

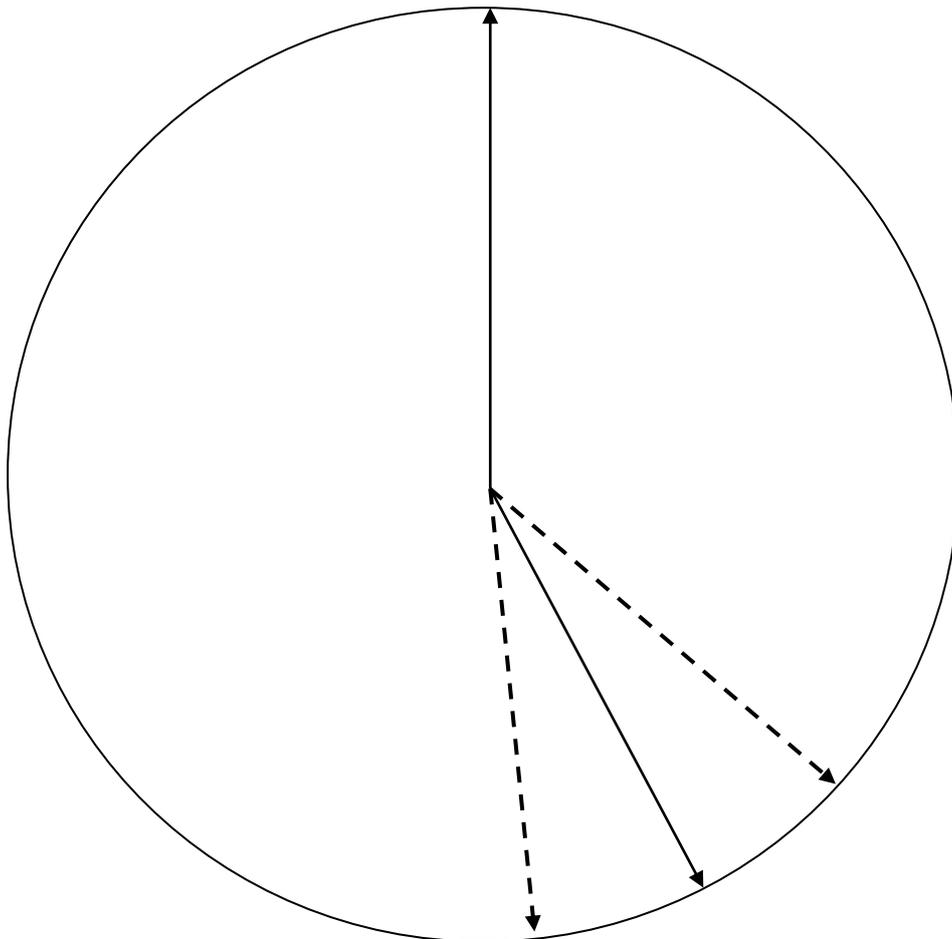


## Some fundamental principles, assumptions & beliefs of solution focused working

- The helper-helpee relationship is paramount
- Generally, people are good at constructing solutions to most of the problems of daily living
- “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it”
- “If it works, do more of it”
- When people get stuck, it is usually because they are continuing to do what does not work. “So, do something different.....”
- Change is happening all the time
- There is no one “right way” of looking at things
- One small change in a person’s life can be amplified and can lead on to other changes being made
- No “problem” happens all the time. It is usually very helpful to find out exceptions to it or when it is less of a problem
- It is important to stay solution focused and not solution forced



## The 5 o'clock rule for first session



### Notes:

1. Solution-talk consists of things like: problem-free talk, strengths-based questions, exceptions, pre-session change, the miracle question, scaling, identification of small steps etc.
2. 'Problem-talk' consists of what the nature of the problem is: its effects on the client's life, sign & symptoms, negativity, general difficulties, failed solutions, setbacks etc.
3. The 2 sections in the diagram above are simply overall proportions of 60-minute hour. It does not mean that the first 25 minutes consists only of 'problem-talk', i.e., the session may begin with problem-free talk. Also, as the client is outlining their problem story, the worker will be interrupting with strengths-based questions and asking exceptions.
4. For 25 minutes of problem-talk is only a guide. It may be possible for it to be lessened (as in the diagram). It may be more but. Ideally, still less than 30 minutes; otherwise the client will be trained the wrong way.



