

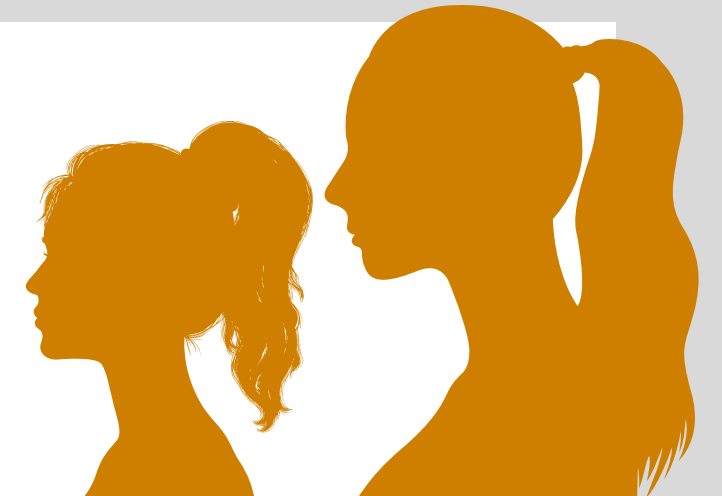
SOLUTION FOCUSED HYPNOTHERAPY AND MEMORY RETRIEVAL IN POST-TRAUMATIC RETROGRADE AMNESIA: A CASE STUDY

Jessika Sheppy (Solution Focused Hypnotherapist), STEPS Rehabilitation, United Kingdom

Solution Focused Hypnotherapy integrated into a rehabilitation programme for a patient with complete post-traumatic retrograde amnesia. The therapy worked to restore lost memories which supported the patient to recover his identity and to start moving forwards with his life.

Patient A

Despite post-traumatic amnesia being known as a common problem following traumatic brain injury (TBI) there is limited evidence to guide treatment. In this case, Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy teams were already using photographs, storyboards, personal objects and music within cognitive therapy to try and help memories return.



Despite this the amnesia was an ongoing issue which meant the patient felt a loss of identity and increasing anger over what had happened to him. He described feeling like his family and friends were strangers to him, including his wife and 12 year old daughter. He was distressed by the fact he was relying on family and friends to inform him about 'who he was'. When he tried to think about the past it was just a blank.

Why Solution Focused Hypnotherapy?

Patient A had made significant physical and cognitive progress during his rehabilitation, however the team were struggling with increased emotional and behavioural outbursts. He was being treated for depression; coming out of his room for therapies although spending the rest of this time alone ruminating about how his life had been destroyed and how he was never going to be the person he was.



Solution Focused Hypnotherapy was introduced 16 months post-TBI with the primary aim of providing support with emotional regulation. The memory retrieval process was unexpected, and once identified the methodology changed to include bespoke scripts aimed at developing this in a trauma informed way. A favourite script about a mountain was created with the clients input reflecting the importance of nature in his life. This imagery crossed over into his Art Therapy sessions which allowed his active imagination to process the symbolism behind the imagery and what it meant to him emotionally.

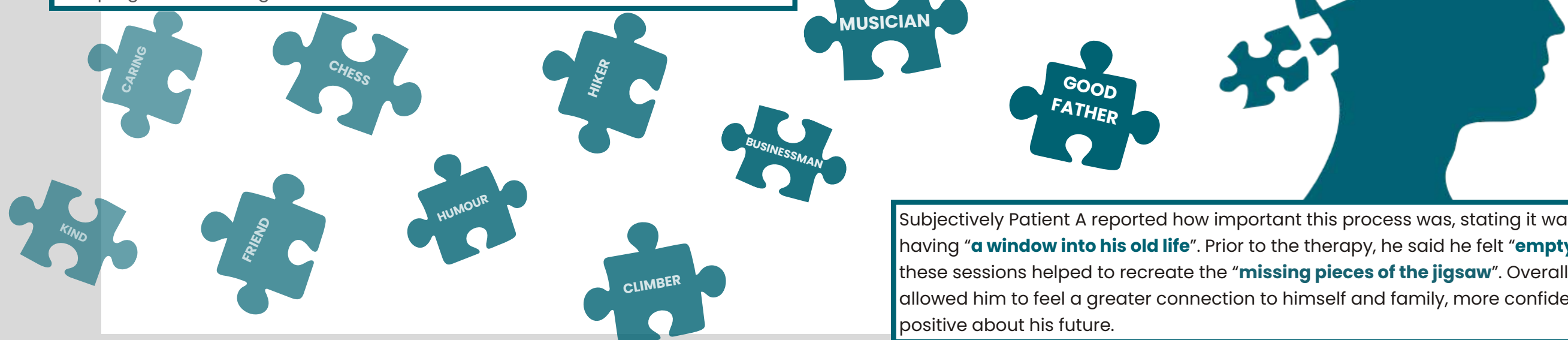
Patient A received therapy 3 times a week and presented as having lost all motivation for a positive future so new ideas were introduced slowly. A good therapeutic relationship was established that focused on positive change and letting go of the past and after 3 months deeper trance work was attempted.



Art piece produced by Patient A during Art Therapy.

Effects of trance

During trance, Patient A reported reliving personal autobiographical memories in vivid detail. When the patient was in trance, his subconscious was able to retrieve these memories, however he had no control over what would come up, it was just a natural process. This came alongside an improvement in the patient's ability to emotionally regulate as he was more self-aware and calmer in himself. He felt like real progress was being made now that he could remember who he was.



Subjectively Patient A reported how important this process was, stating it was like having "a window into his old life". Prior to the therapy, he said he felt "empty" but these sessions helped to recreate the "missing pieces of the jigsaw". Overall, this allowed him to feel a greater connection to himself and family, more confident and positive about his future.

CONCLUSION: Memories lost through TBI do often recover over the course of the initial recovery period, while other memories may take weeks, months or even years to gradually return.

Solution Focused Hypnotherapy successfully and safely enabled an individual patient with post-traumatic retrograde amnesia to retrieve autobiographical memories. Further research is required to understand the underlying processes.