

Identity, memory and imagination: Guided imagery and imagery rescripting and the new science of autobiographical memory

Workshop by David Edwards

Imagery rescripting has become an evidence-based intervention that is widely used in cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), as well as in many integrative therapies, including schema therapy. Such imagery methods have a long history within psychotherapy (and even before), and include Carl Gustav Jung's active imagination, the tradition of hypnotherapy that stems from Pierre Janet, and Hans Carl Leuner's guided affective imagery. However, in contemporary use in CBT, and particularly in schema therapy, there are new and distinctive features related to an enhanced understanding of the nature of emotion-focused work in therapy, and to a modern understanding of the nature of autobiographical memory.

The workshop will present the rationale for imagery work within a schema therapy framework and will include several case examples with audio extracts from sessions that illustrate transformative processes potentiated by guided imagery and imagery rescripting. The phenomena described will be linked to Martin Conway's research on autobiographical memory. Conway's model helps us to understand the kinds of processes we see when doing experiential work – sudden arising of images, sensations or words or phrases, cascades of memories on a particular theme, and to work with these to promote corrective experiences. It also allows us to look at questions about the accuracy of memories, the nature of false memories, and how schemas, as the fundamental abstracted building blocks of personal meaning, are related to memory and the storage of information about events to which we have been previously exposed.