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TITLE: MEETING WITH THE ANXIETY

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Meetings with The Anxiety:

Stories of parents dealing with the anxiety

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents stories of parents dealing with the anxiety of raising their children and how narrative therapy gives them the power to see themselves and their roles as parents in a different way. There are six different stories describing parents' anxiety and fear of raising their children, which makes them feel confused and trapped. Problem saturated stories often prevent parents of dealing their issues. Narrative therapy gives them the opportunity to feel strong and find solutions to their problems without giving them a "prescribed solution". Images and visualizations of a story could be used therapeutically. Parents would give the feedback on how helpful the use of visualization of the story is.

KEYWORDS

Parents, anxiety, therapeutic use of pictures, self – esteem, dominant and alternative stories, retelling of

How this idea is coming from??

My Intentions

Working with parents in my private office, I come across with the anxiety that accompanies them in raising their children. Most parents' concern about issues related to typical child development or issues related to learning and /or developmental difficulties. Some of the parents have to confront traumatic situations or emotional obstacles and feel lost. There are parents who feel vulnerable to support their children in changing periods. Other parents get confused with children's

aggressiveness, anxiety or other negative feelings and they feel overwhelmed. Adoption and foster care issues, separation anxiety, posttraumatic stress, issues related to abuse and neglect and other parent-child relational issues are some of the reasons that parents seek for psychological help and guidance.

Being a parent is a life role and the strong bonding with the child is what most parents thrive in. Parents ensure emotional and body health and safety, prepare children for life as productive adults and transmit values. Most parents feel responsible for upbringing an emotionally stable and happy child and this responsibility makes them try to give their best. Every day parents have to take small and big decisions and they don't have always the time to think clearly. As a consequence, they feel overwhelmed and they don't know what to do even for simple issues.

Most parents come with the "tell me what to do" request and not to strengthen their parenting role or find the way to believe themselves. Strengthening parents' self-confidence is more important than giving information or ideas or tips on how to grow up their children and this is one of my main beliefs as a psychologist. A parent who feels stable and stands on his feet and has a critical view of life and his parental role is stronger and enjoys parenthood through everyday routines and challenges.

The narrative therapy, with its perspective, helps the parent in the context described above. (Lange, 2004) Narrative therapy gives parents the opportunity to see their problems from another perspective and to realize that neither they nor their children are the problem. The idea of this work came from the belief that externalizing the problem from their stories gives them the possibility to learn more about themselves and their parenting style and understand deeper the reasons they take some decisions.

Furthermore, I am at a turning point in my professional life and after 10 years of work experience and a lot of personal therapy and tutoring I want my clients to feel less dependent to me. I don't want to see me

As a "miracle maker"

Or "the specialist with the special knowledge for their problems"

Or the specialist who gives "labels or names in their personality pathologising them".

I want to see me as the person with the stories who accompanies them to a trip to meet their problems. As the person with the questions who helps them to find the best choice for them or even train them to make themselves the right questions whenever they need it. As the person who accompanies them to a trip to reconstruct their identity, to see other possibilities. Not just to positively frame a difficult situation, but to see different parts of identity to a problematic story.

How things are planned?

The process

I met 6 parents with their problems of anxiety. They come individually to my office with a request to process an issue related to their anxiety of raising their children. Children could be of any age.

What connects them is the anxiety they feel about managing the problem. Two meetings take place over a period of two weeks for each. After three weeks a meeting took place to see the effects of the problem in parents' lives and how they manage. The parents are left to express themselves and there are questions that help them to externalize the problem, search for alternative stories and enrich the plotline. During the last meeting they

As they narrate the problem saturated stories and alternative stories, parents are asked to choose how to visualize stories (selecting 1 - 2 stories to visualize). They can choose between fluffy pet animals / miniatures, Playmobil, miniatures of people, painting and plastiline. Parents are given an oral summary of the session and a photograph or e-mail of the visual representation of the story made by them. Before each session the written summary of the previous is sent or read. The last meeting that takes place over three weeks is about how things are and a feedback from the process. In the last meeting definitional ceremonies and external witnesses will be involved in the process depending on their wishes. At the last meeting, parents are given a comparison of the visual representations of the stories (problem saturated stories and alternatives) and give feedback of the process.

The stories

Anny and Tom...

THE IT PROBLEM: A mother of 12 years old boy feels confused on how to deal with his son's anxiety

Anny came to my office asking "for a recipe" to deal with her son's feelings and behaviors. Her son's problems make her feel weak and deficient in supporting him. And this is how things began:

The boy says to his mother that he feels overanxious because he leaves elementary school. Also he says that he cannot be a child anymore and do things that make him be a child as playing with his playmobile. He feels sad and anxious about how he manages to high school. Every night he cannot sleep without his mother. He says that he needs her hug. He talks about these issues with his mother, but Anny (mother) feels confused about how to deal with it.

