

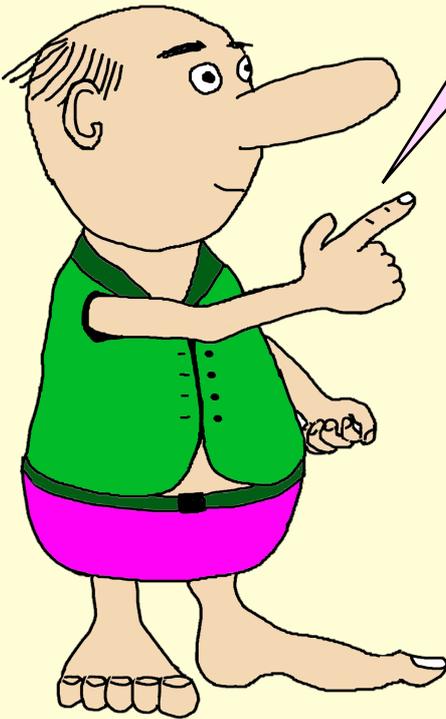
“DEAR DICK” - THERAPISTS

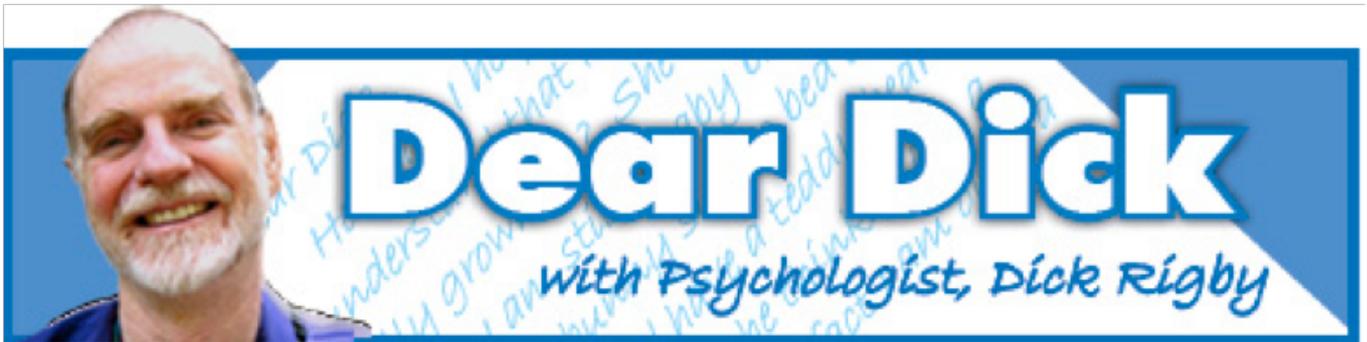
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Chapter 1. Psychologists





“Psychologists have the answers”
August 2005

Psychologists have all the answers! Well I don't think so.

Peter was having a spot of trouble with mid life crisis and with a rebellious teenager son. He went to see a psychologist (Mary) to get things sorted out. His expectations were that the Mary would supply the answers to fix these issues.

Wrong expectations! A good psychologist is not a guru with all the answers, but is a trained guide along life's journey. I tell my clients that I am their assistant not their boss. My job is to help them find their own solutions to their life problems, not to impose my solutions.

There are exceptions to this rule. When I know of a technique that may help, I will suggest my client gives it a try.

After Mary had gathered some background information about Peter's life, it came to what to do about his son. Mary suggested some behavioural management techniques that Peter could try. So far so good.

