

“A” is For Anger *

Necessity is often the mother of invention in our work. I was faced with the dilemma of trying to explain the cycle of anger to a young client, Jimmy, (not his real name) and then have him integrate this. I am a very visual person but I appreciate that not everyone is so here is what my 6 year-old client necessitated that I do in order to be able to teach him and others about the cycle of anger. I have also been able to use this visual with parents so that they understand anger and the importance of not trying to reason when a child is have an angry outburst (or themselves for that matter).

I do work from a client-centred approach so my challenge was to introduce this to Jimmy from this place. I made a five-foot high “A”, attaching 14” X 20” pieces of paper together. I affixed them to the wall before my client entered the room. When Jimmy came in the room, he saw this and looked at me with curiosity, to which I said, “Let me know when you would like to hear about my big “A”. It wasn’t much longer before I was asked about it.

This is how I introduced this to Jimmy:

“This is my “A” for anger. You can see that that anger goes from 0 – 5. Zero means that you are not angry. When your anger climbs to 1, you start to feel things in your body. Your heart might beat faster, or your hands might get sweaty or cold. You might start to feel your body and face get hot and you might start shaking. You might feel like yelling very loud, feel your hands making fists or feel like kicking.

As your anger keeps climbing, you see that between 1 and 2 there is a bridge you can cross that can take you to the other side of the “A”. From here you can jump down really easily to get back to 0. If you don’t stop and cross the bridge, your anger will climb all the way to the top and it is a long way back to 0. It takes a very long time to get back too.”

I took a bench that was the same height as the “bridge” of the letter “A” and placed it in front of the letter “A”. I had Jimmy climb up on the bench, walk across it to the other side of the “A” and then jump down, noticing how easy it was to jump down from this point. Voluntarily he climbed up on the bench again, put on an angry face,

walked across the bench, jumped down and went from an angry face to a smile. He did this several times.

Then we talked about ways that he could stop his anger from rising so that he could cross the “bridge”. By doing different things when his anger was at number 1 such as: pretending to blow bubbles, making “spaghetti legs” for relaxation, getting a drink of water, squeezing his hands together, drawing or imagining a special place he could make sure he didn’t bypass the “bridge”. I then brought out the crayons and asked him if he wanted to decorate this big “A”. He decided to put stop signs and other signals on the “A” between 1 and 2.

In a conversation the next day, Jimmy’s mother reported to me that Jimmy had told her all about the big “A” on the wall and he had described to her everything that had gone on in the session. I knew he had heard what I had hoped he would and had taken it in. I wanted to review it at the next session without belabouring it, but how?

I put the “A” back on the wall at the next session and put a ladder up in front of it. This time I asked Jimmy to climb up the ladder (while I spotted him). When he got up to as far as he felt comfortable, I held his hand, got him to stand up straight and asked him to notice how high he was and how far it was to the ground. Then I asked him to look at the “A” and notice how far up the “A” he had climbed. He was at number 5! I reflected how he seemed to be a little worried about being up so high.

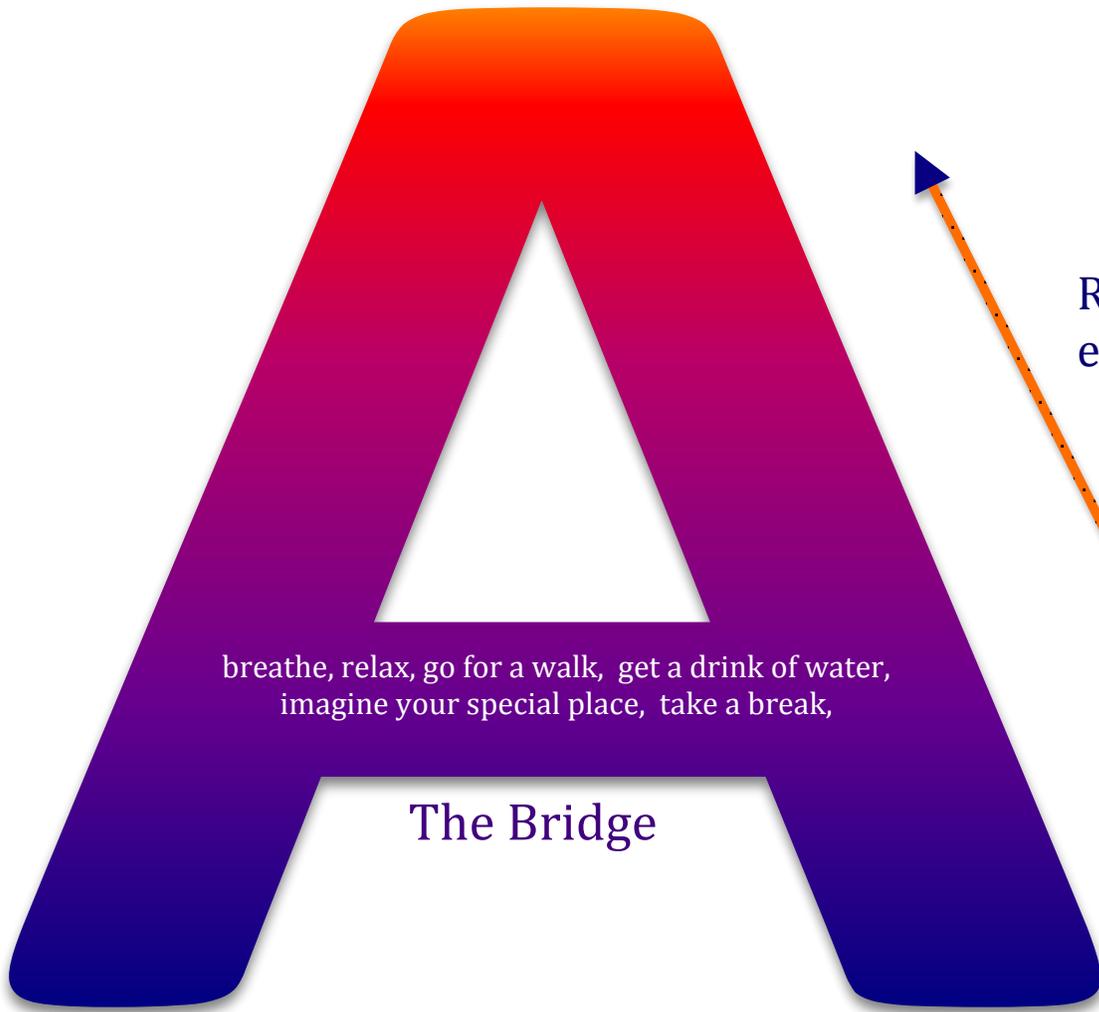
When he came back down the ladder I asked him if he wanted to continue colouring the “A” as he had done last week. He said he wanted to do something else but first he wanted me to move the ladder and put the bench back so that he could walk across the “bridge” once more! I believe that we were able to bridge between the abstract to the concrete by engaging not only his mind but also his body in this experience.

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*This can also be adapted for anxiety.

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5
4
3
2
1
0



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