

## Clinical Case Material – NPD Teaching, Year 2, March 2026 Jo Coggins

- ***I am going to talk through a case that I worked with. As you listen, start to map – does the broken egg model help you to organise this material?***

Andy, 33. White British man. Had had 2 courses of CBT prior that didn't feel useful to him and been transferred for CAT. Lives alone, just started a new relationship, gay, currently unemployed, trained as a lawyer.

I was lucky - Andy was already open to thinking more about himself in relation to others. The CBT therapist had explained CAT well. Andy had just started a new relationship and was aware of patterns in prior relationships that he wanted to think about. He wanted this one to work. He was also struggling financially having not worked for 6 months and his savings were running out.

Described main difficulties as:

- My last partner said I have an abandonment problem. I don't really understand what this is about but I just end up getting bored after about 2 years. All my friends are getting married and having children – I feel like I am getting left behind. I can't bear it when I see people buying houses together on face book. Everyone else is getting on with their lives and I'm being left behind.
- I'm struggling to work – seeing value, finding motivation. I trained as a lawyer, but I hated my last job – but what else can I do? I just don't have any motivation to even look at jobs. I am living off my savings at the moment and I am running out of money. I need help to find motivation to work.
- I often feel low in mood, just want to stay in bed, I don't want to do anything for long periods. Lots of time gaming.

History:

Andy is an only child. He described his dad as having been diagnosed with a MH illness many years ago but not really accepting the help on offer to him. Andy's parents worked together in a family business. Andy explained that it was Dad that lost the business a few years ago (Andy gave the impression this was Dad's fault), and since then Andy has had to support them financially. Andy described his dad with a contemptuous tone. He used words such as bizarre, broken, dysfunctional, weak, un-helpable, pathetic. He described feeling responsible for him, but also repulsed by him.

When he was a little boy, Andy's dad was often not there, working. Andy shared that they were wealthy, and that his dad was well respected. He described feeling that time with his dad could be really exciting – i.e. going to big auctions together 'feeling like we had won the lottery', feeling proud to be with him, or, terrifying if Dad was angry, or had been drinking.

Andy described his Mum as vulnerable and someone who he had to protect. As a little boy Andy described feeling really anxious when she went out. Andy described himself as much closer to mum and that he slept in the same bed as her (them?) until he was 12.

Memory – Christmas, mum took an OD, dad threw the tree and presents out of the window.

Mum and dad were both heavy drinkers, he witnessed serious violence between them although no violence was directed at him. He shared memories of getting in between them to try and get them to stop fighting.

Andy described how 'the front' was very important to both his mum and dad. He had to be well presented, well mannered, and to have achieved highly at school. He remembered how proudly his mum would share how well he was doing at school with the neighbours. The family appearance was important to his parents. They threw lavish parties. Andy shared how he would be pleading inside to the guests 'please take me with you'

Previous relationships: Andy described relationships feeling intense in the early days, lots of anxiety about how they felt about him as well as excitement, 'the chase', arguments but also Disney make ups. Then a boredom that he experiences when the relationship starts to feel more settled and normal. Andy told me that he tends to be drawn to doctors or other lawyers.

Friendships: Andy had a good circle of friends, but described often feeling lonely. Social events would feel very tiring and pressured for him. He often pre-rehearsed subjects he would talk about.

- ***Come back as a group – create a group map.***

***How do we work in a collaborative way with someone who is inviting us to feel and respond in ways that can block our curiosity, empathy and sense of connection?***

***As you watch the role play, hold in mind:***

- ***Where are they on the map?***
- ***How might you feel in this moment?***
- ***What might you be pulled to do?***
- ***How might you respond?***

Role play 1 – the start of session 1

Jo: Ok Andy, so my name is Jo and we've got 50 minutes this morning to start to think tougher about how we might use some therapy time together in a way that is helpful for you. I wonder if you could start by sharing with me your sense of what feels difficult currently.

Andy: [smiling, attentive, leaning forward] .....Jo, finally, I'm soooo relieved, it's so wonderful to meet with you, thank goodness you are a clinical psychologist. I had Gary before, and we tried CBT, but it just wasn't enough for me – you know - so he told me about you and CAT and that this is the one that's going to really help me, and I have waited for a while now. Just so relieved. ....I mean CBT might help some people, but I think for me and what I'm going through, I need a but more....