Anny: Every night I see him trembling, crying, sweating and I cannot calm him. I have tried it all. There is nothing I can do. I feel desperate and alone. My husband believes that I am overreacting, but I cannot leave him suffering. Whatever I have tried fails...

Anny continues to describe the situation and the problem saturated story and the effect this story has on her ability to raise her child. She describes the situation, but she avoids naming her problem. Paraphrasing a lot of times the question of how to name your problem that affects the relationship with her son she desperately says:

Anny: I don't know how to name it. If I knew, I would feel better.



*I invite her again to give a name that would describe the problem and **imagine a picture** of this problem, taking as grounded that the problem is that she doesn't know what it is. She realizes that what she hates with this situation is that she doesn't know what the problem is (even she already mentioned her son's words) and how to control it and she feels like being in a dark room without seeing her child who is crying and the problem is there. The most frightening thing, she mentions, is that she doesn't know against what she is fighting. She decided to name the problem "it". (Naming)*

The "it" problem affects the relationship with her son, the relationship with her husband and how they share the experience of parenthood, the ability of being happy and calm and think clearly. (Effects)

She realizes that these effects are not fit to the way she sees parenthood as she tries to be always next to her child and talks about his problems but not to control him. The "it problem" and the sense of the unknown makes her manipulative (as she characterizes herself) and this is in contrast to what she believes in. This makes her be disappointed and she is afraid of how this affects her child's personality. (Evaluating)

She believes that she loses her faith in basic principles she has for parenthood as communication as she cannot hear her boy's needs. She believes that talking with her child is an important value and "it problem" makes her lose her ability to believe in her child's strengths. She hopes that talking can help her raise a child strong and independent. Independence is an important value for raising her child. (Justification)

She talks about the importance of independence to her relationship with her son. (Window – passing from problematic story to alternative story)

INDEPENDENCE / TALKING / SHARING / HEARING: She mentions two stories / paradigms that enrich the plotline of raising her child with independence.



She remembers how hard it was for her to let her child go to kindergarten and her child had the same difficulties. What made her realize the importance of raising her child with independence was a fairy tale her child asked her to read. It was about a bird with a smaller wing that his mother showed him how to fly even it was afraid of falling. Anny realizes then that independence and sharing are important values for growing up her children and this was the name that she gave to alternative story "Independence". (Alternative story)

She remembers also how hard was for her to see him sad when his grandfather died. He was crying and staying in his room. She thought that it was important for her not to diminish his feelings by saying him "it's ok, he was old, don't be sad, he wanted from you to be happy". Even he looked sad, she knew that showing his feelings and not suppress them will make him strong and independent. It was important for her as a parent not to raise her son with the discourse that the boys don't cry or show emotion. (Alternative story)



During the second session our discussions concerned how things are going with the "it problem" and why Independence is an important value for her in raising her child. She realized that she could be calmer and think clearly in order to support her child and how important role independence makes in her life.

When she was child she saw her father lose his job because he denied agreeing to his boss's will to dismiss his co workers. Even they pass a hard time financially and her dad looked sad and there were times he cried, she felt that her father was a really strong and independent man and she realized how important is Independence in her life even when she pass hard times and not know what to do. Her father used to boost up for her ability to stand up the family financial issues. She never complained for not buying

too many toys, even she loved them. She wanted to be as independent as her father. (Alternative story 3 - past)



She decided to share her feelings with her son and share her feelings about her difficulty to support him. Her son gave her the solution. She asked time from her. Anny was so shocked that she put pressure on him to get over it as this behavior doesn't fit with her beliefs. Tom is sad as he is leaving elementary school and he needs time to say goodbye and accept the new ideas. Anny heard all these ideas with attention. She knew that all this time she couldn't hear her son as she was actually afraid of how he manages at high school as she believes that he is a sensitive boy and sensitive means nice, polite and quiet. These values help him to be loveable to his friend and his teachers, but sometimes he shares feelings of anxiety of how accepted he would be. But even in this case he finds solutions to his anxiety feelings without taking instructions from her but just talking. Sharing seems to be the solution to his and her problem. Anny feels confident as she knows how to deal with the "it problem" as now it is not so unknown and can hear it. She knows that both she and her son are in a changing period and they need time to think and share their feelings. She realizes that her son isn't a boy anymore. He grows up and as he says goodbye to elementary school, she says goodbye to his son's childhood. She knows that adolescence is a challenging period for a parent but she knows that would manage it as she did it when her son went to kindergarten.

