

# Mind Mechanics – The Mindfulness Compendium

Observations of the Mind – and Life

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## **Foreword**

This is a compilation of my most popular blogs, along with some fine guest posts from my website [angliacounselling.co.uk](http://angliacounselling.co.uk). Content has been published previously, however, the text contained within this compendium has been cleaned up and re-edited, bringing together the very best of the Mind Mechanics series.

There is something for almost everyone within these posts. Tips and hints will enable you to absorb and reflect, and to help you find a more balanced, harmonious and peaceful life. Everything contained within this compendium will be considered one time or another within my counselling practice for the benefit of clients. I authored all of the observations contained herein, unless attributed otherwise.

You will find frequent referrals to ‘mindfulness’ – a cornerstone to emotional wellbeing that provides for a holistic, more balanced way of life via enhanced creativity, innovation, reduced mind-chatter, stress and anxiety, better sleep, improved diet, with improved relationships awareness.

## About the Author



Bob Brotchie is the owner of Anglia Counselling which provides counsel, psychotherapy, CBT and coaching from offices in rural Cambridgeshire, East Anglia, in the UK, close to the neighbouring counties of Suffolk and Norfolk.

Bob is from Cambridge, where he lived, studied, and worked for more than forty years; twice married, he is the proud father of three sons.

He retired early from emergency medicine in 2011 after almost two decades, where he had provided active paramedic service on land – and in the air, as a trauma and critical care flight medic.

An award winning manager for service and innovation, Bob's interest in mental health and the way we operate in society increased when he became a mental health services liaison lead, representing the ambulance service in the east of England. Engaging with other stakeholders, Bob also occupied the position of governor for a major mental health care provider.

Today, having re-trained, he has a successful private practice which provides therapeutic guidance in a more structured way than his countless attendances to emergency calls ever could.

A keen social media player and business developer, Bob has an innovative streak and in 2005 created the ICE – In Case of Emergency campaign, which still enjoys worldwide success.

Bob himself has had a lifetime of emotional challenges, including anxieties and depressive episodes.

In finally finding his 'nirvana' he also brings *this* to his practise as valued life experience.

With his emergency care exposure and his mental health training and his roles in consulting or developing businesses, Bob likes nothing more than to utilise these experiences by releasing businesspersons, entrepreneurs, and the wider general public from negative thoughts, anxieties and mind clutter – so those clients become more at peace, enjoy enhanced productivity and

creativity in work and play... and, crucially, in all of their relationships – via improved cognitive responses and effective, appropriate behaviour and communications.

Read on to begin your journey to a more sensory, present way of living...



## **The Entrepreneur**

“Philip” gets up every morning determined to do all the things he promised himself he’d do yesterday, and ends most days frustrated and fed up because he’s not making any progress. Phil’s wife has a stressful job and sometimes needs a lot of support, and their one-year-old son is just like most babies – rewarding though it is – taking a lot of time and energy.

When Phil does have some time to himself, he can’t concentrate. He wastes time on things that aren’t important and beats himself up because he’s not keeping promises to himself or his family. He’s sleeping poorly, lacking in creativity and tolerance, and losing the ability to make decisions that work out.

He works all the time and hardly ever relaxes, but still makes no progress. He finds himself blaming his wife and son for his frustration with himself.

He knows things need to change but is mentally and physically exhausted and really doesn’t know what to do to make things better.

The situation of Philip and his wife are real – the roles could easily be reversed and unfortunately, just like thousands of people leading a company or running their own business, they end up with broken relationships and a sense of defeat and failure, financial and emotional destruction.

Does it need to be this way?

How might it feel to wake more refreshed, to notice your family before enjoying – rather than tolerating – the journey to work? How might it be to reduce the ‘noise’ in your head and clear unhelpful mind-clutter that predisposes you to react inappropriately to stimulus – and to not defeat yourself before committing to decision making processes you undertake at home and work?

Many of us live in the past or future, it’s a fact! We react based on our past, where we may have had negative results – and we fret about future outcomes in the same way, often procrastinating because of the fear of previous experiences. *With a little training and guidance* you can re-learn to be present, ‘here and now’ and become less likely to react inappropriately to the daily stimuli that is making you angry, irritable and frustrated.

This is no black art! Some simple guidance on a one-to-one basis for *an hour a week* for just as long as you derive benefit – then you can fly your own way with your new found clarity and peace of mind.

Reducing the mind-chatter (*monkey-mind, busy mind*)

Reducing pressure, improving personal performance and decision making

Creativity and access to greater thinking for innovation and opportunity

Improving relationships at home and work

Returning to a life of being the only place you really can be; present in the here and now

## **What are you waiting for?**

It's obvious, when we think about it. We are busy. We are looking after business... family... health.

*Are we?*

Where is the balance in your life? Try this. Place segments in a circle with each segment relative to the percentage of time you devote to the things you engage in. How do the segments containing 'YOU' and your 'interests' and 'wellbeing' – doing the stuff that is healthy and that 'floats your boat' – compare to the segment percentages containing work, money, relationships, etc.?

*You can be selfish in a positive way!*

More than this though is our reliance for shouldering burdens because we can. This resilience is all well and good when life is purring along but, just as with your car, you can provide preventative maintenance – or just wait for the problem to appear and take your chances.

The most common theme amongst those seeking help in counselling is the perception of reaching personal or professional crisis. We wait until we feel bad enough; reach the tipping point and waiting until our 'bucket' is full. Performance and relationships are affected, and creativity, motivation and a sense of 'less than' prevail. It is our survival instinct and our guilty pleasure because when we are challenged, pushed, and harried we have the adrenaline to force us through that difficult meeting, chore, or even to cope in our relationship. It allows us to continue despite the true desire to stop or alter our course.

The common outcome of sustaining this behaviour is painful and protracted and affects your relationships with those around you at work and at play. Becoming ever less tolerant and more snappy; or appearing to be okay, bottling up and 'depressing' your feelings, making you physically as well as emotionally 'sick'.

Here's a shocker! It is unnecessary to be the wrong side of 5/10 in the stress, happiness, anxiety, performance and relationship scores (1 being negative!) to devote time and energy for you! This is the positive selfishness you can allow and afford yourself. Why is this positively selfish? As well as demonstrating love, care, and value for you, all those you have relationships with will benefit too! You and your performance and creativity can improve; interactions with loved ones and in business improve; your general physical and emotional health improves.

We all know this, don't we? *So here is the call to action.*

Discover your self-care benchmark, either with an exercise such as that above, or with one of your own. If you discover that you are somewhat out of balance, commit to devoting an activity to yourself; be that finding an impartial 'listener'; re-starting a hobby or interest from the past or starting something you have always meant to do; engaging a therapy you have enjoyed or benefitted from previously – or trying something new. Whispers – It does not mean you are weak or have failed. It means you have succeeded!

## **Meditating**

Requiring no religious affiliation, meditation practice will bring you positive life-altering changes:

*“I’m unsure I could find a teacher, place, or the people to meditate with and even if I could, I feel too embarrassed”*

These were my thoughts originally as well! There is no need to attend a place, be with a teacher or indeed others – though for some that is welcome. Meditation can be learned and practised in private at home... and even at work!

There are plenty of materials available that will provide information and guided meditations are useful also.

Below is a passage quoted from one of the co-founders of the Chopra Centre in California – the late Dr. David Simon:

*“Outside of religion or faith as a requirement, meditation provides life changing respite and repair, returning your organism to a state of ‘homeo-stasis’ – balance”*

Only a few decades ago, medical students were taught to view the body as a machine whose parts would inevitably break down until it could no longer be repaired. Today, science is arriving at a radically different understanding: while the body appears to be material, it is really a field of energy and intelligence that is inextricably connected to the mind.

All of the thoughts, perceptions, memories, emotions, and feelings in our minds influence every cell of our bodies. When we have a loving thought or focus on a happy memory or feeling, our brain triggers a cascade of molecules that promote wellbeing in our physiology. On the other hand, when we hold onto emotions such as anger, fear, and doubt, this creates stress and damage in the body.

Through meditation, we can reverse the effects of accumulated stress and toxicity.

Meditation takes us into inner silence, allowing the body to restore balance and repair itself.

## **Top five regrets of the dying**

A nurse has recorded the most common regrets of the dying, and among the top ones is “I wish I hadn’t worked so hard.” What would your biggest regret be if this was your last day of life?

There was no mention of more sex or bungee jumps. A Palliative nurse who has counselled the dying in their last days has revealed the most common regrets we have at the end of our lives. And among the top, from men in particular, is “I wish I hadn’t worked so hard.”

Bronnie Ware is an Australian nurse who spent several years working in Palliative care, caring for patients in the last 12 weeks of their lives. She recorded their dying epiphanies in a blog called Inspiration and Chai, which gathered so much attention that she put her observations into a book called The Top Five Regrets of the Dying.

Ware writes of the phenomenal clarity of vision that people gain at the end of their lives, and how we might learn from their wisdom. “When questioned about any regrets they had or anything they would do differently,” she said, “common themes surfaced again and again.”

Here are the top five regrets of the dying, as witnessed by Ware:

### **1. I wish I’d had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.**

“This was the most common regret of all. When people realise that their life is almost over and look back clearly on it, it is easy to see how many dreams have gone unfulfilled. Most people had not honoured even a half of their dreams and had to die knowing that it was due to choices they had made, or not made. Health brings a freedom very few realise, until they no longer have it.”

### **2. I wish I hadn’t worked so hard.**

“This came from every male patient that I nursed. They missed their children’s youth and their partner’s companionship. Women also spoke of this regret, but as most were from an older generation, many of the female patients had not been breadwinners. All of the men I nursed deeply regretted spending so much of their lives on the treadmill of a work existence.”

### **3. I wish I’d had the courage to express my feelings.**

“Many people suppressed their feelings in order to keep peace with others. As a result, they settled for a mediocre existence and never became who they were truly capable of becoming. Many developed illnesses relating to the bitterness and resentment they carried as a result.”

### **4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.**

“Often they would not truly realise the full benefits of old friends until their dying weeks and it was not always possible to track them down. Many had become so caught up in their own lives that they had let golden friendships slip by over the years. There were many deep regrets about not giving friendships the time and effort that they deserved. Everyone misses their friends when they are dying.”

**5. I wish that I had let myself be happier.**

“This is a surprisingly common one. Many did not realise until the end that happiness is a choice. They had stayed stuck in old patterns and habits. The so-called ‘comfort’ of familiarity overflowed into their emotions, as well as their physical lives. Fear of change had them pretending to others, and to their selves, that they were content, when deep within, they longed to laugh properly and have silliness in their life again.”

*What’s your greatest regret so far and what will you set out to achieve or change before you die?*

## **Time for a change? Part 1**

One example of a usual 24 hour time period:

*...burning thru the day*

### **7am**

Wake, start to think (worry) about what needs your attention today; go to bathroom/toilet for ablutions and think aimless thoughts. Shower/bath...more aimless thoughts and concerns. Brush teeth... aimless thoughts. Get dressed – gents, same leg first in trouser each time!

Breakfast – prepare and eat without giving any thought to the food; check smart-phone, get on-line, turn on TV and possibly the radio too! Absorb the negative stories of the day... Get in car – drive to work (same route each day), more aimless thoughts, get stressed, bored or both.

Arrive at work following a forgetful journey, get same drink from same place, say same things to same people... and then gossip some!

Work, thinking of the last meeting, the previous conversations and run-ins with colleagues, bosses, blah, blah and thinking of the future... holiday... what to eat for dinner... how is that invoice going to get paid... wonder if *John* is going to leave; how will you cope...

### **Lunch**

Eat at same place with same people and gossip, complaining just a bit... assuming that you do actually remember to stop for lunch!

### **5pm**

Leave work, get in car, take same journey, meet same issues that wind you up... just want to get home.

### **5:30**

Arrive home, fail to notice and appreciate 'home', grunt to significant other – sit down and exhale forcefully, complaining about YOUR day! Read paper, wait for dinner, or prepare dinner...

Consume dinner... again failing to appreciate the food: colours, textures, taste, its journey to your plate (No, not the kitchen to the dinner table!)



**7pm**

Wash up (maybe) and endure yet more thoughts that are meaningless.

Watch TV. *Soap perhaps?*

**11pm**

Brush teeth, go to bed, worry about next day, ensure in your head you have the next day worries 'set'.

## **Time for a change? Part 2**

*An alternative option for a 24 hour time period...*

### **7am Starting the day**

Awaken – get out of bed straightaway, go to bathroom – and take care of the ablutions!

The very next thing: find a quiet place; meditate for 15 minutes, 30 minutes, or whatever works.

*Leave the smart-phone, TV and Radio off!*

Prepare and eat breakfast – and notice, (*no, really notice*) the colours, tastes, textures, any aromas and sounds as you eat. Slow the munching (mastication) – this helps with weight management too!

Shower/bath – This can be before or after breakfast, as suits you. You can even shower mindfully!

Having meditated, you will find the mind-musings may well be more creative than worrisome.

When brushing the teeth or any routine mundane chores, try to alter something every week. e.g., change the hand you brush your teeth with – *that'll keep your mind from wandering aimlessly!*

When getting dressed, alternate the leg you put into the trousers first... do anything to break the routine.

Now you are in a position to get on-line, listen to the radio and watch the 'news' – *if you really need your start to the day with 'bad news', lies, war, cheats, etc.* It is important to stay abreast of world affairs, but routinely listening to 'bad news'?

*Local stations tend to be more upbeat!*



Make your way to work – If you’re driving, can you alter the route for a change? If you’re stuck in traffic, use your senses to ‘explore’ what’s around you. Turn the radio down – or off, and *listen* to noises without judging – what can you hear?

Other traffic, wind, birds, road noise – from your tyres, or the hum of your car’s engine?

What can you see, *really see* between the hedgerows – any wildlife or nice scenery?

What can you *smell*? Fumes possibly, but what else?

What can you *feel*, again, without judging – the bumps on the road, the seat under you;

In reality it takes very little time to implement any of this. *But if you do*, it will make for a more fulfilling and sensory experience.

### **Arrive at work.**

Is there someone you have never spoken to before? Say hello! Grab a different drink perhaps, and listen for any positive statements from colleagues, ignoring any negative, mindless gossip.

When you are attending a meeting, or undertaking something you consider mundane, use your senses again to really be in the moment. You might count your blessings; you have a job, be happy you’re inside if the weather is difficult for workers outside... and vice versa.

At lunch, take a lunch break! Working through lunch is counter-productive. You need to step away from your work and, in doing so, you will let your mind assimilate earlier stuff subconsciously, making room for problem solving, creativity, innovation, and at the very least to gain perspective.

Going home... *a different journey perhaps?*

### **Arriving home**

Look and really see your door, your home.

*Now*, leave the days issues at the door and imagine the family or loved ones inside. Throw off your emotional work persona.

Greet them and really, really look into their eyes – the windows of the soul (*lovingly, try to avoid scaring them!*)

Engage with whoever is there and try to make an effort to be playful! If you are to talk about your day, try to find the positives – *they are a pleasure to hear!*

Eat '*mindfully*'.

Engage some more, then *perhaps learn something* that you want to know more about.

Before bed, try to meditate if you want to release the day – and get a decent refreshing night of sleep.

*Ah, that's better!*

I can provide coaching in *living 'mindfully'*, for just an hour a week, for just as long as you derive benefit... Call me!

## **Mindfully eating your way – to peace of mind**

Phew! The title is enough of a mouthful before we even begin!

Being mindful is about learning, or re-learning to be present, aware and living in the here and now.

How often would you think you are mindfully aware when you eat? If you are anything like me, eating is often perfunctory, which is a little sad really when we consider the journey our food undertakes before it reaches our mouths!

So, who has time to consider the food?

Listen – not only can we have the time, if we want to grow appreciative and quieter minds, we can reduce the mind-chatter and improve our personal and professional performances whilst creating greater awareness! Making the small effort to re-train ourselves earns the right to improving those moment-to-moment experiences of life.

Turn off the media... If you would like to be re-introduced to your eating experience, you'll want fewest distractions, right?

How about a simple exercise to get you started?

Having chosen your item of food, get yourself settled without distractions – and put up the 'do not disturb' sign.

If you have a raisin, or a peanut... or any small piece of food is ideal. A crisp, a carrot...anything!

Place it in your hand, in the palm.

What does it *look* like? Really examine it closely, observing and describing in your mind each contour, each colour and the shape.

What does it *feel* like: warm, cold, soft, hard, malleable, coarse or smooth?

Does it *smell* of anything, does it have any aroma?

Now place it in your mouth and on your tongue. No chewing, what does it really *taste* like?

What does it now feel like?

Now imagine if you can where this item of food came from.

The country and region, how it all started, perhaps as a seed. Were sun and water required?

Did it require nurturing? How was it harvested, what was the process from where it was grown to getting to the shops?

Now chew! *Slowly* appreciate the taste, has it altered, was anything more released?

What does it *sound* like when you chew it?

You may be thinking this all appears quite onerous and long-winded, however, you will also have noticed a new experience, at least one you haven't had for a very long while.

You can practice this exercise with your entire meal, whether its breakfast, lunch or dinner – or anytime you 'snack' because this has multiple benefits for you. Here's how...

Food tastes so much more intense when you eat more slowly. See if you can chew each item more slowly than usual, about 25-30 times. To help with this, put the fork down once you have placed the food in your mouth; try to get into the habit of finishing the food in your mouth BEFORE putting the next piece on the fork.

You can eat junk food mindfully, if you wish – you might enjoy it a lot more.

Or you might decide, halfway through, that your body has had enough. Or that it really needs some salad or greens!

When you eat mindfully, you find you are more satisfied with the quantity, as well as the quality, much earlier. You may find yourself eating less, unable to finish meals; you may find yourself having smaller portions, all of which will reduce the amount you eat, helping with overall intake.

Eating this way improves your mind! Yes, it does, it helps you to introduce quiet contemplative thought processes, and these are calming whilst aiding digestion and well-being!

Remember, this does take some practice. You are considering something we do without thought every day of our lives. The good news is that you get to choose if, when and how you play with this method of appreciative eating and thinking. I suggest enquiringly and non-judgementally.

If you like this idea, there are many more that can re-engage the current ways in which you act in automaticity. Bringing real life to you, without cost and with minimal effort or time commitment.

For more on this subject, do drop me a line. Happy eating!



## **Focus. It's Monday... are you here?**

What was the last thing you were thinking of before sleep came last night, worries?

Did the alarm or anxiety wake you this morning?

When brushing your teeth, washing, etc., did those 'every morning' thoughts simply plop unannounced and uninvited into your head? *Of course they did!*

Is this helpful, useful, or nurturing? What about if you were able to consider, quite deliberately, what you are experiencing? Using your senses more fully to see, hear, taste, feel and smell what is going on rather than allowing your mind to reproduce the daily worry and nonsense that sets you up for just another day crashing from situation to situation, reacting and over-reacting because you are *not there!*

If you want to *really* be 'there', you need focus.

How often have you been in a meeting or discussion when your mind has wandered to the past and future, or in fact anywhere but where you should be, paying attention to what you are supposed to be doing?

How many times have you watched the eyes glaze over of the person you are supposed to be having a discussion with? Then again, how often do you do that? Fair enough, there are conversations that bore you, or are badly timed, but for the rest you owe it to both yourself and the other person to pay attention and focus.



## What Can ‘On-Line’ Counselling Really Offer?

*“You’re out of the area when I need a listener”*

*“I need your availability to meet mine”*

*“I’m too busy to commit to the travel and distance – and those parking issues”*

*“I will feel more comfortable discussing my challenges confidentially over the phone or on-line, at least until I feel a little better”*

*“I like the convenience... and knowledge that we can meet later if I so wish”*

These are just some of the thoughts of individuals when considering counselling, psychotherapy and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) services *online*.

In the context of Counselling, a talking therapy conducted with consultations via Skype (with or without video) or telephone still provides value to the client as an effective therapeutic process.

Possessing advanced communication skills is a vital asset; the therapist needs to demonstrate a high level of awareness around verbal nuances to consolidate the otherwise unavailable visual cues to the clients’ body language.

I am fortunate to have had significant experience of managing via telephony, emergency calls, and having worked at a major call-centre. Understanding the inflections of a voice is crucial to validate the communications elicited.

But these skills still need the professional experience and life knowledge that I am privileged enough to bring; such as meeting thousands of distressed patients and helping them to have enough trust in me to prevent their challenges from worsening, halting the hurtful processes being endured at their time of crisis.

Providing this as a sole worker at 4am or 4pm at a moment’s notice in any environment requires a rapid, calm, and dynamic skill set.

A listening service providing counsel and general guidance, or a deeper analysis as provided for with psychotherapy and the more therapeutic offering with CBT is for the most part preferable ‘in-person’. However, it is also more preferable to have the effective service that online counsel can provide than to avoid the process entirely because of the desire to wait until things get bad

enough *and you have to deal with it!* In delaying assistance to you, your healing journey is likely to be extended.

Early intervention provides a key to effective and sustained recovery and strategy for future resilience to life's inevitable offerings!

Regardless of whether you have 'left things to get to breaking point' for you, or you recognise a persistent emotional niggle, I am happy to be a listener to you – without obligation and in complete confidence.

A final point – Email or IM sessions are also available as yet another option and can provide some value where all other options are exhausted.

## **Making Peace with Stress**

It has been said that there are only two times when we feel stress – daytime and night-time!

Let's face it. Stress is part of our everyday lives. We experience some level of stress every time our needs are not met. Transform your relationship with stress. Learn to let it go and cultivate more peace, joy, and calm in its place.

### **What is Stress?**

Stress has been part of human life since our earliest days on the planet. Although we no longer experience the stress of living in cold, dark caves and fighting off sabre-toothed cats, we do experience emotional turmoil in our relationships, challenges balancing our daily lives, and a multitude of physical health concerns.

When we encounter situations that we interpret as stressful, our body has the same reactions our ancestors had tens of thousands of years ago. Our blood pressure rises, we begin to perspire and our breath becomes shallow. Our body activates its fight-or-flight response, and it takes at least twenty-four hours for the body to recover its equilibrium.

Many people live in a state of chronic stress and imbalance, which contributes to emotional and physical disease.

To help mitigate the causes and effects of stress, we can through the practice of meditation activate a different response – one of restful awareness, intuitiveness, and creativity. Meditation takes our body and our mind from a place of hyperactivity, fear, unrest, and uneasiness to a state of inner calm, peace, and silence.

In meditation, as we cultivate the ability to witness the activity of the mind, we spontaneously make choices that are more conscious. We're able to access the response that best supports our own health and wellbeing. Stress then becomes something that we can observe and release.

*“The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry about the future, and not to anticipate troubles, but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly.”*

*~ The Buddha*

## **Counselling – Dispelling the Myths**

I decided to write a short series of mini-blogs. Partly in response to a recent query from the concerned friends and relatives of someone who could really benefit from that which counselling therapy can provide, and who is struggling to reconcile ‘himself’ with that possibility; and also for general consumption, in an attempt to clarify the practise and to help reduce any stigma that might be attached.

*(Mis-noma) “If I need counselling, I must be in real trouble; I must have failed in some way”*

If you recognise and find courage to consider counselling, whether for emotional ‘niggles’ or for something you feel is more serious, this is a success in your life. A failure might be considered if you continued to neglect seeking to resolve a problem that leaves you feeling ‘less than.’

*“I’m frightened to admit I may need to talk”*

It is completely natural to be anxious if you are considering counselling, or indeed anything that you have not experienced before. We naturally feel nervous about most things we have no experience of. Think of your first day at work and then reflect on and compare the feelings and emotions of that day with how you felt just one month later.

*What do those who have engaged counselling say?*

For those who need the level of support I offer, such as those who I would define as troubled with mild to moderate emotional turmoil; almost exclusively, clients report value and immediate relief following their very first meeting. See if you can canvass the experiences and opinions of any trusted friends, colleagues, or family who have experienced a therapeutic session and hear what they say (*if they are someone that is prepared to confide and share with you, and it is appropriate*). Alternatively, you can of course search through the internet for others who have been before and who have already shared their story.

*My business is my business, right?*

You choose that which you wish to share as in the example above. In fact while you are seeing a therapist you are encouraged to keep the details of the work you are engaged in between you and the counsellor – because to share with others who have anything other than a professional interest and who may be well meaning can compromise the work in progress. This is not to say that if someone asks how you are, you cannot answer!

Identifiable information and everything discussed during a session with a counsellor remains completely confidential. A caveat to this may be where it is understood that the client may pose a significant risk of harm to themselves or others; In this case, a duty of care exists for the professional to manage that risk, hopefully in agreement with the client.

Non-identifiable details around the context of a case may be discussed between the counsellor and his or her supervisor to ensure your counsellor is maintaining standards and for their own well-being. The supervisor is also bound by the same terms of confidentiality.

Professionals are required in law to maintain your confidentiality and take measures to ensure this is the case with up to date knowledge of requirements around information governance and effective security.

## Counselling – Who is it for and what to expect?



It's unlikely counselling and any of the psychological therapies available will ever be an exact science, but here is a broad outline of who counselling is for...

*Anyone!* Whether you are considered 'successful and 'normal' or you have an annoying 'niggling' emotional issue that is interrupting your life such as a past emotional or physical trauma; issues with relationships at work or at home; self-esteem; anxieties; low-moods/depression; stresses; poor performance or... well anything at all that is leaving you feeling '*less than*'.

It is clear that counselling and associated therapies have relevance to all and are far from exclusive to those in severe and acute crisis, *or celebs*. We seek 'counsel' every day after all!

The above list is far from exhaustive and different therapists may 'specialise' and/or provide for differing levels of severity or intensity of illness and the therapy they offer. Although I have had almost two decades of experience in attending to the most severe crises, I have also 'dealt' with many challenges that are quick to resolve with some considered listening, effective communications, and perhaps some guidance from a little coaching.

However, in the environment I now operate in, I offer services of assessment and therapy to those I describe as having 'mild' to 'moderate' challenges, or to put it another way – non-emergency cases (as defined by the assessor). It's important to re-iterate here that what may appear 'mild' to me and other professionals in health and well-being – is likely to feel anything but to the client!

If the assessment reveals a more severe concern or a specialty outside of the therapists' scope of practice – you will be provided with 'signposting' to appropriate services with information provided to you. *This is done with you, for you.*

### **What can I expect?**

It is for the 'client' to decide if they 'feel' comfortable with the service provider they approach, perhaps by considering any information available. Ask yourself 'is the website professional?' – were you referred by word-of-mouth from someone who has experience of the providers reputation? When you made an enquiry by phone or email, how did the response 'feel'? You ought to feel comfortable asking any relevant questions around your expectations or concerns.

I will rarely talk in 'definitives' around your challenges until a more advanced stage – so be wary of the provider who readily states that they will resolve your issues without question!

Once you are happy to commit to a proposed initial meeting, the next stage is to confirm to yourself that after the first contact you feel safe and can trust the person you are considering engaging. This may be easier said than done if you are feeling 'unwell'.

Once sessions are under way, any good therapist will ask for regular feedback from you around how you feel progress and value is being achieved. This is an on-going collaboration in which you are the 'boss' and for whom the 'end-game' is to empower you to manage current – and any further related – challenges with a collaborative and, where achievable, sustainable strategy.

### **How long will I need counselling for?**

Understandably, this is one of the most commonly asked questions. After somewhere between one and three sessions, it should be much clearer to the therapist the challenges that need to be addressed and how severe or mild they are – and how well the collaboration is working. It is common to resolve a single challenge with a client in just 3-4 sessions, but it is also an unknown quantity until all relevant matters have been 'unpacked'. It is also common for clients to continue to work through challenges and new ways of behaving over many months.

Some therapists will work with analysis of the clients *past* 'in-depth', others may focus on the present, and this and other aspects will be determined by the dynamics of the conditions encountered, the client, and the skill of the therapist.

The client will ultimately decide when therapy ends, with the support of the therapist.

In the next of this series, we consider aspects around three models of therapy: Counselling, Psychotherapy and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

## **How do they differ? – Counselling, Psychotherapy and CBT**

*In this article, the third of this series, we consider aspects around three models of therapy: Counselling, Psychotherapy, and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)*

**Counselling** – present participle of coun•sel (Verb)

Verb: 1 – Give advice to (someone).

