

## TIMELINE



### MAIN FEATURES

Reinforced skills (TASC Cluster)	AIM, SUPPORT
Suitable for	Teachers, Students
Difficulty level	Low
Setting	Individual, Group
Minimum number of participants	1
Average time length	60 minutes
Specific materials	Yes
Online version	Yes



## 1. DESCRIPTION

The Time Line method is a reflective exercise that allows the client or student, as an expert on their own life, to carefully observe the most relevant events in their past, from birth to the present moment - or in a particular period of their life (e.g. the last year). The aim of the TimeLine representation is to bring awareness of the most relevant facts and periods in someone's life, to observe how they shaped his/her personality and to learn from their own previous experiences.

As related to self-reflection and attention to personal stories, this exercise consists in the creation of a timeline (it can be physically drawn on a piece of paper/blackboard, or metaphorical) on which the student arranges the most relevant events of his/her life and marks the different stages he/she has gone through so far, including moments of change, family, work, personal situations, etc.

Generally, this is an individual exercise that the client (student at risk of social exclusion) carries out with the teacher, but it is possible to adapt it to a group work context in which the participants to work in pairs on their lifelines - one of them will play the role of the client and the other the role of the teacher who will guide them during the session and process of reflection on their life, and vice versa. In that scenario, be sure to remind the group the rules regarding confidentiality and respect before, during and after the activity.

## 2. AIM / BENEFITS

The fundamental objective of the TimeLine exercise is to encourage the reflection of the client/student about their previous personal experiences, those who have determined their identities over the years and who have a direct or indirect impact on the situation or problem they face today. This exercise can be used as a starting point for the student to observe that changes occur and that their ideal future does not necessarily have to be conditioned by negative experiences from their past. Their past does not have to haunt their future, so that it is critical to comprehend what occurred in order to learn from it and construct a future.

In this way, the mission of TimeLine is to analyse and help understand behaviour patterns and previous experiences, to look for new coping mechanisms before the present situation and the desired future, allowing the student to overcome limiting beliefs from his or her previous life and free himself or herself from a burdensome self-narrative system about himself or herself.

Some of the potential benefits of this exercise are:

- Can be used as a starting point to establish a relationship between the student at risk of social exclusion (or other vulnerable groups) and the teacher, since it allows to know the history of a person and some determining events (or at least, some events the person believe to be determining) in his/her life from the birth to the present moment. This will help the teacher to better understand the student and the situation he/she faces, recognizing him/her as an expert in his/her own life.

- TimeLine can perfectly work to create accurate time frames of what has occurred in someone's life and understand dynamics and changes. To learn about history and understand what happened at a given point in time, a recapitulation of events is required.
- TimeLine favors the identification of possible patterns, which can be positive or negative, and customer reactions and emotions before remarkable events, which can be equally positive or negative. They make connections between events, emotions, feelings, difficulties, important people in a person's life, events, etc.
- Time lines can help with the deconstruction of a stressful experience and its reintegration into a broader spectrum of experiences. It demonstrates that changes occur, so this exercise may be useful for young people to understand that their past does not equal their future, and you can then begin focusing on what needs to change to change the future through deeper conversations.

### 3. COMPETENCIES CLUSTER(S) RELATED

The TimeLine technique could be used to start a conversation with a student, allowing him or her to reflect on previous important events that shaped his/her current situation or problem. It is a great starting point to drill into how students feel about their life and explore a solution.

The exercise is part of a conversation you have with your student about their feelings, resources, hopes, desired futures.

In this sense it is related to the TASC cluster AIM and in particular the Goal-oriented and Future-oriented approaches.

A TimeLine can also be used to SUPPORT an attitude of curiosity among students, for instance you can take a specific event or situation in time which you feel students are interested in and ask them to create the timeline on how this event or situation emerged from the past.

It can also be used for a better common understanding of the other person(s).

### 4. HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE

#### **Step 1 / Preparation**

The facilitator (e.g., teacher) introduces the TimeLine exercise explaining how to draw (or narrate) the timeline of the participant's life so that it includes family, personal, work events, events or experiences that he/she considers relevant to his/her personal trajectory and that have helped to shape his/her identity over the years up to the present time.

To do this, the facilitator will provide the necessary materials - paper, coloured post-it, markers, or a blackboard to draw the timeline - and will leave a few minutes of reflection so that the participant can recall those events they want to include in its timeline.

In a group setting as in the case of a classroom, the facilitator (e.g., the teacher) will form pairs to work together on their lifelines. A member of each couple will be asked to play the role of "client", while the other will later act as "mentor" to invite reflection and encourage conversation. Then the roles will be reversed.

In this case, the facilitator is recommended to first establish basic rules of confidentiality and mutual respect between the participants of the group. These rules will also be recalled during and after the session.

