



Drawing to help overcome C-PTSD

*Michael Davitt
(author pseudonym Luke Pemberton)*

Traumatic Stress Wales Conference

City Hall Cardiff, Wednesday 23rd March, 10:30 to 12:30

A bit about myself

Author of 5 self-help books on overcoming childhood trauma (pseudonym, Luke Pemberton)

Member of Traumatic Stress Wales Advisory Group

Cardiff born, studied, BSc Business, MSc European Affairs London and Paris, worked in EU institutions

Currently based in Vienna, Austria

Worked and studied in a number of countries – Ireland, Belgium, France, Austria – had the makings of an interesting career in the diplomatic world

My work colleagues have moved on, many to very interesting and successful positions, yet I'm talking here with you (no offence!)

Always knew I was very insecure deep down – painful insecurity, but relatively easy to manage when single and in one's twenties

Got married, first child, building a career, can't hide from it anymore - thought of jumping out of a widow, sought help immediately

Managed to keep things on track, just about, but carrying a huge psychological weight I just didn't understand

Led to alcohol abuse, marriage tensions, physical health problems, stalled career

Then full breakdown, burnout, and depression in 2015 – alcohol recovery clinic, 9 months off sick – then resigned from job on health grounds, wrote 5 books, returned to work in 2022

C-PTSD stemmed from emotional abuse and neglect

Financially privileged (private school educated, father a company director, golf club membership, skiing holidays etc) but emotionally underprivileged childhood

Had done 8 years of therapy at this point

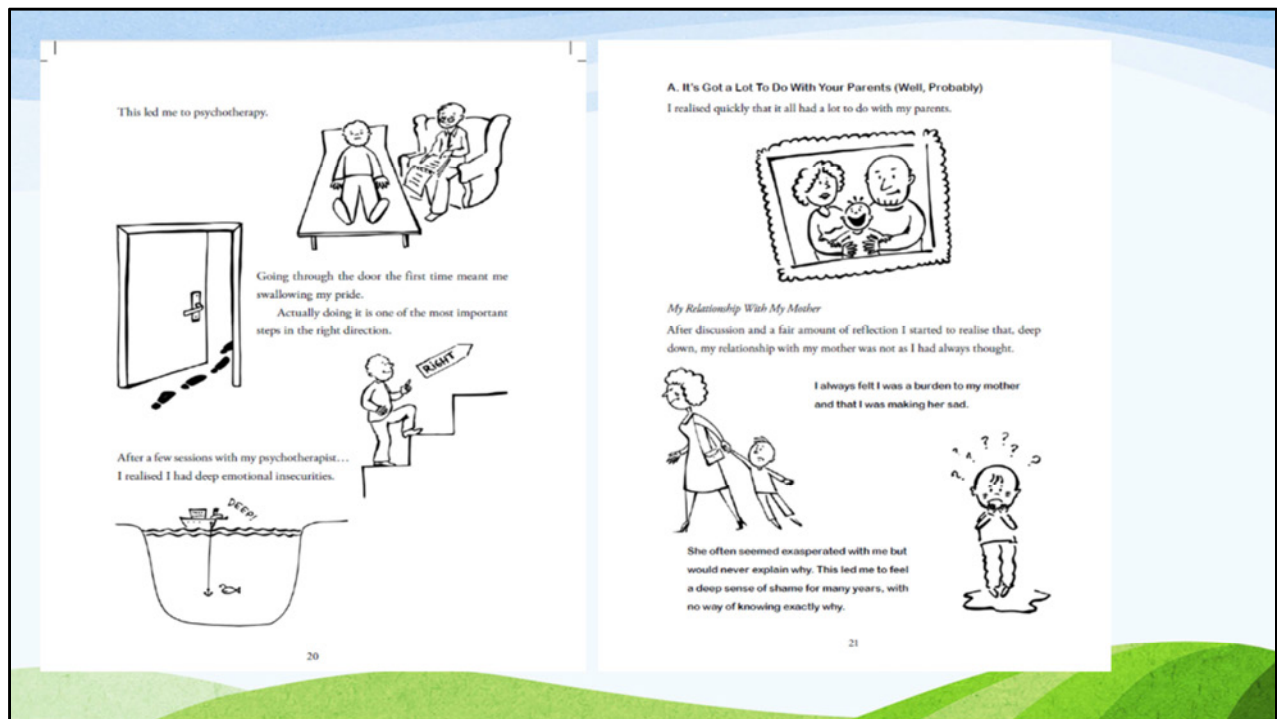
Realised using metaphors to understand my emotional history was very helpful for me, then drawing these to get them out of my head



Led me to start turning these drawings into a series of books describing my emotional experiences



With my fifth book detailing my creative process, upon which this talk is largely based



The books are divided into two halves – a description of my emotional experiences followed by an overview of how I overcame them gradually

Topics covered in my books include

- The critical role played by your childhood; Attachment theory; What didn't happen to you can be the problem – childhood emotional neglect; Maternal enmeshment and co-dependency; Killing your own soul – the effects of toxic shame contamination; Thoughts that scare you – obsessive-compulsive disorder; Lost and scared in an impossible emotional maze; Subconsciously looking for a surrogate mother and father; Inner Family Therapy; Breakups and Broken hearts: When parents (inadvertently) cause you emotional heartache in childhood; When a parent unwittingly becomes a bully; What burnout feels like; Your hyper-critical internal voice is not your own

Outline of presentation

- Some initial personal reflections and personal lessons learned
- **My 5-step, FRESH, drawing-based approach**
 1. Find a suitable, qualified therapist
 2. Record all your feelings by writing them down
 3. Examine your anxieties, fears, insecurities and doubts in detail
 4. **Sketch and draw your thoughts to clarify and solidify your progress**
 5. Harvest all of this information until you feel good about yourself
- Some final reflections

My fifth book is based on a 5 step approach.

A FRESH, DRAWING BASED APPROACH

1. Find a suitable, qualified therapist
2. Record all your feelings by writing them down
3. Examine your anxieties, fears, insecurities and doubts in detail
4. Sketch and draw your thoughts to clarify and solidify your progress
5. Harvest all of this information until you feel good about yourself

Questions and comments welcomed at any time

Some initial personal reflections

- Complex PTSD really is complex; it's roots are very often in childhood



Complex PTSD really is emotionally highly complex

trying to process, disentangle, reframe thousands and thousands of hours of emotional confusion, pain and fear from childhood (and then subsequently self-inflicted) that swirl around in our internal oceans of our minds

At it's core, as with so many other C-PTSD sufferers (although I don't like that term) my C-PTSD stemmed from CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES namely a traumatized mother and father who replicated the childhood emotional neglect they experienced as children and passed this on to their children expressing shame, frustration and regular criticism of myself and my sister. This generated a sense of toxic shame in my child self

These created a highly corrupted prism through which I saw myself and the world around me and a concrete and steadfast conviction that I will be and should be mistreated in the future

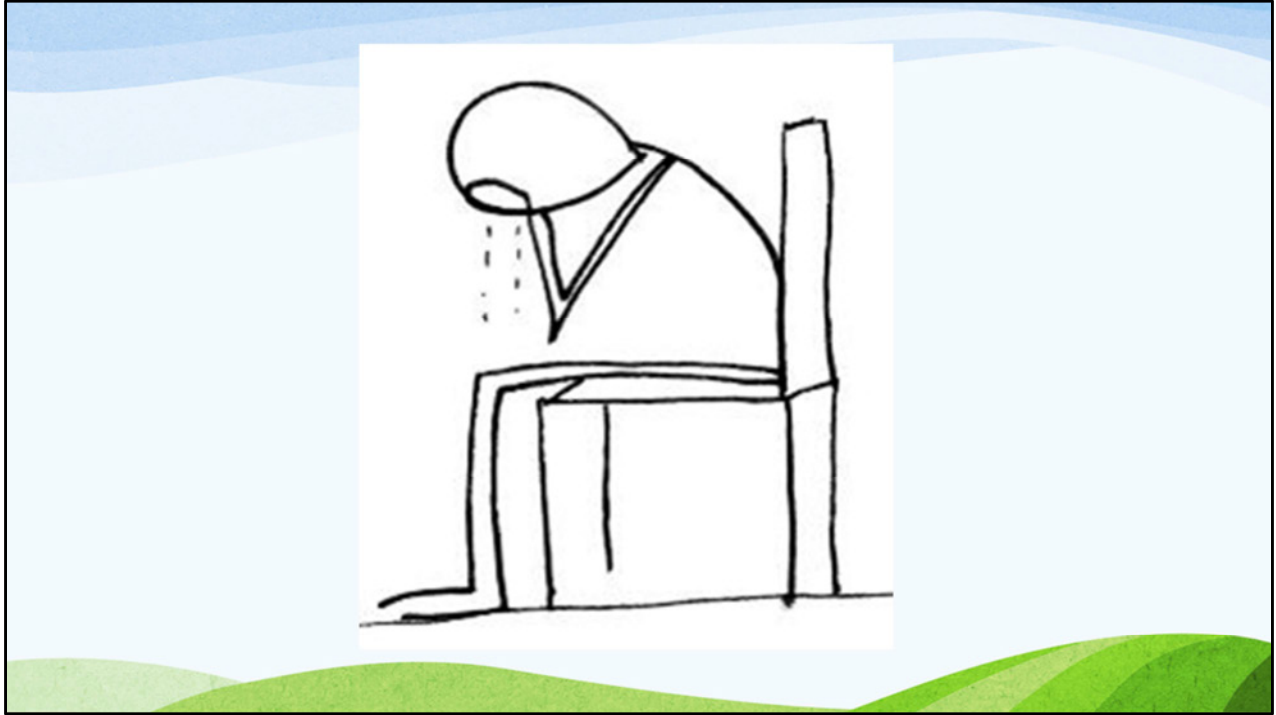
This led to a lifelong "cancer of the soul", a deep conviction that my core self was reprehensible and completely unacceptable to others

Relationships with one's parents are absolutely fundamental of course – if these are toxic, then life-long problems persist

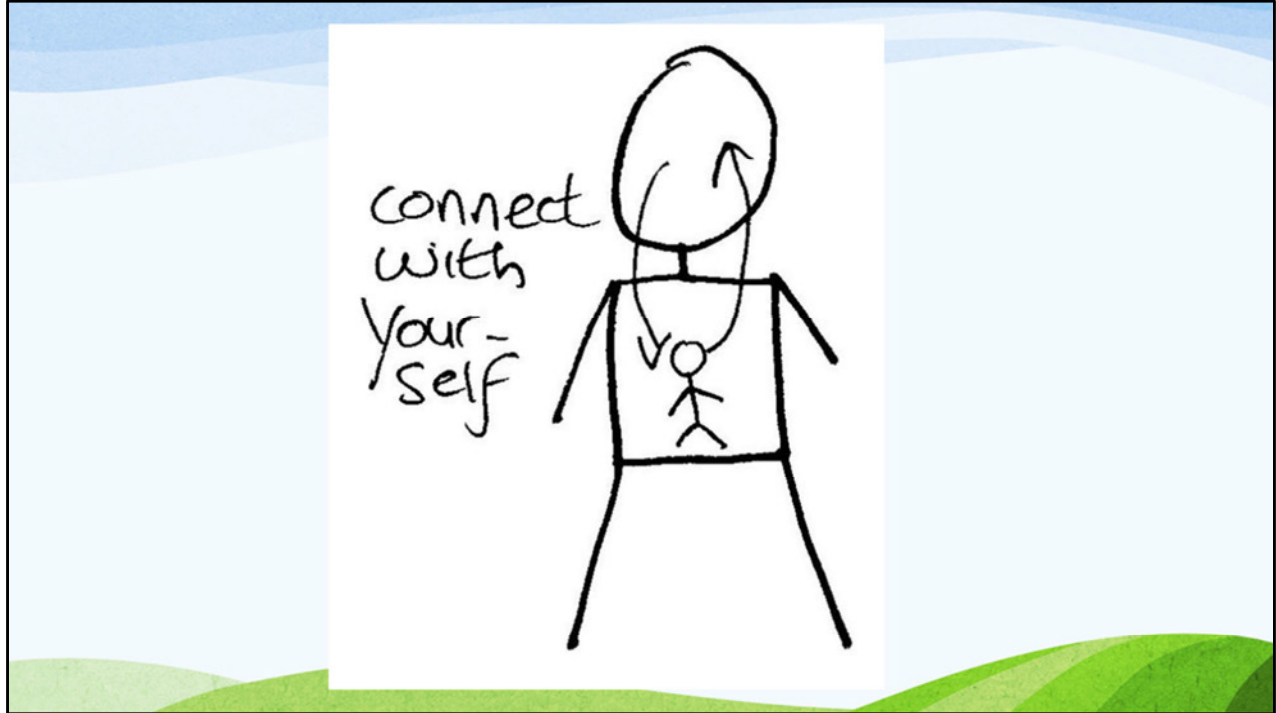
The lifelong **terror** from childhood of not being loved and not knowing why is mightily difficult to overcome

Recovery begins with connecting with, consoling, reparenting and educating your scared inner child to have the wisdom and courage to rise above what happened to you

Closure comes from knowledge, understanding, and then forgiveness, initially by your adult self, and then, more difficultly, by your child self



All this needs a patient reappraisal of one's past with courage and honesty
Be prepared to focus on your childhood; Understand the central role played by toxic shame; Deconstruct, understand and fix your childhood relationship with your parents; Connect with and then integrate the abandoned parts of yourself, especially your inner child; Get used to locating and connecting with your fears
Before I could forgive, I had to recall, work through, process, reframe, and reconstruct in a more objective manner many traumatic experiences in childhood
Forgiveness brings closure, a sense of separation, Independence and liberation



it's about rationalising your fears away by challenging your assumptions and facing your fears

Learning how to pinpoint exactly what you are feeling is vital. This takes a lot of reflection as the traumatic events happened so long ago

Beware the temptation to expect others to fix your broken self

It's about breaking the harmful, toxic emotional bonds that bind you intimately with your parents

Fundamentally it's about overcoming intense, deep seated childhood fear – of not being loveable or acceptable – breaking the bonds of shame (I'll be talking about this later) – and then finding the courage and wisdom to forgive. This means seeing things from your parent's perspective.

If we can break the cycle of intergenerational shame, we are doing the next generation a HUGE service.