For the future, she feels confident and she knows that whenever "it problem" comes up, her values of independence, sharing feelings and talking about them would be available as "arrows in her quiver". In order to obtain it, she will ask for her husband to remind her values and she will by an arrow miniature to remind her commitment. Also she will keep the photos of the sessions to remind her values.

After three weeks Anny came to our session with her son as outside witness. I did a brief interview asking her how is she this period of her life.

***Anny:** ... I am in a calmer state than I used to be. The idea of growing up my son was always a challenge for me. I am proud of him when I see how a loveable, polite and strong boy is. These are the values that make him unique. His politeness and his strength... And now I see that he grows up and he becomes more independent and this makes me feel satisfied. Even there are times that I feel sad because he isn't a small boy anymore and I have to accept that this period of my life is over. I learnt a lot about me as a parent and as human from this period of my life. Growing up an independent boy who has the ability to share his feeling and not to be ashamed of them is an important value for me. I learnt that I lose my ability to hear when I am in an unknown territory... independence is an important value for me... as mother and as a human. As I stay committed to Independence in all parts of my life, I remain strong and sensitive which means connected to my emotions.*

*After hearing his mother, **Tom** said:*

...Hearing my mother, it made me realize that we are in the same place. I feel sad 'cause I leave my school as my mother feels, sad why I grow up. I don't know why she feels like this but to say the truth some time I don't know why I feel like this. I want to go to high school even I afraid of the exams and the new teachers. So I guess it isn't easy growing up. Look my mother... (Laughs.) Independence is an important value for me too. I want to be independent to school and even with my friends. Sometimes I don't say what I think and this doesn't help me be independent. So there are so steps I have to take in order to be what I want to be. I like talking all this about with mum.

I hope this doesn't change as I grow up. And as for the nap troubling I believe that it will pass as other difficult things in the past. Even now, it's better...

Anny and Tom are still coming to our sessions. Tom asked to see me individually in order to discuss some trouble issues. We enrich the plot line with many interesting stories. Anny gave emphasis on how helpful the images are to stay in touch with her values and principles. She made this remark without being asked during the feedback time of the process.

The other stories

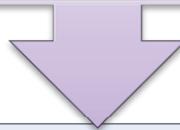
Another five people come to my office and share their stories. There are stories of parents who met with the anxiety and felt troubled.

A mother's anxiety of dealing her daughter's jealousy for her brother

Externalizing the problem

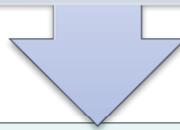
Namina of the problem: The vicious circle

Ira doesn't know how to deal with her daughter's aggressive behavior towards her baby brother. She cannot recognise her daughter as Penny is a polite and well mannered child and this behavior doesn't fit. She keeps hitting her brother and there was a time she hit her in order to discipline and because she lost her temper. Penny's aggressiveness becomes worst after this incident. She describes this problem as a vicious circle that makes her lose the temper.



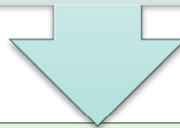
Effects of the problem

The vicious circle effects her relationship with her daughter as they don't share happy moments, she feels always distressed, her husband tries to help but he just yells too. Penny complies with him but Ira feels minimised as she cannot find a way to communicate with her problem. The Vicious cycle makes her use inappropriate ways to discipline her daughter. The home atmosphere isn't peaceful and she cannot talk about it with her friends as they make her feel bad. They propose her things to do and then she tries them but she fails and this is another vicious circle of emotions and behaviors.



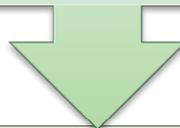
Evaluating

Ira thinks that vicious cycle makes her feel pain and anxiety. She cannot help her to find solutions. The vicious cycle makes her be a parent model she hates. Her mother used to hit her and even she swore that she would never hit her child, she does it.



Justification

The problem cannot help her to be loyal to her beliefs of not use violence, physical or psychological. She describes how hard it was for her to fear her mother. She couldn't understand the reasons of not doing things as fear made her paralysed and weak to make decisions. Discipline was related to fear and not to respect. Respect is an important value for raising her children and every time she yells she feels unfaithful to her need to be respected as a parent. She realises that respect is an important value for raising her children. Respect will help her raise her children in a calm atmosphere without fear and pain. Respect would make her children strong but fair.



The window for the alternative story: THE RESPECT

Respect makes her feel confident as a mother. Raising her children with respect helps her to think clearly and be open minded. When she thinks respectfully about her daughter's feelings helps her to understand deeper feelings and try to talk with her.

