

PRACTITIONER COMPASS



*The Needle Moves
with Moment-by-Moment Shifts
in the Session*

Finding the *Right Words*

Field Guide for Acupoint Tapping Practitioners

For optimal language in acupoint tapping psychotherapy,
this Guide is a moment-by-moment compass for the
direction to take — accompanied by a map of the wording
that carries you there.

David Feinstein, PhD

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THE FIELD GUIDE

THE RECURRING QUESTION

When it's your turn to speak

Tapping practitioners usually leave their training with the acupoint sequences firmly established. The harder decision arrives each time it's your turn to guide: the client is ready for your direction, the body is primed for tapping, *what do I say?*

Uncharted Territory. In acupoint tapping, brief phrases are coordinated with the tapping itself, as the client repeats or holds them in mind. Word choice can be the difference between a session that merely soothes and one that transforms. And when arousal is high, the words can be the difference between helping and re-traumatizing. Yet therapist language during tapping has remained largely unstudied, taught through general principles, instructor examples, and supervised practice, without a systematic framework for the language variations themselves. That has been left, in effect, to be absorbed intuitively over years of clinical experience.

A Decade of Investigation. This Guide is the product of a decade-long project spanning several studies investigating the effective use of wording during tapping sessions. It began with a survey of experienced tapping practitioners, went on to code therapist language in recorded sessions statement by statement, and included a computational analysis of guided tapping videos.

Three Directions, Seven Paths Each. The Guide is organized around the three directions the next phrase can take — **Attune**, **Explore**, and **Lead**. These are the

primary possibilities open to you at each tapping point. Each direction can be carried by any of seven distinct variations of language, twenty-one in all. A variation is a specific way that wording moves the session in a particular direction, and each is illustrated with three examples in the pages that follow.

Staying With and Going Beyond. Even though these example phrases originate with the practitioner, they are voiced in first person. They are often adapted from the client’s own words. On the other hand, when a tapping phrase — based on the practitioner’s clinical instincts — accurately goes beyond what the client has explicitly revealed, the client often shows relief or appreciation along with a readiness to engage more deeply. Because such a phrase is essentially a hypothesis, consider checking it in the moment with a simple “*True or false?*”

The Compass and the Map. The variations and their examples are not meant to be followed like scripts. Think of them instead as a compass paired with a map. Attune, Explore, and Lead are the three directions of your compass. The seven variations that carry each direction are the paths on your map. The compass shows you where the next phrase should head. The map shows you the wording that will get there.

A Note on Scope. These examples come from clinical practice, including work with trauma. Because tapping can surface high-arousal material quickly, use this Guide within your training and scope of practice.

THE RIGHT WORDS

What are the right words?

“The right words” may sound presumptuous — as if one correct phrase existed, waiting to be found. It doesn’t. The question isn’t which words are

correct, but which words meet this client, in this moment, and carry the work forward.

- **The Right Words need only be “good enough,” not polished or perfect.** Offered with presence and a willingness to adjust, “good-enough” wording is all that’s needed to support strong therapeutic progress. Whatever a phrase misses, the next one can adjust.
- **The Right Words set a direction — Attune, Explore, or Lead.** Attuning meets clients where they are; exploring opens the story beneath the problem; and leading points explicitly toward change. These directions can, and do, shift from one moment to the next.
- **The Right Words carry that direction forward.** Once the direction is set, the wording is what advances it — deepening attunement, opening exploration, or taking the next step toward change.
- **The Right Words stay concrete and close to the client’s felt experience.** Specific, sensory language — often drawn from the client’s own words — keeps the client in contact with the actual feeling, memory, or sensation, rather than narrating it from a distance.
- **The Right Words are brief.** Short enough to be spoken, repeated, or held in mind during a single round of tapping, they leave room for the felt experience itself rather than competing with it. Where the concept is too complex for a short phrase, you can move from one tapping point to the next with each part of the statement.
- **The Right Words keep the client safe.** They hold clients within their window of tolerance. Paired with tapping, they help the nervous system register enough safety to stay with difficult material.
- **The Right Words know when to wait.** There is a place for language and a place for silence. When arousal is high, the tapping can carry the work while words can get in the way.

