



Choosing Your Story

Module Nine

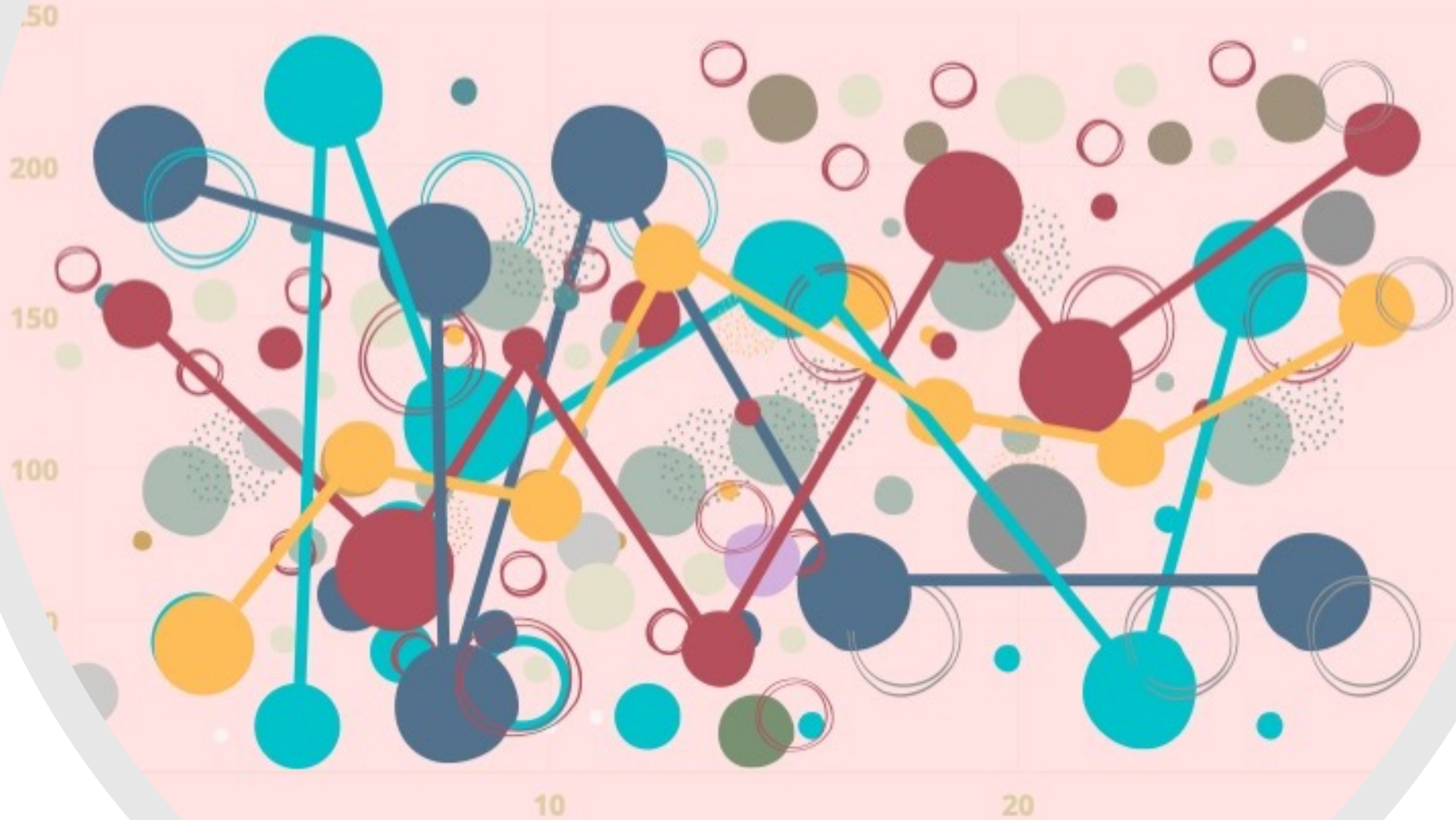
By Catherine Goldhouse

"We tell ourselves stories in order to live....
We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the
social or moral lesson in the murder of five.
We interpret what we see, select the most
workable of the multiple choices. We live
entirely.... by the imposition of a narrative line
upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with
which we have learned to freeze the shifting
phantasmagoria— which is our actual
experience."

