

The Alternate Story

Nicolette Deva

Psychologist

Stories...

- Are central to narrative conversations
- Defined in narrative therapy as **Events** linked in a **Sequence** across **Time** according to a **Theme**

Multi-Storied lives...

- No single story can encapsulate all the contingencies of life
- No single story is free from ambiguity
- Frequently we get stuck on the “problem” story or the story of the problem

The Problem or Dominant Stories

- People consult us about their problems and so tell us about their Problem Story(s)
- Problem stories are dominant and so take up a lot of room in people's lives
- Problems stories tend to privilege certain events while neglecting others

The Alternate Stories

- Important assumption: Problems aren't 100% successful so an alternate, anti-problem story is present
- Alternate stories are usually hidden, often unheard and untold by the people themselves
- These stories bring to light people's competencies, skills, commitments and hopes and connects them with the preferred stories of their lives
- An important question to consider: How can I assist people to break away from their problem stories and re-connect with these preferred stories for their lives?

Before we proceed a few narrative principles for framing for these conversations...

1. We take a respectful and non-blaming approach to counseling
2. People are centered as the experts in their own lives
3. Problems are viewed as separate from people
4. We assume people have many skills, competencies, beliefs, values and commitments

Developing Alternate Stories: Look out for Openings to Alternate Stories...

- Openings to alternate stories are referred to as “unique outcomes” in narrative therapy
- An opening to an alternate story is any action (plan, thought, idea, commitment) or initiative past, present or future that is Anti-Problem
- We assume that these anti-problem actions or initiatives aren't a fluke or a coincidence and don't happen in isolation
- An anti-problem action or initiative isn't significant until the client judges it to be so

Developing Alternative Stories: Rich & Thick Alternate Stories...

- “As these alternate storylines thicken and become more significantly rooted in history, they provide people with a foundation for new initiatives in addressing problems, predicaments and dilemmas of their lives” ~ Michael White
- Narrative therapy enriches and thickens stories by:
 1. Inquiring about the anti-problem action or initiative (when, where, who) and any events in the past, present or the future that may be linked to it
 2. Inquiring about the broader meaning of the anti-problem action and what the person is according value to by taking this action

Michael White's Map for Developing Alternative Stories

*Desires Purposes Intentions Values Beliefs Hopes Personal Qualities Commitments Plans
Preferences Abilities Dreams Hopes*

Landscape of Identity

themes

Landscape of Action

The Event When? Where? What led up to it? Who? Other times