**Storytelling in Therapeutic Settings**

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*"Remember only this one thing," said Badger. "The stories people tell have a way of taking care of them. If stories come to you, care for them. And learn to give them away where they are needed. Sometimes a person needs a story more than food to stay alive. That is why we put these stories in each other's memory. This is how people care for themselves."*

**Barry Lopez, *Crow and Weasel***

Stories from the world’s folk and fairy tale tradition mirror issues prevalent to the human condition in general and to death, grief and loss in particular. When listening to traditional stories we can often recognize our own experience and affirm belonging to the human community.

Storytelling can be a potent vehicle for change, especially within the structured setting of a therapeutic environment. When listeners enter into the worlds of carefully chosen stories, they more readily recognize and articulate emotions while stimulating coping techniques that lead to resilience, resourcefulness, and personal empowerment.

Exploring the intersection between the traditional tale and our own personal story, we hold and model that knowledge in two ways, knowing that there are common experiences of the human journey, and that each person's unique experience deserves honor and respect.

Mixing traditional and personal stories can offer new perspectives for your clients. It can suggest metaphors and images that present possibilities to re-imagine and reframe their own experience. Themes in each story are echoed and highlighted and heard with fresh ears, emphasizing that a personal story is not just about you, while at the same time they deepen and expands the meaning of what is personal and unique.

*“We tell stories to remind ourselves of who we are and to tell other people who we are. One of the basic functions of storytelling is identity maintenance. When a person or a community is more interested in fortune seeking than in identity maintenance – stories are left behind and storytelling dies.”*

**Donald Davis, *Telling Your Own Stories***

# Why Use Storytelling in Therapeutic Settings? Here are some of the benefits:

* **Storytelling** causes us to slow down and suspend analytic thought. Below conceptual linear knowing there is the personal experience that allows a deeper visceral understanding. Some call it the knowing of the heart.
* **Storytelling** creates trust. When a story is told a deeply human bond is established, facilitating the formation of a "therapeutic alliance”. This is simultaneously physical (gesture, eye contact), emotional (feelings of teller & listener), and spiritual (evoking hope, meaning, transcendence.)
* **Storytelling** aids the search for identity. Stories offer listeners opportunities to try out vicariously varying roles and values without suffering direct consequences.
* **Storytelling** encourages emotional release and promotes a greater sense of differentiation of complex feeling states. When combined with follow-up discussions and expressive activities, stories can lead to the refinement of raw emotion and the acceptance of greater degrees of paradox and complexity.
* **Storytelling** helps externalize conflicts. Through distancing and disguise, personal issues can be activated and worked through in story form.
* **Storytelling** supports ego coherence and an increased sense of autonomy. Story metaphors embody symbolic truths, which can in turn be internalized. Wise, helpful and comforting story characters can further reinforce latent strengths in listeners.
* **Storytelling** fosters resilience and optimism. The active stance of the hero/heroine overcoming obstacles inspires a positive "can-do" attitude, evoking hope and faith in a better future.
* **Storytelling** Inspires delight and joy. This is true both for healthy individuals as well as those who may be troubled or depressed.

**Storytelling** promotes socialization. By definition storytelling is a collaborative experience, one that draws in isolated individuals and fosters a sense of group experience.

**Death in a Nut from**

**A Thorn in the King’s Foot: Folktales of the Scottish Travelling People. Williamson, Duncan. Penguin Folklore Library. 1989**

[**https://jimferguson3106.wordpress.com/2013/05/05/death-in-a-nut-a-story-retold-by-duncan-williamson/**](https://jimferguson3106.wordpress.com/2013/05/05/death-in-a-nut-a-story-retold-by-duncan-williamson/)

**STORYTELLING IS ABOUT CONNECTION, NOT PERFECTION!**

“What actually takes place when a story is told? In the broadest sense, there is a transfer of imagery. Before the story is told, you - the storyteller - have mental images of the story. You see, hear, or feel the events of the story you are about to tell. After the story is told, the listeners have created their own mental images of the story. They see, hear, or feel the events of the story, too – but not necessarily in exactly the same way you did. What happens to make your images cause their images? In storytelling, the bridge between your images and theirs is oral language: namely, the spoken word and its partners gesture, posture, facial expression, tone of voice, rhythm, etc.” **Doug Lipman, *Improving Your Storytelling***

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**Online Resources:**

National Storytelling Network: storytelling websites and resources. [**www.storynet.org**](http://www.storynet.org)

National Alliance for Grieving Children: www.childrengrieve.org

HSA: Healing Story Alliance: A special interest group of the National Storytelling Network dedicated to exploring and promoting the use of storytelling in healing. **www.healingstory.org**

Story Drawing- [**https://youtu.be/rVwtaLdO7Q4**](https://youtu.be/rVwtaLdO7Q4)

Listening Training- http://www.sidewalktalksf.com/store/p8/Become\_A\_Better\_Listener%3A\_Online\_Training\_for\_the\_Public.html

*Naser A-Din Hodja was asked:*

*“How can I obtain wisdom?” He said: “Always listen attentively to what those who know tell you, and if someone is listening to you, listen carefully to what you are saying”.*