



# STORIES ABOUT THE PAST LIVE IN THE PRESENT

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FROM SHADOW TO LIGHT:  
RECLAIMING YOUR STORY

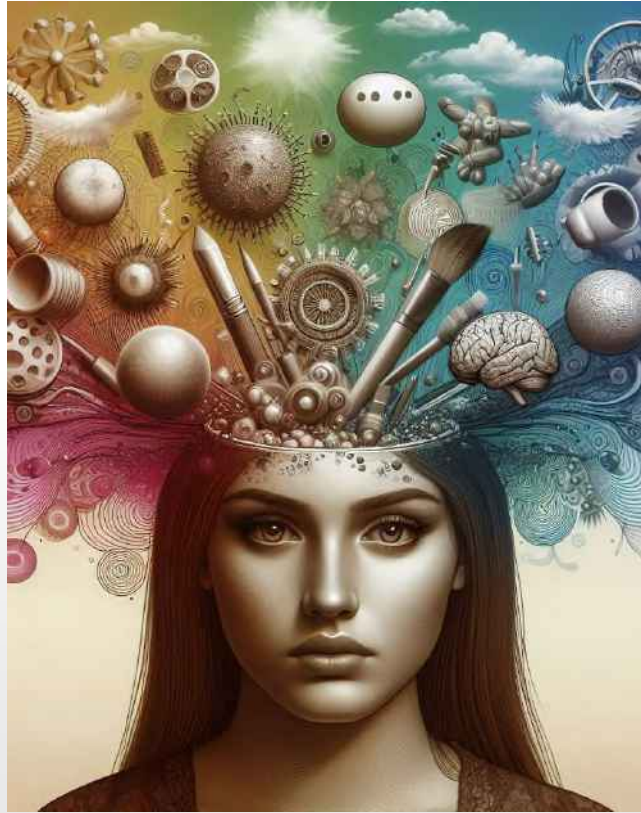
PART III



# THE MIRACLE QUESTION

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WHAT WOULD  
YOUR LIFE LOOK  
LIKE IF THERE WERE  
NO LIMITATIONS?