***Group feedback***

Jo: OK, so, it sounds like ....ummm.....you have experienced past therapies and maybe therapists as ....disappointing? not really giving you what you need or understanding you fully..? Already that feels like important information for us to hold in mind – you know, this CAT therapy is all about us being curious about what happens in your relationships, so I'm just going to make a note of that...

***Group discussion - What was I doing there? How was I using CAT to respond?***

What helped me to get alongside Andy as much as I could during reformulation?

- Using his words to map early – listening out for key words that would enrich a map – Disney, pathetic, abandoned, ‘the chase’, bored – mapping from that first session
- Starting by talking about Andy in the bottom of the RRs – how he feels disappointed by others rather than critical of others.
- Also – starting with the self to self relationship – i.e. huge pressure on self to appear as impressive.
- Using the letter to name my sense of what I was being invited to do/feel – i.e. naming how I had written an especially long letter and spent a long time on it, naming the pressure I felt for this work to be impressive. Also, making predictions about how our relationship could be shaped by these patterns – how could we spot it and how might we manage it?

Target problems – It can be difficult to agree on TPs. A client can often come with hopes of getting back to a place of feeling admired, ‘on top’ - whereas we are trying to move them towards being able to tolerate vulnerability and ordinariness. Keeping target problems more concrete might be helpful?

With Andy – We kept TPs fairly open, explorative, based on the problems he brought, but through a relational lens.

- Relationships and jobs always end up feeling boring and then I have to leave/end it.
- Being with others can make me feel very anxious and on show.
- Sometimes I struggle to motivate myself to get out of bed.

### Writing exercise

**15 mins, work alone, try and write a section/paragraph of the reformulation letter where you are curious/reflect on the countertransference; perhaps what you can already feel and what that might mean, or predictions about what the pulls may be between you.**

**Feedback – anyone to read out?**

### Session 5

‘so what have you been up to?’ – We started to notice how uncomfortable Andy felt at the start of each session – he felt threatened by this question, with me and others. **we noticed** it at the start of each session. Immense pressure on himself to impress me. I reflected how I could sense his unease, that it made us feel a bit blocked/distant. I tried to stay with exploring this – what impact might it have on others, where is it on the map, what impact did it have on his experience of that conversation?

An intervention planned: me to ask how his week was and him not to embellish but to stay with and share the disappointed in self feeling. (**us trying something experimental out together i.e. no guarantee of success**). Mixed result – I think we both forgot....

Session 6 Andy brought a dream of self as a little boy, dismissive of it at first – **we tried to stay with the vulnerable feelings, the loss, fear, sadness** – linking in with the little boy part still vulnerable, what didn't he get enough of when he was little etc – Andy tearful

**Me pulling out how much more connected I felt to him in those moments. Impressing the value of the interpersonal shifts. Starting to build an exit map.**

Session 7 Intervention: Building on the theory that allowing more connection may be an exit – less pressure, I suggested **starting to consciously add in statements such as 'well done that's great news' 'I didn't know that'** – and to be curious about the impact on the connection. Linking in with what he didn't get when he was little. **I was also using to my advantage being in the impressive/admiring position at that stage.**

Me: noticing a drive to impress Andy. Me talking a lot, trying to come up with solutions, me keeping it practical rather than staying with feelings. **Sharing this with him – trying to model being a bit embarrassed, getting something wrong. Bit clunky.**

Session 9: Enactment moment examples: Andy starting to query whether he should be in therapy – really doubting it's worth or value. 'nothing is really changing' 'I am taking up a valuable slot here'

CT: I felt deflated, useless, crushed. I felt invited to agree and dismiss his pain/efforts and my value.

Also wanting to know about my other clients. Jo, how do I compare to your other clients? I imagine I am on the more complex end?

CT: I felt pressured, irritated, tested. Invited to admit what I am offering has no value and reject him, that working with him was too difficult for me.

**Any thoughts on how you might respond here?**

***Role play 2 - Glenys and I will now play a different moment that happened at the final session. After you have watched, we would like you to go into pairs and continue the role play – If you are playing the therapist - use your CAT understanding to help guide a response to Andy. If you are playing Andy – how does it feel to be responded to like this? What are you wanting as Andy in this moment? How do you feel?***

Jo: [warily because she can see Andy looks angry] Ok, so I've got the letter ready to read to you, the goodbye one that I said I would write for this session. I wondered if you have written anything Andy and if you wanted to read yours first?

