

Integrating holistic therapies for mind, body, heart and soul

Eve Menezes Cunningham runs her Feel Better Every Day Consultancy in Essex. Here, she explains her route to integration with a person-centred delivery



As well as being a freelance psychology, health and wellbeing writer and journalist, I run the Feel Better Every Day Consultancy in Essex (and worldwide via telephone and Skype), offering holistic therapies for the mind, body, heart and soul.

These include psychosynthesis counselling (which, in itself, is a holistic form of psychotherapeutic counselling that honours mind, body, feelings and the transpersonal); integrative coach-therapy; yoga therapy for mental health, better sleep and wellbeing; transpersonal and life coaching; NLP (neuro linguistic programming); Energetic NLP; EFT (emotional freedom techniques); and crystal therapy.

It's possible that my mixed background (Indian Irish, London born, with my Goan mother having been born and raised in Kenya) has something to do with my love of integration. I used to feel a bit embarrassed by this range of

therapies, but I imagine that I'll be adding to them for many decades to come. I love the pretty much global access we have to ancient wisdom and cutting edge science. Why not make the most of it?

My specialisms are anxiety, stress, trauma, finding purpose and meaning, maximising potential, sleep issues and burnout/depression. All are areas I have personal experience with. Through wanting to help myself both in terms of recovery and maximising potential, I first trained as a crystal therapist (it sounded odd to me, too, at the time but offered physical relief for a chronic pain condition when hospital-prescribed pain killers made no difference). Over the three years' training (a long weekend every month), I learned some of their other uses as well as beginning to develop my own intuition.

When I initially started training as a crystal therapist, I had no intention of

ever giving up my job in publishing. It was purely for self-help. But during the training, I also started training as a life coach and developed a blend I called Crystal Coaching. I had no idea what integration was at that time but was already doing it.

This offered a more spiritual approach to coaching as I'd teach clients to use their own intuition when choosing stones to support their goal, and how to cleanse and dedicate them. This dual approach (looking at the practical steps as well as what was coming up for them through the meditation) was later echoed in my psychosynthesis training where we were taught to use 'bifocal vision' with our clients. This means recognising their souls and looking for whatever may be trying to emerge as well as hearing the issues around the problem.

My life coach training also started out as a self-help tool. The chronic pain condition had meant giving up alcohol and finding other ways to improve my lifestyle (including yoga). Through the coach training, I realised how much I missed writing, so I decided to quit my job to go freelance as a journalist while also setting up Apple Coaching in 2004.

I knew nothing (consciously) about integration so I imagine that my site and branding was a bit confused, as I don't think that the coach trainers would have encouraged the crystal integration. Still, I did additional training in NLP and EFT, and by the time I finished my NLP Master Practitioner course (more long weekends over the better part of a year), I'd decided to train as a counsellor.

More training

I began the psychosynthesis training thinking that by the time I qualified, I'd be 'fixed', but my therapist quickly disabused me of the notion that that would ever be the case. By this point, I'd been overriding my own issues around self-loathing and low self-esteem using coaching and complementary therapy

tools for years. I felt ready to go deeper and heal the 'rubbish' I felt like when not consciously coaching myself.

I still remember a guided visualisation during the first week of my psychosynthesis counselling training: I got an image of myself as broken and buried beneath piles and piles of actual rubbish. The idea of trying to crawl out from there felt impossible, but in the next part of the visualisation, I got an image of simply being open to healing and the rubbish being lifted off me. The training and personal therapy wasn't that simple, of course, but it was an incredibly healing journey as well as leading me deeper into this work I love so much.

Before I completed the postgraduate diploma, I attended a yoga therapy day thinking I might write a feature or two about it. I ended up signing on to train as a yoga therapist for mental health. Although the psychosynthesis training included bodywork, the yoga therapy training offered a form of bodywork that clients and students could use to help themselves.

I've always been interested in supporting people in helping themselves. Looking back, this was why the crystal therapy alone wasn't enough (too passive. I wanted clients to learn how to choose and use the stones for themselves). Similarly, with the EFT, I show people how to tap for themselves.

So I was drawn to the yoga therapy training by the unique blend of yoga, mindfulness, psychotherapy and neuroscience. Course creator Heather Mason was open about having had her own issues with anxiety and trauma. Up until then, I'd heard lots of people open up about depression but very few mention trauma and anxiety. As these were the issues I'd struggled most with myself, apart from seeing yoga therapy as a wonderful addition to my other services, I wanted that additional healing

for myself. I wanted to become more embodied and at ease in my own skin.

Using the body

Daniel Siegel, author of *The Mindful Brain*¹ and Director of the Mindsight Institute, was one of our guest lecturers. His idea of a 'window of tolerance' was key to the Minded Yoga approach and I started applying it to all my work. It fits with person-centred work in that it's essentially about being very aware of what the client can manage or tolerate in that moment.