— Joan Didion



Life





"My mom cooks dinner around 6pm."



"Something bad is going to happen to my family."





Our Narratives
Launch
Our Inferences





BRIDGING

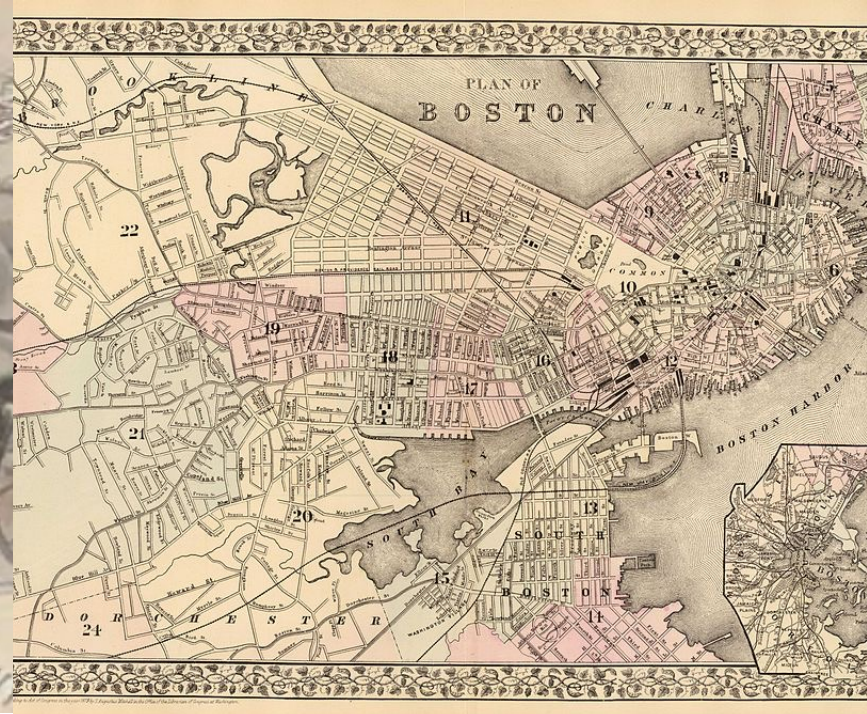


I am home alone.

I get brutally killed at the hands of a psychopath.







BRIDGING



I am home alone.

I get to watch hours of historical dramas about fancy English people.

“The amazing point about bridging is how we are able, by drawing on experience, to connect the most remote and unlikely statements, and accord such invented relatedness not only a sense but an inevitability.”

– Aardema & O’Connor, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, (p.56)

Over on the
corner
there's a
happy noise.

He sold his
own car for a
one-way ticket
back.

There
wasn't a
cloud in
the sky.

I stopped
into a
church I saw
along the
way.

We don't
talk about
Bruno.

He only had
himself to
blame.

Judy and
Johnny just
walked
through the
door.

It's a long day
living in
Reseda.

Bruno broke his heart.
He's going back to his
old life and doesn't
want to hear Bruno's
name ever again.

He sold his car for a
one-way ticket back.

We don't talk about
Bruno.

He was moving back to NYC
where he didn't need a car. That
first day back without his car, he
was reminded how pleasant
walking is. It was a gorgeous day.

He sold his car for a
one-way ticket back.

There wasn't a cloud in
the sky.

BRIDGING

I am home alone.