Much can be resolved in one's imagination

Imagine confronting those who scared and injured you, and keep doing this until the fear subsides

Recovery starts with channeling your trauma into a positive goal - expressing your experiences and emotions through a creative process – as mentioned, drawing can be a great way to do this

Use analogies, thought experiments, emotional information processing, cognitive reframing

Bad joke interlude



A man walks into a zoo.

The only animal there was a dog.

It was a shih tzu.

A FRESH approach

1. Find a suitable, qualified therapist
2. Record all your feelings by writing them down
3. Examine your anxieties, fears, insecurities and doubts in detail
4. Sketch and draw your thoughts to clarify and solidify your progress
5. Harvest all of this information until you feel good about yourself

ALL RUN IN PARALLEL ONCE THE PROCESS IS UNDERWAY

Find a suitable, qualified therapist - (if you are not already seeing one or have not already seen one). This step is a simple one, but it requires courage, and is vital.

Record all your feelings by writing them down - Recording your feelings can be as simple as jotting down whatever is in your head in the most rudimentary manner (just scribbling down key words can suffice). No writing ability is needed whatsoever, just a willingness to carry a small pad of paper and pen with you, or to have a notes app on your phone, to allow you to jot down whatever comes to your mind. The writing I propose you do is for you, and for you alone, and there is no right or wrong way of doing it.

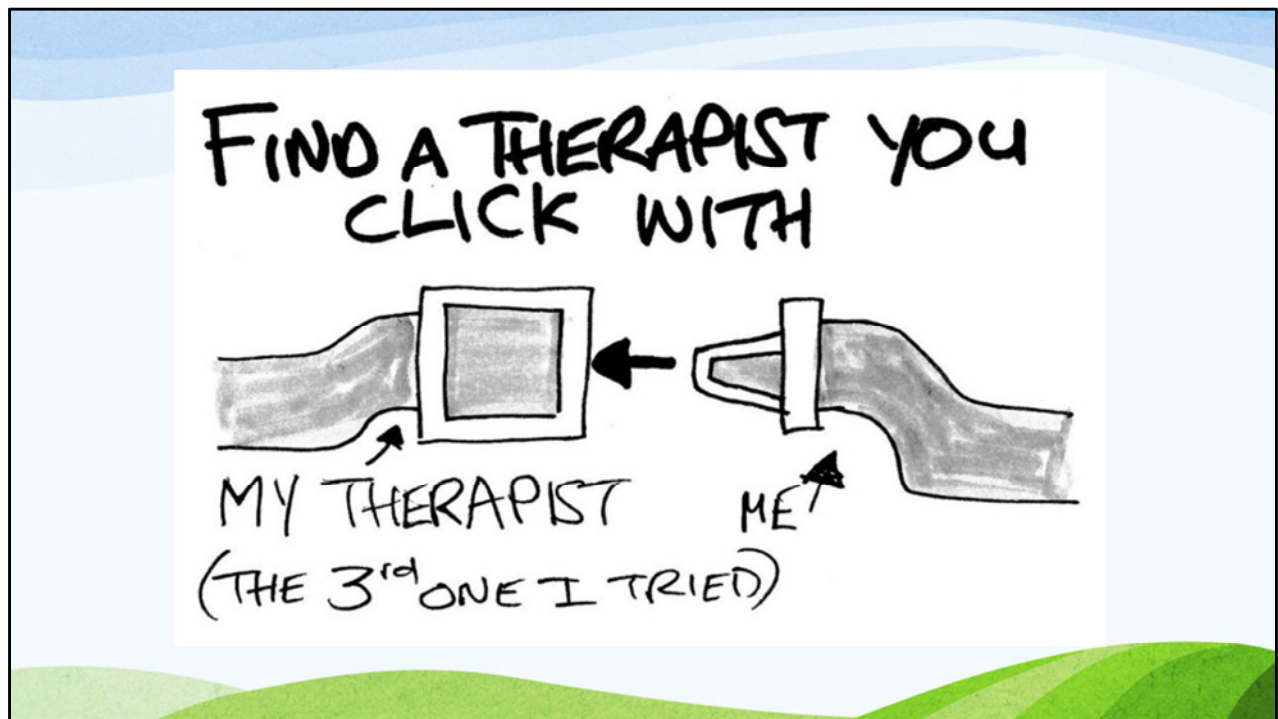
Examine your anxieties, fears, insecurities and doubts in detail (this is where much of the hard work is done, aided by familiarising yourself with some basic psychology themes). I try and keep things basic here as well. What is more important than anything is the courage to ask yourself some difficult questions and to look for their answers or explanations with the appropriate guidance.

Sketch and draw your thoughts to clarify and solidify your progress. This section is the bulk of the book and includes a large number of example drawings that I have sketched in the past. Please note that anyone can learn to draw their emotions using the very basic method I propose (I started off with zero artistic skill, and I

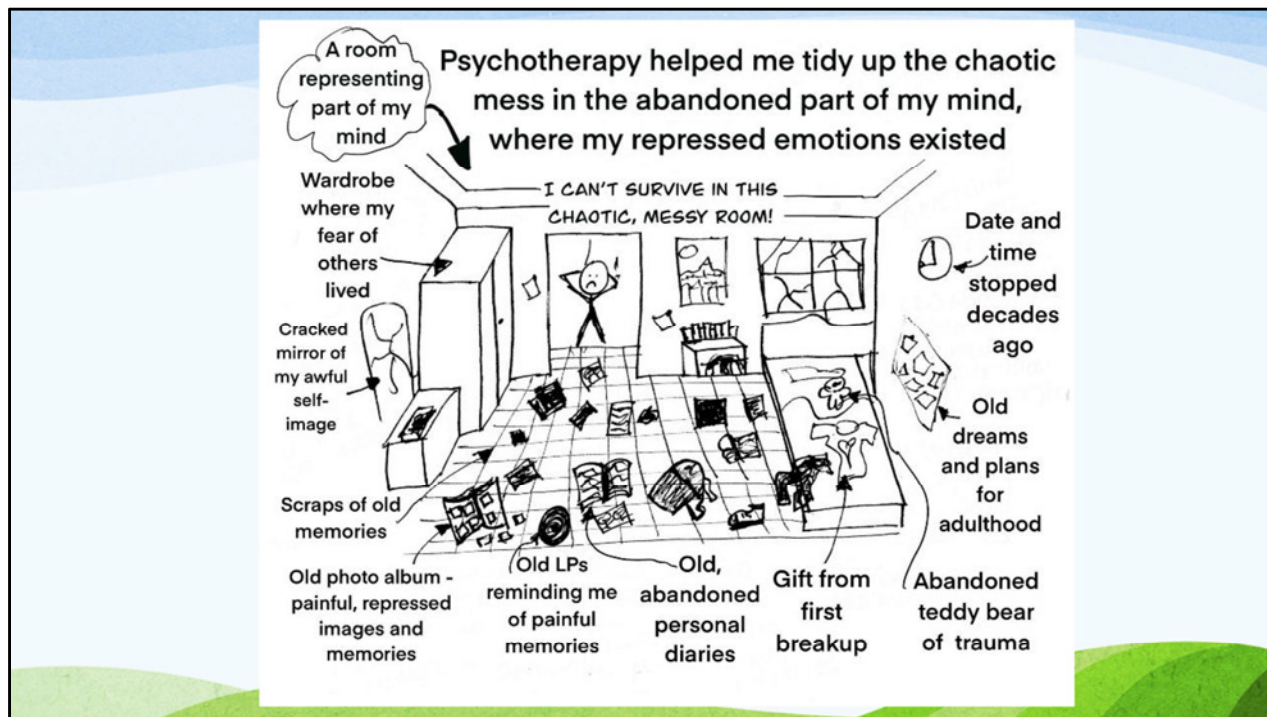
haven't progressed very far since then if I'm honest). This book is not about learning to draw but about expressing your feelings in the simplest way possible (as mentioned, the aim of the book is for you to get these toxic feelings out of your head and onto paper or a tablet where they can be more easily managed and overcome). I will therefore encourage you to use very simple stick figures, some speech bubbles, and subsequently some basic objects such as the outline of a house, a tree, or a mountain. Please remember that any drawings you make are for you alone and do not need to be shared with anyone. A bit of childlike sense of fun can go a long way to helping you here.

'Harvest' in this sense means collating and harnessing all your recovery efforts to nourish you for the future.





Mention types pf therapy?







Note taking

- Issues stemming from therapy and thoughts for the next therapy session
- Strong emotions, especially shame, repetitive dreams, specific fears
- Emotional triggers and emotional cravings
- Negative feelings childhood experiences, especially my childhood relationship with my parents

it's much easier to deal with your past once it is in black and white in front of you, than when it is piled up in a mess in the recesses of your over-burdened mind.

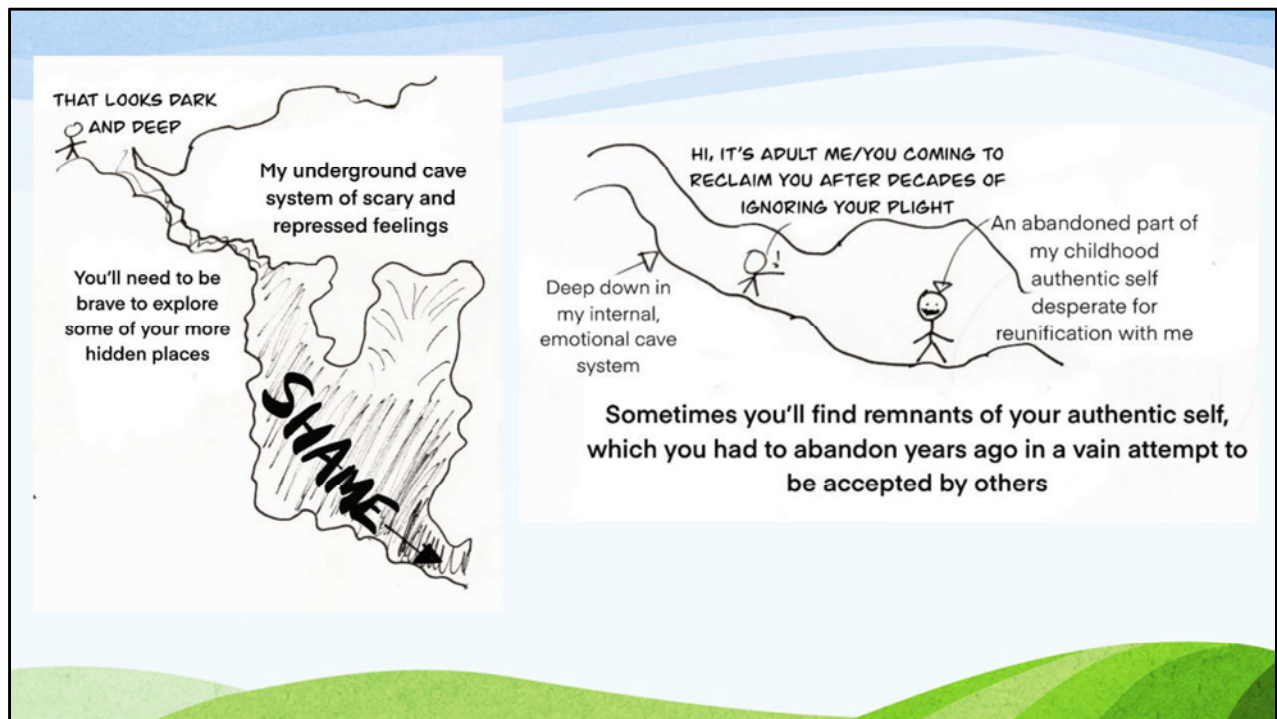
I made brief notes after some therapy sessions, noting down things I had learnt about myself and other revelations so that I wouldn't forget them. I also found it useful sharing carefully selected, generic elements of these personal and confidential notes with my partner so as to keep her in the loop on what issues, at a very general level, I was discussing with my therapist.

You will likely feel frustrated that your partner doesn't understand what you are going through, how deep the emotional wounds are, and how much mental effort it takes to heal them etc. I felt this way, which led me to decide to share some of these notes in a very careful manner.

Other things I wrote down (and still do in fact) are dreams, fears, issues to discuss at next therapy session, childhood memories, images crossing my mind, recent experiences

Again, just writing things down often removes the potency of fears and any uncomfortable thoughts



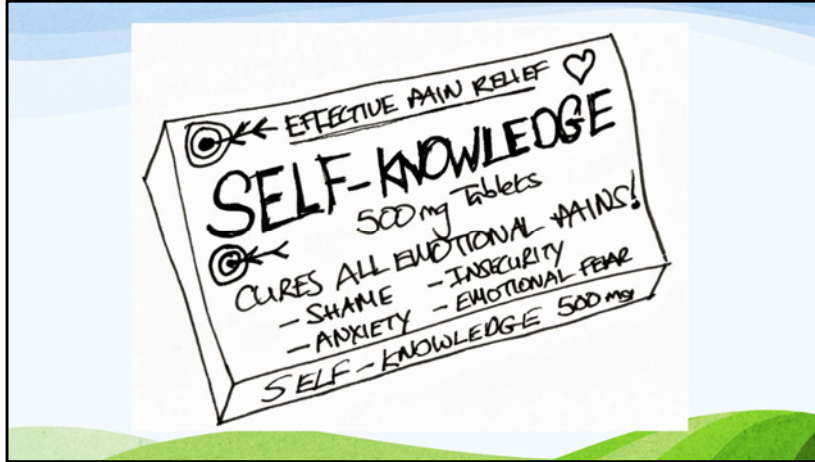


To create more insightful metaphors and drawings, as indicated you'll need to examine your psychological and emotional history in more detail, through introspection. You are studying yourself and this requires attention and inquiry. This technique goes hand-in-hand with talking to a trained therapist and writing down your feelings – so simple reflection and introspection, combined with therapy and note-taking

I like to imagine all my fears sitting around a fire in the outback. I walk over and sit down with them, unannounced, unflinching, not saying a word. I simply listen to them, observe them and stay with them. They behave like scared wild animals, suspicious and wary of my presence, full of fear and hostility. The more I sit with them, the calmer I feel and, the more they get used to my presence, the calmer they become. After a while, they start to trust me more, and they approach hesitantly, closer and closer, sizing me up, until they trust me fully. I still haven't tamed them all, but the more I do this, the less scared I feel. At some point, I hope they will turn into what they really are – scared, abandoned and traumatised parts of myself from decades ago, seeking to reunify with my adult self.

Fears are often just abandoned and traumatised parts of me that are desperate to

be found again and loved.



