

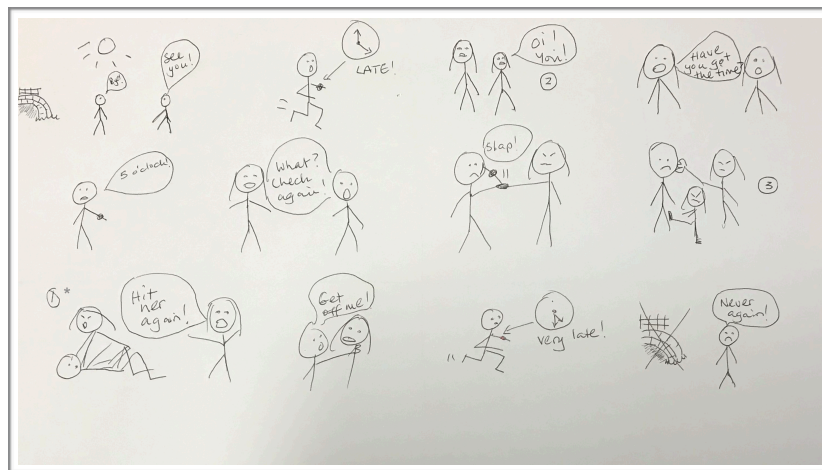


The Belgrade Difficult Experience Comic Strip

A PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY TECHNIQUE

Heather Moran

Chartered Educational and Clinical Psychologist



INSTRUCTIONS

Download more FREE PCP techniques from drawingtheidealself.co.uk

The Belgrade Difficult Experience Comic Strip*



Heather Moran, Chartered Educational & Clinical Psychologist

This technique follows a process for exploring a difficult experience. It will take at least two sessions to work through the first two parts of the technique and then further session/s to consider and discuss the findings and the implications.

Equipment

A4 paper (at least 8 sheets - 3 for Drawing the Ideal Self, the rest for the difficult experience comic strip)

Black pen

Process summary

Step 1 is completing Drawing the Ideal Self (see below).

Step 2 is completing the difficult experience comic strip.

Step 3 is discussing the implications of the difficult experience.

Step 1 - Complete Drawing the Ideal Self

This is important so that you can get to know the client and the way he/she wants to develop before you explore the difficult experience. This way, when you explore the difficult experience, you may be able to understand better why it affected the person as it did. The instructions and a manual are downloadable at no cost from www.drawingtheidealsself.co.uk.

Step 2 - Difficult experience comic strip

Take an A4 paper and divide it into 8 rectangles (tearing or cutting the paper so there are separate rectangles). You are likely to need more than one set of 8 so have spare paper to make more rectangles as needed. Use them so that all the drawings are all in the same orientation (otherwise your comic strip will be messy).

Ask the client to think about the difficult event and draw pictures for every part of their story that they can remember. This will include the lead up, the difficult experience and the aftermath. The story will emerge gradually and you will not know where in the story the client will start their comic strip. This is why the pictures are on separate pieces of paper. They might add information and details into the story at a later point, when something occurs to them. I have often found that when the story makes a more coherent whole, and the person looks at it in a comic strip format, more recollections and details emerge. These are easily added into the comic strip by inserting a new drawing.

Ask something like: "Can you draw a picture on these small bits of paper for each part of your story? We will make the whole story piece by piece. You don't have to remember it in order because we can add pictures or move them around as you want. What's the first thing you can remember about it?"

Once that is done, you can move backwards and forwards from that picture: "What happened next?" "What was happening before that?" "Did anything happen between these two pictures?" The order of the drawings will be determined by the client, so you will find the sense he/she made of what happened. This may not match the descriptions provided by reports from other people but that does not matter because this is their personal construction of events.

Once the client is comfortable with their account, you can fix the comic parts in their order. The easiest way is to glue them onto an A3 sheet or A4 sheets in groups of 8. At that point, you can number them, if that helps. Then take a photo or make a scanned copy of the whole story.

Ask the client to show you the worst three parts of what happened and mark them (they can use numbers but they do not have to put them in rank order). From these three, ask them to identify the very worst part for them and mark the picture with an asterisk. See example below.

