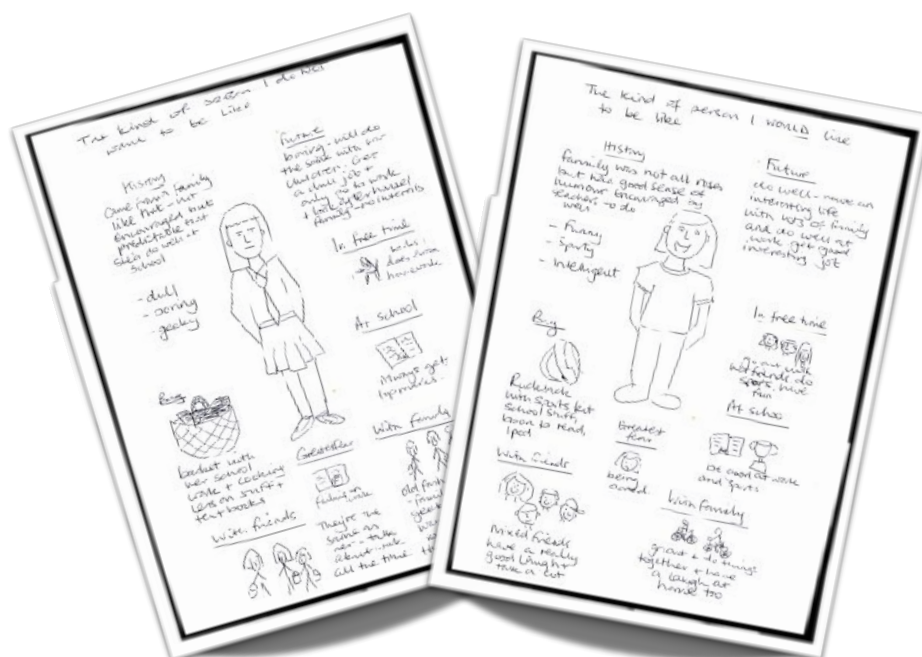# Drawing the Ideal Self

A PERSONAL CONSTRUCT PSYCHOLOGY TECHNIQUE TO EXPLORE SELF-ESTEEM

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MANUAL

Download the FREE SESSION PROMPT SHEET from drawingtheidealself.co.uk

Contents

Introduction

The aim of this book is to provide information and full instructions to professionals who want to use Drawing the Ideal Self (Moran, 2000). Drawing the Idea Self is based upon the theory of Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), developed by George Kelly in 1955 and used in clinical, social and occupational settings to guide clinical practice and as a research tool. It does not require knowledge of PCP to use this technique, although I would hope that it might inspire you to find out more. If you go to my website, you will be able to find links to other PCP sites and find more reading: drawingtheidealself.com.

If you have questions or ideas related to this technique, you can email me. I am always pleased to hear from people who have tried the technique and I will try to be helpful: drawingtheidealself@icloud.com.

For more information about PCP, look at the websites in the further reading section.

A very brief explanation of PCP

Kelly (1955) proposed that the theory of PCP applies to everyone, not just to 'clients' with 'problems'. At the time, that was quite a radical proposal. In a nutshell, the theory is that we each have unique, personal theories of life (called constructs) which are based upon our own experiences, and we behave in ways which make sense according to our personal theories. Kelly proposed that we actively interpret (i.e. construe) our experiences, making sense of them in the ways we know how, and they are always open to other interpretations by other people. They are also open to own reconstruction - such as when we decide that a best friend is actually not the person we thought they were.

Kelly suggested that we each have many theories (constructs) and we carry on our lives as if our theories are truths, rather than interpretations. This makes a lot of sense because to reconsider (reconstrue) at every turn would make life impossibly slow and complex. For example, if we had to decide each time we came across a person whether they were dangerous, we'd be stressed by the effort it would take. We are generally happy enough to use short cuts, such as a theory that people at work are usually safe, people who are with children are usually safe, elderly people are usually safe etc. Using these theories (constructions) is good enough for almost every occasion. The exceptions are interesting and surprising. In fact, when we notice exceptions we are expressing a theory very clearly. "I'm amazed that an 80 year old is a murderer!" tells us that the we have a clearly defined theory about 80 year olds and what they don't do. We complain about or celebrate the things that don't fit our constructions. We might tell a friend that we saw a child of three playing a tune on the piano, demonstrating our theory that the piano is difficult to play, that three year olds are not usually capable of such a feat, and that others are likely to share these constructions (or we wouldn't have mentioned it). That's a big theory wrapped up in a little sentence: "There was a brilliant three year old playing Love Me on the TV last night!"

Another important aspect of Kelly's theory is the idea that we construe our experiences in terms of what they are *AND* what they are not. However, we don't often bother to explain what something isn't. If we tell a child to be good at school we might mean 'don't fight, do your work and don't be cheeky'. We generally assume that people are on our wavelength and share our constructions. We sometimes discover that they don't, and then we realise that a word can have different meanings to different people. If the child says "But I *was* good!" on the day he has done no work, we realise that the child's construction of 'good' was not as elaborate as ours. We have a misunderstanding of each other which could be very problematic.

Sometimes we cannot see the sense in another's behaviour and attitudes so those people are problematic to us. In daily life we would usually describe them as *having* the problem, rather than the problem being our inability to see 'sense' in what they do. For example, "She has a dreadful problem with her temper!" could mean "I cannot work out when she is going to get really angry!" or "I can't understand why things annoy her so much!".

Another really important idea in PCP is that we are able to construe someone else's constructions. For example, we will be able to make a reasonable guess about how a good friend might interpret an experience. We are able to construe that person's constructions (theories) and imagine whether they would like a film we saw or whether they might like to borrow the book we have just read. In PCP, saying that we 'know' someone means that we can construe the way they construe. We might not agree with them and we don't have to share their interpretations, but we understand what sense they are likely to make of things. This is why we could say, "Oh, I know her! She is a pain in the neck!" Knowing and liking are not the same, although with friends we might assume that they are.