1.) One benefit of looking inside myself without fear is that I find these previous versions of myself that I felt obliged to disown and then abandon. I remember suddenly coming across abandoned parts of myself, and the genuine feeling of finding a long lost, beloved but abandoned, and now isolated, sibling. It felt as if I had found a version of myself, abandoned in my twenties, sitting on his own in a secluded and empty café in a medieval town square, tucked away behind the back of a cathedral. I approached this lost part of myself and asked him/me to re-join me and my friends, telling him that he no longer had to survive on his own and that he was now rescued and safe once more.

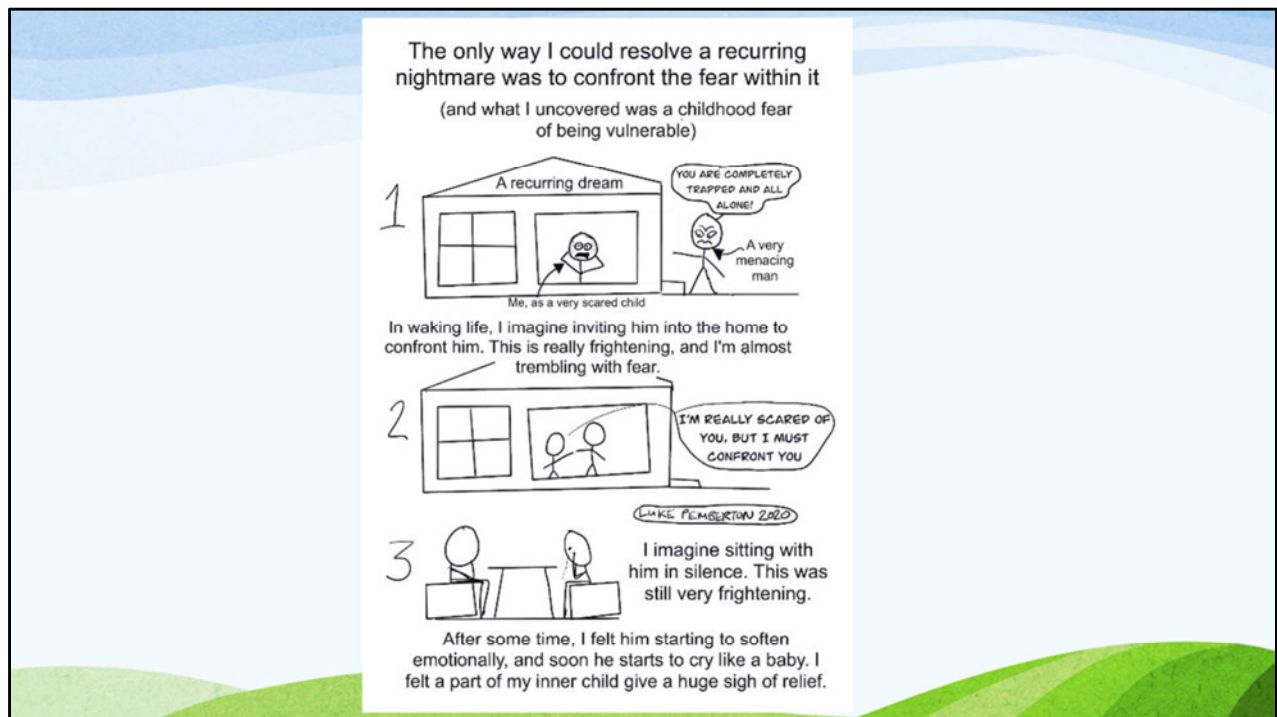
2.) Example of finding a long lost room in my soul, like an old dungeon, and me going in, finding a very scared, forgotten about and abandoned part of my former self who is so relieved to be found again. I go through the dungeon like room/cave with a powerful torch and I'm looking in the hidden corners and recesses for any fears, anxieties or abandoned parts of myself.

3.) Once I found my inner child, I started to try to integrate him into my adult self. This felt like finding a traumatised child in real life. I imagined soothing my inner child, comforting and reassuring him, and slowly winning his confidence. Once this was done, I needed to encourage him to look at my/our shared past from his perspective. This was quite frightening. For instance, it was tricky enough for adult me to imagine confronting my father and mother about the past. It was much more difficult imagining child me standing up to my father and mother and telling them to stop treating me so badly.

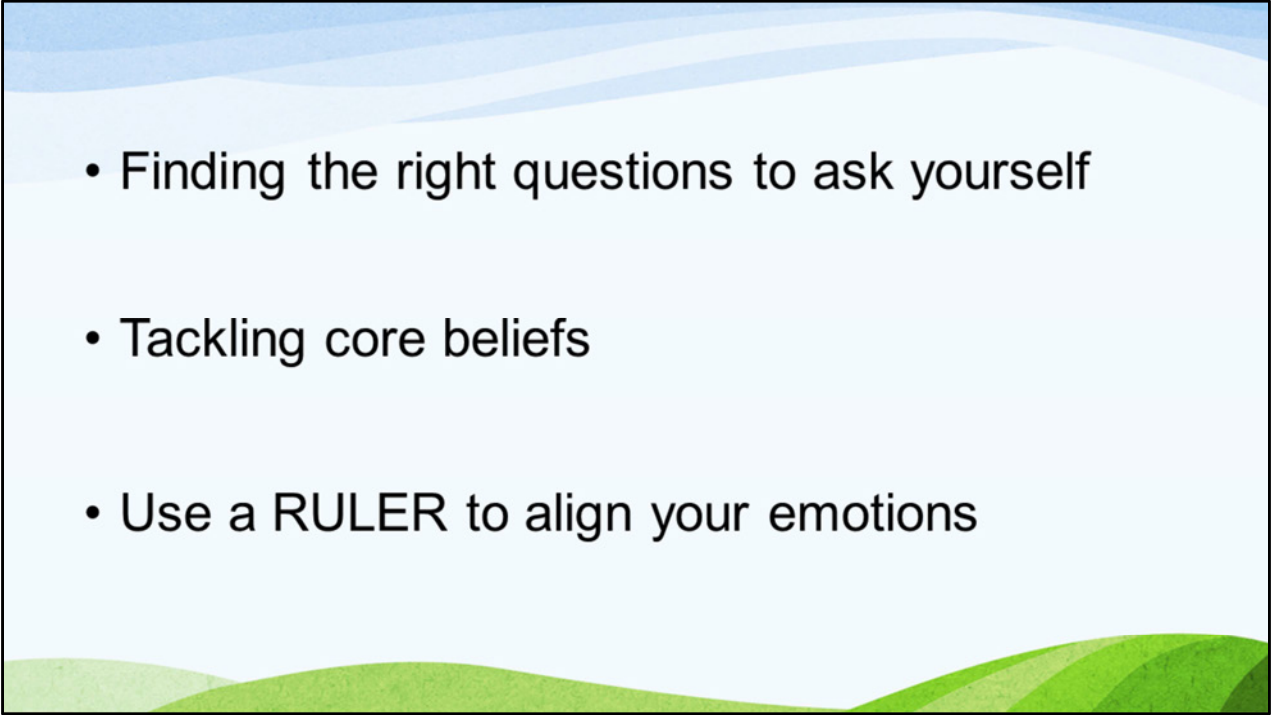
4.) In short, I have tried to locate and connect with my deepest emotional fears, face them

and keep probing them until I now know them inside out. I can then reintegrate them into myself, as one would wholeheartedly welcome long-lost siblings back into the family, to the mutual benefit of all.

Most importantly, **CONNECT WITH YOUR INNER CHILD**



One additional example of examining my fears is working out a recurring nightmare that i would often have

- 
- Finding the right questions to ask yourself
 - Tackling core beliefs
 - Use a RULER to align your emotions

Have I ever challenged, and challenged again, *all* my assumptions about how I see myself? No, never; it never even occurred to me. I just assumed this is how I am and that's it

How do I really, deep down, value and see myself as a person? Um, now you ask, OK, I think...

Answer the same question again with brutal honesty after some real self-reflection.

OK, in my case, less than humanly possible; know what infinity is? Well in terms of poor self-regard, go past it and keep going...

Why do I believe this? Not sure when I think about it...

What evidence is there? Well, it's always been like that, I've never known any different and it's engrained in my every fibre of being

Does evidence exist? OK, if I really think about it, it's circumstantial at best, only my interpretations of other/my parents' behaviour

When did I come to these beliefs? When I was a scared, egocentric infant with an underdeveloped brain and no ego defences.

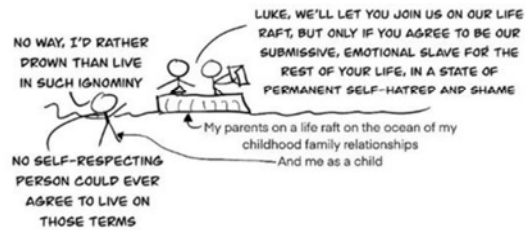
Could I have been wrong therefore? Absolutely, 100% yes

If I am wrong about everything I know about myself, then what is the truth about me? I'm going to find out and I'm excited about the prospects

So, if I challenge all my assumptions, I will find my authentic self again? Absolutely, yes, and what a reward that is.

Imagine confronting those you fear

I finally have the courage to recognize, and stand up to, the emotional blackmail I had to give in to in my childhood



So much progress in my experience comes from simply confronting my parents in my mind and standing up for myself, calmly rebutting their insinuations and criticisms



My drawings cluster around certain concepts

1. describing my painful experiences to myself
2. story-boarding emotional experiences from my childhood
3. applying basic psychology and self-help concepts
4. more positive, forward looking drawings

ALL WITH THE GOAL OF UNDERSTANDING MYSELF BETTER

As indicated, my drawings cluster around certain concepts

1. describing my painful experiences to myself
2. story-boarding emotional experiences from my childhood
3. applying basic psychology and self-help concepts
4. more positive, forward looking drawings

ALL WITH THE GOAL OF UNDERSTANDING MYSELF BETTER

You have all the material you need for expression inside of you

Basic drawings



Aggressive



Agonised



Anxious



Apologetic



Arrogant



Concentrating



Determined



Disappointed



Disapproving



Disgusting



Distasteful

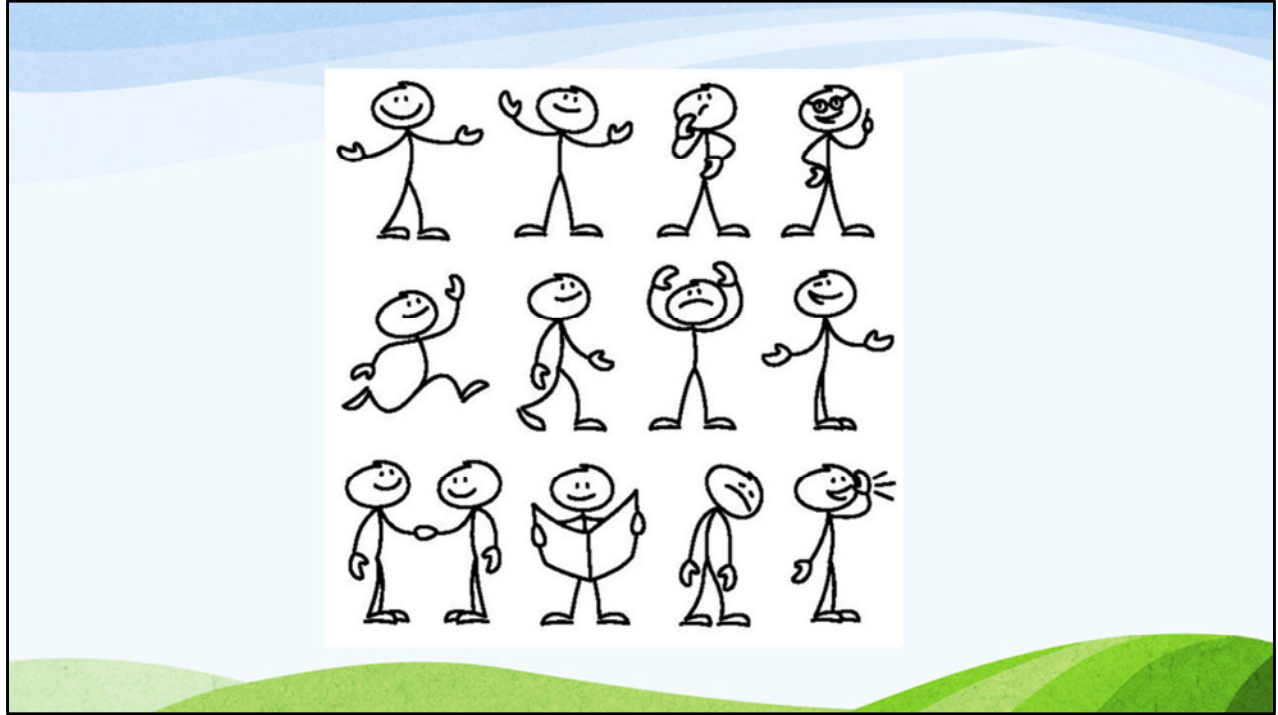


Exasperated

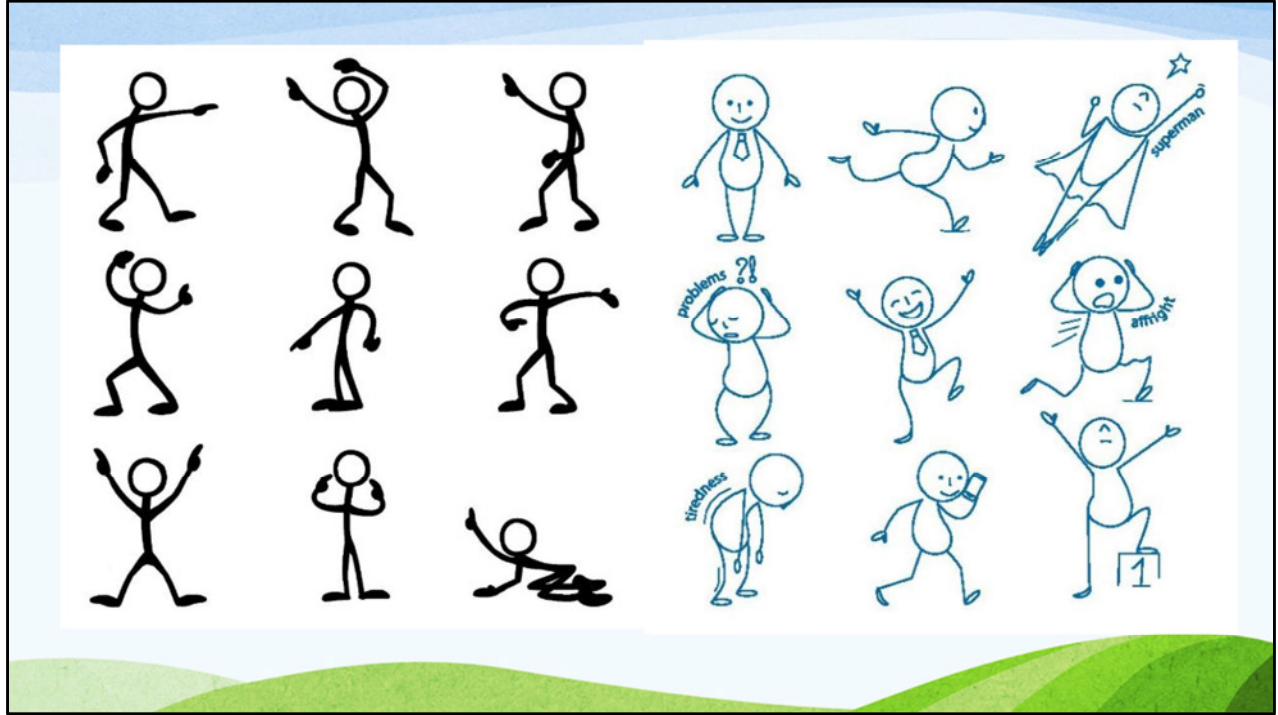
I would encourage you to start with some very basic facial expressions



