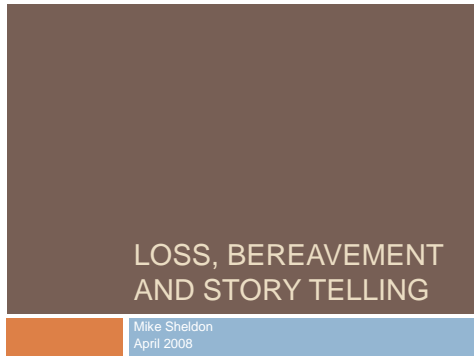


# Counselling Training – Spain, April 2008

Dr Mike Sheldon

## Session on –Loss, Story Telling and the Truth



### ABOUT ME

GP with some counselling experience

Married to Jenny, who keeps teaching me

I have more theory than practice

**GRIEF** is something we all experience, yet find very difficult to deal with, in ourselves and in other people. Because it is an area of raw emotions we often shy away and don't provide the help someone needs.

Grief is also a natural process, part of the human condition. Most cope with it sort of OK, but in some it floors them and has a significant harmful effect on their lives.

- Bereavement – a process we all have to go through when we lose something of value in our lives.
- Grief – the personal experience of emotions, feelings, thoughts and physical symptoms associated with loss.
- Loss - can be large (our closest loved ones), medium (divorce, children leaving home) or “small” (loss of youth, job etc)

- Bereavement – a process we all have to go through when we lose something of value in our lives.
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2

## **GRIEF**

The counselling approach can be considered under the two main headings – generic and specific counselling help.

## GENERIC counselling skills and practice

Comfort in emotional and practical ways

Support in a sensitive way

Encourage

Let God do the work

Invitation to move forward

Discernment as to God's timing

Stay committed to them, especially in the ups and downs

## Generic Counselling Skills

- Comfort in emotional and practical ways
- Support sensitively
- Encourage
- Let God do the work
- INVITATION to move forward
- Discernment as to God's timing
- Stay Committed

## SPECIFIC counselling skills and practice

The process of adapting to LOSS is different in all of us, no two paths are identical.

Stress again that coping with loss is a “normal” life event, and yet always causing disruption to the person's life, and is probably one of the main causes of emotional and psychological damage to people.

There is no “right way” of coping, the highly strung woman who is always bursting into tears, or the quiet man who always says that he is “fine” are both “Normal”. However in most of us, some of our coping strategies are flawed and will lead us into difficult waters.

## No two paths are identical

- BUT – each individual is unique, and their journey through this process from loss to acceptance will never follow exactly the same path as that taken by others.
- NORMAL process – person passes through these stages, often taking several years, but comes to a good level of acceptance and can again play their part in life.

4

## Stages in the bereavement process

Kubler-Ross

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

3

## Stages in the bereavement process (Kubler-Ross) – an emotional journey

1. Denial
2. Anger
3. Bargaining
4. Depression
5. Acceptance

BUT – each individual is unique, and their journey through this process from loss to acceptance will never follow exactly the same path as that taken by others.

NORMAL process – person passes through the stages, often taking several years, but comes to a good level of acceptance and can again play their part in life.

COMPLICATED process – where they get stuck at one stage or another.

This can happen because –

- Size of loss
- Multiple losses
- Other factors present such as pre-existing depression
- Spiritual weakness, loss of hope, unbelief etc.

We all need help “No man is an island”

## Getting stuck

- COMPLICATED process – where they get stuck at one stage or another.
- This can happen because –
  - ▣ Size of loss
  - ▣ Multiple losses
  - ▣ Other factors present such as pre-existing depression
  - ▣ Spiritual weakness, loss of hope, unbelief etc.

6

## LIFE CYCLE and LOSS is a natural part of life

### Life Cycle

#### Normal Life Cycle

gathering & letting go  
gain & loss  
joy & grief

### Loss is a natural part of life

- We all lose people and things in life, what marks us out is how we deal with that loss.
- Loved one
- Job
- Reputation
- Friends moving away
- Wallet
- Health
- Pet
- Money
- Dignity
- Companionship
- Ability to do things
- Eye sight