2 – Give professional psychological help and advice to (someone)

As I alluded to in the last piece, we seek counsel almost every day in one form or another. E.g. *“Do I look alright?”*, *“What do you think I should do with this business opportunity?”*

However, when ‘we’ think of going to a ‘Counsellor’, it’s more often than not when we can no longer cope! Counsel can offer so much more than picking up the pieces and guiding you back to some form of peace. Challenges accepted and acknowledged earlier from the onset of symptoms enjoy successful resolution in a far shorter timescale than those who leave matters until feelings become desperate.

It is a wise person who seeks assistance with an issue that just doesn’t seem to be going away and who seeks the advice of an impartial, non-judgemental advocate and coach to your cause. In a safe, secure, and confidential environment – this is empowering!

Nonetheless, it seems that because sufferers may not understand the process, they feel they have failed in some way, or perhaps just as bad – disempowered if they ‘need’ the help of a counsellor.

A counsellor’s key skill is to be a ‘listener’! You may feel that ‘anyone’ can listen. Trust me – it is a skill to simply listen without interjecting or putting an opinion across of your own. Try it!

So how does this help?

With all the ‘noise’ of daily activity and the ‘busy-ness’ of life each day, we rarely really listen to ourselves, let alone others. Sure, we hear ‘stuff’ and make decisions about that which we hear but most of that is reactive, using learnt behaviours that go round and round in our lives without much true consideration.

The most positive thing about any kind of counsel, whatever kind of counselling is provided, is the manner in which the client feels after the first and second session compared to immediately before. This always brings a rewarding smile to my face.



## **Psychotherapy**

Noun: psy•cho•ther•a•py/

The treatment of mental disorder by psychological, rather than medical means.

Therapists are trained to understand what you say — your words, how you say them and which ones you do not use. They pay attention to body language and voice tone to fully understand your speech. Having learned about and treated people with your condition before, therapists can comprehend your particular problems.

They are familiar with the symptoms of various psychiatric illnesses and the difficulties of daily living. They know what questions to ask and might pose questions that you have never heard before. The communication between patient and therapist is not equal. Therapists rarely will reveal their opinions or stances on various issues, such as abortion or politics.

Psychotherapists will still use counselling techniques but have a more detailed training and understanding surrounding analysis and interpretation of an individual's challenges.

## **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)**

Cognitive behaviour therapy can be employed to treat people suffering from a wide range of disorders, including anxiety, phobias, depression, and addiction.

CBT is one of the most researched types of therapy, in part because treatment is focused on a highly specific goal and results can be measured relatively easily. It is not a stand-alone therapeutic process, nor does it infer that your challenges are more severe. A useful adjunct that once again is used with other models of therapy, it is also not for everyone.

Cognitive behaviour therapy is often best suited to individuals who are comfortable with introspection. In order for CBT to be effective, the individual must be ready and willing to spend time and effort analysing his or her thoughts and feelings. Such self-analysis can be difficult, but it is a great way to learn more about how internal states impact outward behaviour.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is also well suited to people looking for short-term treatment options that do not necessarily involve pharmacological medication. With practitioners that are more skilled it may well be useful for longer term issues.

One of the greatest benefits of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy is that it helps clients to develop coping skills that can be useful both now and in the future.

These are the briefest of synopsis and are deliberately 'generalist'.

*For any impartial advice on the above or other issues around emotional and thought well-being, contact me via the website for a prompt response, in confidence and without obligation.*

## **Small Changes – To Great Effect!**

*Have you ever decided to make some big change in your life?*

Was there something you were not happy with, so you decided to ‘turn over a new leaf?’ Did you spend a huge amount of your time and energy trying to change that which you didn’t like?

For many people, major changes in life begin with a huge rush of enthusiasm. Sometimes this can work. Too often, once that initial burst of energy has been poured into making these monumental life changes, it slowly drains away.

Many people discover that gradually as the focus of energy dissipates, they find themselves sliding back into those same habits and patterns that they are trying to escape from.

This can be an extremely frustrating experience!

In today’s fast-paced world, most people want ‘instant’ results. Many people believe that any effort put into creating any sort of change needs to show some very fast results or they will lose interest and give up in the despair of “nothing’s happening, so why bother?” This usually results in lots of effort and energy expended for little, if any, lasting result.

*The truth is... It’s the little things you do every day that will make a big difference!*

The most difficult to change habit and the most insurmountable problems are both the inevitable result of the sum of all of your day-to-day experiences. Just as the internet is made up of millions of different computers all linked together to form a massive field of information, so too is your life built out of millions of interconnected memories and experiences.

Your life is continuously being built out of tiny pieces of time. One small action connected to the next, and each one of these tiny pieces of your life combine into the whole web of who you are.

Many years ago, a wise man in India who was living in some very troubled times wrote down these words

*“Carefully watch your THOUGHTS, for they become your WORDS.*

*Manage and watch your WORDS, for they will become your ACTIONS.*

*Consider and judge your ACTIONS, for they have become your HABITS.*

*Acknowledge and watch your HABITS, for they shall become your VALUES.*

*Understand and embrace your VALUES, for they become YOUR DESTINY.”*

–Mahatma Gandhi

Each day brings slight and subtle changes. No matter how ingrained your habits are, no matter how deeply entrenched you are in your routines, at the close of every day you will be a little bit different from who you were that morning.

The amazing thing is that you have the power to consciously decide which direction you want that difference to be moving towards.

One of the best-known Chinese proverbs says;

*“A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”*

On any given day, the changes you make need to be anything other than huge, earth shaking events. Simply decide what it is that you want, and then take small, conscious steps on a daily basis.

It’s one of life’s paradoxes that sometimes the fastest way to make major, lasting, changes is to take things slowly. Just a daily series of steps repeated daily towards a conscious direction.

So tomorrow as you go through your day, look at every action you do, no matter how small, and take a note of every person you encounter, from parents and children, bosses, workers, shopkeepers, strangers... everyone. At the end of each encounter, ask yourself “in which direction am I moving? What will be the result of these actions repeated many times?”

For ultimately, at the end of our lives, all we will be left with is the journey. It will be the time spent on becoming what we are that will make up our lives. So make the most of each precious moment, and remember:

The little things you do every day really make a huge difference.

Courtesy: Rochman Reese and Sofan Chan <http://www.theartofhappiness.net>

## **Is regular exposure to social media nourishing us – and our relationships?**

What are our next generations going to look like in their societal and familial interactions? I think we are very much still in transition, but there are a number of schools of thought around what is healthy, and what may be less so.

Much is rightly made of criminality via social media; from porn to stalking, to bullying to fraud. However, when we observe with even greater focus, we can also see much in social media that provides potential for growth and celebration.

We see examples of concerns and efforts for raising awareness via online campaigns around matters such as mental health and reducing stigma to animal welfare and human rights; these all help those suffering to find compassion, for those offering help, to BE compassionate, and for the wrongdoers to potentially be ‘outed’.

For marketing of commerce: The solopreneur, the therapist, the satchel designer(!), to the multinational. Social media and affiliated marketing is now a vibrant and critical route to market for products and services offered.

Finding our lost family, reunions of work, military, school and many other alumni have provided for wonderful meetings... and hugely cringe worthy moments! And this leads nicely onto relationships!

Where we may have never even considered writing to an ‘ex’, in the past, or a friend, we can now find them presented to us on a plate, maybe leading us to an opportunity of unintentional harm when we aimlessly stumble upon a rekindling of a relationship from that past. This is frequently and painfully presented in my therapy room by clients.

Just the inference of a possible relationship being formed outside of the marriage can be the tipping point in relationships that have become unexciting and staid, or where other issues are being left unaddressed.

*We are being driven to rely on this most recent, accessible to all, medium.*

‘Like’ us, ‘Tweet’ that, find us on... (I am no different)

*But is everything – heck, anything social media, being accessed in moderation?*

The funeral: A recent report from a major funeral service provider in the UK said that a growing number of mourners are accessing mobile phones and tablets *during* the service!

The meeting: It is commonplace and, in the opinion of the author, a growing trend to access emails during a meeting. This is rude enough, but now we are very often encouraged to ‘share’ the event we are attending for promotional purposes – and then find we are ‘checking’ social media by default! Hardly the best way to focus on where you really are supposed to be.

The romantic meal, the family get-together... meal-times are all becoming lost to the smart phone or tablet. For decades we have had the divide between those who feel the TV should be switched off at meal-times, those who have come to accept it left on, and those who actively encourage it! Now, there is a further opportunity to disconnect from each other and with this the meal and the experience itself.

The date: Bit of a killer of romance I would suggest if when on a date you find yourself, or your date, checking the comms!

Your relationship: Please say anything really important in the presence of your loved ones! So many messages shared via social media are ‘lost in translation’. If the relationship has become lost, please try to avoid airing the dirty washing or getting revenge ‘online’, it just chains you both together for even longer when “he was rubbish in bed” is available for the world to snigger at!

News Alert: Two views on the rapid access to news events via social media. On the one hand I think it is a fantastic resource for learning of/about events. On the other, this is a hugely powerful route to propaganda, the creation of a belief that the world has indeed become smaller, and therefore all the ‘bad’ stuff is ‘with each of us’, affecting us and our senses. It is helpful to stay in touch of course, but in moderation.

Just as watching and listening to every news bulletin, stuffed full of negativity, creates in us a feeling of constant threat and doom if we fail to manage the frequency of that which we access, attending to ‘stories’ via social media channels can become overwhelming, and more easily we can become less aware of the present. We CAN choose to focus on the good stuff, the majority within this world that is good, or...

The meditation or mindful walk: So, having taken stock of the constant insult to our senses, you take the step to learning to bring yourselves back to reality, to what is really important and you decide to start meditating, become more mindful perhaps and start your road to recovery with regular walks. Great! But the benefits will be lost if you simply alter the environment in which you check your smartphone! Turn off everything but the phone if you must take it with you – In Case of Emergency, of course (blatant plug)!

The party: I wonder if we will all soon be known by our online profile image, our avatar, or the tops of our heads! Less than helpful when so many use an image of years long gone by! At the

next party celebration you attend, just observe how many faces are buried studiously in the screens of their devices! We're all doing it! Or if we are not, we soon will be... unless we start to 'wake up'!

The school performance: Hopefully some of us are managing to let go of the social media and are just using the phone to record our beloved offspring's performance!

*On the plus side...*

Sharing: Yes, we can share and celebrate our achievements. Yes, there are others who understand and are feeling this way when things are good – and when they are less so. This has a powerful effect for many who so often, in the depths of low-moods, may think they are so alone; they are unique in their suffering. One caveat to this is to choose carefully the community or friends you share tough times with. It is a reality that some may even be pleased to learn someone else is finding life tough, it makes them feel better, or people may shy away, unsure what to say, other reports show that some people engage less with negative talk, and the effect negativity may have on them.

Learning & Education: Access to learning material, to education, to opinion and countless resources: I think for me, social media has been the greatest life and game changer in its accessibility to learning, for both my personal and professional agendas.

Social aspects: A contentious issue and I do think there are very much two sides to the true social aspects of social media.

For the introvert, they can 'fly', for the work at home, for the parent, for the disabled, to name a few – they can grow social communications. On a more negative side perhaps, socialising from behind a screen may remove us in some way from the nuances of face-to-face contact, it may remove some inhibitions that are less healthy, perhaps particularly around alcohol consumption at home; previously consumed in the 'pub!'

Clearly, we are only scratching the surface here; in conclusion, and this really could have been a book, moderation is a key to healthy enjoyment and participation. This is particularly relevant for teens who may well exhibit more narcissistic tendencies. When communications are unclear, misrepresented on social media and magnified by a perception of one's self – or the audience, the emotional impact can be much stronger within this group.

Remove the importance of at least some of the engagement, and checking in much less frequently can help us compare less, feel less stressed and less answerable to 'them out there'.

We are accountable, but for the self-compassion to ourselves first and foremost.

Online can go offline now and again. Book that regular screen break in your diary from today!



## **Failure – A necessary evil**

Have you reached a stage in life yet whereby you truly believe a perceived or actual failure is an opportunity to learn? Sure, that statement is a cliché yet we still concern ourselves incessantly with succeeding *every time* in *everything* we do.

Okay, to be fair this is no bad thing. After all, we would be foolish to be a success at making the same mistakes time and again but we put ourselves under such huge pressure to impress, to look good or even perfect!

It has long been recognised in the U.S that as a business owner/leader, you lack credibility until you have ‘failed’. Americans recognised the benefits of failure in others of having walked that fire and to have learned; done the apprenticeship if you will.

Life is a journey of daily learning from the moment you’re born, to the last cognitive thought you have. Look at the resilience and tenacity you unwittingly demonstrated when learning to ‘toddle’! You fell – you got up. Consider the way your behaviour has altered in so many aspects of life to accommodate what was once a ‘failing.’ The kind of arguments you got into; what was once so important and is now less so.

Developing and growing awareness of risk and mitigation in our work, play, and relationships helps us to recognise opportunities also. When did you last ‘see’ the opportunity to share something you had learned because of a ‘failed’ action?

Do you get over a mistake in reasonable time – and then recognise it for what it is, the opportunity to have done with that mistake and bank it in your knowledge portfolio?

I’m realistic enough to know that being involved in an error, failing or mistake – call it what you will, is less than pleasant in the emotions it elicits. But seriously considering, no matter how impactful the cost at the time, the knowledge growth achieved is truly the most empowering and uplifting positive of experiences.

So here’s the other cliché so richly associated with ‘failures’. It’s not that you fall, but how often you pick yourself up.

## **Our health – our business**

Much talked and written about of late... and with good reason is our health, and especially the health of those with responsibilities in business.

*Business stressful, is it? Appears to be a pre-requisite!*

*Does it have to be?*

Probably to a degree, but that's the whole point of this particular blog.

*To what degree do we have to endure Stress in the workplace?*

We all understand the causal factors of stress; I guess just one of many definitions is that:

“Stress is the body's reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental or emotional adjustment or response.”

There are many other definitions and it seems that it is unlikely there will ever be just 'one' that fits all. You can determine your own definition with a little introspection.

Physiologically, stress has useful attributes which are well understood to come from our inherited 'flight or fight' response, whereby our senses are heightened to danger, perceived or otherwise. Adrenaline is released into the bloodstream which prepares us for optimal performance to either 'fight' the danger or 'run for it!'

That was, and is, all well and good in short bursts and when we need it, but for prolonged periods, due to workplace or home-life stresses, perhaps over many years, this response is unnecessary – indeed unsustainable to the human organism; it's damaging to mind and body.

Blood pressure becomes elevated and can become the 'default' state in the body. Left untreated, elevated blood pressure (*hypertension*) can lead to heart disease, vascular compromise – leading to stroke or dementia, kidney failure, cancer or diabetes – these are just some of the more common side-effects of sustained stress on the body – and it's trillions of cells.

When arteries become hardened and lose their elasticity, this increases dramatically the risks associated with stroke and heart attack. Many Cancers are also widely believed to be triggered by Stress. Indeed the [World Health Organisation](#) (WHO Article) believe that stress will become the biggest killer in the 21st century.

Sleep pattern disturbance and emotional turbulence become the 'norm' leading to poor behavioural tolerance to others and this leads to yet further stress.

We try to calm the nerves after a tough day with alcohol which whilst in moderation is fine, in excess reduces creativity and appropriate motivation and very often can be a trigger for and exacerbation of depression.

Diet choices can become impaired, leading to malnourishment, even in obesity. Recent reports have stated that there is a "shocking" increase in the numbers of 'new' cases of Diabetes totalling hundreds of thousands in the past year alone in the U.K. Improved lifestyle choices mean this IS avoidable for many!

Depression & Stress, both are such well-used terms now that it seems we have become desensitised to them. Yet with more and more people suffering needlessly, depressive and other mental health issues still carry huge stigma in our workplaces – and society in general.

*"Often perceived as weakness or of failing in some way, and at best, misunderstood"*

Do you feel 'safe' talking to your colleagues or boss or occupational health people (*if you have OH!*)

Or do you feel that to raise your health concerns may threaten your job, or future promotion prospects? It's our '*dirty*' little secret, it appears and yet here's the irony – consider what depression is, in its literal form. A result, partial or complete of "*depressing one's feelings or emotions!*"

And so, clearly if we are unable to discuss or disclose that which is making us unhappy, it can only lead to us failing to address the issues until work becomes intolerable. Leading to loss of self-esteem and general wellbeing, financial crisis (and for the business, loss of productivity), but potentially also to tragic losses to society, when otherwise productive, useful contributory lives are lost to suicide, hospitalisation or disability.

What works, what helps?

Clearly, everyone is different and is affected by their own unique issues, which may be and often are short term and temporary 'wake-up' calls. For others, lifelong preconceptions around people and circumstances interfere with their ability to see things for what they really are. It's tough enough that life IS so demanding without living life through different themes!

I'll explain...

We base many, if not all, of our emotions and reactions on experiences from our past, especially those from our formative years, *so we live in the past.*

We worry and *concern ourselves with our future*, something for the most part in which we have no control whatsoever, and while bothering ourselves with the future, ruminating our past while we try to deal (poorly) with the present. The future is created by what you do today!

A cluttered, monkey chattering mind with its 60-80 thousand random thoughts every day, for us all is the net result.

## **Meditation**

*“Tree hugging scariness” (Is it?)*

*“I just didn’t want to go to a public place and try it, and besides, I could never find enough time!”*

[Meditation](#) can be conducted anywhere but comfortably, with help from books or online, very easily in the home. It can be 15 minutes, 30 minutes or an hour, both ends of the day – whatever works for you... it’s without formal prescription and counter intuitive to ‘try hard’ at! (*Oh, and it’s really fast to learn!!*)

There can be some stigma attached to meditation it seems, but this is likely because of ignorance in the true sense... lack of knowledge or fear of trying something (*ironically*) outside of your comfort zone!

Mindfulness and ‘The here and now’

By living this way – mindfully – we can clear a great deal of daily mind-clutter and increase our creativity and performance at home, and at work. Mindfulness helps us to manage and cope with life as it *can* be lived – in the here and now. It will provide the necessary and fairly effortless solution and tools to a much more peaceful and productive life. And your family and boss will really see a difference. *How cool is that?*

## **Counselling**

The majority of us have a default position to reach before we will consider seeking some help. Physical or emotional ‘dis-ease’ usually manifests itself and is commonly seen as the marker for us to finally act – the tipping point, if you will, for self-preservation.

But it is important to know that whilst eventually seeking an opportunity to attend to the issue(s) is a good thing; chatting in a safe, private, and confidential environment with a skilled listener *before* things get so bad improves dramatically the chance of early repair. And this means less time and financial commitment, something we would all welcome, right?

[Meditation](#)

[The Power of Now!](#) (Eckhart Tolle)

## **Under the influence**

Are you under the influence of... positive or negatives?

Clearly, our life and the experiences we realise are a mixture, and hopefully a balance of the two influences. Just as with happiness and sadness, without both in our lives we could not recognise one from another.

When we talk of positivity in our lives, people often react with the pre-conception that we are being told, “BE positive whatever!” If something is wrong or unpleasant in our lives, it is unrealistic to suggest that feeling positive at that moment will make it all right, that’s just plain ridiculous!

However, to be able to acknowledge this unpleasantness, whatever that might be and giving ourselves permission to feel hurt, angry, resentful, etc... and then move on – and perhaps even find something positive out of that issue might not be so ridiculous.

Maybe we feel bad because we messed something up, made a mistake. Well a positive is simply recognising the error for what it WAS, and learning from it. It may not always be the case but *consider* if it was an opportunity to learn.

Who do you surround yourself with? Do you sit in the workplace or social setting with the ‘competitive moaners?’ “Oh, I had a terrible time with that...”, “Ooh, so did I, but mine was so much worse...” and so it goes on, round and round, each trying to outdo the others misfortune.

On the other hand, do you mix with those who support you, provide nourishing inspiration, or have a never say die attitude?

*In the workplace, are you all you can be? What about at home?*

Do you religiously soak up the world’s terrible events relayed so efficiently in the media’s TV and press editions? Are you paying for and reading the gossip mags to see who’s doing what... and with whom?

We become what we think! We also become that which we expose ourselves to!

If you embrace and consider gratitude, you are more likely to be gracious!

If you consider compassion, you will become more compassionate!

If you seek opportunities, you will be more likely to recognise opportunities!

If you find positive influences, you are likely to be a positive influence, to yourself and others!

*It really is up to us!*

## **Managing Mental Health in the Workplace**

...is ignorance acceptable?

If you, a colleague, or particularly a manager/leader are ignorant of mental health challenges that affect us all, then this is only acceptable in my view to the point that 'it' touches you in some way, and you commit your awareness to learning about the subject.

### **Stigma**

Stigma only exists because of ignorance, and because 'we' allow it to exist. Think of how equality, diversity, and discrimination issues – although they clearly still exist have altered thanks to increased legislation and the enforced education that has followed.

*“Why does it take legislation to encourage us to educate ourselves and those in our charge?”*

If you see a person hurt or in distress in the street many of us would (hopefully) offer some concern and maybe even assist them. Yet in the workplace we appear frightened to intervene, to learn, and to help in a positive way. But then that's the point of this plea.

Fear, anxiety, even anger, and especially discrimination, exist in the home and workplace typically as a result of a lack of understanding – or to put it another way, ignorance.

People often like to help. It makes us feel good and compassion is a leading positive behaviour trait that leads to a more fulfilling relationship with yourself and others. Imagine 'knowing' at least some of what is needed to help someone in emotional distress. It might be that nothing is required of you, just to be aware and allow someone to 'just be' while they work through their concerns!

Ignorance in the workplace and in relationships at home is also a leading causal and contributory factor in clients I see with emotional mental health challenges. It is often described as feeling like being bullied.

*That is worth thinking about!*

But here is the thing! At a place where you spend so much time, you would undoubtedly wish for that time to be as comfortable, productive, and manageable as possible. You might even like to think that if you were in some form of trouble, instead of having to hide it you could have a mechanism, including understanding, that would allow for some form of support whilst protecting your dignity and confidentiality. As a business owner, manager you will not only want



but need your staff to be as productive as possible, especially if they are customer-facing in some way.

There really is no excuse for ignorance in the workplace or home. Mental health issues affect each and every one of us at some stage and often more than the once, whether that is personally or because we witness it. Surely you would prefer to be kind, compassionate, and helpful.

You can be, with knowledge and a desire to understand even just a little more.

*If you are suffering, please do contact a professional listener. If you are a business owner or manager and do not understand the issues, but would like to know more so you may be better prepared to protect your staff and business, I can help. Simply let me know and we can discuss the requirements of you, your business, and that vital component...your staff.*

## **Emotional Therapy – Just a walk in the park then!**

...that wasn't a metaphor, or was it?

Actually, a walk in the park, the riverside, through town, or just walking rather than driving where possible, can be helpful, emotionally and physically.

*However, you know this, right?*

We're busy, can't really afford the time to walk, need to get back to the desk, work, or whatever...

*That's part of the point I'd like to make.* Why would you really want to put yourself back into a position of sedentary physical inactivity – and emotional stress – quickly?

Okay, so what about when you are not at work? How about taking a walk for 30 minutes and really seeing what is around you? Do you even know how far 'out' you will get in 15 minutes?

This isn't walking on a mission, you know, walking to the... to get the... and then hurrying back, head down – not looking or acknowledging anyone you 'see'.

*What's that all about?* We have our own homes. We can be cut-off from the rest of the world if we choose, why do it in the street also?

For a walking therapy to release the mind-chatter and stressful and negative feelings I recommend a 30-minute walk out – giving you an hour away from all that stuff you keep 'fiddling' with.

If you actually care to 'see' what is around you (*Mindful walking*), 'listen' to the sounds – be it traffic, birds or the wind even; 'feel' the ground under your feet, and 'smell' the air. After 20 minutes, you may become aware that your mind has become calmer and quieter – and this releases you to be more creative, and is particularly useful should you have a problem you have been trying to solve – it's a great time to consider the potential answers.

Having enjoyed your new found emotional release – *and* perhaps solved a problem – it is time to just walk and enjoy the peace in your mind, appreciating whatever you normally miss.

Then when you are ready, walk your way back and allow yourself to be grateful for the relationships, your health, and the things *you can* be grateful for.

Two – three times a week will make a huge difference to you, with minimal effort and is genuinely physically beneficial. In addition, best of all, no subscription fees required!

## **It passed...**

Some of the most important words I ever embedded into my life are “*It will pass.*”

And, ‘it’ did!

What were you overwhelmed with this time last year?

What was it that ‘gave you’ feelings of panic and high anxiety this time 6 months ago?

What was it a month ago that gave you a restless night?

Is ‘that’ worry from a week ago as emotively powerful today as it was then?

It is true that specific worries pass. Some anxieties may linger with greater duration than others – but even the intensity of *these* can be reduced with appropriate cognitive coaching.

It is useful to remind yourself, particularly at time of greatest emotional distress, the worry will reduce and dissipate... but only to be replaced with another fresh anxiety, if you allow it!

*So what might be a first step to altering this un-nourishing behaviour?*

Practising that old favourite – ‘Mindfulness!’ Be here, right now! Leave the past where it belongs, the future will be created by what you do today, right here and right now.

And the next step?

If you’re carrying something or if you’re unable to free yourself and live your life as it is meant to be – seek some guidance and allow some time for you to examine what can work for you

To you, for you... *let it pass!*

## **Bereavement. What is it... and why?**

Many, if not all, of us will be aware of the term ‘bereavement.’ It is of course a fact of our very existence that where there is ‘life,’ there is ‘death.’

It’s usual for us to consider grief and bereavement when it touches us in some way, maybe the death of a loved one in our family, or someone you know – or even know of!

However, bereavement also extends beyond that which we ‘normally’ consider. It can include loss of our pets, and rightly so, but also areas around relationship breakdowns and separation, work issues such as a change in position or redundancy (*It is the position you were employed in that was made redundant, not you!*).

Another area rarely considered in bereavement or provided merit in is disability. Those who are born with or become less able, mentally and or physically, yet appear to have amazing resilience to the stigmas they endure and the hand dealt.

Now consider those of us who take our mental and emotional health and our physical abilities for granted – and who then lose some aspect of our capabilities; ‘loss’ becomes very evident, often leading to a bereavement process in its own right.

If you are suffering a ‘loss’ of any kind and would like some space and private time to explore, do let me know.

## **When you look in the mirror, what do you see?**

Do you see the role you play at work, the boss, the employee... your title? If so, what happens if you lose that title, who do you see then?

*Who do you see?*

When you see or hear a colleague, an individual in the street, the bar or the restaurant, who do you see? Do you see a weakness? Do you revel in their challenge, emotional or physical... and *you* are feeling... just fine!

*...or do you see!*

Do you see the person, the individual who is happy, who is sad, is angry or scared – and remember that that person is you, has been you... or will be you?

An emotional or physical disability, permanent or temporary, is *with* that person, that individual... It is not THE individual, THE person.

A person carrying a challenge needs to be a person, to be seen as a person and to be treated as a person. No more, no less!

*A person carrying a challenge rarely needs sympathy!*

Give him or her space and time, or care and compassion. Most of all, respect them for who they are.

A brother or sister, son or daughter, mother or father, grandparent, aunt or uncle? They might be any of these... *could they be you?*

Stigma in mental or physical health is ignorance. We have a choice to learn, and to change.

*Will you?*

It is a successful and courageous person who seeks guidance. Failure is available to those who continue because they fear seeking a listener, such as a counsellor. *This is leaving people in pain!*

People can be anxious about meeting a counsellor because of the perceived stigma; or because things are not yet desperate enough; worried they may be perceived as having failed in some way or are weak!

*Learn, grow, and be the success you are...*

## **Do you ask for help?**

It's all very well asking for help, but then I'm admitting...

Others cope

Others are smarter

I've failed

I'm less than

*Really?*

And what if any of the above was true, might any of those statements be permanent, and define who you are?

Each and every one of us can benefit from the advice, physical or emotional support at some time in our lives and the best thing is – lots of us like to be asked! It makes us feel good! It can make us feel clever, strong and important – *valued, respected and needed!*

Unconditioned at birth from expectations and experiences, we happily cry and make it known we need help. Gradually we learn to be independent to a greater or lesser degree... and then we find something we are unable to do and we hopefully ask for help to navigate the challenge.

Inevitably, we also make plenty of mistakes because we didn't ask, *and then we learn...* and we can see someone else with similar problem(s) and choose to help them avoid similar mistakes... *then they didn't have to ask!*

Play to your strengths at any given time, and enjoy knowing what you know.

It is also so useful to *'know what you don't know!'*

At any given time in our lives, we enjoy positions of strength and knowledge over our fellow beings. Within these times we are constantly still to learn certain other strengths, this is unique to no-one!

