

Appendix XVIII

Ending Letters

Dear Anne,

As you know, we have met for a series of sessions of psychological therapy. I am therefore writing in order to summarise the sessions we have had and note down any points for the future.

When we first met, you reported feeling low in mood for about two years but it was difficult to identify what might have triggered the depression. When we discussed this further, it seemed that you had to deal with a number of difficult events at the same time, including the menopause, your children leaving home and difficulties in your relationship with Jack, which precipitated you into having an affair with a work colleague. This last event was particularly difficult for you to cope with as you had immense feelings of guilt and shame and thoughts of worthlessness. It seems that these events may have triggered beliefs developed in your childhood about being worthless. You described your childhood as a lonely time as your father was away a lot with work and your mother was not affectionate. You had a very good relationship with your grandparents but they both died when you were a teenager and you said you felt you may have gone through a period of mild depression then.

When we discussed the symptoms of your depression, you reported that you had been feeling low in mood and tearful and incredibly tired all the time. You described your sleep as being very poor and you found it very difficult to get off to sleep, often waking up several times a night, thinking over your difficulties. You described finding it difficult to interact with your friends in the way that you used to and said you kept thinking that you had nothing to say to them and that they were starting to ignore you. These thoughts left you feeling anxious and low in mood and further perpetuated your difficulties in maintaining conversations with friends in a way that you used to.

You started to challenge yourself to engage in activities you were previously finding it difficult to engage in and also started to notice that certain activities did help to lift your mood. We spent a fair bit of time exploring your thought processes and looking at how you could challenge your thoughts in order to focus on the less negative aspects. We also focused a great deal on how you could change your role with both your family and friends and allow yourself to take risks in terms of letting them get closer to you and offer you support when required. I feel this was a brave step and one which took courage.

You became adept at catching and challenging your negative thoughts and I enclose a sheet of questions you can ask yourself when you need to challenge your thinking. We also spent time talking about the affair you had and you began to process thoughts and feelings around this event. You began to realise that, although you had made a mistake, it did not make you completely worthless and that it was important to move on from this event and put as much into your relationship with Jack as possible. We looked at the pros and cons of telling Jack about the affair and you finally decided against it, as you felt that telling him would only be a means to salving your conscience rather than making things better with Jack.

We discussed setbacks and that it is normal to have them – they are stages on the way to recovery, not a sign that you will not overcome your difficulties. You had a number of setbacks during the time we have been meeting and, although these were very difficult to endure at the time, it is clear that you have learnt a great deal from these episodes. Most importantly, you learned that you can recover each time. For the future, it will be important to recognise when you are having a setback and to re-read the handouts and relevant books.

Finally, I have enclosed a book list so you can continue to read about and develop your coping strategies in the future...

1. ??
2. ??
3. ??

I feel you have worked hard and shown great commitment and determination during our meetings. It has been a pleasure working with you and seeing the changes that you have made and I wish you all the best for the future. As you know, I will leave your file open until the end of _____ and you can contact me at any time if you wish to get in touch. After that time, you will need to go to your GP if you wish to have a re-assessment with our team.

With best wishes,

The therapist

Dear Andy,

As you know, we have met for a series of sessions of psychological therapy. I am therefore writing in order to summarise the sessions we have had and note down any points for the future.

When we first met, it seemed that you had been experiencing feelings of anxiety and panic over the last couple of months, although you had not been feeling like your normal self for about six months. During our initial sessions, you strongly believed that your symptoms were related to your physical health and you found it challenging to think that your thoughts could have such a strong relationship with the symptoms you experienced in your body. During the course of our work together, we tried out a number of behavioural experiments and you learned about your body and how it responds to 'panic and anxiety thoughts'. You were shocked at just how powerfully 'panic thoughts' could affect your body. We spent time discussing how your thoughts, feelings and behaviours form cycles which keep the anxieties going. We talked about how, when you think about going out, you start to worry that you will have a panic attack. These kinds of thoughts lead to you feeling very panicky (which you previously perceived as being unwell/having heart problems). You had started to cope with these difficult feelings by avoiding situations where you might feel panicky/unwell. However, as we have discussed, avoiding anxiety-provoking situations keeps your anxiety going. We explored ways of breaking this cycle and I was impressed with your determination and courage in facing up to some really challenging scenarios. We discussed coping strategies you could use to manage your panic, such as grounding techniques, breathing and relaxation techniques and distraction techniques. You have found the grounding techniques most useful and have been using these on a regular basis.