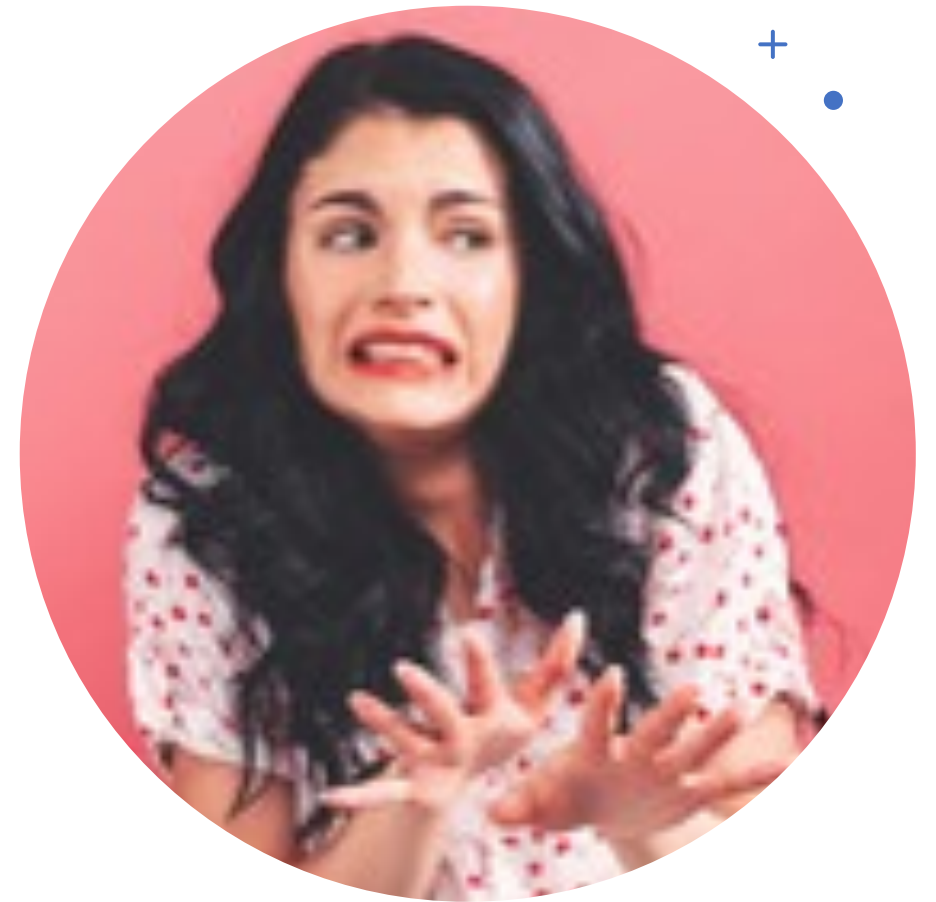
I get brutally killed at the hands of a psychopath.



Imaginal Exposure
vs.
Alternative Narrative



"I use the toilet at work and as I am wiping myself, I feel that my fingers are wet. I conclude that I have urine on my fingers (on the side of my index finger). I wipe my finger with more toilet paper. Since there are no washbowls, I cannot wash my hands and the urine stays on my finger all day. For me, if something is there, it stays there until you wash it. I arrange it so I don't touch things at work with my index finger to avoid contaminating things. If I touch something with that finger, a part of what is on my finger will find itself on that particular object. When I get home, I open the patio door with both my hands while trying to avoid touching the door with that part of my finger that touched urine. If that part touches the door, a part of the urine on my finger will find itself on the door. What is on the door stays on the door because I have not washed my finger. The next day, I suddenly realise that other people have touched the door. So now they have urine on their fingers. Because those people touched objects in my home, there is urine here and there in my home."



