

“The Use of Metaphor and Story-Telling to Work with Codependent Behaviors”

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I. The Use of Metaphor and Story-Telling (Landes, 2014)

- Advantages
 - Stories are traditional formats for change and insight
 - Stories can help to engage clients because they:
 - Co-create meaning
 - Connect with the client
 - Can reduce defensiveness
 - Stories contain layers of meaning
 - Stories can be told so as to meet the clients needs
 - Stories can be remembered
 - Stories can indirectly teach skills
- How to Use
 - Note the condition of your client. What are their symptoms, characteristics, features? What clinical goals are they working on with you?
 - Create a metaphor or use a story that is relevant to your client:
 - The character in the story should present the same **challenges** the client is facing, and in the story-telling, model the **outcomes** being conveyed.
 - Determine valid and obtainable client-desired outcomes.
 - Identify resources that will help the client reach their desired outcomes.

II. Working with Codependent Behaviors:

What are the client **challenges** and client-desired **outcomes**?

- Four Defining Feature of Codependency (Dear, Roberts, and Lange, 2005)
 - **External Focusing** refers to focusing one’s attention on the behaviors, opinions, and expectations of other people and then fitting one’s own behavior to those expectations or opinions to obtain approval and esteem.
 - **Self-Sacrificing** refers to neglecting one’s own needs to focus on meeting the needs of other people.

- **Internal Control** reflects an entrenched belief in one's capacity to fix other people's problems and control their behavior.
- **Emotional Suppression** refers to the deliberate suppression, or limited conscious awareness, of one's emotions until they become overwhelming.
- Desired Treatment Outcome/Goals
 - ↑ **Internal Focus** vs. external focus
 - ↑ **Self Care** vs. self-neglect and over-care of others
 - ↑ **Self Control** vs. efforts to control others
 - ↑ **Emotional Expression** vs. denial and suppression
- Working with Codependency in terms of **Codependent Behaviors**
 - Helping
 - Fixing
 - Caretaking
 - Serving
 - Hardworking
 - People-pleasing
 - Thinking for others
 - Speaking for others
 - Controlling
 - Conflict avoiding
- Working with Codependent Behaviors on a **Continuum** – Learning to listen to Self and moderate behaviors along the continuum

Giving/Fixing/Caretaking

OK	Going Too Far
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make offers <u>within your resources</u> (\$, time, energy) • Make offer/<u>accept</u> the other person's acceptance or rejection of your offer • Make suggestion(s) and <u>leave them alone</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make offers <u>outside</u> of your resources and carry them out (causing debt, exhaustion, losses) • <u>Force</u> your offer on the other person, insist • <u>Insist</u> upon your suggestions and/or actually carry them out for the other person

- Skills needed in order to listen to Self and moderate one's behaviors with the continuum in mind

Skills – all of these

Self-awareness

Self-education

Self-talk

Self- adjustments

Facilitated by – all of these

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Mindfulness Practices

Boundary Setting

Spirituality

III. A Metaphor, Story-telling, and Codependent Behaviors

- A Metaphor: Daisy, the Border Collie

Border Collie Characteristics (Burch, 1996)	Defining Features of Codependency (Dear, Roberts, and Lange, 2005)	Tales and Lessons (Johnston, 2012)
Highly intelligent	External focusing	Smart
Alert	Self-sacrificing	Devoted
Responsive	Interpersonal control	Hard-Working
Hard-working	Emotional suppression	Serving
Athletic		Pleasing
Loyal		Sensitive
Tenacious		Adaptable
Sensitive		Herding
Very active		Reactive
Affectionate		Tenacious
Eager to learn		Delighted
Eager to please		Big Hearted
Thrives on human companionship		

- Some Stories

Devoted

Healthy Relationship

(Balance of Internal and External Focus)

(Balance of Giving and Self- Care)

Loss of Self

(External Focus)

(Self-Sacrifice)

Devotion can be a good thing. Loyalty and commitment help us to grow as individuals and in relationships. By being involved these ways, we can learn more about our self and make changes that enrich and strengthen us. Devotion can help us to have a home-base, a set of beliefs and values from which we live. Daisy and I both benefit from being devoted creatures.

I can lose my self in my devotion. In being loyal and committed, it is important for me to consider my self as well. This does not mean that I must always have my way or attend to my needs without consideration of others. It does mean that as I deeply attend to someone else, or for that matter, some cause or activity, that I also connect with me. Is what I am about to choose good for me? Will I feel okay about me and my choices if I am acting out of my devotion? Am I starting to feel compelled to say or do things that may be driven by my devotion? Has my devotion blurred into an obsessive watching and checking to protect my self from abandonment by this object of my devotion?

Watch out for my watching. I need to be very mindful of my watching behaviors. I need to notice when I am slipping into them and not let my self go too far. This means I stop my self from trying to read others and from trying to guess what they want from me. I need to just listen well and respond in ways that are true for me.

It is important for me to be able to express my self to others. If I am losing my self in watching, then I am shifting into a defensive posture, a defensive posture whose goal becomes to not lose the other person. Ironically, in so doing, I am losing my self. I must retain my self by consciously remembering my presence, my thoughts, and my feelings which I want to be able to express.

I do not want to abandon my self. Again, ironically, the greatest abandonment with codependence is that of self-abandonment. When who I am and what I think and do is molded around someone else, then I am in trouble, because I really need them for my identity, sanity, and security. If I find, cultivate, and treasure my self, I can never be abandoned – as long as I am watchful of my self and am devoted to caring for me in this loving way.

