

“every tool is a weapon - if you hold it right”

Ani DeFranco (and reaching me via therapist and activist Vikki Reynolds
website: vikkireynolds.ca)

Mental health “epidemic” amongst young people. Question / illustration / provocation: are young people seeing the planet fall apart and having no job / housing prospects:

(a) depressed and anxious

or

(b) oppressed and annoyed

An idea to play with: “depression” and “anxiety” – useful tools – can be “weaponised”, e.g. there’s nothing wrong with the world / society - you’re just broken / unwell.

Exercise

Recall - or generate from imagination - contexts where a given concept / term that comes up in the therapy room can be used as: (a) a tool and (b) a weapon. Try it out with some of the terms below or come up with some ideas of your own.

depressed	avoidant attachment style
self-care	responsive (Winner’s triangle)
secure attachment style	kind
intimacy (TA sense)	assertive
grandiosity	self-compassion
aggressive	persecutor
scripty	insecurely attached
victim	perfectionist
discount	sad
on the spectrum	forceful

Changing styles: breaking the habits of a lifetime

TA Cumbria Conference, 2nd March 2019
Matthew Elton | www.extra-help.org.uk

Exercise

In pairs or in threes. One person adopts the role of the interviewee, another the interviewer. If there are three of you, the third person can be observer for part one and interviewer for part two.

As interviewer notice the particular language of the interviewee and use that language as you ask further questions. Move towards particular and away from abstract where you can – avoid reframing using theory unless it's led by the interviewee – and even there, be curious about what it might mean to them. The “scripts” are only a guide. I invite you to improvise around them.

Interviewer script: part one

Think of an unsettling episode where someone important to you was first close to you and then moved away – this might be a change of physical distance or a change of emotional distance – go with a story that comes to mind and that has some meaning for you.

- Can you tell me a little bit about the episode?
- How did you feel as they moved away?
- What did you think about yourself as they moved away?
- What did you think about them as they moved away?
- Was the experience familiar or unfamiliar? – If familiar, can you share another example... and can you say what it has you thinking about how the world is?
- Did they come back? – If so, what was that like for you?

Interviewer script: part two

Imagine that a well-resourced and steady version of yourself was on hand to offer support around the time of the unsettling episode. Maybe think of this version of yourself as a trusted adult, perhaps an aunt or uncle. Imagine a dialogue between this version of yourself and the you that was unsettled by someone important moving away.

*Note: “well-resourced and steady”, “unsettled”, and “version” are words / phrases that I bring. (I become the expert **and** the words abstract away from the particular.) If the interviewee brings words / phrases that can, perhaps with a bit of creativity, be substituted, I encourage you to do that.*

- If the interviewee seems stuck – encourage them with sideways suggestions, e.g. “Do you think this other version of yourself would be patient or impatient with you?” or “What might this other version of yourself say about what you’re like, what the person moving away is like, what the world is like?”
- If the interviewee is really, really stuck – open up an exploration about this using a phrase such as “It seems as if it’s really hard for you to conjure up a version of yourself that could be supportive. Sure, it’s only an exercise. But what do you think it might mean that you are finding that so tricky? What do you think it’d be like to be able to conjure up that version of yourself and for it to be effective?”
- If the interviewee is coming up with ideas - reflect back using introductory phrases such as “so the well-resourced version of yourself might say to the unsettled version that...” and “what is it like for the unsettled version of yourself to hear that” or “what is it like for the unsettled version of yourself to be around the well-resourced and steady version of you”.

Reflection: some possible questions

What was it like being the interviewee? What was it like being the interviewer? Can you imagine using interview questions like this in the therapy room? How do you relate what you were doing to the attachment-styles (if at all)? What (if anything) do you think either part one or part two might have to do with bringing about a change in / disruption of attachment-style or core script belief?