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MY THERAPIST IS RETIRING



by 'Marian'

My therapist is retiring next year. I've worked with her for nearly five years and I'm not ready to finish therapy yet, so this is a difficult issue for me. I've realised that many other people face the same or similar situations, so I thought I'd write about how it's impacting me and how I'm dealing with it. But I have dissociative identity disorder, so I have a variety of responses ...

MILLY

I don't want Christine to go. It's not fair. She says it's not because we've been naughty, but if that's the case, why won't she stay? What is she going to do anyway? I know she's got grandchildren and she wants to spend more time with them. But it's not like they're living with her or anything, so why can't she keep seeing me? It's only a couple of hours a week. It's not fair.

MUD

I knew we shouldn't have trusted her. These therapists – they do all this, 'You

can trust me' bullshit, but when it comes to it they're just like everyone else. They're only in it for the money anyway. Or to feel better about themselves because they feel guilty that they have such nice lives while ours are so shit. They reel us in, to make themselves feel good about themselves, and then when they've had enough of us, they cut us loose. It sucks. I've been telling the team all along not to trust her, that we shouldn't open up to her, because it'll end in tears. Now the little ones won't stop crying and the adults are just wandering around in a daze like a zombie. What's the point of that? Therapy is supposed to help us, not screw us up even more.

MARY

I can't believe Christine has kept going for this long – she should probably have retired years ago. I really don't mind. It's her decision and I respect it, and I'm not sure I need therapy any more anyway. I think it's only going for therapy that stirs things up for me, so if I stop going



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then I won't need it any more. I think I'm probably making the whole thing up anyway, and I'm not even sure I've got DID. I think it's a game that I play – maybe unconsciously or something. For the attention. Because I haven't really got anything to talk about. Every week before the session I have a huge panic that I'm paying all this money for therapy and taking up Christine's time, but when it comes to it I haven't actually got anything to say. I'm not sure all that stuff happened. Well, maybe some of it, but we've talked about it now so really I think it's time that I moved on. So in that sense it's positive that Christine is retiring because otherwise I'd never get around to stopping therapy, and I could really do with the money it'll save me. I hope she'll be very happy and I'll miss coming to see her, but it is only a tiny part of my life, so it's not exactly a big deal, is it?

MARIAN

I should have realised that this was going to happen, and I should have had a contingency plan in place for it, but I guess with my avoidance and how difficult things are it's not surprising that I've pushed it to the back of my mind. Now that I know that it's happening, I need to get into gear. She's given me plenty of notice, so I need to figure out what I'm going to do. At one level, I'm terrified. I know I'm not ready yet to stop therapy. There's so much that's still unresolved, and although I'm much more co-conscious and aware of my parts, some weeks it's only my therapy session

that helps me hold it together. If I didn't have that beacon of hope, I don't know what I'd do. So the logical thing for me to do is to find another therapist so that I can continue the work, and I need to do it as soon as possible so that there can be a smooth transition. I imagine that during the last few weeks it will be really difficult to focus on anything other than the ending, so if I leave it until then I might not be in a good enough place to be looking for someone. And people have waiting lists, and it's not straightforward finding someone who's willing to work with DID and this kind of trauma, and finding the right fit.

So I need to get myself into gear and find someone else. But of course I don't want to! The thought of it terrifies me. It's taken me so long to build up any kind of level of trust with Christine and I can't imagine doing that all over again. I don't want someone else – I want Christine! These big waves of emotion just keep crashing all over me and I don't know how to manage them. But that's exactly why I need to continue the work. My life is my responsibility and what Christine is doing in retiring is perfectly reasonable behaviour on her part and I need to respect it. The best way of doing that is by facing it head on and looking for someone else to work with once we do end. I might not want to face those emotions, but that's what the therapy has been about – helping me to learn how to manage my distress in productive and positive ways. So in order to honour



what Christine has done for me, I owe it to her to put it into action by looking for a new therapist now.

MILLY

I'm so scared. Why does everyone I love leave me and go away? I can't cope with this. I just want to curl up in a ball and cry. It hurts so much. I can't figure out what I did wrong to make her go away. I want to tell her how sorry I am and that I'll be good, I'll be really really good, I'll never do it again, and please can she stay.