Drawing the Ideal Self is a way of trying to discover the 'sense' in the young person's behaviour and attitudes (i.e. to understand their construing). It is based upon Kelly's theory and in PCP terms it may be viewed as a technique to elaborate a self characterisation. The emphasis is upon trying to understand a person through understanding the way the person construes him or herself.

Although Kelly's Psychology of Personal Constructs (PCP) was published in 1955, there have only been a few books illustrating a PCP approach to working with children and adolescents (see my website for a reading list). The aim of this book is to add another technique to the therapist's tool box.

An explanation of my terms

I will refer here to 'young person' but please understand that this is unrelated to age so it includes children and young adults too. I will refer to 'interviewing' young people rather than 'talking' with them. To me, interviewing a child is a very purposeful activity, aiming to explore views and to develop understanding. I will also refer to 'therapy' as any work on ideas, feelings, and behaviour which helps to address the problems posed by the young person. I will use the term 'therapist' for the professional person who tries to help the child in a school, clinic, home or youth work setting. All of these are to help the text to flow.

About me

I am a consultant child clinical psychologist and I have been working with children with psychological problems since 1979, in various guises (residential social worker, teacher, foster carer, educational psychologist and clinical psychologist) with the vast majority of my work being as a practising psychologist working with children and families. I use Personal Construct Psychology in all areas of my everyday work.

Equipment and setting considerations

Equipment

Very little equipment is needed for Drawing the Ideal Self. The therapist and child each need a black pen to ensure that the finished pictures are easily photocopied in case the child wants to take them home. The only other equipment is three sheets of A4 paper. For the first two parts of the technique, the paper needs to be in portrait orientation. For the third part (the rating scale), the paper should be in landscape orientation. At first, the therapist may wish to have the step-by-step instruction sheet available as a prompt (available as a separate download from my website).

The setting

Care needs to be taken with the environment, making sure that there is equality between therapist and child, and that the task can be completed without interruptions. It is vital that the process is allowed to develop its own flow during the session, so a quiet, private place is essential. Allow an hour to complete the whole process but bear in mind that some children will need to complete the task in chunks. There are three natural parts to the process, so the child might have three separate sessions if it cannot be completed in one go. It is best to complete chunks rather than to halt at the point the time runs out, so note how time is passing and make any breaks fit with the chunk points. Experience suggests that most children are able to complete the task in one session, providing the therapist keeps to task too. It can be very tempting to explore issues as they arise in the process but it is much better to wait until the task is completed. Make a mental note of things you might like to return to, and wait until the whole task is complete.

The seating positions in this exercise are important. This is a shared, co-operative task involving taking turns with the child. It involves the sharing paper, ideally without moving it much. Therefore, the best seating position is at right angles to the child, at a desk or table. If the child is right-handed, the best place for the therapist is to sit on the left of the child.

This makes it easier to observe the child drawing without it being too intrusive. It also allows the child to read what the therapist has written without having to turn the paper around completely.

Rationale

A child never enters this type of interview situation as an entirely unknown person. The therapist will have others' constructions of the child from their referral, whether that came in the form of a chat about the child or a written referral. Drawing the Ideal Self is a way of helping the child to express his personal views about himself, in an effort to address this imbalance. Adults would not tolerate being defined (construed) entirely by other people, but adults do not always afford children the same respect. This technique helps children to have a say about their own development, both how it has been and how they would like it to proceed. This can run parallel to adults' views on similar matters, and can shed light upon why the child is not developing in the ways adults might expect, prefer or hope.

The aim of Drawing the Ideal Self is not to focus on problems, but to gently explore the child's construction of the *'kind of person they would not want to be like'* and the contrasting *'kind of person they would like to be like'*. The purpose is to gain an understanding of how the child feels he compares to *his* ideal self. This provides a very personal measure of self esteem. However, the task avoids asking direct questions about the self until later in the process.

It is important that the therapist does the writing. Children are more likely to use more limited vocabulary and provide less information if they know they will be writing what they have to say, so the task is designed to remove this restriction. The therapist's job here is to provide the role of scribe, writing what the child says and using their words without interpretation.   It is essential that the child's words are transcribed exactly because otherwise their personal meanings will be lost. This way, the child is also free to use words in his personal ways, which is particularly useful when working with children with autism spectrum disorder and language disorders. If the child does use unexpected combinations of words or invented words that are similar to real words, the therapist can simply ask what they mean by what they say. For example, one child described the kind of boy he wanted

to be like as "kindful" and "superstitious". He was asked to explain his meanings in a way which did not suggest that he was incorrect in his use of language, something which was crucial to helping him to feel comfortable with the process: ***That's interesting, what do <u>you</u> mean by kindful, because everyone has their own meanings of words?*** This child said that kindful meant "very kind" which might have been guessed accurately. The child's explanation of superstitious was less expected: he said, "Like a super boy" and then explained the role of a superhero. Although his use of the word was idiosyncratic, it could be understood by asking him to explain and did not cause a problem once I knew what he meant.

The chapters which follow take the reader step-by-step through Drawing the Ideal Self. It will include instructions and explanations so that the reader can try it out. I recommend that the first trial is of the reader on themselves, then on someone who is not a client. This will allow the therapist to experience the technique from both views and decide whether it valid and is something they want to use, and to develop some proficiency in its use. The example here is clearly a girl but all instructions are clearly modifiable for male and female children.

Step 1: Exploring the non-ideal self

Figure 1. Example of Step 1

The kind of person I do NOT want to be like

History
Came from a family like that – not encouraged but predictable that she'd do well at school

- dull
- boring
- geeky

Bag
basket with her school work + cooking less on stuff + text books

With friends

Future
boring – will do the same with her children. Get a dull job + only go to work + look after house/ family – no interests

In free time
works + does extra homework

At school
Always gets top marks.

Greatest fear
failing on work

They're the same as her – talk about work all the time

With family
old fashioned – family are geeky too watch TV together all the time

Initially, the child is asked to explore the kind of person they do *not* want to be like. This is deliberate: it is more difficult to think about changing in the future if there is no baseline to move from. This way, the child elaborates the less desired pole of the construct first, and each step finds (elicits) new constructs. During the process, constructs will be elicited about relationships with family, friends and education. There will be illumination of the child's personal theories about child development and the way in which childhood experiences are connected to opportunities in the future. The child will also be asked to talk about something they fear could interfere with their progress towards the kind of person they would like to be like.