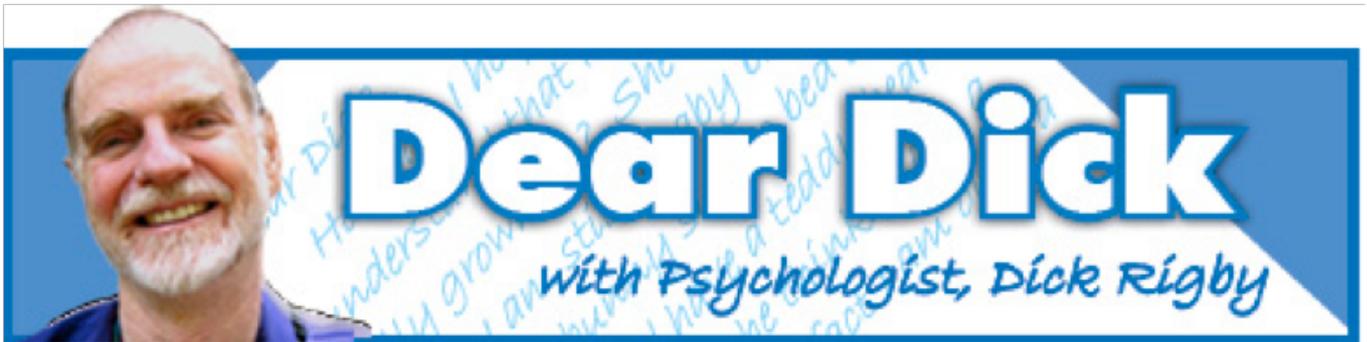
But when it came to Peter's mid life crisis, Peter wanted recipes to fix it. He felt frustrated with Mary because he got more questions than answers. Mary was encouraging Peter to look at certain personal issues that he didn't want to look at. Peter didn't want to look at his workaholic behaviour or his anger towards his father.

Mary picked up that these issues that were troubling Peter lay at a deep level. There were no quick fixes for Peter's problems. He had to work on his deeper issues. Peter went away from the first session feeling frustrated. He almost didn't come back, but his wife encouraged him to return. After all, the techniques that Mary had suggested for managing his son did seem to be working.

In their second session Mary explained that unless Peter could find a way of letting go of the resentment towards his father, he would never be able to be in control of his own life. In other words, he would continue to do things that he believed would impress his father.

Peter did see Mary for another seven sessions. He learned how to let go of his resentment towards his father. He also learned how to talk to his father adult to adult. This resulted in him developing a much improved relationship with his father. He also admitted to being a workaholic and started to make changes in that area of his life.

Mary hadn't supply the answers, but had guided Peter towards finding his own answers to his life crisis problems. Nice one Pete.



**“Common sense psychology”
July 2005**

Going to visit a psychologist for the first time can be such a daunting thing. However, most of psychology is the clever application of common sense. It's about finding solutions to every day problems. Todd (not his real name) was in a crisis after his girlfriend Janet left him. It was just before his final year Uni exams.

Todd was very upset about the breakup. On his father's suggestion, Todd came to see me last September. He was very nervous. He didn't know what to expect.

He had grown up with the belief that only mentally ill people see psychologists. He was scared stiff that I would find something seriously wrong with him. There was nothing wrong with Todd. He was a normal young man having difficulty facing a serious crisis.

I reassured him that most people have felt desperate and lost at some time in their life. He was very relieved to hear this from an “expert”. I took a common sense approach to helping Todd. Once I had learned more about the way he thought and acted, I was able to give him some concrete ways to manage the distress that he was going through. The first strategy was to learn to accept his emotions. I reassured him that it was normal to go through feelings of sadness, loneliness, anger and grief. It was normal to feel betrayed and abandoned. It was normal to believe that he would never find another loving relationship.

A good deal of our sessions were about teaching Todd how to reassure himself that there would be a grieving and readjustment period and then someone else would come along who he could love.

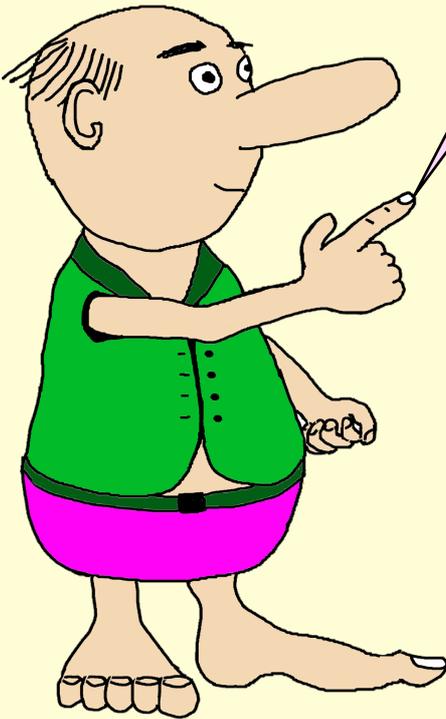
Another strategy that we worked on was how to deal with Janet. He wanted to go around to her house and plead with her to come back to him. We looked at whether or not this would work. We both agreed that it wouldn't.