- **The Right Words are offered, not imposed.** The therapist supplies the phrase, but it only works if the client finds it fits. Returning to attunement as the session enters new ground can verify that the words are tethered to the client's actual experience rather than only the therapist's read of it.
- **The Right Words adjust to the moment.** They follow the client's shifting state and focus. Awareness of the model guides the choice — the words themselves are chosen fresh, never recited as scripts.
- **The Right Words begin with presence.** Their deepest source is pre-verbal: an attuned, embodied sense of the client and what the moment calls for that often feeds the next phrase before it has been consciously formed.

THE COMPASS

Three directions for the next phrase

Moment by moment, sense whether the next phrase should *attune*, *explore*, or *lead*. In general, within the work on any given issue, the trajectory begins with attuning, opens into exploring as safety deepens, and moves toward leading as readiness grows. Still, these directions are flexible, not sequential — work can and does cycle back and forth among them as the moment requires.

ATTUNE

Meet and reflect

Connect with and reflect the client's present experience — establishing safety, engagement, and resonance with the presenting problem and related concerns.

EXPLORE

Question and uncover

Bring into awareness the underlying story, patterns, and connections — tracing the present difficulty to its roots and uncovering the logic behind it.

LEAD

Orient toward change

Point toward pathways for resilience, resolution, and meaningful change — often going beyond recovery to new growth.

THE MAP

Twenty-one paths, seven per direction

This Guide presents seven types of statements that support attuning, seven that support exploring, and seven that support leading. The sections that follow examine and provide examples for each of these 21 language variations. For the most part, each variation belongs to a single direction, though the direction a particular statement serves can shift with the nature of the clinical moment. In fact, two — humor and metaphor — while listed under specific directions, are equally at home attuning, exploring, or leading.

7 VARIATIONS OF ATTUNING LANGUAGE

Attune

Words that attune acknowledge the client's inner experience and hopes and reflect these back accurately, communicating that their world is understood and respected. This includes parts that feel contradictory or hard to accept. Combined with tapping, attuning language lets the nervous system register enough safety to stay with difficult material. This is where the therapeutic relationship begins, and where the work returns regularly throughout a session. While the seven following variations of words that attune are numbered, they might occur in any order.

1. Naming the Problem

Phrases that describe a client's feelings, challenges, or haunting memories signal that their inner reality has been heard. Hearing it reflected back *accurately* is itself therapeutic. On the other hand, prematurely reaching for a positive framing of the client's challenges can ring false and invite resistance. **Examples:**

| *This grief that just won't lift.*

| *The shame I feel when I think about the accident.*

| *My chest tightens when I imagine facing him.*

2. Validating Reasons to Keep the Problem

Coping strategies that once helped may have become counterproductive. Acknowledging why a pattern is hard to relinquish despite its costs builds empathy and reduces resistance. **Examples:**

| *My perfectionism has helped me succeed.*

This worry keeps me alert — nothing bad can sneak up on me.

Maintaining distance protects me from being hurt again.

3. Recognizing Conflicting Feelings

Conflicting feelings sit side by side; neither cancels the other. The task is simply to make room for both — here the focus is the conflict itself. **Examples:**

Part of me wants to change, but part of me doesn't.

I love my wife, and I also resent her.

I want to forgive, but I'm so angry I can barely speak to him.

4. Discerning Multiple Layers

Different from conflicting feelings, here one feeling is hidden *beneath* another rather than opposing it. The client already senses a deeper layer at play. **Examples:**

When I tune into this anger, the sadness underneath it is overwhelming.

Part of me feels relieved it's over — but beyond that relief is grief I'm just touching into.