MUD

What sucks is that she knows so much about us. I imagine her sitting around with all her friends in the old folks' home laughing about how stupid we are, telling them stories about us. She'll say she won't do that but I bet she will. She's just used us. She was just meeting her own needs by seeing us. She shouldn't have let us get so dependent. If we fall apart, it's her fault. I hate her. I wish I'd never met her. I'm not sure I can be bothered to go back for any more sessions with her. What's the point? We're just giving her more ammunition to fire at us later. I don't trust her. I've never trusted her, but the others wouldn't listen. That's why I hate them! Why can't they see that people just use us and abuse us!!!

MARY

I bet Christine wants to end before next year but she feels bad about it or something, so she's giving us extra time. But I don't think we need the sessions

anyway, so it's probably best if we don't go any more. I can't see the point of going – it's just costing money that we haven't got and taking up her time. I feel bad that we've led her up the garden path, pretending to have had all this trauma and to have DID when there's clearly nothing wrong with us. I don't think I'll go back for any more sessions and then she can retire earlier if she wants to. It's not fair on her to keep dragging it out.

MARIAN

It's normal that I'm reacting like this, isn't it? I'm all over the place. I can feel the conflict on the inside – parts who desperately want to cling to her and for her not to go, then parts who feel really hurt and betrayed by her that she's leaving so are angry with her. I can just about see it, but it takes a lot of effort, a lot of journalling and making myself think about it, to recognise all these conflicts. There's a big drive on the inside to hurt ourselves as a way of dealing with the pain. But I guess that pain is the pain of loss – is it called grief? – and that it's normal for people when they lose major relationships in their life. How do 'normal' people deal with grief? What do they do? Well, I guess the first thing they do is they acknowledge and accept it and they don't beat themselves up for it. They don't give themselves a hard time for feeling grief. What I'm doing at lots of levels is denying that the grief is there, or kicking against it in some way like becoming angry at Christine. What is it that I'm supposed to be doing instead?



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What was that thing about 'feelings are meant to be felt'? Oh, but that's SO painful! Dissociation is so much easier...! Isn't it ironic that by doing the work of therapy, life gets harder in a way because you have to actually feel your feelings rather than pushing them into other parts of yourself ... I need some support to deal with this. I need to start looking for a new therapist NOW. I need to find constructive ways of dealing with this. It's going to hurt and we can't go over it, we can't go under it ... oh no, we have to go through it! - as the Bear Hunt story says.

MILLY

I'm such a bad girl. I've been really naughty. I can't stop crying. I can't remember what I did wrong and I can't put it right. I think it's because we told Christine all those bad things about what we did when we were little. They told us not to tell anyone and that if we did they wouldn't believe us and they'd send us away. Christine doesn't believe us and she's sending us away. We shouldn't have told her. When I see her next time, I'll tell her I've made it all up and it didn't happen and I'm sorry, so if I untell it then maybe she won't send me away.

MUD

I hate the fact that we told her stuff. I hate the fact there's parts of us who want this stupid relationship with her. I hate all of it. I hate people. I hate myself. I just feel so angry, so stupidly stupidly

angry. This is why it's not safe to get close to people - because then they abandon you and send you away. She's always had all the power and now she's using it, and it's our own fault we're getting hurt because we shouldn't have let her in to start with. I keep telling them! Now all they're doing is crying. Whining brats! I hate them!

MARY

It's going to be great to have Thursday afternoons to myself again. It's going to be such a relief not to get all worked up every week before therapy and then spend the day in bed on a Friday recovering from it. It's strange that therapy is so exhausting, and I think that's what they mean when they say it's 'iatrogenic' - that it's the therapy itself that causes the problems. Because I can't see any other reason why it has such an impact on me. When Christine is on holiday, I'm so much calmer. I don't really feel anything. It's a relief to be able to squash everything down and not be so on edge with it all. So it'll be a relief when we don't have to see her any more.