Alternative stories



Alternative story 1

• When Penny was born, she was crying out desperately. Ira as a new mother felt that she couldn't do anything. Her relatives told her not to hug her because "she would learn to hugs" (It's an often said discourse in Greece: if you hug your child when she cries, she will not be independent). Ira decided to respect her child's needs and not to hear others. She hugged her child and this helped their bonding. She thought that her child has needs and crying is the only way to express them. She thought that she has to respect these needs.



Alternative story 2

• Her grandmother used to speak to her about respect and how important is to respect other people's needs and emotions. She remembered a story that her grandmother who lived at the Second World War told her and this story made her think the importance of respect. When her grandmother was 8, she was hungry. She saw a girl with a slice of bread and she felt jealous. Every day the girl was eating while she and her schoolmates have no food. One day the other kids hit the girl with the bread. The girl was suffering and there was nobody to help her. Ira's grandmother resist to this by helping the girl with the bread. The other kids hit her too. Her grandmother was always proud of her behavior. Even hard times that she has no food, she remained devoted to her principles. Grandmother used to talk with passion about respect and peace. She believes that these stories affect her belief system.

Ira enriched the plotline with other stories that respect affects her life and her belief system. During the second session, she named her difficulty to deal with jealousy more than other feelings and she started to brainstorm ideas of dealing this feeling. I salute her idea to perform these ideas. She admitted that brainstorming is an act of free will and respect and this is a way to stay in touch with this principle. She was impressed by her ability to brainstorm. She was eager to perform some of the ideas she has and she has no fear of the vicious cycle. I email her the therapeutic documents and the photos of her stories.

Three weeks later, Ira was calmer. She was satisfied as she never hit her girl again and she could calm herself. The girl still shows her jealousy, but not aggressively. Ira realizes that there is no need to fight against jealousy but aggressive behaviors. Even some of her ideas were not effective; she still remains devoted to her idea of respect. Apart from brainstorming, she realizes that she remains devoted to respect by listening her feelings of jealousy as she cannot do anything to change it. She reminds her daughter that she loves her as she loves her brother and even she passes hard times because of jealousy, things will go better. The images and the therapeutic documents / revisions of the session are useful for her. She pointed out their importance without asking her.

Externalizing the problem

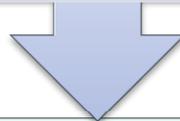
Naming of the problem: The fly

Anna is confused and frustrated with her 14 years old daughter's behavior. She tries to discipline her but El ignores her desires and demands. Anna feels confused and overwhelmed of her emotions. They are often fighting and every method she used to discipline is waste of time. The way she speaks and behaves disappoints her. She compares herself to a fly that her daughter ignores her. She punishes her by cutting into the pocket money but El seems passiveaggressive and disregardful. She says that she doesn't care. The last period Anna is usually crying or fighting. She cannot understand what's going on.



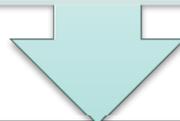
Effects of the problem

Anna has lost her ability to smile. She cannot think positively and this makes her feel sad and depressed. The fly affects the way of thinking and it makes her see things black. She cannot understand why discipline ways she used to follow are not effective any more. This makes her be more aggressive with her daughter. The more aggressive Anna becomes, the more passively El behaves. The fly has effects on relationship with her husband as they don't take pleasure on things they used to and they just talk about El's behaviors. The intrusive fly affects her ability to have fun with her daughter.



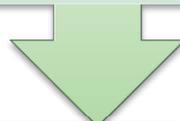
Evaluating

Anna recognizes that the effects of the fly in her life are destructive as she loses her faith to herself and her abilities as a parent. Being a mother is a key role in her life, even it is important for her to be involved in many activities and relationships. The fly makes her dispute the ability to raise her daughter and this is disappointing and it makes her see life in black.



Justification

Seeing life in black isn't what fits to her. It's important for her to be optimistic, to be creative in the way she raises her child and parenthood for her means raising a well mannered, kind, independent and happy child. Fights and negative feelings don't fit with the way she wants to raise her child and she remembers the fights she used to have with her mother and how painful and destructive were for their relationship. She remembers how pessimistic she used to be this time of her life and how important role peace and calmness play to her life. When her life lacks of peace and calmness, she loses her ability to think clearly and sees herself as self competent. She doesn't believe that fights are not part of family life, but there is no meaning in fighting when these quarrels don't lead to something effective. She understands that her daughter as teenager needs to give some fights and she needs to challenge her parents, but she believes that these kinds of fights aren't helpful.