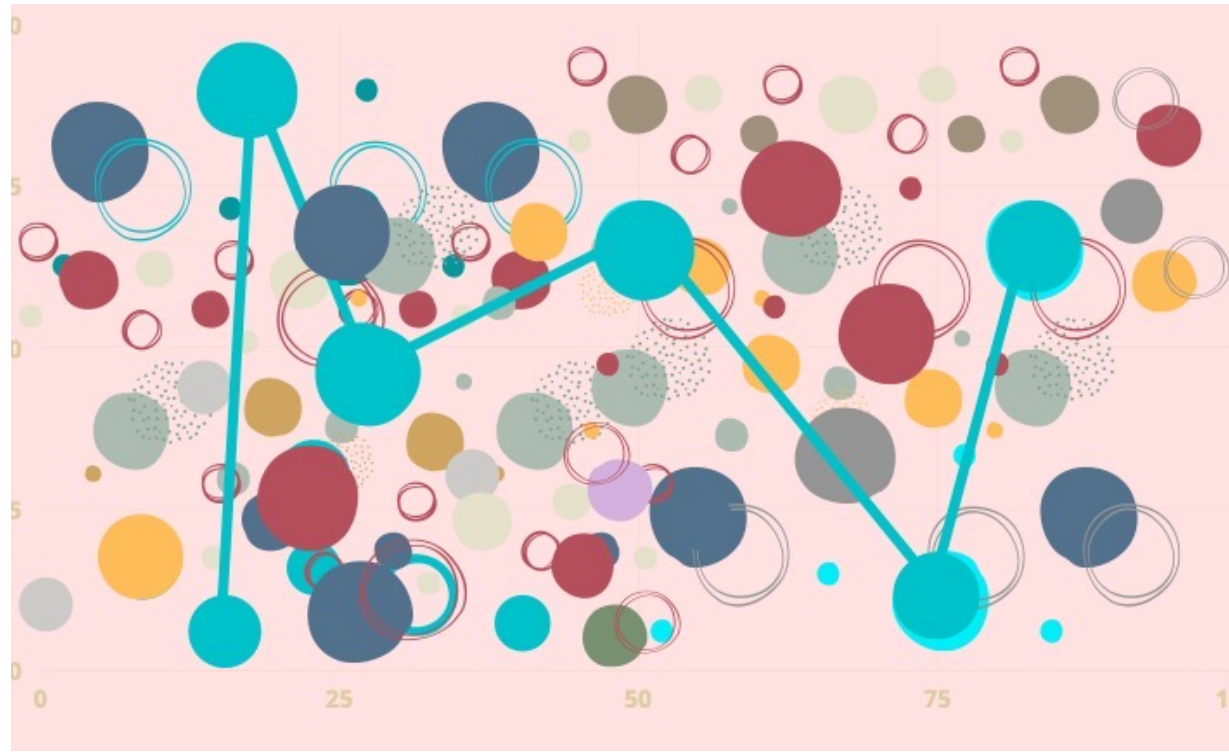
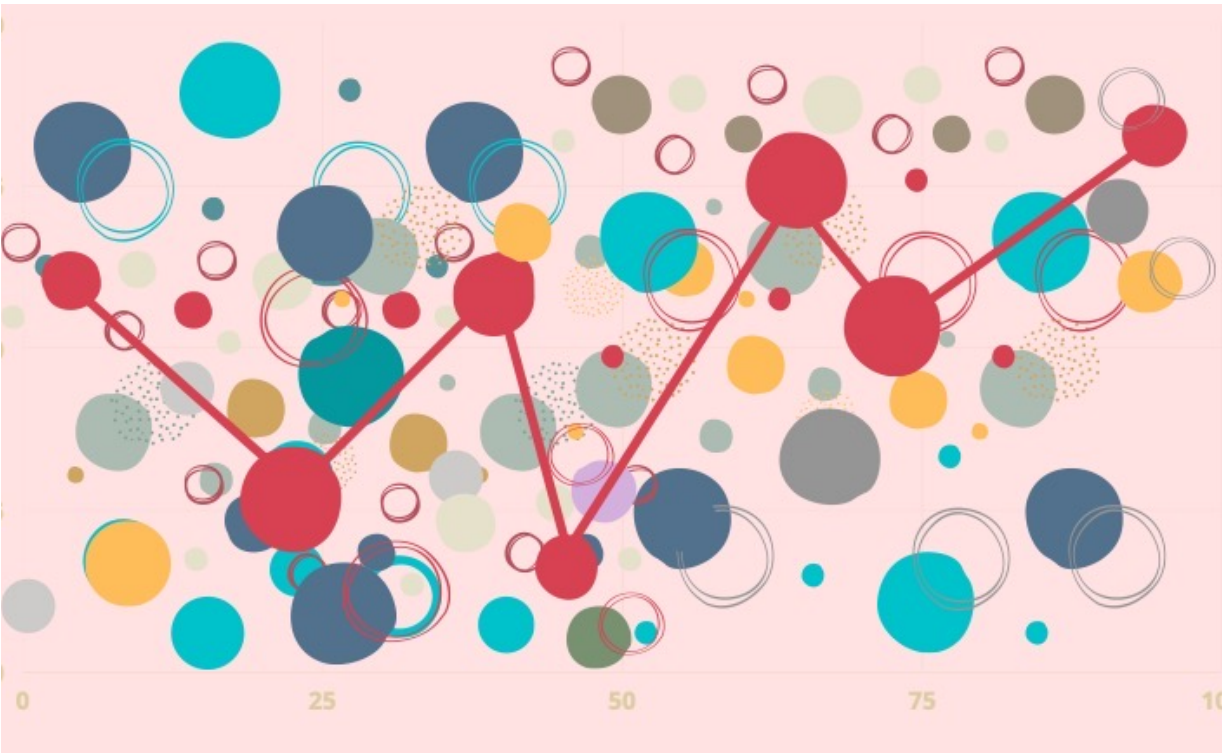
The purpose of creating an alternative story is NOT to disprove the OCD story.