I still refer to these whenever i do my drawings – they are a great starting point



You can then move to basic stick figures and combine these with the facial expressions
I like the simplicity of stick figures



You can then move on to basic physical movements

Add some text or handwriting



IN SHORT, I WAS VERY SAD,
CONFUSED, EXHAUSTED AND
IN DESPAIR



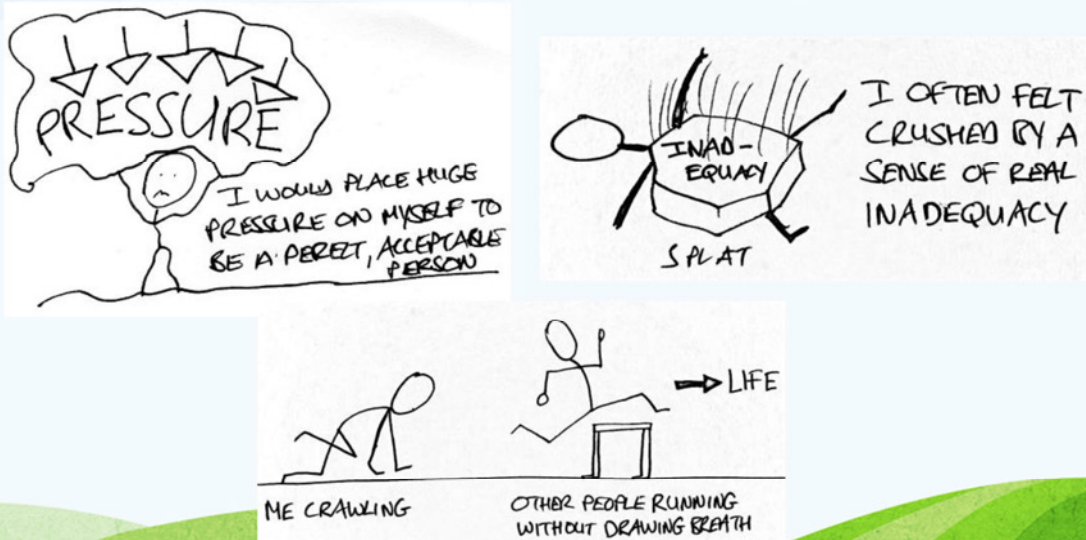
I WOULD PUT MY HAPPY
FACE ON EVERY DAY
BUT DEEP DOWN I
WAS IN DESPAIR



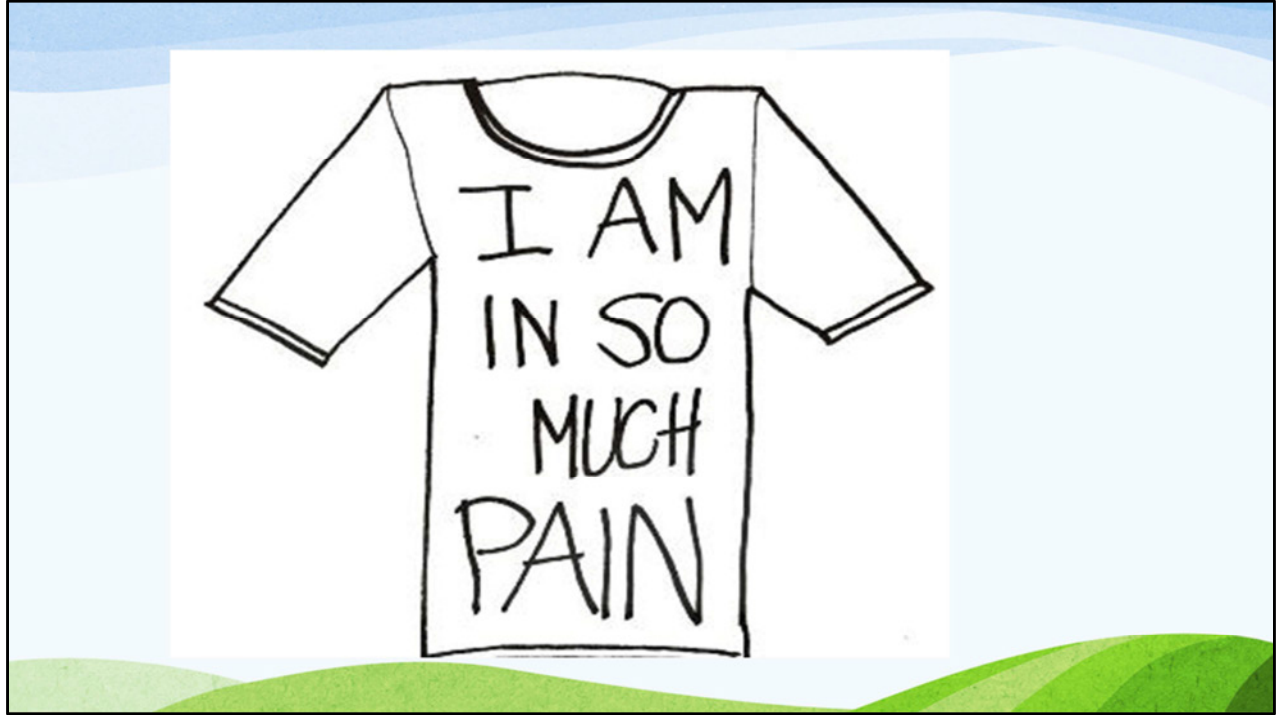
Then, simply add some handwriting

A word on tools – i used to use a simple pen and paper. Now I use a basic iPad and the iPad app Procreate, with an Apple pen

Adding some basic symbols or objects



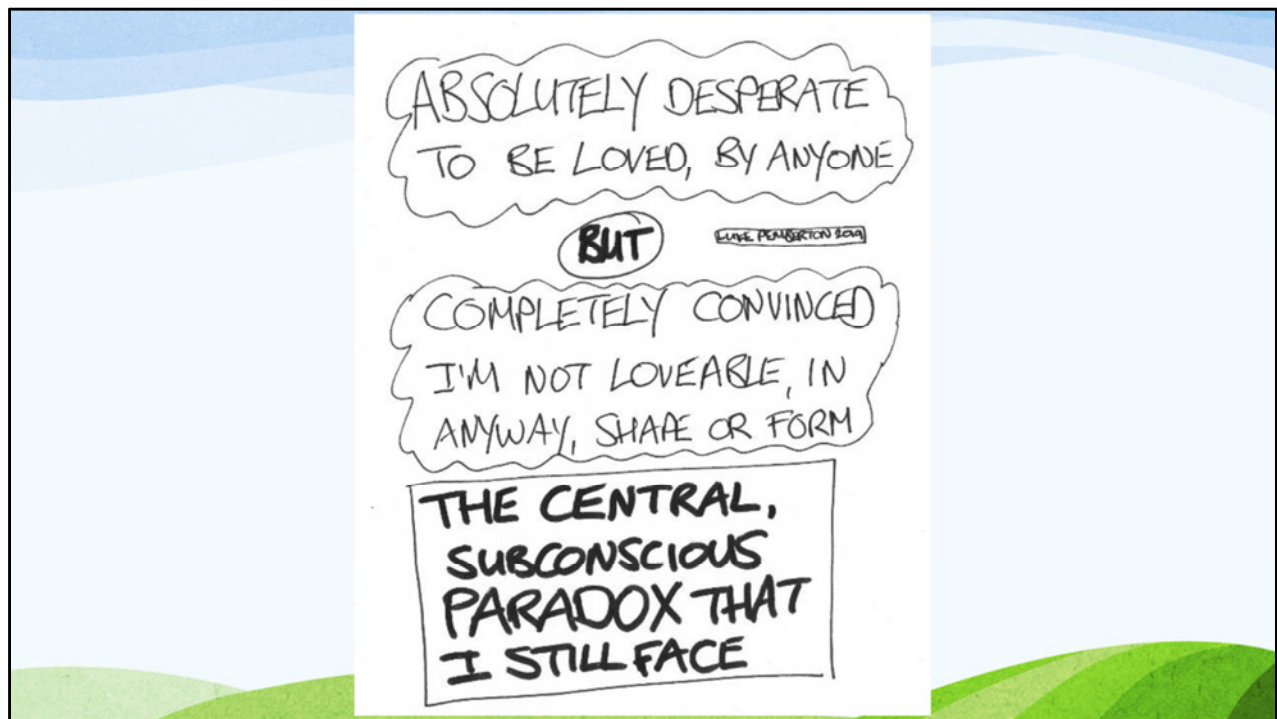
Then you can add some basic objects which most reflect the emotional experiences you are going through or processing



Often, very simple drawings can be redemptive and cathartic

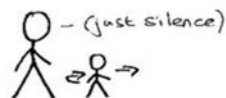
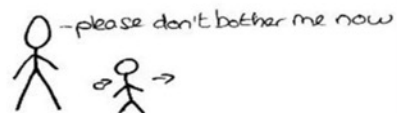
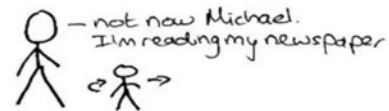
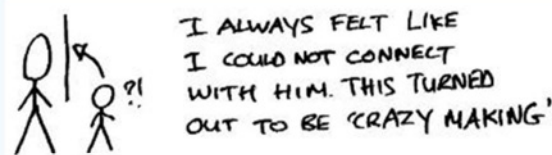
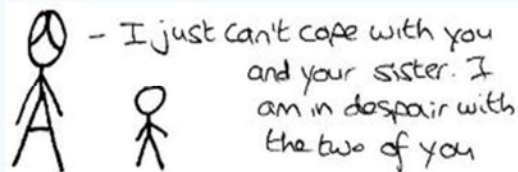


Simply writing what you feel can be very helpful



As with this example

Adding extra characters and dialogue



etc. for many years

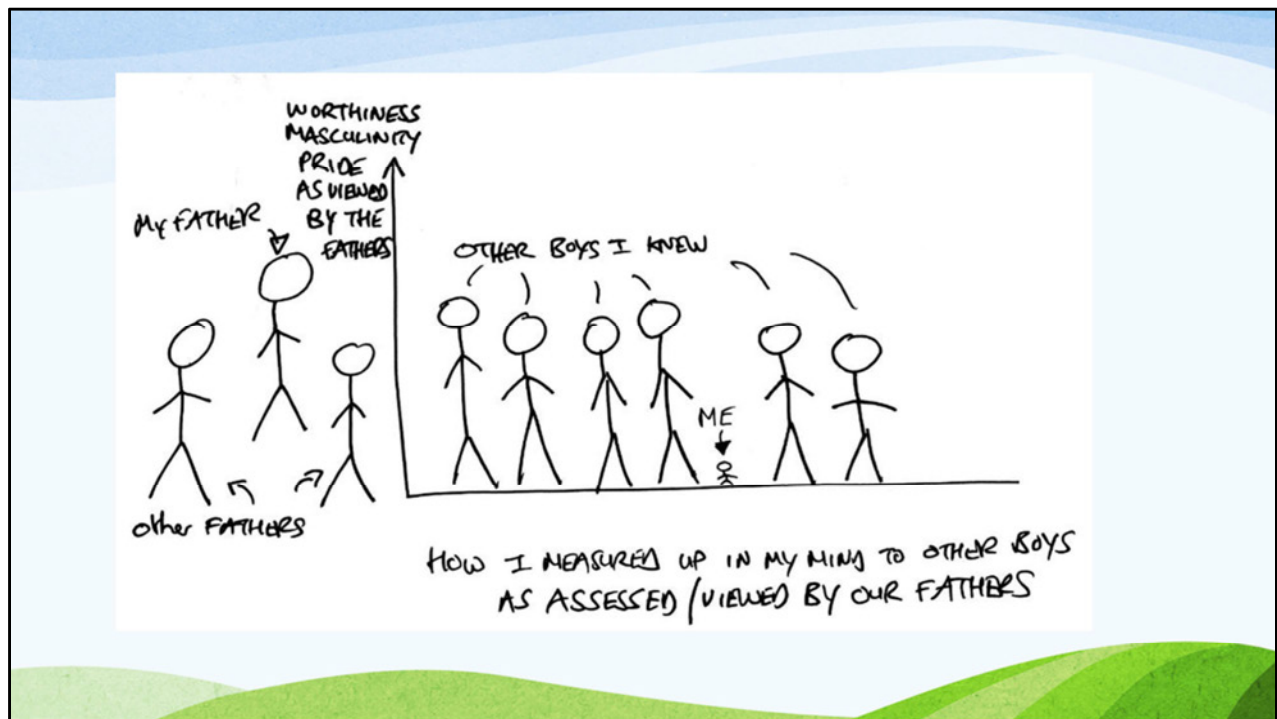
As mentioned, and when I started my therapy, I quickly realised that my issues had a lot to do with my childhood, and my relationship with my parents. So, I started drawing very simple dialogue exchanges between them and me as a young boy. Putting this simple image and handwritten dialogue down on paper helped me to see things much more clearly.

