Fanciful Distraction

Sometimes it's necessary to use fanciful and imaginative methods of distraction to help people out of potentially dangerous, self-harming or distressing behaviour. Fanciful distraction is the term applied to:

'Distracting someone with a make-believe stimulus as an urgent method of changing their focus'.

The concept behind fanciful distraction is to provide something fairly dramatic to focus on to *rapidly distract the person from whatever they are focused on*. This is different to normal types of distraction-based strategies as the concept or idea you are using must be a bit

dramatic in order to be effective. Fanciful distraction must be used carefully as we don't want to create habits of lying to those we work with or doing anything which could be considered exploitative of

When Distraction is a Good Thing

their trust. However, in many situations, we have to weigh the risk with the benefit when making ethical determinations about strategies. In situations when fanciful distraction is appropriate, the risk is usually significant.

Fanciful distraction can be used in some of the following instances:

- A person is about to hurt someone else.
- A person is extremely distressed about something and becoming more and more distressed without signs of self-soothing.
- A person is struggling with reality and/or very confused about something which might have happened.

- A person just had something happen to them that they don't understand and that is causing them distress.
- A person might be stuck in a repetitive loop of thinking and not able to pull themselves out of it.
- You're driving and the person becomes upset and (based on their historical presentation) is about to become aggressive and place themselves and others in the vehicle at risk.
- The person has an assessed high risk of behaviour and is at risk of doing harm to themselves or others as a result of the way they respond to situations.
- The person has a history of problematic mental health (which can lead to risk of harm) and becomes fixated on ideas without the skills to move on from them.

Fanciful distraction can:

- Provide enough time for the person affected to lose the angry/distressed energy they had and have some capacity to see with more clarity.
- To stop thinking about whatever it was which was consuming them and distressing them.
- To immediately stop a chain/pattern of behaviour which was likely to end in harm to the person or someone else.
- Provide some perspective and some time away from toxic and hurtful thoughts.

How do you use fanciful distraction?

It's helpful to have some ideas already which will suit the person you're working with. The ideas must be:

- Relevant to the person.

- Interesting enough to work as a distraction.

- Dramatic enough to take the person out of the frame of mind they were in.

- Able to be executed (eg. Played out) by you, or whoever is using them, in such a way that they are believable.

- They cannot be something that unfairly affects the person later (eg. Saying mum is visiting when she is not, then getting the person excited – this is NOT ok).

- They cannot be something that you cannot prove later or you will lose the trust of the person (eg. Distractions about cars you saw, which are already gone are great, but saying something is going to happen tomorrow when it's not, is actually setting the person up for failure and is NOT ok).

- This cannot be something that other people have to play into and/or something that carries on beyond the time you spend with the person (eg. Don't start a web of lies or anything that requires other workers to be involved. Don't say things like "Your worker Jack is really sick", then have Jack turn up perfectly well).

- Fanciful distractions should be short, fleeting distractions which are dramatic in nature and over quickly.

Some examples of fanciful distractions which might work are:

- "Oh my, did you just see that plane in the sky – was it carrying another plane somehow?"

- "Oh gosh look, is that an animal on the side of the road over there?"

- "Hang on a second, I think I just heard a helicopter flying over us, can you hear it?"

- "Oh gee, hang on, I feel really sick, Oh gosh, I think I'm going to be sick , we need to pull the car over for a second"

- "Holy Dooley, is that red car out there a Porsche?"

- "Oh gosh, is that your phone ringing?"

- "Hang on, I thought I just heard them call our number – was that them? Should we check?"

As you will see from the above examples, using this strategy shouldn't affect the trust the person has with you as the distractions are fleeting and can be explained away ("oh, maybe it wasn't a helicopter", "oh no, it's not a Porsche, just a Hyundai – goodness I'm dopey today" etc).

Fanciful distractions will hopefully help provide some space for the person from the thoughts they were having, which was leading them or others to a situation of risk or harm. Please use this technique very carefully and with guidance from your Specialist Behaviour Practitioner or Therapy Assistant as it's important that it's not used in such a way that can lead to the person losing trust in their workers, or in such a way that creates webs of lies or deceit. Fanciful distraction should be short, swift, not able to be proven incorrect and not requiring the investment or 'buy-in' of anyone else.