Try to resolve what you can so you can learn and grow.

And where you are overwhelmed from *time* or *energy*, these are just two examples where asking for help can make the difference and help you avoid the path leading to longer term stress and anxiety, depression, or feelings of low self-esteem.



*“I didn’t like to ask”!*

*...really?*

*It won’t hurt to ask!*

## **What is Mindfulness?**

Mindfulness is one of the easiest models of behaviour to adopt, being useful both inside therapy sessions and in your life generally.

When you are living life, as we often do, on autopilot moving from one task to the next, without any great thought (mindlessly), we start to pre-empt our next task, meeting, meal, or whatever. This means we fail to 'be here' with the current job in hand, and this can mean we fail to give our full attention to our kids, our partners, our colleagues, our food, our work, or play.

So what?

It is widely reported that our 'mind-chatter' or 'monkey mind' is the result of anything between 60-80 thousand thoughts passing through our minds, every single day! It is also reported that we only use 1% of our available brain!

By living life in the 'here and now' mindfully, we can rapidly increase this percentage of brain power to 2%: *a 100% improvement!*

*And this does what?*

By living mindfully, you will 'see' opportunities in all aspects of your life, whereas before you will have missed so much. You will be more creative. You will enjoy food more, enjoy play more, relationships will be 'real' and understood; performance at work is improved.

There you are, in the meeting room recalling how the last meeting went, worrying about what you have just left at the desk – and the work that's not being done while you are at another bloody meeting, and likely as not, thinking about domestic matters too!

So does that leave you ready to embrace this meeting and really try to get some value out of it?

One step at a time, I can guide you to a more relaxed way of living that actually makes you more productive, more pleasant to be around and more appreciative of life with less effort! Greater creativity, better sleep... the list is huge of that which can be improved with even a little more mindfulness in your life.

Physical and emotional illnesses are increasingly being addressed and symptoms reduced by utilising mindful techniques. It's easy to learn and easy to retain leading to a sustainable strategy for improvements to the way you feel and the way you live.

To experience this for yourself, book an appointment with me now.

## **Can counselling help with weight loss?**

As with any human condition, it is highly important to rule out medical reasons for an existing or recurring condition where appropriate, as much of these can be diagnosed accurately.

When we are sure that the weight gain issues are originating from something other than a biological and clinical condition, then counselling can be highly effective in finding a meaningful strategy to alternative behaviour – following an understanding from an introspective appraisal of oneself.

This is best achieved in a controlled environment where you can feel safe, where it is confidential, and where judgements are left for outside.

We know that at some stages in our lives we will feel ‘less than.’ We ruminate about how the world ‘sees’ us and what people think of us. And we are faced with countless ‘airbrushed’ and contrived images of the ‘ideal’ physique. Yet like most things in life, the more you think you want something, the further it tends to get from you!

Imagine *really* believing in yourself. Imagine *really* caring less about what *you* ‘think’ others are thinking about you. We all make snap judgements about what we look at, but we can change that to remind ourselves to ‘*see*’ the person, not the image. And *the truth is* people are more worried about their own issues to care much for yours!

Before this paradigm shift in our cultural and cognitive behaviour can occur, we need to consider (at the very least) clearing the decks.

In talking about your life and your feelings, and in providing some ‘*you*’ time, you can start to see things for what they really are. This requires a supportive environment where empathy and coaching, counsel and guidance are the order of the day.

To leave you focusing on what is the *real you*, so you can do the right things, for the right reasons and without the wrong struggles that lead to the yo-yo weight issues, which aside from anything else can increase the risk of diabetes and other associated chronic conditions!

*What else can be attributed to weight gain?* As well as mis-aligned cognitive responses due to experiences in childhood and beyond, the mid-life arrangement is significant. Life begins at 40! ...and so does the weight gain for many!

*So can counselling help with managing or reducing weight gain?*

Most certainly, in my view, because ‘sufferers’ benefit from impartial guidance and coaching, they can set goals and clear the decks rather than yield to peer pressure and the social punishment that is available to us all.

Counselling for guidance and life coaching is there for you for those reasons, as well as for when you are overwhelmed or are suffering other emotional health and well-being issues. If you want to be successful, you can benefit from others and the offer of impartial counsel.

If weight loss subscription schemes are to be effective – and are to see a great deal less ‘returners’ because weight gain has reoccurred, then counselling is an effective partner.

*“If you change nothing, nothing will change”*

## **How you can maintain meditation**

Practice daily.

Practising daily is habit forming. Just 21 consecutive days is all it takes to create the daily 'you' time ritual. Once formed, and if you allow it to be, meditation time out can be just as much a part of your daily routine as brushing your teeth.

### **Time to meditate**

We often have times to eat, sleep and work and for performing most of the other functions of daily life. So set a time to meditate. Make it as much a part of your routine as having a wash.

Morning is the best time for many to practice because your mind is fresh and uncluttered. Meditating as the very last thing before sleep is also wonderful because it clears your mind of clutter and you can revisit (without judgement) your day in just a few minutes and then relax – helping you to sleep soundly and peacefully.

### **Supporters**

Having a supportive group or like-minded friends can create an invaluable group synergy that keeps you in the flow of meditation. You've then got people around you to share the inevitable ups and downs with. This suits some more than others. For me, meditation is a private affair; however, I'm happy to share!

Practice at every opportunity. The goal of every meditation practitioner is simply being in a state of awareness 24/7. Meditating whenever the opportunity presents itself during the day is a good way to increase your time in awareness, being in the here and now and utilising your five senses.

You can chant a mantra while driving, or you can just be totally focused in the present while doing almost anything. It's not that difficult to achieve with good counsel.

Remember, meditation isn't only about sitting quietly!

Going on retreat. Retreats are few and far between in the UK, but if you are lucky enough to have one accessible, they are highly recommended to grow your development. They can help you to deepen your practice.

Read up. It is useful to read about meditation, its history, and the different styles you can try. Don't miss out! Do try different practices to find which ones suit you best.

Huge effort is counter-productive in meditation. However, daily consistency is necessary for the best outcomes. One of the toughest times is actually when you are feeling 'at peace' due to your practice.

It is then that the temptation to 'just miss it today' creeps in.

## **Do I need Counselling?**

*'Need' is unnecessary for some, and a requirement for others.*

For those who are unsure, the benefits can be found without waiting to be emotionally or mentally overwhelmed. *Yet most do exactly that!*

You can benefit from counselling guidance and coaching regardless of your emotional stability at any given time. To be listened to in a private and confidential setting by someone who is impartial – yet skilled as a professional listener (it's harder than you think to really listen!), and who will leave judgements outside of your session, opens up all kinds of possibilities to unpack and discover a journey into the real you. And if something in your life can be improved upon... to provide a strategy for this.

We behave outside of the counselling environment in a 'conditioned' way. We perform to societal expectations to those of our peers, family, work colleagues, customers or whomever we serve and this, as we get older, really can interfere with an understanding about who 'we' really are, what our values might be and how we want to live.

Get the facts!

For many when considering counselling, it is seen as the first step to admitting failure in some way and likely as not that a hospital admission will be next! Neither of these scenarios is even remotely close to reality!

The successful (whatever that really is) and rich and famous appear much more readily accepting of engaging the ear of someone quite frankly 'they' could care less about. Yet these 'celebs' are no more important than anyone else on the planet. To state the obvious, yet frequently forgotten, we are all human spirits with minds and bodies of flesh and blood. We are all, without exception, born, we exist – and then die.

*“Important as the birth and death are, we can do something about the middle.”*

So are you happy, fulfilled, have no concerns?

Do you live in the here and now, or in the past or future?

Are you all that you can be?

Do you know who you are?



Are you content?

Struggling to sleep well? Counselling can help a lot with that!

You may be anxious – Yep – it can help with this!

Past traumatic experience(s) | relationship problems | family | workplace issues | low self-esteem | low moods or depression | sexual dysfunction or sexuality issues | communications | performance | abuse – as an abuser or victim | relaxation | pressure of work – and or life | addictive behaviours | weight gain or loss

Therefore, either you can see some challenges here that you will recognise from your own experiences, or of someone you know or love. Some are more serious than others are, but all have the potential to be improved upon with guidance, compassion, counsel, and coaching.

## **Are we there yet?**

Where are you going?

What are you aiming for?

*Will you be happy then?*

We do insist on chasing things! The next payday, the new job, car, house...

...and when we get that next 'thing', are we happy, content, and can only then... *really enjoy life?*

What does it mean to be happy and content? *How might that feel?*

One measure might be to aspire for 'things,' *and then let go* and not give it another thought!

(Unless you can honestly say that when you achieved that last thing you became truly happy and fulfilled, of course!)

*When we stop wanting...we start living, now that is worth having!*

## **How do I know if I'm depressed?**

We all experience low moods, this helps us differentiate between happy and contented emotional states – and those days where we feel ‘less than.’

Low moods can also be differentiated within themselves and your exposure to them. So how do you know if you're depressed ... *and what might happen if you are?*

Amongst other observations and questions, *I would be asking you...*

Duration: How long does the low mood(s) last in a day, week, or month?

Intensity: How do these symptoms compare with those of the past, and how strong are they now?

Frequency: How often do you experience low moods in a day, week, month, or longer? How long does it last and how long has it been since they commenced?

Trigger: What happened immediately prior to the last low mood? What emotions did you experience, anger, sadness? What feelings were you aware of; ‘butterflies’ in your stomach area, dizziness, and headaches?

Effects: Do these symptoms cause interruption to your sleep, eating or digestion? Do you get less tolerant than before, more agitated or angry? Are you consuming more alcohol, smoking more or involving yourself in ‘riskier’ behaviours such as illicit drugs, infidelity or workplace issues? Are your relationships at home, play, and work altering? Do you laugh less? Are you less able to relax? Are you really handling [stress](#)?

First action: It is useful to discuss in the first instance with your GP. You need to be made aware if any medications, or any conditions you may have are contributing to feelings of sadness and depression. A helpful GP will provide you with an insight and establish whether this is likely to be purely, and importantly, psychological in origin. Medication may be offered and this is often a contentious point in the medical community.

Next action: Consider engaging a counsellor and psychotherapist! People wait until they are overwhelmed before contacting help and this can delay the healing process, extending the time taken to regain balance in your life in a more nourishing and meaningful way.

Ideally, this relationship and the work you collaboratively do will be in a private and confidential setting where you will not be disturbed and can discuss and be heard impartially without judgement, essentially though, in person and face-to-face. For others, distance or mobility may

be an issue preventing access to this and for those people I can provide secondary best options, such as telephone sessions, Skype, or email.

Pharmacological therapy: Medication may be worth considering for breaking cycles of insomnia, or anxiety and providing temporary respite, particularly if you are exhausted from lack of quality sleep. This can then provide an opportunity for any ‘talking’ therapy (Counselling – Psychotherapy) to be more effective.

Many people have reservations around the taking of medicines for emotional and mental health challenges, and rightly so! It is a decision that requires skilled assessment from your GP – and of therapists when providing an opinion.

*You may not be in the best frame of mind to ‘know’ whether it is wise or indeed necessary to introduce medication into your life, any decision will ideally be made collaboratively, with you.*

Do ask why you are being prescribed any medicines, how they are intended to help, and what they will provide, including any side effects. It is most important to let any other therapy providers know if you commence, or have already commenced a medication regime.

Where possible, I hope to avoid medication in a client’s life. It is frequently possible, with appropriate levels of skill and expertise, to navigate the challenges being faced without pharmacological involvement. Each situation needs to be assessed on its own merits and in almost all cases, unless you are desperately ill, the choice will remain with you.

## **Coping with Addiction**

Addictive behaviours are one of the most concerning challenges we may ever have to overcome.

Some of the common addictive behaviours include: overuse or dependence on alcohol, drugs, food (too much or not enough), obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD), gambling, theft, self-abuse, abuse of others, physical, mental, emotional self-harm, pornography and other sexual attendances

Addictive behaviour therapy can help an individual overcome an addiction, but it is a highly specialised remit and is very much dependant on the specific behaviour, the individual – and the causal factors. Each person requires a thorough assessment of the journey to addiction, and how the addictive behaviour affects themselves – and those around them.

In the final analysis however, and almost regardless of the individual's symptoms, it is the individual themselves who will determine the ultimate success in reducing or removing the harmful behaviour.

*But, who can the sufferer turn to for help?*

A doctor is likely to be the first and most appropriate port of call. Even if you have an uncertain relationship with yours, it is still wise to have your concerns recorded and to at least provide the opportunity for appropriate signposting to a mental health professional.

There will inevitably be a waiting list, and it is this and your level of concern that may determine if you wish to see a therapist privately, and earlier, with the duration of the course of therapy determined by you, rather than the NHS!

In addition to that, one of the strongest requirements for a client, which may be obvious, is that *feeding the habit* is to be protected from judgement and provided impartiality.

A safe, secure, and confidential environment is also paramount, as is regular and consistent contact in building a strong, collaborative, and trusting relationship with a therapist who can support, coach and guide you.

Staged management – over time – of the identified behaviour is more likely to provide a more sustained positive response than “quick” solutions delivered over 5-6 weeks. There are a number of different models available for the sufferer to engage with, some being more suitable than others.

As a minimum, I would suggest a therapist must have at least studied and delivered psychotherapy and anything more than this is a distinct benefit. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy has a good record of success in reducing or removing the symptoms, as the client actively practices new behaviours with the guidance of a therapist. There are of course behaviours that are felt to be mild to moderate, and the management of these may require less intervention than others.

## **Relationship Therapy and Counselling**

An age-old challenge for society and for couples – or colleagues in the workplace – is the business of relationships.

We are all different, of course, having been exposed and influenced through our lives by various experiences. Put two or more different people together and, at some stage or another, something is likely to give.

A key component to achieving and maintaining relationships is the ability to communicate effectively with each other. It's interesting to draw the parallels between how we behaved and interacted when we first met our partners, or colleagues, how courteous and considerate we probably were, and how many of us become in subsequent months and years!

*Hold that thought!*

Do you now come anywhere close to communicating today with how you once did?

Of course not, we take our eye off the ball, take each other for granted, and regard everything else as more important, but is it?

How much more content might you and those around you be if you re-learned how to engage with each other again?

However, it's not that simple, and it's pointless blaming 'the other side' because it really does take two!

Communications are important, and so are 'understanding' and 'expectations.' Learning how the 'other' side thinks and might 'feel' about things may uncover why they react the way they do.

The female of the species may want to talk immediately about a problem that has arisen. The male will as likely as not want to [retreat to his cave](#), metaphorically speaking, to calm down and consider the possibilities to resolve the problem. When neither is afforded the opportunity to re-examine how they are often programmed to do as they do, arguments and ill feelings erupt. Then communication may be lost, apart from the other negative stuff unleashed.

This is just a snapshot of some of the reasons why we do what we do. But we needn't stop there and do nothing. Help is available through relationship therapy and counselling.

## **Fatherhood – a dedication**

For mothers out there, help is often available and accessible, and there is a vast array of resources dedicated to this need, and people with far more relevant experience than I to offer it.

*I dedicate this article to fathers, to bring some avenue of knowledge and experience. Opening up for discussions to the men who are new to parenthood, and for whom in my experience there is an expectation to *just get on with it*, because during the pregnancy and childbirth, the mother took all the inconvenience and pain (true enough) ...therefore men just need to *just get on with it!**

*Is it that simple?*

There are so many factors to be addressed but, for now, I simply want to provide a brief airing to some of the aspects affecting some new fathers, and particularly (though not exclusively), first time fathers.

From the outset, when pregnancy is confirmed, a number of emotions arise – some positive and inevitably some less so. Often there is a lot of anxiety. This may be around questions like: “Am I ready?” “Can we afford it?” “Is my job safe, or going to be at risk?”

And what about those cognitions around the father-to-be and his past and childhood experiences, will they arise and be re-visited?

All going well, the big day arrives and already leading up to this the dynamics of your relationship (of two) have changed forever. The father-to-be now has to simply watch, stripped naked of control and disempowered, and yet expectations are running high along with emotions.

At which point is the father to be prepared for this? At which point does ‘anyone’ turn to the fathers-to-be and offer true, considered and sincere advice around what is to come, how to manage themselves so they can be at their best for the new-born, the mother and themselves?

All the attention is now on the mother and baby. The father’s job is to keep the plates spinning in their relationships, finances, home maintenance, employment, and fatherhood.

The physical and emotional loving relationship may have altered perhaps due to the major trauma his partner’s body has undergone; with the body changes and sensitivities of his partner, the hormonal and massive physical changes to his beloved partner, and his sense of loss at being discarded as the one his partner turns to for the things she once did.



Loving is now strictly on her terms and with the natural pain, fear and fatigue of the mother, and the fatigue and fear of the father, effective and considered communications will probably never be more important.

The mother DID go through the pain of carrying the baby, delivering the baby, the emotional turbulence of hormonal changes, the insecurities of body change, and having to rely on others.

The father did have to go through anxieties that may well impact positively or negatively on the future wellbeing of himself, his partner, and the baby. His ability to continue to maintain his emotional and physical health, his employment and his relationships will be crucial if he is to continue to provide, in all the ways necessary, not only to his new family, but first and foremost to himself!

Does this resonate with you as a man? Did new parenthood work for you and if so, what do you attribute the success to? Please share your experiences.

## Fathers 2

New ones, experienced ones, those who live with their children, those who are estranged, those whose children have left the nest... and those who are no longer 'in touch', for whatever reason...

*"Am I good enough?"*

*"Was I good enough?"*

*"What if and I wish I had"*

*"Where did I go wrong?"*

*"I am so proud being a Dad"*

These are, as I'm sure you know, recognisable statements commonly said, thought or heard!

*I suggest if you cared at all... you are, were, or will always be 'good enough!'*

Contrary to popular belief, a father is fallible! Fatherhood is anything but an exact science, and a father, just as any other human, will communicate at times less efficiently or ideally as he would care to because of 'lack' of knowledge, or other factors such as stress, his own experiences as a child; the list could go on and on.

Fathers: *Who put you in charge?*

You are a by-product of your upbringing, your experiences in life and it is acceptable, actually preferable that you make mistakes: how else will your child learn this? Do you really want your child to put you on an impossible to maintain 'pedestal?' Sure, we all want our children to be in awe of us and to turn to us in times of need, or simply for a reassuring hug, and why not.

Remember, you can and should be a human who can demonstrate 'ignorance,' show pain, weaknesses, and areas for development and even turn any areas of knowledge deficit into joint learning exercises where you are able! *Try laughing at yourself – with your child!*

It is never too late to re-dress that which you believe caused harm! Acknowledge any actual or perceived failures and forgive yourself. If an issue needs talking through, do this... and then leave it where it belongs.

*What is it that makes you think you are anything other than 'Dad'?*

You co-created a legacy, your responsibility is simply to do your best, and care, and doing your best is what YOU know to be your best, for others it is simply perception.

Forgive your mistakes, your harsh words and criticism, your inappropriate behaviour at times. It is never too late to learn; to redress and to nurture a new relationship based on the here and now, and leave the past where it belongs.

## **I Forgive You!**

Our feelings are hurt in some way at some stage in our lives, and for some, more often than others.

Yet forgiveness often appears to be a major challenge, *why is this?*

When we are unable to forgive, we bind ourselves to the source of the pain. This is almost certainly unintentional, and so why do we do it? In failing to forgive, do we make the issuer of the act that hurt us feel worse; do we dis-empower them in any way – or are we exacting revenge perhaps?

“I will never forgive you/them”

“I cannot forgive you/them”

“You/they hurt me so much”

These are natural responses on the face of it, aren't they? We look on incredulously at those who forgive, even in the extreme cases. We have seen parents forgiving molesters, rapists, killers – who intentionally or unintentionally kill their loved ones; terrorists, and even opposing religions sometimes find they are able to forgive.

So what is it that these souls find within themselves that allows for such incredible behaviour?

It might be self-held religious beliefs or simply that somehow, through experience or education, they realise the benefits of living in the here and now and are ‘mindful,’ able to live in the today, leaving the past where it belongs – the future being taken care of by what *they do and think today*.

We are more commonly unable to forgive much less powerful misdemeanours though, and these are probably areas we might be able to bring some understanding to. The family domestic dispute; the friends who wronged us in the past; the work colleague and so on and so on.

I believe a key is around recognising that what happened... happened! *It's in the past and cannot be undone*. This part is easy to comprehend, but what about if we then consider two points here:

It's in the past and that is where it belongs – end of!

The negative energy you provide for something you cannot alter is hurting and damaging to you, and for those who perhaps were involved.

*Is this helpful in any way?*

It might seem trite to expect us to acknowledge what's done is done if the effect is still being felt tangibly today. But really, no matter how tough the recurrent emotions still resonating are, it is you who is experiencing this, not the perpetrator – and 'this' pain is unhealthy, unpleasant, unhelpful and of your own creation – now, here, today!

*Might it be possible, in those most difficult of circumstances, to forgive the event instead?*

Opening up to these and other possibilities, “unpacking the issue” as with any traumatic event, real or even perceived, creates possibilities for you to place things where they belong, appropriately and respectfully – for you.

*Please, if you are harbouring a grievance and it is a constant thought in your life, contact me or another professional for an exploratory session of counsel, either in person or over the phone so together you can hope to bring an end to the angst and concern.*

It often helps to talk to someone impartial and outside of the family about how you feel, what you want to communicate, how to express *your feelings*. It also helps to understand primarily why you feel or felt the way you do.

It is also never too late to forgive yourself and/or to start over...

## **Well-being for you – and those you support**

Many engage and embrace the challenges of life, work, and play every day. We may bemoan our lot at times, that's only natural; but we get on with it and do what needs to be done. This works well and it is only when we are challenged beyond 'normal' limits that we are pushed further. Our minds and bodies are resilient however and we may sustain the level of effort required for significant periods, years even. This is, however, not to be confused with coping as we understand it.

*Coping suggests all is well!*

Coping needs to be in context – to get over a hurdle through a relatively brief challenge such as job loss, relationship disturbance, or bereavement through loss of life or loss of function; whether it's yours or someone you care for. What coping *is not* is a substitute for balanced and nourishing mental, emotional, or physical health – in the longer term.

If we rely on coping, we may be failing to address the reasons for coping! However, not everything in our life is within our circle of control or influence. *So what are the options?*

A business analogy is that when you enjoy your work, it really doesn't feel like work. To really have the resilience built up for those times when *we need to cope* and be anything but overwhelmed we need enough rest, exercise, nourishing food and time away from that which requires our best.

Typically, the more challenged we are by something, the more attention we give it! This is okay *if* because of that attention we change the dynamics to make the situation more digestible.

However, do we always look to work or play smarter and to make things easier and more sustainable? Sadly not, and the legacy of this is that not only do we become worn down: we are less tolerant of others' needs: we can become less creative and miss more opportunities to introduce quality elements into our lives – and the lives of those around us.

In business, as in ourselves, we can be 'too close' to see situations for what they sometimes really are. There may be financial, relationship, or health-related issues that impact on our ability to be kind to ourselves, leaving us less able to demonstrate the best for those around us.

*So how might we improve on the status quo?*

Take time out from what you know. Establish relaxation in your life – something most of us have become conditioned to find difficult. Help is available: we can help you to establish meditation in your life, if that is something you want.

From being able to operate from relaxed states to the ability to sleep soundly, waking rested and refreshed, starting the day how you want it to continue: these and many other aspects are available to us all via a number of different yet complementary practices which can be taught and learned in a short time.

That short time investment will bring life-long benefits if you choose to open your mind and practise for even a few minutes a day, leaving you with renewed vigour to deal effectively, creatively and compassionately with the challenges that come your way.

*Choose to be the best you can be for you first, and others will benefit too.*

## **Stigma – Is this now a cliché?**

Stigma is still attached to many aspects of our lives and experiences. Disabilities and mental health in particular are some of the most significant areas still to be overcome, although there appears to be a growing shift to overcome and educate.

The recent ‘debate’ in the UK’s House of Commons around mental health was a great opportunity seized by two MPs to share their personal experiences of illness in mental health, and for yet more MPs to talk of exposure to others with illness. This was in one of the most ‘macho’ of settings where power has all kinds of connotations, and mental health has, or has not, certainly been one of them!

How long will it take to create a paradigm shift in attitudes?

It is of course up to each one of us to...

Consider any negative beliefs we or others hold

Challenge ignorance in ourselves and others

Observe the language we use

Cease discrimination

Provide opportunity

This has done this before in other areas! *In no particular order, as they say...*

Drink driving | Discrimination against physical disability (work in progress!) | Health and safety at work | Racial equality | Sexual discrimination

Other areas of work-in-progress – or which need to be included might be; ageism; mental health discrimination by recruiters (in the insurance industry and finance sectors, people can be judged unfairly by their current or past mental health)... and I am sure more besides.

To name another couple of examples: Jury service eligibility and governorship.

For more on helping you and others with this important topic, please visit <http://www.time-to-change.org.uk>



## Gratitude

Truly recognising or considering gratitude is immensely powerful and can be used to expand our happiness and improve our emotional and physical health.

Scientific studies by psychologists [Robert Emmons and Michael McCullough](#) have found that people who consciously focus on gratitude experience greater emotional wellbeing and physical health than others.

In comparison, those who cultivated gratitude:

Felt better about their lives as a whole

Experienced greater levels of joy and happiness

Felt more optimistic about the future and got sick less often

Exercised more regularly and had more energy, enthusiasm, motivation, and focus

Made greater progress toward achieving important personal goals

Slept better and awoke feeling refreshed

Felt stronger during trying times

Enjoyed closer family ties and were more likely to help others and offer emotional support

Experienced fewer symptoms of stress

*If we want more happiness, joy, and energy, gratitude is clearly a crucial quality to cultivate and express.*

Keep a gratitude journal.

Each day, list at least five things for which you are grateful.

Challenge yourself – by not repeating items from the previous day, this will help you look more deeply at all the ‘little’ things that enhance your life and give you joy, such as...

Waking in a comfortable bed; listening to your favourite song; taking a phone call from a friend; the ability to touch, see, or hear; the beating of your heart; the warmth of a hug.

You can write in your journal just before bed or when you wake up in the morning. The time of day isn't important; what is important is that you consistently take a few moments to consciously focus your mind on your blessings.

What we put our attention on expands in our life, so by focusing on what we have to be grateful for, we feel happier and can place matters into greater context.

Write a Thank-You letter.

Make a list of at least five people who have had a profound impact on your life. Choose one and write a thank-you letter expressing gratitude for all the help you've received from that person. If possible, deliver your gratitude letter in person. In studies of people who have practiced this form of gratitude, the results have been amazing.

Often the recipient of the letter had no idea what an impact he or she had had on another person and were deeply touched by the expression of such authentic gratitude. While we may often thank people verbally, a letter can be even more powerful because someone has taken the time to write their appreciation. A letter can also be re-read and treasured!

Take a gratitude walk (mindfulness).

This is a particularly useful practice when you're feeling down or are filled with stress and worry. Set aside 20 minutes (or longer if you can) and walk in your neighbourhood, through a park, around your office, or somewhere in nature. Pay attention to your senses – everything you're seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and maybe even tasting – and see how many things you can find to feel grateful for. This is a powerful way to shift your mood and open yourself up to creativity and peace of mind.

## **When is the right time to seek counselling?**

One of our most common challenges in life can be coping with emotional distress. We endure concerns in life, brushing them aside in the hope that they will resolve or go away of their own volition, or commonly, and especially in the workplace, we are expected to just get through.

A financial analogy!

In reality we store our troubles in the bank of emotional turmoil, where they simmer and grow interest until a tipping point is reached – and we ‘break down’ or achieve emotional bankruptcy.

The symptoms may appear physically at first with longer and longer periods of ‘butterflies’ in the abdominal area, disturbed sleep leading to irritability and lower tolerance levels, relationship struggles at home and at work, and eating and digestive problems.

Another unfortunate common side effect is to engage in less than nourishing addictive behaviours such as excessive alcohol, risk taking, or even illicit drugs, particularly in cases of stress, anxiety, and depressed states, but also in many other conditions.

Here are three reasons people give for leaving their emotional and mental wellbeing so long:

A perception that they may have ‘failed’ in some way

Feeling ‘ashamed’, because of the stigma sometimes inappropriately attached

Things are not bad enough yet!

In reality it is a successful person who reflects and addresses unhealthy emotions and behaviours. The most successful people in the world use ‘guides’ throughout their lives. Do you believe you deserve less?