The window for the alternative story: "THE CREATIVE FIGHTS"

She believes that people could have disagreements and remain calm. Expressing anger could be deliberating and helps a relationship to be improved. She believes that there are times in which she had fights that helped a relationship to be improved. She gave the name "Creative fights".

Alternative stories



Alternative story 1

• When she was teen, she had many friends. Some of them were too close to her. She remembers her friend, Mina. Their bonding was strong. Mina and Anna used to disagree for many things as they had a different point of view for many things. They used to have many fights, but these fights lead to a closer bonding. It was important for her to be heard as it was important for Mina too. Anna and Mina even they have different point of view they love to hear each other and they didn't fear to argue. After a while they just stop arguing and just talking. This made her understand how important is to hear and be heard.



Alternative story 2

• Anna and her husband, George, are used to argue for things related to their relationship, the way they raise their daughter, domestic issues. She realized that these disagreements help them to find solutions to their problems and they never "pass the red line." They hear each other and they never fight toward El. They have their time to do it. Creative fights lead them to a closer relationship.

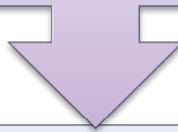
During our meetings Anna realized that "creative fights" play an important role in her life. Creative fights help her releasing her anger. The anger is not unlimited but it helps her to express feelings and thoughts she has and it makes her more communicative. She believes that she and her daughter don't argue in a helpful way as they don't express their feelings or thoughts. She realized that punishment and reinforcement are not effective ways of discipline as her daughter is growing up. Anna realizes that "the fly" makes her not hear her daughter's concerns and she just tries to find a way to control her. Her daughter grows up and she has different needs. The "fly" made her not take attention to different needs that El may have as she grows up. In order to stay in touch with the principles of "hear and be heard" and "creative fights", she has to be more open to the idea of not harmful disagreements and the idea of El's growing up. To take distance from a fight that nobody hears and they are just trying to impose on each other is a way to stay in touch with "creative fights". Discussing in a calm atmosphere and giving emphasis on El's maturity is the way to connect each other. She gave some example stories that help her see that under these circumstances they can communicate without quarrels.

After three weeks Anna comes back feeling better. She remains devoted to the idea of creative fights. She spoke to her daughter about this idea. El was open to this and even they had some disagreements they find they way to communicate in a calm atmosphere. The effect of the "fly" in the way she deals with the situation is more optimistic and positive. She recognized how helpful images are to stay devoted to this idea.

Externalizing the problem

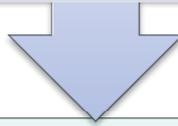
Naming of the problem: Dyslexia

Maria is concerned about Paul's learning disabilities and how these learning disabilities affect the way he perceives himself and his self esteem. Paul is 11 years old and he is diagnosed with dyslexia when he was 9. Paul is attending an educational program for children with learning disabilities at school. Apart from this he attends extra lessons with a special educator at a private center. He seems to be positive to attend these lessons as they help him deal with his difficulties. He describes himself as "daffy" and he believes that he is a "lazy dog" who hates school.



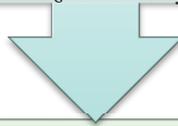
Effects of the problem

Dyslexia affects the relationship with school as teachers are complaining about Paul's disruptive behavior as he speaks and he teases other kids. Maria is anxious each time she goes to school about what she will hear. Furthermore dyslexia affects the relationship as they are fighting all the time about his "laziness". Maria is furious with his behavior as he seems to be aloof and disregarding. He is totally absorbed in playing play station. Keeping the play station away as a way of discipline isn't effective as he says that he doesn't care and he seems pathetic. Maria is worried about her son's self esteem.



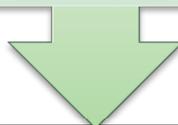
Evaluating

All these effects destroy the way she sees herself as a parent. She thinks that she fails to support her child and that their bonding loosens. These effects make her worry about his future as he isn't assertive both in school and in his personal relationships. As a parent, she feels powerless and she realizes that dyslexia and its effects have made her lose pleasant moments of their relationship. She thinks that these effects make her lose the positivity.



Justification

Losing the positivity makes think of herself as a bad parent. Thinking in a negative way doesn't fit for her. She thinks of Positivity as a supporter in her life. In difficult times positivity gave her the opportunity to think clearly and find solutions. She couldn't imagine her life without positivity and its effects. When she thinks herself as positive person she feels pleased.



The window for the alternative story: "Positivity"

Alternative stories



Alternative story 1

• When she got divorced with her ex husband (and Paul's father) was a difficult period for her. She was young and alone as her parents wouldn't support her decision. Paul was just a newborn and she couldn't stay married with a violent husband. After Paul's birth, Paul's father became violent. Even it was a hard time for her, positivity helped her to get out of this unhappy marriage. She strongly believes that being positive and thinking of all the happy moments she could have with her son made her be strong. She didn't stick with the "bad thinking" as she said. Thoughts as "what she has done wrong" or "how difficult is to manage with a newborn alone" were extinguished by positivity. She remembers Gloria Gaynor's song "I will survive" that she used to sing and she smiles.



