

Buried Emotional Landmines = Golden Opportunities

(Marci Bell, MA, LPC © 2025 www.balancedlifeinfo.com)

The work we do together will be really good — often great — but never perfect, because we're human. And as humans, we're a bit *glitchy*: we sometimes misunderstand, misspeak, lack information, make faulty assumptions, go off-line (fight, flight, fawn, or freeze), or jump to wrong conclusions.

These human “glitches” can trigger an explosion of emotions — anger, confusion, heartache, or discouragement — as if we've stepped on a **buried emotional landmine**. The explosion of feelings can be startling and disorienting, but it doesn't mean something is wrong. When discovered during a session of counseling, it means we've hit a place in need of healing — **a golden opportunity!**

When we stumble upon one of these buried spots, the best thing we can do is *pause, breathe, and redirect* until the emotional intensity settles. Once the dust clears, the counselor can then work with you to resolve it — both past and present. These moments, though uncomfortable, are necessary for healing.

The Sudden Eruption. When emotions erupt, resolution may feel impossible. Taking a moment to breathe and gently redirect focus allows your nervous system to settle. Then we can return to the issue with clearer minds and calmer hearts — both essential for collaboration and problem-solving.

You might say: “Marci, what you just said doesn't feel right to me — can we slow down and talk about it?” I will always make space for these emotionally-regulated conversations.

If the trigger is avoided or left unspoken, pain can remain stuck and reinforce old wounds. But if you are able to calmly share what's happening, it opens the door for your counselor to lead the way in sorting through the complexities of the issue with you to transform it into progress rather than setback.

The Skew. These *emotional eruptions* often stem from missing information. You know your history, perceptions, and inner thought “bunny trails” that I can't possibly know until you share them. Most misunderstandings are simply *sender skew* or *receiver skew* — a mismatch between what was meant and what was heard. Once we uncover the missing information, much of the emotional charge dissipates.

Emotional Flooding and Triggers. When strong emotions surge, the nervous system interprets it as danger. That sense of threat can trick you into believing someone is intentionally trying to hurt you in that moment, which activates fight, flight, or freeze — temporarily blocking clear thinking and productive conversation.

In that moment, perceptions may be distorted, but your beliefs, self-talk, and emotions themselves hold valuable clues. They point to deeper needs or old wounds asking to be seen and healed. Triggers aren't enemies; they're valuable signals that show us where the buried pain lies.

Working Through and Repairing. Once the emotional dust has settled, we can gently investigate together — not to decide who's right or wrong, but to understand what happened.

We might ask:

- What did you hear or feel?
- What did the speaker intend or mean?
- What might this moment reveal about deeper needs or past experiences?

By slowing down and staying curious, we defuse the charge, learn from the moment, and create a strong working relationship between counselor and client(s) that enables forward progress to the next level of healing. Each emotional landmine that's uncovered and examined in counseling becomes a **stepping-stone toward greater insight, safety, and healing.**