Behind all this frustration is loneliness I haven't wanted to face.

5. Softening Harsh Absolutes

Extreme statements can be gently modified to reduce distress and become a stronger bridge to a more workable reality, while staying true to the client's experience. **Examples:**

FROM "No one can be trusted" **TO** "*Right now it seems impossible to trust.*"

FROM "This situation is hopeless" **TO** "*At this moment, I don't see a way forward.*"

FROM "Nothing works" **TO** "*I haven't found a good solution.*"

6. Using the Client's Exact Words

The client's own phrasing is often the most direct way to stay connected to the issue. Echo the charged word back. **Examples:**

| *If the client says, "I feel crushed," use "crushed."*

| *If the client says, "I'm drowning in pressure," stay with "drowning."*

| *If the client says, "It's like being invisible," echo "invisible."*

7. Using Humor or Irony

Used carefully, humor can produce a leap in engagement — but only when the alliance is solid and the client has shown some lightness about the issue. Poorly timed, it can shatter trust. **Examples:**

| *My anxiety shows up early to everything, just in case the disaster starts without us.*

| *If self-criticism were an Olympic sport, I'd have retired undefeated.*

| *I'm everyone's emergency contact, but nobody's mine.*

7 VARIATIONS OF EXPLORING LANGUAGE

Explore

Once attunement has established safety and resonance, language can begin to open doors — bringing hidden aspects into awareness, examining recurring patterns, questioning old assumptions, and linking present difficulty to past experience. Exploration often requires a hypothesis, an intuitive leap extrapolated from what the

client has shown. If you are making an informed guess, follow it with a confirmation question (such as “True or false?”) to keep attunement intact.

1. Connecting Past and Present

Linking current feelings and events to earlier experiences illuminates the roots of an issue.

Examples:

When my boss criticizes me, I go right back to never being good enough for Dad.

The panic I feel every time is like the moment I realized the car was about to crash.

This shame reminds me of how I felt when my teacher made fun of me in front of the entire class.

2. Examining Costs and Benefits

Many patterns carry both advantages and drawbacks. Stating both sides makes the trade-offs visible and bridges into deeper exploration. **Examples:**

My suspiciousness protects me, but it also pushes people away.

Pleasing everyone keeps me liked, but it leaves me feeling resentful.

Staying busy numbs the pain, but it also keeps me from dealing with my grief.

3. Uncovering Patterns and Timing

Naming repeated themes or predictable triggers helps the client see that their reactions follow a logic rather than striking at random — itself often a key to change. **Examples:**

This anxiety shows up every time I get a new assignment at work.

Whenever someone gets close, I find a reason to pull back.

It seems this sadness always returns around the holidays.

4. Challenging Limiting Beliefs

Loosen the grip of outdated beliefs. Unlike connecting past and present, the focus here is on *beliefs* that no longer serve the client. **Examples:**

“I’m not smart enough” was my father’s verdict when I was nine. Do I still want him grading me?

Let’s put “I’m not someone people rely on” on trial. What’s the evidence for it, and what’s the evidence against?

What would I have to see to stop believing I’ll be abandoned?

5. Exploration via Metaphor

Metaphors, similes, and analogies can capture an issue more powerfully than abstract descriptions. Listen for them and use them. When they emerge from the client, they carry more clinical weight. You can also judiciously introduce clarifying metaphors. **Examples:**

I’m spinning my wheels in sand and can’t get enough traction to move out.

It’s like my heart has a wall around it.

I’ve been standing guard at a door that no longer needs protecting.

6. Investigating Secondary Gains

Many problems, for all their costs, also serve a purpose. Naming these hidden benefits brings them into view, where they can be met with clarity and compassion. This differs from “Reasons to Keep the Problem” (in Attunement) in that here the focus is on weighing trade-offs rather than simply acknowledging that the secondary gains exist. **Examples:**

If I weren’t so depressed, my family would expect a lot more from me.