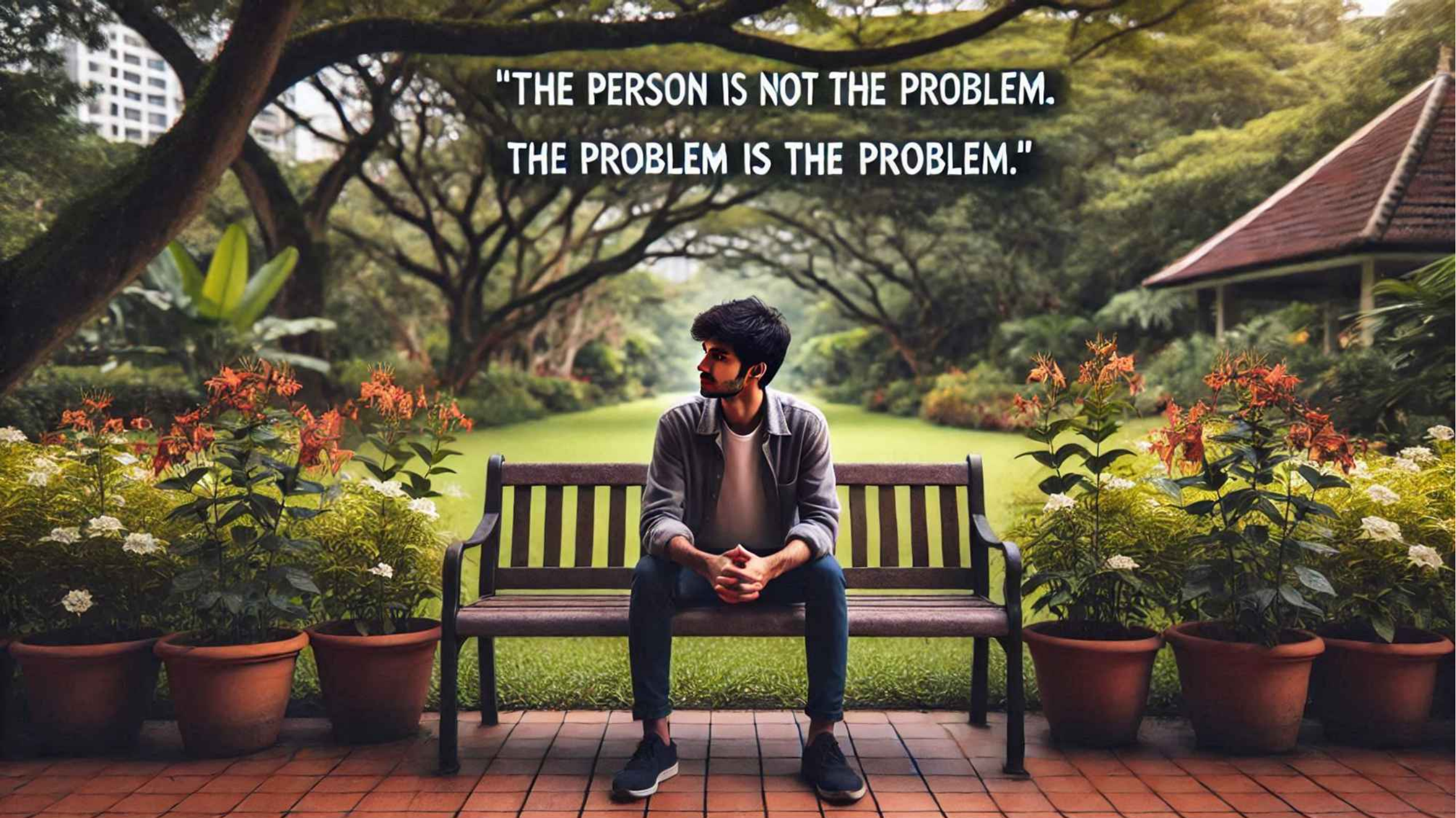
# IMPLEMENTING NARRATIVE THERAPY

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Empowering Clients  
Through Story  
Reconstruction



**"THE PERSON IS NOT THE PROBLEM.  
THE PROBLEM IS THE PROBLEM."**





# INTRODUCTION TO NARRATIVE THERAPY

**Definition:** A collaborative therapeutic approach helping clients re-author their lives by separating themselves from their problems.

**Founders:** Michael White and David Epston, developed in the 1980s.

**Core Idea:** The problem is the problem. The person is not the problem.



# BENEFITS OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

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- Empowers clients to reclaim their identity.
- Honors and integrates cultural narratives.
- Effective across individual, family, and group therapy.





# CORE PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

- Externalization
- Deconstruction
- Unique Outcomes
- Empowerment



# CORE PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

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**Externalization:** Viewing the problem as outside the person

- Help the client name their anxiety (or depression, or OCD, or...) as if it were a separate entity.
  - If your anxiety (or depression, or OCD, or...) were a character in a story, what would it look like or act like?
  - By giving the problem a name and identity, the client begins to see anxiety (or depression, or OCD, or...) as something they can challenge, rather than a fixed part of themselves.

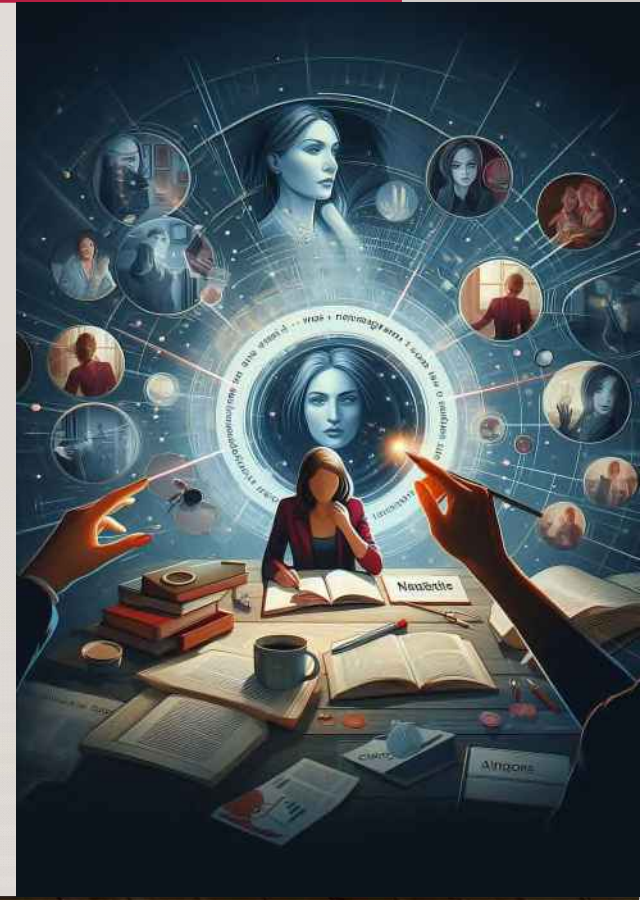




# CORE PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

**Deconstruction:** Breaking down dominant narratives.

- Analyzing dominant stories that influence an individual's life.
  - Examine cultural, societal, or personal narratives.
  - Question origins, assumptions, and power dynamics of these stories.
  - Deconstruction encourages critical thinking, enabling individuals to separate from limiting labels or beliefs
  - This process empowers clients to re-author their stories, aligning them with their values, aspirations, and preferred identities, fostering greater agency and self-awareness in their therapeutic journey.