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## What service users have found to be helpful in this work

Service users found it helpful when workers:

- Enabled identification of conflicts they were experiencing/feeling
- Encouraged working through these issues, if that is what they wanted
- Promoted self esteem and self confidence
- Encouraged them to take control of their lives
- Allowed them to choose the goals of therapy, in accordance with their wishes and values
- Maximized collaboration; minimized resistance in the work
- Encouraged them to give up secrecy and shame where possible
- Gave information: both verbal and written
- Provided a good quality therapeutic relationship for disclosing: this mobilized the person's capacity for self healing and growth
- Built a trusting relationship
- Provided acceptance and supported and encouraged them to confront conflicts where appropriate
- Helped them to share thoughts and feelings
- Showed understanding
- Gave time
- Enabled correct apportionment of blame
- Acknowledged, validated and normalized wherever possible
- Helped them to express emotions appropriately
- Simply allowed them to disclose what happened in their way
- Asked what they were seeking in treatment and how they will know when treatment has been successful
- Did not assume that they needed to go back and work through traumatic & stressful memories of the incident (some do, some don't)
- On rare occasions, made provisions (e.g. contracts) for safety from suicide, homicide and other potentially dangerous situations, if necessary. It was best when these were mutual.
- Remained focused on the goals of treatment; rather than getting lost in the gory details
- Did not give the message that the person is 'damaged goods' or that their future is determined by having experienced the traumatic or stressful incident
- Admitted sometimes to getting it wrong
- Enabled them to feel safe

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## Helpful questions and statements from the worker

- 1) "How would you like to use these sessions?"
- 2) "How much of the detail do you need to tell me before you are ready to move on?"
- 3) "Would it matter, if you healed yourself without remembering all that happened?"
- 4) "What strengths, qualities or special abilities did you call into play to survive that time/those incidents?"
- 5) "What have you done, up to now, not only to heal yourself, but to be living your life well?"
- 6) "What do you feel you need to tell me, in order for me to be most helpful to you?"
- 7) "What particular techniques do you use to counteract any intrusive thoughts you might be having?"
- 8) "On a scale of 1-10, where are you now, in terms of living life to the full?"
- 9) "What have you put into place so far?"
- 10) "What we know from this type of work, is that rarely, is the victim to blame at all."
- 11) "It is quite common for people to feel guilty, but the guilt belongs with others"
- 12) "What has been particularly helpful to you so far in expressing anger or other strong feelings?"
- 13) "What particular strengths, qualities, resources do you have that you have found to be helpful to you?"
- 14) "What would be the first (smallest) sign that things are getting better; that this is having less of an impact on your life?"
- 15) "What will you be doing differently when this (incident/trauma) is less of a problem in your life?"
- 16) "What will you be doing differently with your time?"
- 17) "What useful things will you be in the habit of saying to yourself?"
- 18) "What will you be thinking about (doing) instead of the thinking about the past?"
- 19) "Tell me about some times when the above is already happening to some (even small) extent."
- 20) "What difference will the above healing changes make when they have been present in your life over an extended period of time?" (Weeks; days; months; years)
- 21) "What do you think that your (significant other) would say would be the first sign that things are getting better?" "What do you think he/she will notice first?"
- 22) "What do you think your (friends; boss, etc.) will begin to notice about you as you heal/move forward even more?"
- 23)
- 24)

(Add more of your own)

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## A couple of quick techniques

### 1. “That was then, this is NOW!”

This technique is very powerful for arresting a trigger in its tracks. It ensures the locus of control remains with the service user and not with the trigger, which could easily lead into a flashback.

The secret is to practice saying, “That was then, this is NOW!” on a regular basis, so that it is ready to use, in an instant. Service users should be encouraged to slow down their pace of speech, lower their voice-tone somewhat, and say the sentence forcefully, with the emphasis on the “NOWWWW...!”

With this technique held in readiness – triggers, which are highly unpredictable – need not be feared; instead, they may be welcomed.

One service user who had had several traumatic experiences over a number of years, reported that, on average, he encounters one trigger roughly every 2 weeks; but that this is not a problem, as by using this technique for just a few seconds on each and every occasion, he continues to live life to the full, regardless.

