

Taking the DNA-V Walk of Life

This introduction is done with one person, either a volunteer from a group or class- room or an individual in therapy. You first write the letters D, N, and A on three sheets of paper and place them on the floor in a circle. Space them at least a few steps apart. Don’t explain what’s happening at this point. Let the curiosity build.

Ask the young person to walk to A with you and, once there, say something like this:

This A stands for advisor. It’s something we all have. I have it. You have it. It’s that inner voice in our heads, evaluating everything and trying to tell us how good or bad we are. Have you ever seen a movie where there’s a little creature sitting on someone’s shoulder, whispering in the person’s ear? It’s kind of like that.

Let’s illustrate what the advisor does. We’ll both do this together. Think of some critical ways you evaluate yourself, and I’ll do the same. I’ll write mine first. I’ll start with “I’m not good enough. I’m unlovable.”

Write your evaluations on the piece of paper with the A on it, then have the young person write her evaluations, encouraging her to really think about how the advisor evaluates.

Take a moment to just stand there together, looking at the words on the page. Then ask, “What’s it like to be standing here?” Seek some descriptions. Then just wait until the person says something like “How long do I have to wait here?” or “What else can we do?”

To this, you might reply with something like “What else *can* we do then?” You’re attempting to have the person say she could see what the sheets of paper with N and D are for. If need be, use your gaze to playfully prompt this. Once she voices that idea, say something like, “Okay, let’s walk to N and see what that is.” Once you’re at N, say some- thing along these lines:

Hayes, L., & Ciarrochi, J. (2015). *The Thriving Adolescent: Using Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and Positive Psychology to Help Teens Manage Emotions, Achieve Goals, and Build Connection*. Oakland CA: New Harbinger.

What we just did is the most important skill in our work. If we feel stuck, we move to something else. Whenever you’re stuck, you can move—you can do something new with your hands and feet.

Okay, so here we are. N stands for noticing. This is a space we can move to when we feel stuck and want to increase our awareness of where we are and the choices available to us. Let’s do a noticing practice right now.

Have the person take a few slow, deep breaths, just noticing the breath for a moment or two. Then ask her what it’s like to be in this space. Also ask whether she can notice a difference between the advisor and the noticer. Explain that we all have the ability to be a noticer and we all have an advisor.

Next, elicit curiosity about D, again playfully using your gaze if need be. Then walk to D and praise the person for being curious and wanting to see what D is. Discuss how moving around is more flexible than standing and fixating on the advisor’s evaluations. Then describe D something like this:

D stands for discoverer. This is where we try new things and see what works. It’s where we discover what we care about. We can be discoverers even when our advisor says we can’t be. For example, has your mind, or advisor, ever told you that you can’t do something, but you did it anyway? When you did that, you discovered for yourself whether or not you could do it, instead of relying on the advisor.

Now let’s return to A. I don’t want to suggest A is always bad and that D and N are always good. They’re just different spaces we can move to or different skills we all have. Can you give me some examples of when the advisor might make some useful evaluations? (Elicit some examples, such as it’s a bad idea to drink and drive, or it’s a bad idea to put off studying until the last minute.)

Next, say something like “There’s something in the middle here, something that drives DNA.” Then write a V on a sheet of paper and

place it in the middle of the circle. Return to D, then ask the person to walk to the new sheet of paper with you. Once there, begin to introduce values:

We use our DNA skills in the service of what you care about. I call this valuing, or values. Values might be having fun, playing sports, or connecting with others. It just depends on the person. For each of us, everything we do is in the service of this. So everything we do in our work together will be about helping you to have more things you care about and value in your life.