If I stay anxious about money, I won’t get complacent and end up broke again.

As long as I stay angry, I don’t have to feel how much I was hurt.

7. Inviting Curiosity

Exploration works best as curiosity rather than pressure to “figure it out.” Gentle inquiry keeps the process safe and grounded. **Examples:**

| *Why can a simple email from him hijack my whole afternoon?*

| *I wonder what my body is trying to tell me with this back pain.*

| *I’m curious why this keeps happening in my relationships.*

7 VARIATIONS OF LEADING LANGUAGE

Lead

As tapping reduces intensity and reframes the problem, new space opens. Leading language points the way forward — reinforcing strengths, envisioning alternatives, and supporting change-oriented action. Because leading moves the client toward the practitioner’s sense of what’s possible, it works best as a collaboration — with the client involved in shaping the statements, rather than simply receiving them.

1. Reinforcing Personal Strengths

Highlight the client’s resources and resilience, anchoring new possibilities — often reaching beyond recovery to fresh growth. **Examples:**

The stubbornness that got me through has proven I can endure. I'm starting to wonder what I could become.

My track record is much more promising than my view of myself has been.

What I know now that I didn't know then is . . . (client adds the words while continuing to tap on a single point so as not to be distracted)

2. Transcending Old Beliefs

Where exploration asks “Is this still true?”, leading begins to formulate more adaptive perspectives that support forward movement. **Examples:**

I learned to believe that speaking up would result in rejection — but the truth is I have a lot that's worth saying.

I've been operating as if no man can be trusted — but is one marriage, even a deeply painful one, enough reason to close that door forever?

Doing everything alone kept me safe once — but I have people now who've shown up for me, and I'm ready to start letting them in.

3. Re-experiencing Past Events Safely

Once safety is established, imagination can revisit a memory while anchored in present-moment resources, helping the nervous system re-encode it from a more balanced state.

Examples:

As I tap, I'm allowing that old scene to be held with more calm and compassion.

I'm bringing the safety I feel now back to my younger self in that memory.

I can be in touch with that younger part of me and let her know she won't always be alone.

4. Envisioning Change

Language that invites the client to imagine new ways of being. Kept achievable rather than forced, wording can make change feel plausible before it has happened. **Examples:**

A different version of me is starting to feel possible.

I'm beginning to see myself as someone who can walk into a room and hold my own, something I couldn't have imagined before all this.

I'm ready to . . . (client adds the words, again continuing to tap on a single point so as not to be distracted)

5. Using Bridging Statements

Rather than leaping to “I’m completely healed,” use intermediate phrases that feel believable and supportive. **Examples:**

Despite my mistakes, I'm starting to recognize how much I bring to my kids.

I can't say the anxiety is gone, but it no longer feels bigger than me.

I'm not there yet, but something in me is starting to believe it's possible.

6. Consolidating Gains

As a session or work on a specific issue comes to a close, naming the shifts that occurred helps them take hold. Optimistic phrasing at this point can land without resistance in a way it couldn't during attuning and exploring. **Examples:**

Something shifted today — the memory is still there, but it's lost its grip on me.

I can see from yesterday's staff meeting that my ability to stay strong and centered is steadily growing.

I'm carrying something different out of here — and I intend to build on it.

7. Strengthening Commitment to Action

As clarity grows and emotional charge diminishes, language helps translate intention into action — not just willingness, but a concrete sense of how, and with what resources.

Envisioning such specific changes extends the work beyond the room. **Examples:**

I'm ready to have this difficult conversation, bringing the calm I've found here into the room with me.

I will take one clear step right now toward protecting my time: I'll say no to that last-minute request without overexplaining myself.