### 2. “Park it...and move on...”

A powerful instruction to the mind, for dealing with intrusive thoughts, this technique is a simple statement which acknowledges that the incident occurred, without attempting to bury it in any way.

As a car parking metaphor, it is helpful because the service user can conjure up a picture of parking an old car anywhere they choose (a lay-by, car park, road-side, etc.), and then walking away from it – and onward, along their life-journey.

They may choose to return to the car, from time to time, either to take a fresh look at it; maybe sit inside for a while; or, drive it around a little. In either case, they can park it again, lock it up, move on, returning to their walk along their life-journey.

This metaphor is powerful in another way, as what becomes of cars when they are left parked-up and neglected for a long period of time? They become dusty, covered in cobwebs, the tyres deflate, and brakes & clutch plates become seized. Eventually they become a rusty heap, fit for nothing and certainly, after many years, not something the person would want to revisit anyway. By this time, a great distance has been covered between the ‘parked’ car and their journey along the path of life. What happens is that, although the car is an important part of the service user’s life, its potential to affect them in the present weakens further and further. It begins to become but a distant memory.

It is helpful for service users to be encouraged to practice saying the command: “Park it...and move on”, a few times in the session, before setting it as a between-session task. Saying it between 10-12 times/week, when intrusive thoughts occur, for a number of weeks, seems to be about right for bedding in this technique effectively.



## Dual awareness exercise for dealing with flashbacks

*(Adapted from a protocol drawn up by Babette Rothschild)*

It seems we have got two things going on here.

**Right now**, I am feeling (isolated/lonely/fearful/etc.) and I am sensing in my body...  
(3 or so things: i.e. heart racing, perspiring, tremulousness, etc...)

They are real sensations - that's what I am experiencing now - because I am remembering the abuse/neglect/trauma/RTA/hold-up/explosion/combat/accident/etc.

**However, at the same time**, I am looking around where I am now here (the place/room where I am now) and:

- I can see 5 things...
- I can hear 5 things...
- I can sense (feel, smell, taste) the following 5 things...

**And so I know**, the incident/trauma/RTA/hold-up/explosion/accident/etc. is not happening now or any more.



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## The authentic self, the 3 stages: Victim – Survivor – Thriver

### 1. *Victim: first stage of healing*

- First it is important for you (the service user) to face the reality of the bad or unfortunate thing that happened
- You can then acknowledge the negative feelings and emotions that might be around (grief, anger, sadness, disappointment, frustration, despair, hopelessness, helplessness, etc.)
- Allow yourself to experience these feelings & emotions: and express them safely  
This is a vital part of healing and a valuable part of this stage
- It is also important to recognise that what happened **was not your fault**, so you can let go of self blame and shame. (In the small number of cases where it was your fault, it is important for you to attribute only the correct proportion of blame to yourself. Then, it is important for you to consider in what ways constructively, you may make amends for what occurred)
- Find the courage to tell someone else what happened to you; this breaks down the isolation
- As soon as the victim stage has been acknowledged and understood, you can move into the next stage: Survivor

### 2. *Survivor*

- This begins when you understand you have lived beyond the traumatic or highly stressful experience/s that occurred
- This stage reinforces the fact that it happened in the past
- Then questions may be asked: “How did I survive it?”; “How did I do it?”; and, “What strengths and resources did I use?”
- Acknowledgment of survivor hood involves:
  - Developing an inventory of positive personality characteristics
  - Identifying and appreciating the internal strengths (knowledge, courage, spirituality and other positive aspects of self which have got you this far)
  - Identifying external resources: mates, counsellor/therapist, minister, supportive family members, community support, etc. – at the time of the incident/s and afterwards
- At this stage, you will regain ability to function in everyday life: work, family time, household chores, time with mates, hobbies, community activities, etc.
- **Once you have acknowledged you’ve survived – skills, strengths, qualities & resources – that have got you to survival and eventual wellbeing: move on to thriving - move on to live life to the full/live as purposeful and meaningful life as possible**