The child can be introduced to the technique with something like this explanation:

> I would like to get to know you better so that I can get a better idea of how to help you. I'd like to know how you want to be in the future and then I can see how I can help you get there. I will ask you to do some quick sketches and I will do some writing. Are you willing to have a go?

The non-ideal character

In the first step of Drawing the Ideal Self, the child is asked: ***First think about the kind of person you would not like to be like. This is not a real person, but someone from your imagination.*** The therapist writes *The kind of person I would not like to be like* at the top of the page. The child is invited to ***make a quick sketch of the kind of person you would not like to be like in the middle of this page.*** There are lots more pictures to go on the page, so the initial sketch cannot take up the whole page. It helps to indicate where and how much space you would like the child to use. Sometimes children want to draw very detailed pictures but they should be encouraged to sketch (meaning draw a quick picture, not a work of art). Coloured pens are not offered because some children will take a long time making decisions about colour, trying to mix colours to get the right shade or colouring in small details. This would make the task take a lot longer and it is not necessary for the purpose of eliciting constructs.

It is important that the gender of the characters the child draws is decided by the child, so the use of person rather than boy or girl can be helpful. Sometimes the two characters are opposite genders, or one character is the opposite gender to the child. This makes it possible for gender roles or sexuality to be an issue which is expressed and emerges naturally from the process.   It is also possible that the characters will not be human, although they will be given personalities. For the purpose of Drawing the Ideal Self, this is not a problem. The therapist must 'go with the flow' from the child, showing curiosity rather than surprise so that the child is not put off. Sometimes it will be necessary to wait until the whole task is complete before drawing attention to surprising elements such as gender or sexual differences. Construing oneself in terms of gender is part of core construing, so it is likely to be an important issue to follow up if the child indicates that he would like to be very like the opposite gender.

After the character is drawn, the child is asked ***What kind of person is this?   How would you describe this person you wouldn't like to be like?*** The therapist writes the child's descriptions next to the sketch, as in Figure 1. Encourage the child to think of three or so descriptions and take care to write exactly what the child says. Do not change the child's grammar because you might inadvertently alter the child's meaning. It is easiest to write these descriptions in bullet point format. If the child gives only physical descriptions, ask him ***What kind of person is he/she? What is their personality like?***   If no psychological constructs are given after that, just continue using whatever descriptions the child gives. There are some children to whom physical descriptions are very important and may imply other constructs which are psychological. For example, a child with an eating disorder might give constructs *fat, ugly and heavy* to describe the kind of person he would not like to be like. Later (but not now because the flow of this exercise would be lost), each of those constructs could be explored in more detail, leading to other psychological constructs.   For example, asking *What are fat people like?* could lead to *lonely and miserable*.   The aim of Drawing the Ideal Self is to produce a complete portrait, working through from start to finish. We can always return to explore things in more detail later in the session, or in a further session.

Now details are gradually added to build up a picture of this person the child would <u>not</u> like to be like. This will be done through a number of further questions. The child will be asked to provide details of this imaginary person's lifestyle. In each case, the child will be asked to draw something to illustrate the answer to the question. The complete picture of *the kind of person I would not like to be like* will be made up of a number of small, labeled sketches. These will explore the child's life at home and school, her fears, and her theories about past development and predictions for the future. The sketches will be drawn around their main drawing of the person. When the pictures are finished, they will be compared and this is much easier to do if the additional sketches are in similar positions on the page. I usually work anticlockwise, from a nine o'clock position, with the final part being written at the top of the page. This results in a layout as shown in Figure 1. The order of these elements of the character is not fixed, except for the initial three descriptions and the final two items, History and Future. These need to come at the end of the process because the charcterisation needs to have been be developed for those parts to make sense.   Just remember the order you have used and keep to it for the second picture in the process.

Bag

The exploration of the person's behaviour and constructs begins with asking about the contents of that child's bag. This is deliberately chosen: all children need a school bag and its contents will reflect their interests, preferences and personal constructs.   The child is asked to draw (under the title <u>Bag)</u> this person's bag and its contents with something like: ***Everyone has a bag: what would a girl like this have in her bag? Remember she is the kind of girl you wouldn't like to be like who is .... (insert constructs from the child's description). Sketch her bag and what she has in it here.*** Point to the place on the page where you want the child to draw. Depending on the child's drawing ability, you may need to label the items in the bag but if you do this in a matter of fact manner the child will not be aware that it is because their drawings are unclear.   I would usually say, something like, ***ok, so let me jot down what she has*** and write them next to the drawings. This does not draw attention to why you are labelling them.

Birthday present

Next, the child is asked to develop this imaginary girl's character by suggesting a present this person would like for her birthday. This is an important part of a child's life and an opportunity to express character. The kind of person who would like a gun might be very different from the one who would like a Barbie doll. Write another title, _Birthday Present,_ and ask the child to **think again about the kind of girl you would not like to be like, and sketch a present she would like.** Indicate to the child to draw under the title. Ask the child why she would like that present and write the answer next to his sketch.

Family

The next task is to set this imaginary girl in the context of a family. Ask the child to **draw something to show how a girl like this gets on with her family** underneath a new title _With Family_. Ask the child to explain her sketch and write what she says next to the drawing.

Friendships

All children will have some social relationships with other children. They may or may not have friends but all children relate to others with varying degrees of success. Write the next title _With Friends_ and ask the child **how would a girl who is ...…(insert constructs) get on with friends? Sketch something to show what she is like.** Write the child's description next to her drawing.

Greatest fear

Now write the title _Greatest Fear_. Say to the child something like **Everyone is afraid of something. What would a girl like this be afraid of? Draw her greatest fear here.** Ask the child why this kind of girl would be afraid of what she has drawn and write down what she says. This may reveal common fears (like spiders) or fears more connected with the character of the girl he does not want to be like (like being shot by a rival gang).