When 2012 was upon us – and having such a focus here in the U.K around ‘our’ Olympics it provided a useful reminder of the efforts both physical and psychological athletes go through.

Do they reach such high levels of skill, stamina, and strength on their own? It is a hugely psychological affair, just as with your life. These finely tuned individuals are supported emotionally with guidance and coaching, without which they would be unlikely to attain such amazing levels.

As with any illness, early intervention brings the potential for rapid and sustainable repair. And for those who have suffered long term distress, due to abuse (in any form), emotional trauma – or

anxieties and busy minds, it is entirely possible to find release, to relax, and to learn new ways to respond, react less, and behave to stimulus that otherwise causes you to withdraw or be fearful.

## Happy holidays – Yeah, right!

So, another holiday season is upon us, if we are fortunate enough to be able to take time out!

Then again, if you have the finances to take a holiday here or abroad, it's just as important you do so, and in the right mind! If you haven't the finances, you can still 'take a break' from your daily routine, and that can be just as meaningful.

Whether you stay at home, have a holiday abroad or within your own country, thought really *does need to be given* to some basic elements in order to avoid the usual stresses and aggravations a holiday often brings because we fail to prepare ourselves mentally and emotionally.

Yet we prepare (for the most part) to pack, to have the in-date passport, any currency, stop the papers being delivered... along with the milk.

We work our 'bits' off to make sure 'everything' is done, the desk is cleared before we leave the place of work – on the premise that we can then relax while we are away. *Who are we kidding?*

In reality, we do work hard to cover off as much as possible, and it's probably well-intentioned but c'mon... are you really going to leave the smart-phone 'off'? Are you really going to be able to 'relax' having just put in four weeks' work in one day on the premise that you will then be able to relax? It will now take you the first four days of 'leave' to get to anywhere near 'normality', let alone holiday relaxation!

Then there is the relationship thing! Two times during the year families might typically be together for more than a couple of days, Christmas, and a summer holiday. So are we emotionally prepared for having to engage with each another?

"Christ, I married you, didn't think I'd still have to talk to you outside of... what do you want from the fridge"?

Okay, let's say you have managed to change your stressful routine and planned a holiday. How can you make the most of it, and get the most out of it?

Professionally I suggest counselling before you start, but then I would! But we really do often need to give some time to skilfully preparing for this change in routine if we are to come anywhere close to having a break and recharging our batteries and those of our relationships.

All of this leads nicely to the art of 'mindfulness', with a healthy dose of positivity.

In preparation for your break in routine, 'the holiday' –

Stop trying to clear the world's problems that are just the same...whether you go away from the workplace or not, *immediately prior to going*. I'd bet you could be away FOR 6 MONTHS, delete every email when you returned and very little harm would be caused!

Instead of the above, ramping up all your efforts to try to subdue your 'guilt', slow everything down gradually at least a week prior to your 'leave'. Manage expectations by gradually slowing (or ceasing) your routine responses to the nonsense emails you have been cc'd into and which is an arse covering exercise for others.

Start thinking and imagining the holiday at least a week before. 'They' say, quite rightly, that you should always have your next holiday booked before the current one ends! Maybe a little optimistic with that, but the principle is correct. Try to provide 'you' with something of value FOR YOU to look forward to!

At least a week before the holiday, start talking, yes, actually talking to your significant other about how great this holiday/break will be.

*Hurray, you've adopted some or all the advice, you haven't been fired, and all is well. You are on vacation!* Now comes the best bit! Continue to be mindful!

If you're travelling, this aspect needs as much mental preparation as the aforementioned! If you are at the airport, it's because you've *chosen* to fly! There will be lots of people who will be grumpy, stressed, and very intolerant trying to remain in control and attempting to be first, ahead, in front, getting wherever they think they can get to – *sheep mentality abounds!*

The reality is that this is another paradigm shift in your routine and way of life. You ARE going to have to trust in others! The check-in, the baggage handlers, the passport control, the boarding staff, the flight attendants and god knows, even the pilot! *Get over it!*

When you are finally 'in holiday situ', at home or abroad, this is the perfect time to gain more out of your holiday than ever before. Because you really can use your five senses to actually hear and listen to sounds in the environment – and register those sounds, not judge!

You can smell the air, and actually acknowledge the smells, even in your own home! You can notice that which you can actually see, really look! You can actually touch and feel the sand between your toes or even the carpet under your feet... actually registering the texture, etc. What can you taste? Perhaps you just had a continental breakfast, or simply your favourite meal at home.

Being mindful is a year and life-long practice that really will alter everything for you in a positive way.

Happy holidays!

## **Tom & Sarah – looking for love**

*Tom and Sarah are fictitious, but their stories are typical and anything but!*

Tom is fed up with what he describes as “the clingies.” Tom says, “the girls I get are always possessive, trying to keep me under their thumb, watching my every move and expecting me to justify myself all the time... and then they prefer to believe *I’m lying*. I just want a girl I can have fun with, who can relax and trust me! *Is that too much to ask?*”

Sarah is sick of getting the guys that emotionally, and, sometimes, she admits, physically “beat up on me. *Why do I always seem to attract those?*”

We can cite many more similar stories of relationships that are unlikely to be nourishing, nor stand the test of time.

When we’re seeking that next relationship, whatever our sexual orientation, we are sometimes at our most vulnerable in emotional terms. We are perhaps rarely at any other time more self-critical and introspective as when we are trying to attract a new partner.

Our minds are full of the last relationship, the pain and heartache... as well as the good times, the sense of belonging, routines, and ‘safety’. We felt included and wanted, however good or unpleasant the partnership.

Who we choose as a partner is more often than not directly attributable to our formative years, the experiences we had then – and have had since. We are often attracted to, and stay in certain unhealthy relationships, at great personal emotional and mental health sacrifice, because it is something your subconscious can relate to and can make sense of.

*So is that all then?* NO. Sorry!

The past *was* all about ‘you’. The next stage in the equation is all around your *potential* significant other. Whilst you may not want or wish to try to change another person, you can afford yourself the knowledge and reflection to understand and comprehend why they are the way *they* are.

Are you looking for that next partner in life?

Give yourself the emotional intelligence to understand who your next partner should be, and just as importantly, shouldn’t be, and why.



Give yourself the power to understand why you and others behave and react in the way they do.

## Great expectations

*What do you expect out of others, yourself, and life?*

Many personal frustrations demonstrated by clients are with people not meeting ‘their’ expectations. This may be unrecognised initially but when the question is considered, it can provide for that eureka moment.

In relationships, at home or work, the same is equally and often demonstrated.

*“My significant other just doesn’t ‘behave’ in a way to me that makes me happy anymore.”*

Therapist: How have they changed? Client: *“They have always been that way!”*

So, in the above example, are the client’s expectations realistic? Does the other person *need* to change to accommodate that which is making the client unhappy, and if so, is *this* reasonable?

One answer might be to lower or manage expectations of the source of annoyance, accepting in some way just who they are and what they stand for; their principles and values may have just as much credence to them as yours!

What we may eventually believe to be ‘irritations’ and ‘imperfections’ can also be seen as that person’s individuality! A walk in natural woods will show you many trees that are less than perfect; this is the beauty of those woods! Or can you really imagine walking in a recently planted, perfectly aligned bunch of trees, lacking in character?

Of course if that ‘other’ is unreasonable, as deemed by the values and principles as viewed within the societal ‘norm’, the other person perhaps deserves to have that expressed to them. *Failure in those and the options might suggest separating yourself from that relationship, at home or work.*

So, now to you! What do you expect of yourself?

We get so frustrated and disappointed when we become ill or injured, disabled in some way. Why are we less accepting of this? Could it be that our expectations of our health are unrealistic?

*...and what of our mistakes? Are we kind to ourselves when we have that opportunity to learn and grow, having made a mistake... did you intend to fail?*

*...and the other side of the coin?*

Are your expectations of yourself high enough, or do you achieve only that which the parent or teacher alluded to with those ever so harmful throwaway comments such as “you’ll never be...” or “why can’t you be as good as...”

*– then, subconsciously you only ever give yourself permission to be as good as “they” said you could be.*

Maybe we can find this compassion for those in public office.

Does the individual in office really derive benefit from making a choice, implementing decisions that are unpopular – or that are subsequently seen as having failed? *Is it really, for anyone who is accountable, in their interest to deliberately fail?*

In considering these and other aspects of your psyche you can find release from disabling, restrictive thoughts, emotions and reactions that leave you feeling “less than,” angry and intolerant or unfulfilled.

*...and you can start to really live the life that you and each and every one of us deserve.*

## **I fear not!**

*We all recognise fear, and I'm sure we can all describe the thoughts and emotions associated with fear*

There is a healthy fear of course. The 'fight or flight' (or become immobile) state when we are threatened by a risk of harm, emotional or physical and which is natural, short lived, brief onset (acute) and can be moved away from in reasonable time.

Unhealthy fear however is more pervasive in our lives, coming from less evolved patterns of living. They may be long lasting (chronic), and exist through a lack of trust in a situation, of others, and ourselves and consist of worries around our health, finances, security, relationships at home or work or our performance in any area.

Heck, sometimes if we are briefly free of a particular worry and fear we will seek one out; such a habit being a victim of fear becomes.

So living in fear becomes the default way of living... or should we say, *existing!*

*"To regain a balance we need to take a little more care"*

Consider reflecting on what we were fearful of this time last year, last month or last week. Can you even remember? What about the past disasters in your life, as you recall them, they not only passed, but very often there was a positive outcome.

Identify your main repetitive fear, write it down, and ask what the reality of your fear becoming realised is. What would happen then (if it were likely) and would you be able to live beyond this?

Remind yourself of what you have, count your blessings. If you have a physical ailment, focus on the parts of your body that serve you well!

If its finances, consider what you need, and what you simply 'want'. There really is a huge difference. That's not to say that your financial situation may not be dire, but really think about what the genuine worst outcome will be.

Look in the mirror and try to 'see' you! This takes courage for some but really, really look at yourself and ask "who do I see?" If you 'see' your position at work or in the community, maybe you have too much invested in that.

Can you find a positive from what may be concerning you? This is something we can do whilst being realistic too! If I have a health scare, it's a great time to find the reassurance of knowledge around that issue, or perhaps changing the way I live to be more healthy – that would be a reasonable positive outcome of a 'negative' situation.

To access these more responsive actions, thoughts and beliefs, try really living today, in the here and now? ...Because if you do, then you cannot be anywhere else! (It takes practice – see Mindfulness)

## **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)**

*PTSD is anything but a 'weakness'*

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is increasingly being recognised as something real and tangible. The condition can be debilitating in the extreme, and can manifest in less severe, but no less intrusive ways.

Commonly understood as a condition suffered by front-line personnel in the military and emergency services, there is a groundswell of opinion that suggest quite strongly that variations of PTSD can be found across society.

There are a great many of us who have witnessed, or been part of an event 'outside the normal range of experiences', and we may become aware of the classic 'flashbacks' which are much more than reminiscing – they can take you back to 'that' moment, the smells, emotions, sights and sounds – at any time, and this may continue for months – or even years.

The good news is that positive therapeutic results have been achieved in a relatively short time with those who suffered undiagnosed for more than 60 years!

### **A brief explanation:**

The 'trigger' for such an event may be a stimulus that is unrecognisable to the conscious mind and this may cause great distress resulting in mood changes, altered behaviours, which for the casual observer make little sense. PTSD may manifest itself sometime after the event. The event itself may be difficult to differentiate from other experiences and it is here where expert guidance can be particularly useful.

The methods of treatment and the various success rates are growing along with greater understanding of just what PTSD is. Finding or managing the cause of such distress in one individual over another may well require different approaches.

Curiously, two people can witness the same event, or be exposed to the same situation, but one may suffer no obvious 'trauma'. For the sufferer, their mind may have considered the event to be linked to something else in their past, perhaps an unprocessed event or memory. Therapists may also select to work with the symptoms in the 'here and now', rather than the past.

### **Understanding Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.**

Perceived incorrectly to be a failure or weakness in the sufferer, it is sometimes incorrectly described as a chink in a person's emotional and mental health armoury!

It is potentially the mind's way of 'holding' a traumatic thought until it can be processed in a way that can be understood and then 'filed' away.

If you, or someone you know, may be suffering with intrusive and unpleasant thoughts from a past event, please do ask for help. With skilled guidance, you, or they, may just be able to 'let go'!

## **How to be absolutely positive**

Each time you turn on the TV or get on the computer, you can tune in to an abundance of negative news that can nip away at you. On top of that, you have your own personal issues to deal with.

It is the fear of the unknown that builds up in our mind and takes over like a dark cloud. This dark cloud follows us and rains on us, making us negative in our personal and professional lives. We are what we think, and we become that which we are frequently exposed to!

For example – *Do you ever remember coming out of the cinema after a car chase scene? You get in your car, and feel ready to race Monaco, huh!*

As humans, we sometimes focus on the negative and stay under the negative cloud that we created. We must understand that we can walk from under this cloud at any time. We have the power to make our days sunny and bright. Often we wait for sunny weather before we decide to be outwardly happy; yet, we can choose to be this way regardless of the weather.

*“Why wait for a sunny day?”*

Some people consider *thinking positive* to be *thinking unrealistically*; *but it really is much more than that.*

It really is possible to find positives out of challenges, although we may first have to calm ourselves and find some acceptance before we are ready to harvest something positive out of the situation.

Thoughts turn into feelings, which then turn into actions. If you tell yourself you can't do something, you will, likely as not, ultimately fail.

If you tell yourself you can do it, you have increased your chances of achieving that goal. Keep your mind clear and your thoughts positive.

This way can bring great success to you in your personal and professional life. Forgetting limitations that you or others place on you releases you to believe once more. Reminding yourself you need not be a 'victim' can be very powerful!

### **Observe your 'negative thoughts' and try to catch yourself!**

When a negative thought comes into your mind, instantly try to find a positive one. An example of this would be thinking about a child's smile, someone you love, or a moment of personal



satisfaction. This will help keep the mind clear of negative thoughts. When something unhelpful happens, examine the situation: see if you can find anything positive about it!

The washing machine breaks down: it's natural to be upset initially, but try to think about the good service it might have given for years; perhaps it would be nice to have a new one, even though it's an expense you may prefer to avoid!

### **Engage with positive people.**

Stay away from, or at least reduce time spent with, negative and pessimistic people. If they are around, surround yourself with positive people, and you will be more positive! This is a simple and crucial factor in reaching a positive lifestyle.

Negative people (*energy vampires*) can rob you of your energy and your drive. Learn to be around people that are like-minded, and the ones that have courage to go forward in life, and support you in yours. Try to meet with these people frequently so that their positive attitude will become part of you.

### **Read and listen to positive information.**

A great way to create a positive mind-set is by filling it with positive information. Too often we get our information from the wrong places. When we are focused on the negative news of the world, this can bleed into our subconscious. We need to learn to be careful on what we let into our mind.

We can choose to focus on the ills of the world, minute-by-minute, or we can elect when we will consider the world's traumas, and in the meantime, remind ourselves that there is far more to be grateful for, to enjoy, than might be sold to us by the news bulletins.

To get out of the negative rut, we need to get into the habit of picking up an inspirational book, finding a positive article on the web, or just listening to a positive inspirational audio.

Put a positive CD or download in your car, home stereo or at your office. Listen to it for the length of the car ride or 30 minutes in your home or office. Try to implement that one new positive idea that you learned into what you are doing on that particular day.

Try to keep a journal of some form; you will then recognise improvements for yourself.

### **More steps to being absolutely positive**

*In the last blog we discussed the huge impact that negative news can have on us and discussed some steps to being absolutely positive. We share some more insights on this theme below:*

**Focus on the here-and-now:**

Too many of us spend our time mulling over our past. We think about something that happened to us or we think about something that someone told us that upset us and we play it repeatedly like an old recording.

We need to break this habit and 'be' right where we are in the moment, here and now. Be mindful and really look at your environment, feel the ground under your feet or the chair under you, notice any smells, any taste and what can you 'really' hear? Ground yourself in the present because you can't really 'be' anywhere else.

What you do in the moment will create your future!

**Learn to meditate**

This is nowhere near as odd or scary as you might imagine! Meditation is easy to learn and with some practice, the beneficial effects are astounding and undeniable.

If you are curious, please talk to a practitioner before you judge meditation. There are many misconceptions around what you are trying to achieve, and how to go about it.

**Be grateful – count your blessings:**

It is easy for us to focus on what we haven't reached, and become negative or overly critical. Take some time every day to be grateful and thankful for what you have in your life right now. Find these great things and recognise them. The very thought of what you are grateful for will help you to maintain a positive attitude in your life. This habit is one of the best ways to turn negative thinking into positive thinking – instantly.

**Find compassion:**

Helping others in need – even small acts of kindness and compassion can be described as a positive selfishness! It makes us feel good too, and it's hard to feel negative when you have brought a little light into someone's life!

**Exercise more:**

Daily exercise will help you improve your mood, along with helping to fight against stress and depression. Many [medical authorities](#) recommend it. This healthy way of life will keep you living longer and living a healthier lifestyle. Remember, exercising will also make you feel better about yourself. When you feel better about yourself it breeds confidence, which will help you in your personal and professional life.

Go for a 30 – 60 minute brisk walk. This is a great exercise to create positive thinking. I walk for an hour, around three times a week. During the first 1/3rd (20 minutes) of each hour, I am

usually still unwinding from the business of life, the problems, challenges, and ‘mind-chatter’. The next 20 minutes are all about relaxing the mind, enjoying my surroundings by being really mindful. If I’m in the countryside, I really use my five senses to ‘see’, ‘hear’, ‘feel’, ‘smell’ and ‘taste’ whatever I can (I’m not suggesting eating the trees to taste, taste is a tricky one sometimes!). Consider all without judging.

By the last 20 minutes, I am freer in my mind and will almost certainly have solved a challenge because I’ve ‘let go’, or I will have at least gained greater clarity... and now, on my way home or to the office I can just relax and enjoy the mental and emotional freedom having *come home to myself*.

**In conclusion:**

Following and implementing any of these practices can truly bring about life-changing ways of life. They will take you from underneath that dark cloud of negativity and bring you out into the sunshine of a positive lifestyle. It’s best to start with small steps. Practices work and suit some more than others. Try one at a time.

We can do little about our birth or our death... but we can certainly do something about the important bit in the middle. It’s all there for us.

The choice is ours. Enjoy life, or suffer it. You decide!

## **Relationships – and the Wall**

*A brief focus on relationships at home... and at work.*



### **Communications – what are you really saying?**

Generally, we tend to ‘feel’ our way in any new relationship. We exercise great consideration – being mindful to avoid offending that new person in our life – or being misunderstood. We do this by choosing the tone of our voice, the words we utter, our body language, and so on. Have you noticed how when you are comfortable in the space of another you can accept a friendly ‘touch’ to the arm, or allow another person to stand in your ‘bubble’ (space)?

### **The wall**

What can happen at any time afterwards may be the result of a misunderstanding, a careless throwaway comment, or any number of factors... There is a disconnect and ‘The Wall’ may start to be built out of pride, arrogance, ego, anger, pain, jealousy, lack of forgiveness or any number of emotions.

### **How does this feel?**

‘Unpleasant’, ‘stressful’ and ‘EMOTIONAL’! So who does it serve to build and maintain the wall? Do you really want to keep *feeling* all that negative and unpleasant stuff? Of course you don’t, it’s poisonous.

### **Options:**

So how about learning and acquiring some tools to empower you to knock ‘the wall’ down before it gets too high? Instead of pointing a finger at someone *and* saying YOU did this, when

YOU did that ...try saying: 'When I heard that comment, I felt angry inside; or it felt unfair or wrong.'

The small example above demonstrates a subtle shift in focus that, with care and learning, we can adapt and apply to those communications when we are upset. This way we can stop the wall ever being built.

Known as Non Violent Communications (NVC) [<http://www.cnvc.org/> ], this technique is just one of many communication tools available to us to find alternatives to the 'reactive' response we so commonly employ.

## **Are you a master of your emotional past?**

*Where do you 'live' your life?*

In the past, present... or where you hope to be in the future.

Imagine how amazing and unconditioned you would be if you could keep the learning experiences gained, but were re-introduced to yourself every day!

*Why?*

Because then you might stop living a life based on your experiences and allowing them to define you.

As a child, you may have heard the throw-away comment 'you'll never be anything', or any number of other hurtful and unnecessary comments. You probably feel you have forgotten them, or that they have little bearing on 'today'; you may be mistaken.

I often meet clients who have never considered how they may be limited in their beliefs as a direct result of, and based on, what they heard (and subsequently believed) in their formative years.

Once identified, they are *released* from some or all of those limiting beliefs and give themselves *permission to believe and value themselves* for who they really are.

Provided with the environment and conditions in which to honestly reflect on their value and personal worth, most realise *they have always* been valuable and worthy!

When you first meet someone, you inevitably form opinions based on your previous experiences – and hopefully you give them a chance to demonstrate that they are 'okay'- unless they prove otherwise.

I hinted above what it could be like if you could really '*see*' yourself as new and fresh – undamaged and without limiting beliefs about yourself – *every day*.

The start to this freedom to be who you really are can be found by clearing the emotional clutter. This can be done through self-development and learning models of living such as 'mindfulness', if necessary, with the guidance of a counsellor.

The counsellor is much more than someone to turn to in times of crises; they are there to ‘listen, *really listen* – and provide you with the opportunity to consider who you really are, where you have come from, *impartially and without judgement*.

It may be tempting to ‘blame’ those who provided us with those hurtful and unhelpful experiences, be they parents, siblings, guardians or teachers, but that serves to hurt only yourself. Forgiveness is necessary and may be found, amongst other methods; by realising that those who were ‘responsible’ were probably doing the best they could, given their level of consciousness.

*It was not your fault!*

Sometimes in these circumstances, the *inner child* is trapped. We find ourselves behaving now, in adulthood, as the child (from that time), throwing embarrassing tantrums, or with petulance because our emotional maturity was halted before we could transit through the rites of passage.

What do you think people you engage with really think of you when you first meet? What do you truly believe they would say if you asked them to be honest?

Can you ‘see’ you in the ‘here and now’... *or are you being a ‘past master’?*

## **Three weeks...**

*Or 21 days...*

How long have you had an uninvited thought, worry, or concern invading your mind along with the 60-80 thousand other thoughts you have every day?

The kind of thoughts that say, “I feel so low, I’m so worried, I can’t forgive, or forget.” We tend to consider dealing with issues only when they overwhelm us.

How do you know when that point is arriving? *Would it be preferable to head it off at the pass?*

You can get a little help at any time, rather than waiting until the whole thing’s broken!

If you are one of those who are carrying a thought, leading to unhealthy emotions every day for more than a few weeks, *why would you allow that to continue?*

We do wander somewhat aimlessly at times, acting as victims who are powerless to intervene. Truth is, whenever you manage a pervasive unhelpful thought, this is a positive action, rather than adding it to the other stuff swirling around in your mind, keeping you awake, or disturbing your sleep – and interrupting your everyday life.

Talk about it!

Let someone impartial *who can really listen* hear your nagging thoughts – and help guide you through the process of understanding, unpacking, and acknowledging that which just needs a little care.

The sooner you do – the sooner you can have your life without those nagging thoughts.



## **How looking after ‘you’ looks after your success in life**

Do you take care of your emotional well-being? *What does that even mean?*

If you fail to take care of your emotional well-being, it is easy to exist in a routine *zombie-like* state, wanting for ‘something’ (unsure of what it even may be). You will fail to find consistent focus and end each day stressed and resentful, sleeping poorly, before burning straight through the next day.

On the other hand, if we choose to grow our emotional self, our resilience will also grow for the challenges we all must face. We will improve our performance in life and be open to creativity, innovation, and opportunity... all with less effort! Wanting diminishes and – paradoxically – that which you welcome into your life appears to come to you much more easily.

You pull less *and* get more!!

*How many times have you achieved an objective, a perceived success, only to move straight on to the next target?*

Can you afford to let your performance and success be hampered by the incessant thoughts of the past, and worries of the future? It’s all too easy to be completely consumed by the barrage of things to attend to on the road to our success, *because you can – you will!*

We are human beings, *rather than human doings*. In the always ‘*doing*’ mode, we often neglect our ability to be kind to ourselves. This is when our resilience can be eroded, stage by stage until ‘pop’!

*Often, there is little obvious warning when we are about to reach the end of our emotional tether. Others will be noticing the changes in behaviour, like persistent irritability, intolerance, failing to look – really look – into the eyes of our partners and children.*

Here is what we must all understand in our life’s journey...

With clarity of mind and relaxed, appropriate thinking, this *more-sensory and present way* can become the new norm. You can achieve more by working your mind less!

Looking after your emotional well-being is truly about focusing on success, rather than the way emotional health welfare is often regarded – namely as a perceived failure.

It is necessary to understand that whilst your physical well-being is relatively easy to see (gaining the pounds, being out of breath, etc.), your emotional well-being will determine how you *manage* your physical health and perceptions in the years to come.

By growing your self-compassion and taking care of the *here and now*, you remove much of the unnecessary noise in your life as you move that much closer to success!

## **Even Mild Depression and Anxiety Can kill!**

*A large-scale study has found that having even mild mental health problems results in a lower life expectancy.*

*This is a guest blog from [Dr Peter Zafirides](#)*

One of the missions of [The Healthy Mind](#) is to emphasize the importance of the mind-body connection. The importance of proper emotional health goes well beyond the psychological benefits of a positive and happy outlook. Growing evidence is confirming that poor emotional states – like depression and anxiety – can have serious consequences on our physical body as well.

A recently-published European study is a sobering yet critical example of the mind-body connection in our health.

According to a large-scale population based study published in the [British Medical Journal](#), people with *even mild* mental health problems have a lower life expectancy. The findings may prompt further research into the way doctors treat patients with psychological problems.

A team of researchers from University College London (UCL) and the University of Edinburgh analysed data from over 68,000 adults aged 35 years and over. The research team looked to see whether people who reported symptoms of anxiety and depression during the study were more likely to have died over an 8 year period. They also examined whether there was an association with death from cardiovascular disease, cancer or from external causes of death.

### **Even Mild Is Deadly**

Their results reveal that people who experienced symptoms of anxiety or depression had a lower life expectancy than those without any such symptoms. Even people with minor symptoms of mental health problems seemed to have a higher risk of death from several major causes, including cardiovascular disease.

Dr David Batty of UCL, and senior author on the study, explains, “These associations also remained after we did our best to take into account other factors such as weight, exercise, smoking, alcohol consumption and diabetes. Therefore this increased mortality is not simply due to people with higher levels of psychological distress having poorer health behaviours.”

There is a possibility that mental health problems may be associated with biological changes in the body that [increase the risk of diseases such as heart disease](#).

## **A Change in Treatment Approach**

In this study, approximately 25% of people suffered from minor symptoms of anxiety and depression. These are typically individuals who do not come to the attention of mental health services. The authors say that their findings could have implications for the way minor mental health problems are treated.

“The fact that an increased risk of mortality was evident, even at low levels of psychological distress, should prompt research into whether treatment of these very common, minor symptoms can reduce this increased risk of death,” said Dr Tom Russ, of the University of Edinburgh.

Previous studies investigating the association between symptoms of mental health and life expectancy have been small and unable to reliably measure thresholds of risk. This is the largest study to address the problem to date.

“People with mental health problems are among the most vulnerable in society. This study highlights the need to ensure they have access to appropriate health care and advice so that they can take steps to improve the outcome of their illness,” said Dr. John Williams of the Wellcome Trust.

*Courtesy: The Healthy Mind Network*

## **Angry!**

*Anger...is a natural and healthy emotion!*

However, just like stress, anxiety, or low moods – it needs to be available in moderation. When it manifests and continues repetitively and consistently, this may demonstrate a more significant challenge to be explored.

Conversely, *failing to allow anger* to surface can be harmful. If you consider the word, and term, depression – it is to depress ones feelings, and generally – this is unhelpful!

*So how do we differentiate?*

How reasonable was the anger felt? If someone was behaving unreasonably, and most others shared that view – then clearly that is understandable

Each day, are you ‘losing it’? How often are you regretting your actions – as a direct result of getting angry?

Are events and actions that created anger in you staying with you for weeks, months... or longer?

How often are situations or other people ‘failing’ to reach *your expectations*?

*If we are ‘guilty’ of inappropriate displays of feelings of anger, why does this happen?*

An in-exhaustive number of reasons are...