### 3. *Thrivers – Living Life to the Full*

- This allows you more freedom than the earlier stages
- It allows you to experience a more compelling present and to contemplate a realistic and achievable future that is more vivid and fulfilling than your past
- It is now possible to enjoy life to the fullest, within any physical limitations you may have
- It is worthwhile to explore possibilities and dreams for the future you may be having right now
- It is now possible for you to express yourself in the most personally rewarding and creative ways available to you
- In this stage, your current experiences and relationships – may evoke increasingly a sense of immediacy, wonder and enhanced potential for future growth

(Handout developed from ideas outlined by Yvonne Dolan in her book, *Beyond Survival: Living Well is the Best Revenge*. BT Press 2000)



## **Write, Read and Burn (or Write, Read and Shred)**

Based on a technique from the Milwaukee Brief Therapy Centre, the purpose of this exercise is to resolve negative memories that are intruding upon and constricting your life in the present, in the form of flashbacks or any other kind of intrusive negative thought or image.

1. First, write down the details of the memory, thought, or image that troubles you.
2. Now, write down any feelings you have about the memory, thought or image. If another person is involved in the memory, address these feelings to the person, where appropriate. Include anything you would wish to say or wish you could say to that person.
3. Now re-read what you have written, reading it aloud. \*
4. Once you have done so, burn the pages.

\*While not essential, sometimes it is helpful psychologically, to have another person present to hear what you read and witness the burning of the pages.

(With full acknowledgement to Yvonne Dolan & Charlie Johnson for the original version)



## The Rainy-Day letter

Yvonne Dolan, M.A., Charlie Johnson, M.S.W.  
Copyright 1995

(Excerpted and subsequently amended from: Dolan, Y. (1998) *Beyond survival: Living well is the best revenge*. Used with permission)

While some of life's difficult passages are impossible to anticipate, thankfully, they are not impossible to prepare for; that is the purpose of the 'rainy day letter'. It can function as a bridge over life's chasms, not in the sense of providing numbing or 'faking' the experience, but rather as a way to help transform difficult moments into experiences of mastery and hope. It is ironic that the very times when one most needs to remember strengths and resources are often those occasions when it is easiest to forget about them. The Rainy-Day Letter, or if you prefer, 'Rainy-Day Postcards', are a way to remind yourself of strengths and resources at those very times, when they are most needed.

### How to make your own 'Rainy-Day letter':

This is a letter from you to you. It should be written not in a moment of despair, but in a moment of relative calm and well-being. It is an emotional insurance policy against the inevitability of those darker moments that come at various times in life, a sort of "emergency road side repair kit" for the spirit. The letter should contain, but is not limited to the following:

- A list of nurturing activities to do
- A list of nurturing people to call
- Reminders of your positive character traits
- Reminders of spiritual or philosophical beliefs that strengthen you
- Reminders of some of your dreams and hopes for the future
- Special advice or other reminders important to you
- A reminder of the tools & techniques that you have found helpful so far

Once completed, put the Rainy-Day Letter in a place where you can easily find it whenever needed. Some people like to make several copies so that they can carry one in a briefcase or purse, leave one in a special drawer or car glove compartment, etc.



## How to avoid re-traumatisation and re-victimisation

1. Show compassion and deep empathy
2. As the service user discloses:  
acknowledge, validate and normalise all feelings & sensations expressed
3. Ask strength-based questions, interrupting as appropriate whilst the client is disclosing, as follows:
  - How did you cope at the time?
  - What got you through all this?
  - What most helped?
  - How did you do that?
  - How did you know how to do that?
  - Looking back on what happened, in what ways has it made you a more determined and/or stronger person?
  - Awful though it was, which aspects of surviving it have made you a better person?
4. It is important to compliment sincerely, where appropriate, both as the service user is disclosing; and most importantly at the end of the session.
5. Treat the content with care, respect and in a supportive manner
6. Value and affirm throughout, both verbally and non-verbally
7. Keep your own and your service user's eyes on the treatment goals
8. Keep to the '5 o'clock rule' (see separate handout)