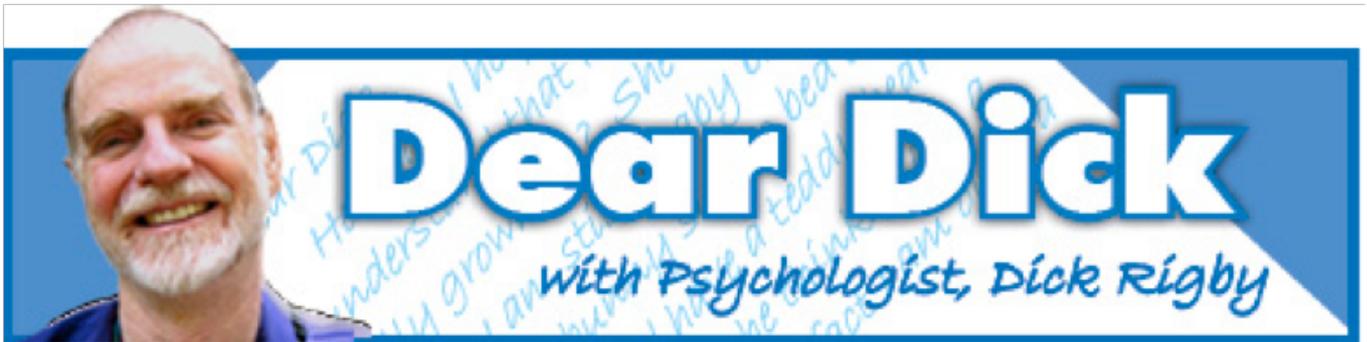
Finally we worked on what he could learn from this situation. There was much to learn about how things went wrong. Todd had a tendency to take all the blame on himself. He needed to see things in a more balanced way.

Todd saw me for five sessions. That was enough to get him on his feet again. He has been in a new relationship since January and it is going very well.

It's just common sense and knowing what to do.

Chapter 2. Therapist problems





**“A psychotherapist with problems”
July 2002**

When we go to a motor mechanic to get our car fixed, we assume that the mechanic will do a good job. We might be surprised to find out that their own car is in a state of poor maintenance. This can also be true of some psychotherapists. While they are working as a therapist, their own life is in a state of disrepair. The question is, can a therapist with personal problems still be a competent therapist? The answer is that it depends on his/her ability to put their problems aside and concentrate on the issues that the client wants to work on.

A psychotherapist can be going through a hard time in their personal life, yet still be empathic, understanding, supportive and know what to do to help their client. The job of a therapist is to leave their personal problems outside the room and concentrate their efforts on their client's issues.

A psychologist friend of mine was able to continue to work effectively even while he was going through a very difficult marriage break up. On the other hand, I knew of another psychologist who let their personal problems get in the way of their work.

How can you know if your therapist is letting their problems interfere? The best way is to talk about your concerns. If you get a very defensive response from your therapist, then your concerns may be justified.

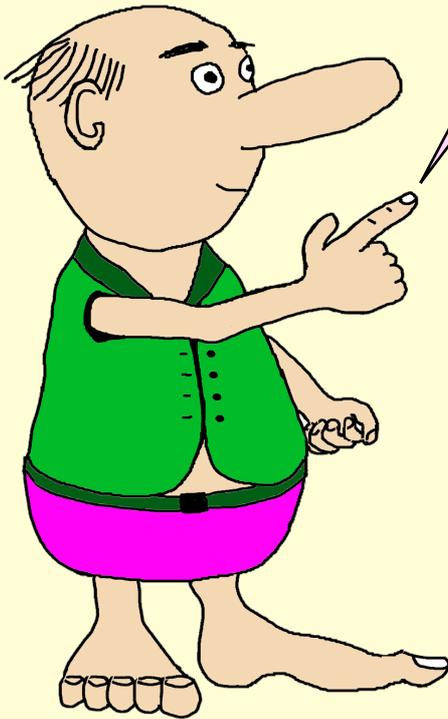
Things get complicated around the issue of “transference” or “projection”. This is where the client believes something about their therapist which really isn't true. For example: Peter had been seeing a psychologist, Mary for several sessions. He felt that Mary was often angry at him. He felt that Mary was “dumping” her anger on him.