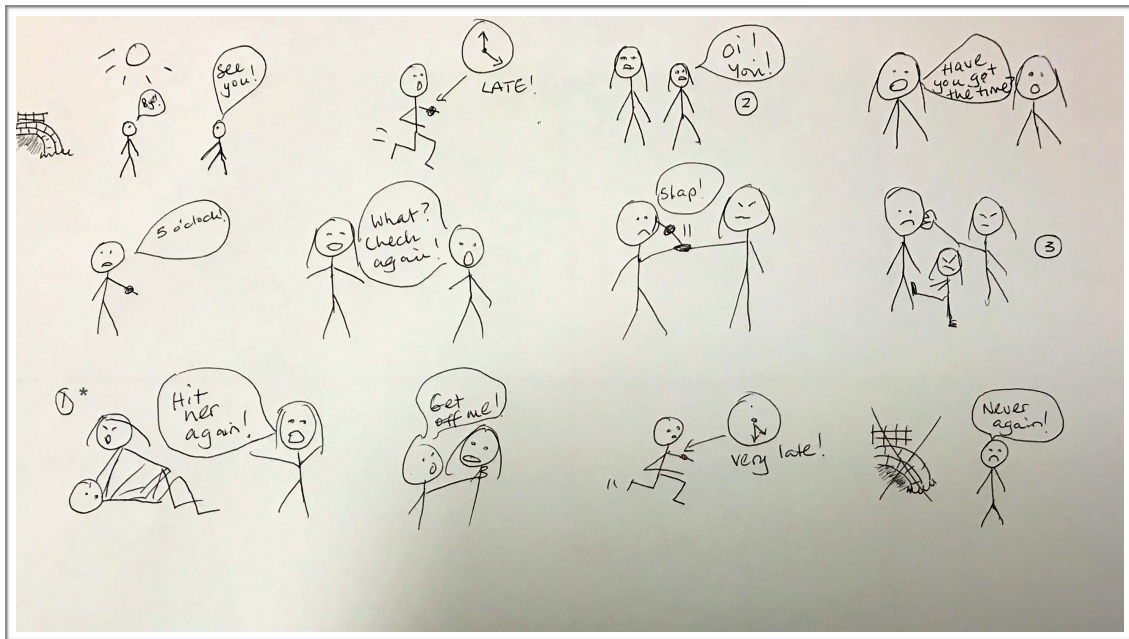


Fig. 1: Example comic strip

Step 3 - Implications of the difficult experience

From your knowledge of your client's Drawing the Ideal Self, consider how the difficult experience might have impacted on their sense of self. Discuss with the client how he/she thinks the experience might have affected them. E.g. Did it interfere with their progress towards their ideal self? Did they get stuck somehow because of it? What important things did they learn about self or others, or life itself, through having this difficult experience? Has anything useful come out of it?

To start this discussion, you can add some additional ratings to Drawing the Ideal Self rating scale. The following may be helpful but you may think of others that are related to the client's story:

Where would you put yourself on this scale before [difficult event] happened?

Where were you after it happened?

Where would your family members have put you on this scale before [difficult event] happened?

What about afterwards?

Where do you think you might have been now on this scale, if that hadn't happened to you?

Look at the parts of their story that they have identified as the worst parts and discuss why they were the worst. You will find that there are constructs to explore in more detail. There is very likely to be a link between the experience of distress and core construing (e.g. "I thought I was going to die!" "I thought I would never see my mum again!" "I thought they would hit me every day so I stopped going out."

Discuss why the experience might have been so difficult in relation what you know of the client's construing. This might help them to understand why the experience was so difficult. This should be done tentatively, trying out possible connections in a way that the client can refute. E.g. "I wonder if there is a connection between your views that a family is really important and supports you, and the possibility that your mum could die?" The discussion should enable the client to see connections so they can make sense of why their experience was distressing to them.

The final part of the work is to consider what useful aspects of the experience there might be. This could be anything but it is likely to relate to the total experience. E.g. they learned to cross roads more carefully; they realised that their life could continue even though something terrible happened to them; they realised that they wanted to help others not to be bullied. The idea is to pay attention to the future and to consider that there are other possible ways to construe themselves and the experience.

This is also a point where the therapist can offer reflections on what they have noticed through the facilitation of this technique. The therapist can also go back to Drawing the Ideal Self and ask the client where they think they might be in a year's time on the rating scale. This will provide an indication of whether they can anticipate that they will grow and move towards their ideal despite this difficult experience. It is helpful to explore what the factors might contribute to this anticipated move up or down the rating scale. This can lead into a discussion about what they or other people could do to support their future development.

If the client anticipates a decline in their development (i.e. moving towards the kind of person they do not want to be like) then the focus would be on trying to understand how they expect that might happen and who or what could minimise the decline. This would also mean looking for exceptions so that the impact may become more specific, rather than it being construed as having a construed in a more generalised effect. If that happens, you may be able to develop strategies to tackle the issue.

