



# THE HIVE OF WELLBEING LIMITED

## A Technique Used in a Narrative Therapy Approach

### Narrative Therapy

A Narrative Therapy Approach was developed by Michael White and David Epston in the 1970s and 1980s and is a therapeutic intervention to support clients and families in identifying unresourceful stories or “narratives” about their lives which limit their wellbeing.

Narrative Therapy is based on a social constructivist model and holds that our identities are shaped by the accounts of our lives found in our stories or narratives. By focusing on problems’ effects on people’s lives rather than on the problem as inside or part of people, distance is created.

### “Externalising the Problem”

One technique used within the therapy is to identify the problem as “external” to self. In recognising that the problem is separate from self, there are then opportunities to tell a different story about the problem and to even give it a separate identity.


If we take the example of Anxiety, we can move from telling an Internal story about being anxious to an External narrative that has Anxiety “visiting” us from time-to-time:

| Internalising  | Externalising   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• How long have you been anxious?</li><li>• How did you get to be an anxious person?</li><li>• Why do you think you are such a worrier?</li><li>• Does being anxious run in your family?</li><li>• What does being a worrier tell you about the kind of person that you are deep down?</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When did anxiety first come into your life?</li><li>• What has happened that might have made you vulnerable to the influence of worry?</li><li>• What does worry try to get you to believe about yourself?</li><li>• Are there tricks and tactics that anxiety uses to try and influence you?</li><li>• In which situations is anxiety most likely to try to take over?</li></ul> |



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Taking this a step further, we can begin to assign a persona or metaphor to the “external problem.”

| Questions to answer...  | Examples of other Metaphors/Personas for Emotional States   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personify the worry</li> <li>• What does it look like? How big? Colour? Shape? Gender?</li> <li>• What would you call it?</li> <li>• If the problem was a person, what would you call it?</li> <li>• How does the worry speak?</li> <li>• How does it have you feeling?</li> <li>• What would you like to say to this person?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Wolf of Anxiety</li> <li>- The Black Dog of Depression</li> <li>- “Flat Battery” for Depression</li> <li>- “Fire “ for Anger</li> <li>- The Bully for Helplessness</li> </ul> <p>Or it could be a completely new invention for you, a new image. Here is mine:</p>  <p>This is Henrietta who “visits” me when I feel anxious and out of control. She arrives with her clipboard, telling me about all of the things that I have not yet done.</p> |

## “What would you like to say to this person?”

In externalising and personifying the problem, we can now find ways to relate to this differently. I write to Henrietta often with a new to-do list or a quick note to tell her that all is well and that I have everything under control or that it can all wait until the morning.

If we have chosen a metaphor, such as a flat battery, we may need to use more visualisation and imagine recharging the battery or placing it in a car that we would most like to travel a good distance in. The main thing is that it is a metaphor or person that works best for you. Visualisation is a powerful technique used by coaches in a vast array of sectors, especially Sport, Business and Health.

## Taking this technique further...

Of course, the Narrative Therapy process as a therapeutic approach is much more than simply identifying a metaphor or person to represent a problem. However, what this small part of the process enables clients to do is to firstly, identify that they are separate from the



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problem and secondly, develop a new relationship with this problem which can be more resourceful and allow them to have more control over a situation where the problem arises.

## Your Turn...

Here are some reflective questions for you to consider.....

Think of a particular problem or emotion that is recurrent in your life and is limiting you in your resourcefulness:

Answer these questions with this specific “problem” replacing each gap:

- When did \_\_\_\_\_ first come into your life?
- What does \_\_\_\_\_ try to get you to believe about yourself?
- Are there tricks and tactics that \_\_\_\_\_ uses to try and influence you?
- In which situations is \_\_\_\_\_ most likely to try to take over?

Now, if you were to give your “problem” a new identity, which persona or metaphor would you give it?

- What does it look like? How big? Colour? Shape? Gender?
- What would you call it?
- If the problem was a person, what would you call it?
- How does the problem speak?
- How does it have you feeling?
- What would you like to say to this person/do with this metaphor?

**If you have any more questions or anything that you would like to discuss, then please do get in touch with Claire at [info@thehiveofwellbeing.co.uk](mailto:info@thehiveofwellbeing.co.uk).**