History

The next area to explore the child's understanding of the development of this girl she does not want to be like. This often brings up some interesting theories about influences, determinism, fate and the importance of experiences. Write the title *History* and ask the child to tell you ***How did this ...(insert constructs) girl get to be like this? Was she born like this or did something happen to make her like this? Tell me what you think?*** Write down, word for word, what the child says.

Future

Finally, explore the child's views about how a person's character interacts with their past to leads to their future. The child is asked, ***What kind of future will this person have? How will things work out for her?*** Write down what the child says under the title *Future*. This question often illuminates the possibilities the child faces if she does turns out to be like this girl she does *not* want to be like. It can reveal the fears of the child and perhaps also the threats other people (e.g. parents or teachers) may have made in an effort to motivate the child to change (such as, "If you carry on like *that* you will end up lonely/in prison/unemployed/dead!").
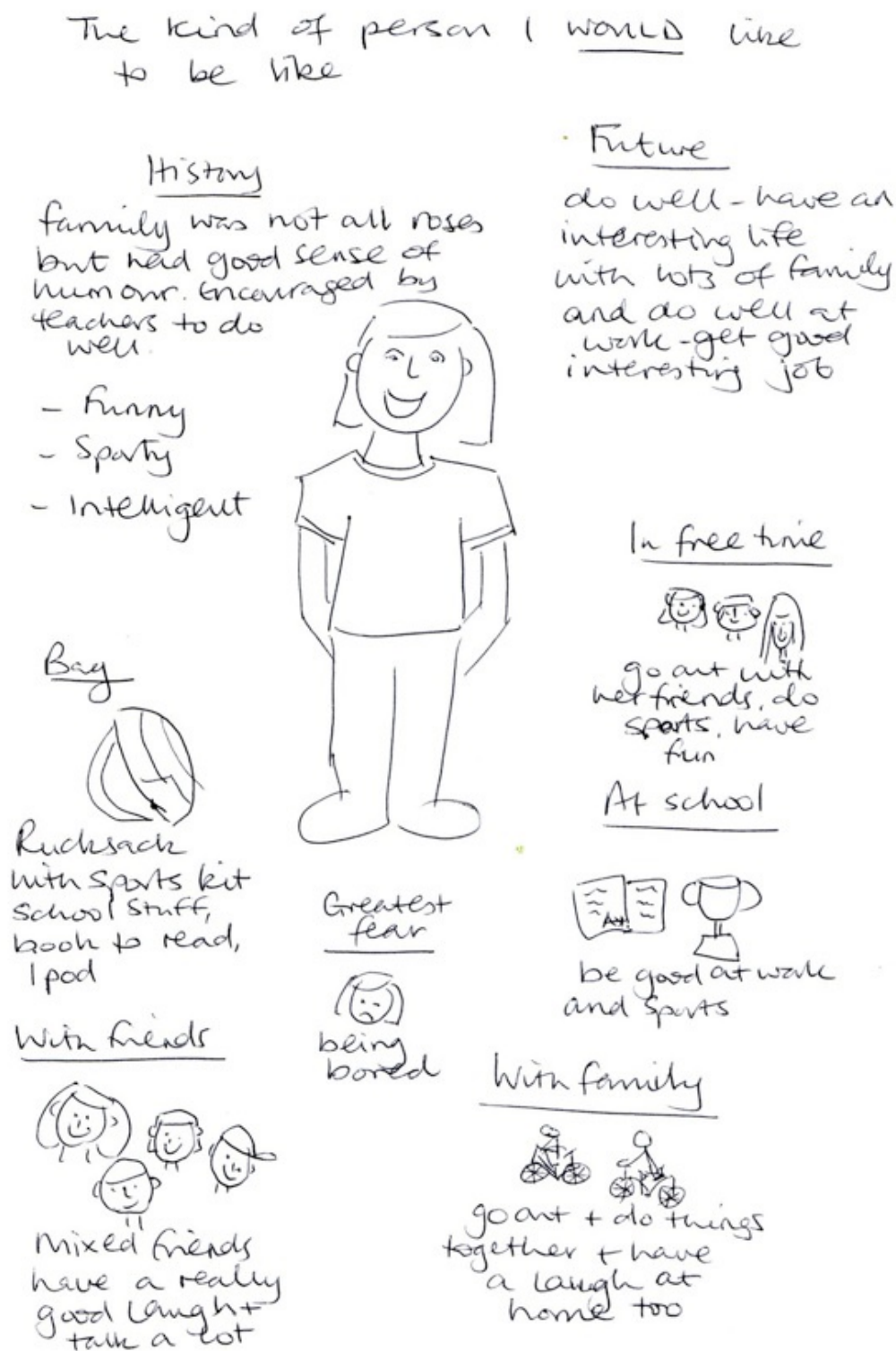
The final picture should look coherent and complete. Put this to one side, preferably upside down so that it is truly out of sight. This is so that the child will not merely make the most obvious contrast without considering possibilities, working with an exactness which would not necessarily be a more elaborative choice. If the child chooses a contrast which is very obvious then that is fine but we don't want to push them in that direction.

Step 2: Exploring the ideal self

The next step is to explore *the kind of person I would like to be like*.   An example is given in Figure 2. In PCP terms this is means elaborating the contrast pole of the construct. To do this, go through the same steps to create a picture this alternative person which could be described as an ideal self.   Say something like, **Now let's have a look at the kind of person you <u>would</u> like to be like.   Think about what she might be like.   Again, this isn't a real person, but it could be made up of bits of people you have met, or it could be from your imagination.**   While the child is thinking, write the title *The kind of girl I would like to be like* at the top of a new piece of A4 paper (in portrait orientation). At the end of the process, these two pictures will be compared, so take care to place items in similar places on the page.   Start at the same place on the page as in the first picture and proceed in the same direction (anticlockwise, from 9 o'clock).   There is not usually any problem with this. The instructions seem to set up the expectation of a pattern matching the first picture.

Go through the same process as for the first picture, using the same headings. Experience suggests that making the second picture is quicker than the first, with children being more able to construe how the process works and what is expected of them.

