

## TALKING ABOUT PROBLEMS OR CONCERNS

This way of thinking or talking about problems below can be used for yourself or with others. It is called **externalising** the problem. Others have found it a helpful way to explore problems, the effects in their lives and to find ways to move forward.

There are 4 parts:

- Choosing a **name** for the problem or concern that is non-blaming, it is a particular name you or you and others come up with that is agreed on by you both. The name can be playful or non-blaming and this does not decrease the seriousness of the concern. *Naming the problem*
- Exploring the **effects** of the problem in many areas of your life/lives. The ways it operates, what ideas it has for you about yourself, when it first entered your life, times when it has been very influential or not so influential etc *The effects of the problem*
- Deciding whether it is **OK or not OK** with you for the problem to be operating like this. *Taking a stand for or against the problem*
- Saying **why it is OK or not OK** for the problem to keep on going like this. *Justification*

If you are two or more people, a family or group, you may like to hold a meeting with the idea of talking about a particular problem or concern in this way.

Below is an example I made up with the using **sulking**.

**1. NAME THE PROBLEM OR CONCERN**

It is useful to choose your own name rather than use a general name. You could talk with a partner about this and come up with a shared name, or you might start with a name and find another name is better. Once you agree on the name it is important to refer to it as THE (name). This locates the problem outside of the person so they can also get to explore the effects of this on their own life. This way of looking at the problem helps to explore it with more fully and can open the way to review your relationship to it.

*Eg. Names for sulking eg 'the going quiet', 'the sad looks', 'the horse and cart' ....*

**2. EFFECTS OF THE PROBLEM OR CONCERN**

Each person can speak the effects the '.....(problem) is bringing into their life, eg on people, community, house, pets, social life, law, etc.

Take turns so each person gets to explore the effects thoroughly.

*The effects of 'the going quiet' are that it helps me get out of household chores, it talks me into ideas of how deserving I am, it persuades me that the world is not so easy to be in, it tells me that its OK to eat, smoke or drink more. It's hopes for me are that I get more time to myself, it keeps my partner/friends/children away from me, it tells me I should be able to have/not have sex whenever I want, it helps me to get my own way with others etc...*

**3. IS THIS OK OR NOT OK?**

Each person can say whether it is OK or NOT OK with them for the problem to be having these effects on their life, maybe some parts are OK and others are not.

**4. WHY IS THIS OK OR NOT OK?**

Each person to say why it is or isn't OK for the problem to be having these effects on your life and the life of others.

**3 & 4.**

*It's OK because I get some time to myself*

*It's NOT OK because my partner/friends/children are complaining more and more and try harder to get me interested in them.*

This way of exploring/talking about problems is called Externalising Conversations, the problem is seen as the problem, not the person seen as the problem. It can reduce ideas of blame and shame. Taking an attitude of curiosity about the problem can help with sensitive topics. It does not in any way decrease responsibility for the problem but can open up a thorough exploration of what the problem is bringing into the lives of the people affected by it. It is one of the practices of Narrative Therapy.