Fatigue – When we fail to take *care of ourselves*, we often have less tolerance and resilience

Fear – We may have appropriate or inappropriate *fears and anxiety*. Did these come from *our past*, and are these cognitions to stimuli relevant today? (E.g. childhood experiences)

External influences and loss of control, *changes in life, work, relationships*

### **Actions to remedy**

*Reversing some or all of the causal stimuli can result in responses that are more appropriate.*

How much of any day is *just for you*?

Talk about your fears and anxieties. Do you get angry because you fear the childhood admonishment?

Consider reasons and possibilities why others *are seen by you* to behave inappropriately

Victims?

We often seem to believe we are who we are – and forever! *Is this true?*

You can challenge your belief system for the positive, *if it is producing unwanted daily emotions.*

You can write or call for your personal and impartial guidance today – and realise your true self.

## **Ding ding... seconds out!**

Are you ready for the fight?

Who are your supporters? Who is in your corner when you have a fight on your hands?

With the boxing metaphor, your 'seconds' are those in your corner who have your interests, success, and welfare in mind. They are there to help you prepare for a future fight; they are there during a fight, and are there after the fight.

Do you have people in your corner for life's battles?

Who are the people who provide the encouragement to you? The "you can do this" response when you most need it?

You may be about to embark on a new relationship... or about to be party to a relationship that has run its course; maybe you are about to start a new venture – or changing jobs; what about that 'idea' you have... is anyone saying, yeah, go for it?

Who are your ne'er sayers? Who do you need to consider if you really need to be asking the question of, or listening to, when *they* never fail to deliver the "can't do that" response? It's often a worthwhile exercise identifying your supporters, and the role they might play in your 'corner'.

*Try this!*

Grab a sheet of plain paper – draw 3-4 circles starting with a small circle in the centre – this represents 'you.'

The next circle out is reserved for those you trust with your innermost thoughts and most intimate concerns. Write their names in here.

The next is for those you may turn to for things other than the last – with any further circles furthest away from the centre for professional supporters, colleagues perhaps – you decide but the most important will be closest to you, at the centre of the page!

When you are feeling 'less than', or anxious – it's worth reminding yourself if you really are all alone!

## Jealous?

Jealousy is one of the most insidious emotions. I'm sure no-one has ever *enjoyed* feeling this way – or being on the receiving end!

So where does it come from, why do we feel it, and what can we do about it?

*“That, which we dislike in others, is often a reflection of ourselves”*

Why is this important?

Because in jealousy, we may be judging others, based on our own view of the world, our belief system and lack of faith in ourselves. We may wish to be ‘in control’ and most likely, we’re subjected to a belief of low self-esteem.

When we are fortunate enough or have learned to value, like, or perhaps even ‘love’ ourselves (in a non-arrogant way!) we are far less likely to be troubled by jealousy. We comfortably observe our loved one engaging in a social setting or on social media (Facebook reportedly being one of the greatest catalysts for jealousy with the opposite sex) without feeling threatened.

We might never feel the temptation to ‘check’ our partner’s phone, emails, or on-line activity!

*Jealousy manifests outside of the loving relations too!*

“Workplace or educational environments are also rife with insecure individuals who have been emotionally harmed in some way which may predispose them to challenge what they perceive to be unfair.”

*So what can we do about these unhelpful emotions?*

You can try to understand who ‘you’ are – and where your beliefs about how you behave may come from.

Consider your beliefs about the person you are jealous of. Are *they* really perfect, and get everything they want? Is their life *really* always perfect and without drama?

We all suffer, we all get to enjoy the great times – and the less than great times but all are experiences to be treasured as part of that very fabric of life!

In the final analysis, finding a love, or even a liking and acceptance of you is the primary key, and the cornerstone of reducing or removing those awful anxious imaginations. For some, you



will work this out with your own path to personal growth and development. For others you may wish to make use of counsel and guidance to provide this kind of dispassionate, impartial, and non-judgemental help from an external perspective!

## **Single – and looking for love?**

*Have you ever thought, unromantic as it is, how looking for that new relationship can be very similar to 'job hunting' (ouch!)*

We want to 'sell' ourselves as trustworthy and pleasing to that someone who just might become the significant other – and with whom we might have a future.

Unlike the job hunt though, we want to be *lucky* in love.

*But is it really luck that will see you succeed?*

In preparing for our search we can do a number of things:

Focus on our strengths, attend to our appearance, and learn to say the 'right' things.

More than anything, we want to be successful in our quest.

The catch is that we often *allow* negative thoughts to creep in – and these are usually based on experiences.

*You may fear being passed over.*

*You may still be recovering from your last relationship.*

*You may think this will simply not last.*

*All of those* were influenced by something much more powerful – your childhood and formative years

If you worry, you might attract more of the same; or find you always seem to attract the wrong partner,

*...there is a reason for this!*

We unknowingly attract less than nourishing relationships based on what our subconscious can be telling us. Indeed, *your subconscious* can sabotage each and every relationship until you come home to yourself – *the real you!*

So, understand past relationships, and *let go* of residual negative thoughts and emotions.

Realise and find your confidence – in you.

Establish what you really want – and deserve.

Set yourself on a path to meeting the person *you really want*.

## **Who Am I Really? (Who Are You)?**

*What would I be afraid of if I didn't have a past?*

...very little, in reality!

Because living in this moment, aware of that which is present – in the here and now, and which you can see, taste, smell, hear, and touch, the past can be left where it belongs, along with the often inappropriate reactions to this moment's events.

Try to imagine what it might be like to be introduced to 'you'.

Might you 'see' someone without judgement? Might you provide 'you' the benefit of the doubt and accept you for whom you are – in this moment? Someone who hasn't been conditioned to respond the way you do to an aggressive comment, and in a way that comes from your childhood, your formative years...

Might you 'see' someone who appears confident, without a care, at peace with themselves and who offers no threat? Someone who appears loving, who listens and who is valued, loved, and good enough?

Our emotional conditioning provides responses that no longer serve us. If we have been hurt (and who hasn't?) in any relationship, be it at home, at work – we often put up a barrier, something contrived to protect us! But then this means just a small but significant part of you is no longer the real you. It is a new persona, a frightened, anxious person – who may become withdrawn or aggressive in relationships, both new and existing.

*Is that who you want to be?*

Responding appropriately to that which you see in this moment provides for clarity of thought and action. You will always have access to the memories stored away that provide a safety net for areas of danger, risk or other threat, but by living in the only place you really can be, in the here and now, you will reduce conflict, anxiety and become more aware of opportunities to observe for the things, including relationships, that you really want. You clear the emotional way, you clear the clutter!

## **Sex – and dysfunction**

Even today, sex can be a taboo subject, more so with any dysfunction in a sexual relationship – and with good reason! Sexual relationships are generally a highly private matter, but what does that mean when things start to go awry?

Sexual behaviour can be frivolous, or intentionally highly loving and emotive, maybe both, but there are few areas of our emotional psyche that are more affected by our past experiences, and current emotional and physical wellbeing. Put in other words, we often react within relationships, and especially sexual engagement, from a basis of previous and/or formative experiences.

*Another way of considering this might be to ask yourself – who are you in a relationship with, sexual or otherwise?*

You ‘know’ who you met, at the very beginning. You ‘know’ how they looked, smelled, felt, sounded and yes, tasted!

*But ‘who’ are they emotionally?*

When behaviours in the bedroom become unexpected, where does that come from? Here are some possibilities.

At a deeper level, were the transitions through the various psychological growth periods – from ‘toddler’ – child – adolescent – to adulthood, interrupted by anything?

Has there been any ‘abuse’ or significant (to the recipient) emotional harm in the past?

What has changed if all appeared well before?

An increase of stress and pressure at work or home?

Increase in alcohol intake?

Depressed feelings?

Intolerance and fatigue?

Loss?

Previous relationship memories?

Illness? (Worth checking with your GP that there are no medications affecting you, or other physiological reasons for the symptoms)

Perhaps it is that communications are an issue, it frequently is!

When affected by any of the above or similar, and our sexuality is questioned, it is perhaps inevitable that this will bring about painful and sensitive emotions.

There is no better time than this... to learn how to communicate and demonstrate kindness to yourself, rather than the usual self-berating stuff, and provide empathy (rather than sympathy) for your partner.

It is also worth remembering that both parties are deeply affected, and missing effective, deep communications, the imagination begins to run wild...

“I’m no longer good enough, man enough, woman enough”

“I’m no longer attractive, sexy... wanted”

...and in reality, this is often far from the truth!

When affected by sexual dysfunction, it is crucial to communicate in whatever way possible.

If you feel unable to talk face-to-face, can you write down your feelings and thoughts? Just doing this for yourself is helpful and can put things into context – and if you can share this with your partner, then so much the better.

By doing this, or however you convey what you are experiencing, you reduce the chance of misinterpretation from overactive imaginations! (When we are worried and imagine stuff in life, it is usually much worse than the reality!)

If you feel unable to communicate, in any way with each other, how will the challenge you both face resolve? ...*affairs, relationship breakdown, anger, depression, and anxiety* all eagerly wait!

...or you could do something equally courageous and use the guidance of a counsellor who has no stake in your relationship other than to improve matters!

Understandably, this takes a huge leap of faith. Once again, the imagination dances in and states that this is ‘your’ business, no-one else’s, or what will the counsellor think of me/us? Or, I/we can’t be ‘seen’ as failures!

It is a failure if as individuals, or as a partnership, you are unable to communicate in some meaningful and healthy way. It is, however, a sure sign of your commitment to yourself, and

your relationships if you care enough to do whatever it takes to enjoy the rest of your time together...

## **Post-Partum Depression**

Also known as PPD, or Post-Natal Depression

Of the clients seen by me, women are very much in the ascendancy. Having published articles earlier in the series for fathers, this is an opportune time then to share some observations for a challenge, which, whilst not exclusively faced by women, is clearly more prevalent in this gender. [1]

In my practise, I have noticed a tendency for the focus of the symptoms of postpartum depression to be around the pregnancy and subsequent birth, and of course post-partum. This may seem obvious, but it can be a distraction from what may be the cause, rather than a trigger!

First and as much as are reasonable, physiological reasons such as vitamin deficiencies and hormonal imbalances need to be understood and managed – or excluded.

There are many predictors and possibilities worth considering when investigating PPD. Here are just some of them:

An analysis of the past is required and may include visiting at least; formative years and emotional development of the sufferer; emotional well-being prior to and during the pregnancy; life before baby; was baby planned; relationships; expectations of pregnancy and baby care; reactions to stress, anxiety and pressure prior to pregnancy; socio-economic issues; esteem and confidence... and potentially more.

With the arrival of baby, it is a challenging time regardless of who you are.

With so much learning to be undertaken, whilst trying to manage expectations that may be unrealistic, and experiencing crippling fatigue, it is perhaps unsurprising that anxiety, stress, and depression can visit, and whether it is believed to be ‘baby blues’, or postpartum depression, both are unpleasant and unsettling.

If we throw into the mix other pre-cursors, for example being career-oriented and aspirational for a time prior to the pregnancy, it is possible that any enforced ‘break’ – from all that you threw yourself into before maternity leave provided an opportunity for past-unresolved emotions and traumas to visit

And so, just when you may be feeling most vulnerable, and maybe most accountable, you may recognise so much responsibility and expectation, often with no previous experience to call on!



It is clearly a profound change to the mother and father's lifestyle, and there really is no true way to prepare for the powerful emotions of 'new' parenthood. Yet, we *react* based on experiences outside of our own newfound parental role and these reactions, or cognitions, may be in conflict with whom we wish to be, and what we are trying to achieve.

Then we try to meet the societal expectations of how things 'should' be!

### **Medications**

Always a contentious subject; whether to accept medications in the first place. What kind and for how long is a serious consideration.

I prefer, where possible, for clients to consider alternative options where safe and appropriate.

However, medications can have a place, and if anything prescribed concerns you please ask the doctor what the medicine does, including possible side effects, why they are the chosen drug, and how long is expected before reviewing their efficacy. Of course, if you are breast feeding this will need consideration also!

### **Therapies**

Counselling, psychotherapy and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) demonstrate positive results and these are no more improved upon with medication on board! [2] Group therapies are also particularly useful where available, although these may not address issues specific to the sufferer in some instances, the group will provide significant assurances and support.

Consider your own support network! Try to ensure you are around people who are empathic to your needs and challenges, *avoid*, where possible, those who tell you to "*get on with it!*"

### **Diet**

It's very difficult to maintain the best diet for you when feeling 'less than', but nonetheless it is a crucial component to recovery, as is exercise... and regular sleep! *Hum, I can see a challenge with that one*, but grabbing sleep, rest, and quality time for you is also a significantly important consideration!

Just the tip of the proverbial iceberg!

[1] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postpartum\\_depression#cite\\_note-0](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postpartum_depression#cite_note-0)

[2] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postpartum\\_depression#cite\\_note-Appleby-32](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Postpartum_depression#cite_note-Appleby-32)

## Family Separation and Divorce

Married couples often consider long-term separation, rather than a divorce; or maybe worse, they stay together despite irreconcilable differences, citing an inability to overcome financial barriers.

Financial considerations are still, and rightly so, a major factor, along with the custody of children and pets and house disposal, amid seemingly countless other 'battles' fought.

Is it then, possible to 'manage' the separation or divorce process without this domestic war?

[Mediation](#) is a vital and useful tool if both parties can agree to take part *with the right heart!*

However, even before mediation, establishing meaningful and appropriate communications with each other, conducted in a way that somehow leaves aside the point scoring, hateful and hurtful attitudes, which otherwise serve to complicate even further a massively emotional and turbulent time with no winners at the conclusion, is critical.

*"It's our thoughts, feelings, and reactions to events that create the turbulence – rather than the event itself"*

Good law firms will support you through the various options, and signpost you to other colleagues who can assist with areas of separate expertise such as counselling or relationship therapy, along with mediation if required.

Easier said than done of course, and like anything challenging, it takes preparation and courage!

Why preparation?

For the paradigm change, for learning to talk despite anger, anxiety, fear, recriminations... for the kids!

The emotional after-effects of such change in your lives will be determined to some degree by how well you can 'engage' *without* the 'hatred' and other emotions being active. These, and all the other powerful emotions, can be expressed in an appropriate separate environment with time and space set aside just for you! (I and others like me can provide this for you and your family)

Only when you have been heard and recognised may you be in a greater position to negotiate the necessary business end of the separation.

Remember...

“It’s our thoughts, feelings, and reactions to events that create the turbulence – rather than the event itself”

## **About Depression!**

Depression, depression, depression...

We hear this word all the time, it seems. Does this mean it has lost value? Have we become desensitised to the word 'depression'? What does it *really* mean?

In the psychological sense, we can consider 'depression' in its simplest form as 'depressed' thoughts, as in, keeping them hidden away, or, thoughts and emotions that you cannot express for whatever reason. Maybe 'repressed' would be more apt? Often it is an inability to examine an area of your life, present or past, and say what needs saying... or experience what needs feeling!

Symptomatically, a sufferer may feel 'low'; we all have 'low' days, and these are what differentiate happy from less happy!

However, when we feel 'low' or have other symptoms typical of depressed states for longer periods, we face a risk of holding on to these unhealthy thought patterns with a greater chance of re-occurrence.

I would suggest that if any emotions are disturbing your normal level of daily balance in your sleep, eating, relationships, or work, to name a few, then it is worth reflecting to consider if something needs your attention.

We continue regardless, in mental and emotional turmoil, because we can! Yet, if we get a stomach 'rumble', injure ourselves physically, we are very quick to act; perhaps taking time off work – and sharing with others how we hurt our ... doing ...!

*Wouldn't it be something if we attended to our mental injuries as they arise with such ease!*

Depression is often less than clear in how it presents to the sufferer and to others. The root causes and triggers may have come from recent or distant past and may have other contributory factors worth consideration such as physical and biological health, diet, relationships, work, and past events that may, or may not be understood or even remembered!

Therapy, whether for minor irritations of our daily emotions and functions, or more significant disruption, will vary from case to case, person to person and therapist to therapist

Some individuals will benefit from spending time unpacking and reflecting on the past. Others will only benefit from a cursory examination of this area; all however will benefit from learning

to bring daily thought processes to the present, and with a little assistance this is really easy to learn – and practice.

However, one thing is clear. If seemingly minor emotional disruption continues unabated for longer periods, this creates opportunities for further negative impact on your emotional and physical health, your relationships, and your performance in all you do.

Early intervention is paramount and this is about giving the sufferer the power to understand and manage more healthily, their own challenges, and creating an achievable strategy that is straightforward in reducing the effects of negative thoughts, now, and in the future. It is really a bit of skilful coaching, if you prefer!

We often fear anything we are unable to understand, and this is natural. Society however has somehow contrived to encourage us to believe that seeking a trained professional helper to guide us through our challenge is in some way a ‘failing’!

We already know that if we have a physical ailment, we are accepting for the most part and feel able to get help and share what we are suffering with others. Now is the time, with stigma reducing to afford ourselves the skills and experience of a counsellor or therapist of your choosing to explore, guide and educate you in ways to be the best you can be.

Clear the emotional ‘junk’ and that which no longer serves you – so you can be ‘here’, living your life in this day as it is meant to be. When the time comes, doing anything other than the best for yourself in this life is much more likely to be seen (by you) as a failure, than gaining an understanding to be the best you can be. Work and family get to benefit too, how cool is that!

It really is our reactions, feelings and emotions to an event that hurts us, rather than the event itself!

## Professional Service Providers

Are you a professional service provider; who looks after you?

I have written earlier in the series about carers and the need for them to be their best, so they can give their best. This blog is for providers of services, and for whom neglecting to keep their emotional stability in check may ultimately affect their own well-being, as well as their performance delivery!

Let's target some service providers, in no particular order, as they say!

Lawyers

Civil Servants (Yuk, is there any place for the term 'servants' today?)

Educators

Accountants

...of course, there are so many more and this may have relevance to all!

When professional providers have completed their emotive, energy sapping primary skills training, they quickly become completely ensconced in their new career and standing. The next 5-10 years (or more) will be a whirlwind of new opportunities and challenges; and the business of life to contend with too as you assert your position, authority and standing.

In amongst this 'sprint', you will inevitably endure less positive matters – in social, domestic and professional terms. Will these be properly 'put to bed', or simply 'tucked away'? ...after all, you're busy and haven't the time or inclination to give such matters the attention that might reduce the chance of a re-visit in later years!

Now consider a little introspection, if you will. As an esteemed provider of services to others, you will have become expert in what you do. That's why people engage you, right? They have an expectation of you, and you *have to* deliver!

Within each engagement, exposed to projected stress, traumas, and other frustrations that you have to make your own, seeing the problems and challenges through the eyes of the client.

How can we manage this healthily? Is this possible?

How do you keep your mind healthy?

How do you maintain resilience, for you and yours, when YOU need it?

We know the importance of keeping physically fit, right. We also know that taking time away from the task in hand, during the day, provides for a more creative and productive result, right?

Pie in the sky for most of us! We keep going, because we can! There are few clues within our internal resilience meter to provide us a cue that we are about to fall off an emotional precipice. We rely on chance and 'if all goes well'.

Okay, let's say we simply feel unable to change our personal and company culture to allow for space and health during the day. What does that look like when you do finish each day?

Do you leave the work 'at work'? Do you enjoy your journey home? What is it like when you get home? Do you have a quality evening, enjoying your own company and that of any spouse or family?

Do you sleep well, awake refreshed?

Does your next day begin with renewed vigour, health, and vitality – are you going to be creative and as productive as you (and your client) want you to be?

...or will it be another day of fire fighting, getting off on the stress of it all?

There is a way! Change *can* come about. You guys are changing and adapting, look how many now use social media, smartphones! All that information and communications access, saving you time

...so you can fill it with even more demands... at a cost, without taking care of you.

You can be super busy, face the stresses and demands a professional provider expects and have peace in your mind. But, *have you the courage to find out how?*

Change, and you will adapt. Do nothing, clearly nothing will change.

## **Are you getting S.A.D?**

Many of us have become aware of the acronym S.A.D. *Seasonal Affective Disorder* is a phenomenon associated with the onset of winter, and the reduced hours of available sunlight exposure. According to [SADA](#), significant symptoms affect an estimated 7% of the UK population each year, with a further 17% suffering discomfort of a milder form.

SAD also shares other terms of reference, such as...*Winter Blues* or *Winter Depression*

Symptoms can be...

Disturbed sleep patterns

Eating Disorders

Altered Moods

Reduced Performance

Feeling Lethargic

Over-eating

Social withdrawal

There is science to the symptoms too!

A biochemical imbalance in the brain (hypothalamus), resulting from the shortening of daylight hours and the lack of sunlight in winter. This reduces the amount of 'feel-good' hormones released into the bloodstream and for many is significantly disabling, and for others at least causes discomfort and is mildly debilitating.

### **Treatment, what helps?**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, treatment shown to demonstrate highly effective results, with 85% success reported, is *light therapy*. Exposure to light up to ten times brighter than ordinary domestic lighting, for up to four hours a day can bring rapid benefits.

### **How do we do this?**

Specialist 'light-boxes' can be bought that can provide the necessary light required, in a safe way and that allows the sufferer to continue with activities involved in sitting in the office, or at home. (Please see the SADA website – link below)



**What else?**

Psychotherapy, and other complementary therapies. These are effective in helping to reduce distress.

Exercise, even just getting out there, especially on, but without restricting yourselves to, sunnier days!

Excellent nutrition. Some really useful data [here](#) to help battle the blues.

Medication, when carefully considered

For access to the UK charity created *specifically* to support those with an interest in SAD, please visit and consider joining and/or making a donation to <http://www.sada.org.uk>

## **An insight into Bipolar Disorder**

*“What I didn't know then, that would have changed my life”*

Wonderful guest blog by Shauna Smith – [Bipolar2Happiness.com](http://Bipolar2Happiness.com)

When I was young, as far back as I can remember I was depressed, emotional and moody. I was very sensitive, easily hurt and bullied regularly. I went through the majority of my life living this existence of sadness, loneliness, hurt and fear.

My mother started taking me to the doctor for symptoms such as shortness of breath, and overly emotional outbursts, but they couldn't or wouldn't help. As a very young child I would hold my breath until I turned blue and my mother would grab me, smack me, forcing me to breathe.

They decided my shortness of breath was asthma and gave me an inhaler. I now know it was panic attacks. I wish my mother had been more direct with the doctors and gotten me some help as a child.

Back then Mental illness was not discussed, people were suffering in silence and those that weren't were labelled crazy. I must assume this is why my mother did not truly ask the doctors about depression. The doctors were not interested in treating kids for depression. They will grow out of it they all said and sent us on our way.

Today, it doesn't have to be like that. Mental illness is just that – an illness, and even though there is still a stigma on it, things have come a long way. The internet has been a great tool for mentally ill people to find help and support from others like them.

I remember when I first was diagnosed at the age of 30. Bipolar II disorder is my diagnosis. I told everyone because I was relieved, why you ask? Because the rages and nastiness were finally proven not to be the real me, it was the illness and now it could be treated. I wasn't the Bitch I was labelled as a child and through adult hood by my parents and others around me. I knew I was stuck inside this body that was controlled by an illness. *Life could change!*

My wish for those today that are suffering is that they will openly ask for help and receive support from family and the community rather than being an outcast or labelled crazy.

I compare Mental Illness to diabetes regularly, they are both illnesses, and would you be ashamed to say I have diabetes; no you wouldn't, so why be ashamed of Bipolar Disorder or any other form of mental illness?

Some are affected by schizophrenia, I have a family member afflicted and it's horrible but it can be treated. Will they have a perfect dream life, no but they will have a life and with help can enjoy living.

*"Crazy needs to be stricken from the lips of society. We aren't crazy, we are ill and treatable"*

When I was going through treatment while I was unstable, I wish that I had trusted my instincts more about the doctors I had seen. I wish the general practitioners would have given me information or resources to research mental illness. I was simply given medicine and sent on my way in the early years.

Those doctors need to learn how to recognize serious depression and get people information and help. Sometimes I think they are as ignorant as the general public where mental illness is concerned. The last doctor that finally sent me to a psychiatrist never looked me in the face – and acted like he was frightened of me. Ha! Cracks me up, I was never rude to him or anything.

On my blog I write about my life with Bipolar Disorder and other aspects of my family. Both my girls are on medications and one of them is diagnosed the same as I am, Bipolar II. I started getting them treatment when they first started to have symptoms that affected their lives and I urge anyone with a child that has a problem to get them help.

I was affected from a young age and I think had I gotten treatment earlier things would have been much better in my life. My objective with my blog is to show people that there is hope no matter how deep into your illness you are, you can climb out, it just takes determination and time. Believe in your strength and keep moving forward.

The best to you all and if you have a moment check out my blog at [Bipolar2Happiness.com](http://Bipolar2Happiness.com)

Shauna :)

## Choosing Words for the Bereaved

One of the most challenging times for our communication skills is when someone we know suffers bereavement.

Death and grief are sometimes taboo subjects in our society, so we are often unsure what to say – or how to act around people grieving. Whether to say anything at all, and if so, what, how and when, are common thoughts.

It is reasonable for this issue to feel awkward if we are without awareness of the person grieving, but presumably, if you want to demonstrate some compassion, you will know something of the person affected!

My first tip comes from my professional experiences attending literally hundreds of deaths in the community. It helped me if I reminded myself that the loss belongs to the bereaved, rather than me; easier said than done at times!

We often react based on our experiences from the past – or even inexperience! It is however still very possible to provide a compassionate question or statement without making the pain our own; a small disassociation can be useful. On this occasion, sympathy rather than empathy is, in my opinion, the order of the day.

Most of us will be concerned about saying the wrong thing, and you may well do – you are altering your behaviour, and this will be making the communication different, perhaps too considered!

In avoiding saying something, tiptoeing around each word we make, each sentence is contrived. We may actually be at risk of behaving selfishly, because we are worried we might further upset the bereaved – and that would upset us, we may lose some form of control.

An analogy that many can relate to is attending the interview. We stumble and falter because we are trying to say what *we think* people want to hear, rather than say what we think!

Guess what? The thoughts and feelings of the bereaved are on that which has happened; many will be numb to your stuttering efforts! If you say something that hurts, perhaps because it gives rise to a memory, this is natural and can help the grieving process considerably more than ‘being brave’ or stoical, repressing that which we can benefit from in acceptance.

Try to talk sincerely. If passing a comment of condolence, simply state what you want to say, preferably looking into the eyes – and move on. The key here is expecting nothing in return!

If you are visiting someone specifically, again, ensure you have no expectations around responses. Listening is what is required, rather than your opinions, views or whatever else. This individual requires permission to think and feel whatever they like at this time, and a safe environment without judgement in which to do it.

*Please avoid the “I know how you feel” comment, no matter how well meaning it is!*

Be kind to yourself!

If you are unsure how you are feeling after talking with the bereaved, know that you tried to do your best. If you are then suffering, talk with someone else but, above all, reminding yourself where the pain belongs can be highly useful.

## **Imagine...**

Our imaginations change as we move through our lives...

As a child, we were able to experience positive imaginations, fantasising about who we were, what we could do... the possibilities appeared endless.

We all probably recognise we had less helpful, normal thoughts that left us frightened too!

We were able to experience this primarily because we were 'unconditioned' by life, and by expectations; remove responsibility and accountability, and you have free reign to live the life you believe in!

*Fast forward to adult-hood and we have 'learned' behaviours that are often embedded in our psyche*

We 're-act,' based on experiences... frequently in error! What may have been appropriate at the original time may no longer be the case – yet still, we wonder why... or worse still, others wonder why, you just 'jumped down their throat'!

Back to the imagination...

In cases that breed anxiety, the imagination plays a pivotal role in the subsequent emotions experienced. Palpitations, dizziness, sweating and shallow breaths, are just some of that which waits when the imagination runs amok. The fearful thought (imagination) is so often considerably worse than the reality, however.

A wonderful example of how we can see those anxious thoughts more clearly for what they are is a reminder of the past visiting, rather than an actuality, to imagine watching that event being played out on a cinema screen. You can see it, but it is no longer reality, just lights flickering on a screen – you can't actually touch it, or be physically touched by it!

Thanks to author of this book *Reconciliation: Healing the Inner Child* by Thich Nhat Hanh (1 Nov 2010) *for the quote.*

The next time you experience an anxious thought, perhaps because you are running late is one good example, try to be aware of the thoughts you are having -I am late, I'm going to look bad, I'll be in trouble, etc.