Drawing childhood scenes



Drawing scenes from childhood can help you process, reinterpret and understand them more objectively, extracting yourself from your own ego-centric view of events. As children, we blame ourselves for our parents' behavior. These drawing exercises allow us to see the scene from an emotional distance where we realise we weren't to blame at all, and weren't really involved (with hindsight it seems that my mother was likely suffering from C-PTSD herself)

This drawing depicts a traumatic experience I had with my mother and brother during a trip to London in my early teenage years



My father came from an emotionally neglectful childhood – one of seven children in Dublin to a father who had lost his father when very young and a pious but emotionally distant mother. He subconsciously replicated this emotionally distant relationship with me and I blamed myself for it, feeling very small

Drawing subsequent relationships

MY FIRST GIRLFRIEND WAS ONE OF THESE FRIENDS



OH MY GOSH, SHE IS SO BEAUTIFUL (AND SHE WAS)
I CANNOT BELIEVE SHE IS INTERESTED IN ME. SHE
IS GOING TO SEE THE REAL, HIDEOUS, GROTESQUE,
REPULSIVE AND REPELANT ME, AND THEN SHE IS
GOING TO DUMP ME AND RUN A MILE. I AM
REALLY SCARED...

SLOW TRAIN CRASH



-I'M REALLY
SORRY, BUT
THIS JUST
ISN'T
WORKING

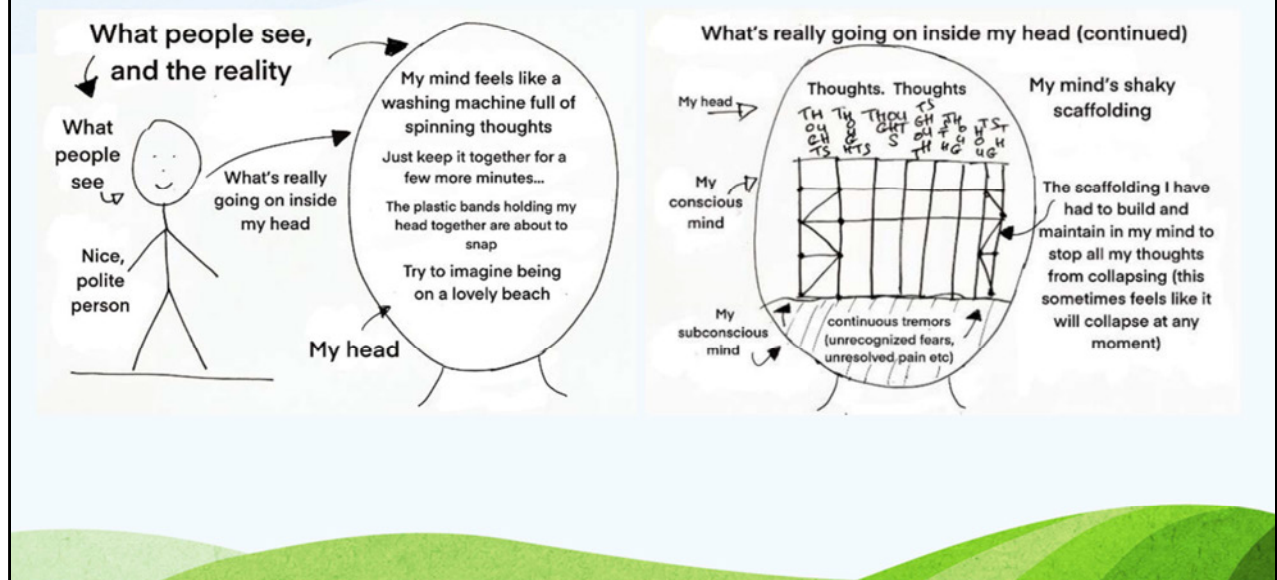
(HE TO MYSELF)
SEE, I KNEW I WAS
NOT WORTH ANYTHING



AND THEN THE INEVITABLE HAPPENED,
BECAUSE I WAS SO STUPENDOUSLY
INSECURE AROUND HER. I WAS TOTALLY
DEVASTATED AND MY 'CONFIRMATION
BIAS' KICKED IN BIG TIME, TO THE
POINT WHERE I FELT SORRY FOR HER
FOR HAVING THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING
WITH ME.

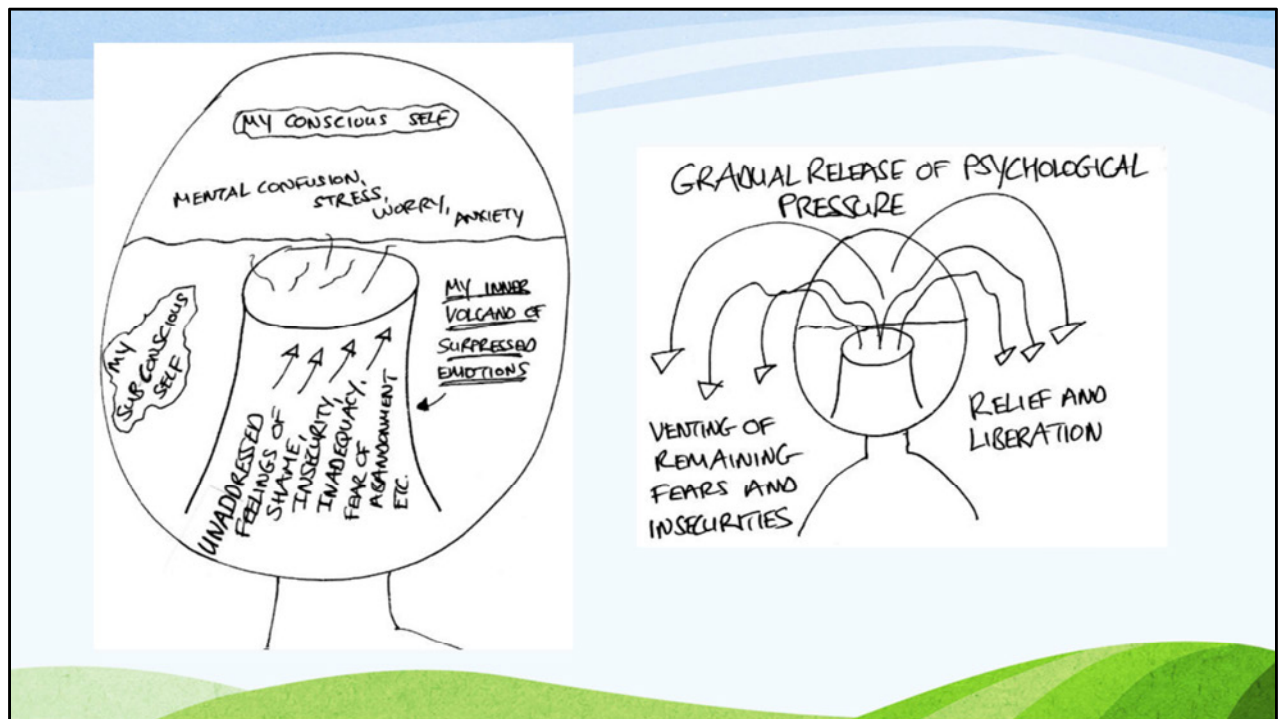
I carried my emotinal insecurity into my first relationship

Drawing my emotional states of mind



After playing around with character dialogue, one additional simple technique I started to use was drawing an outline of my head to display what is going on inside my mind at any one time. This can involve just text or some simple concepts.

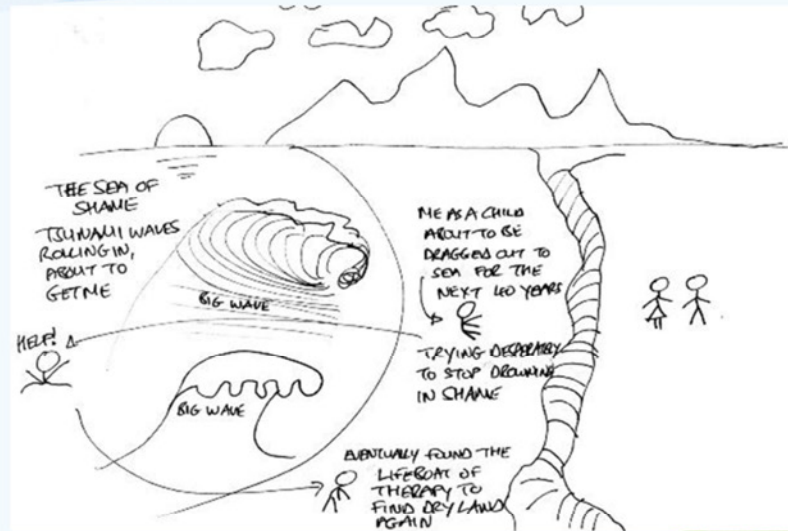
These started out very simply, such as this one in which I admit to myself that I was scared of my father.



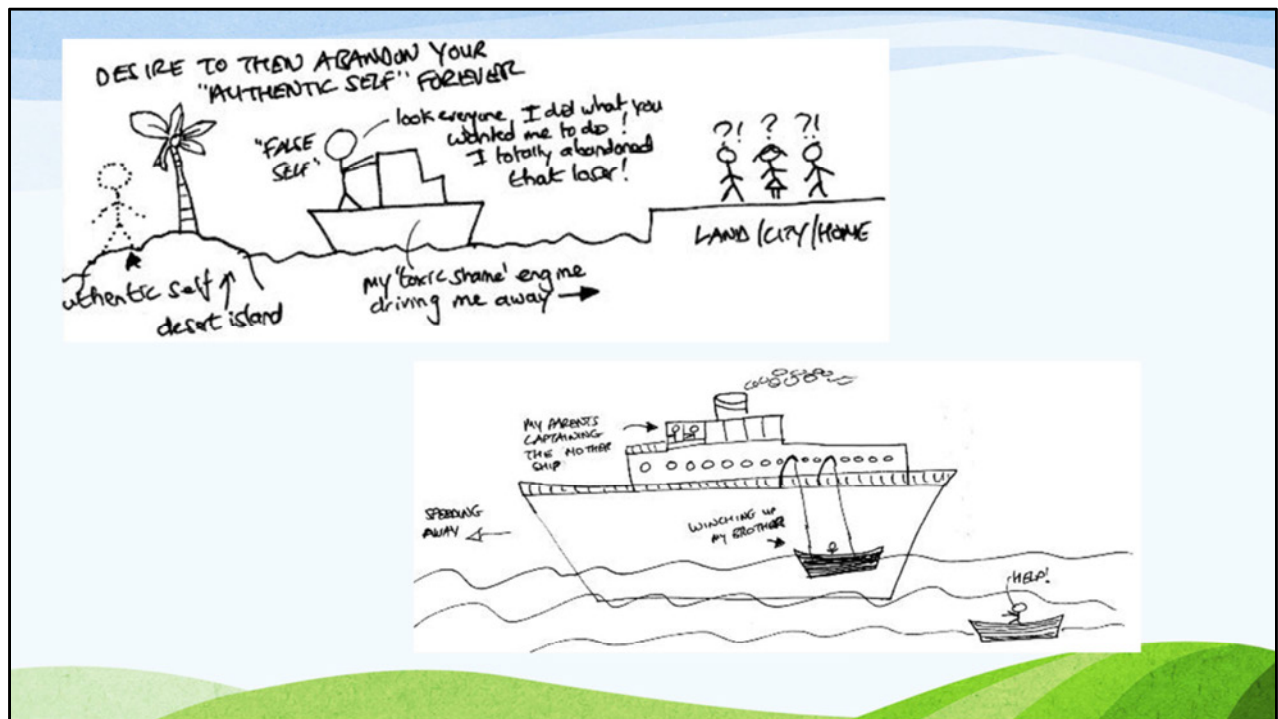
Drawing my mind, and the important relationship between my subconscious and conscious mind is very useful

Using common themes to convey feelings

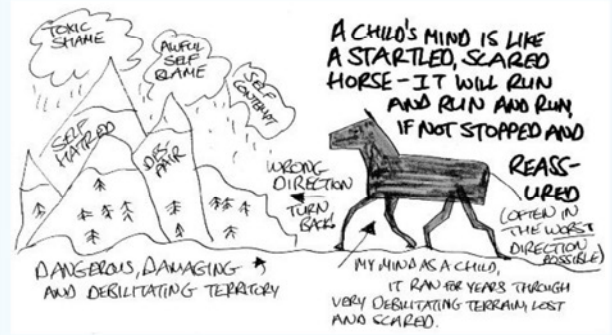
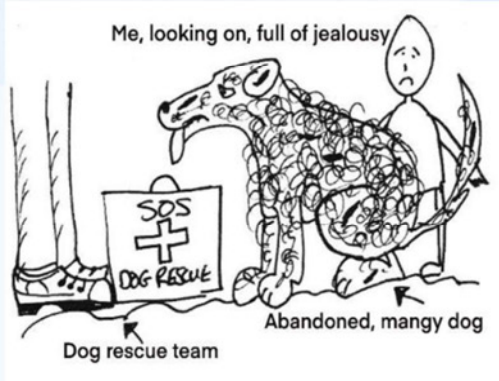
- The ocean



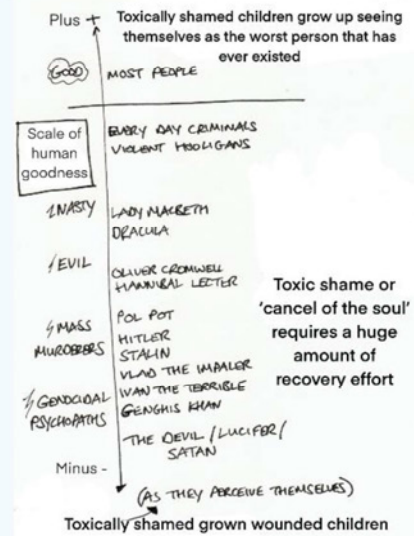
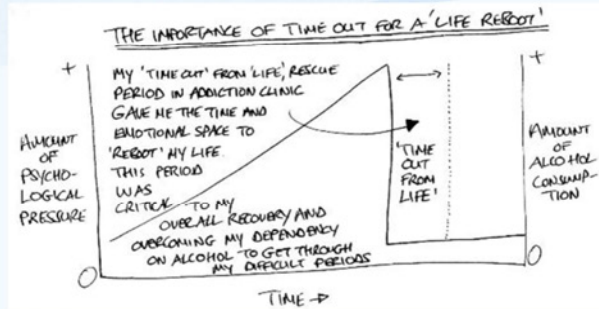
I then started to introduce a number of common themes that seemed to me to be good metaphors for emotional experiences