## THE STEPPING STONES TO HEALTH

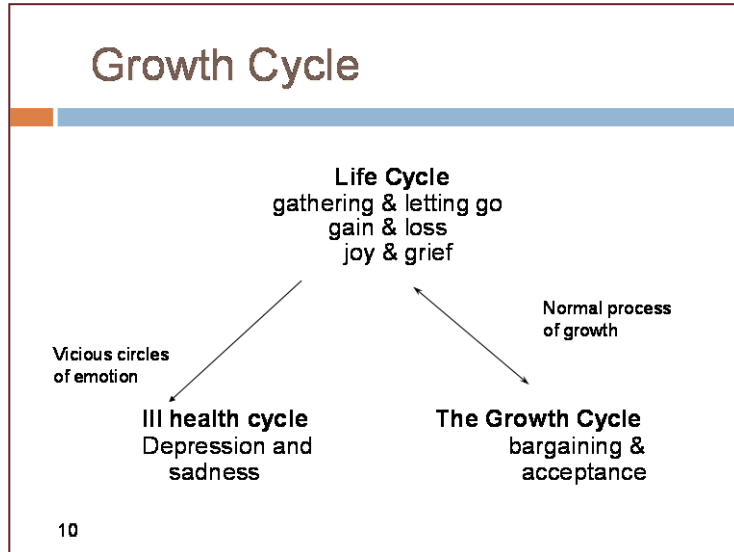
Kubler-Ross stages - adapted

### Stepping stones to health

- Shock
- Denial
- Guilt (anger turned inwards)
- Anger (with others)
- Depression
- Bargaining (or re-organisation)
- Passive acceptance (with sadness)
- Active acceptance (with joy)

Get each person to describe what happens in each of these stages. Are they a complete and useful description?

## GROWTH CYCLE



As we have said, loss is a normal part of life. It is through our adaptation to loss, pain and suffering that we grow.

The growth cycle consists of bargaining and acceptance.

If we don't do this (and remember that each one of us can fail to do this with every loss we have suffered) then we move into the ill-health cycle.

In some respects we are all sad and depressed beneath the mask.

## MY PERSONAL LOSSES and how I have dealt with them

Each of us has lost many things in life, some large and some small. How have we dealt with them? At which stage of the healing process are we with each loss.

Personal exercise:

We take 10 minutes with ourselves.

Note down all of the losses we can think of that we have suffered

Put them on the chart.

Then prayerfully assess where on the stepping stones you have reached with each loss (No one else is going to see this list – it's between you and God)

NAMED LOSSES						
Stepping Stones						
Shock						
Denial						
Anger						
Guilt						
Bargaining						
Depression						
Acceptance + sadness						
Acceptance with gladness						

**THE WHIRLPOOLS** our clients can fall in to

### Four Vicious Cycles of Emotion (Whirlpools)

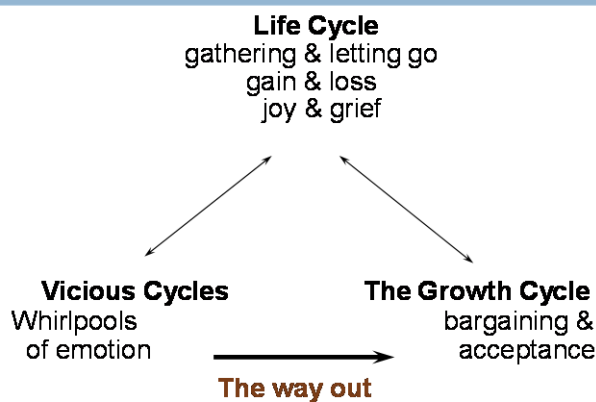
- **Depression-anger:** Destructive drives, either suicidal or sociopathic
- **Guilt-anger:** Compulsive drives to self-harming behaviour and eating disorders
- **Guilt-shock:** Intractable shame and paranoia
- **Depression-shock:** Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME)

12

These are the very harmful end results of a failure to correctly process grief and loss – we need to be aware that these may be present, but be slow to make “clever” diagnoses, or to “discern” what is wrong. Let God lead and the person themselves discover what has happened to them

COUNSELLING to provide the **“WAY OUT”** to Health

### Healing Cycle



13

**FORGIVENESS**, acceptance and restoration are positive stepping stones to health and wholeness (that is the state of maturing that God calls us to)

## Conclusions

### Grief Can Trap People in Unforgiveness

- Unrecognised grieving can lead to physical, psychological, behavioural and spiritual problems.
- A 'stepping stones' approach to unrecognised grieving helps forgiveness by breaking it into small steps.
- Forgiving removes the conditions in which evil thrives. It creates conditions for healing by *personal growth into loving communion*.