After your appointment, meeting, or whatever it is, try reflecting on the outcome. If you were late, or if you were on time and someone else was late. Did anyone 'die'? Did you lose your job?

Most of us, out of courtesy, make arrangements to provide a reasonable opportunity of being on time, however it can be useful to consider the 'automatic' negative thoughts and imaginations – and compare those with the reality!

Test your thoughts and try to remind yourself earlier in an anxious period of what the likely outcome 'really' is.

*The truth is – the imagination is much scarier than the reality!*

When we feel jealous, and therefore anxious, we are often behaving because of our own insecurities, failing to realise at times, what we are afraid of in others, we are afraid of in ourselves!

If we become anxious and resentful of someone else, and how we 'believe' their position in society is, and how their possessions are making their lives 'perfect', we are imagining something that is rarely true!

Money and possessions rarely bring an inner peace and total satisfaction; they may provide alternate choices, but that is another thing entirely.

When we become acutely angry with sudden outbursts, these may be because of the fear of an outcome – a perception imagined. Perhaps we imagine because we subconsciously believe that the car driver who has just cut you up 'should' know who you are, what you do, how you are, that you have a family and you do a great job serving others, so how dare they cut you up, *they wouldn't do that to someone they knew!*

We often behave 'unconsciously', on automatic and it is appropriate for us to feel anxiety with a new experience. Nevertheless, with a little more consideration, challenging a thought or imagination, we can ask ourselves whether the anxiety at that time is healthy and appropriate.

And sometimes... it is a positive thought that makes us feel good; and that is healthy!

Challenged by occasional or frequent anxieties and fearfulness? Do seek a little guidance from an impartial ear. I have two of those, I'm happy to listen!

## **Sleep... ah, that would be nice!**

A regular cause, or result, of anxiety and depression; poor sleep affects us on so many levels.

We know this, yet still many of us seem unable to achieve regular quality sleep that will find us waking refreshed and ready to enjoy the day.

We do what we do, because we can...but at a price! We are trying to keep pace with the means at our disposal. The smart phones and laptops, the iPad and games consoles, the cloud, social media, networking and all the other wonderful things that can provide education and engagement to help us personally and professionally.

*To maintain well-being, emotional and physical, you will need some balance!*

Turning off the electronics more than a couple of hours *before* bed will increase the opportunity of sleeping well.

However, there's more to it than this and most of it revolves around self-care and care of the business of life around you – and yours.

We have at our disposal the means of engaging into the wee hours, but why do we take up this option?

Are we missing something in our lives, our relationships, that is encouraging us to disappear into the web? Just what are the opportunities?

As we need to monitor our dietary intake, so it is with the net. Too much food and not enough exercise, we become lethargic, gain weight, and feel tired. Too much online time, we get the same...

Managing our time has become more and more challenging as the demands we have self-created creep up on us. I too am guilty of responding to an email enquiry late at night, because I can! Would we open up our shop of business of whatever type just because someone tapped at the door and asks?

No, we have our hours of business clearly displayed, right?

So maybe it is discipline that's required?

Where to start?



Changes in our daily lives are required from us if we are to allow ourselves to find any balance. We have to try to see things for what they are, reacting less on 'auto' and being more 'mindful'.

In the meantime, here are some practical tips:

Exercise! Yep, that dirty word, I said it! If you can set yourself small achievable increases in your weekly exercise, this will help. Too late in the day and it can leave you feeling buzzy so it's best to find a way to do something before you engage the day, or perhaps at lunchtime.

What you consume in the 2-3 hours before you sleep will provide significant effects to the quality of your sleep – and how you feel when you wake. Alcohol may get you off to sleep, but you will sleep lighter and awake more frequently, not least because you may need the bathroom more regularly!

Caffeine and carbs are also going to provide negative effects and are unhelpful to sleep – or waking refreshed.

Going to sleep at similar times – within 20 minutes or so, on a regular basis is helpful, as is waking within a similar 20-minute period. Weekends can be separate and in fact, it is healthy to introduce some change, just limiting change where possible to twice a week will provide some benefit.

When you go to bed, try to ensure the next day's concerns have been recorded already, or dealt with hours before. Thinking about what you have to do the next day is simply going to excite your mind, and will change nothing of the event you are imagining!

Immediately before going to sleep, try to relax your entire body. Visit each muscle group with your mind, from scalp and face – down to your toes, and ensure all are loose and relaxed. Some slow deep breaths whilst you visit each area will further help with this.

*Meditate, if you are versed in this, or want to learn.*

Meditation at any time of day brings benefits, but prior to sleep, what it brings is remarkable!

The very last thing before sleep, and if you have had a particularly busy day, run through the day from the moment you awoke – to the present time with a video replay – without judging anything – simply trying to recall as much as possible for 3-5 minutes. This might appear counter-intuitive but can help unscramble the day, leaving less for the sleeping body to defragment and put straight via the dreams we have.

If you do wake in the night, finding you cannot achieve sleep – get up! Read a book, sit quietly in another room, or listen to some light music. The more you ‘try’ to sleep, the less you are likely to find it. Let go... and it comes to you.

Is your bedroom peaceful and uncluttered? Limit electronics, phones, etc. if you can. The bedroom needs to be a place of peace and tranquillity, not the place you share with the TV, PC, phone and stuff you haven’t had time to put away!

How is the temperature? Are the curtains working for you?

So how are your mornings?

Do you find yourself yelling at people to get up? *Try a more gentle approach!*

Do you find yourself rushing around, competing for space? Try getting up 20 minutes earlier and doing the stuff that needs doing – in peace! Leave the TV off, or at least turn it on when everything is done – it’s another noise nuisance and interrupts your mind and concentration.

Having risen earlier, and with everything ready for the day, you can all enjoy a decent breakfast... or you can all run around with a piece of toast, moaning that the clothes are not washed/ironed, where are the keys... and rush off, stressed, in to the traffic. That’ll set you up for the day!

If you want to re-learn how to live the day, rather than react to it all, be kind to yourself.

## Yoga – Who Knew?

So many years passed where I ‘thought’ I would benefit from Meditative practise, before actually doing something about it. Now, a similar thing has happened...with Yoga!

Yoga: Everything from the ‘wiki’ definition [here](#)

A definition as a lay-person is that Yoga is a series of taught/learned movements that promote joint mobility, bone density (ergo-strength), muscle tone/strength, digestive and endocrine benefits, improved posture, and crucially... wonderful peace of mind! A union between mind and body,

Yoga is available via group classes or via 1-1 sessions. When demonstrated by an approved instructor, preferably someone who has great knowledge of anatomy and physiology, individuals receive benefits almost immediately, both in body and mind.

*It was serendipity that visited, a chance meeting where all the circumstances came together for me to feel comfortable experimenting with Yoga*

Just as meditation brought a paradigm shift in my life for the better, Yoga has too, within just four weeks!

*So why did I leave it so long?*

Simple. I behaved like a victim!

I spend my life these days encouraging others to act empowered, and here I was thinking, *that’s it, my body is deteriorating and that is just the way it is*. I had even consoled myself and come to ‘accept’ that this was actually okay, because I had found such ‘peace’ in my mind, life is so much richer now than before and as such... I can accept almost anything. However, I’m always learning...

And now?

I am so incredibly grateful to my instructor, [Chrissie](#)! After just 4 sessions of 1-1, I am a new man!

Really, my joints have loosened, I stand and walk taller (which is helpful when you are diminutive!), my back is far less tight and painful and I genuinely feel better than I have for 30 years! Moreover, this is just the beginning!

One of the key reasons I failed to explore Yoga properly was because I chose to ignore those who had previously said my lack of joint flexibility was no barrier.

However, Yoga hasn't only improved my joints and posture, it also raises my heart-rate during sessions, is a great workout for muscle groups (and bones) thanks to the load-bearing aspects, helpful for arthritis and rheumatism, digestive system and more.

I guess my message is to at least explore, and try to achieve, your potential! Especially for those who think, as I did, what you 'believe' you wish for is unachievable – to you!

Many Yoga teachers out there will provide expert advice and instruction, so I will leave the experts to answer any questions you may have around the various types of Yoga and so on

What is clear though is that you are almost certainly 'capable', and the benefits have far outweighed my initial naivety and ignorance.

Yoga: Hard work...done slowly!

## **The Circus of Life!**

*The balancing act on the tightrope of life – and the myths of work/life balance*

It's a phrase we hear frequently – “work-life balance.” Does it really exist in the way most “experts” express?

Just as with many of my clients and friends, I too have found myself susceptible to fatigue at a level that is less than optimal. Sure, I can advise ways to consider change that can lead to greater balance and harmony. However, in today's world realism is called for.

Maybe we need to demonstrate a greater sense of self-awareness and, in doing so, we can be more dynamic and make choices based on our own fundamental ground rules. These can provide for a healthier, more aware existence, creating the potential to provide resilience to pressure when it's greater than the norm.

In practicing greater self-awareness, we also achieve a more intelligent view of life and its demands around us.

Consider the seasons and the separate demands these may place on our business and our emotional states. Winter may be a time of greater demand on your reserves because you suffer with the reduced

hours of Sun; and work becomes more demanding because you sell or produce something that ‘peaks’ in winter. Conversely, winter may be the time when work is slower – perhaps this creates additional pressures!

Have you ever really considered when you perform seasonally at your best, and less so?

We can achieve a flow and manage expectations of others and ourselves. At slack times we can learn something new; develop areas of our life and work that might otherwise be neglected. Maybe this is the time for recovery and some play.

When we run on auto, life can be one long challenge. Bring greater awareness and you get to choose where to distribute your emotional and physical ‘wealth’, or energy. I love the summer months and longer days of light more than winter, but I still manage to see positives in both.

Although I study and consciously develop personally and professionally most of the year, there are times where I can invest more time and energy. Instead of moping when business is quieter I look at other areas to provide a positive impact, such as finding more family time.

Can you plan for the feast and famine periods in your life, however they may manifest?

You can look at your life on a weekly, monthly, and yearly basis and schedule times to work hard, recharge, renew, play, and engage with your family/friends and significant other.

If you can achieve this, and for the most part, it really is in your hands, you may feel less guilty when you have to work longer or harder, but would rather be at home... or... you can commit to play, knowing this time available is predictable, at least to some degree.

## **Am I acceptable to me?**

After all, you are good enough! Do you really know that though? Have you granted yourself permission to really, truly believe in you?

Many people have something in them that is waiting to 'be discovered' and are sadly held back for any number of reasons.

Negative or prohibitive self-judgemental chat is easy to find in most of us. Sometimes you can consciously hear the throwaway remark passed many years ago, and it rings in your ears! However, it is just as powerful when we are unable to consciously 'hear' them!

My daily work is incredibly rewarding – and often so sad too! When a client discovers that for decades they have been behaving in a conditioned way because of some early years' experience, it is both sad – and exciting!

So sad that for so long we may 'behave' and react in ways less healthy to certain situations; aggressively, fearfully, sadly, or any number of other responses. We may avoid situations entirely leaving us missing living life to the full...

...and so exciting when an individual is 'released' – right before my eyes!

*An example:* A child is maybe 7 or 10 and at school he has been told to stand at the front of the class and tell everyone how their vacation was. Despite being shy and nervous, the child does as instructed and whilst recounting the holidays, two children sitting close and at the front start mocking 'knobbly knees'!

The event passes and unpleasant and disturbing though it was, the memory is 'filed' in the sub-conscious as a 'risk of harm' or unpleasant event, sometimes incomplete and hidden away.

Except whilst the memory may lay apparently dormant, it manifests some 25 years later when the adult is asked to 'present' at the works exhibition. And it doesn't just happen the once!

The more successful the employee gets, the more presentations are required, and each time the individual gets sweaty and anxious, losing sleep and arguing with loved ones.

*Life becomes almost intolerable!*

All this from one dismissed yet significant moment 25 years earlier!

Uncovering the past can be painful; it can also release these hidden moments that lead you to respond helpfully with errors of thinking and responding.

Do you get angry when asked to see the boss? Perhaps your subconscious sees a significant person from the past, and is incorrectly leading you to respond as was appropriate then? It's just possible the boss wants a view, to give some praise or something less negative.

If you have troublesome thoughts that appear unexplained, talk it through with someone trained to listen, and let them guide you through your potential to 'letting go'.



## **Lonely Thoughts!**

I recall being about 14 years old. I was at school and whilst moving from one lesson to the next recall thinking,

*“No-one else thinks like me, my thoughts are so intense”*

Of course, I was mistaken, but in that moment... and for some considerable time after, I believed I was the only one in the world who felt this way;

*It felt really deep and lonely!*

Episodes like this appear through later life too.

When we start a new job, or go to Uni... *how lonely is that?*

When we become a parent... no one said it would be so unique, *it can feel so lonely!*

When *we lose our partner* through break-up, divorce, or death

When we become ill...

*There are a couple of themes recurring!* Both are brought about by a lack of knowledge – and a lack of awareness.

We get fearful and anxious when we are unsure of the future, wondering what will happen next or worrying what the medium-distant future holds.

Reminds me of emotional and mental health... but that has the added complication of social stigma and the oft ignorance of others.

When we fail to understand – we get anxious and fearful, and this can lead to anger.

None of these emotions lends themselves to sufferers to get help for a psychological condition in the way they would a ‘bug’ or physical injury. Yet, many do gather the courage to explore and find knowledge to help them face their fears, *and these inquisitive individuals get well sooner...and build resilience for the future.*

These days, I see so many others feeling and thinking in this way – with the resultant emotional and mental health implications.

Remember how each time you hear ‘that’ song being played... it transports you back to a time and place, *in an instant*? That is just one example of your cognitive responses to an experience. *It is the same for a negative, hurtful, or traumatic moment or event.*

We make so many presumptions; oh, this is just the way it is, or, no one is going to be bothered with my busy worrisome mind, and... *It’s just me!*

*We get to choose!*

So often through life that thing sitting on our shoulder; that worrisome thought remains niggling away, day and night – unless ‘something’ happens to galvanise us into action, to learn about, to do something about it.

*...or nothing changes.*

Are we victims to these lonely and individualised thoughts leading to emotions of fear, anxiety and often anger?

*Yes, but only for as long as we so choose.*

*“It is a failure in me”*

No, it is an error of thinking over which you need to consider gaining awareness of... if you are to live life with any peace at all.

*Feelings are not facts!*

They are based on imagination, rumination, and perceptions from the past about a future that is yet to become the present, and it is the present that *does* represent the reality!

*Can you say how worrying about anything that requires no actual intervention at that moment will change the outcome?*

More than a few of these thoughts repetitively running through our mind create the ‘mind-chatter’, or ‘monkey-mind’. For many, there will come a time where they will hear the mind scream... *“Where is the peace, I just need some peace of mind!”*

When we are dehydrated, we get a drink. When we get tired, we (might) rest. *When we get repetitive unhelpful thoughts, we worry!*

Can you learn to acknowledge these thoughts and ask yourself *if* any action is required in that moment – then *‘let go’*?

Available to you, all it takes is a little guidance... and a little painless practise.

*No, you're not alone.*

However, with a little help you can reign in at least some of the 60-80 thousand thoughts we have each day, and increase your awareness for that which DOES require your attention – *you, and your life!*

## What the Dying Teach Us

It's ironic that one of the politically correct terms describing those who are deemed terminally ill is "*life limiting illness!*" These souls are the very people who, in many cases, actually demonstrate to us *how to live!*

Can *we* realistically live each day as if it were our last?

In my view it is somewhat unrealistic to live each day as if it was our last. If we are to do that, surely we are less likely to be able to differentiate the quality of each day

On the other hand, we do tend to sit and wait for our 'nirvana'!

We wait, expecting something to drop in our laps, as if we have some divine right for our illuminated path to fulfilment and inner peace.

This has been a curious observation of both my own life before now, and of those I see in my private practice.

### *Victims and choices*

Is it necessary to remind ourselves that we get what we create?

We get to choose whether to create the awareness – and 'notice' our emotions, our 'selves' and our environments!

We get to choose how we interact with others in our relationships at home, at play and at work.

We get to choose how we stand and sit; how we present our physical self to ourselves and others – *and the emotional state that comes from that chosen posture.*

Sit slumped – and feel less energised

Stand slouched – and feel small

Have facial expressions without a smile – be less than joyful

*We get to choose*, but only in awareness

Are you going to wait for 'something', or will you choose to live your life 'now'?

## **“Go Compare” – Really?**

I apologise in advance to our UK based TV advert watchers... (*Do you now hear a certain operatic man ringing in your mind?*)

However, with little doubt it IS wise to compare providers of services and products in these tough economic times, *but is this also true of your place in this world?*

At some stage in your life, and for many it is most of the time, we compare what we had, what we have and what we want, based on...

*On what?*

If you really listen to your inner dialogue, you might recognise the statement we so often make to ourselves, they might go something like this...

“I can’t wait to get my next promotion or pay rise... or job – then life will be better”

“Wow, just look at *that* car... You’ll see when I’ve got one of them”

“When I get a bigger house, it’ll be okay”

“I wish I had...”

Now see if you can recall times, *even just a single moment*, when you achieved a desire!

How did that ‘feel’?

Did you feel elated? Did you feel amazing? *I hope so!*

*Did you then feel everything would be great... forever?*

It is a fact that we are unable to hold these wonderful moments of joy and perceived fulfilment. However, that is not to say we cannot enjoy them while they are with us, or remind ourselves of them.

We most often base our happiness on things outside of ourselves!

However, can you find anyone; do you truly *know* anyone who is genuinely and completely fulfilled and content because of what they had ‘gained’ outside of themselves?

I recall eventually *coming home to myself* in recognising the futility of my life-long search for happiness being achieved because of something I got. Each car, house, job, promotion, and success brought only temporary satisfaction!

I spent my entire life wanting, comparing, and never really fulfilling that desire

When I became more grateful for the gift of life; when I could 'see' the positives out of all my experiences; when I trusted in my own self, my value and my place in this world... that is when the comparing and wanting diminished.

Here's the thing! Once I let go, life became clearer. The things I thought I wanted in order to achieve happiness simply arrived, or they mattered considerably less!

It was never about the gains we can make for our ego; comparing with our neighbours, friends, colleagues and relatives. Our 'value' isn't to be found in the size of our car or house. The amount of money we can access gives us choices... but this is outside of happiness or fulfilment.

Do you see complete joy in a lottery winner two years after they have won the lottery?

No, they have spent it all; now they may have a fractured marital relationship and their 'friends' all resent them.

Do you see the world's richest people jumping up and down with constant unremitting joy? No, they do enjoy the alternatives and worry less (perhaps) about money, but they mostly continue to work hard.

If you could ask each and every one of the rich and famous, and if they are honest, they will share that they are still searching for... something.

*\*Panto voices\* ...It's inside you!*

If you want to learn why; if you want to learn how to 'know' ...this is available.

Are you willing to move away from "go compare", stop wanting and find *your* inner peace?

## **How to Survive Christmas, without Unpacking the Wrong Emotions**

Christmas is a time for festive fun and family dinners – being more mindful will help avoid roasting the emotions – as well as the turkey.

In preparing for all the other things we feel is necessary for our holiday celebrations; spending a little time coming home to ourselves, examining (kindly) our true feelings, can lead to healthier emotions round the festive tree.

Recent research shows that 25 per cent of people find the Christmas dinner experience as stressful as their wedding day!

And to avoid frazzling during the frenzied festive period, they need to put as much effort into preparing themselves mindfully (mentally) as they do decorating their house, buying the presents, stocking up on food and putting the final bits of tinsel on the tree.

When the Family fails to get themselves in the right frame of mind for Christmas, they may cook up a recipe for disharmony and an emotionally fraught few days.

In theory, Christmas should be a time to relax and enjoy the company of loved ones without having to worry about the stresses of work, but too often the furious pace of the build-up and the holiday period itself can leave many with lower tolerance; fatigued and frustrated.

So rather than joining the sprouts in boiling over, use these tips to have a cool Yule:

Only spend what is truly affordable – avoiding a massive credit card bill, with its high interest rates to pay off for the next few months.

Buy gifts with true intent and forethought.

Give without expecting anything in return – in giving without expectations it is possible to give with true intent, and this reduces emotive negative responses to our expectations.

There is real and sincere pleasure in simply giving.

If it didn't work last year – does it make sense to want to do the same this Christmas?

Be prepared – buy things in advance – reduce any last-minute rushes.

But only buy what's really need – the shops will all be open again within 24 hours.

Do what really pleases, rather than what is expected (as long as it's reasonable and people know why).

Most importantly – be kind to yourself and be mindful... *and loved ones may just get the best Christmas ever.*

The reality of Christmas is too often far removed from the idyllic picture people build up in their minds ahead of December 25th.

A roaring fire, the delighted cries of joy from excited children unwrapping their presents, sitting round the table eating traditional Christmas fare before watching the best the TV schedules can offer us – and all is well with the world...

*“But is it really?”*

A burst of initial excitement, unrealised gift payback expectations, and the introduction of alcohol and excess food consumption in an enclosed environment with loved ones (and less than loved ones) – and things may start to get a little tense!

A dose of [mindfulness](#) – and realism – is necessary as we enter the seasonal preparations, to make sure everyone can keep smiling.

Is it realistic to expect to start and finish these annual events with peace, harmony and warmth – or even love – for one another, coupled with an ever-so-potent dash of gratitude for all we have? Maybe not, unless prepared emotionally and mentally.

But it is possible, when allowing a little more space in our lives building up to Christmas, and at other times too – in other words, when some mindfulness is practised and adopted.

In preparing for all the other things felt necessary for the holiday celebrations, spending a little time coming home to ourselves and examining (kindly) true feelings can lead to healthier emotions around the festive tree, and reduce the loss of emotional control that can result in the fall-outs.

When we slow down, even just a little, and focus on our presence (be here, now) and are kind to ourselves in mind and body then our loved ones will notice peace in ourselves and appreciate some higher tolerance levels.



## **Festive Season Sees Increase in Family Break-Up and Divorce**

What can be done, particularly at this festive time, when family pressures reach tipping point?

Mediation and Counselling, when used together, can provide solutions for a less bitter and more harmonious future for all those affected by the trauma of relationship and family break-up.

“When the family is in pain and suffers the emotional turbulence associated with family separation and divorce, it is possible to do more to offset at least some of the emotional trauma for those affected”

*There are few experiences more painful than divorce and family separation.*

In stress terms, relationship break-ups appear to share emotions likened to bereavement, which of course it is!

During the free-for-all of accusations, fights, threats, and fears of separation, along with any subsequent divorce, there are very few winners – and even fewer intact emotional survivors!

*Does there need to be a further cost to pay, by default?*

Mediation can help.

When the communications break down, there are very few healthy avenues left in which to move through and on from the separation. Helping to overcome this are good family lawyers who are pro-active in offering or referring to the services of a Mediator. As of April 2011, it is a requirement in the UK for divorcing couples to consider Mediation before completing court proceedings.

Mediation can help provide for a more harmonious settlement of child welfare and financial matters at a time where it may feel impossible to have such conversations without point scoring.

Mediation is not however an attempt for reconciliation, simply to provide a communications conduit, and an environment to facilitate impartial, non-judgmental negotiations – with the preferred outcome being ‘win-win’. ([Resolution Advice](#))

If a couple use a mediator and they come to facilitated meeting(s) with the right hear -, that is they have attended and agreed of their own free will (rather than be ordered) – their chances of working through the other hugely emotive and stressful matters, such as any children, finances, the homes and pets are greatly enhanced.

Mediation is one crucial avenue requiring careful consideration to protect yourself and your family from at least some of the emotional duress, whilst providing a route to better communications beyond the separation. Another important aspect that can bring sustainable emotional health benefits for the entire family is family and individual-centred counselling and guidance.

It is possible to manage your present and future emotional well-being (even if it feels a bit late for that by this time) and it may be too late for the marriage and partnership; but for on-going emotional mental health it can be highly beneficial.

It is of course preferable to avoid playing one another off against the kids, and it is helpful for all parties to be able to talk when there is a need to discuss the children's future.

Expressing your emotions and feelings in an impartial, non-judgmental environment, with a professional listener, can facilitate the means to bring closure to a number of existing elements with the relationship that has ended. This helpfully allows the parties to progress into future relationships with a healthy frame of mind, rather than risk bringing the past emotions to an unsuspecting new partner and relationship.

Change is clearly inevitable for all involved in separation and divorce, and with change comes a number of other potentially harmful emotions. How long these last can depend on whether they are provided opportunity to be aired in that non-judgmental and impartial environment, just as with that provided for the more practical elements in mediation and counselling.

With change comes fear and anxiety; often accompanying these emotions can be anger and resentment, and all of this overflows into outpourings of emotional behaviours and intolerance to that which you would ordinarily accommodate. Families involved in break-up have to get used to so many new ways – and each individual's subconscious would prefer routine, even if that involved discomfort!

Counselling and guidance can further invest in all parties current and future emotional well-being, potentially avoiding a negative emotional legacy.

In times of personal crisis, we appear to have a tendency to believe we are victims to the entire process. This may be the case for a moment in time and during an event, but this lack of personal empowerment can be overcome, and it is that which can determine how to continue through the rest of life.

A legacy of resentment for past, current and future relationships can be overcome; it is possible to take each moment of every communication and formulate responses based on the present, rather than the past.

We really can get to choose.

It was New Year's Eve 2012 and, like many, I found myself musing over the last twelve months.

I'm lucky that nowadays I have learned to celebrate with a brief reflection of that which deserves celebration, and just as briefly, I remind myself of that which I have learned from *less pleasant*, but no less important, even welcome, stuff of life.

*What about the title of this blog, what's that about?*

For those of us who choose to be with others at midnight tonight, singing and celebrating the event, how wonderful it is that for a brief moment we can forget our differences, our preconceived notions of one another and just share the joy, holding hands, dancing and singing in the New Year.

Wouldn't it be something if we could maintain even a small part of that momentary connectedness?

Yet, once we are back to the mindless, day-to-day business of life that many of us indulge in, we will once more become reactive to those we see or hear based on experiences and, once again, we will become disconnected.

And the alternative?

We can practice... and it does take practice, seeing each moment, each meeting with new eyes and ears. I try to be aware of any creeping emotions which are leaving me feeling less than and ask myself where in the past it may belong. I then recognise and acknowledge that emotion as something from that moment in time, and bring myself back to the present.

Here is an example – we often make a judgement about someone we meet. We like them instantly... or we dislike them, or are indifferent. Have you ever thought why that is? The next time you recognise in yourself a feeling or thought about someone you meet, try to think who they remind you of. It may be their face or general appearance, their mannerisms or voice, but see if you can find who it is they remind you of. *It could even be you!*

In bringing fresh perspective to experiences and people you meet you can remain connected to yourself and others, and this brings greater balance and harmony to your emotional well-being, and to your interactions with others.

Wishing you a connected and wonderfully mindful New Year.

## Happy New Year – Now What?

Welcome to the New Year everybody; can we make it meaningful – *and* a more mindful year?

The festivities are over, gifts given and received, food and drink consumed (*as if we will never see food or drink again!*), and family and friends met with. How was that for you?

...and now what?

Expectations met at Christmas and the New Year's Eve?

Do you now feel more fulfilled and content? I hope so, but we know we cannot hold onto that feeling, *yet we try*, and when we are unable we get depressed and low. We need a lift; we may feel 'empty', needing something to lift our spirits.

And so, come the third Monday in January, historically reported as the most depressing Monday of the year, with festivities ended, mid-winter for many and it feeling too long before the respite of Spring and Summer, we sit back and wish for something to make us feel alright again.

What are we waiting for?

Many of us have plenty to be happy and grateful for! Just look within yourselves rather than some external and time based reference point that is misleading us to believe that "when we have this or that... everything will be okay." (*It will not!*)

These satisfactory moments can only last as long as the Christmas festivities – and the joy of the new relationship, car, house, and holiday... all of them, when you reflect, bring only temporary fulfilment.

So what else is there to do?

Could try a dose of 'mindfulness'?

Gather your senses, in fact, use your five senses and start to bring yourself and your thoughts to the only place you can ever really be – *the here and now* – the present.

Take every opportunity to practise listening (not judging) to the sounds of life around you, the smells permeating your environment, taste in your mouth from fresh coffee or your favourite food, feel what is under your feet or what your hands are resting on and truly appreciate the texture. See, really see, what is around you

When was the last time you truly took in your environment?