Andy: [sitting back, slightly contemptuous look] No Jo, I haven't done a goodbye letter, to be honest with you, I forgot, but.....also..... I didn't see the reason in doing so. I mean.....I just couldn't really put it into words.....I feel ....disappointed I guess, that nothing has *really* changed, I still struggle, everyday, I still haven't applied for that job, I still text my partner 12 times last night... you know? That's not really success is it?

(I felt crushed, shocked, hurt, heart racing, tongue tied, I struggled to know what to say. I felt defensive, protective of myself. Angry at Andy)

**Come back to the big group – feedback. Would anyone like to demonstrate?**

### **Glenys and I continue the role play with what I said in that moment:**

Jo: oh, well.....I guess being open with you now...I feel quite sad that you've written anything for me, for our work. I feel sort of pushed away by it I guess. I.....I also feel a little punished by what you are saying, that really all this time together has been wasted, when I know that it hasn't, I know how different it has felt to sit with you and talk as the weeks have progressed, how much more connected we have been at times. But, thinking about it now..I wonder if what you are feeling now, here at our last session, disappointed with me and this therapy.....maybe fearful of this being our last session..... is somewhere on the map.....

### **Counting down to the ending and wondering how it might feel to stop coming, using the map as a guide.**

Andy rang me before the follow up saying he wasn't sleeping, he was feeling more disconnected, bored, he had ended his relationship 'it wasn't enough for me' some suicidal thoughts. He asked for another course of therapy with me

What would you do?

### **I offered 3 FU's instead of 1**

FU 1 Went back to map – pressure on self to be admired. Did a role play – how it felt for Andy to talk to himself. I played Andy – he experienced himself -

Continued to doubt the worth of therapy – not impressive. But - more catching of self trying to impress with friends noticing it - but still doubting that doing this would be enough to make him feel better. Final FU – more positive – starting to be more open. Regularly seeing more of a friend and talking about himself a little more in a less rehearsed way. Lockdown helped with less pressure.

3 months later – another call 'can I see Joanna again'

Dear Andy

Here is my goodbye letter to you. I hope it will be useful to you as a summary of the work we have done and the time we have spent together. Also, I hope it will be a chance for us to mark the ending of our sessions and say goodbye to one another.

You came in for therapy, wanting to think about the problems you were encountering particularly in your intimate relationships and your career. You felt in both that you were stuck to an extent, struggling to 'commit' and finding yourself questioning critically how well matched you were to both partners and jobs.

We talked about your past experiences – how much trauma you endured; witnessing physical violence and experiencing emotional distress with no-one to safely protect you from this. We explored how responsible you felt you were - an only child, feeling you had to manage and resolve your parents distress but that this was never realistic – that you were stuck and overwhelmed. We talked about that strong desire to please and impress people, that this felt like one of the only safe ways to safely connect with others. We talked about how lonely and alone you were – no-one

supporting you, no-one helping you to find out who you were and what you needed and how you were feeling – how your human needs and emotions started to become distant and hard to connect with.

We drew a map together that identified the 3 key loops:

- The red loop – wanting to connect with others, but only feeling safe (from being humiliated, harmed, rejected) to do so when you feel ‘better than’ them and admired by them or protecting them so they feel special and admirable. You strive to achieve this sensation by – being gregarious, putting on a front, agenda planning, not letting others shine. The problems are though that it’s a fragile and only fleeting (if at all) sensation, its exhausting, and (perhaps most importantly) others can’t connect with you, see the real you and you are left (ironically) *more* vulnerable to their judgement and criticism than you were initially.
- The blue loop – wanting to protect yourself from vulnerable feelings you scan for threat almost constantly, question what’s happening, whether its right, what it could lead to. Feeling anxious is so familiar that at times you engineer situations to make them feel more uncertain and unsteady. This though puts you into the critical and dismissing position with others who struggle to connect with you and see and care for your human needs.
- The green loop – wanting to protect yourself from distress you push feelings away by – using computer games to distract you, using matter of fact language, not connecting to and sharing your feelings with yourself or others, leaving them unheard/unsoothed.