I will take these steps today to support my recovery . . . (client adds the words, again continuing to tap on a single point so as not to be distracted)

A CAUTION ON LEADING

Most Powerful, Most Easily Misused. Leading is the most powerful as well as the most easily misused direction. Introduced too early — before attunement and exploration have laid the groundwork — leading statements feel presumptuous and invite resistance, or quietly “lead the witness” toward your vision of healing rather than the client’s. The remedy is collaboration: invite the client to co-construct the statements, and when unsure how a phrase landed, check again with “*True or false?*”

Collaboration Is the Remedy. Collaboration is served by inviting the client to participate more actively in forming the statements used during the tapping. Here are three structured approaches for leading collaboratively:

1. The practitioner may ask the client to finish statements such as: “A next step for me now is...?” or “I can overcome this obstacle by...?” or “What I understand now that I didn’t understand earlier is...?” or “These experiences [practitioner names moments of success] tell me that I am...?”
2. A Gestalt-like dialogue can be initiated in which the client articulates both sides of an internal conflict while tapping. Although this may be part of exploration and may take some of the charge out of the conflict, it often leads to new levels of resolution and direction.
3. The client can, while continuing to tap, rehearse statements that take conversations further or lead to resolution within challenging relationships (e.g., “Tell her what you

would need if you are ever going to trust her again” or “What would you say to your father about that if he were still alive?”).

THE FRAMEWORK IN PRACTICE

Attune, Explore, and Lead in a Session

A brief illustration shows the directions cycling in real time. “Sarah,” a 44-year-old marketing professional, sought help for chronic anxiety and trauma-related nightmares. This is her second session, focused on a recurring nightmare of being trapped in her childhood home. Although the statements are grouped around the three directions for clarity, the session itself moved more freely — cycling among attuning, exploring, and leading as Sarah’s state shifted. All identifying details have been altered.

Opening SUD: 9 of 10 The practitioner began by staying close to Sarah’s own words. Setup statement: *“Even though I wake up terrified from these nightmares, I’m here right now to get help.”*

● ATTUNING

This terror in the night.

Naming the Problem

I’m trapped and I can’t get out.

Using the Client’s Exact Words

Right now sleep doesn’t feel safe.

Softening Harsh Absolutes

It's like my brain waits for the lights-out moment to say, "Great, now we can panic."

Naming the Problem • Using Humor or Irony

I wake up from the nightmares shaken, and underneath the fear I'm still furious at my uncle.

Discerning Multiple Layers

No wonder my body still stays on guard at night; it learned that danger comes in the dark.

Validating Reasons to Keep the Problem

Part of me is desperate for sleep, and part of me is scared to let go.

Recognizing Conflicting Feelings

Breathing deepened; shoulders dropped. When the SUD was at 7, a new set-up statement was introduced: *"Even though these nightmares still terrify me, I'm choosing to look them in the face right now."*

● **EXPLORING**

The little girl who couldn't escape lives in me still.

Connecting Past and Present

All these years of bracing for danger at night — and the danger isn't actually there anymore.

Uncovering Patterns • Challenging Limiting Beliefs

This part of me has never felt truly safe in any relationship, in any situation.

Uncovering Patterns

The feeling in my dreams is like being trapped in a maze that has no exit.

Exploration via Metaphor

I'm noticing that my body remembers what my mind tried to forget.

Discerning Multiple Layers

Maybe I've been carrying shame that belonged to him, not to me.

Inviting Curiosity • Challenging Limiting Beliefs

"I never thought of it that way," she said quietly after this last statement, tears forming. When the SUD was at 4, leading statements were introduced.

● LEADING

I've brought up three healthy kids despite what happened to me as a child.

Reinforcing Personal Strengths

That vigilance helped me survive then, but it's exhausting me now.

Examining Costs and Benefits

I'm beginning to trust that I can rest without something terrible happening.

Envisioning Change · Using Bridging Statements

I have resources and choices I didn't have back then, including...Sarah added "the support I've built around me," "these tapping skills," and "my ability to maintain strong boundaries"

Reinforcing Personal Strengths · Transcending Old Beliefs

I'm allowing my nervous system to learn how to rest, one night of peaceful sleep at a time.

