Using Narrative Approaches to Support Children and Young People with Acquired Brain Injuries

Elizabeth Roberts, Alison Perkins, Louise Owen, Gemma Costello, Laura Carroll, Birgitta Norton & Amanda Davies

Background

- Narrative Therapy was developed by Michael White and David Epston in the 1980s. Michael and David were both Social Workers by background and developed Narrative Therapy after meeting at a conference in Australia.
- Narrative therapy is grounded in social constructionism and the belief that, “the person is not the problem. The problem is the problem”.
- Narrative therapy uses linguistic techniques to explore how problems are constructed and maintained.
- The goal of therapy is for clients to access their strengths, resources and value systems with the aim of promoting them to make new or alternative meaning of their experiences.
- As such, it encourages clients to redress their relationship with the problem and take agency over it.

The Narrative Intervention at The Children’s Trust (TCT)

Developed by Dr Alison Perkins (2013) over several years of work at TCT. The intervention follows these key principles:
- The therapy takes an adapted narrative therapy approach
- The therapy aims to give the child or young person control over the content and timing of what’s discussed.
- The therapy is continually adapted to maximise the child’s level of engagement.
- The therapy uses concrete materials to represent information.

The intervention involves the following elements:
- Creation of a document
- Developing positive stories
- Providing an opportunity to revisit traumatic information
- Outsider witness

Why we use Narrative Therapy at TCT

- When a child or young person sustains a brain injury, they find themselves on a new, unwanted and unexpected journey.
- This can cause the child or young person’s experience of being themselves to change.
- Having a brain injury can become the dominant, ‘thin’ narrative.
- Narrative Therapy gives the child or young person a safe place to stand before talking about difficult aspects/trauma in their life.

Implications for practice

An adapted Narrative Therapy approach can be supportive when working with children and young people who have acquired brain injuries. It allows them to create a safe place through the exploration of preferred stories, which connects them with their strengths, values and abilities. From this safe place, the child or young person can then begin to explore and process difficult and traumatic aspects in their life including their past experiences and journey into acquired brain injury.

Key principles off Narrative Therapy (adapted from Morgan, 2000)

- It is a respectful, non-blaming approach that centres individuals as the experts in their own lives.
- The key metaphor of this approach is that life is storied.
- Our lives are multi-storied; however, in conversations with professionals, people often favour problem stories.
- Within narrative therapy, the individual is given an opportunity to identify, challenge and contradict the beliefs underpinning the ‘thin’ story.
- This is done through the exploration of preferred stories that contradict the ‘thin’ story.
- These preferred stories help to create a richer narrative

Examples of Narrative Intervention at TCT

References


eroberts@thechildrenstrust.org.uk
@Childrens_Trust

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