## **EXCERCISE**

I've suddenly introduced the word forgiveness.

What has that got to do with grief and bereavement?

**Small discussion groups** – what types of actions are helped towards resolution by forgiveness

Feedback

All of the "emotions" of grief can lead us into sin – or separation from God.

Anger can be destructive, so can depression etc.

We have to take personal responsibility for not getting God to walk us through a situation. As we stay in our weakness, so God is less able to act in our lives. Forgiveness unlocks the door and lets God in. He is a good and loving God. He wants to extend his mercy and love towards us. We need to open doors.

HOW do we open doors – one excellent method is to tell our story, and as we re-tell it with a Godly person listening and inter-acting, so the story becomes closer to God's truth which is where healing, wholeness and salvation live.

## The Importance of Stories

- You don't know what you are thinking until you speak it out
- Telling your story is essential for you to be able to understand it
- The whole of life is a story
- Life consists of a series of events, some happy and some traumatic

## Importance of stories (2)

- Everyone else is a "ME" seeing this life through their eyes
- If you have nothing to lose – you have nothing
- The telling of a painful story is usually the first step in healing
- Many people never have the opportunity to tell their story

## Importance of stories (3)

- "To listen another person's soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being can ever perform for another"
- Douglas Steere

## WHAT IS THE TRUE STORY?

In our own lives the stories we tell are all subjective – from MY view point. So how TRUE are they? Does it matter? My understanding is that in counselling we listen to people's stories and provide an external objective reference point which actually enables the person to begin to understand what the true story is.

We need to digress a little and look at TRUTH and consider why it is so important.

### Seeking the truth

- As the person increases in their understanding of the truth about their health issues so they have the power to become healthier
- They can then better adapt, cope, make allowances, take action, seek appropriate help, make better decisions etc.

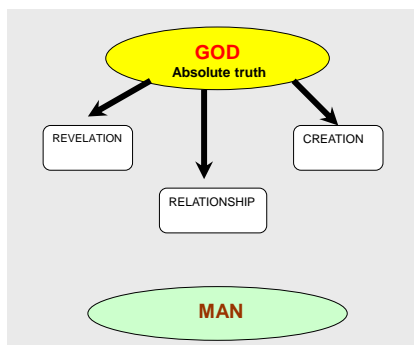
God alone is absolute truth. He is the unchanging source of all truth, and only in Him is truth.

How does God's absolute truth come to His creation mankind?

Is it directly or through agencies?

Adam walked and talked with God, but as a result of the fall mankind was put out of the garden

where this could happen. Now, because of man's sin God is so much above His creation that he cannot communicate directly to His created creatures, but uses agencies through whom he can allow us to see not the whole absolute truth, but a partial, relevant glimpse of the absolute truth, which God knows is all we can handle at this stage of our maturity.



As we grow, God is able to reveal more truth to us – but it is never for us to decide when we can handle more truth apart from a relationship with God.

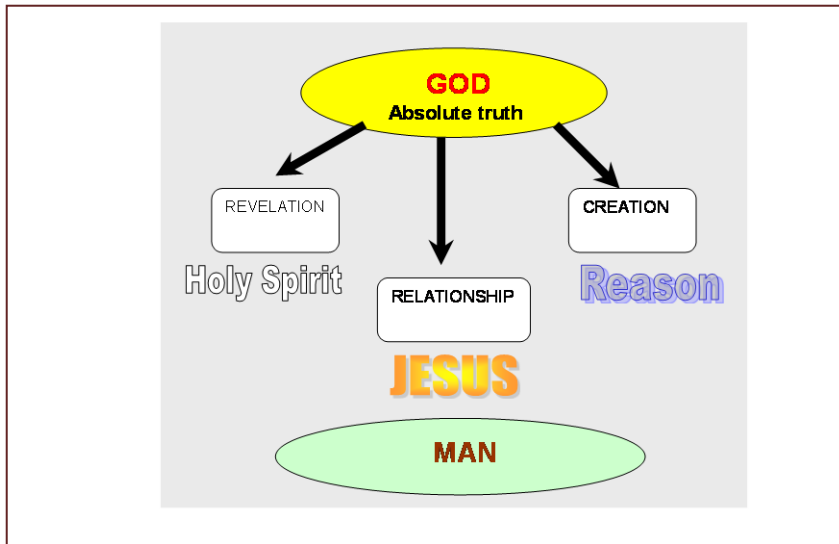
The three main ways God uses to impart truth to us is through Revelation, Relationship and Creation.