We made some clear goals together and your first goals were focused on going outside. You found these goals challenging at first but when you realised that your anxiety was reducing each time you tried each goal, you were willing to try facing new situations. You are now going out on a regular basis and have started to see friends again. You have been speaking to your boss about the possibility of going back to work.

We have also spent time discussing self-esteem and confidence and have explored your concerns about the judgments others might make about you. You have started to become less concerned about other people's opinions and are continuing to challenge your thoughts in this area. You have also taken some risks in terms of phoning friends, rather than waiting for them to phone, and you have been surprised by the positive response you have received.

We discussed setbacks and that it is normal to have them... [see Anne's letter above for the rest]

Dear Megan,

I am writing to you following our sessions together as a summary of the sessions and to note down goals for the future.

When we first started meeting, your main difficulties were the obsessive thoughts you were experiencing about harming Molly and the consequent thought that you must be a bad person to be thinking like this. You were worried that, because you had had the thoughts, you would actually carry them through and harm Molly. You also felt the need to check on her to make sure that she had not become ill. You were feeling extremely panicky if you had to look after Molly on your own, and Paul was having to take time off work. You would also phone the health visitor for reassurance on a daily basis. You gave me some information about your background history and it seems that you had a difficult relationship with your mum while you were growing up. You remember receiving a lot of criticism while you were growing up and your mum was very strict. You also felt she favoured your sister, and that you were the 'pain' in the family, the one who always messed things up. This seems to have carried on through to adulthood and, since you have had Molly, your mum has continued to make critical comments, which has been difficult for you and 'fed into' your beliefs about being a bad person.

Despite the difficulties and low self-esteem you experienced while you were growing up, you managed to cope reasonably well until you gave birth to Molly. It was at this point that you started to have intrusive thoughts – about harming Molly – and you became extremely frightened by these thoughts and why you might be having them. We discussed the fact that it is normal to have strange thoughts from time to time but that it can cause problems when people start to get worried about the thoughts, or that they might act on the thoughts. Your worries about the thoughts and the possibility that you might act on them then led on to very strong feelings such as anxiety and guilt. You used to cope with these feelings by checking/performing a ritual (e.g. checking on Molly's health), avoiding being alone with her or asking for reassurance from Paul or the health visitor. These behaviours lowered the anxiety in the short term but, by behaving thus, you did not get the opportunity to learn that you would probably be fine without them.

We started to work together to explore these cycles and you started to conduct some small experiments whereby you stopped performing one of the behaviours or stopped avoiding a certain place and learned to cope with the anxiety this caused. This was difficult at first and I was impressed by your courage and determination when tackling these tasks. You gradually learned that you could gain some control over your thoughts, feelings and behaviour and you found that, over time, you were able to face increasingly difficult situations and your confidence grew.

However, despite the changes in the obsessions, you still had very low self-esteem and your thoughts about yourself were very negative and critical. You did not feel that you were a good mother and you lacked confidence in this role. We spent some time exploring these thoughts and beliefs. The main themes appeared to be related to your need to be a perfect mother and you were concerned that if you made one mistake it would mean that you were bad. Through the various discussions we had together, you realised that it is normal to worry about new roles, to make mistakes and to do things less than perfectly.

You gradually started to have some positive ideas about yourself and have built on these ideas over the last year. There are times when the old beliefs slip back in and it is important to realise when this is happening and challenge the negative thoughts/beliefs if they are getting too strong. I have enclosed a list of questions you can ask yourself to help you with this challenging.

We have discussed setbacks and that it is normal to have them... [see Anne's letter above for the rest]