(Johnston, 2012)

Serving

Healthy Serving

(Balance of Giving and Self-Care)

(Balance of Efforts to Fix Others and Self-Control)

(Healthy Emotional Expression)

Loss of Self

(Self-Sacrifice)

(Interpersonal Control)

(Emotional Suppression)

Serving is good, useful, and important. There is no doubt that being helpful and offering our self to others is valuable. It is really a natural thing to do. When we see someone with a difficult situation or expressing a problem, it makes sense that we want to help. Serving others helps them and can serve us as well, giving us positive feelings of connection and usefulness. We can all benefit by healthy service.

Notice my self as I serve. In serving, it is easy to lose track of our self. We can become so focused on what we are offering to others – what to offer, how to offer, when to do what – that we forget to check in with our self and what may be best for us as we give to others. I am sure this is one reason I put Daisy in the house while I went to look further for what was causing her to bark so intensely. I am sure I was afraid that if I let her walk with me toward the railroad tracks where we found Eddie that she would be paying no attention to her self and get harmed in some way while she was on this mission of service.

Speak up for my self. As I notice my self, there will probably be things which I need to express to others. . . . As I notice how I am feeling and what I am thinking as I am giving/fixing/caretaking, then I can say things like, “No, I can’t take on any more,” or “We won’t be able to do that unless I have more money,” or “If I put my time into creating that I’d like to know that my work will really be used.” I know this speaking up for our self can be challenge for us with fears of displeasing others and/or even losing our job. However, if we are thought-full, clear, and what I call neutral in our tone, then this speaking up can be done in a way that honors both our self and the person to whom we are speaking.

Bad feelings from serving serve no one. . . . If in our serving we start to feel tangled by our expectations from our work or we are just giving in excess of our personal resources, then the serving is now beginning to not be good for any of us. And if, as we progress on down this serving continuum into further disillusionments, frustrations, and exhaustion, I believe it is fair to say that neither my self nor the person(s) I am serving are really being served well. . . . It might be better for all of us, in such circumstances, to not even continue with that particular act of service or at least to take a break and see if the good spirit of giving and helping may be found again by restoring some balance in efforts and expectations.

How can I serve my self? If I am not mindful as I give and help and serve, this is the question that I forget to ask and answer. In the midst of our

important work of helping others, it is very important to remember our self. In fact, important is an understatement. It is imperative to remember our self. It is our very self that is doing this serving, and without the health of that self, no serving can be done. So how can I serve my self? I believe that in order to answer this question, we must check in with the thinking, feeling, physical, and spiritual aspects of our self. I believe we want to give equal consideration to each of these important parts of who we are and ultimately integrate them into a healthy self. If my thinking is dominating and driving me crazy, I want to quiet it. If I am not in touch with my feelings, I want to know them. If my body is crying for rest, I want to sleep. If I have disconnected from my higher power, I want to re-establish conscious contact. By attending to each of these areas, I am learning that the loads I am carrying, usually by my own distorted choices, can be better managed, and I can be better managed by me. Then healthy serving is more likely. And it is even more likely if I ask my self:

How can my spirituality serve me? As I noted above, I want to connect with my spiritual self as I work to find this balance in my serving. I have found spirituality to be an extremely important area of self as it is a remarkable source of the energy I was speaking of in earlier lessons on serving. My spirituality feeds me and strengthens me. It helps me to practice the serenity prayer, to notice what I can and can not control. It helps me to control what I can control and helps me with the letting go of what I can not control. My spirituality is a comfort, a companion, a deep well of wisdom, a blanket wrapped around me holding me close and keeping me safe – safe from others and especially safe from me. I call Daisy to “Come” many times over the day. Similarly, I want to “Come” to my spirituality many times over the day and allow that connection to help me as I help others. (Johnston, 2012)

IV. In Closing

One More Summarizing Tale and Lessons

We want to embrace our natural tendencies and manage them so our strengths do not become our weaknesses. In this case of writing in the plural, I have Daisy and me in mind, though I am certainly speaking to all of us who are engaged in this process of growth and change. Daisy and I both thrive on having a job to do and purpose in life, and we come equipped with many wonderful qualities that enable us to fulfill these personal goals and desires. We do our jobs well, and we are pleased by our accomplishments. We are blessed with energy, focus, and loyalty. But as we have learned through this book, these fantastic assets can go too far and cause trouble whether the being is a canine or a human. We can run our self to death, lose track of other important responsibilities and/or people, and certainly stop noticing and attending to our very self. So knowing these possibilities for my strengths to weaken me:

I pay attention to where I am on the continuum of a specific behavior and adjust my self on that continuum as I would adjust a thermostat. This is an important part of my training. Daisy has her own training – which she continues to need – and I

certainly have my own. Using the continuum as a tool to help me notice and gauge my self is very useful. Codependency is not a black-or-white issue. We are not simply codependent or not. There are important gradations to the behaviors which can ultimately have us acting in codependent ways. Further, codependency itself is fostered by black-and-white/all-or-nothing thinking which has us unable to live in the gray. All of which is to say that I choose to use the continuum to help me notice the point at which my serving is becoming too much, my devotion has me accepting the unacceptable, my tenacity has me wearing out, or my big-heartedness has me with diminishing funds. If I am in a room that is too hot, I naturally go and turn down the heat. If I am losing my healthy connection with my self as I am in relationships with others, I want to go turn down the heat of my codependent behaviors.

Kindness-of-Heart + Presence-of-Mind can go a long way toward/= Excellence-in-Health. This excellence-in-health is what my work is all about. It is about both physical health and mental health. It is about attending to self as we attend to others. It is about giving to self as we give to others. It is about loving my self as I love others. The balancing of all of this is what can bring me long-lasting love, serenity, and health. Moment-by-moment, I want to remember this and live this.

(Johnston, 2012)

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