Consolidating Gains · Envisioning Change

I can honor what that little girl went through, and I am ready to move forward now.

Re-experiencing Past Events Safely · Strengthening Commitment to Action

By the close of the session, her SUD was at a 2. She reflected, "I feel like I can actually imagine sleeping through the night." Two visits later, she reported that disturbing dreams had been few the previous week and far less intense.

Reading a session is one thing; making the call yourself, in the moment, is another. If you'd like to practice that directly, see [Take It Further](#) at the end of this Guide.

SEVEN SOURCES

Where do your words come from?

Words don't come from a vacuum. You draw from multiple streams of information in formulating them, and none of them require elaborate or polished language.

Among the natural sources for your next statement:

1. The client's words and presentation

Intake gives an initial, mutable map. The client's presentation at the start of each session sets immediate priorities. Throughout the session, the client's own phrasings are the most reliable raw material for the next tapping statement.

2. Nonverbal cues

Shifts in posture, facial expression, muscle tension, breathing, and eye contact give immediate feedback on how the last phrase landed, what the client is experiencing, and what the next phrase needs to address.

3. The SUD rating

Discussion of changes in the SUD rating after each tapping round is often highly informative about optimal next steps, as are your observations of the client's reactions to each new phrasing.

4. Gaps in the story

When tapping isn't moving the SUD — even when the words feel productive — that stall may be a signal that something in the story is still missing. Clients often present one layer of an issue while a deeper layer remains unspoken.

5. Your own background and clinical experience

Your own life adds language for grief, fear, and relief that no training can teach. Your clinical experience supplies something else: a sense of how moments like this one tend to unfold, and the phrasings that served when they did. Much of what a seasoned practitioner reaches for was earned in the treatment room rather than taught — though experience can also entrench a habit, which is why the sources that follow matter.

6. Established knowledge

Familiarity with the mental health field's best established practices for treating anxiety, trauma, depression, addiction, PTSD, and other challenging conditions keeps your language aligned with the accumulated knowledge of the clinical community.

7. Therapeutic resonance

A pre-verbal attunement — an embodied sense of the client — may bring the next phrase to you before you've consciously formed it (more in the discussion below).

HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

Three strengths tapping protocols quietly embody

More is going on in a tapping session than its simple structure suggests. Applied with proficient language, attunement, and presence, the approach accomplishes three things the wider field works hard to achieve:

- It is inherently client-centered.
- Yet it brings client and practitioner into a deep encounter where what unfolds is beyond the conscious understanding of either of them.

- And these two qualities act in concert to bring forth the client's innate wisdom and self-healing capacities.

In most talk therapy, both parties speak in paragraphs. In tapping protocols, you offer a phrase, watch what it does, and offer another — often several in the space of a minute. Each is shaped by what the last one produced: a breath that deepened, a word the client repeated more slowly, a flicker that said *not quite* or gave affirmation. Even statements that lead stay tethered — the strengths you name are ones the client has shown you, and the direction you point toward is one the client has already begun to lean into.

Notice what the tapping phrases you offer are made of:

Client-centered. The words are often the client's own, echoed back. The images are ones the client built. The goals are the client's. The strengths are ones the client has demonstrated. Even a hypothesis that reaches past what has been said is handed back for the client's verdict — *true or false?*

Beyond conscious understanding. The substance of a tapping phrase originates with the client. You add shape, timing, context, responsiveness, and a willingness to be corrected, which is what keeps your phrasing calibrated to the client's experience. Because the exchange unfolds in a field neither of you fully controls, the direction of the session often shifts before the reason for the shift is apparent.