Throughout history God has spoken to His people. Through angels, prophets and leaders God's

revelation has been given to His people.

As mankind developed so the second agency became more used – that of a personal relationship. Men of God walked with God, and before the fall Adam had direct communication with God. The story of salvation in the Bible leads us to the new covenantal relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Thirdly God has chosen to reveal parts of his character through His creation, we can see truth about God through the way he has made all things.



The revelation we consider comes through the work of the Holy Spirit.

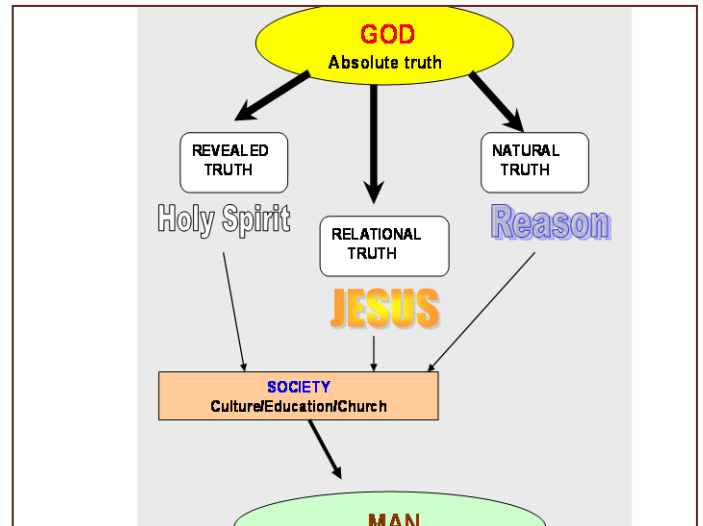
The relationship with God is now through Jesus.

Revelation and relationship may be quite close together – however God speaks to non-believers before they have a relationship with Jesus. God may also speak to Muslims – but I don't want to provoke a discussion here on that topic.

The interpretation of God through creation is through the agency of mankind's reason. Here we have science, experimentation, personal experience and man's ability to reason (which is a God given gift)

However, we all start life as infants, and so these three agencies come to us through the filter of the society in which we are born.

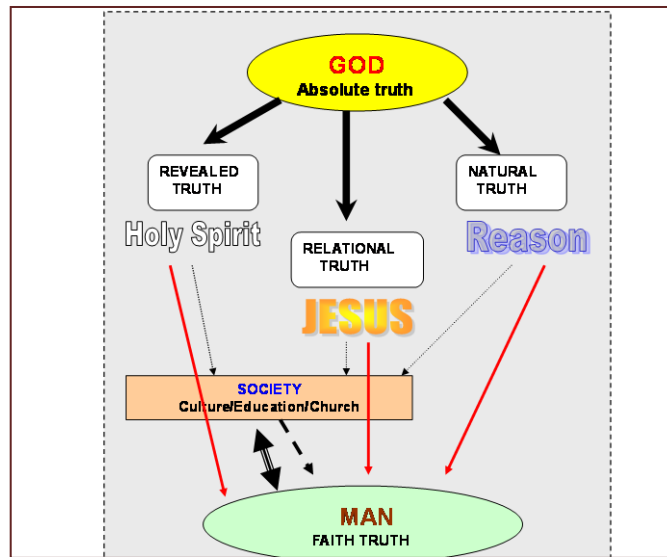
Culture, education and beliefs of our family all filter God's truth so that we receive a WORLD VIEW through which we interpret God's truth



Finally as we become mature so we are able – if we wish to – to go directly to God's agencies (Holy Spirit, Jesus and Reason) rather than receive our truth through other people.

Note that society and the Church still have an important part to play in the development of our individual faith truth. We do not approach God in isolation but in the context of relationships within

society. God's truth continues to be mediated through the Church and in fellowship with other Christians. We check out our revelation and understanding with others.



## TYPES OF TRUTH

**Six types of truth**

- Absolute truth
  - God alone – hidden from us
- Revealed truth
  - Through the Holy Spirit
- Relational truth
  - Through a relationship with Jesus
- Natural truth
  - Scientific “facts” of creation
- Cultural truth in society
- Personal Truth

24

Absolute truth is not revealed to us in this life

Revealed truth is according to our needs and ability to receive it.

As we walk with Jesus as His disciples so we discover truth through Him, mainly as we walk through life's experiences – a sort of truth through experience.

