

Externalizing and Re-authoring

Separating who you are from what has happened to you

What this workshop covers

- Workshop 1 established the foundation: stories shape what we see, feel, and do — and they can be changed
- Workshop 2 goes deeper into two core narrative therapy techniques: externalization and re-authoring
- Externalization: placing the problem outside the self so it can be examined rather than inhabited
- Re-authoring: building the alternative story with rigor — not affirmation, but evidence
- The Unwritten framework structures this workshop — five movements from stuck story to new chapter

Module 1

Samskara — the deep impression

Painful memories as wounds that soften. From knife to old scar.



Painful memories can feel like a knife in the heart — a persistent, sharp reminder of something unresolved. But what if that pain could soften? What if, instead of a stabbing wound, it became the sensation of rubbing an old scar?

— Lex Enrico Santí

This is the essence of samskara — the deep impressions left by past experience that continue to influence the present.

What samskara means for narrative therapy

- In Sanskrit, samskara refers to the impressions left by past experience — stored in the body and mind, shaping present perception and behavior
- We do not live in the past directly — we live in the stories we've built from the past, and those stories carry the emotional charge of the original experience
- Narrative therapy works with samskara by changing the story's structure — not erasing the impression, but altering its relationship to the present self
- The knife doesn't become nothing. It becomes a scar — evidence of survival rather than ongoing wound.
- This is not about bypassing grief. It is about locating it correctly: in the past, not in the permanent self.

The dominant story and what it costs

- The dominant story is the one that has been told most often, reinforced most strongly, and accepted as the most accurate version of events
- It costs: attention (we see what confirms it), energy (we use resources defending or mourning it), and possibility (what contradicts it gets explained away)
- Common dominant stories: 'I am the person who can't follow through.' 'I am someone bad things happen to.' 'I am not enough to be loved well.'
- None of these stories are lies — they were built from real experiences. But they are incomplete. They exclude counter-evidence.
- The work of re-authoring is not rejecting the dominant story but expanding it — until it can hold more of the truth.