

Externalising: separating the person from the problem through linguistic practices

Tips for Externalising:

- 1. Turn adjectives into nouns** - *e.g. "anger" rather than "angry".*
- 2. Prefix words with "The..." to render them nouns** - *e.g. "The sadness" rather than "sadness"*
- 3. Use gerunds (verbs ending in "-ing")** - *e.g. "this cutting of your skin" rather than "cut your skin"*
- 4. Personify problems to give them intentions** - *e.g. "What is this problem trying to do to you?"*
- 5. Prefix problematic descriptions with their relationship with the person** - *e.g. "This sense/ feeling/sensation of his unfairness" rather than "his unfairness"*
- 6. Externalise positive things too** - **this prevents initiatives getting minimised as being 'natural' rather than skills with a social history** - *e.g. "using/expressing/demonstrating confidence" rather than "being confident"*

From (1) internalising to (2) externalising to (3) exception development

1. "He's bad tempered"
 2. "How long has this bad temper been with him?"
 3. "How would you describe him before bad temper came along?"
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1. "He's a lazy boy"
 2. "What kind of laziness is he most susceptible to?"
 3. "What kinds of laziness is he sometimes able to avoid?"
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1. "Helen is anorexic"
 2. "How does anorexia have Helen going about her life?"
 3. "How does this compare with what Helen would prefer for her life?"
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1. "Suzy is an attachment disordered girl"
 2. "What is this detaching Suzy from?"
 3. "When she's less detached from this, what kind of order are her attachments in?"
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1. "I know I'm a bad mother"
 2. "What experiences in life have been trying to convince you of this?"
 3. "If you treated yourself with understanding and sympathy what other meanings might you make?"

1. "Ryan always swears at his brother"
2. "How has the swearing affected their relationship?"
3. "What areas of their relationship are intact despite the swearing?"

1. "My mum doesn't care about me any more"
2. "When do you feel this 'not caring' most strongly?"
3. "What are you able to do when this sense of her caring is less strong?"

1. "I'm so depressed"
2. "When did depression first visit you?"
3. "Is depression a welcome guest or has it overstayed its welcome?"

1. "Sally's just a fearful child"
2. "Could you draw these fears Sally so I've got an idea of what you're up against?"
3. "Would you be interested to hear what other children have told me about fear-taming?"

1. "He's got a nasty attitude"
2. "How can this attitude have you treating him?"
3. "What ways of treating him can prevent the attitude growing?"

1. "He explodes - just like his father"
2. "Are these explosions more like a volcano, a nuclear bomb or a T Rex sneezing?"
3. "How does he manage to calm down afterwards?"

Exceptions: gaps in the problem story that point to less problematic ways of living.

Some Tips for Discerning Exceptions

- Look for a time before the problem emerged, when it faded for a spell or when it was less severe.
- Look for a context where it doesn't appear or is less severe - e.g. at school? On holiday? After a good day out? When playing computer games?
- Look for relationships within which it doesn't appear or is less severe.
- Understand why they're protesting the problem rather than thinking it's what they deserve, or it's forever and just accepting it.
- Inquire how they have sustained enough hope to keep meeting.
- Look for important values or principles they are determined to stay true to, despite the best efforts of the problem.
- Consider all actions as acts of agency and initiatives in pursuit of a better life.
- Enquire about any experience they have in problem-solving in life.
- Understand what the people involved do still agree about.