Natural truth is open to all to discover – but is open to blindness and bias in interpretation

PERSONAL FAITH TRUTH is how each person puts all of the above together and develops their own world view – their faith which is determined by their real beliefs which then determine their actions.

Could also add – CULTURAL TRUTH – or TRADITIONAL TRUTH – that which society – or the Church holds traditionally to be true as opposed to the Faith Truth which is individual.

## My Personal Truth

- What I believe to be true
- My world view
- What I put my faith in
- What motivates my actions

25

We might just call it my faith, but the word truth expands the dimensionality of our faith.

It is what we hold to be true – our real beliefs which motivate our actions.

I will come back to this shortly.

REVEALED truth is given according to OUR NEEDS

Truth becomes a personal revelation

HS uses the Bible, other people and direct revelation

Builds on and does not contradict traditional truth

## Does truth change with time?

- Yes of course, as long as we define what sort of truth.
- God's revealed truth will change according to our needs.
- God's relational truth will vary according to our maturity
- Natural truth grows as science develops
- Cultural truth grows and changes with time
- My "truth" is always changing

26

RELATIONAL TRUTH – varies according to OUR MATURITY

Where we are in our walk with Jesus

My understanding may be different from yours

We do not walk alone, so must be loving to our brother

Ephesians 4: 14-16

Telling the truth in love – often misunderstood

Truth often keeps his mouth shut and heart open

God may reveal different aspects to me and you.

## Patient's personal truth

- MY truth is influenced by –
  - Society's cultural beliefs
  - My education
  - My application of reason
  - Family and peers
  - Significant others
  - Personal experience of illness
  - Fears, anxiety and emotions
  - Revelation through the Holy Spirit
  - Relationship with Jesus
  - Illness itself will affect our understanding of the truth

27

The STANDARDS against which we judge our faith truth are –

1 God's word

2 Our experience

3 God's word to others in relationship

4 How effective it is – do we get a good outcome (but note we need to define our outcomes, which will be spiritual ones rather than physical ones)

Is acupuncture TRUE?

How do I judge it's truth?

## Is my truth true?

- If it's true then it's health giving in the long term
- I then put my faith in the right things
- I can exercise hope for the future
- I can be fulfilled
  
- What standards can we use to compare our understanding of truth?
  - God's word, other people, tradition, experience and effectiveness in promoting health.

28

## Telling the story

- Telling their story increases a person's understanding of their health.
- Importance of language – verbal, non-verbal and emotional.
- The more times the story is told the nearer it can come to the truth.
- The story is told within the context of a trusting relationship

29

## Patient discovers the truth

- Encourage the person to hear God themselves
- Knowledge leads to understanding which allows wisdom to be used.
- Truth sets free, empowers the person to make health care and life decisions which will be more effective

## Listening to the story

- Three ways to see into the person's life
- Windows into their lives
  - ▣ Physical
  - ▣ Psychological
  - ▣ Spiritual
- Take time to listen + feel
- Allow the person to reflect
- Combine the external hearing and the internal experiencing viewpoints.

31

## Producing a healthy truth

- 1 Person needs to discover the true story of their illness, loss or whatever
- 2 This is usually hidden from them
- 3 Role of language important – how to explain
- 4 Conversations on equal footing
- 5 Listening to the story
- 6 Different listeners hear different aspects of the story

32

## THREE TYPES OF STORIES

Stories can be divided into many types – here are three kinds–

- 1 “Novels” which take real life or imaginary situations and enable you to see the story from the different perspectives of the various characters. Most films use the same technique. This is usually denied us in real life as we can only see our side of the story. A good “novel” will enable us to see things from a different perspective.  
(Story of the Land of the Giants)
- 2 “Morality stories” or PARABLES which take a difficult truth and explain it in new ways.  
(Story of the water bugs).
- 3 “Personal” stories, told by ourselves.

### Three types of stories

- Novels, fiction, films
  - ▣ Enable you to see the story from the viewpoint of different characters in the story
- Parables – moral stories
  - ▣ Take a difficult truth and explains it in new ways
- Personal stories
  - ▣ Told by you and me - subjective

### HOW to **tell** your story

You first have to find someone to listen to your story

Try to tell the story as truthfully as you know – it will be from your own perspective, but you will also have interpretations about other people’s perspectives in the story.

Understand why you are telling the story – need for resolution, healing, moving on etc.