We also started to talk about possible exits to these patterns:

- Building that observing capacity in yourself – tuning in more to the nuances of how you are feeling and what is happening loop wise. Writing down may help you to see it as less overall negative and tune you in more to shifts and patterns that you may not have been aware of.
- For example, using the sensation of boredom to tune in – has the boredom just kicked in because the other person made you feel vulnerable in some way and as a result, you are being a little more curt, controlling, critical or superior? Or has something else just happened? We are aware that boredom is likely to kick in sooner for you based on your past experiences so it’s a good one to start tracking.
- Finding a way to connect more to your emotions and building a kinder more soothing relationship with how you feel. Checking in emotionally with yourself as to how you are feeling.
- Talking more about how you feel to your partner and learning that this process, rather than leaving you more vulnerable, actually makes you closer and more connected. Can you extend this to others and how? (This reminds me of a Ted Talk that I think would be good for you to see if you haven’t already – The power of vulnerability by Brene Brown)
- Noticing and then stepping away from overthinking. We’ve talked about how overthinking can sometimes interrupt your connection with your intuition which feels more honest and real. Is there a more realistic alternative to the thought? Can you postpone this worry till later? can you tune into something here and now to help? Practicing mindfulness (Mind offer free 8 week courses in Salford) may help with this – anchoring to now.

- Noticing the pull to feel powerful, protective and special in your relationships – can you step away from that pull?
- Practicing sprinkling some conversations with more ‘well done’/s ‘that’s great news’ ‘you must be really proud’ ‘I’m impressed’. Notice the impact that saying these things has on you, them, the connection between you; in the moment and over time. I know that you were doubtful of this and I appreciated the fact that you could be honest with me about your skepticism – but I still see value in little moments like this. I see them as bridges to others and possible channels for connection and kindness.
- Noticing yourself planning ‘an agenda’ for and wanting to manage a social event – can you step away from this and allow the flow of conversation to be a little more organic and to trust that others can manage with less of you?

Are these useful ideas for you to hold onto as you continue after our sessions have ended? They aren’t ‘cure alls’ by any means – does that mean though that they are worthless?

Reflecting on our relationship and how it has developed. I have wondered throughout our time how much you and I have been sitting at the top of the red loop. It has felt very easy to be with you, nice, you appreciate me, you certainly don’t make our time together feel hard or difficult. How much have you been protecting me? But what do we miss by sitting in this pattern together?

We noticed that you started doubting that CAT was for you after we moved onto considering possible exits together. We wondered if it was because I might be relaxing a little thinking that you were ‘getting better’, that I might forget you as a result? You talked about noticing that you wanted to feel special, more complicated perhaps than the other people that I work with, that it may even lead you to sabotage the therapy (urges to). We wondered if this was the blue loop at play – it feeling more familiar, safer in many ways to doubt our relationship, see problems in it. Is this happening with your partner, with friends?

You have been more able to share with me your very human and understandable feelings of disappointment and frustration as the ending of sessions draws near – that nothing feels different, that you are now left “having to rejoin the back of the queue”. We think that this may be part of a pattern (red loop?) *that its hard to see value in something that isn’t ‘Disney perfect’*. Of course therapy isn’t Disney perfect – there is no ‘silver bullet’. But, what do you miss by casting aside as worthless, everything else. Not just here in therapy, but in all your other relationships too?

Towards the end of our work we shared a powerful session. We talked about the 11 year old you – that he needed someone to hear and validate the terribly distressing feelings that he was experiencing and to soothe and comfort them. When you allowed yourself to be tearful and honestly express your anger and frustration (a side to you that is usually more hidden and less available) I felt very connected to you and moved in the sharing of your human experiences with me. I wonder if allowing others more opportunities to connect with you in this way is something to think about as you go forward now. We’ve talked about the difference you feel in connections with others that are more balanced, free flowing, not overthought – these don’t feel boring, they feel more real and rich. Can we translate any of this understanding to other areas of your life – your career?

Therapy is brief and this IS frustrating and disappointing. The ending of our time together possibly feels even harder for you and resonates with your core anger at never having been cared for properly. Although a special time, therapy is also pretty ordinary. I hope that you have seen value in this though, despite it not having been a cure. Being ordinary, and tolerating the sensation of this, without expectations of more, allows and invites a more honest and open connection. I look forward to meeting with you again in 3 months time