- Animals

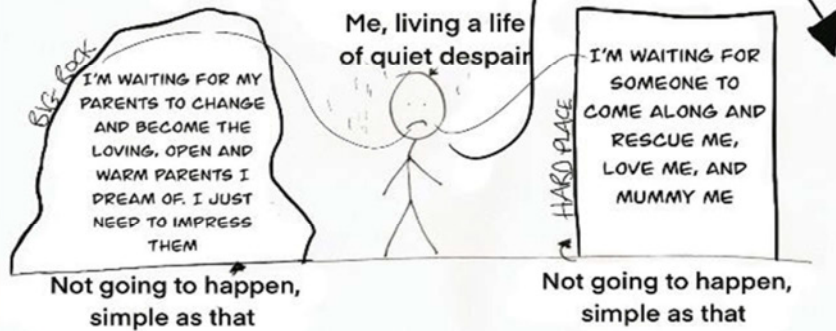


- Graphs and charts



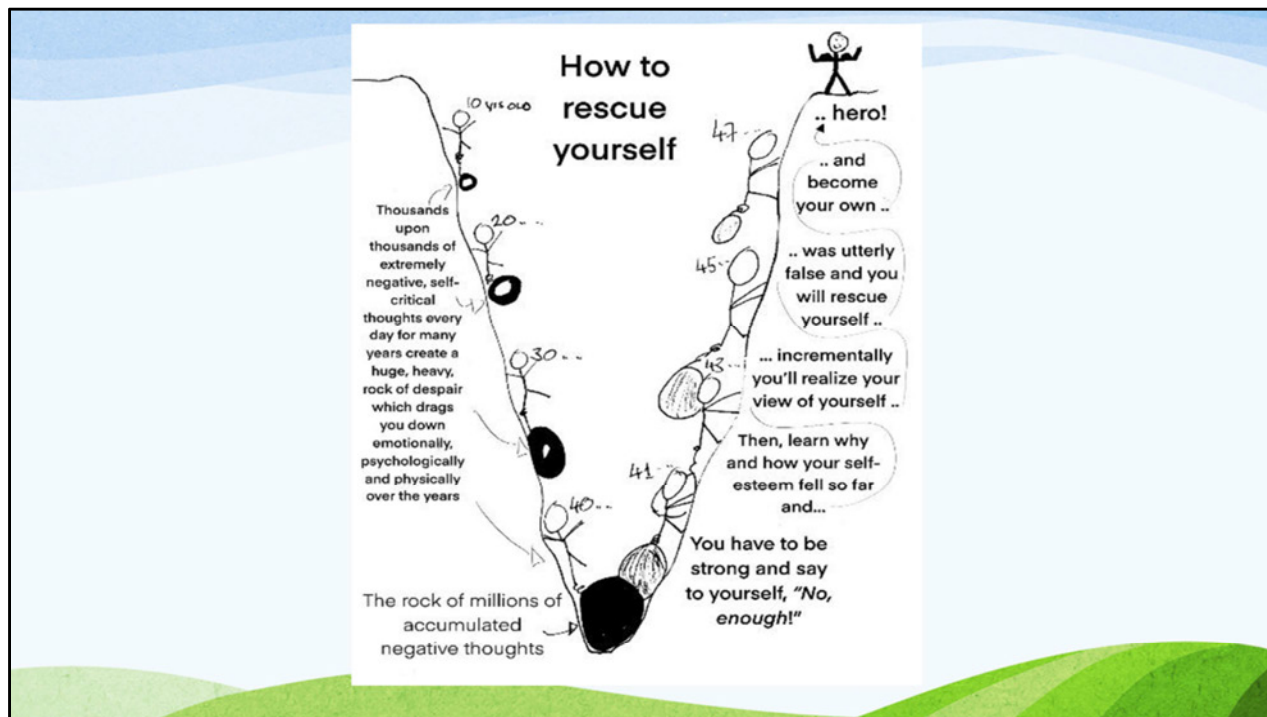
- Common sayings

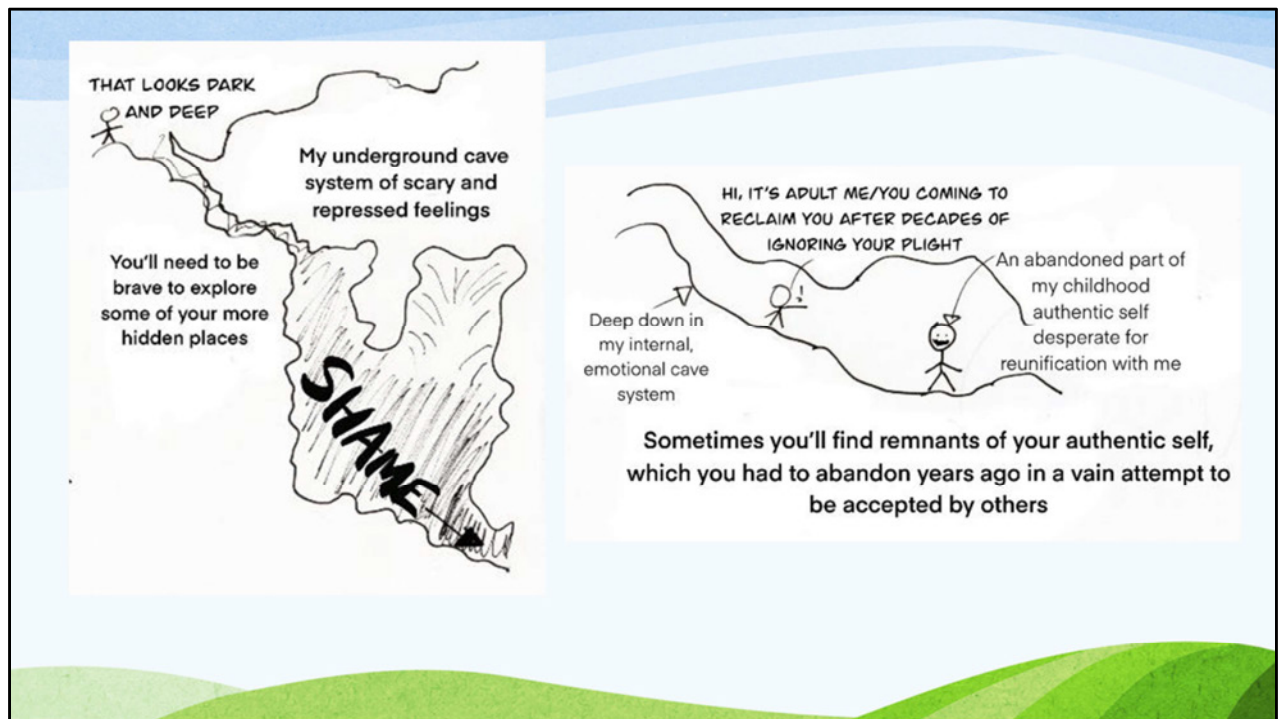
If you're stuck between a rock and a hard place, jump out



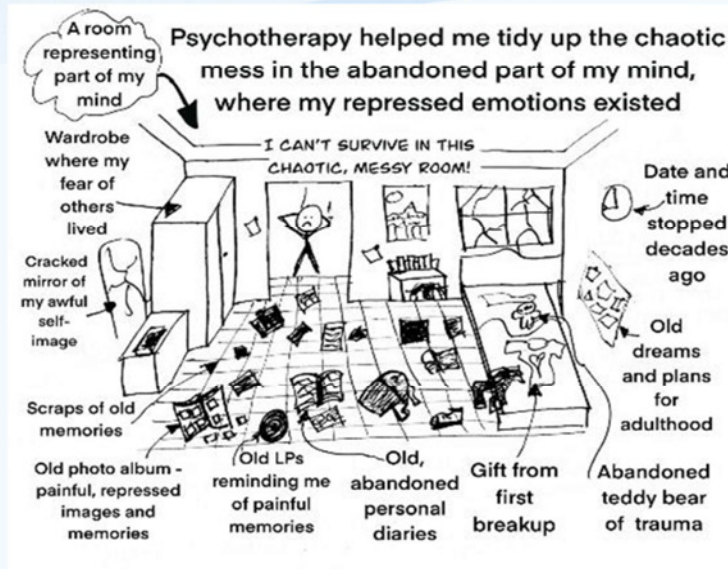
- Pits, wells and caves

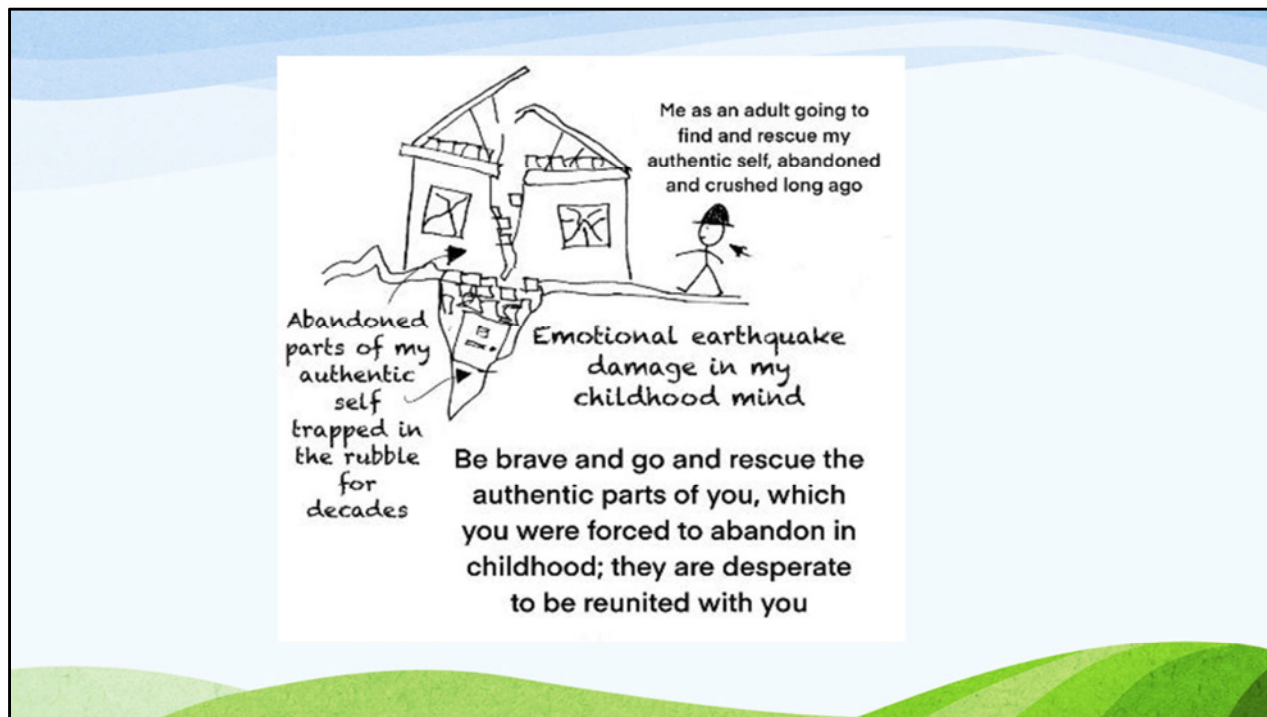




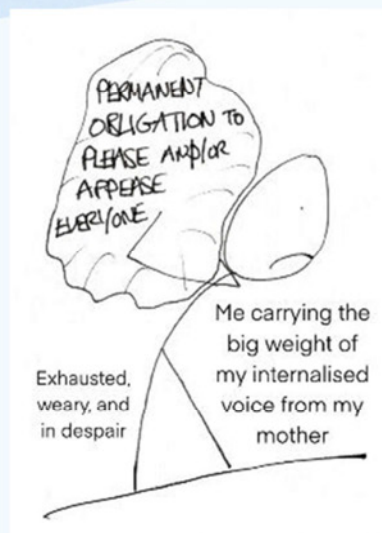


- Buildings and rooms





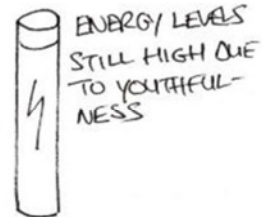
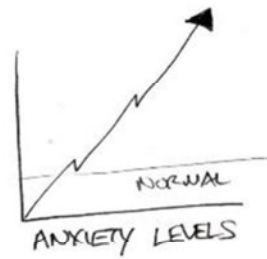
- Weights and baggage



- Chronologies

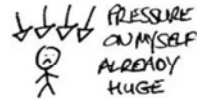
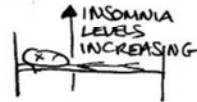
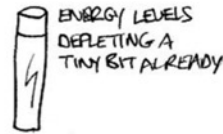
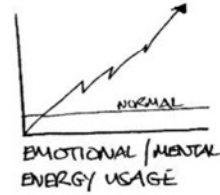
8 to 15 years old

- I'M CONVINCED OTHER KIDS WANT TO ASSAULT ME, BECAUSE THEY TOO KNOW I DESERVE IT; I CAN ONLY TRUST MY CLOSEST AND OLDEST FRIENDS
- IF I'M SUBMISSIVE AND PASSIVE, I SHOULD SURVIVE MEETING FRIENDS, IF I'M VERY CAREFUL.
- I'M A GEEK AND AN UGLY LOSER, AND I WILL NEVER STOP BLAMING MYSELF



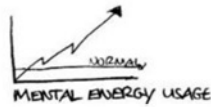
16 to 25 years old

- I AM DISGUSTING INSIDE;
MY FIRST GIRLFRIEND WAS
RIGHT TO SEE THIS
AND OMP ME. I
- WILL ALWAYS
APOLOGISE TO HER
FOR THE AGONY SHE
MUST HAVE ENDURED
- ALL MY GREAT, NEW
FRIENDS ARE
WORTH SO MUCH
MORE THAN ME; I
MUST BE SUCH A DISAPPOINT-
MENT TO THEM
I CONTINUE TO BLAME AND
HATE MYSELF; I MUST BE
PERFECT, ALL THE TIME
- I CRAVE LOVE AND AFFECTION
YET EVERYONE HAS A PARTNER
EXCEPT ME



25 to 30 years old

- I MUST PERFORM EXCEPTIONALLY IN MY PROFESSIONAL LIFE TO PROVE MY SELF-WORTH TO EVERYONE
- I'M TRYING SO HARD TO BE LOVED, YET NO-ONE IS INTERESTED
- DEEP DOWN I'M VERY SCARED AND LONELY, AND I'M STARTING TO FEEL EXHAUSTED
- I MUST TRY EVEN HARDER BECAUSE I'M TO BLAME FOR EVERYTHING
- CLUMPS OF MY HAIR ARE FALLING OUT
- FUN THINGS NOW FEEL BURDENSOME
- SEVERE NIGHT SWEATS ARE OCCURRING
- MY CHRISTMAS BREAKS ARE SPENT FEELING SHATTERED



ENERGY LEVELS DEPLETING BIT BY BIT

INSOMNIA LEVELS HIGH

PUTTING MYSELF UNDER MORE PRESSURE

STRESS LEVELS HIGH

BURNOUT PERIODS OCCURRING

ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION INCREASING



YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME

IT WASN'T YOUR FAULT

IT DIDN'T HAPPEN LIKE
YOU THINK IT DID

- Collages of feelings

Understanding and drawing toxic shame

- Shame is a soul-eating emotion. *Carl Jung*

Background: Toxic shame

As John Bradshaw points out, too much shame experienced by a child can become toxic when the child internalises the feeling of shame to such a degree that he feels overwhelmingly, that his/her own perceived deficiency and inadequacy is its cause. The child becomes as bound up in shame as a person tied round with rope. This leads you to despise your true essence or authentic self. It drives you to denigrate and destroy this authentic self to create a false self that you think will be more acceptable to the outside world. This can lead people to spend their whole lives in a tragic mindset. (For more on this topic search online for D. W.