# CORE PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

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## Unique Outcomes: Identifying exceptions

- Highlighting exceptions to the dominant story.
  - Uncovering evidence of the client's resilience, strengths, and alternative narratives.
  - Challenging the problem-saturated story
  - Revealing possibilities for change.
  - Exploring these moments allows clients to recognize their agency and resources, fostering hope and self-empowerment.



# CORE PRINCIPLES OF NARRATIVE THERAPY

**Empowerment:** Highlighting strengths and resilience.

- Exceptions, or unique outcomes highlight moments when the client successfully resisted or overcame the problem
  - By exploring these instances, clients gain insight into their skills, values, and resources that contradict the problem-saturated narrative.
  - This process fosters self-awareness, confidence, and a sense of control over their life story.
  - Therapists amplify these exceptions, transforming them into empowering, preferred narratives.
  - Clients feel more capable of shaping their future and reclaiming their identity from the problem's grip.





# THE NARRATIVE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS:

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## 1. Engagement

- Building a collaborative, respectful relationship between therapist and client.
- The therapist listens without judgment, creating a safe space for the client to share their story.

## 2. Mapping the Influence

- The therapist helps the client uncover the ways the problem shapes their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, revealing its pervasive impact.



# THE NARRATIVE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS:

## 3. Externalization

- Separates the problem from the person, shifting language from *I am the problem* to *The problem is influencing me*.
- This reframing fosters empowerment and agency.

## 4. Re-Authoring Stories

- Identifying moments of resilience or *Unique Outcomes*, when the client resisted the problem's influence.
- These moments become the foundation for creating new, more empowering narratives that align with the client's values and strengths.