Example explanation of the technique for a report

This is one idea - you might have a better one but feel free to copy this is it is helpful.

The Belgrade Difficult Experience Comic Strip (Moran, 2020) was used to explore the impact of XX on XX. This involved three parts: first, an exploration of XX's view about him/herself as a person and his/her anticipated development; second, the creation of a comic strip explaining the difficult experience; third, the impact of the difficult experience on XX's sense of self and the identification of anything useful that could be drawn from having had such an experience.

A note about asking for drawings

If you work with someone who finds it difficult to make drawings, you might wish to invite a description instead. I suggest that you wait until you know that they are struggling with drawing part of the task, rather than offering it as an option at the beginning. If your client cannot be encouraged to draw, don't worry about that because you can write the description for them and use the same comic strip approach. It will be more difficult to 'view' the whole comic strip so it might help to give each one a short title related to what happened. Remember that you are trying to get the whole story down so do not get focussed on finding every detail otherwise you will not be able to reach that point.

Sharing this technique

I am always very happy to hear about how people use this technique and how/where when they find it useful. I have made this technique freely available so that it can be used without concern for the cost. My aim is to further the understanding and support for people who are struggling in some aspect of their lives. The more free techniques there are, the more easily they can be helped. I also believe that professionals should share what we know as much

as possible. I have benefitted enormously from the work of experts in the PCP world and I want to be able to make a contribution too. Please do tell other people if you find it helpful and give them a copy yourself or direct them download one from my website.

Training sessions or publications

This booklet may be used, copied and passed on free of charge, as long as it remains intact, with the cover and all pages included. Selling it is prohibited and that goes against my personal purpose - it must be free. It cannot be used as the main item in any course or training without my permission. However, I am unlikely to deny permission, especially if it is delivered to a public sector service, but I would like to know so that I can see whether professionals are finding it useful. It can be referenced with a link to my website to show people where they can find it: drawingtheidealsself.co.uk.

Modifying this technique

You may modify this technique to make a new development of it, but please reference my technique in your own work and provide a link to my website. This is how many so interesting techniques come into being and I would be delighted to hear about any modifications you make, mainly so that I can use them too!

Get in touch

I love to hear from people who are trying out my techniques, especially if you find they are useful. If you would like to email me, I will reply. There is sometimes a little delay before I get back to people, purely to do with volume of work so please don't take it personally! You can email me at drawingtheidealsself@icloud.com. Remember that you can also download other free PCP techniques from my website: drawingtheidealsself.co.uk.

Find out more

If you are interested in learning more about PCP or attending CPD days, go to the Coventry Constructivist Centre's website: <http://covpcp.com>. These are low cost because the organisation operated on a not for profit basis. Have a look at my website for more information about PCP: drawingtheidealsself.co.uk. The website also includes links to publications about this technique and to the PCP community.

There are two publications that might satisfy a developing interest in PCP without reading heavily academic texts:

Coventry Foundation Guide to Personal Construct Psychology: 2018 Edition.
Coventry Constructivist Group: <https://amzn.to/2BzFway>.

“This book is based on the 5 day foundation course in Personal Construct Psychology which is run on an annual basis in Coventry. The course is taught by Diane Allen, Peter Cummins, Heather Moran, Sally Robbins and Grant Weselby. Although this book was initially designed to be used with our course because it provides reading materials which are then expanded in course sessions, it can be used as a brief introduction to Personal Construct Psychology.”

A beginners guide to Personal Construct Therapy with Children and Young People, Heather Moran: <https://amzn.to/2tmBO3G>

“This introduction to using a Personal Construct Therapy approach with children and young people will be most useful to professionals who already have a some knowledge of Personal Construct Psychology and would like to know more about the practicalities of therapy. It might also be a starting point to readers who are trying to find out about therapy styles and want to see what a PCP therapist might do.

This book includes details that are not available in other texts. Heather Moran draws attention to issues around referrals, setting up for therapy and measuring progress. There is an explanation of what happens at the start, middle and end of an episode of Personal Construct Therapy. The book ends with some thoughts about how to write about therapeutic work. Sample letters and explanations are included. There are also explanations for six Personal Construct techniques which can be used in sessions, including two newly developed techniques, The Belgrade Difficult Experience Comic Strip Technique and The Super Simple Role Grid.”

*This technique was named at a PCP workshop in Belgrade.