Alternative story 2

• Positivity was also an ally when she has to deal with financial problems. As a single parent, it was important for her to feel proud and decent. She didn't want other people taking pity on her. Even she has no job and no home, she remained positive. She went to a shelter for abused women. She stays there for a month. After a month she found a job and she left for the shelter. Her parents realized their mistake of leaving her alone and they stood by her. Maria admits that it was hard to forgive them, but she didn't want to keep negative feelings. Her parents have never criticized or tried to patronize her again. Her mother speaks with pride for her daughter's strength and she emphasizes on her positive way of thinking.

Maria recognizes how positivity helps her to see her son as a child with many abilities and not as the child with dyslexia and disruptive behavior. She admits that her son has dyslexia, but now she knows that dyslexia doesn't run their life. She recognizes that her desire and expectations of educating her son made her not see that Paul is a child full of possibilities even he has a low performance at school. Shedding light on his abilities, she ends up that Paul is a passionate boy. He loves fishing and constructing. His passion for the things he loves could make him assertive. His friends admire the wooden objects he does. Furthermore he loves cooking. Maria believes in his cooking abilities and he loves baking. I explained Maria how helpful is for improving his lack of attention (as he is diagnosed with dyslexia and ADHD) to follow step by step the instruction of a recipe. Also it is an activity they both love. Maria admits that even he is a small boy, he makes cakes. She realizes that she put pressure on him because she wants to be financially independent. Maria wonders how he could be independent if school performance is low. Now positivity makes her see that his passion for the things he loves will show him the way.

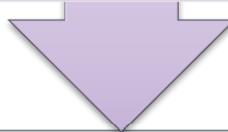
After three weeks Maria comes back. She and Paul are in a better state. Maria is calm. Paul still hates school but Maria is more supportive. She understands better her son's difficulties so they have fewer fights. Paul's teacher mentions that his behavior is not disruptive anymore and he tries to ask for help. Maria praises her son's attempts without giving attention to his performance. Maria and Paul have "their time". Every Saturday they cook together and Maria let Paul lead the procedure. Paul loves this activity. Maria has the photos of positivity in her mobile to remain faithful to positivity. She mentions that it's a way to be calm when things go wrong.

A mother's anxiety for her daughter performance on the final exams

Externalizing the problem

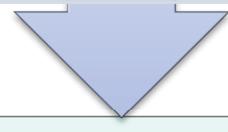
Naming of the problem: The bad change

Lena concerns about her daughter's performance on final school exams. Anastasia is 17 years old and she is going to take exams. These exams are for admission to university. She cannot understand Anastasia's behavior as Anastasia looks like indifferent and aloof. She is always bad tempered and she never studies. Anastasia used to be an excellent student previous year. Lena is anxious and furious with her daughter. This change of her behavior makes her to be more intrusive in her daughter's life. She is snooping her staff; she tries to control her behavior. As a consequence, Anastasia is estranged even more. Lena cannot communicate with her daughter and she is afraid that Anastasia will ruin her life as she will be devastated if she fails at exams.



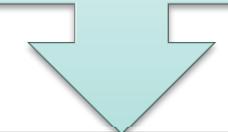
Effects of the problem

After this bad change of behavior Lena feel that she cannot communicate with her daughter. This bad change has affected their communication. They cannot talk to each other. They just shout and Lena's behavior towards her daughter has changed too. Snooping her staff, speaking to other people for her behavior and not to her, putting pressure on her and telling her what to do don't fit for her. All this time they used to discuss things and Lena was aware of her daughter's concerns. The most painful effect of this change is that she cannot understand why her daughter stop studying and giving up trying. She believes that as a mother cannot leave her all alone as she is just 17 and she wants to protect her from a bad decision.



Evaluating

All these effects make Lena feels disappointed about her parental role. She was always proud of their way of communicating. Anastasia is a confident and assertive girl. She used to be open to express her feelings and they used to talk a lot. Lena was proud of her not only because she was an excellent student, but also she was a mature girl. Bad change makes her be fearful of her daughter's future and pessimistic about the way they communicate in the future.



Justification

Lena ends up that this way of communication with her daughter doesn't fit for her. Snooping her staff, secretly asking others what's going on and not speaking directly at her about her concerns make her feel as "bad cop" and not as a mother. When she became a mother, she decided to raise a dynamic girl who would be aware of her feelings and not afraid of them. She knew that putting pressure on her couldn't help her be this kind of people. Communicating and speaking with her is the key.