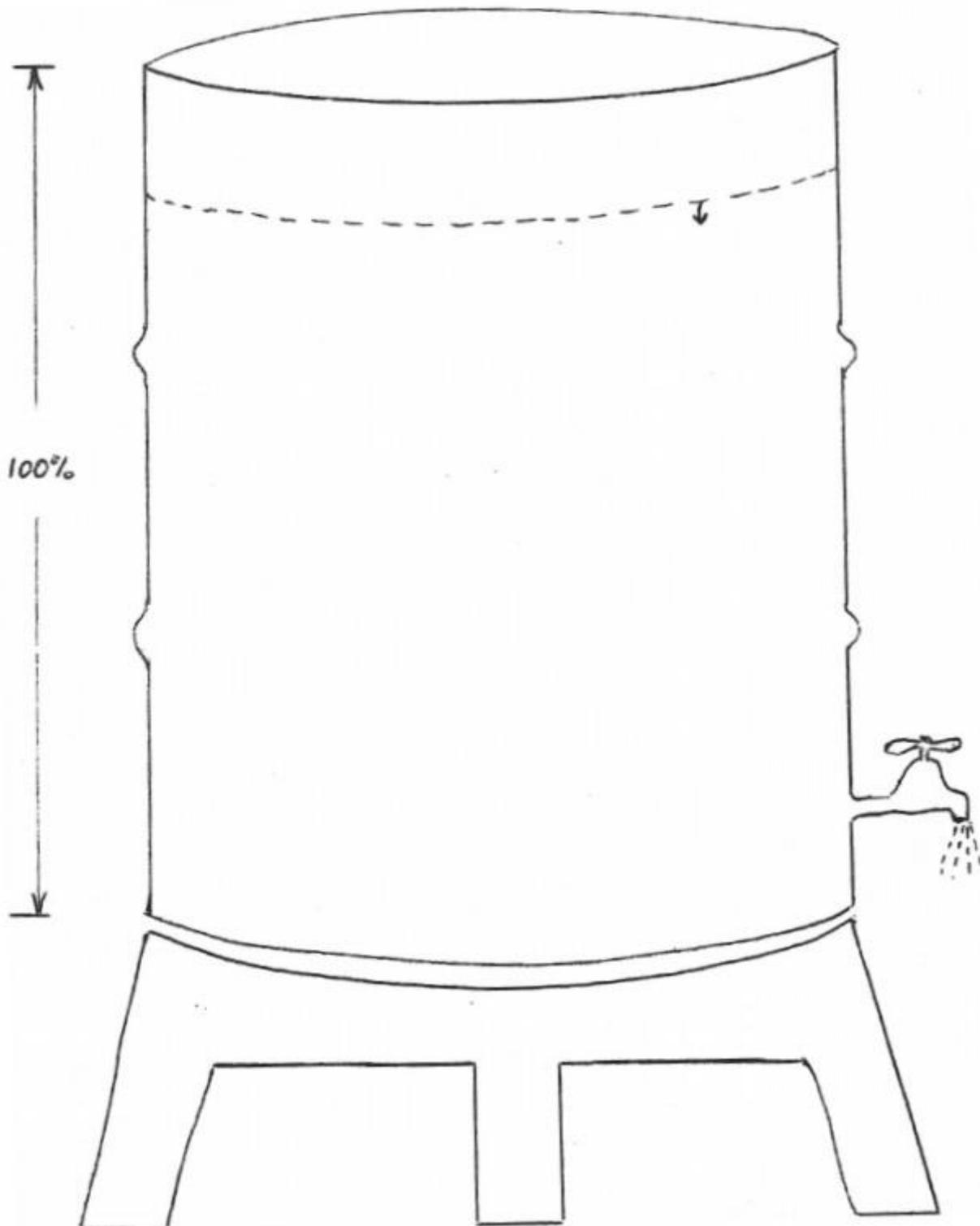
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## The solution focused 'Feelings Tank'





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## Blocs to disclosing

- Gender of worker                      guilt                      shame
- Not being believed                      poor basic personal skills
- Fear of consequences                      fear of rejection
- Loss of control                      rank/perceived status of worker
- Special needs disability                      inarticulation                      denial
- Feeling unsafe                      non-recognition
- Feeling dirty, damaged goods and not wanting to infect/affect worker
- Not wanting to be seen in poor light by worker                      embarrassment
- Religious beliefs                      reaction of worker unsure
- Previous poor experiences when disclosing
- Fear of being judged                      cultural
- Fear of being seen as weak/different/abnormal
- Not trusting the environment (answerphone for messages, paper thin walls, too many windows, etc.)
- Believing the worker's knowledge of the subject is insufficient
- Feeling the worker has undeclared secrets of their own, in the same territory



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## The letter from the future

Yvonne Dolan, M.A.  
Copyright 1995.

