

Externalising problems and finding a way to respond to them

1. An exercise between a group and a group facilitator. The facilitator offers the directions and asks the questions in the exercise below to the group.

2. Introduction: Naming the problem

- What would you say is the main thing you are contending with at the moment? How do you describe it in everyday talk to family or friends?
- Write down the problem name at the top of the page
- Jot down some of your answers to the following questions based on the problem you have named

3. Interviewing the problem – the problem’s successes

- What are the effects of the problem? How does it affect your relationships, your thoughts about yourself, your thoughts or hopes about your future, your conversations, education, work etc.?
- What would you say are the problem’s purposes for your life? What are the problem’s intentions? What do you think it is trying to achieve in your life?
- If you could imagine the problem is like a person ‘speaking’ to you what are some of the things it often tries to convince you of? How does the problem speak; with authority, loudly, quietly, with persistence...?
- What do you think the problem tries to take advantage of in your life? What happens in your life that gives it power? What cultural ideas about a normal or successful life does the problem rely on to capture more of your life?
- What tricks or tactics does the problem use?

4. Interviewing the problem – the problem’s weaknesses

- What does the problem see you doing or even not doing that it doesn’t like, that weakens it?
- What does the problem see other people doing around you that it doesn't like, that weakens it?
- What does the problem see you appreciating about yourself or your life despite its efforts? What qualities and skills about life can you remember you hold despite the problem’s efforts to erase them?
- What does the problem hear you say back to it that seems to quieten it?
- What does the problem do when its dominance is threatened? What do you do to quieten the problem when it tries to reassert itself?

5. Responding to the problem using two options

a. Write a letter to the problem

Use the following structure:

- Dear ‘problem’
- What do you know about the problem?

- What do you think about the problem? What is your attitude towards it?
- What kind of relationship do you want with the problem?
- What kind of steps will you take that will make that relationship more likely?

b. Write what you 'say back' to the problem, especially when you 'take exception' to the problem

Use the following structure:

- What have you noticed that you have 'said back' to the problem, perhaps an 'inner dialogue' you have with it?
- If you have a sense that you don't engage in an inner dialogue, what would you like to see yourself 'say back' to the problem?

6. Read either the letter or what you say back to the problem out to the group

7. Ask the group members what they will be doing as a result of the exercise