

EXAMPLE OF ONE WAY OF DEALING WITH A PSYCHOTIC PROCESS

The patient is a caucasian, middle-aged female, who has been hospitalized previously. She has been with us about three weeks this time and is scheduled for discharge within a week. Though she has never been protagonist before she is familiar with how it works. We'll call her Sadie.

She described herself as calm and annoyed. I asked what was on her mind, and she replied that she was hearing voices again. I told her that if she heard them while she was here with us in the group, we could work on them, if she wanted to. I said I'd get back to her (while passing on to inquire of others). I wouldn't press her. It should be her decision.

When I came back to her, she was ready to go ahead. "More than one voice?" I asked. "Yes," she replied. "Male or female voices?" "Both." "How many right now?" "Three." So I set three chairs before her, and for her to imagine embodied voices in each chair. I explained that would help the rest of us, who could not hear the voices experience along with her what she was going through. She addressed each in turn.

The emergent identities were: a very feminine woman, who liked smelling flowers and picking them, liked to lie back and enjoy life. Secondly, there was a screaming child, also female. The middle voice was a domineering and controlling person, who proclaimed order and structure. She wasn't sure of the gender, but gave the name 'Lizzy' to this identity.

I asked whether the voices told her things about herself or did they give her orders? Again it was both. We began with the benign voice, a female peer in the auxiliary role, taking Sadie around, pointing out the various flowers and picking them. A very pleasant experience.

The child identity was very unhappy, couldn't get her needs met. Sadie gave to the child, and reversed roles in order to be given unto. It was Lizzy who provided the significant challenge. I casually suggested in passing that of course she recognized all these three as parts of herself, and before she could doubt, I told her to enlist the help of the feminine self and the satisfied child (now that Sadie had mothered her and soothed her, ending her crying and screaming). Flanking her they assisted her coping with Lizzy.

Lizzy kept telling Sadie that she was 'no good, that she didn't deserve to live, and that she should commit suicide. I called attention to the auxiliaries on either side of her and to the presence of the whole group of peers, saying firmly, "We will not let Lizzy destroy you. We are convinced (to the group), are we not, that you are a good person, deserving life.

Suddenly I asked her who Lizzy reminded her of. It was mother. So I put Sadie in the reverse role position as mother and interviewed her, and learned for the first time that Sadie's plans call for returning to live with mother. I asked how she was getting along with mother, and she said very well. I guess that hadn't always been true, and it hadn't. They'd worked on their relationship and mother said she was sorry for the past and Sadie had forgiven her. Therefore I underscored the distinction between mother-as-she-once-was and mother-as-she-is-today. Therefore we were able to enlist today's mother as another helper to block Sadie's self-destructive trend.

"If Lizzy actually got Sadie to kill herself, Lizzy would die too. I reasoned aloud that Lizzy wants to end the pain, not the life (she just couldn't think of another way). Lizzy actually could help Sadie through providing structure and control. With the whole person working together, each respecting the wishes of the other parts, then overcontrol all the way to destruction would be totally unnecessary. Right? A Sadie, so reinforced, could contain the pain & rebellion, and compromise in behalf of the common (intrapsychic) good. They sealed the agreement with a handshake, and Sadie wore a happy smile as her peers shared with her.

Don Miller, 1990.