Self-healing capacities. Beneath the whole method runs an assumption: the client's deepest guidance is already wise and oriented toward healing and growth. What obstructs this is not a missing direction but the parts of the story that are still unnamed, unfelt, unspoken, unprocessed. Wording that stays close to the client's own does not impose a new direction. It clears what stands in the way of one. Practitioners describe this less as supplying answers than as making room for what the healthiest part of the client was already pressing toward. The session is built by

both of you — toward healing, resilience, and growth neither of you could have imagined at the outset.

THE REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER

“Good-enough” words, offered with presence

Staying Regulated. If language is the tool, the practitioner is the one who must stay present and self-aware enough to use it well. Some facility with language is obviously important, but its impact is limited unless you can remain regulated and curious in the face of both the client’s intensity and your own.

When Getting It Right Gets in the Way. In a culture of evaluation and pressure to excel, “finding the right words” can quietly become another performance — and if you’re preoccupied with getting each phrase just right, you’ve half left the room, no longer tracking the cues that could be guiding you. Easing that pressure tends to make attunement more accurate. As you accept that you’ll sometimes get the wording wrong, you become freer to listen, to be surprised, and to adjust. And adjustments can come with the next tapping statement. The method is as forgiving as it is precise.

Showing Your Uncertainty. Wording doesn’t need to be perfect — and neither do you. Your own uncertainty, hesitation, or emotional reaction doesn’t have to be hidden or resolved before you speak. Brought into the room rather than suppressed, it can still support the client’s progress. The judgment is always whether it serves the client. When your reaction would pull too much attention toward you, or when the client needs steadiness more than candor, it belongs in supervision or your own self-tapping instead.

Countertransference as Information. Reflective practitioners treat their own emotional reactions — often discussed as countertransference — not as signs of trouble to be met with discomfort or shame but as vital information. The key is to recognize and work with these responses rather than act them out. Your own self-tapping, personal therapy, or work in supervision can disentangle your history from client hot spots and sharpen the precision of your attunement.

Your Own Safety. An often-overlooked dimension of safety is the practitioner's own. Clinicians need to feel emotionally, professionally, and physically safe to offer the quality of presence this work requires — which includes maintaining clear boundaries. For instance, if a client asks about your training, background, or personal life, you can use these inquiries to clarify roles, expectations, and the frame of the work. Instead of reacting from anxiety — over-disclosing to win trust or withdrawing defensively — consider the degree of transparency that will best support the client's therapeutic goals and the sanctity of the healing relationship. Missteps, approached as openings for repair rather than failures, tend to strengthen the alliance. Ruptures resolved well are associated with better outcomes.

Common tapping errors a reflective stance helps prevent

- 1 Beginning tapping too early, before sufficient rapport and context have been established.
- 2 Rushing to fold the client's words into the next sequence without pause.
- 3 Prioritizing moving forward over maintaining connection.
- 4 Pushing the client toward a SUD of 0 or near 0 before resolution can be attained or integrated.
- 5 Persisting with seemingly productive wording that nonetheless makes the client uncomfortable, rather than inquiring and adjusting.
- 6 Becoming so absorbed in wording the next statement that you miss what's happening in the client's face, posture, or affect.

- 7 Attributing difficulties in attunement solely to the client — “transference,” “treatment resistant,” an “attachment disorder” — without examining your own presence, pacing, or wording.

BEYOND WORDS

How attuned presence guides the next phrase

The deepest source of effective language may be one that precedes language entirely. The framework tells you how to shape the words. A quieter, pre-verbal process brings them to you in the first place.

Many decades ago, the renowned psychologist Rollo May described how therapist and client can feel as if they share a single psychological space rather than two separate minds — a psychosocial background that is continuously available. One of May’s students, Nancy Larson, explored this phenomenon in depth, referring to it as “psychotherapeutic resonance.” She documented a merging of personal boundaries that goes well beyond ordinary empathy and rapport. In one account, Larson met a new client and, with no apparent cues, became aware of diffuse sensations deep in her own abdomen. After reflecting and ruling out any personal source, she gently asked whether the sensations might hold meaning for the client. The client immediately disclosed that she had cervical cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy — a striking illustration of how a therapist’s body can register clinically relevant information before a word is spoken. Others have described this as the “meld experience” — two minds joining so that awareness is briefly, inseparably shared.

