three other members of the retreat also commented on his improved clarity of communication, without being asked about this topic. Also, one of the cameramen spontaneously commented on his ability to understand Zachery and what he was saying.

After using EFT for relaxation, confidence and emotions of anger and frustration about having been diagnosed with CP, Zachery was surprised and delighted to find he was able to use sign language with his left hand, something he had never been able to do prior to the EFT Retreat. On the film, he calmly showed how his dexterity and control had improved, and signed the alphabet for us with his left hand. In addition, Zachery started tapping the face and body meridian points with his left hand, which he had not even attempted during the first two days. Finally, Zachery demonstrated a significant increase in coordination by showing us how he was now able to touch his forefinger, middle and third finger (mostly) to his thumb on his left hand, something that had been impossible on the first day. He was quite excited about all these improvements.

Donna Bach was observing the bilateral activity of the brain hemispheres of clients during EFT treatments, using a Mind Mirror electroencephalogram (EEG). She remarked that Zachery's right and left-brain functioning became much more balanced after using EFT. She said that both sides of his brain were "firing" at the same time, unlike his initial tests. Initially, the Mind Mirror showed the right brain function literally "drop off" the chart, and reappear intermittently, indicating impaired right brain functions.

Finally, Zachery was pleased to notice he was now able to be a part of and stay in a group setting, with lots of noise, laughter, and people changing topics without getting emotionally or physically overwhelmed. He was able to maintain his balance and pay attention. He was also delighted with the suggestions to tap for improving his confidence and reported feeling much calmer about who he was and what his struggles were.

Overall, Zachery left the retreat a more confident, hopeful, excited young man. At a 21-month follow up visit, his left hand sign language remains fluid and easy; his balance when walking was dramatically improved; and he continues to enjoy improved dexterity in his left hand when picking up items off the table. He is thrilled to be attending a special college this Fall in Rochester, NY, after completing necessary classes in his home state.

Carol Look, LCSW, DCH, EFT Master

In summary

Carol Look: Overall, it was a delight to watch Zach come out of his shell and be more sociable with other members of the retreat. His speech improved over the 5 days, his balance looked better, and he was proud of his new-found coordination in his left hand. While he knew he had many more issues to tap on, he and his mother were quite pleased with his progress.

When I have worked with other clients suffering from physical impairments, I have found that addressing the frustration, irritation and sadness around pains, reduced mobility or limited range of motion has been extremely effective. The tapping makes them more relaxed, less physically rigid, and more fluid in physical movements. Releasing pent up emotional conflicts also relaxes the body and allows for more physiological relaxation.

Suggestions for further applications of EFT for CP:

I have used EFT for over a decade for trauma, pain syndromes and other conflicts. When working with pain or illness, I make it clear that I am not a medical doctor, but that I am applying EFT to the emotional conflicts that are surfacing through the body. Once a client agrees that their emotional past or current stressors may be contributing to physiological challenges, I then have the rapport and cooperation of the client.

I recommend that clinicians using EFT for CP start with applying the tapping setup phrases to the emotions "about" having CP or other illnesses, (the frustration with the rigidity or lack of movement, the annoyance with pain syndromes) and gently move towards targeting emotional conflicts from the past. It is imperative that people never feel they are being "blamed" for their illness. Incidents from the past that have been highly charged with guilt, anger, abandonment, grief, betrayal or terror can be effectively collapsed with accurately worded EFT setup statements and sequences.

Zachery: EFT is a wonderful tapping tool that provides new opportunities, I'm always reminding my mom to tap when she is getting caught up in things or things are just crazy. I also tell friends about EFT. I will always remember EFT the rest of my life.

And I know it's only the beginning of the possibilities with EFT. Thanks EFT! I thank Carol Look for working with me directly. And I thank Gary Craig for developing this amazing technique. Gary, You're the Best!

Reference

Craig, Gary; Bach, Donna; Groesbeck, Gary; and Benor, Daniel J. Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) For Traumatic Brain Injury, *International J Healing and Caring* 2009, 9(2), 1-12.

For more information on Carol Look's EFT-related training products and workshops on the topics of pain relief, clearing addictions and attracting abundance, please visit <http://www.attractingabundance.com>



Zachery Larson is focusing on completing his education.



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