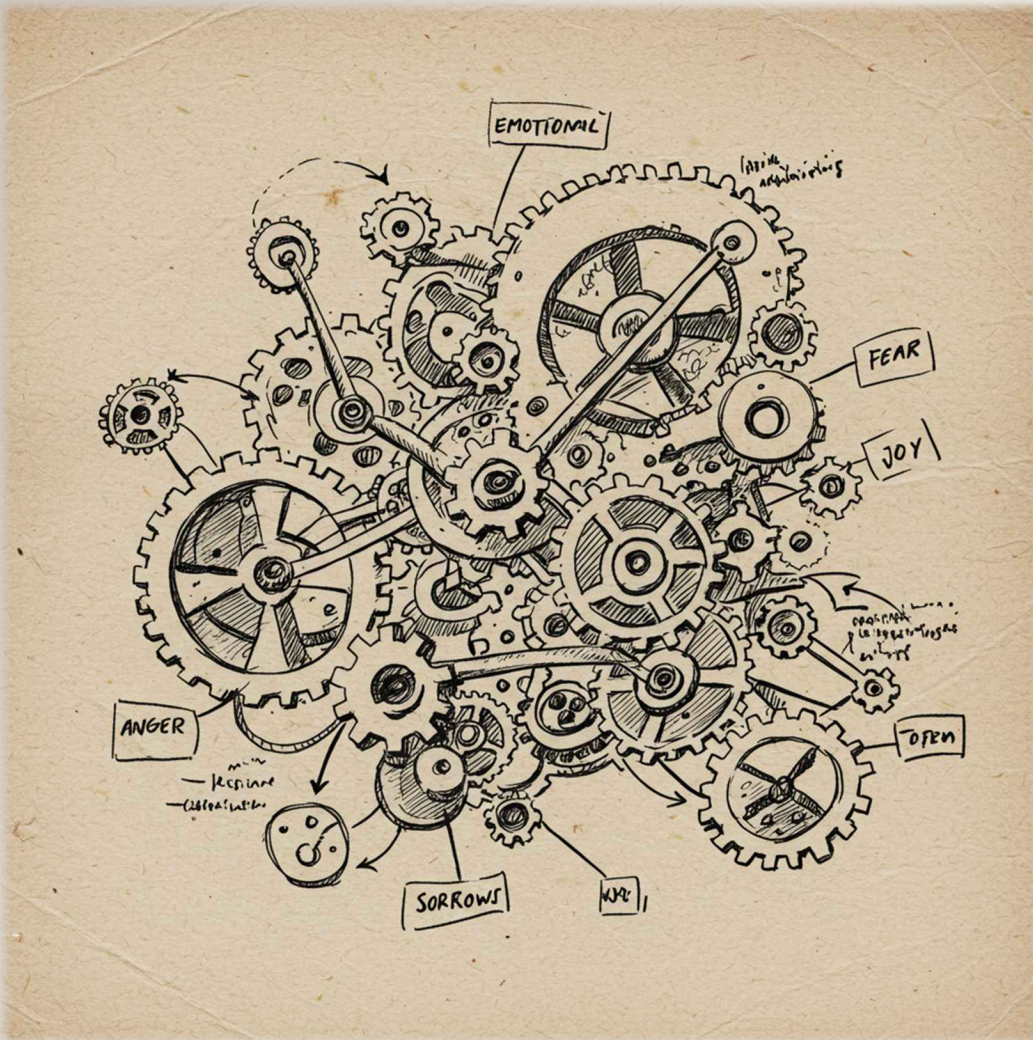




# EMOTIONAL SYSTEMS IN NARRATIVE THERAPY

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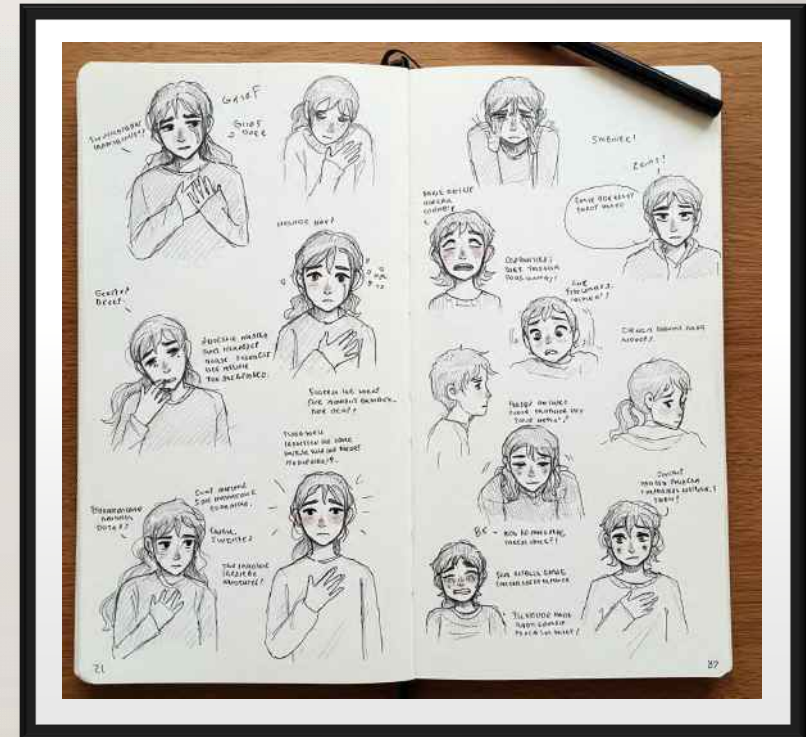
- Emotions are the brain's way of signaling survival information.
- Emotional systems operate like an internal guidance mechanism.
- Emotional awareness enhances self-regulation and decision-making.
- Negative emotions, when accepted and processed, can protect against depression.





# THE CONNECTION BETWEEN EMOTIONS AND PERSONAL NARRATIVES

- Emotions arise in the body before we consciously interpret them.
- The limbic system plays a key role in shaping meaning and responses.
- Our stories emerge as we attempt to make sense of our feelings.
- Affect (outward expression of emotions) must be internalized before externalization.
- Thought-provoking question: *Have you felt this way in the past?*





# THE PANIC/GRIEF SYSTEM

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The **PANIC/GRIEF** system, identified by neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp, is a fundamental emotional network in the brain responsible for feelings of separation distress, loneliness, and social bonding.

This system evolved to ensure survival by motivating social animals, including humans, to seek connection and support.

When social bonds are threatened or lost, the PANIC/GRIEF system is activated, triggering distress responses such as crying, sadness, and anxiety.