When you try employing just a moment of ‘mindful’ appreciation using the senses, you cannot *be* anywhere else wishing for that something to make things feel better. You cannot keep falling back into the past and worries associated with that, and you cannot keep jumping forward, wondering what the future will look and feel like.

You will be that only place you truly can be – *present in this moment!*

We fight the impermanence of life, yet impermanence is inevitable.

From our sub-atomic world – our cells, to our galaxy and the cosmos – everything is in a state of flux.

What might it feel like to be more accepting of this than constantly seek that which is outside of us to bring us our brief moments of joy?

Enjoy and try to appreciate *each and every moment* – and life takes care of itself. You lose nothing but worries and concerns yet you gain greater peace and perspective and start to really live life how it is meant to be, in this and every moment.

Mindfulness is easy to learn and practise and is outside of religion. Thousands of years in existence, it is growing exponentially throughout the Western world, having been born in the East.

It is unnecessary to become a Buddhist Monk – the teachings and ways of life are there for us all, without expectation or any payback required.

For more on ‘mindful’ practise in your everyday life, do subscribe to my blogs, or call/write to me.

## **As the Kids Arrive, the Sleep Leaves...**

I'm unsure at what point this was ever part of the plan! Yes, of course I wanted a family, and yes, I knew it would be tough... how tough though when sleep deprivation occurs for us – and our children.

We do get lulled into thinking that once our baby passed through the milk demolishing, nappy destroying and sleep-hating stage; surely, the worst is over...isn't it?

Let's review that early stage of complete self-denial (for pleasure) and self-sacrifice. Many of the thoughts are likely to be relevant later on too!

Of course, so many dynamics mean there really is no one-size-fits-all solution. Considering factors such as; age of parents, difficulty of pregnancy, first child, single-parent situation, interference from other well-meaning family and friends, diet, work-life balance, finances, general health of parents, post-partum depression... it seems the list is endless, and yet we manage.

However, could it be easier?

Focusing here on the sleep aspect as a stand-alone, and critical to wellbeing of the emotions and the body, well yes, I believe we can at least consider some options. One of the problems I see in my professional capacity is that we do have a tendency to wait until something becomes an issue before tackling it. *I've been no different!*

The problem however with tackling sleep issues is when they become established, and all sense of proportion and perspective may be lost in that stage of gross fatigue. Where possible, my belief is that planning contingencies *before the event* can provide for interventions that we can make sense of and implement.

Prepare for battle, or at least the demands!

At the earliest possible time, preferably during the pregnancy, adopt the best possible healthy diet you can. Ditto for your general physical health and fitness.

Treat your bodies to the best you can afford and give yourself time for reflection, balance and physical harmony.

Be 'positively selfish', that is, do what you want for you, and that doesn't cause harm to others.

Do try to clear any emotional baggage that may otherwise surface during the sleep deprivation periods.

When we prepare ourselves for the demands – that if we think about it we know *are* likely to challenge us, we give ourselves greater opportunity to be less resentful and more tolerant to the rigours parenting can provide.

*I do recognise first-hand what a privilege and joy parenting is by the way, but this is about the reality of some of the associated challenges!*

Another crucial stage of the planning for this utopian vision (!) is for the parents to ensure they communicate with each other exceptionally well. That is, considerate and mindful to the needs of each other – as well as ourselves.

The resentment is all too frequent! Perhaps because one parent has been on the night watch for baby whilst the other sleeps, even if it is because the other has to go *out* to work.

There is no escape, you will both be required to accommodate each other's needs if you are to create and maintain some form of harmony during sleep loss periods.

I think most people understand that babies, and older children, will have periods of growing up where sleep will become the enemy – and some of the reasons for this are:

*Hungry, teething, not tired, bored, lonely, fretful, unwell, bodily changes, bad dreams, anxiety...to name a few!*

So what's to do?

Some classic tips are...

Try to monitor feed times, and what is being eaten. Some foods will create less than ideal digestion or absorption for the little ones!

Introduce routine; as much as is practicable, try to have your cherished ones go to bed/sleep and wake-up within + or – 20 minutes.

Quieten the household down at least 1-2 hours before bedtimes. It may be somewhat unrealistic to expect little ones, whose senses are being bombarded with the flurry of dinner-time preparations, others coming in from their work, TV and games – to then be immediately withdrawn from all that stimuli and placed in the calm, quiet nursery or bedroom!

*I can recall now the shock in me when laying a son down in the cot... only for his eyes to become like saucers with the shock of it all!*

Parents – sleep when you can! I'm amazed at how many become martyrs to the cause, feeling guilty at grabbing an hour here, or there, even in the middle of the day.

This is not a time to be socially mindful – this is self-preservation time!



## **Campaign to Raise Depression Awareness & Research Funds – Challenging ‘Blue Monday’!**

Bob Brotchie and Anglia Counselling are proud to be supporting the fundraising and awareness campaigns being launched annually by the Mental Health Research UK Charity.

Let’s brighten up the third Monday in January – whilst raising awareness and reducing stigma – and raise vital research funds in the process.

Blue Monday No More!

*Organisations and productivity are adversely affected when their individuals are absent from the workplace, or present, but suffering low mood or depression. January presents a particularly marked low point for many. Can this be challenged and reduced in some way?*

“Yet despite our increasingly lengthy winters, most people tend to wear dark clothes, *especially to work*”

The first charity of its kind, [MHRUK](#), believes so. ‘Blue Monday’ is the third Monday in January. It is a short, dark day, and indeed has become known colloquially as ‘the most depressing day of the year’.

Blue Monday comes after the Christmas festivities have ended, it is a long time until Spring, and typically people feel rather low on what is often a cold, grey day. Yet despite our increasingly lengthy winters, most people tend to wear dark clothes, especially to work.

MHRUK hopes to make a big visual impact on Blue Monday each year, starting in 2013, by injecting some unexpected colour and joy. Instead of Blue Monday, it will become [Blooming Monday](#).

The concept is simple; MHRUK is asking everyone to wear their brightest clothes that day. Even if workplaces usually require sombre attire, the charity hope that on this one day a year employees will be encouraged to brighten up, whilst raising awareness and helping others to understand they are indeed not alone when feeling low.

Mental Health Research UK (MHRUK) invite organisations, be it a company/school/University/law firm or other, to get on board with this fun new charity campaign. It is hoped that those who do get on board will also publicise the campaign and encourage employees/students/members to take part on Blooming Mondays.

The charity hopes that this well-being campaign to raise awareness of depression and seasonal affective disorder (SAD) will help to break down the continuing stigma attached to mental illness, as well as enabling participants to have fun, which will be good for their mental well-being.

**The Charity:**

MHRUK is the first charity in the UK dedicated to funding research into the causes of mental illness in order to develop much more effective treatments that really work and do not cause debilitating side-effects. If participants in Blooming Monday wish, then it would be wonderful if they would donate £2 on the day to MHRUK.

We would happily receive donations for the total amount raised; cheques should be made out to Mental Health Research UK.

Donation cheques should be sent to our Treasurer

Mr. David Pugh at the following address:

Robertson Pugh & Co

3 Leicester Road

Oadby

Leicester

LE2 5BD

All donations will be very much appreciated, and the charity hopes to help to make great inroads in the future into the causes of mental illness so that much better treatments can be developed to reduce the misery resulting from it.

If you would like to keep up to date with MHRUK and its efforts to improve the lives of those suffering from mental illness in the long-term, all that is necessary is to send an email to [trustees\(at\)mentalhealthresearchuk.org.uk](mailto:trustees(at)mentalhealthresearchuk.org.uk), which has approximately three newsletters per year.

For further information, please visit MHRUK's website at <http://www.mhruk.org>

## **The Many Facets of Drug Rehabilitation (Guest blog)**

*I welcome the opportunity to offer you this informational (guest) piece from our friends in the US. Despite a few cultural differences, there are many points referred to that are equally relevant the world over.*

Drug rehabilitation entails medical or psychotherapeutic intervention following drug dependency. Typically, once someone reaches a low point with alcohol, prescription drugs, or street drugs, they require the help of drug counselors, doctors and/or interventionists to lift them out of a self-created hole.

The idea behind drug rehabilitation is twofold – to give the previous drug dependent inpatient his or her life back by getting that particular person clean and, secondly, to promote the future psychological, occupation, spiritual, and emotional freedom for a repentant ex-user. These goals are accomplished via an array of treatment options. If someone you know has a related problem, here's what you should know about all of this.

### **Counseling**

Drug abuse counselors help addicted individuals kick the habit and find healthier ways to live in the process. As drug dependency can be both physiological and psychological in nature, drug abuse counselors attack addiction with a host of weapons. Patients are encouraged to form new friendships at the treatment facility and forgo association with old friends who are still struggling with addiction

The Twelve Step Program, as an example, forces previous alcoholics to not only cease the use of alcohol and various other drugs but also alter the habits and lifestyles that lead to the addiction in the first place. The Twelve Step Program and Narcotics Anonymous inform inpatients that addiction is an ongoing process for which vigilance is required to avoid rekindling the fires and tribulations of addiction

### **Beyond Inpatient Care**

Some drug treatment facilities promote the following alternatives to inpatient care: sober houses; regional support groups; addiction consultation; medical treatments; and, mental health advisement

It's important to note, however, that research from the seventies onwards demonstrates that addressing the particular patient's needs is favorable to doggedly applying one method to arrest addiction in all patients. In other words, patients have dissimilar preferences and needs that

should be creatively addressed in therapy and drug rehabilitation. Recently, the National Institute of Drug Abuse advocated for the use of behavioral therapy and medical intervention (where appropriate) to curb addiction. (1)

### **One Size Fits All?**

Although individuals should be seen as individuals whilst tailoring treatment options, famed psychologist, Carl Rogers, noted some commonalities that should be present in all treatment: empathy, genuineness, and unqualifiedly positive regard for the patient's needs. By taking this route, drug counselors treat the patient's specific addiction and help the patient get in touch with underlying problems afflicting the psyche and wellbeing of the individual.

This type of therapy effectively couples the psychodynamic approach and client-centered approach into a potent weapon against addiction and the patient's underlying personal demons. The truth is that therapy that is client-centered and coupled with cognitive-behavioral therapy, which has its roots in both behaviorism and cognitive psychology, demonstrates lower levels of relapse than most other treatment options for addiction

### **Getting Clean**

Drug rehabilitation must take into account the client's individual needs. Modern research has shown that a combination of therapy options, notably medical and therapeutic intervention, provides the best results and lowest rates of relapse back into addiction

Addiction is a lifelong struggle and a journey that requires constant commitment and vigilance

*Works Consulted:* <http://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/treatment-approaches-drug-addiction>

Rachel Vickers writes about addiction, counseling and more at <http://gulfcoastdrugrehab.com>

## **After Rehab: Why You Still Need Substance Abuse Counselling**

*(Guest post)*

Making the decision to go into rehab is a huge one, and you should be commended for it. You've taken the first step to starting fresh and new. Still though, you must continue to attend substance abuse counselling afterward for the following reasons

### **A New World**

When you are in rehab, the purpose is to help you recover from whatever addiction you had. An environment is set up that is conducive to such a purpose, but when you enter back out into the real world, you do not have the same structure in place. Substance abuse counselling will help you understand how to put what you learned in rehab into practice at work, at home and in other "real world" situations.

### **Support Network**

Furthermore, you cannot feel as though you are alone when you enter back out into the world. If you do feel immense amounts of solitude, it might be easy to slip back into your old patterns. Family members and friends might still need some time to forgive you for any wrongdoings you've committed in the past. As a result, of all of these mixed emotions, it's important to have a steady support system in place to help you out. When you attend these meetings, you'll be in a safe environment where you can discuss what you're going through.

### **Making a Mistake**

Now, once you are out of rehab, the hope is that you will never pick up that drug again. Sometimes, even the most strong willed of people make a mistake. In the event that this occurs, you need to speak with a substance abuse counsellor as soon as possible. Letting the problem linger only opens up the door to more issues with substance abuse. When you make the decision to talk to someone right away, you will work on figuring out why the incident happened, what made you get out of control and how the problem can be avoided again in the future to maximize your health and strength.

### **Hearing and Sharing**

Substance abuse counselling could be individual, but you might also be part of a group. People can be a little frightened by this situation at first, but, ultimately, it can really be an excellent experience. It's a totally different situation when you hear a success story told from the mouth of someone who has lived through substance abuse.

You can feel incredibly inspired to follow that person's example and go on to be very happy and successful. Additionally, you'll also have the opportunity to share your story. When you share these tales of both pain and triumph, you never know who you are affecting and inspiring to lead a better, substance abuse free life.

Substance abuse counselling after you have left rehab is a really important part of the recovery process. No longer need you feel as though no support network exists; you can call up your counsellor to schedule an appointment when you need to. Going to these meetings is a part of following the rehab all the way through.

Javier Fitzgerald writes about counseling, addiction and education.

## **Managing depression when the cure is elusive**

*There are a great many sources of information and opinion around how we might reduce the effects of depression when it visits. I wanted to share some thoughts that reflect my own personal experiences of suffering the effects as an individual – and as a mental health professional guiding others.*

Depression can be acute; that is, visiting seemingly out of nowhere (although with reflection and investigation it usually becomes apparent why and how), Depression can also be defined ‘chronic’ and last more than 6 months.

The levels of symptoms experienced vary from person-to-person, and the condition and its circumstances at any given time – and where that individual has come from.

However, although at least *one in four* of us will suffer the effects of depression at some stage in our lives, I strongly suspect that these reported figures are grossly conservative, coming just from those who have ‘reported’ the illness, the illness being something that is only now becoming better understood and diagnosed.

The question now is, what will society and its individuals do to stave off the huge growth forecast of this disabling condition?

### **Is a label helpful?**

Once ‘diagnosed’, we can sometimes inadvertently succumb to beliefs held around how we might now behave. Depression can be incorrectly diagnosed, perhaps simply because it is accompanied by another illness such as anxiety. Worse still, the treatment options may be advised unhelpfully due to the referrers ignorance of the sufferer’s belief system, and in which way this individual enjoys their communications.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is one of perhaps a hundred different available models of ‘talking therapies’, but as with any drug or therapeutic intervention, each is as individual as the sufferer.

When people have a label attached, we appear to trust that label and sadly start to conform to that label and its associated expectations.

### **Is this useful?**

Consciousness – we can choose to be aware

When we become so emotionally and psychologically unwell that action *has* to be taken, we finally start to become consciously aware of our frailties. The reality is that if we were to become aware of our vulnerability to the traumas and stresses of life in advance of becoming unwell, we would more often avoid the debilitating illness to the extent that so many of us face.

### **Victims?**

We operate to the expectations and pressures of society and our peers. We do this mindlessly at times, often believing we actually have no choice. *Is this really the case?*

Make alternative choices, and practise...

Fortunately, as human organisms we have tremendous resilience available to us. Yes, we have vulnerabilities but many of these are due to choices we make in how we choose to react to everyday needs not being met, to situations that actually only remind us of experiences – rather than actually reacting as we did in the past.

*Gratitude, positivity, and mindfulness:*

An amazing trinity for overcoming, and even reducing incidence of depression. These topics each deserve more space than I will afford here so just a quick resume...

Gratitude, positivity and mindfulness are all challenging during a depressive episode – but can provide significant relief. Practise outside of depression and you can reduce the episodes, even remove them, whilst providing management strategies that are available to you throughout your life.

*Gratitude:* It is really hard to maintain a depressive state of mind when you can recall and remind yourself at the times you ironically feel least like doing so, of that which you can be grateful for.

Your physical self. Your Heart – that it beats without you thinking, feels full when happy, and alerts you when less than.

Your Lungs – sustaining life with each breath whether awake or asleep, at rest or exerting.

Your Mind – for having the intelligence to make decisions, to think, to consider and create.

Your Family, any legacy you leave... and so much more!

*Positivity:* Practise finding a positive out of events. If you look, really look, and reflect you will often find a positive out of a seemingly negative event. Moreover, if you reflect on past events, did they ever have a decent outcome? You might be pleasantly surprised by the answer!



*Mindfulness*: I've begun to touch on this crucial and life-changing practise throughout this article, and there are many more examples on my website.

Look inside yourself for your fulfilment.

What does that mean?

Well, we spend so much time following and reacting to what has been in our lives, and what we believe is expected. We also spend a huge amount of time dissatisfied and seeking something that means we can hear ourselves say “when I have that, when I have this, it will be okay!”

Of course, it never is the case, is it? How often have you wonderfully achieved something only to fail to celebrate that achievement, and worse, to immediately seek the next thing?

The new car, a new job, a new house... none of these satisfy our need to fill our ‘want’, that desire for that *something* will make everything okay. *And this is because all that we need is within us.*

If you were to truly believe that you were actually okay; if you could become less conditioned and less reactive today, and able to stop responding inappropriately to your distressing situation *today*; you know, the ones that remind your subconscious of a negative experience – you might be more accepting of the changes in life and circumstance – *the impermanence of life.*

*Learn to disclose*

Depression – *to depress one's thoughts!* Repression is similar and demonstrates that we have failed to address those times when we were hurt and traumatised. It may have been a one off comment, or a sustained unhealthy exposure to a hurtful stimulus, but it is never too late to disclose and address with someone who can really, really listen and help you appropriately.

These musings of mine are simply that. They come from that which I have learned and which I have put into practice – and as a result, I have found my life and it is wonderful!

My desires for *that something* have dissipated, and yes, I do still have aspirations for a nice car, a bigger house (at times), but these are now fleeting – and of far less importance. My happiness is now independent of these things.

## **Finding Alignment in Your Relationships**

*(Guest blog)*

Building and maintaining a healthy relationship is always an on-going work in progress. In our world of social networking it can become even more challenging not to fall into the trap of online illusion and fantasy.

Online access and instant gratification have become the new norm and although it may have its pros, it also has its cons, especially when it comes to creating and maintaining healthy relationships. In this world of instant change, many relationships and marriages have fallen to the way side only to find the grass was not as green on the other side as they had first imagined.

So what can we do to ensure that we find alignment and fulfilment in our relationships? How do we compete with the rampant online seduction and prevent distrust and jealousy from destroying not only our own relationships, but our mental health?

### **Influence**

First, we must have a complete understanding and acceptance of the fact that we cannot control another's actions, thoughts, behaviors or otherwise. We only have dominion over ourselves, and even that is a skill developed through consistent effort.

However, while we cannot control another human being (nor should we want to) we can greatly influence how another thinks, feels and responds to our own thoughts and actions. For example, if you were to approach your employer and call him or her a heartless dictator, there is a large possibility that you may not have a job by the day's end. Now, had you made a better choice you would likely still have your job at the end of the day. Let's take it one step further; had you approached your employer and offered to work extra hours when needed or shown some other form of enthusiasm toward your work, you may have even inspired him or her to give you a promotion.

So although we do not have ultimate control over others, what we say and do carries an enormous amount of influence

### **Human needs**

According to one of the world's most sought after speakers and life coaches, Tony Robbins, there are six basic human needs that need to be met:

Love/Connection

Significance

Variety

Certainty

Growth

Contribution

We each rank these needs differently in order of priority and two of them we value above the others.

For some love/connection and certainty may be valued the most and for another significance and growth may be at the top of the list.

So where does this connect to influence?

Pay attention to your partner and identify what human needs they seem to value most. Do they require a lot of attention and if so, do you give it? (Love/connection)

Do they remind you of their accomplishments often or seem to seek some sort of recognition and if so, do you give it to them? (Significance)

Do they seem their happiest when all of the bills are paid and there's extra money in the bank and if so, how well do you contribute to financial security? Or if not financially, how sure do you make your partner feel that no matter what, you are there for them?

Do you threaten to leave when things get rough? (Certainty) Is your relationship growing or is it the same as it was when you first met?

Do you still argue over the same things or are you learning to listen and compromise? (Growth)

These are all things that should be evaluated

### **Transform your relationships**

Once you've identified your partners most valued human needs, and where you stand in relation to those needs, spend the next several weeks doing whatever you can to fulfil them.

But do not stop there; include the other four needs as well. Bring that scale up to a 10 across the board. Do this without expectation of return for 60 to 90 days. After that time, re-evaluate your relationship. Has it transformed? My guess is yes, completely

If your first thought upon reading this is "what about my needs?" then you're going to have a difficult time making any of your relationships work for you and you may have some self-work

to do before attempting to create and maintain a healthy relationship with anyone else. By no means am I suggesting that relationships are all give and no take or that you should deprive yourself of your own needs and only give to the needs of another. Not at all. What I am suggesting is that if you give loving energy to the human needs of another, in most circumstances they will return that effort and as a result, a healthy and happy relationship will emerge

Of course, there will always be challenges in every relationship. As I stated in the beginning, relationships are an ongoing work in progress. The difference is that now there is a mutual willingness to contribute to the other's needs, and from that a strong, healthy foundation can be built and maintained

This method can be applied to any relationship, not only with a partner or spouse. Identifying and giving loving energy to the needs of another will almost always transform or greatly improve any relationship. It could be your relationship with your siblings, parents, boss, best friend, banker... you name it

Now, as with everything there are exceptions. Indeed, there will be those few who do not return the effort and if that is your case, you may need to make a hard decision. Is this really the type of relationship that you want? No relationship can be healthy if only one person is committed or contributing

### **Alignment**

Use your life energy to create positive influence first in your own life, and then in the lives of others. You will then be in alignment with your relationships, which will express themselves fully and beautifully. Don't take my word for it, take the challenge

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## **5 Uncommon Symptoms of Depression**

*(Guest blog)*

*It's often useful to learn other professional care-givers views about subjects within mental and emotional health and well-being. This article is kindly provided by nurse – and writer, Jane Tremont, from the US*

People experiencing depression aren't always sad and sitting alone in a corner. In some cases, the symptoms are not as apparent as one would think. People who are depressed can sometimes mask their inner feelings when they are in public.

Many achieve a level of energy and feeling of joy when they are around family and friends or when they participate in social activities. In effect, family members and friends should be aware of these uncommon indicators and warning signs in order to seek expert help as soon as possible if necessary.

### **Low Energy**

People who suffer from depression tend to deplete their energy and feel fatigued quickly, despite getting enough rest. Furthermore, people who are depressed are mostly unable to fall asleep easily or sleep long hours, because their minds cannot rest. These symptoms are sometimes mistaken as natural for people who lead busy and stressful lifestyles when actually it could be clear indicators of depression.

### **Anger**

Anger can be set off by even the simplest things when someone is depressed. People who suffer this mental condition are not capable of handling things they dislike, due to the naturally sad and stressed lifestyle they live. Whereas most people can simply disregard a tedious situation, depressed people are more likely to overreach and unleash their frustrations that have been bottled up for so long.

### **Thinking About Death**

It is a common perception that people who are depressed are suicidal. While this may sometimes be a fact, it isn't the rule of thumb. While the idea of being better off dead may sometimes slip the minds of people who aren't depressed, most people who are depressed think of such ideas frequently. This does not necessarily mean they are capable of committing suicide. Unfortunately, this pattern often keeps depressed people from seeking medical advice and treatment.

## **Self Injury**

Only recently, the buzzword “emo” was caught in the social spotlight. These people (emos) were regarded as emotional, suicidal, and likely to injure themselves whenever they were depressed or bearing a heavy problem.

Depressed people often injure themselves, as it gives them a sense of pleasure and relief. A common method of self-inflicted pain is cutting one’s self with a razor blade, pulling one’s hair out or even breaking one’s own skin with one’s fingernails

If you notice that someone close to you exhibits scarring or other clues to self-injury, it would be worth it to look into it further. Ask them about it, or seek guidance from someone knowledgeable about the situation, such as a doctor.

## **Absent-Mindedness & Isolation**

People who are depressed will often miss business meetings, scheduled appointments, or work days. In addition, these people are often late or absent during social gatherings like parties and reunions

Some depressed people want to be alone rather than socialize with other people. This isn’t necessarily a huge cause for alarm – introversion is a normal part of society, but there is such a thing as being too withdrawn – just as there’s such a thing as being too extroverted. Either can be a huge warning sign that someone is hurting

By identifying these uncommon symptoms of depression, you will more likely be able to detect if a loved one is suffering from the condition. This also enables you to help them as early as possible.

It can be hard to broach the subject, but it will be worth it in the end and only show that you love them.

Jane Tremont is a nurse who writes about mental health, health promotion, education and more. Her most recent work focuses on the [\*Top Nursing Programs\*](#) in the US

## **What's it like seeing a Counsellor?**

Do you think you will consider a counsellor *only as a last resort*? *Why would that be?*

Perhaps a sense of failure?

Many people feel that to see a counsellor is to admit a failure in some way. Many wait, trying to work out how to overcome the matters hurting them.

It's a good thing at times, being inquisitive and testing for effect – but left too long without learning kind new ways and mechanisms to softly grow self-awareness and compassion for oneself, and we can reach an end point to our amazing resilience against adversity.

Might you consider being open to exploring your mind and success instead?

You can choose to meet a counsellor to find a faster, more comfortable and sustainable way to live your life – and not because you need *telling*; you're going to aspire to learn from someone who has a passion for this area of living – and quite likely someone who has walked the fires of life too!

They want to share lessons learned with you out of compassion, rather than ego!

## **Couples & Relationships**

If you are a couple experiencing challenges, those needs of a couple can often be found within the individuals! At assessment on the initial enquiry I might suggest, based on the information provided, whether it might be of greater value to be seen individually – or together at the beginning.

## **Fear of being judged by a therapist**

A therapist who accommodates the healthy needs of the client without judging them – and offers impartiality, helps the individual explore their potential, offers a dynamic and accepting way and is more useful than one who attempts to make the client fit his or her beliefs or education.

## **Communications**

I for one can express a statement, opinion or view in exactly *the same way to two different people* yet they are likely to be interpreted differently. My role is to understand this in my communications, so that what is said – is what is understood. Until trust has been established, individuals may well wonder if they are going to be admonished in some way!

## **Coaching**

Your counsellor willingly demonstrates how they are in your corner and raises your awareness of the successes in you, especially in how you seek to make the most of your life – and are willing to accept help, finding more harmony and balance, less emotional turbulence – and that *this* journey is anything other than as a result of failure.

### **In short...**

You will ideally seek a skilled, impartial professional, they will be non-judgemental, and listen. They will guide you when *you* ask – and can help you explore where you have been, and where you want to be now, at peace with yourself – and others.

The most successful individuals seek the views, opinions and experience of others; they were anything but failures before they learned to grow and accept knowledge from outside of themselves.

*So, are you any less deserving?*



## **The rise of divorce – and the single parent family in the UK**

*Mental Health: Suffolk based psychotherapist, Bob Brotchie from Anglia Counselling explores the reported rising tide of single parents – and discovered some surprising statistics.*

*“In the U.K in 2012, there were a recorded two million single parents, up four hundred thousand from 1996.”*

Reviewing some of the demographics for couples and individuals who presented for relationship advice, and for their individual emotional and mental health conditions; research shows that in the U.K, in 2012 there were a recorded two million single parents, up four hundred thousand from 1996. [1]

Recorded figures below represent combined ages at divorce for husband and wife (2011) England and Wales [2]

Combined | Divorces

Ages

30-34 18,020

35-39 20,285

40-44 22,370

45-49 19,307

50-59 18,260

(Excluded, are ages ranges above and below these as they are considerably smaller than in this group)

What’s driving and sustaining this increase?

Of interest may be the reasons the combined age ranges of both men and women who divorce fall between ages thirty and sixty years. What is the cause in this effect?

Opinions suggest aspects of society and marriage that will be unsurprising to many.

Financial pressures from debt, job loss, or over-expenditure

Stress at work... and then brought home

Communications failing in the relationship

Infidelity, with social media influences increasingly cited [3]

Negative cognitive responses and behaviours based on individual's life prior to relationship

Addictive behaviours. Physical/emotional abuse, gambling, alcohol and illicit drugs

### **Impact on children – and the chain**

It is well documented how children are emotionally affected long before a family separation or subsequent divorce takes place. This may then influence how they respond to their future parental responsibilities, as well as their relationships.

This chain, however, has the potential to be broken when talking therapies are accepted, such as counselling – and strategies for the daily thought processes to be more balanced are implemented.

### **Great expectations**

Life is very different today when considering the overall access to each other, to work and information access. Social media is also undoubtedly impacting on the days 'must-do' list, decreasing our personal awareness and those of relationships within the family.

### **Powerless to change**

Many individuals within a relationship suggest they are victims to circumstances. Earlier life experiences are known to influence current behaviours – but can be managed more healthily if addressed and considered.