Figure 2: Example of Step 2

The kind of person I would like to be like

History
family was not all roses but had good sense of humour. Encouraged by teachers to do well.

- Funny
- Sporty
- Intelligent

Bag

Rucksack with sports kit school stuff, book to read, I pod

With friends

Mixed friends have a really good laugh + talk a lot

Greatest fear

being bored

Future
do well - have an interesting life with lots of family and do well at work - get good interesting job

In free time

go out with her friends, do sports, have fun

At school

be good at work and sports

With family

go out + do things together + have a laugh at home too

Step 3: Rating scale

The last step in Drawing the Ideal Self is an exploration of the child's view of herself. This is the way to find out what the child thinks she is like <u>now</u>, and at various points in time (past and future).   The rating scale part of this process is crucial: it connects the two pictures in the exercise. Together, the three pictures make a sensible whole which is rich in information about the child's view of herself.   It is a way of the child explaining her development, her ambitions for her development and her experience of movement towards and away from the Ideal Self over time. Later in this part of the process the child is invited to explore her theories about those experiences which have influenced her development. She will be asked about her anticipation of how her development will proceed, and what she and others could do to support her development towards her Ideal Self. First, take the two pictures which have been completed in steps 1 and 2 and place them on the table in front of the child, with *the kind of girl I would not like to be like* on her left, and *the kind of girl I would like to be like* on her right. Take a third piece of A4 paper in landscape orientation and place it in between the two pictures as in Figure 3. Draw a line across that page (linking the two pictures) - this will be the rating scale. Make sure that the line does not go to the edge of the paper because you may need to write above the end points (and it is better for photocopying/scanning).

Figure 3: Layout of the three pages, ready for the rating scale

The kind of person I would *not* like to be like

The kind of person I *would* like to be like

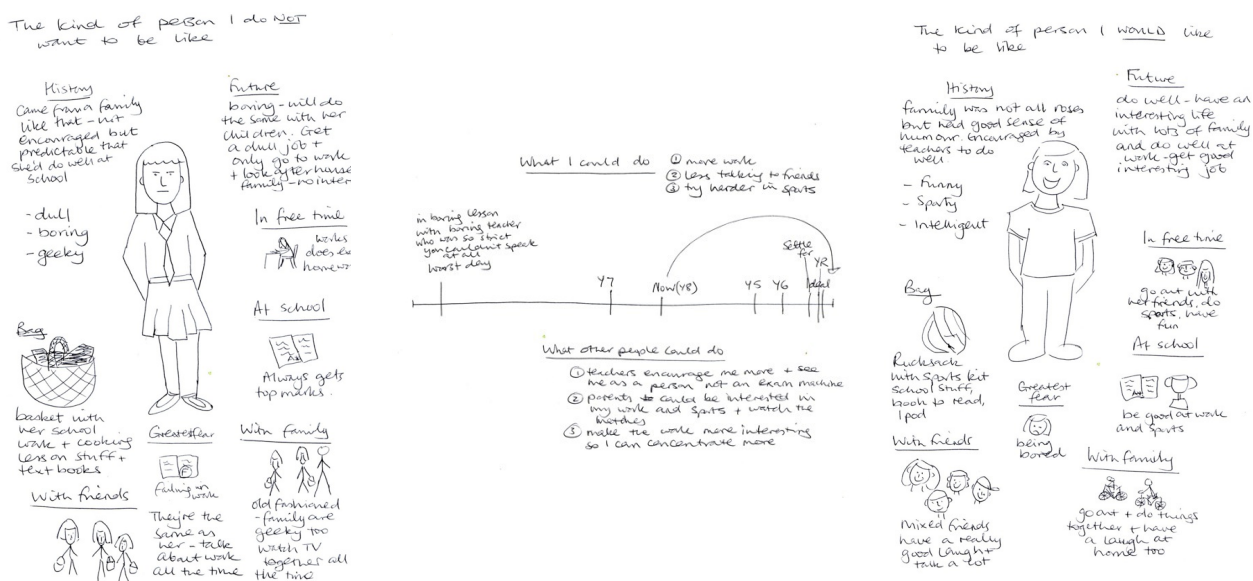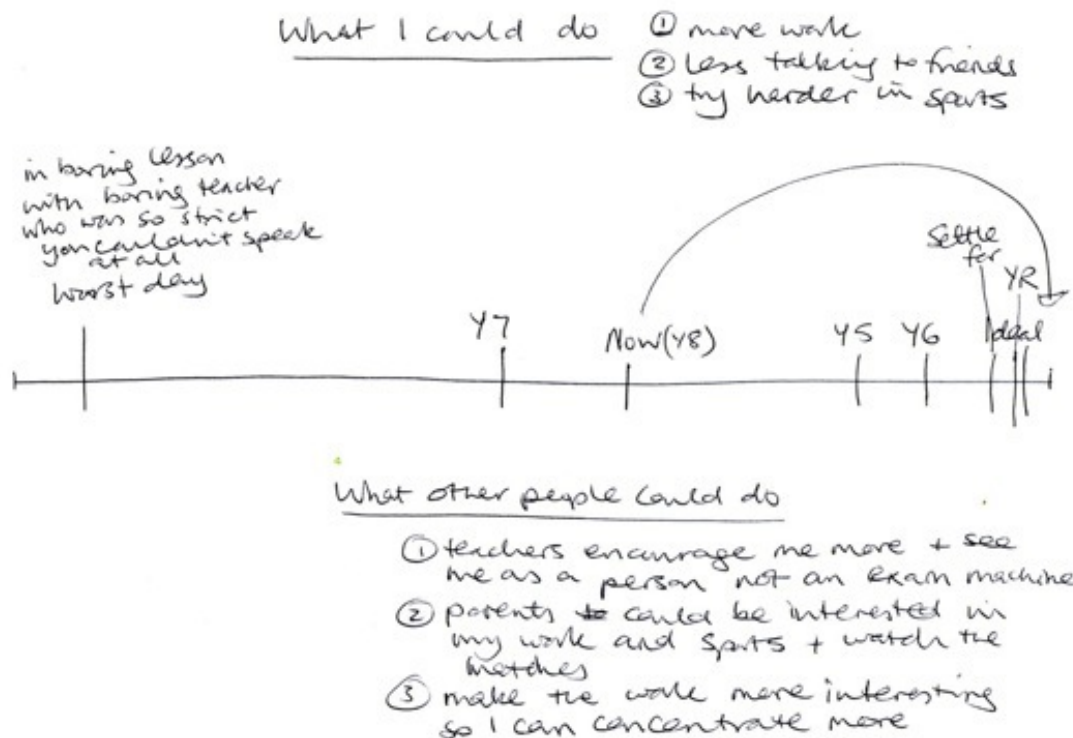Figure 4: Completed Drawing the Ideal Self

