

Change History

Using NLP Timeline Process to Re-Write Personal History

In NLP we use the term "timeline" to describe our unique way of internally representing chronological time. Our experience of time has a structure which can be investigated and modified. When we modify the structure of an event in time, we intrinsically alter the meaning of the event so that it cannot impact on us negatively.

This process can be used to strip away pain, grief or loss over childhood events, or even to eliminate phobic or allergic responses which may have developed in childhood due to some external stimulus.

It is usually very obvious that people mentally store memories in a spatial manner. How often do you notice that when people refer to past events they gesture to their left, or behind themselves? And when people refer to the future, they often gesture to their right, or in front. (These are two very common ways we organise time. Of course there are many variations.)

Here is one way of working with timelines to rewrite personal history. This usually works best when someone leads you through the process as it is quite difficult to both be in the process and talk yourself through it. To do that, you have to be both associated and dissociated at the same time, or quickly alternating without losing the experience or the momentum. Not easy and probably impossible for most people.

The Process

1. Decide upon a problem you wish to deal with. Maybe grief over a past event, maybe an unhelpful belief you'd like to change, maybe a fear you've developed.
2. Imagine you are looking at a line that represents your life. See the line stretching way, way back into the past; see yourself standing on the spot that represents right now; see the line stretching way, way out to the future. On this line are all the events of your life. Maybe some of them stand out. Maybe you don't really see events but just notice areas of light or dark or skinny bits or thick bits. Everyone will have a different experience, depending on their own unique ways of remembering things and especially depending upon whether we are processing visually, auditorially or kinesthetically. Take a moment to check out your timeline and become familiar with its qualities and characteristics.
3. Notice as you examine your timeline that there is an area or event way, way back that represents the time you had a particular experience that led to your making a decision that caused your present problem. Even if you don't have a specific awareness yet of that, allow yourself to be drawn back along the time line until you find yourself on a spot that represents a time 5 minutes before you had that experience and looking at or being with the you of that time. How old do you look? What do you look like?

4. The you that you find there is about to go through that experience but since that experience is in his/her future, does not yet have an awareness of it. You, on the other hand, know exactly (either consciously or unconsciously) what is to happen, as well as all the consequences and ramifications. In addition to that you have skills, knowledge and wisdom, as well as a physical, supporting presence, to share with the you of that time. What can you share now with that younger you to fully prepare and resource him/her so that in passing through the experience he/she will make an entirely different decision about the meaning of it and instead use it as a jump to more personal power or some other wonderful quality?
5. Is there anything the younger you wants of you? Ask. Maybe it's information, maybe some symbol or gift. Maybe it's as simple as a hand to hold. Give what is asked for, make sure the younger you is happy with that and fully ready to proceed.
6. Step forward now with the younger you and go through that experience with all of the skill, knowledge and wisdom that is yours and notice how not only does he/she react differently and form different decisions and beliefs, but that everything changes around you as that occurs.
7. Continue moving through the timeline with the growing you, noticing how all of life continues to move and change with you, changing everything in line with these very different learnings.
8. Come through to now, and stand for a moment hand in hand with that other you, looking out to your future, and noticing how even the future has changed and now looks and feels so full of promise, full of opportunity, full of love. Perhaps it even seems to sparkle and beckon? Take a step and feel what that is like. Take another and another. What is this wonderful feeling? Maybe like walking on stardust? Breathe this in and know that this is yours, your birthright, and you own it.
9. Say thank you, and turn and step back to now, to the present, here, now, awake and refreshed and renewed, in your own time, right here with us in this room.

Warning: this whole experience can be intensely moving. Be gentle. Also, if there is a traumatic event which needs to be dealt with, on no account attempt to use this technique unless you are a fully-trained and experienced therapist. Techniques cannot hurt people but clumsy, ignorant handling certainly can do a great deal of damage.

To learn more about working with timelines, take a look at the book "Timeline Therapy and the Structure of Personality", by Dr Tad James and Wyatt Woodsmall. Tad James' live trainings are highly-regarded around the world.