The purpose IS to create doubt about the legitimacy of the OCD story, to remove it from its pedestal as THE story.

The basic requirement for the alternative story is that it not conflict with the senses.

The alternative narrative should begin at the primary source of the OCD inference.

The more detail, the better. Remember, we are competing with the OCD story, which often has had years to develop richness and detail.



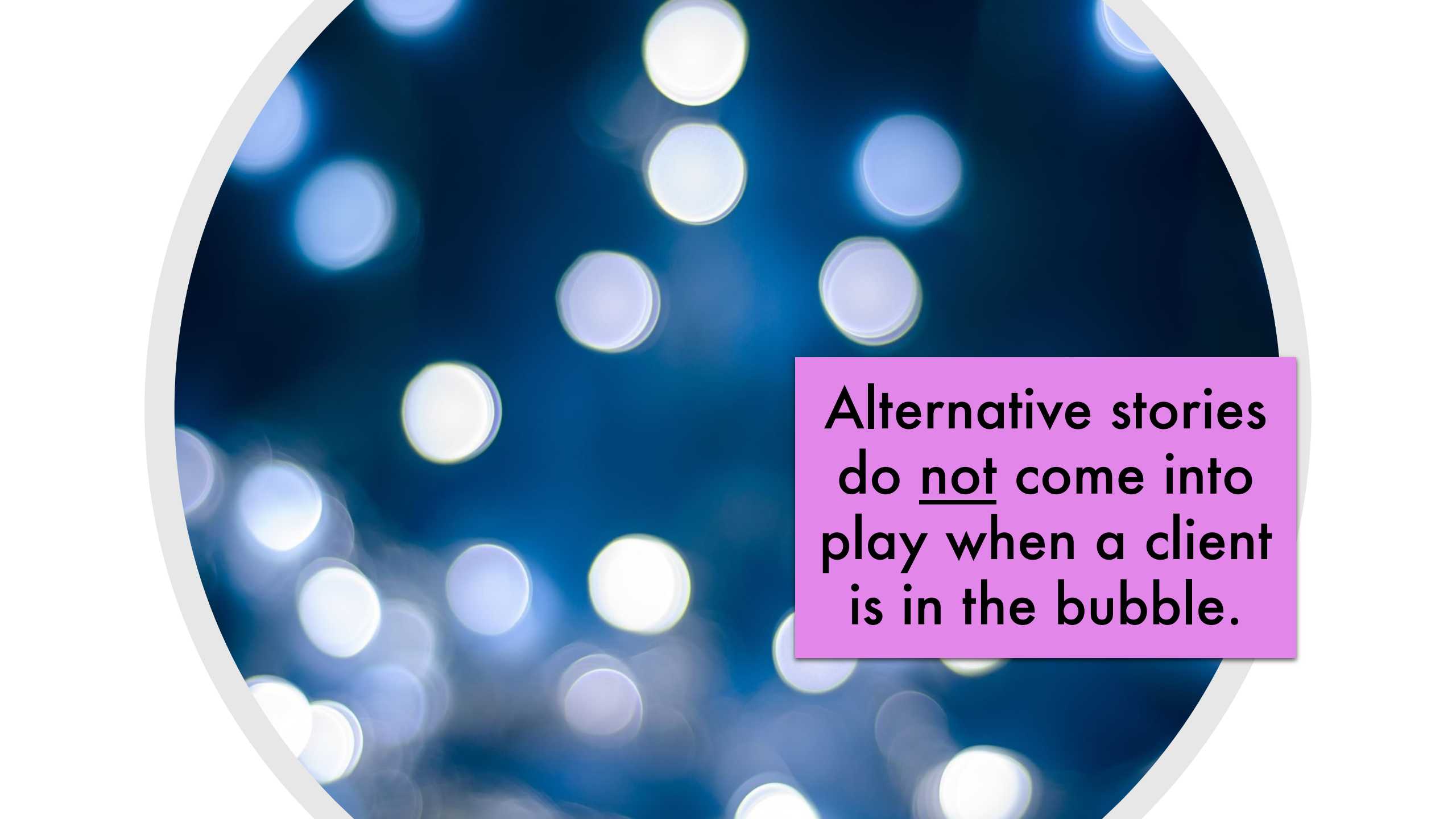


“When I wiped myself with toilet paper, I removed the bit of urine I had on my fingers. If I wipe water on the counter, I trust my senses in order to know if there is still water or not (by looking or by touching). I have no reason to behave otherwise with urine. If I have cola on my fingers, it is the sticky sensation that will indicate if there is more. If I don’t feel anything or see anything, then I will believe that there is nothing on my hands. The fact that I consider urine dirty is not proof that I have some on my fingers but simply a way of removing myself from my senses. When I feel dirty, it is simply because of things I imagine, so the fact that I feel dirty is not proof that I am dirty. Even if I had urine on my fingers, it must have evaporated during the day, since it was not long after that I didn’t feel it on my fingers anymore. If I wash my hands and do not wipe them afterwards, water will end up evaporating by itself and I will feel nothing on my hands. There is no reason for this to be different for urine. It is also possible that the urine dries up. When something is dry, it becomes impossible to transmit it from one thing to another.”