Figure 5: Completed rating scale

Explain this final step to the child: ***Now let's get an idea of where you think you are on this scale. We have the kind of girl you don't want to be like here, (point to the picture on the left), and the kind of girl you would like to be like here (point to the picture on the right). Think about what you have been like recently, for most of the time. Put a line like this*** *(demonstrate a short vertical line which crosses the rating scale)* ***to show where you usually are.*** When the child has drawn their line, write <u>Now</u> above the line. Next, ask the child to rate the place they would like to be: ***Where would you like to be on this line, in an ideal world?*** Mark this rating <u>Ideal</u>.   This is the <u>*Ideal Self*</u> rating. Notice the difference between the Now and Ideal ratings. Is the child pretty much like they want to be? Is the child a long way away? It is important to remember that this is a self-created scale for that individual child and the distance between points will become clearer as they add additional rating points. Therefore, it will be better to notice the difference and not to comment aloud at this stage.

Encourage the child to consider whether they need to become exactly like their Ideal Self: ***If you can't get all the way there, what would you settle for? Put a mark on the line to show what would be ok for you.*** Mark this rating <u>*Settle For*</u>. Some children will insist that this rating is in the same place as their <u>Ideal</u> rating, and others will be able to make another, less extreme point on the scale. If the rating is in the same place, mark it at the same point, writing <u>*Settle For*</u> above the <u>*Ideal*</u> rating. It is interesting to note whether the child will settle for less than perfection in their personal development. The child who aims very high is more likely to experience disappointment with herself and this might be linked with intense feelings of distress (e.g. anger, anxiety, urges to self harm) if she sees herself as failing to be the person she wants to be.   In PCP terms, this is a risk of invalidation - her most important theories about the kind of person she wants to be are threatened.

Next, ask the child to ***Think about your worst ever day, whenever that was. Where have you been on this scale? Have you ever been more like the kind of girl you don't want to be like?*** *(point to the kind of girl she does not want to be like).* ***How close have you got to her?*** Put a line on the scale. Mark this <u>*Worst Day*</u>. This rating shows how close the child has been to this undesired pole of the construct. It is very interesting to see the

child's reaction to this: often I see a wry smile, showing that she is well aware that she is able to move along this construct of self, according to circumstances.   Make a comment about the distance, retaining a curious, interested approach e.g. ***That's a long way from where you want to be/That's quite close to where you are now./So you have been right down there, exactly the way you don't actually want to be***.   Notice the child's response, but do not get involved in a big discussion at this point.   The art to this part of the process is to keep going without missing an opportunity to let the child know that you are finding their ratings very interesting.

Now place other points in time on the rating scale.   I usually ask children to think in terms of school years because they are naturally defined points in time and schools make much of the differences between the school years.   Generally, it is a good to have about half a dozen additional ratings to show progress over time. The aim is for them to rate each point in time as a separate element, so it is helpful to remind the child that ratings will not necessarily show uninterrupted progress towards their ideal.   In my experience, children make comparisons thoughtfully. They will move their rating points up (towards their ideal rating) and down (towards non-ideal) without prompting because they recognise that their progress is related to their context.

The decision about which time points to rate is somewhat arbitrary, but within the constraint of being able to show change (or not) over long enough periods. This means that the task can be tailored to the age and experience of the individual child.   For a younger child, it is possible to ask her to rate the points such as before school, reception/first school year, and then each year in school to their current year.   For older children, ask for a before attending school rating, and then pick time points spread across their school career (e.g. Reception, Year 3, Year 6, Year 7, Year 9).   Try to pick times with significance in school careers, such as times which involved adjustment to a change or a particular challenge such as examinations. These are times at which children are overtly construed by teachers and parents often in terms of their psychological characteristics and their academic ability (e.g. as *average, slow, adjusted to school, lazy, confident*).   Comparing the 'before school' rating with other ratings allows some evaluation of the impact of moving away from the family and entering school life with new ways of being construed. The therapist might also

wish to explore the impact of experiences she thinks are relevant to that child's development, such as an accident, a change of home circumstances or a change in close relationships (e.g. a move into foster care, a road accident, a death). The therapist can use her knowledge of the child's life to decide what to include here.   Simply add in some additional rating points, e.g. **W*here were you on this line when you went into foster care?*** *e.g.* ***Where were you after you came out of hospital?*** Depending upon the problem, the therapist may also want to explore how the child thinks others see her. Ask the child to mark where significant others would say she was: ***Where would dad say you were? What about mum? Where would your friends put you? Where would your teacher say you were?*** It is important to distinguish these ratings from the child's self-ratings. It can help to write the labels for these below the line (rather than above) so that things are clear at a glance. As long as the rating points are clearly labelled there should be no problem even if there are a quite a lot of ratings points on the scale.

When the all the rating points have been placed, take a good look at the total picture. What does it say overall? Is there a large gap between the way the child's view of herself and the way she wants to be? This provides a very personal measure of self esteem.   If there is a big difference, we can expect that the child won't feel good about that difference. In contrast, if the child is satisfied with the way she sees herself now, then 'therapy' is unlikely to lead to significant or permanent changes in behaviour.   In my experience, those children who have rated themselves as already being like their ideal have remained unaffected by the efforts of other people to change them. They have been comfortable with themselves regardless of the problems other people would see them as having. This was really useful information and served as an excellent predictor of the likelihood of significant changes in behaviour over a few years. In such a situation, I would heed the warning that the child is not seeking therapy and switch clients and work with parents or teachers, working with someone else in the child's network who *is* seeking change.