Winnicott who introduced the concept in the 1960s.) To my mind I went through the following stages to reach a state of toxic shame – please note that these stages are based purely on my own experiences and have no professional or academic grounding .

AS A CHILD, IT'S VERY EASY TO BRAINWASH
YOURSELF INTO

WORTHLESS,
BELIEFS

→ BELIEVING YOU ARE

→ BASED ON FALSE

AND

MIS-UNDER
STANDINGS



- ME AS A SELF-
PROCLAIMED
HIGH PRIEST
IN MY TEMPLE

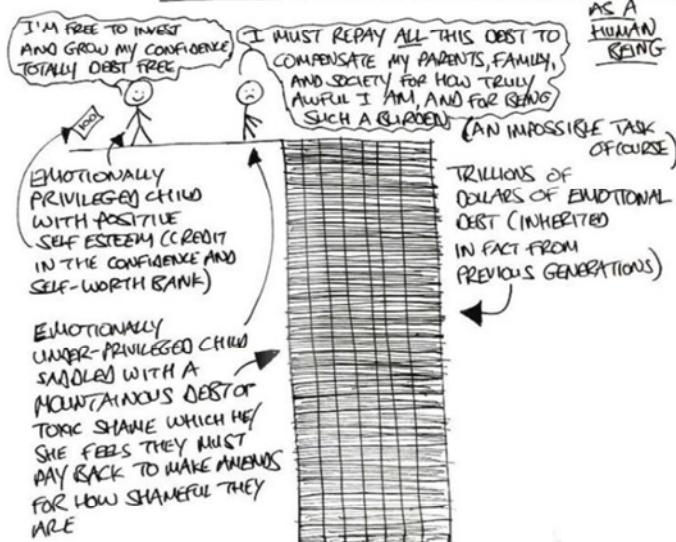
FALSE FOUNING
DOCUMENTS / BELIEFS
INCLUDED:

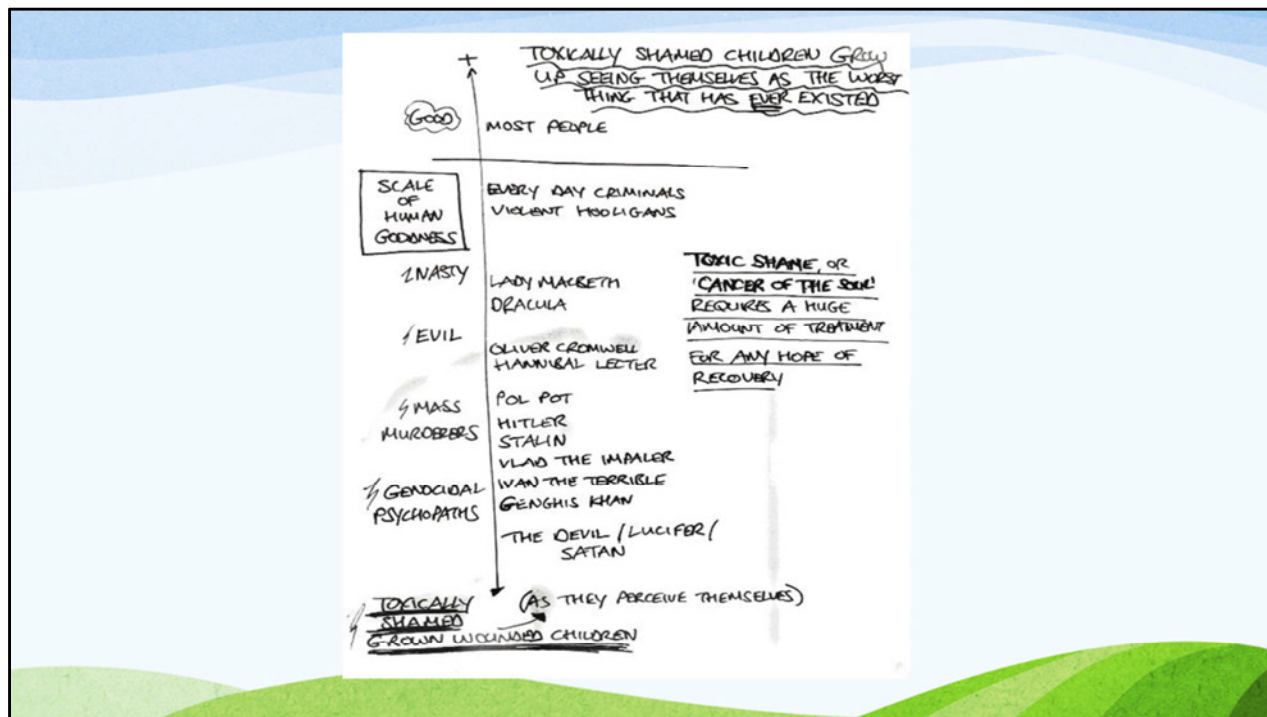
- MY PARENTS ARE
DISGUSTED WITH
ME

(TO BE REPEATED
TO ONESELF DAILY)

I INDOCTRINATED AND BRAINWASHED
MYSELF INTO A SELF-CREATED CULT OF
SHAME. THIS PROVIDED ME WITH A SENSE
OF IDENTITY, STRUCTURE AND BELONGING

TOXIC SHAME SADDLES THE CHILD WITH REMORSE
AND AN IMMENSURABLE DEFICIT OF SELF-WORTH HE/SHE
FEELS THEY MUST REPAY BEFORE BEING ACCEPTABLE





**Adding
cultural
references
and
specific
themes**

**TOXIC SHAME FROM CHILDHOOD IS AN INCREDIBLY
STRONG FORCE**

THE DEATH
STAR OF
TOXIC
SHAME
FROM
CHILDHOOD
↳
(CONTROLLED
BY MY PARENTS)



INCREDIBLY STRONG TRACTOR
BEAM SENDING OUT WAVES OF
TOXIC SHAME PULLING ME BACK

**ESCAPING FROM THE
POWERFUL TRACTOR
BEAM OF CHILDHOOD
TOXIC SHAME TAKES
REAL COURAGE AND
FOCUS**

ME AS
AN ADULT
IN MY X-WING
TRYING TO ESCAPE THE
STRONG GRAVITY-LIKE
PULL OF THE BEAM

(AN ANALOGY FROM
THE FILM STAR WARS)

A HUGE AMOUNT
OF ENERGY AND
FOCUS IS NEEDED
TO BREAK FREE
FROM THIS
INCREDIBLY
STRONG FORCE.
ESCAPING FROM IT
IS LIFE-CHANGING

To help me describe what I am feeling more descriptively, I occasionally like to turn to cultural references, such as films, music, sport, science, biblical parables, literature, current affairs and everyday objects. The following are some examples of these.



Watch how one man relives his childhood experiences seemingly endlessly, day after day!

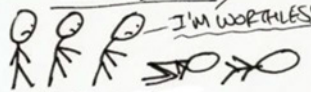
New movie!

Groundhog Day

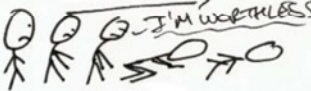
How can
he escape
his current
fate?



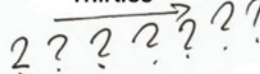
Teen years



Twenties



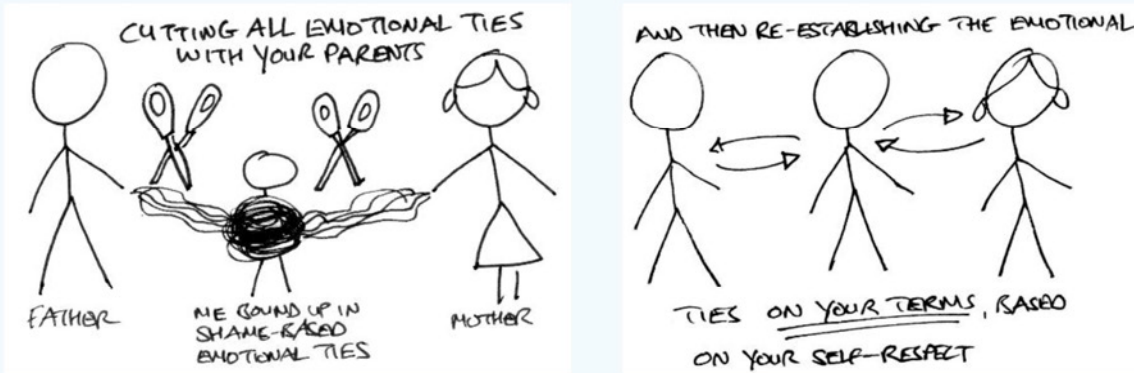
Thirties



Forties and beyond?

Same
fears =
same
results

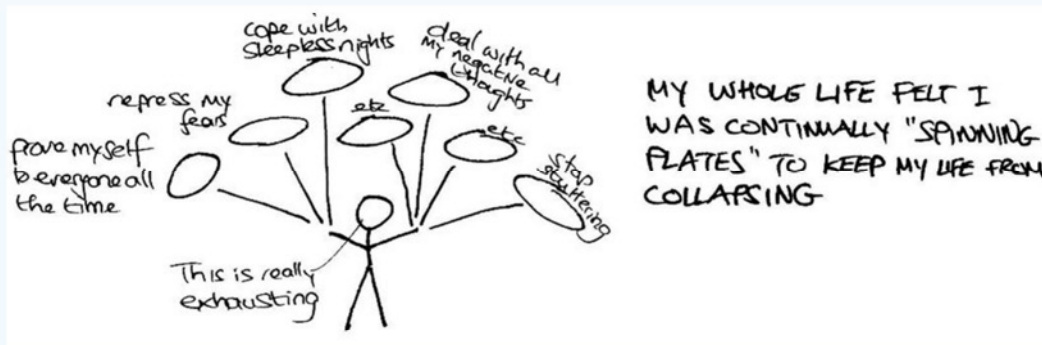
Understanding my childhood, deconstructing my parents, and overcoming my fear of them



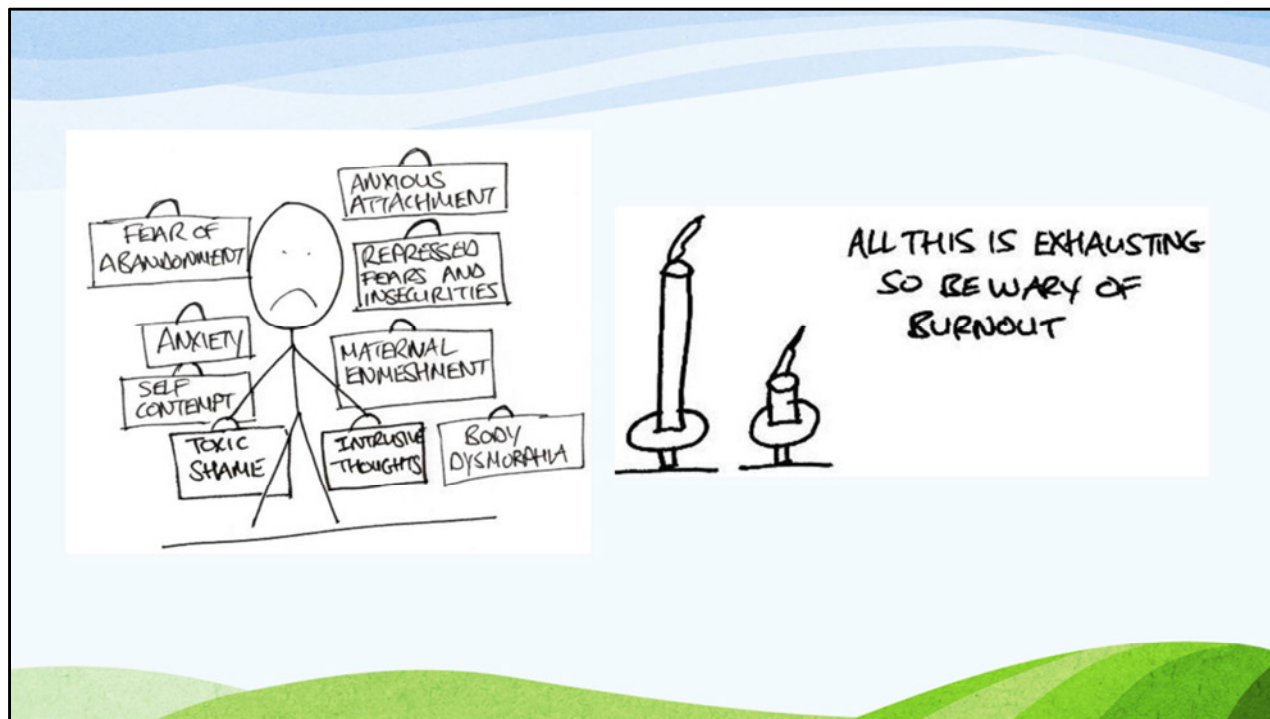
Like many people, my childhood experiences are the root of my adult fears and insecurities. At first, it was difficult to recognise this because everyone wants to imagine that they had a good childhood (for a more complete description of my past and how I came to terms with it, please see my previous books). This was the case with me because, like many people, I subconsciously wanted to ignore my repressed pain and keep it buried. What most helped me to recover was focusing very closely on these very formative relationships, especially with my parents. As children, we spend, on average, 25,000 hours in the company of our parents or caregivers. This is a time in our lives when we are naïve, young, innocent, highly impressionable and biologically programmed to believe, copy and follow whatever these adults communicate to us. In addition, we have no way of questioning, scrutinising or analysing what is being communicated to us. Therefore, it makes sense to focus on these relationships from where much of the trauma, at least in my case, stems. It is clear to me that both my parents had, to one extent or another, emotionally impoverished and damaging childhoods, so little if any blame can be laid at their door. Every child is a victim of circumstance, but we have the ability to repair the damage in adulthood. I have, therefore, put a lot of work into analysing, processing, reinterpreting and reformulating how I related to my father and my

mother during my childhood and, subsequently, as an adult.