***This letter is to be written and not mailed.***

Pick a time in the future: 5, 10, 15, 20 years from now, or any length longer or shorter, that is meaningful to you.

Date the top of the letter with the imaginary future date.

Imagine that the intervening years have passed and you are writing to a friend (pick someone you know and like). Use the friend's name in the salutation, as in, Dear (friend's name). Or, if you prefer, pick some other supportive person to whom you can comfortably imagine writing.

The purpose of dating the letter and writing it to someone you actually know is to strengthen the psychological realism of the letter for you on both an unconscious and conscious level. Imagine that in this future, you have resolved whatever problems that are troubling you at the present time. Describe what helped you resolve those problems. At the time of the letter writing, you are living a wonderful, joyous, healthy and satisfying life. Describe how you are spending your time, where you are living, your relationships, beliefs and reflections on the past and future.



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## How to use the letter from the future

Now that you have completed the letter, what did you learn?

What did you include in the letter that is not yet happening in your life?

What would be the smallest\* behavioural step you could take towards making one of those things begin to happen? Do you want to try that step?

What difference would that small step make if it continued over time?

Are other small steps needed?

What would be the next smallest one?

What will the result(s) be for each of the steps you can identify?

Do you want to start? If not, is it the wrong goal? If you want to start, but feel stuck, are there any advantages to not starting? If so, is there some way that some of the advantages of not starting (such as extra time, etc.) could be preserved to some degree without you staying stuck? What will be the consequences (how will you feel in 5, 10, 15, 20 years, if you do not start?) The purpose of this question is to identify your motivation. If you still want to start, don't be discouraged by the smallness of steps. If you need inspiration for the power of small steps, go and interview a successful quilter, or writer, or tile layer, or anyone who has work that progresses gradually. In fact, what work doesn't progress gradually? You are your own greatest project!

\*Sometimes people ask, "Why imagine the smallest sign, why not big, glorious signs?" My aim here is to make whatever changes you desire become unthreatening, to scale them down to a level that is comfortably achievable for you, so that your goal is reachable. I do not believe that people fail to make changes because they are lazy. What passes for laziness is usually fear, demoralisation or despair. The smallness of these signs is intended to overcome fear and demoralisation, and to allow you to complete your own version of the proverbial Chinese Journey of a Thousand Miles, one small achievable step at a time. If the steps you identify seem too small, simply make them larger, taking care to make them no larger than is "do-able" in the next day or two. Then proceed. Remember, if the process stalls, or if you become overwhelmed or stuck, check to see if the goal is truly what you want, and if so, ask yourself if the step needs to be made smaller. Keep making it smaller until it is one you can do. Don't give up; you deserve the life you want.

(Revised version used with permission from Yvonne Dolan; and to whom full acknowledgement is given.)



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## How to beat the “*If only*” monster on the shoulder

“If only...” can be a handicapping recurrent thought for service users, in that it has the powerful result of keeping them stuck in the present.

The technique for dealing with it is an adaptation of that used by Frederike Jacob in her excellent book, *Solution Focused Recovery from Eating Distress*, where she introduced the notion of “The Eating Disorder Monster.” In both cases, what service users are encouraged to do is to externalise the problem and sit it on the shoulder, such that it can be defined as an entity in its own right, rather than being an integral part of the person.

Once sat on the shoulder, not only can the service user get a good look at it, in its entirety, but can also get into direct and assertive conversation with it. The objective of these conversations is to beat it/outsmart it/defeat it/put it on the back foot/etc. Most service users seem to prefer “beat it” because of the double meanings conjured up thus: “Successfully argue against it”; “beat it physically”; or “persuade it to beat it (leave altogether).”

“If only...”, if allowed to persist, is very controlling and disempowering for individuals experiencing it. As workers, it is important to encourage service users to regain both control and power. This technique achieves both.