MARIAN

I suppose it feels so difficult because for the first time in my life I've actually engaged head-on in a relationship. It took me a long time, and to start with I was just ducking and diving and trying to keep my distance. Then it was like the younger parts of me formed an attachment first and like a bomb going



off all their need for a 'good mummy' came exploding out of us. That caused a huge conflict on the inside of us, because for other parts that just didn't feel safe at all, and I suppose that's why they're thinking now that they're right, because she's leaving, and it hurts. But there's a saying about 'better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all' and it does feel like that too: that we began to really relate to another human being for the first time with Christine, so although the loss of that feels huge right now, I'm still glad we did it. She says as well that when we've done it once, it makes it easier for the future as we have a new template on the inside of us which we can use in future relationships.

It's amazing really that we've worked with her for five years and in that time she has always been consistent, always been there for us. She's not suddenly got cross with us over something, or got fed up with us. She's seen some really dark places on the inside of us and she's still accepted us, and that's a new experience. A lot of the stuff that happened to me doesn't feel as huge a secret as it did before. I feel like I can dare to look at some of that stuff because Christine didn't turn and run when we looked at it together. That's changed the way I think about it, and think about myself. So I don't actually feel as scared at the thought of finding a new therapist as I did when I found Christine, because there is a part of me that gets the fact that I am capable of

relationships and that there are people out there who won't use us and abuse us. It's just that at the same time it hurts massively because I'll miss Christine. But that's normal, isn't it? We haven't talked yet about whether we'll have any contact afterwards or not. I'm assuming that I won't get to see her, but she did talk about another client that she used to see that she meets up with once a year for a catch-up. I'm not sure if I want that or not, even if she offers it. I'll have to think about it.

MILLY

It's not fair that she won't let us see her any more. Yesterday she said we could meet up a couple of times a year and go for a coffee and we can tell her what we've been up to. But it's not fair. If she can meet up once or twice, why can't we see her every week? Why does she only want to see us once or twice? So much will happen between each time, and we won't have enough time to tell her about it, and we might be upset and we can't cry if we're in a coffee shop. I don't think she wants to see us afterwards but she's doing it because there's a rule that she has to or something. Even if we can't see her every week, why can't we see her every month? Why do we have to wait a whole year? It's not fair.

MUD

There's no way we're going to meet up with her again after we finish. Why would we want to? She's just offering it for her own benefit, so that she



doesn't feel so bad about ending. We won't remember who she is anyway. She can bugger off for good, as far as I'm concerned. I can't think of anything worse than being made to meet up with her once or twice a year. What good is that going to do?! If she wants to end the relationship, then let her end it – don't keep on pretending that she cares about us by offering to have these 'follow-up sessions'. She said something about attachment and how it's important that we don't have another experience of a sudden ending to a relationship. Sounded like bullshit to me. Sounds like she doesn't know how to let go and move on. Stuff that.

MARY

I don't think I mind whether we meet up or not. I wouldn't want to take up any more of her time, and I'm not sure if we're supposed to pay for those sessions or not as she didn't mention it specifically. I can't really see how it's going to help, because I will have moved on by then and seeing her again might just stir all this stuff back up to the surface. It's really kind of her to offer but I don't think I'll need to see her again, and anyway I wouldn't want to take up her time. I'm sure she's got better things to do than to see me.

MARIAN

I'm really grateful that Christine is willing to meet up with me once or twice a year after she finishes. We'll have to talk it through, like she said, and

figure out what we're trying to achieve, what our expectations are and what the boundaries will be. She's said she's discussed it in supervision and that, as long as we're clear on what we're doing, and that it's for my benefit, she's more than happy to do it. Five years is a long time to be seeing someone for and then they just drop off the radar. I'm sure at times it will be really difficult to see her as it will feel like I'm waiting forever, and then once it happens I'm sure it will be disappointing at some level, especially because it will be over with so quickly. I'll have to think through how I manage it with my parts and whether they're allowed to come out to speak to her as well, or whether it's just better for me to take the lead on it. I'm a little bit afraid that it will be too much and that I will find it too difficult. But that's what she said about making sure that it's for my benefit and that if it's not we don't have to do it. At least it gives me a sense of continuation, and I think that will help stop me going back into denial that everything is fine. I wonder how she'll feel about me seeing another therapist ... of course she'll be fine with that! She wants the best for me! But it would be good to talk about these things, and work them through. It's all a bit complicated, isn't it? But it will be alright. ●