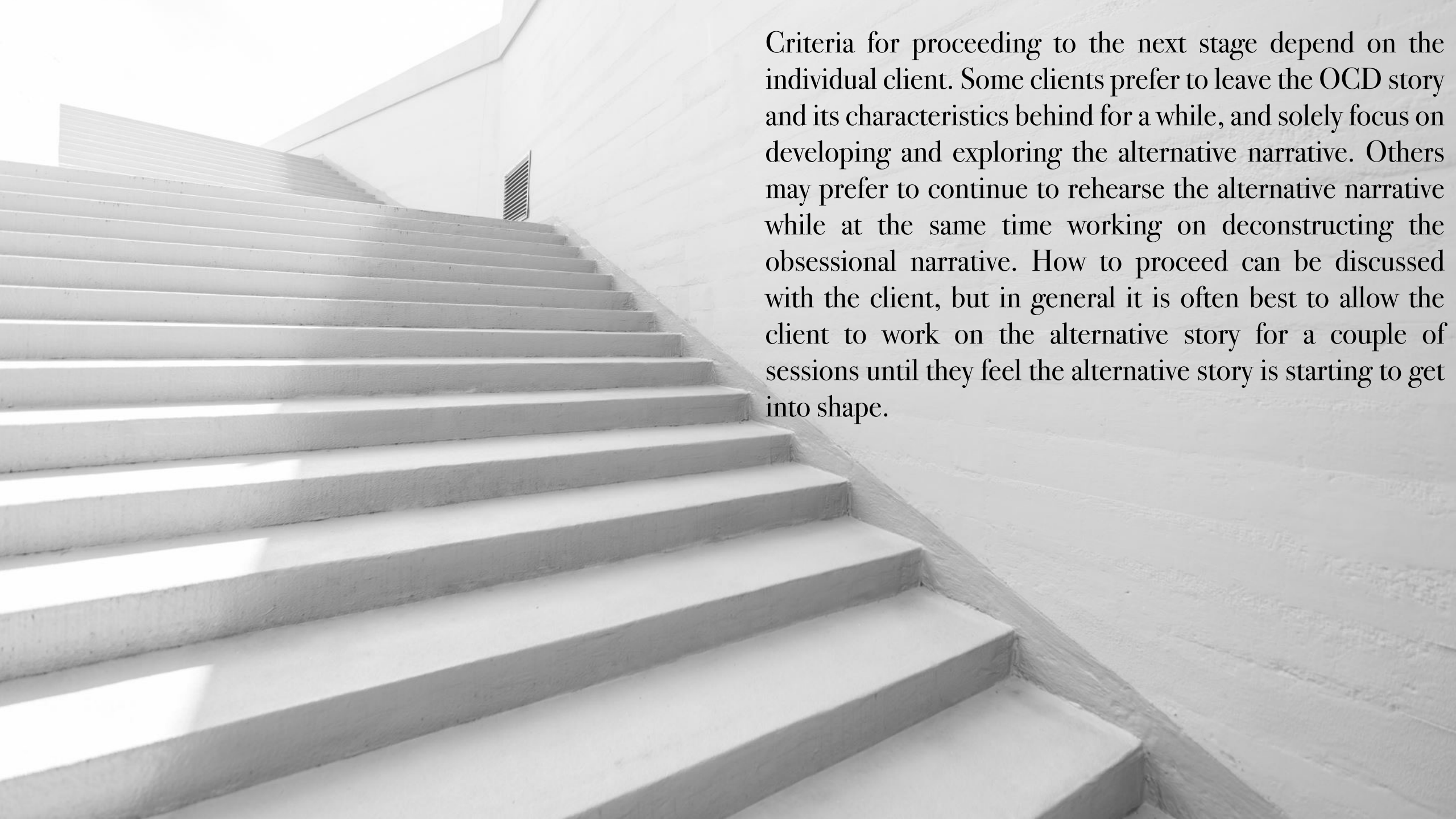
“Do you agree with the idea
that both stories
are equally plausible?”

Reminder: plausible means you could make a reasonably valid case for something, while “possible” means something is capable of becoming true, though it's not always reasonable.

- ❖ Advise clients initially to only practice the alternative story outside of OCD situations.
- ❖ Once clients are progressing, they should only invoke the alternative story in OCD situations when they are relatively confident that the alternative story is able to over-ride the OCD story rather than the opposite.



**Alternative stories
do not come into
play when a client
is in the bubble.**



Criteria for proceeding to the next stage depend on the individual client. Some clients prefer to leave the OCD story and its characteristics behind for a while, and solely focus on developing and exploring the alternative narrative. Others may prefer to continue to rehearse the alternative narrative while at the same time working on deconstructing the obsessional narrative. How to proceed can be discussed with the client, but in general it is often best to allow the client to work on the alternative story for a couple of sessions until they feel the alternative story is starting to get into shape.



“As we become aware of ourselves as storytellers, we realize we can use our stories to heal and make ourselves whole.”

– Susan Wittig Albert