How is this achieved? Sometimes it is helpful to ask service users to describe their “If only...” monster, once they have been encouraged to take it out of their body and placed it on their shoulder. The most important part of the technique is the next part, when the person is asked to come up with 3 or 4 things they would like to say to their monster, in order to begin defeating it. Some typical commands service users have come up with are:

**“It’s happened, and there’s nothing anyone can do about it!”**

**“Shut up! Get out of my life. I’m moving on.”**

**“Go and take a running jump! And I hope you will kill yourself!”**

**“I’ll give you more than “If only...”, if you don’t shut it!”**

As with other techniques, it is helpful if service users are encouraged to practise the technique in the session, before being instructed to practise it as a between-session task. Practising it about 10-12 times/week for a few weeks has very beneficial effects; transferring the power and control back from ‘the monster’ to the service user.



## Extra Bits and Pieces

### 1. Formula First Session Task (FFST) – Adapted version

“Between now and when we meet . . . I’d like you to notice . . .

What you have done already to process the memory of this event/put it away safely .

Can you do that for me?”

### 2. Exception finding questions

“Tell me about a time when the problem is not happening at all; or, is happening less.”

“Tell me about times when you are coping better with this situation.”

Threefold purpose:

1. Shows the client it is not 100% bad, 100% of the time
2. Shows that you expect there to be better times
3. There are grounds for hope

### 3. The Neuroscience

van der Kolk, Bessel (2014) *The Body Keeps the Score: Mind, brain and body in the transformation of trauma*. Penguin: Random House

LeDoux, Joseph (2011) *The Emotional Brain: from the humanities to neuroscience and back again*. Copernicus Centre Lecture. YouTube video

LeDoux, Joseph (2012) *Joseph LeDoux’s Biggest Discoveries*. YouTube video

### 4. Beginning second and subsequent sessions

4 x step process:

1. Elicit positive change: “What’s better?”
2. Reinforce: “How did you do that?”  
“How did you know how to do that?”  
“What have you learned by doing that?”
3. Amplify: “What else is better?”  
“Who’s noticed things are better?”;  
“What have they noticed?”
4. Build on improvement: “As a result of doing this, what else might you do?”  
“What might be your first small step?”

### 5. 3 x part ending:

a. Acknowledgement, validation and complimenting

b. Bridging statement/rationale for the task

c. Task/homework

- i. notice;                      ii. think about;                      iii. do

Date and time of next appointment

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## Benefits to doing this important work

No to:	Yes to:
Life of fear & anxiety	Successful personal relationships
Marital/Couple break-up	Quality family life
Existence as a victim/survivor	Passing on tips & techniques to other survivors
Constant pulling around the PTSD ball & chain	Living Life Well
Excessive use of drink, drugs or tobacco, to cope	Healthy living/eating
Feeling out of control	Feeling in control, living life well
Finding difficulty resting or doing nothing in particular	Physical fitness, as much as possible
Feelings of stuckness	Feelings of great joy, from time to time
Fearful of unexpected triggers	Welcoming triggers on which to practise techniques learned
Difficulties with every day functioning	Getting on well with day to day tasks
Feeling that life is meaningless & pointless	Having a sense of meaning & purpose in life
Disturbed sleep with recurrent nightmares	Settled sleep patterns
Feeling odd & disconnected from people	Enjoying a connectedness with people – especially loved ones
Reliving constantly, what happened	Regarding what happened as being part of life, but not being dominated by it.
General unhappiness and discontentedness with life	Personal goals & targets in life to look forward to
Sudden & unpredictable outbursts of anger	Safely controlled aggression
Isolating self excessively from family & friends in particular	Having a forward view of life in terms of chapters yet to be written



## What perpetrators do

- Blame shifting
- Minimising
- Denying
- Excusing
- Defending
- Accusing
- Make veiled threats
- Revictimising
- Emotional blackmailing
- Selective forgetting
- Show no empathy
- Say “It is not really you saying these things”

For perpetrators to turn their backs on this behaviour and seek to establish a sincere, genuine and honest relationship with survivors, they must first complete the following two steps:

1. Accept they have done some or all of the above
2. Acknowledge that harm was done to the survivor at the time the abuse occurred and now to show empathy towards them.

Unless and until these two steps have been taken, no real relationship can be established.