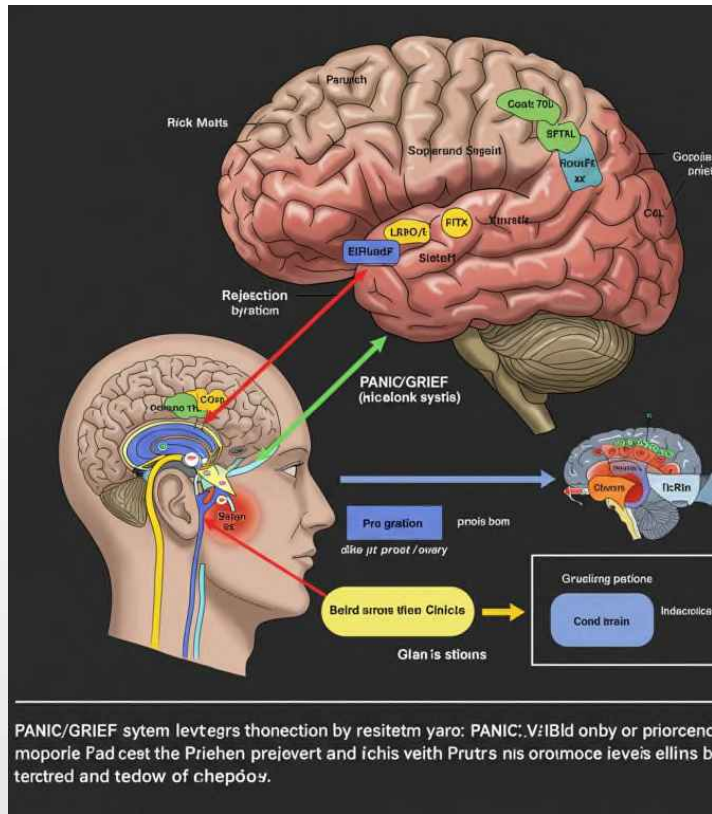
# ACTIVATING THE PANIC/GRIEF SYSTEM

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- This response is particularly strong in infants who rely on caregivers for survival.
- The system is associated with the **anterior cingulate cortex, periaqueductal gray, and opioid neurotransmission**, explaining why social pain resembles physical pain.
- In grief, the brain undergoes a process of adaptation, initially experiencing acute distress before shifting toward emotional regulation.
- Chronic activation of this system, such as in prolonged loneliness, can lead to depression and physical health issues.



# THE IMPACT OF REJECTION, TRAUMA, AND ISOLATION



- The PANIC/GRIEF system is linked to the brain's pain response.
- Rejection activates the same neural pathways as physical pain.
- Research shows Tylenol can lessen emotional pain similar to physical pain.
- Addiction is both a cause and effect of social isolation.
- Trauma involves divided attention, impairing memory integration.



# THE NEED for a SAFE NARRATIVE SPACE

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- PTSD is linked to decreased emotional awareness and processing.
- Stress hormones disrupt the hippocampus, making traumatic memories feel present.
- Implicit memories lack context and remain emotionally charged.
- Therapy must establish safety before processing traumatic events.





# CONSTRUCTING NEW NARRATIVES for HEALING

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- Affect-filled problem memories + Story = Problem Management
- Affect-filled unique outcome memories + Story = New Story
- Supportive listeners help individuals construct more adaptive narratives
- “Conscious awareness is shaped by perception, not just reality.” – Diane Ackerman





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WITHIN NARRATIVE THERAPY,  
EMOTIONAL AWARENESS AND EXTERNALIZATION  
ARE KEY THERAPEUTIC TOOLS





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**ANYONE HERE NOT HAVE  
ANY PROBLEMS AT ALL?**



# PLEASE TAKE A MINUTE TO WRITE DOWN ANY PROBLEM YOU HAVE AS EXTERNAL TO YOURSELF

My Perfectionism is holding me back from Accomplishing my Goals.



My Need for Acceptance is creating Anxiety.



