

The Way I Want It To Be

Source: More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth, Liana Lowenstein, 2002

Theme: Engagement and Assessment

Recommended Age Range: Nine and Up

Treatment Modality: Individual, Family

Stage of Treatment: Beginning, Middle

Goals

- Verbalize positive and negative feelings about current life circumstances
- Increase awareness of presenting problems
- Verbally identify treatment goals

Materials

- Two large sheets of paper
- Markers

Advance Preparation

Write at the top of one of the pieces of paper: The Way My Life Is. Write at the top of the second piece of paper: The Way I Want It To Be.

Description

Instruct the client as follows: “Draw a picture of the way your life is. Include the upsetting things about your life as well as the positive things about your life.” Once the client has finished drawing this picture, instruct the client to draw a second picture: “This time, draw a picture of the way you want your life to be. This picture should be realistic, and only include things that are possible.”

The client then discusses the two pictures. The therapist can ask the following process questions:

1. How did you feel during the drawing activity?
2. How are you going to get from the way it is to the way you want it to be?
3. What actions do you need to take and what choices do you need to make to get to the way you want it to be?
4. What help do you need from others to get to the way you want it to be?
5. How might therapy help you get to where you want to be?
6. How will you feel when you get to where you want to be?

A variation for family therapy is to have the family draw two pictures. The first is titled: The Way It Is In Our Family. The second is titled: The Way We Want It To Be. The therapist processes the activity as above, but the questions are reworded to suit family therapy. Suggested questions include the following:

1. How did each person in the family feel during the drawing activity?
2. How is your family going to get from the way it is to the way you want it to be?
3. What does each member of the family need to do differently to help your family get to the way you want it to be?"
4. How might therapy help your family get to where you want to be?
5. How will it feel to get to where you want it to be?

Discussion

A client's artwork can be used in counseling sessions as tools for assessment and creative expression. Through the expressive arts medium, a client's thoughts, feelings, and experiences are translated into concrete images. This drawing exercise enables a client to examine presenting issues and define treatment goals for future intervention.

Incorporating art activities into family sessions provides a medium to engage all family members. While the content of the family drawings provides valuable diagnostic information, the therapist should also focus on the family dynamics that emerge during the exercise, for example:

- What role does each person play in the family?
- Did the interaction take on structure, or was it chaotic?
- Did any dysfunctional patterns emerge, for example, parentification, triangulation, disengagement, scapegoating, overfunctioning?

About The Author

Liana Lowenstein, MSW, CPT-S, is a therapist, lecturer, and author who has been working with children since 1988. She is internationally recognized for her innovative work including numerous books on child and family therapy. She is winner of the Monica Herbert award for outstanding contribution to play therapy in Canada.

Source: *More Creative Interventions for Troubled Children and Youth*, Liana Lowenstein

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