In our own era, the psychiatrist Daniel Siegel has given this space both a name and a mechanism. In his framework of interpersonal neurobiology, the mind is not sealed inside a single skull; it is an embodied, relational process regulating the flow of energy and information between people as much as within them. Mind, brain, and relationships form one system, each shaping the others, so that attuned connection alters neural structure rather than merely feeling good. Minds, in this view, are porous: our states are co-regulated by whoever we are with.

Read that way, the phrase you offer next is not only a message across a gap. It is part of what regulates the system the two of you have become.

What was once hard to speak of scientifically is increasingly open to measurement. Research on “interpersonal synchrony” shows that clinician and client can become physiologically attuned — in heart rate, electrodermal activity, vocalization, and subtle movement — and that the degree of synchrony predicts rapport and clinical progress. Experiences described as a “felt sense,” an informational “field,” or a “meld” appear to reflect shared underlying biological processes, not only subjective rapport.

SENDING YOU OFF

When you're unsure what to say next, tend to your own presence first — take a breath and then shift your attention to the space between you and the client — already active and informative, even when nothing obvious is “happening.” Rather than searching for the phrase through deliberation, let your attention rest on what the shared field is signaling, and notice the words that emerge.

A clear conceptual map and a deeply felt resonance work together, supporting both precision and fluidity. The framework prepares the clinical instincts. Presence brings the words.

Attune regularly. **Explore** when there is safety. **Lead** when there is readiness. And when you're unsure, tend to your own presence first, take a breath, and return to what the client in front of you is signaling.

TAKE IT FURTHER

Understanding the Importance of Wording Is One Thing.

Building the Skill of Finding the Right Words Is Another.

This Guide is complete on its own — free to use and share.

What follows is an optional next step, for those
who want practice in turning understanding into instinct —
building a skill that is automatic and discerning.

An Interactive Program for Tapping Practitioners

The Right Words Practice Program turns the 21 variations of language from something you understand into something you can do. Across 144 real clinical choice points, you select a phrasing and see the reasoning and likely outcome of each option, some stronger, some weaker. The challenge deepens as you go — sensing the direction, then shaping the phrase, then the finest discriminations that mark seasoned practitioners — until the right words begin to arrive on their own. What clinicians have long had to absorb slowly, over years of treating clients, can now be systematically practiced.

Learn more about the Practice Program →

An interactive companion to this Field Guide

Stay in Touch with David →

A few emails a year — new resources, classes, or papers. Unsubscribe any time.

About this framework

The Attune / Explore / Lead framework grew out of a 10-year project spanning several studies — a survey of experienced practitioners, a statement-by-statement coding of recorded sessions, and a computational analysis of guided tapping videos — which together organized the language of effective tapping into the three directions and 21 variations of language. It is an early but grounded account, offered as a working framework rather than a finished one. Firmer footing will require independent coders with formal inter-rater reliability, larger and more varied samples across practitioners, clients, and presenting problems, and controlled studies linking specific language variations to treatment outcomes. At its current level of development, it can still serve as a flexible map and compass for orienting the next phrase.

While the map can orient you, it cannot replace the judgment, presence, and attunement that make the difference in any given moment. Full methods, validation, and citations are in the source paper, referenced below.

This Field Guide is a companion for tapping practitioners, drawn from a freely available academic paper. It may be freely shared. For trainings and related resources, visit energytapping.com.

CITE THE SOURCE PAPER

Feinstein, D., & Rajah, S. (2026). Finding the right words: A process-informed framework for therapist language in acupoint tapping psychotherapy. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 17:1800386.