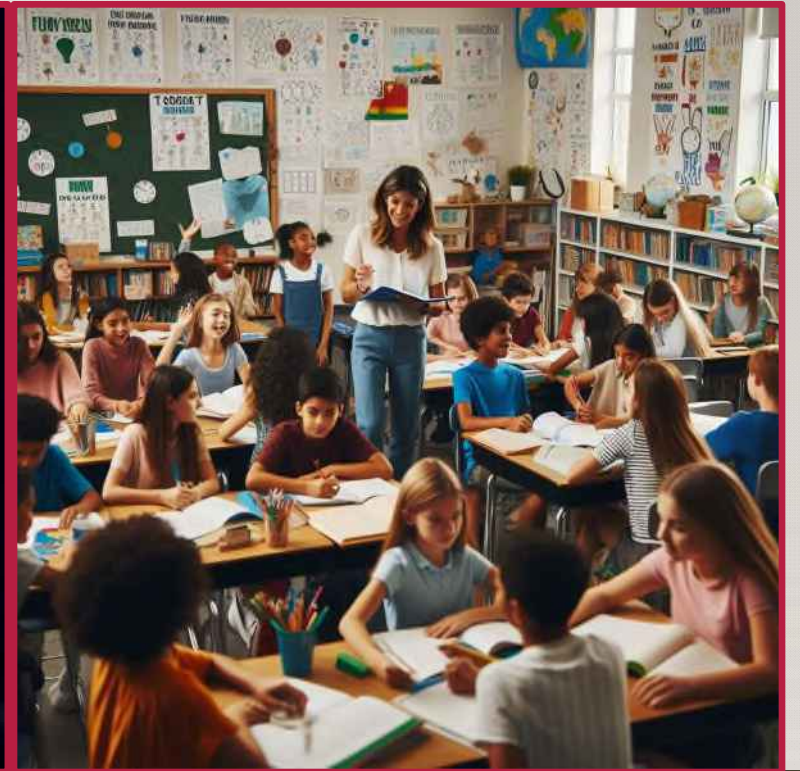
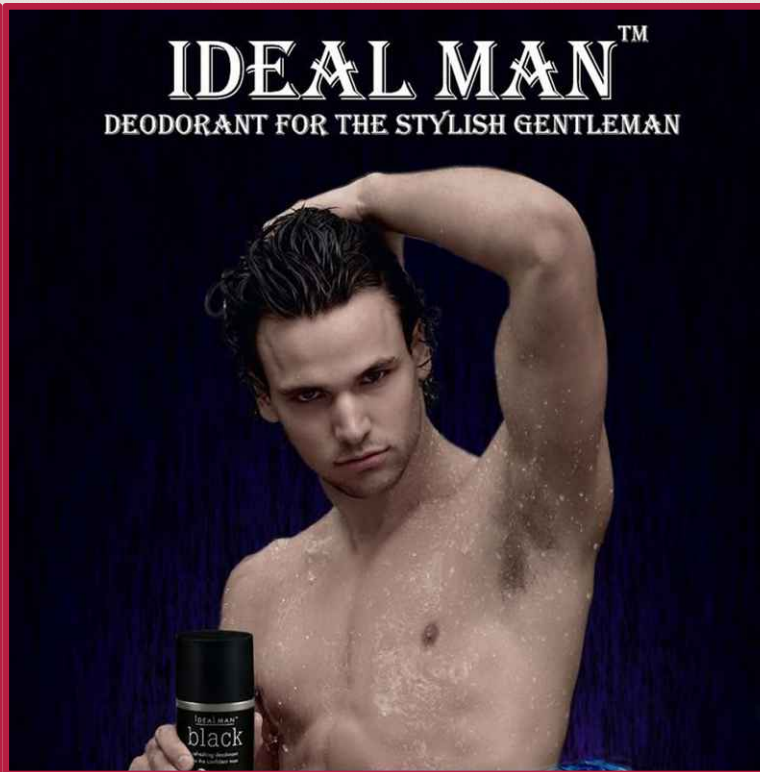
My Anxiety is keeping me Awake all Night and I'm Exhausted.





NOW TAKE A MOMENT TO DETERMINE HOW YOUR FAMILY, CULTURE OR OTHER INFLUENCES MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THIS PROBLEM?

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# SO WHAT'S THE STORY YOU HAVE BEEN TELLING YOURSELF?







**ANXIETY IS THREATENING  
OUR MARRIAGE!**





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DEPRESSION HAS ME PARALYZED!



A man with a terrified expression, wide eyes, and an open mouth showing teeth, holding a large knife. He is wearing a light-colored t-shirt. The background is dark with a vertical light source on the right.

TRAUMA HAS METERRIFIED!





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HOW CAN YOU BREAK  
THESE CHAINS THAT  
BIND YOU?



**WHEN I RE-WRITE MY STORY,  
I WILL BE FREE TO BE ME!**





# 15 MINUTE BREAK to STRETCH & CONNECT