The rating scale is deliberately uncalibrated, with no numbers on it at all. This allows for personal interpretation of distance between ratings. It means that the child considers distance in relation to points she has placed on the scale rather than being focussed on what a difference between numbers might mean. Therefore, it is not relevant to calculate numerical scores from her ratings. This retains the emphasis on the child's very personal way of construing, without the temptation to compare the scores of two children, or to interpret similarities between children as suggesting something about children in general. This technique is not designed to be norm-referenced and to do so would make it into something different. There is a very good PCP self esteem scale which is norm-referenced (see Bultler & Green, 2007), if that is what you are seeking.

The Drawing the Ideal Self technique will provide a personal rating of the *child's view* of her own self-esteem, where self-esteem is the difference between the way she wants to be and the way she construes herself as being. The interpretation of the difference must be decided in agreement with the child. If the gap between Ideal and Now looks big to you, ask the child what she thinks, e.g. ***You seem to be a long way from the way you want to be, is that right? Is it difficult for you not being like you want to be?*** The reason for asking the child is that it may not be a problem for her, even if you feel that the gap would be intolerable. A child may see the distance as expected or reasonable, and have an anticipation of being able to reach their ideal without too much difficulty. She might expect that she will reach it by the time she needs to or that age will necessarily lead to development in the desired direction. It is interesting to add an additional question about <u>when</u> the child would like to reach that point. If the gap is large and the child feels that she really wants to reach that point within a short time frame, then there is a risk that she could become disheartened and feel a strong sense of failure, in her own terms.

Do not ignore the <u>*Settle For*</u> rating. This can be as important as the <u>*Ideal*</u>. It may be that the child is able to think of an ideal position, yet feel comfortable with the fact that they may not reach it. Another child might have their <u>*Ideal*</u> and <u>*Settle For*</u> ratings located in the same place on the scale. This suggests that there is no flexibility in their ambitions, but remember to check out with the child whether this is actually the case. The child might wish to reach the point she will <u>*Settle For*</u> within a much shorter time frame than it would take her

to attain the <u>*Ideal*</u> position. Depending upon what this position would be like (i.e. what the child would be like at this position, how much change would be required and how much of that is within the child's control), this could be realistic or problematic.

The next part of Drawing the Ideal Self is to explore movement between some of the key points on the rating scale, starting with the difference between the way the child is now and the way she wants to be. On the rating scale, the therapist connects the two points, making a link between <u>*Now*</u> and <u>*Ideal*</u>. Physically, the connection is shown by drawing an arc with an arrow between the two. (See the example in Fig. 5.) Explain to the child that you are interested in this difference with something like, ***Let's have a look at the difference between these two. You are here now,*** *(starting at the <u>Now</u> point, drawing an arc over the top of the scale to <u>Ideal</u>)*, ***and you want to be here, at your ideal. Tell me three things other people could do to help you to get there.*** Above the arc, write <u>*3 things others can* do</u> and write the three things the child tells you, each with a separate numbered bullet point. Sometimes, I ask the child to tell me something their parents could do, something their teachers could do and something their friends could do to help the child to become more like the person she wants to be. This provides a little more focus but it may not be necessary. If the child says that she can't think of anything, I would write a question mark for that item. It is useful for the therapist to know that the child has no idea *who* can help them to change or *how* they might be helped. It could be very important to let adults (parents/teachers etc) know that the child cannot see a way forward. If the child has a view of what might be done, then intervention is more likely to succeed if it includes the things the child suggests. For example, if the child says that her teachers could help her by giving her better marks for work, it would be helpful if teachers knew this information and could consider the way they give feedback in their marking. Maybe a new marking scheme could be worked out with the child so that she could to get the kind of feedback she needed?

Next, the child will be encouraged to consider her part in determining her own development. Write <u>*3 things I can do*</u> next to the arc between <u>*Now*</u> and <u>*Ideal*</u> and the child to ***tell me three things you can do to help yourself get from here*** (point to <u>*Now*</u>) ***to here*** (point to <u>*Ideal*</u>) ***and become more like your the person you want to be.*** Jot down the child's answers as three separate numbered points. Again, if the child cannot make a

suggestion, write a question mark next to the number. This is very important information, perhaps indicating a sense of helplessness.

In my experience, most children are able to come up with ideas about how make changes in their lives and these are often exactly the sort of things adults might suggest to them. This has proved to be very helpful to parents and teachers who can then encourage the child to follow her own plan, rather than telling her to follow their plan. Even though the things the child will be doing are very similar, the sense of agency might make a significant difference to what that feels like to a child, especially to one who has found herself to be in trouble with adults.   The child's suggestions might be used as targets, leading to a discussion of how they could be achieved. The suggestions for other people could be used to help them to support the child's movement towards to kind of person he would like to be. The child's own suggestions will have much more meaning and this can avoid adult-dominated contracting which is sometimes tried as a solution to behavioural problems. The child's proper engagement in the process of addressing problems will increase the likelihood of success.

What to do with the completed task

Drawing the Ideal Self yields a lot of information and it is not necessary (or advisable) to work through every area as part the information the child has provided as part of a therapy programme.   The completed Drawing the Ideal Self is an impression of the child's view. The best thing is to pick out things which could be important, relevant and interesting, based upon your knowledge of the child's problems and her view of herself.   There is no hard and fast rule about this so you can be guided by the child's reaction but do bear in mind throughout the discussions that you are trying to understand the child's view in order to help others understand her more.   You also must remember to adopt a credulous approach, not contradicting the child, nor telling her that her view is wrong in any way.   If you know that other people (usually adults) would be surprised by what the child has said, that is well worth a discussion to discover whether the child is aware of the difference of opinion and the reaction she anticipates from adults who will see her pictures or hear what she has said.   The idea is to discuss the sense you have made of the child's Drawing the Ideal Self and connect it with what you already know about her.   An essential part of this is to check out your view with the child so that you can be corrected if necessary.   Don't be tempted to miss this part out, even a young child will appreciate you explaining what sense you have made of their work.