By meeting them where they are and working gradually and gently, the window can open much wider, but if we go too fast, it may slam shut, undoing the good work (possibly even breaking the glass). It reminded me of Winnicott's 'secure base' idea and being able to explore and be more creative and resourceful when we know we have that safety to return to.

This fits with the physiology aspect, too. Peter Levine's suggestion that humans can, in some instances, learn from impalas was pretty revolutionary for me. Impalas, it seems, simply shake off traumatic stress and get on with their day after a real or perceived lion threat, rather than beating themselves up for embarrassing themselves by shaking or overreacting or not being fast enough or whatever.

When our stress response has been triggered, we're in survival mode. By honouring what's happening in our body and brain (that desire to flee or fight

and moving and self-soothing accordingly, we can burn off the stress hormones that have flooded the body and return to a calmer state. In NLP terms, we can only hold seven conscious thoughts at any given moment. When we're stressed, this goes down to five, and when really relaxed up to nine.

We can use our body and breath to activate the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system (the opposite to the part responsible for the fight/flight stress response and the part that enables our rest/digest response). From this calmer, more-at-ease place, we can heal and recharge more deeply physically and emotionally, as well as being better able to access our creativity and resources.

Pulling it all together

I'm very fortunate in terms of the mix I have of client work, yoga classes and bespoke workshops and writing, as it never gets dull and provides changes that to me are as good as a rest. I prefer days where I'm writing,

seeing talk therapy/coaching clients and teaching yoga to days where it's more weighted towards just one thing.

When AICTP began, it was amazing to meet experienced psychotherapists and counsellors who also coached and to hear their experiences of feeling a vague sense of shame around it. For a while, I co-ordinated their London group meetings. Throughout my psychosynthesis training, I also attended BACP Coaching events. I loved hearing Gill Fennings Monkman's reframe of the

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'multi-skilled therapist', as this was a way of owning all our trainings and experiences with pride.

In 2013, I was asked to review Debra Jinks and Nash Popovic's *Personal Consultancy: a model for integrating counselling and coaching*² for *Coaching Today* and *Therapy Today*. Before I'd finished reading it, I'd signed up to do Nash's postgraduate certificate course in Integrative Counselling and Coaching at UEL³.

This training gave me a more conscious understanding of integration (versus eclecticism etc) and I began to more fully own all of my therapies. I'd already rebranded as the Feel Better Every Day Consultancy but calling it 'holistic therapies for your mind, body, heart and soul' suddenly helped me exhale.

Mind, body, heart and soul are all very important to me and while my services overlap, they help me when thinking about integration. I have separate pages for each of my offerings on my site but also openly offer an integrative approach. Everyone's different. Feel Better Every Day incorporates all of my offerings but also allows me to tailor things specifically for each group or client and allows them to choose the focus.

As well as working from my consulting room and tiny yoga studio in Witham, Essex, I run bespoke workshops for organisations and have recently started a series of these for staff at a south London school. This summer, I started teaching chair yoga and mindfulness to a 'healthy living group' at a hospital in east London. And very recently, I started teaching yoga classes at a rehab centre in Essex. I feel incredibly lucky to be doing

this work and sharing these tools with so many different types of clients.

I integrate coaching into most of my yoga classes and sessions, and my counselling background is very helpful too. At the rehab centre, it was interesting to use some of the more transpersonal elements, because the 12 Steps (which my students there have already worked through) have that spiritual element of surrendering to a higher power.

When working with individuals at Feel Better Every Day, I start with a free initial telephone consultation (15-20 minutes) and then, if I feel I can help the person (and they want to come and see me), arrange a 90-minute assessment session. After this session, I have a clearer idea of the way forward and (again, assuming I feel that I can help them and they want to work with me) contract for six sessions, moving into open-ended if appropriate.

For counselling, the sessions are usually weekly. For my other services (including coach-therapy), it may be fortnightly or even monthly. Maybe because I started as a coach, I've always been a fan of short-term work (wanting clients to be able to continue coaching themselves). But I had experienced long-term counselling during my psychosynthesis training and also see from my own long-term clients that there's a depth that I didn't previously appreciate. It's pretty amazing to see how transformational this deeper work can be.

Still, I want to meet clients where they are and with whatever they're ready for. My preference is for clients who recognise the need for mid- to long-term work and are ready, but I also see the

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benefits of of someone having just a few sessions (or even one) if that is all they can manage for whatever reason. Even if they just attend the initial 90-minute session, I want each client to have some regulatory tools to take home and practise if they choose to do so.

I love meeting other integrative coach-therapists (or therapeutic coaches – whatever people choose to call themselves!) and people who integrate other tools, too. Thinking back, I shudder to imagine what it would have been like to begin my private counselling practice without support from AICTP and BACP Coaching, knowing that integration can be a wonderful way to work.

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References

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