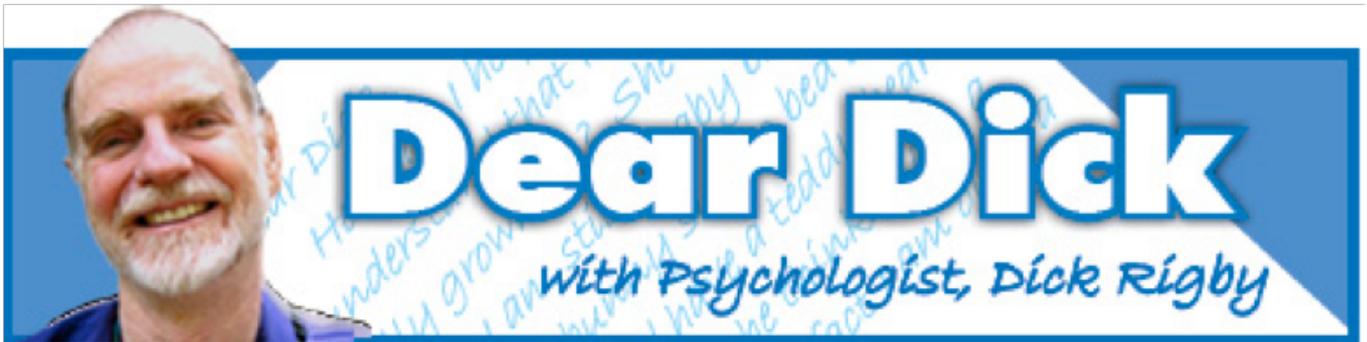
Peter thought about stopping therapy with Mary. Instead, he summoned the courage to confront her about it. Mary was able to reassure Peter that she wasn't angry with him. In the discussion that followed, Peter shared that his mother had often been angry with him and that Mary reminded him of his mother.

In this example, Peter was projecting his mother onto Mary. Once he discovered this, it led to a breakthrough in how he dealt with angry women.

The moral to the tale is that, if you feel that your therapist is bringing their own issues into therapy, talk about it and try and resolve it before you decide to quit therapy.

Chapter 3. Projection





**“How I disappeared”
February 2007**

This is the story about how I disappeared. There’s a trick to disappearing. Firstly, find someone who projects onto you. By this I mean that they see you as who they want you to be, not who you really are.

Then you give them a reason for projecting onto you. They may think you are absolutely wonderful. You become their perfect knight in shining armor. That’s all there is to it. You have disappeared. It doesn’t matter how much you tell the person that you have faults, they are still going to think you are perfect. The trouble with this is that when the idealization wears off, you come crashing down.

Rose was one of my clients several years ago. She came to me because she lived with an abusive husband. She thought that I was just wonderful. She looked forward to our sessions. She thought that I had all the answers to sorting out her life. The problem was that I didn’t have all the answers. The real me had become invisible to Rose.

I was in for a fall. It happened during the third session. She started getting angry with me. She was getting angry because I wasn’t waving my “magic wand” to make her pain go away.

The fall had begun. My halo was tarnished. It didn’t matter what I said, I had let her down and that was the end of it. I tried to get her to look at her projection, but she wasn’t having a bar of that. She had made me someone who she wanted me to be. Firstly an angel and then a devil.

That was her last session with me. Well almost. Rose returned a year later. She had done a lot of thinking and she said “The process that I started with you was never completed.” I was delighted to see her back. We were able to work through her issues of idealization and disillusionment and we got a good result. She learned how to take responsibility for her life.

When we project onto someone, we are not dealing with our issues. We are attaching our issues to someone else. Projection is dangerous in relationships because, we cannot be empathic and understanding with another person when we have made them disappear.

Advice – Own your projections on to people so they don’t disappear.