It must be told to someone you trust

The story will vary according to the person listening, and how they interact with you.

### HOW to **listen** to someone’s story

## Healing through story telling

- A spiritual healing process – needs two people
- Goal is to turn unhealthy stories into healthier ones
- Needs a relationship of trust
- The “patient” tells their story
- The “therapist” listens to the story
- Together they consider and seek understanding (include God in the process)

## The Healing Encounter

Each person has a “Health Story” which is incomplete.

- 1 First indication that ill-health is possible –
- 2 Attempts to make sense of this fact on your own
- 3 Attempts to gain understanding (and therefore have some degree of control) by using friends and family.
- 4 Attempts to gain control through personal study, reading, internet etc
- 5 Finally turn to the health profession (often as a last resort)
- 6 Now we (as health care professionals) become part of the person’s health story.

## Spiritual healing process – steps

- 1 Encounter between two people
- 2 The purpose is to make the patient’s health story a more healthy one.
- 3 Requires a trusting relationship
- 4 The patient “tells a story”
- 5 The therapist “listens” to the story
- 6 Together they consider and seek understanding
- 7 This is a spiritual encounter between two people, closes the circle and leads to better understanding, and so gives patient chance to take control of their own health story.

# Interactive listening

- The listener brings an objective viewpoint to the story
- The teller often changes the story according to the interaction of the listener.
- The listener is asking God for discernment – what is important, what is true?
- The listener becomes part of the story – uses good questioning techniques.

## TYPES of questions when listening to a story

- 1 Open – exploring – inviting
- 2 Closed, specific information gathering
- 3 The listening question – calls for expansion on something said – enlarges the story, indicates the listener is involved in the story.

### Questions for listeners to use in the early part of the story

- a. **OPEN** – exploring, inviting
- b. **CLOSED** – specific information
- c. **LISTENING** – calls for expansion, enlarges the story, draws them on

4 Circular questions – invite the patient to go back and think about their story, like the listening question, but taking the patient further in exploring what they think and experience

5 Strategic questions – calls for an analysis of the situation – asks the patient what they think is wrong, and what they think is the answer

6 Reflective question – gets them to look at their story in a new light, seeks new understandings, explores a common shared understanding of the situation

7 Grounding questions – allows a common agreement to emerge (Do you agree with me that this is not the answer to your problem?)

## Questions used in the later part of listening to the story

- a. **CIRCULAR** – go back and tell that bit again, helps exploration
- b. **STRATEGIC** – calls for an analysis – what do you think went wrong?
- c. **REFLECTIVE** – look at the story again
- d. **GROUNDING** – seek common agreement

## STAGES of the healing encounter

### 1 OPENING

Purpose to start building a trusting relationship – indicate to the patient that the therapist is prepared for a significant **spiritual encounter** - not a religious encounter, but spiritual which involves

- 1 sharing a common humanity,
- 2 a trusting relationship
- 3 love and concern,
- 4 a desire to help,
- 5 seeking for the growth and maturing of the other person
- 6 walking alongside – being involved,
- 7 commitment to the person.

## Stages in the healing encounter of story telling

1. Opening
2. Telling the story
3. Listening to the story
4. Arriving at a shared understanding
5. Deciding actions
6. Dealing with further questions – reassurance
7. Closure

## 2 TELLING THE STORY

Patient talks, encouraged by the therapist to tell the story as the patient has experienced it, the first telling – enables the patient to explore exactly what has happened – allows remembering, exploring how details fit in and what is irrelevant.

Issue of what is the true story – what are all the different levels and contributory factors in this story.

You don't know what your own story is until you have told it

The more times you tell it the more "truthful" it becomes.

*It's a different type of story to the one detectives are seeking. They lay great stress on the first telling of a story – before the person can think, embellish or alter the story because of the implications – later they can weave lies into the story to suit their own ends. The health story is quite different – here the truth is hidden within the person. As they tell the story so they get revelation about what their thinking process is. Bringing thoughts from the sub conscious part of the brain into consciousness.*

## 3 LISTENING TO THE STORY

The art of listening –

- Hearing the patient's words (including body language)
- Exploring what lies behind the words
- Sharing in the story
- Validating the story from the health point of view
- Helping the patient to summarise the story, exclude extraneous details, and get to the heart of the story

## 4 ARRIVING AT A SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Define health issues, agreement on story, understanding, implications

## 5 DECIDING ACTIONS

Inviting the patient to change their health story

Giving them the tools to make these changes

## 6 DEALING WITH FURTHER QUESTIONS

Reassuring patient about health issues, being honest, allowing them to verbalise other issues (such as fears)

## 7 CLOSURE

Purpose: To bring a good conclusion to this encounter and pave the ways for other healthy encounters in the future. Giving the patient reassurance about future events

## CLASS EXERCISE

On listening to the story

Divide into threes – one patient , one therapist, one evaluator

Choose a personal health or similar story

Tell it, listen to it, explore it.