Reporting Drawing the Ideal Self

The child will need to give permission for her information to be shared. It is helpful to tell the child that your job is to help people to help her; and that they will be able to do that better if they understand her views.   Suggest to the child how you might explain this to those people who have made the referral (e.g. parents and teachers). Check whether you will also be able to show the pictures, so it helps them to understand the child's views (this is the most powerful way to explain what has been done). If you are to write a report, it is in keeping with the PCP approach to tell the child what will go into the report and why.

The aim of the following section is to suggest a format for reporting Drawing the Ideal Self. It is not the only way to report, but it might provide a starting point for you try and then you can develop a style which is more to suited your particular style and needs. The first paragraph provides a short and simple explanation of the technique.   This may be freely copied if credited. The second part gives an outline of what might be included and what to pay particular attention to.

Explanation of Drawing the Ideal Self for reports

This assessment of (child's name)'s views used a technique called Drawing the Ideal Self (Moran, 2001), which is based upon Personal Construct Psychology (Kelly, 1955). The aim was to explore (child's name)'s personal views of (his/her) own development, particularly focussing upon personal ambitions for (himself/herself) in the future, and the kind of person (he/she) would like to become.   The technique used a combination of drawing and dictation to elaborate (child's name)'s views, and a rating scale to provide a very personal measure of self-esteem.   It explored the kind of relationships with family and friends that (child's name) would like to have in the future, and how (he/she) would like to get on at school. It elicited (child's name)'s views of the way personal history affects future development, and (child's name)'s fears about what could interfere with (him/her) becoming the kind of person (child's name) would like be.   The outcomes of the assessment have

been discussed with (child's name) and (he/she) has given permission for these to be shared in this report.

Main points to be included in the report

Pictures and constructs

Include the description of the kind of person the child would like to be like, and the kind of person he/she would not like to be like. Make sure that these descriptions are exactly what the child said, rather than your own interpretation. Comment upon how this compares with information from other sources (especially noting major differences) and whether the child's ambitions are likely to be socially desirable.

Summarise the kind of relationships the child would like to have with family, friends, and school. Note anything significant about fears of the kind of person he/she would like to be like. Draw attention to anything which might indicate that the child would prefer to stay as he/she is or to become very different.

Describe any significant the links between the history and future of both characters. Often this is where children show awareness of those life experiences which have not been good for their development.

Rating Scale

Report on the comparison between the self now and the ideal self – comment upon whether there is a large gap between *Now* and *Ideal* and whether he/she would settle for anything other than *Ideal*. This is the self-esteem measure and it will need some explanation. If the child is very unlike the way he/she wants to be, it would be reasonable to expect the child to feel at least uncomfortable with their own development. If there is very little difference, then it is unlikely that the child will wish to change their behaviour. In such circumstances it is often more fruitful (i.e. quicker and more likely to work) to work with the carers or teachers, helping them to adjust the way they deal with the child because they are the people who want to see changes. Explain this in the report if the child does not seem to be seeking change

and make some suggestions for what might help, based upon what you now know about the child.

Report word-for-word what the child thinks will he/she and others could do to help him/her become more like their *Ideal*. Explain the direction of changes between rating points and the reasons the child gave for the change. If the child is critical of adults in this, it will need some careful handling in the report to avoid polarising the views of both parties. Report any differences between the way the child thinks various people would rate her. Be tactful if the child's ratings might be a surprise to other people.

Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, present a summary of the assessment, particularly emphasising whether the child is seeking to change and whether that change would be in the same direction as the adults are seeking. The therapist can then make suggestions for the direction and focus of any further work. Your recommendations will be based upon what you have understood to be the problems and any barriers affecting movement.   It is helpful to highlight how the adults can support in ways which will make sense to the child (e.g. Jane wants to be able to show how helpful she can be so allocating her a regular helping role within the class would be useful).

Copies

You may want to copy your report to parents and to other professionals. As long as the child is comfortable with them seeing a copy, I would argue that the more people can understand the child, the better they will be able to help him/her.

Repeating Drawing the Ideal Self with the same child

Drawing the Ideal Self is not norm-referenced so repeating it is not a problem. The results provide a snapshot of construing about the self and it will show some core construing. Core construing does not change quickly so repeating DiS may not be useful within a short time-frame. Construing will develop in relation to experiences, so points of transition are likely to lead to the development of many new constructs and to the consolidation of some previous construing. For example, moving into secondary education is likely to have a significant impact on the construing of self. Upsetting experiences are likely to lead to significant changes in construing, such as a bereavement or a road accident. In the same way, pleasant surprises and success will have an impact on self-construing (e.g. exam success, winning a competition, performing in a show).

Repeated similar experiences will lead to construing becoming more and more connected to core construing. For example, repeated bullying or repeated failure or success in a particular situation. This applies to the construing of self as a learner of particular school subjects. It would be expected that construing of self would develop and change over time so repeating Drawing the Ideal Self might be really useful after a while. However, unless something has happened to lead to a change in construing, it might not be the best use of time. It is likely to be more useful to use the DiS rating scale and add more ratings to it, using the method described above.

Sharing Drawing the Ideal Self

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.

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! If you look on my website, you will find links to published research using variations on Drawing the Ideal Self.

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: drawingtheidealself.co.uk.

Get in touch or find out more

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 drawingtheidealself@icloud.com. Remember that you can also download other free PCP techniques from my website: drawingtheidealself.co.uk.

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: drawingtheidealself.co.uk. The website also includes links to publications about this technique and to the PCP community.

There are two publications to take develop an 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."

References

Kelly, G. A. (2013): The Psychology of Personal Constructs (Volumes 1 & 2). Routledge.

The full theory and lots of examples. Please note that the language and style are of its time (the original edition was 1955) but this does not prevent it being such a useful book.

Vol. 1: https://amzn.to/363iKFZ

Vol. 2: https://amzn.to/2PkpeKC