

Some Fluid Practices of Narrative Therapy

- **Engage externalizing language** when discussing client-identified problem(s). A shift from adjectives (eg: “depressed”, describing the client) to nouns (“depression”, naming the problem as separate from the client) facilitates this process.
- **Explore the history and effects of the problem.** What gives depression its strength? What impact has depression had on the client’s life, relationships, hopes and dreams?
- **Invite the client to evaluate these effects.** “Is it ok with you that depression is having these isolating effects on your life?”
Evaluating the effects allows the client to take a stand in relationship to the problem, as something separate from her/himself. This practice also invites accountability for the kind of relationship the client would prefer to have with the problem *instead*.
- **Listen for and identify exceptions to the problem story.** This involves being genuinely curious about the times in which the problem has been less influential in the clients life. “What’s your understanding of how that was possible?”, “What quality were you able to call upon in order to make that happen?”
- **Explore the history and meaning of these exceptions** in the client’s lived experience. “Who in your life wouldn’t be surprised to know that you are sometimes able to get the upper hand on depression?”, “Is this ability of yours linked to a particular value you hold in your life?”
- **Name and develop a counter story** to the problem(s), using the client’s language. “You mentioned self-care. Would self-care be a good name for the project we’re working on here in order to diminish the power of depression in your life?”

- **Deconstruct dominant discourses.** Discourses are the values and rules of engagement from the culture (organizations, family, religion, etc) telling us how we “should” or “should not” show up in the world. For example, men should be dominant and un-emotional, women should be thin and less vocal. Identifying and deconstructing discourses makes visible many of the oppressive forces that tend to operate on our lives, oftentimes convincing us “that’s just the way things are.”
- **Nurture supportive allies** for the client’s new, preferred narratives and experiences in life. These can take the form of significant friends and/or family members, 12-step associates, pets, letters/correspondences, fictional characters, etc.

Charley Lang, LMFT, 2010

narrativecounselingcenter.com