Evaluator looks for the good things and what could be improved in the listener. Invites reflection on the process

## In the land of the giants

**Once upon a time** – you suddenly woke up in a land entirely populated by giants

Deafening noises, bright lights – terrified - you screamed – the nearest giant slapped you.

**Fear** gripped you, lack of comprehension – anxiety probably stay with you all your life.

After a while the giants didn't look quite so frightening and one or two of them seemed to take a special interest in you.

**One particular giant** seemed quiet attentive, got you food (which tasted horrible) and some clothes to wear (which itched), and when you cried this giant tried to help, although it usually misunderstood what the problem was.

Then one day this friendly giant shouted at you, hit you and then abandoned you in your room.

How could you ever be safe again in the land of the giants– the one giant you trusted abused you

**But you survived**, you learned slowly how to cope.

Then one day you met some other little people like you, great, you got one well, at last someone who thought and acted like you – you now felt much more at home.

Time passed and you slowly learned the laws of the giant's land.

You gained insight by observing the giants and copying them – you began to figure out how you could stay safe. Occasionally a giant abused you, either physically hitting you, or poking fun to make you cry, but you survived.

**You learned** the lessons of survival –

Do as you are told

Obey the giants in authority

Don't cry and show your weaknesses

Do as you are told

Keep a stiff upper lip

Study hard

Get a job

Get married and have children

**You have now grown up**, and then one day you wake up and there is a tiny little creature looking up at you. She has just woken up in the land of giants and is terrified.

And because you love her you start caring for her and teaching her everything you learned about surviving in the land of giants.

And so the story goes on

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## Water Bugs and Dragonflies

Down below the surface of a quiet pond lived a little colony of water bugs. They were a happy colony, living far away from the sun. For many months they were very busy, scurrying over the soft mud on the bottom of the pond.

They did not notice that every once in a while one of the members of their colony seemed to lose interest in going about with its friends. Clinging to the stem of a pond lily, it gradually moved out of sight and was seen no more.

'Look!' said one of the water bugs to another. 'One of our colony is climbing up the lily stalk. Where do you suppose she is going?'

Up, up it went slowly. Even as they watched, the water bug disappeared from sight. Its friends waited and waited but it didn't return.

'That's funny,' said one water bug to another.

'Wasn't she happy here:?' asked a second water bug.

"Where do you suppose she went?' wondered a third

No one had an answer. They were greatly puzzled.

Finally one of the water bugs, a leader in the colony, gathered his friends together. 'I have an idea. The next one of us who climbs up the lily stalk must promise to come back and tell us where he or she went and why.

We promise. they all said solemnly.

One spring day not long after, the very water bug who had suggested the plan found himself climbing up the lily stalk. Up, up, up he went. Before he knew what was happening, he had broken through the surface of the water, and fallen onto the broad, green lily pad above.

When he awoke, he looked about with surprise. He couldn't believe what he saw. A startling change had come to his old body. His movement revealed four silver wings and a long tail. Even as he struggled, he felt an impulse to move his wings. The warmth of the sun soon dried the moisture from the new body. He moved his wings again and suddenly found himself up above the water. He had become a dragonfly

Swooping and dipping in great curves, he few through the air. He felt exhilarated in the new atmosphere. By and by, he alighted on a lily pad for a rest. Then it was by chance that he glanced below to the bottom of the pond.

Why, he was right above his old friends, the water bugs!

There they were, scurrying about just as he had been doing a little while before. Then he remembered his promise to return and tell everyone what happened when someone climbed up the lily stalk.

Without thinking, the dragonfly darted down, suddenly hit the water and bounced away. Now that he was a dragonfly, he could no longer return into the water to talk to his friends and keep his promise.

Even if I could go back - he said - not one of the bugs would recognise me, or even understand what I was saying. I guess I'll just have to wait until they too become dragonflies. Then they'll understand where I went. And so he flew off into the sun.

Doris Stickney

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