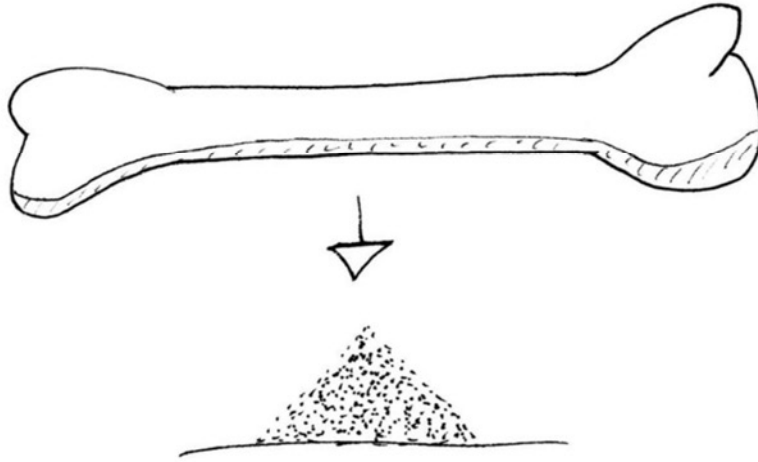
How to draw burnout, depression, mental exhaustion and despair

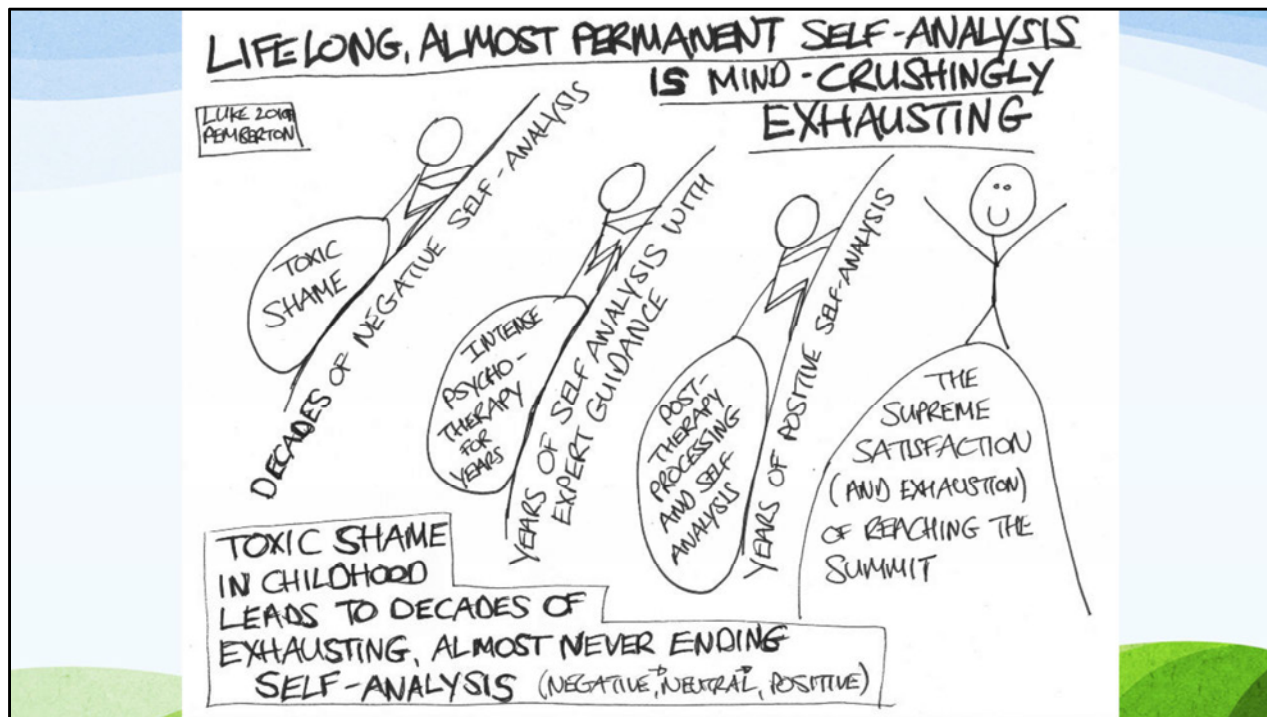


I read somewhere that it's not necessarily what you go through that is traumatizing, but rather the inability to talk about your experiences at the time. For decades, toxic shame prevented me from talking about my problems. I simply believed that I was deficient and unworthy of ever allowing myself to find a way out of my despair. Carrying around all that fear, self-hatred, anxiety, insecurity and despair takes a huge toll on your mental health, creating almost non-stop inner conflict. Eventual depression and burnout are pretty much inevitable. I have, on a number of occasions, been diagnosed with burnout and a specific form of depression. Recovery has been a demanding process. It's difficult to convey the deep and prolonged feeling of exhaustion, emptiness and numbness involved. I found it a huge help to try to draw what I was going through. Drawing also helped me to convey my feelings to other people who were concerned about me but didn't have much idea of what I was going through.



BONE CRUSHING MENTAL FATIGUE





HOW TO FEEL BETTER ABOUT YOURSELF

- OFTEN FEEL STRONG, NEGATIVE EMOTIONS?
1.  WRITE DOWN WHAT YOU FEEL; GET USED TO DESCRIBING YOUR FEELINGS
 2.  GET YOUR DEMONS OUT OF YOUR HEAD, AND ONTO PAPER
 3.  TALK TO A THERAPIST YOU CLICK WITH
 4.  READ A FEW KEY BOOKS (eg by JOHN BRADSHAW on Shame)
 5.  TAKE TIME OUT TO REFLECT
 6.  RESEARCH YOUR PAST (eg CHILDHOOD, WITH SIBLINGS, PARENTS)
 7.  EXPRESS YOUR PAIN + OTHER FEELINGS
 8.  OPEN UP TO OTHERS (I REPEAT UNTIL BETTER)

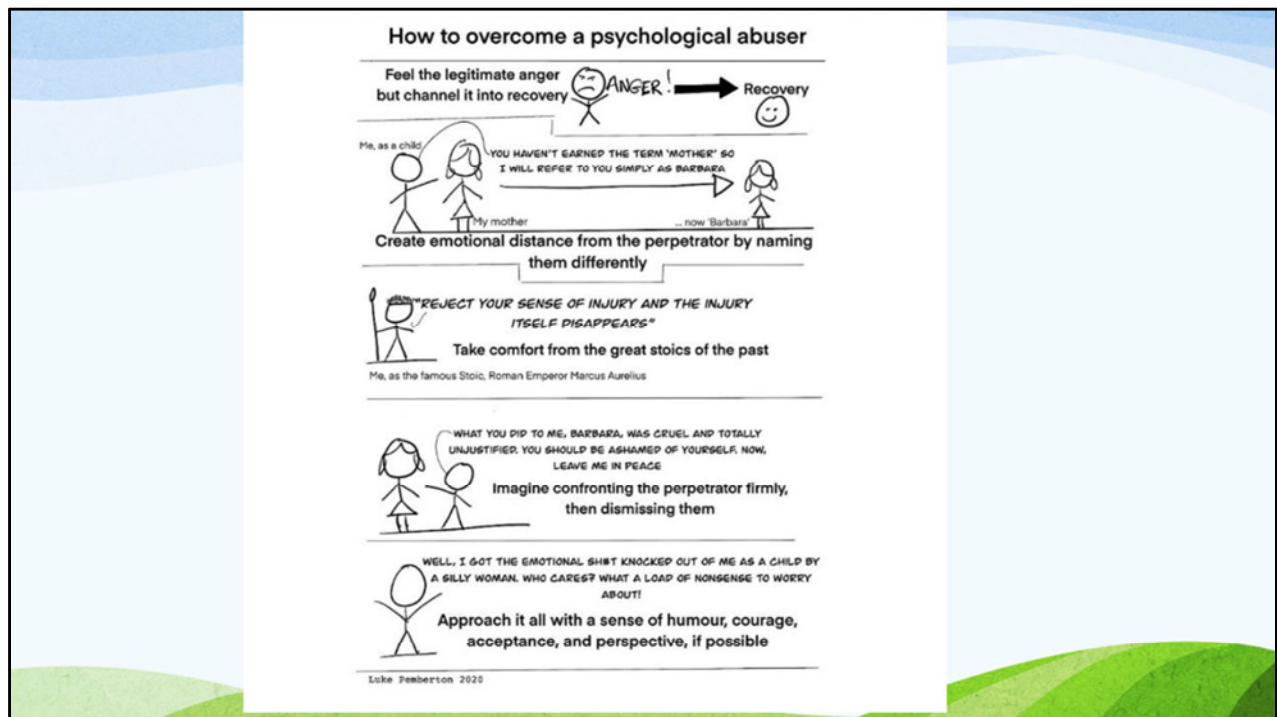
HOW TO FEEL BETTER ABOUT YOURSELF

... CONTINUED

9.  REALISE IT'S PROBABLY GOT A LOT TO DO WITH YOUR UPBRINGING
10.  BECOME A BIT OF AN EMOTIONAL ARCHAEOLOGIST/EXPLORER/GENEALOGIST
11.  BE BRAVE AND IMAGINE SAYING ALL THE THINGS YOU SIMPLY COULDN'T SAY IN YOUR CHILDHOOD, TO THE PEOPLE YOU LIKELY FEARED GREATLY
12.  CONNECT WITH THE LOST PARTS OF YOU, WHICH YOU HAD TO ABANDON TO SURVIVE
13.  DECONSTRUCT, TAKE APART, QUESTION, CHALLENGE, DISSENT FROM, ALL YOUR VERY POWERFUL AND FORMATIVE BELIEFS FROM CHILDHOOD
14.  FEEL YOURSELF GROWING IN WISDOM A LITTLE BIT EVERY DAY



Some final reflections

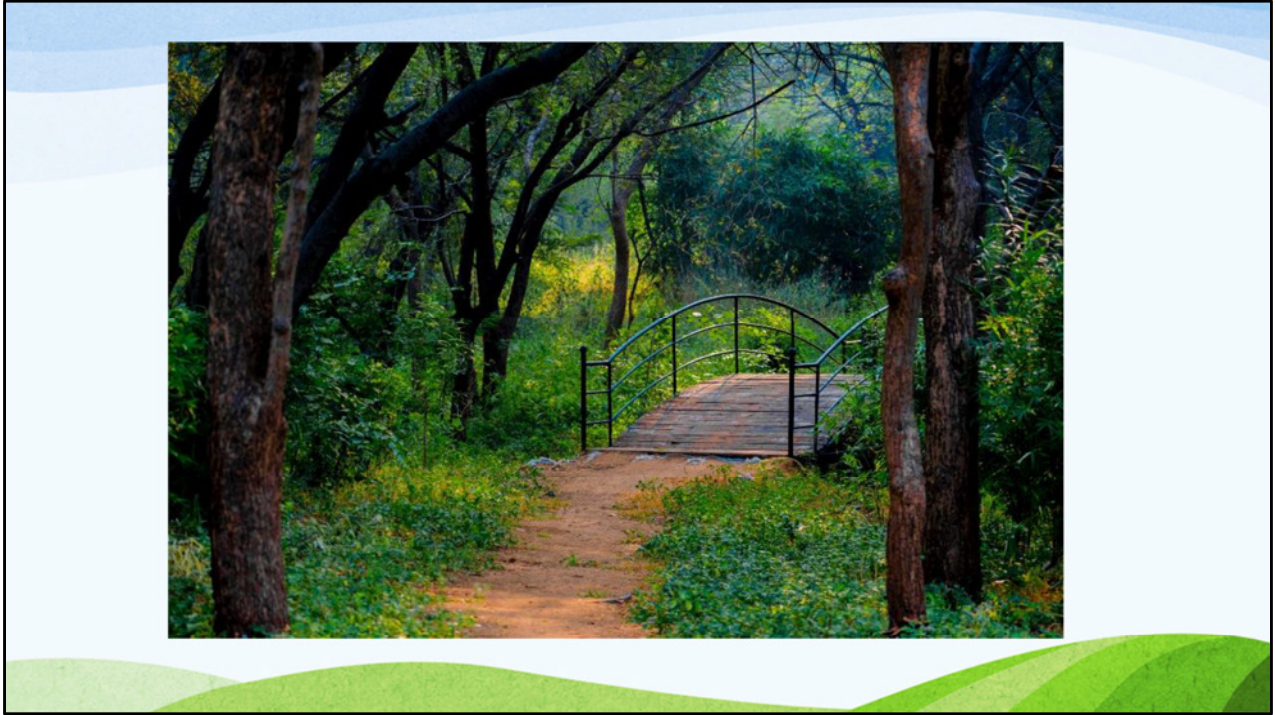


SKIP?



Most importantly, CONNECT WITH YOUR INNER CHILD

- Your value doesn't decrease based on someone's inability to see your worth. *Anonymous*
- Stand up and walk out of your history. *Dr Phil McGraw*
- Facing it, always facing it, that's the way to get through. Face it. *Joseph Conrad*
- At first, know yourself. *Anonymous*
- The happiness of your life depends upon the quality of your thoughts. *Marcus Aurelius*
- In the midst of winter, I found there was, within me, an invincible summer. *Albert Camus*



Any questions?