

Metaphor Examples

Your client is “yes butting,” not trying interventions, generally not engaged or “stuck” discussed:

It is like you are in prison and each week I am smuggling in hacksaws and other tools to help you escape but you don't use them. Maybe I could come by to “just visit” or do you want help escaping from prison?

It is like we are baking a cake together. I measured the flour and you needed to bring sugar but didn't. What kind of cake will that make?

We are hiking a mountain together. You want to get to the top but every step is so hard. You feel tired and a bit hopeless. We are sitting on a bench a long the train and can see the top on the mountain. If we just sit here, we will never get to the top.

You are treading water and sometimes your head goes underwater. I come by in a raft and we chat once a week. I'd like you to learn to swim to shore but you feel you just can't manage that. Learning to swim feels entirely overwhelming to you but I am worried you will drown if you keep just reading water!

Client is always in crisis and refusing to try new skills. Therapist is always doing crisis intervention:

I feel like you are in the ocean and can't swim. I keep offering to give you swimming lessons but you really need lifesaving. I'm not a lifeguard but I can teach you how to swim. What should we do?

You are on a bucking bronco and I keep coaching you to lean right or left. We are not getting anywhere and you are always just about to fall off. How can we get you off the bronco?

Client is planning suicide while trying to learn new skills:

(At the beginning of therapy) We are in Kansas and talking about taking a trip together. Just when I think we have a great travel plan, I realize that I am planning to head to the East coast and you plan to go to the west coast. How are we going to travel together if we have different destinations?

(After therapy as progressed for a while) You have brought a car to the shop and we have been working on it together for a long time. The car's engine runs now and it's transmission is smooth. Just when I think it is time to redo the upholstery, you tell me that all along, you have been planning to drive the car over a cliff!

Fear and anxiety:

Someone got bit by a dog a while back and now they are afraid of dogs. They managed at first by refusing to go outside but then they could hear neighborhood dogs barking. Then they decided to soundproof their house. Still, they could see the dogs so they blacked out the windows. They are now in their attic with no windows and no sounds. Do you think they are more or less afraid of dogs right now attic with no windows and can't hear anything. Do you think they are more or less afraid of dogs right now? What should they do?

Say I am afraid of blue carpet. It would only be natural that I would try to avoid blue carpet! I would

begin to notice it more and more. When I get invited somewhere, I'd begin to think, "hmmm..do they have blue carpet? How can I get there without walking on any blue carpet. Eventually, by trying to avoid blue carpet, I'd be thinking about it all the time. What other solutions might there be to this problem?"

Client has poor emotion regulation skills and avoids problem-solving:

You are in bed and are afraid. You want to get up but every time you try, you get scared so you just pull the covers over your head. You hope the problems will go away while the covers are over your head but every time you peek out they are still there.

You are walking in a mine field and are so scared you can hardly stand it. You have a map of the mines but are too scared to look at it so you are walking through it with your eyes shut just hoping you can deal with whatever happens.

Client wants to do trauma processing before they have adequate coping skills:

It is like you have a fire in your living room. Of course, you want to rush over and put it out. It is scary and threatening the whole house. I want you to cover yourself in insulation and fireproofing so that when you DO put the fire out, you won't get badly burned.

Using drugs or self-injury to cope:

You are in a room that is on fire. There is a hot metal ladder leading to the outside. You think about climbing the ladder but the rungs are hot. There is one spot in the room that is cool. You keep running back to that spot to cool off but you will never escape from the fire unless you climb the ladder. What do you want to do?

Client says she has a scary secret but can't tell you what it is:

It is like you are bringing your car to a mechanic and saying the car isn't running well. When the mechanic asks to open the hood, you say, "no," you want the car serviced but you won't let anyone open the hood.

Relapse:

It is like water skiing. When you are first learning the skill, you fall a lot but you try to learn from each fall. Eventually, you get better at seeing what is making you fall and it gets easier. Falling is really part of how you learn.

The first time you have a period of abstinence, it is like blazing a trail up a mountain. You have to carve out the path and cut down big trees to make progress. When you relapse, you kind of slide down the trail but the trail is still there, you don't need to build a whole new trail, you just need to climb back up.

It is like you are trying to learn the piano and you think that if you study the music hard enough and long enough, you will get it right on the first try. I think you need to sit behind the piano and and play. Sure, you will make mistakes, but how else can you learn to get it right?

Client wanting therapy but not skills:

In order to work effectively with you, we need to keep both skills and therapy on the front burners. Skills have been on the back burner and now I think they are falling off the stove!

Client blaming themselves for lack of progress but unwilling to tolerate emotions

That like filling a bucket up with water and sealing it tightly. Then you turn it upside down and wonder why it is taking so long to empty the bucket.