

Dear Paul

Now our sessions are coming to an end, here is my goodbye letter to you.

You came to therapy wanting to feel better in yourself, feel less anxious and feel more able to be in touch with your feelings. We discussed these and exploring what was possibility maintaining the difficulties you came to therapy with.

Together, we developed a diagram to help us to understand how the experiences you had told me about as you were growing up could be linked to some of the problems you were describing. The main patterns we drew out were:

We talked about how you would strive really hard to do well at things, with the aim of feeling better about yourself, but that you would feel exhausted, overwhelmed and angry at yourself. We developed this into a pattern we've referred to as the 'striving' pattern.

We also talked about how you will try to manage your anxiety by putting off or avoiding things that scared you.

Finally, we talked about how you have learned to dismiss or suppress your feelings, through fear of being overwhelmed by them, particularly anger, but when they do come out, they then feel overwhelming and out of control, which encouraged you to cut off from them again.

Through the reformulation letter, we traced the development of these patterns from your early life up to how they appear to be manifesting in the present day. We also developed a diagram which we used to help us recognise the patterns as they played out both in your life and between us in the sessions.

From our discussions, we have talked about how therapy has created a safe place where you have felt allowed to express your emotions; to talk about things you have been fearful of in the past (for fear of judgement, or feeling out of control, or perhaps both). Together we have acknowledged rather than avoided your feelings and have been able to step back and think about them.

A strong theme in our work has been acknowledgement of your emotions and we have spent time discussing your relationship with them.

You initially spoke of anger as being a 'toxic' emotion, and how you tried to avoid it. We explored this relationship and discussed how anger always comes from a sense of unfairness, and you have continued to reflect on this in your journal. However, you still fear losing control and still suppress such feelings although you have reflected that you have a deeper understanding why you struggle with this and have also shown steps towards acknowledging your anger in your writing and re-defining your relationship with it.

You also spoke about how ashamed you felt about crying for example; or as you called it, being a 'wimp'. We talked about where the feeling of shame may come from both your dad's opinion and also in terms of a wider cultural sense and the popular notion of what is acceptable for men to do in our society. Between sessions, you were also encouraged to think about how your opinions – for example, you actually feeling that it's okay for a man to cry but struggled to apply this to yourself - differ from those of our culture.

More recently, you have spoken about how therapy has given you the time to “take a breath, be pissed off, angry, desolate and lonely”. Your recognition of these and the way you have stated them without judgement suggests a level of acceptance – I wonder if this is because during our work together they have been accepted by us. I encourage you to build on this - through continuing to listen to yourself, not judge yourself and giving yourself time to reflect (basically what I hope you have experienced in our work together) to further develop in this area.

We have reflected a lot on the session quite early on in our work together where you became upset and angry after I hadn't sent you the reformulation letter. We talked about the process of this, and also the fact that you came back to therapy when we know you were likely to avoid coming back to sessions either through anxiety or through cutting off. However, you did come back. I wonder as I write this whether this was the beginning of you accepting me as not being perfect – that although I try my best, I will sometimes get things wrong. I also wonder if by accepting my imperfections, you were perhaps able to start tolerating and accepting your own?

We have talked about the ending of our work together throughout therapy and increasingly, in the last few sessions. I know you are worried that it hasn't been enough and that you will miss our sessions. We've talked about what you will miss, and you have spoken about being listened to, and feeling like someone cares. You've also spoken about how you miss having a designated time during the week where you can reflect and focus on yourself.

We discussed this and thought about how you can continue to build on the work we have started together. We developed a structure for a 'self therapy' session which you are going to do once a week at the time when we would normally have out session. You are also keen to continue with your journal. These are really important activities and I encourage you to keep them up. In terms of being listened to, I feel we have a lot of evidence that you have started to really listen to yourself, and care about what you are hearing. A safe place is developed by staying curious and not critical. I encourage you to build on what we have started together and in remaining curious and not judging – giving you a safe place to step back and think.

Thank you for all your hard work, and I wish you all the best for the future.  
See you at the follow up.

Best wishes

Lisa