### **Step 2 / Representation**

The "client" (e.g., the student) will work in the representation of his/her line of life while the "mentor" will have to guarantee that the person feels free and in confidence to expose his/her personal stories, remembering his/her role as an expert in his/her own life.

At this point it is possible to work using several methods:

- a) Drawing a timeline graphically on paper or board. In this case the mentor may provide a template, or look for one that best suits the needs, for the client to mark the events he/she considers appropriate and make the relevant notes.



- b) The TimeLine can also be carried out in a metaphorical way - for example, it can be suggested that the student moves around the room as he/she "advances" in his/her life and goes explaining those events that have marked him/her. Or, simply, the student can narrate in chronological order the remarkable events of his/her life. In this case, it is recommended to take notes to have a "graphic" and chronological representation at the end of the session, since the written visualization of such events can be very convenient for further reflection on them.

### **Step 3 / Self-reflection**

To ensure adequate reflection on the timeline and those events or experiences that the "client" has pointed out, the "mentor" should guide the participant's self-reflection, paying attention at all times to the expressions used and the emotions that recalling certain stages of its lives arouses in the participant.

It should also be noted that the mentor can place special emphasis on those events or life experiences identified as positive, as well as on those resources that the client mentions during the exercise, rather than developing a reflection based only on negative aspects and difficulties.

Some of the possible questions the practitioner may ask during the course of the session to guide the "client" participants are:

- *How is the timeline divided into stages?*
- *What are the key events or milestones associated with these stages?*
- *What is the "heart" of your timeline and life?*
- *Where does the timeline become busy or crowded, as opposed to simple or blank?*
- *Do marker events involve people, events, achievements, and so on?*
- *How do you intertwine your teacher, sentimental and family moments?*
- *Who are the people in your life who are important to you?*
- *Is there anything missing? (people, events,...)*
- *How do you think your significant others would depict your timeline?*
- *Which resources did you develop in the past?*

#### **Step 4 / Conclusion**

At the end of this exercise, the practitioners will reflect together on the participant's personal journey - *What do you feel when you look at all your experiences?* - with a focus on their strengths and skills, as well as their resilience in overcoming past obstacles and challenges in earlier stages of their life. Looking with interest at events or stages when the student's life was happy or changed for the better can also be helpful in identifying positive patterns and coping mechanisms that are helpful in the present/future.

In a classroom setting, the teacher can use different types of questions, i.e. focus on possible solutions and on the strengths that the student has shown throughout their personal journey to overcome previous challenges, and not so much on the problems themselves.

At the end of this exercise, the teacher can also ask the student to draw, or imagine, a Timeline representing their desired future, and reflect on how they could achieve this future with the skills, experiences, life lessons and strengths they have acquired throughout their life.

It may be useful to end this exercise with a visualisation of future goals, as through reflection on the past it is possible to learn that change is possible and growth occurs, and to lay the foundations of what a person hopes for in life will be a starting point from which to begin working towards a solution.

#### **5. DEBRIEF**

Some relevant questions in this process may include the following:

- *What have you felt when recalling important events in your life?*



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- *Why have you selected these particular facts/events?*
  - *Has this process changed your ideas/thoughts/feelings about the problem or challenge you are currently facing? Do you think it has helped you to face the future you want?*
  - *What would you like to say if you repeated the exercise in X years time?*

## 6. SPECIFIC MATERIALS

Some materials you might need:

- A piece of paper/whiteboard
- Sticky notes
- Pencil/pen/markers in different colours

## 7. TIPS & TRICKS

Some students might be reluctant to talk about their past, especially if they lived through some traumatic events. In this case, we suggest not forcing them to do the exercise. If you are working in a group, an idea to involve participants in this activity who do not want to create their timeline could be asking them to take the role of tutors, helping you in facilitating the exercise. By listening to other people's stories, they can experience in any case the idea that it is possible to change the narrative of your past and not be haunted by past negative events.

It might also happen that some students create quite poor timelines, in terms of (negative and/or positive) events. In this case, you can ask them why they highlighted just these events, why they thought it was important to indicate them, among all the events that surely have happened in their lives. If they highlight only negative events.

## 8. ONLINE VERSION

The exercise can be done online, and essentially follows the same steps as the offline version. In this case, a video conferencing tool should be used to have a reflective conversation with the student.

You can use a variety of digital video conferencing tools to enable your student to share a screen or documents, so that you can work on the TimeLine using a Google document or presentation, for example. If you are familiar with online tools such as [Miro Board](#), you may also find them useful for leading the conversation and allowing for individual reflection by the young.

## 9. BIBLIOGRAPHY - SITOGRAPHY

- James, T. and Woodsmall, W., Time Line Therapy and the Basis of Personality, Meta Publications,U.S.; UK ed. edición (1 junio 1988)
- [LifeLine exercise](#)