The window for the alternative story: "Communication"

Alternative stories



Alternative story 1

• Before two years, Anastasia needed an orthopedic surgery. Even it was a routine surgery without risks she was afraid of the procedure. Communication was an ally in doing the surgery. Lena and Anastasia used to talk for days before and after the surgery about fears and stress. Anastasia knew that she would have a quick recovery. However, this health problem made her think about illness, death and loneliness. Lena tried to listen her daughter's concerns and she shared her feelings too without trying to give answers or solutions. They ended up that death or illness is something that cannot control or even predict, but life is all the fun. Lena was proud of her daughter's way of thinking and she thought of how communication and sharing help them to strengthen their bonding and be aware of their thoughts and feelings.



Alternative story 2

• When Anastasia was 8 years old, she had problems with some girls at school. These girls made fun of her and Anastasia kept it secret. Anastasia looked like sad, but Lena couldn't understand what was going on. Lena found out the truth by mistake from a mother of Anastasia's schoolmate. Lena and Anastasia talked about it. Anastasia said that she thought that she would feel embarrassed for her if she learnt about these events. Lena and Anastasia made an agreement. To be always honest, direct and not afraid of what the other would think of their behavior. They gave a hug to remind their agreement. Lena and Anastasia discussed about these girls and how to deal with this. Lena gave her options of how to deal it and Anastasia choose to speak to her teacher and not to do company with these girls.

Lena named other stories which made her think how important communication is for her and that they have lost it. Now she knows that her desire to see her daughter succeed in the exams and be expected to a university put pressure on Anastasia. She narrated many stories of how her mother expectations made her feel trapped. Lena knew that she broke her promise of speaking directly at her daughter. She admits that it is difficult for her to see her daughter not succeed in exams, but it's more difficult for her to see them with the effects of "bad change" in their relationship.

During the second meeting Lena spoke to her daughter about her thoughts and they made a good restart. Lena observed that Anastasia took attention to her when she started to narrate stories that communication was leading their relationship. Anastasia told her mother that she is still angry with her intrusive behavior, but she is open to discuss what happened. Lena was honest and she shared her concerns about her future, recognizing that she put pressure on her with her expectations. Anastasia was cautious at her mother's sayings. They agreed that they need time to "re - communicate".

After three weeks Lena comes back. She was calmer and she took some decisions. She decided to make a step back about the exams and give her daughter the opportunity to try. She tries not to give attention to the results of the exams, but she knows that she has to fight with her expectations and her belief system about school success. Anastasia and Lena speak about their issues and even they sometimes have disagreements they remain in touch. Anastasia will take exams. Despite the results she asked the summer to be the time to relax that would help her think

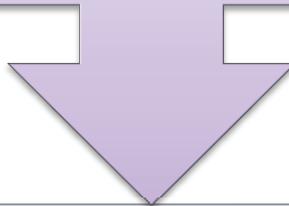
what to do. Both parents agreed. In order to stay in touch with her principles of communication Lena kept in her mind the image of the hug. She didn't pay attention to the visualizations of the stories, but she remained in touch with her stories without the aim of pictures.

A mother's anxiety of dealing her son's anger after divorce

Externalizing the problem

Naming of the problem: Anger

Eva is a mother of a boy, John, who is 7 years old. Eva is taking divorce after 10 years of marriage. Eva and her ex husband are taking a consensual divorce as they are not in love anymore and Mike had an extramarital relationship. After many fights they decided to break up. Eva is sad and feels betrayed but her main concern now is John's anger. John lives with Eva and he goes to his father at the weekends. His father has a partner and she lives with him. According to his mother, John is a kind and smart boy. He is spontaneous and he always tells his mother what's in his mind. After the announcement John is always angry and he hit a boy at school. He never talks about the divorce and he looks like sad when he is at home.



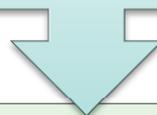
Effects of the problem

Eva believes that anger has ruined their life. She feels sad when she sees her son angry, shouting and breaking things. She tries to keep him calm, but she fails. She feels guilty for causing all this to her child. She is confused as there are times that John is hitting her and she doesn't know what to do. There are times that she loses her temper and she screams so anger makes her be a mother she cannot recognize. There are times John cannot sleep and he is looking for his father. When he goes to his dad, he pretends that everything is ok.



