



(R)evolution Psychotherapy

Narrative Therapy: A Simple Guide

Narrative Therapy: Rewriting the Story of Your Life

Narrative Therapy is built on a simple but powerful idea: you are not the problem—the problem is the problem (White & Epston, 1990). Many of us carry stories about ourselves that feel heavy, limiting, or shaped by hardship. These stories can make it seem like our identity is defined by struggle. Narrative Therapy invites you to step back and look at your life as a series of stories, with multiple chapters and perspectives.

One of the central practices is externalizing problems. Instead of saying “I am anxious,” we might say “Anxiety has been showing up in my life.” This shift separates you from the issue, allowing you to see it as something outside of yourself that you can interact with, challenge, and change (Jagatdeeb et al., 2024). Externalizing reduces blame and shame, opening space for curiosity: When does the problem show up? What helps me resist it? Who supports me in standing against it?

Another key process is re-authoring stories. Often, the dominant story we tell ourselves is problem-saturated—it highlights difficulties while overlooking strengths, values, and moments of resilience. Narrative Therapy helps uncover “unique outcomes,” times when you acted differently than the problem predicted (Carey & Russell, 2020). By gathering these moments, clients begin to craft alternative stories that reflect their preferred identities—stories of courage, care, creativity, or persistence. Re-authoring is not about denying pain; it’s about recognizing that pain is only one chapter, not the whole book.

Through these practices, clients reclaim agency. Agency means recognizing that you have choices, skills, and values that shape how you respond to life’s challenges. Narrative Therapy emphasizes that people are the experts in their own lives. The therapist’s role is not to impose solutions but to walk alongside you, asking questions that help you notice your own wisdom and resources (Hutto & Gallagher, 2024). This collaborative stance fosters empowerment: clients begin to see themselves as active authors of their lives rather than passive characters trapped in someone else’s script.

Importantly, Narrative Therapy is deeply respectful and person-centered. It honors cultural context, family traditions, and community voices. Many practices, such as definitional ceremonies, invite supportive witnesses to affirm the new stories clients are creating (White & Epston, 1990). This collective dimension reminds us that healing is not only personal but

relational—we grow stronger when our preferred stories are recognized and celebrated by others.

References

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