

Coaching Tip: Using the Metaphor Tool

Welcome to my coaching tip on using the metaphor tool with your clients.

First, what is a metaphor? I'm so glad you asked!

It's a direct link between 2 apparently unrelated things or more plainly, it's a metaphorical representation of whatever you are struggling with – sex, money, parenting, love.

The reason we use the metaphor tool is multi-fold:

1. It's less threatening and less invasive to talk about the metaphor, the imagery, rather than deal with the issue head on. Remember, some of your client's issues will be very tender, emotionally charged, deeply embedded, like our personal and dogmatic beliefs, or just too plain scary to work with directly.
2. Using the metaphor tool gives you a sense of how your client feels about their issue, both emotionally and intellectually, by asking questions about the physical object or representation.
3. It opens up new perspectives and helps your client to think "outside the box" - like discovering solutions they might not have considered before.
4. It provides starting points for ideas on how to relate to the problem – they may discover alternative ways to frame things that may provide real relief.

Even though it's considered a Square Two/Three tool, using imagery can be equally beneficial for Square One issues.

I find the metaphor tool works best with clients who are less cerebral, more right-brained than left-brained. People who are more creative have an easier time with this tool but if set up correctly, it can also be useful for left-brainers. The important thing to remember is that it's an experiment, like any other tool, and if it doesn't work, you just move onto something else.

I also don't use this tool with a client who I am just getting to know. You need to have a solid and trustful rapport with your client before you roll out this tool.

Having said that, it's very important that both you and your client are as relaxed as possible. This is a tool that requires you to be deeply connected to your Essential Self because it relies on your marmoset and intuition to inform your next steps. Being calm and relaxed is key. Once you are there, you want to get your client into a similar space. Use your favorite techniques or simply instruct your client to take a deep breath, slowly inhaling to the count of 4 and then exhaling to the count of 4. Do this 2-3 times in total.

Teeing it up!

Now it's time to tee up the tool. You can simply say that you want to try something or play with a tool that can help them to expand their awareness of their issue and offer them some insight into how they can manage/handle/solve/relate to it that feels better. Let them know that there is no right or wrong answer and to answer with the first thing that comes to their mind. Remind them not to worry if they're making sense or not, that it's only an experiment.

So let's say your client is struggling with parenting and you want to get an image of what parenting to them represents. You can ask them very simply:

If parenting were a person, place or thing, what would it be? Encourage them to free associate.

You can get more specific and ask them if parenting were an animal, landscape or food, what would it be?

If their problem were a feeling, you might ask, if this feeling of tension were an object, what would it be?

You can also apply the metaphor tool to thoughts. For example, if someone believes they being a good mom means always being there for their kids, ask them to really feel into this thought. Do any images come up when they believe they must always be there for their kids?

Some people are strong visualizers and will have no problem coming up with an object or some type of imagery... others may find it challenging. Gently remind them that they can't do this wrong and ask them for the first thing that pops into their head. If you encounter resistance, back off and try it another time. Highly cerebral clients may feel embarrassed or foolish because they like to be in control... I'm one of those people so I get it.

Tip: Make sure you move very slowly with your client. Don't rush them to take premature action before you fully explore the metaphor.

Once you get the image from your client, create that same image in your mind's eye. That way you can track them and it will help you with your questions.

Be curious. You want to get as rich and as expansive picture of the object as possible.

Here are some questions you might ask:

Let's say the image for parenting is a rocky mountain.

You can ask:

Describe this mountain.

What do you see?

What color is the mountain?

Where are you in relation to this mountain?

How big is it?
Can you touch it? If you can, can you describe the texture?
Temperature?
What else is around it? Behind it? On the side of it?
If you couldn't label it, how would you describe it?
What are you feeling?
How did it get there?
Do you want it there?
How can you get around it?
How might you see this mountain so it's less overwhelming?

You don't need to ask all these questions or ask them in this order. If you're coaching from your Essential Self, trust that you'll know which questions to ask and when.

An alternative option is to incorporate the Dream Analysis tool and ask them to become the mountain. As the mountain, ask them to describe themselves using 3 adjectives. What's your purpose, mountain? How are you here to help (name of client)? What's your job?

Once you go through this process, you can start the debrief. Ask them, did you see anything in this image that's like your problem? What insights did you have as you went through this process? What did you learn? How is this mountain like the overwhelm you feel as a new mama? When you discovered that you could walk around the mountain and get a new perspective, how did that feel? How might that same approach apply to your sense of overwhelm as a new mother?

As usual, I'd love to hear how or if you're using the metaphor tool, if these tips were valuable and/or if you'd like me to craft a tip just for you!

Thank you Coaches!!

Jackie