Evaluating

The effects of the anger in their life make her think guilty. When they decided to take divorce, she felt pain, anger, but relief as she was unhappy in this marriage. She was confident that she would make it out. The anger and its effects in her life make her think that she overestimated her abilities. She thinks that she cannot raise this child as a single mother and this make her think of her future in a negative way.

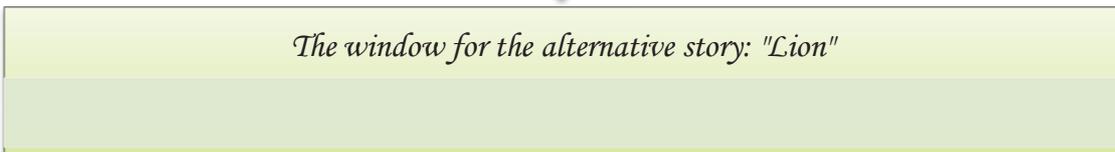


Justification

Seeing her as impotent to deal with her son's feelings doesn't fit with what parent she wants to be. She loses her strength to stand up her decisions. It's important for her to stand up her own decisions and not to be affected by other people's opinion. This principle makes her feel free and strong like a lion. Seeing her son's anger makes her dispute for her decision to break up.



The window for the alternative story: "Lion"



Alternative stories



Alternative story 1

• When she was 17 years old, she wanted to be an architect. Her father was a lawyer, so he put pressure on her not to follow her dream. He tried to convince her not to do it with many ways. Threatening, reasoning and shouting are some of them. Eva took her decision. She would be an architect without her father's consent. She succeeds in exams despite the bad home atmosphere and she announced to her father that she would be an architect either he would agree or not. She didn't fear the problems. She was like a lion. For a year she hadn't spoken with her father. He refused to support her decision so she managed all by herself to study and live. When she made up with her father, he praised her strength to deal with his stubbornness.



Alternative story 2

• When Eva gave birth to her son, she was suffering from maternity blues. Her husband seeing her be sad and irritated, he insists on visiting a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist wrote her a prescription. Eva knew that she could manage without medicine. Even her husband insists on taking them, Eva remains stable on her decision. After two weeks she was better. She didn't stop breastfeeding and she never took pills. It was important for her to find her way to deal with the complex emotion and stay tuned to her decision of breastfeeding and not taking pills. This made her feel strong as a mother.

Eva realizes that seeing her child behaving like this made her go back and forth. She knows that her decision not to stay in her marriage is right as she doesn't want to be angry and miserable in a relationship. She remembers that she felt very angry with her husband when she learnt about the extramarital relationship. She was shocked and angry. But now she is fine. She realizes that anger made her move on. But this took time. She thinks of her child and she realizes that she just realizes that his mum and dad are not living together. He is just 7 and his world changes rapidly. He is a kind boy, but now he has to adjust at something new and feel safe. Eva realizes that feeling guilty and rethinking her choices can't help either her or John. If she looks firm with their decision, John will adjust.

Eva comes back after three weeks. John is angry, but now he begins to ask questions about the divorce. This makes her feel relief as she can communicate with her son. The aggressive behavior towards kids and Eva has stopped. There are times John looks sad. Eva gives him a hug and she explains to him what happens in his head and how difficult is for him to live in two houses. John listens carefully. Eva knows that this is just a beginning but now she feels like a lion strong and ready to stand by her son.

Giving feedback about the use of the images Eva realizes that she didn't use the images all this time. Seeing her son's face is a reminder for her. She said that stories made her think about her relationship with guilt, anger and the importance of stability in her life.

So this is my story of how I met six parents who gave me the opportunity to practice my skills in narrative therapy. Narrative therapy has been used in parenting counseling and it has proved to be helpful for the parents that they have chosen this approach. (Lange, 2004; Narva, 2009; To, So & Chan, 2014). Alice Morgan (2000) emphasizes on the influence of images or drawings. She mentions that images help people stay connected to their story or be used with a symbolic meaning. From parents' feedback, it seems that the image or the representation of a story gives the opportunity to keep in mind a part of the story. Some parents used these pictures to keep connected with their stories. A parent mentions that pictures facilitate not only to be connected with the sessions, but also to keep a structure of our sessions. She finds that it is easier to see the picture and remember what has been said in comparison to read a written text. The most interesting finding is that most parents kept the pictures of the stories and use them as a reminder of their stories or used them as therapeutic documents.

The most challenging part of this experience for me as "future narrative therapist" is the "tell me what to do" issue. Parents gave me the feedback that they feel more confident and strong to support their role as parents. However, there were times they asked persistently for instructions or magic ways to solve the problems. It was not always easy for me to work "narratively". My faith in narrative therapy and its effectiveness helped me to stay tuned to narrative's therapy philosophy.

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