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Working towards a more peaceful future

# Conflict stories: taking the melodrama out of conflict

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## Jerome Bruner

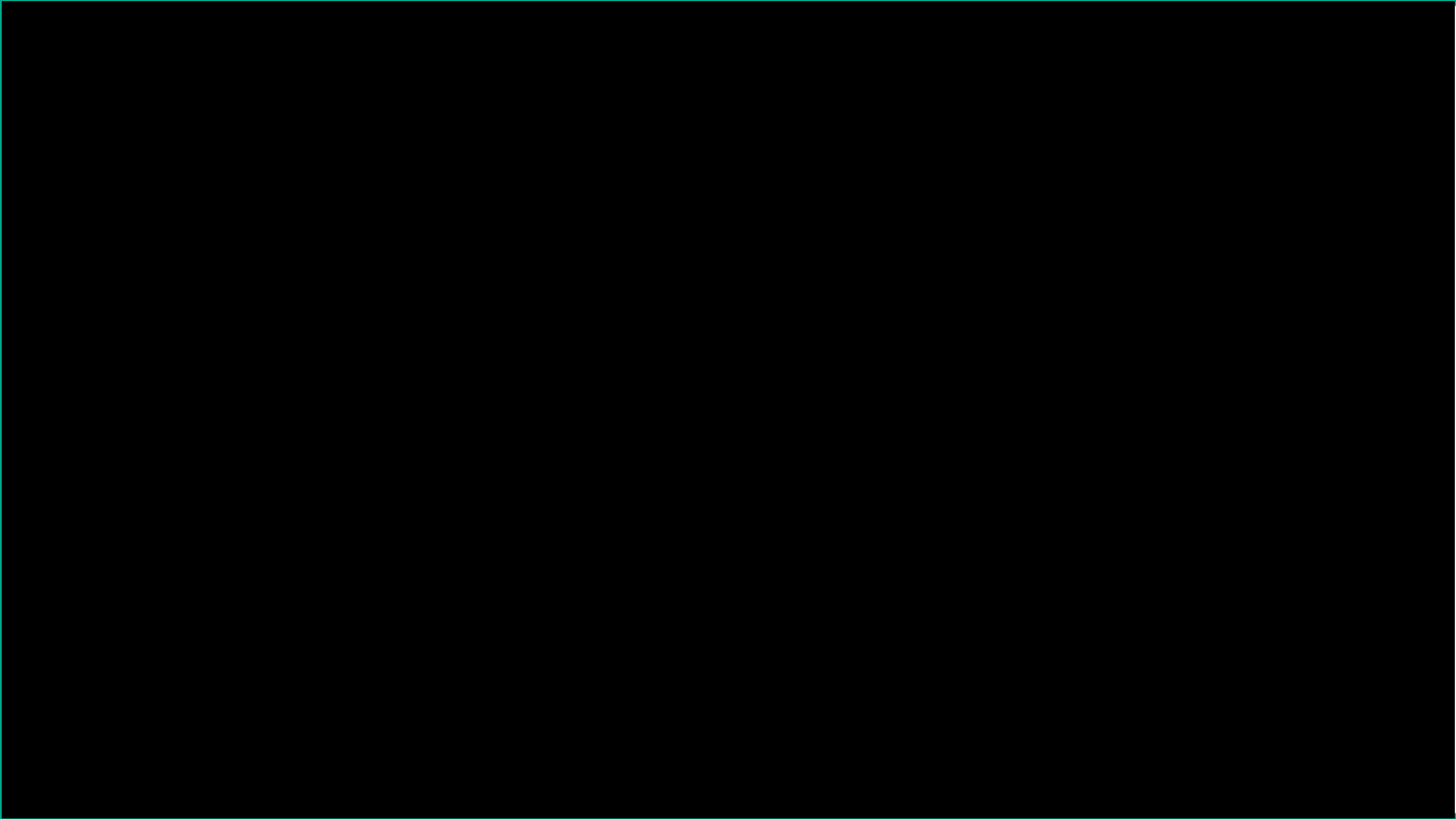
*“It’s only when we suspect we have the wrong story that we begin asking how a narrative may structure (or distort) our view of how things really are.”*



## Conflict narratives

“The stories people tell about conflict carry implicit notions of what conflict is and expectations about what moves or responses are possible or required in specific contexts, what role third parties play, and what outcomes are desirable.”

Folger and Bush (1994)





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## What is wrong with this story?



- Simplifies complex people and events.
- Diverts our attention from useful information in relation to the conflict and social structures / context.
- Polarizes people in conflict:
  - Actively discourages communication; and
  - Works against mutual understanding and collaborative problem solving.
- Discourages us from considering our own contributions.
- Encourages us to remain passive.



- Encourages dependency on others.
- Discourages us from recognizing past and future choices.
- Focuses us on, and incentivizes suffering and exaggeration.
- Encourages us to wait for dream justice (win/lose mentality).
- Motives us to idealize the past:
  - When no return possible; and
  - Restricts opportunities for growth and learning.



## Some tips for helping someone develop their story, and improve their future actions.

- Resist the temptation to “rescue” them... it is actually unhelpful in the long term.
- Personalise the ‘other’ – use their name often, talk about them as if they are a good person in a difficult situation not an evil villain.
- Minimise sensationalism – often possible by simply asking for more details.
- Complexify:
  - Characters
  - Plot (client’s actions, context)
  - Possible outcomes
- Highlight choices (past and future).





## In the pre-conference workshop...

- I'll give you an easy to understand and intuitive framework to help you identify problematic areas of a person's conflict story.
- You'll learn about the attributes of a constructive conflict story, and more importantly....
- I'll give you a simple tool to help people develop their story to incorporate more of these constructive attributes, which in turn will...
- Open up their choices, their competence and confidence to manage the situation more effectively....
- (and save you time and money, as well as building staff engagement)!



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If you register for my pre-conference workshop, I'll throw in free registration to my online course "Introduction to Conflict Styles" valued at \$99. Just email me with your registration confirmation at [sam@cciacademy.com](mailto:sam@cciacademy.com)