From the dataset above, the largest group falls within the ages of 30-60 years of age. When asked, these individuals have often failed to access or be provided with the care required.

At initial client assessment, a significant seventy percent of individuals had never sought meaningful intervention by way of a talking therapy. Moreover, at exit interview 80% of the sample [4] from 2012 recorded significant improvement in their individual emotional and mental health, and significantly, those of their relationships thanks to greater awareness of self, of lifestyle – and of others.

### **Conclusion**

The growing trend analysis for couples divorcing, and the subsequent impact on themselves and the next generation is something that may require us to consider where the responsibility lies.

In accepting methods of therapy or guidance early on, this process can be relatively short in duration to help achieve meaningful strategies for a more sustainable loving family unit.

1- ONS – Office National Statistics <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/2012/index.html>

2 – ONS – <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/datasets-and-tables/index.html?pageSize=50&sortBy=none&sortDirection=none&newquery=divorce+rates&content-type=Reference+table&content-type=Dataset>

3 – <http://www.scienceofrelationships.com/home/2011/3/29/does-facebook-cause-divorce-and-infidelity.html>

4 – Based on data sourced from authors private practice [angliacounselling\(dot\)co\(dot\)uk](http://angliacounselling.co.uk)

## **Is all counselling the same?**

There are more than one hundred talking therapies available to help guide you through your emotional and mental health challenges, with so many, which one is right for you?

We're really not all the same!"

Clearly, I'm unable to cover all available options here... even if I knew them all! What we can do however is explore a short journey around some offerings, and considerations.

*"I am a Counsellor! There are many different styles and models of counselling"*

Hum, that's unhelpful!

*I am a counsellor who uses an eclectic mix of all that I have experienced and learned, and I use this knowledge and skill dynamically – to provide a unique experience for each client who has chosen to meet with me.*

I rarely 'just' listen! I do listen, and really, really listening is an art form in itself! Learning to leave judgement aside – and to remain impartial are just some of what creates a positive listening experience.

Being silent when necessary to allow for reflection and the 'self' to work through emotions may be relevant sometimes, and at others if pursued, it can be really awkward and any counsellor worth their salt will quickly observe if this is happening.

To the client I say,

*"You hold many of the answers"*

*"You are in command"*

*"You are beholding to no-one"*

I work to figure out quite quickly whether providing a comfortable, private and confidential environment is useful to the individual. If not, I can employ a more analytical and investigative approach utilising a psychotherapeutic model – as a psychotherapist, yet still I am a Counsellor!

If, after further assessment it becomes apparent that the individual has an emotional challenge that would benefit from an even greater level of intervention, then my learning of these clients who are comfortable with introspection, may benefit from Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)

It is worth knowing there are a number of variations with this model of therapy. One I am studying towards just now is *Mindfulness Integrated CBT*.

As with Psychotherapy, CBT is an option to consider, rather than an indicator that you are more unwell than someone else. These models are about finding the closest match for the collaboration – and the quickest resolution or management strategy that may provide for a durable and sustainable plan, rather than an emotional sticking plaster or quick – but short term ‘fix’

Of course there are some conditions that are more serious, these may well also be appropriate for models discussed here – always however, subject to appropriate assessment and evaluation.

Counsellors are ‘complementary’ to other professionals in healthcare. Your GP is more often than otherwise your first port of call to assure whether other conditions are contributing to your emotional well-being. If prescribed medication, please do ask any questions you may have, such as possible side effects, duration of prescription between reviews, etc.

Do also let your GP know if you have started seeing a counsellor. One challenge that has arisen in recent times is when, without formal assessment, a decision to have you placed on a waiting list for CBT is made.

This is often done without understanding a) whether you are appropriate – due to your personality and your acceptance of certain kinds of communications – and if you are content to look inwardly and b) whether your illness is receptive and appropriate for CBT.

It does occur during courses of self-funded private therapy that the collaboration is interrupted when CBT or other NHS intervention becomes available. This can be months into the efforts of both you and the therapist.

Unless you are seeing another provider for a separate condition, it is highly unwise to see two therapists at the same time. When your NHS appointment comes up, it is worth remembering you will need to start-over, and build another possibly shorter term relationship.

It may be that if you are advised to see a counsellor by your GP, you have identified, or may wish to research a counsellor to suit your needs. You might ask, rather than be placed on a waiting list, if your GP practice will fund a counsellor of *your* choice?

## Snarl or Smile?

I've spent many years behind the wheel of one vehicle or another, *maybe you have too?*

When I'm behind the wheel, less so when walking, I catch myself smiling at people and behaviours... or snarling... because I've made a snap (*mindless*) judgement about a person or behaviour.

*Why is this?*

When I think deeper about those moments, I come to realise that when I smile at something, an intellectual judgement at a conscious level is less apparent; I didn't appear to think and create much inner dialogue.

However, when I snarled, it was very clearly a result of a judgement; a conscious decision assembled in my mindless moment – and may sound (unpleasantly) something like this...

*“What an idiot – driving so fast”*

*“Look at the state of that”*

*“OMG” and “You D\*\*k”!*

Now, I consider myself a genuinely compassionate soul...so what goes wrong?

I think a clue is in the earlier paragraphs – *“Mindless”*

When I am driving, and like much of life this can happen (seemingly) it is without much conscious effort, yet clearly, I am thinking at some level or I would crash before the first hundred metres is reached!

I *am* making decisions all the time, observing for hazards, anticipating the potentials requiring me to manoeuvre in another way or alter my speed... and that's helpful!

Yet what value is there in making judgements and negative comments in my head (or aloud) about things that have no obvious connection to me. *What business is it of mine?*

When we are living in a way that is without conscious thought, mindlessly and on autopilot, this is where so many negative thoughts occur, ambushing us.

Recall how when you are brushing your teeth, your mind wanders off, thinking of the past, and the future, but rarely, unless you choose, actually *present* and *aware* of the toothpaste, the bristles, the noise as you brush... the sensations that are in that moment; ‘mindfully’ using your senses to be present.

Why would you?

Because when you choose otherwise, automaticity rules and a huge number of the seventy thousand thoughts we have each day will be negative, and less than healthy.

We are *always* making judgements; they’re conditioned responses to experiences. When those logged experiences replay, resulting from a reactive response to “what do they look like” or “I don’t like them” as a first impression, it comes from a place that may have been relevant previously, but is less likely so in THAT moment.

Practising mindfulness brings many clients to peace from the suffering attributable to negative unwelcome thoughts, and ‘mind-chatter’ or ‘monkey-mind’!

## **Children unable to conform – or learn?**

*Do you have or know a ‘defiant child or adolescent’; are they being naughty, or is there something else?*

Oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) is a diagnosis described by the [Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders \(DSM\)](#) – (*Latest revision proposed for DSM 5*) – as an on-going pattern of anger-guided disobedience, hostilely defiant behaviour toward authority figures which goes beyond the bounds of normal childhood behaviour ~ Wikipedia

Having been recently exposed to this ‘phenomena’, I felt so intrigued that I wanted to share and understand with others who may have experience of ODD, a defiant child... and the potential for lack of a true diagnosis!

We are very quick to assign a label to an individual and their behaviour. It helps ‘us’ identify something intangible at times – and that makes ‘us’ feel better.

Do you know a young person who appears defiant ‘all the time’, unable to transition between play and study, home and school, or accommodate change?

*However, what if we’re wrong with a label?*

Do all the reward schemes and separate disciplinary codes set for our struggling children provide value? *Many might!*

*What about medication regimes? Are they working for you and your ‘explosive’ child?*

It appears there is a horrible potential for a model of behavioural therapy professionals are sometimes failing to explore!

*What if the child actually cannot understand that which is being presented to them? What if WE are failing THEM?*

We can be very quick to ‘assume’ that our child or adolescent is ‘bright’, but ‘lazy’, poorly-motivated and shamefully failing to reach their potential – which you know they have in them.

To be fair, without exposure to and subsequent knowledge gained why would you think anything else? If you are unable to challenge this belief in a struggling child or adolescent whose behaviour and educational standards appear unacceptable, maybe it’s because you are too close.



So who else might be entrusted, maybe expected to notice and test for some other possibility than 'lazy' and 'disruptive'?

Education

GP

Family

Friends

?

I strongly believe the educational setting has a huge responsibility for 'asking the question', "why is this individual failing to conform and meet standards of behaviour and education?"

I'm sure some do!

Does anyone ask this question?

*"Is this young person's disruptive or unhelpful behaviour predictable?"*

...and where they fail in this, the child is failed. The education system and those within who are charged with facilitating this person's education and growth; the environment and methods required to enable each and every student to reach their potential has failed... and marginalised, even discriminated against them.

This child consistently fails to achieve the objectives

This student's behaviour is unacceptable on a regular basis

This individual is being excluded from lesson, and the school. *That will teach them!*

Will it?

What if...this child has a learning development challenge?

What if this individual has no comprehension of why they are being punished? How will that 'teach them'?

*"If a child can do well, they will"*

What if... this student is 'explosive' because they are frustrated, because they are unable to grasp the communications made available for the others?

Have they had a diagnosis of dyslexia or some other neurological deficit? *Are you sure?* Have you documented the assessment?

I am writing this impassioned plea because I am becoming regularly exposed to children and adults who have yet to be assessed, or they are becoming diagnosed from the age of 15 upwards!

If I had excluded a child from school only to subsequently learn that that child had a learning or behavioural disability, I'd be concerned.

Why then, does this occur so often?

Funding and resource limits are commonly cited.

Lack of awareness, knowledge or consideration to the potential.

### **The good news**

Once recognised, there are measures to assist, accommodate and manage the behaviours and educational requirements for these individuals – which in turn is helping the educational environment to de-marginalise these valuable people and provide for their future, and ours.

The British Dyslexia Association – <http://www.bdadyslexia.org.uk>

## **Five Ways to Be Yourself**

Many relationship difficulties arise out of us failing to be who we are seen to be in a given moment. How, as individuals, can we return to be who we really are in any given environment?

*“We can choose to be present! Instead of allowing thoughts to drag us into the past, or we fall into the future; both places we cannot actually be”*

The spouse who gains a living outside of the home, and who in their head and mind is already at work before even leaving the family unit and who then fails to actually return home with the correct persona later on in the day, leaving the family trying to address a shell of the person they know and love.

Why is this?

There is a tendency today to respond with rapid energy to many things calling for our attention, in the belief there is little choice.

Ping – the email message arrives and is immediately viewed and considered, taking us away from our present role, and what we are supposed to be doing.

The news report on the radio/TV/internet/newspaper grabs our attention and may distress us, or at least, once again, leave us feeling a victim of the world’s ills. The phone rings and we are driven to answer it, removing us once more from where we are supposed to be.

From the moment we wake to the moment we put our head on the pillow we are allowing thoughts to drag us into the past, or we fall into the future. Both of which are places we cannot actually be; both places that remove us from the present, and what we can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch using our five senses.

In being more mindful and demonstrating present moment awareness, we can be in the right place at the right time and this allows us to be awake to opportunities, and make decisions with clarity.

Try this:

1. When waking, try to move off the bed gently, move kindly, thinking only of that moment.
2. Ask yourself at breakfast, who you are in that moment. The parent or spouse, rather than the worker?

3. At work, do one thing at a time; consider one thing at a time. We believe we can give sufficient attention to more than one task or thought process, but in reality we can't focus efficiently or effectively on more than one thing at a time.

4. When leaving the place or period of work, leave! It may well be 30 minutes before your reactions and responses to morph through the transition from work persona to home persona. Help this along by seeing the door of your home and getting out of the car as the trigger to change your emotional clothes.

5. At bedtime allow a brief and non-judgemental review of the day, and leave the thoughts for tomorrow until then, when actions will be necessary.

In practising a more mindful and aware approach to everyday life we can stop burning through the day on the hamster wheel of life, and start to live each moment as it can be. This allows space to respond appropriately to events rather than allow unhealthy and mindless reactions based on the past.

## What does “Anglia Counselling” Look Like?



I wanted an excuse for sharing my clients’ new room; provided for them by my company Anglia Counselling – Newmarket. But it goes further than that... fortunately!

Many clients share when asked that they had *no idea* what to expect in relation to the environment – or the talking therapy process. An addendum to that is the reason I ensure images *of me* are available; the last thing I want is for the recognition to arise that I am a reminder for someone who might have had a negative influence on a new client – when they walk into the room.

We can’t help it, at least initially. We *do* have a reaction to people when we meet them, based on a previous cognition, or, a mistaken re-cognition!



Anyway, to celebrate my 21st year in delivering healthcare – and the growth of my relatively new business, I have moved to a larger office/therapy room – all of 3 metres away from the last one!

Expense and no little inconvenience, but so worth it to offer the warmest and most comfortable environment I can to complement my service delivery; our collaboration, *achieving a changed mind – a more comfortable life.*



When ‘in-session’, the space between the collaborating individuals becomes set in a much more focused area – just between the individuals involved – but of course you still hope for a warm, fresh, safe room when you walk in, somewhere you are happy to share your private thoughts and experiences.

Enquirers ask questions similar to these!

*Can you help me/us with my/our problems...?*

*When can you see me/us?*

*How much does this cost?*

*Where are you located?*

I will also explain other aspects such as... duration of sessions, testimonials – and where to find them on my website. Appropriate insurance is in place, a little bit about me... and which models of therapy are offered.

To view all of the images of this new facility, please visit <http://t.co/Wq1muun2jZ>

You are also welcome to visit in person, by appointment.

I look forward to meeting you soon!

## What are my options for accessing mental health care?

*Mental health, your GP, and access to primary care*

Below is a link to a 5 minute video that painfully illustrates some of the challenges a person faces when they do pluck up the courage to seek help with their emotional, psychological distress. It also provides a candid overview of some of the responses of GP's and surgery staff and, helpfully, what mental health advocates "Time to Change" ([TTC](http://www.time-to-change.org.uk)) are trying to address. Please do watch before reading on...

<http://youtu.be/gAVu3a69x04>

People who seek help for mental health challenges often fall into two categories; those who are pro-active and want some relief before things get too disruptive in their personal and professional performance, their relationships at home or at work... and those who wait and wait, before 'tipping', in the hope things *will get better* but they WILL try to keep going... or 'risk' some form of personal self-imposed persecution for 'failing' in some way!

*It's NEVER about failing, by the way!*

Both these types of individuals can benefit from appropriate advice and guidance, ideally via a calm, unrushed and objective way, in an environment that is safe and comfortable – in a relationship that is impartial and non-judgemental.

The first port of call?

...is, the GP or physician. They may be hurried (and harried!) but he/she can access your medical history. This is important because you need a professional who has an intuitive 'nose' and the experience to interpret how you present. *Is what you are saying being understood as such?*

Little use saying to a GP you feel out of sorts! What does that mean? The GP's biggest enemy amongst others is time! So prepare before you go in to say, really say what you believe the problem to be, and as bluntly as possible! This is not the time to be reserved!

*"My mind is all over the place, I can't sleep, I'm drinking too much and not sleeping. I'm off my food and fighting with my loved ones, and those at work. I just want some peace IN my mind; it's racing all the time with worry."*

Now, that may seem a lot, but this does provides more than enough information for the doctor to start, and to ask you more questions about your past before deciding if tests or other investigations may be appropriate.

If tests and other investigations are deemed to be necessary, do ask what the tests are and what would the doctor be looking to learn from them?

It is interesting to note that ‘low blood sugars’ alone can be a significant cause of changes in mood! Thyroid dysfunction is another. This doesn’t necessarily mean you are ‘diabetic’, you just may need to adjust your diet and/or explore a way to reduce your stress.

### **Pharmacology and prescriptions**

If the GP offers you medication, ask if this is the most appropriate first line intervention? In some cases medication may be necessary, particularly if sleep has been a major problem coming to you and the cycle of insomnia needs to be broken.

Do ask what the medication is designed to offer, how long before *you* are reviewed for its effects and which possible side-effects may be associated with the prescription.

\*Important – Easy access to information means many people look up medications in a similar way a prescriber does these days. The difference is a prescriber may know how to place the information contained in publications explaining medicines – such as the British National Formulary (BNF) into context. This is important because when people learn the huge number of ‘possible’ side-effects associated with some medicines, they may become non-compliant – and fail to take the prescription. Although side-effects may be reported, indeed they have to be, this does NOT mean YOU will experience them!

### **Counselling and talking therapies**

There is a smattering of counselling options available across the country via your doctor. More is available in some areas than others and the waiting times vary considerably. Improving Access to Psychological Therapies ([IAPT](#)) is an investment made by the government, to the NHS and the people it serves, and is well intended to provide more readily and accessible short term therapies (commonly) to the population. Although this investment has been financially significant, it is still grossly under-resourced in many areas, due in no small part to the sheer demand from that population.

### **CBT?**

Many GP’s are inviting their patients to join waiting lists for Cognitive Behaviour Therapy ([CBT](#)). The wait can be as long as six months, and may be less. My challenge as a private



counsellor is that there are people who feel they cannot wait – and who then come to me or my colleagues in private practice.

The person and I may start to work together and be making progress when the GP referral appointment comes through, and this is a challenge because it is outside of best practice for a client/patient to be seen by more than one therapist at the same time. (A caveat to this may be where there are separate issues to be worked through.)

The second challenge is that a GP may have had little possibility of appropriately assessing their patient for the correct model of therapy.

CBT is not for all and whilst it is an excellent talking therapy recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence ([NICE](#)), there is a growing belief that CBT is a panacea for all mental health ills – which sadly, it is not!

It may be two or three meetings before I can accurately assess how much of our collaboration will, if at all, involve CBT. What chance does a GP have other than in exceptional cases? The concern is then that patients wait for months for an appointment to see someone who is intending to provide a therapy unsuitable for their needs, and that even with adjustment, a collaborative and therapeutic alliance is challenging, due in part to the often short-term duration of that which is offered.

Many clients who have experienced this method of delivered service report a ‘conveyor-belt’ approach, due in part to the service capacity pressures rather than quality of individuals delivering care. I should also offer that there are many successes for patients who do derive wholesome benefit.

If you have trusted knowledge of a counsellor, maybe someone who is recommended in your area, it might be worth sharing this with your GP during your consultation!

Please remember, if you are facing a desperate period in your life, there are always opportunities to engage someone who will listen. This can be voluntary sector support such as the [Samaritans](#), or private providers, such as myself.

Please also remember that desperate times are often an accumulation of events and, where possible, try to manage the effects of family break-ups, relationship issues, job loss, bereavement, anxieties and depression ‘early-on’.

It’s never too late to intervene, and the sooner challenges are dissolved to manageable, acknowledged chunks, the greater your opportunities to maintain the resilience that is often required in today’s world.

## **Laughter in the Therapy Room**

Are you serious? (Heh!)

I suspect most imaginings around a consultation and therapy room provided for psychological wellbeing contain images of weeks of unhappy, painful and tearful interactions.

Is this how you see it?

I can't lie, those and many other, more painful conditions do occur – frequently, but so does laughter, relief and acceptance, to a greater or lesser degree.

When acknowledgement is discovered from individuals; when they 'find' they really ARE an individual with choices – and a genuine place in this world, everything lightens.

There is very little written about the role of humour in such a culturally serious environment, yet, in discussions with peers, experiences demonstrate laughter and humour is not only helpful (when appropriate of course), it's actually really welcome. This state of lightness brings a special human engagement that is difficult to contrive without integrity.

### **Laughter: It is so powerful and healing.**

Anyway – laughter and crying are so close and in synergy with each other. Both are complicit in forging an even closer and stronger alliance to the collaborative human efforts working towards the same goal.

There are times where clients may laugh out of nervousness, or whilst being dismissive to something that may require further exploration, but most therapists can pick up on this and respond appropriately.

So, if you find yourself a little low, perhaps wishing you had the courage to meet with a counsellor, but the last thing you need is another 'grumpy' environment, please know that a therapy room is regularly filled with happiness, joy, and yes... even laughter!

## **You Make Me Sick!**

Nice!

No... *not YOU!*

The first thing so many of us do when illness or unhappiness visits is to close up our emotional shop. Down come the shutters... go away pain, divorce, job loss, and CANCER!

Well, who wouldn't? However, does this help?

What IF, when faced with illness and bad news or events – we opened the door to it, welcomed it in?

ARE YOU SERIOUS?

Yes, I know... radical, but it's also anything but a new practice.

If you are told the dreadful news that you have a life-limiting illness, you CAN choose to *consider your response* to this news, you really do have, as challenging as it might seem, a choice of how you respond.

As the cliché goes, “it’s not what happens to us – it’s how we respond to it.”

*There need be no exceptions to this!*

A radical story is of the individual who goes to his physician to receive the results of his biopsies and is told “it is terminal, I’m sorry!”

The response of this individual is one that leaves the physician wondering if the dreadful news has caused the person to take leave of their senses because they ‘laugh’, appearing completely un-phased and accepting of what they have just learned. “*Did you not hear what I said? – You’re dying, and there is no hope.*”

The individual looks compassionately at the physician and says calmly – “I cannot change the news you have given me, but I can choose and exercise control and power over how I respond and behave for what remains of my life – and I choose to be as happy as I can, remaining positive, knowing that I can learn to accept and make the final days on this earthly plain as enjoyable as my mind will allow

- or else, I can be miserable... and die that way. What a waste of knowledge... and remaining time.”

For less dramatic news, but that which we choose to allow to create huge emotional turbulence, we can choose our responses. If those choices are outside of what society deems appropriate, and are not deliberately harming others, then so much the better.

I have a shoulder pain, I've had it for weeks now but I choose to focus on life, and the parts of my body and mind that are fine just now. I can decide to focus on the pain... but why would anyone choose to do that? Will it remove the discomfort, or make it feel worse?

Open the door.

I have opened the door to physical pain. I accept it, knowing it is less than what I might wish for – but given it is here; I accept it... and get on with the business of life. At some stage it may need attention. I can put in place actions required to achieve the appointment for referral, and then I can let go again until another action is required.

Bad News!

We can focus, having immersed ourselves in the 'news' – at every opportunity, on bad news! Available to us via sight and sound 24/7 – 365 days a year, we can learn that the world – and our place in it, is “under threat.” We 'learn' that terrorism is rife, that no-one is safe – anywhere!

Really?

Consider the percentage of people on this planet who want to cause harm, compared to those who get on with the business of living – and even serve others? Just as with a shoulder pain, we can choose to focus on that which serves us! Or, we can 'believe' everything is screwed!

It'll pass.

It always does... pass.

Try recalling the very last challenge, be it with a relationship or illness. *Did it pass?* If not, are you holding onto it and refusing to allow it to?

Or did you, can you let go, having opened that door, allowed it in, found acknowledgement and acceptance... and let go of it?

Without acceptance in some form we are imprisoned in our self-built and maintained 'cell'. We continue to believe 'it's unfair, I am a victim, and it's not even my fault.'

That may be so... but how you choose to respond is.

## How Do You Define You?

In the daily judgements we pass on ourselves and others, what is it we believe we are defining?

“Oh, that Sandy and her son, yeah, you know the one – the criminal, he’s in prison!”

...is this person Sandy, this individual – a criminal? Does this ‘label’ define him... or, did he commit a criminal act and he might well be defined a criminal – *at that time*?

When we label prisoners as such, rather than a person, an individual incarcerated will have strengthened the belief in him or her that they always will be worthless and sit outside of society – whilst reducing the possibility of rehabilitation, because it ‘defines’ the act, an event – rather than the person.

If we want someone to respect rules and be respectful, we are going to want them to rejoin society as a person, rather than reinforcing an identity that once may have been true – in that moment.

*“I was raped – I am a victim to that event and person and this will always be so.”*

Terrible though the suffering of such horror and cruelty is, does this view and statement serve us? Empowering the horror further, and forever doubling up on the pain? This will define who we were!

“Sally, you know – the rape victim.”

...or ...I am Sally, I have always been Sally. However, there was an awful time in my life when I was raped – but I AM still Sally, *rather than a rape victim forever*.

“My son/daughter/mother/father/lover/spouse died – I will never get through the pain of the loss.”

Do we choose to honour the death of someone so dear to us as a choice to define ‘us’ and the rest of our existence as a sufferer, a victim of life and its circumstances? Or...

...do we choose to grieve and adjust... then celebrate the life and privilege it was to have known that person while they were ‘here’?

These few examples can illustrate a couple of points, but those defining judgements are occurring all the time with much less potent events and these will create the falsehood of who we think we are... or someone else is.

One of the measures I employ for my clients, when appropriate, is to ask them to look in the mirror – really look into your OWN eyes! It can be so powerful and awakening. Similarly, if I ask to ‘introduce’ you to ‘you’, then observe how challenging that can be because we have elected to define ourselves by our experiences and past events.

Life can be looked at as if ours was a big brick wall. The majority of the wall is strong, uniform and good, but here and there a slightly discoloured brick might be found, another may be a little out of line.

Can we then say that this brick wall, serving its purpose, so strong and true... is less than – and is useless, unworthy?

No, of course the bricks outside of uniformity simply add uniqueness to the wall. They too were part of the process in creating a strong and purposeful structure...

Could it be that if you were to ‘meet’ you today, without knowledge of all the pain and any wrongdoing or mistakes, you might really like what you saw?

Defining ourselves and others based on our lives to date can be hugely unhelpful. Living with you today, you can learn to let go of the past and grant yourself permission to recognise you for who you are in this moment – in the only place you really ever can be, here, in the present moment.

The rest... is in the mind, no longer a reality or true today.

## **Battles in the therapy room**

All clients I see in my office have an idea of sorts about what they wish to achieve. Whether they are individuals seeking a means to bring some quietness and peace from their mind-chatter – to the couple who recognise their latest challenge just isn't resolving and choose to take that courageous step to bring the matter for consideration and guidance to an outside influence.

But what happens when the motive is clouded, or even deliberately misleading? Here are some views from the mind of a counsellor:

*Disclaimer \*the following content is partly drawn from experiences. Any similarities to real cases and individuals can be assumed to be purely coincidental.*

Emma calls the office to discuss whether I might be able to help with her relationship and marriage to Paul. She decides she is happy with the format offered, the terms around fees and times available, and the location – and now wishes to book an appointment, having received agreement and permission from her spouse, Paul.

At the discovery meeting the couple are taken through an introduction to the service being provided and are given time to explore any initial concerns.

Next, each person is provided an uninterrupted period of time to express their position and the challenges they see in the relationship. Then, each individual gets to respond, again uninterrupted.

The three of us can now begin to hypothesise the possibilities, drawing no firm conclusions, beginning to see how things appear. If time allows in this first session we may begin to work on an issue and introduce a strategy to protect both from further distress during the break between sessions.

It might be easy to imagine for some that the fee charged is simply for the counsellor and the use of the room for that session. The reality is that whilst that is part of the contract, the counsellor will also reflect and consider the relationship and what has been discussed during the time between sessions, having had the benefit of experience and training, but crucially, impartiality and a non-judgemental stance – un-emotionally!

It is this ability to view the challenges in the relationship that allows a view for progression with clarity. The counsellor does not need to judge one person over another, he is not tempted to 'case build' against one individual to validate a point.



At the introductory session I always make it clear that I am not a referee. My role will be to help the relationship by empowering those within that arena.

For many couples, they get to make progress, choosing some form of acceptance in gaining a clearer insight around the dynamics of their lives together – whilst understanding more about their own expectations of each other – and where these might have come from. There may of course be other factors impinging on the relationship, from family disparity to infidelity, addictions to abuse; emotional or otherwise.

Usually by sessions two or three, I can start to see themes developing. It is here where we can collectively get to the nub of the challenges and explore them in greater depth. For the couple who are honest and acting with true intent, this will often bring a catharsis – a letting go.

However, for those couples where one or both individuals are intent on proving a point, one demanding to be ‘right’ and the other refusing to ‘disclose’ perhaps, the cause will be unattainable via the counsellor – he is becoming a pawn in the game being played.

The counsellor is trained to observe for this and because he is emotionally outside of the issue, he can see quite quickly where the points of contention are clouded, consciously, or unknowingly by the participants. This will unlikely end well!

Another important point aside from this, and a major deal for some, is the sex of the counsellor. For me, a chap (!), when matters become heated or intractable, it can be mistakenly viewed by the female (within a heterosexual relationship) to think she is being discriminated against; that the male counsellor is siding with the male!

Again, counsellors have to learn this skill to assure and remind the person who may be open to this type of false interpretation that the relationship brought into the room is the only interest for the counsellor, rather than one side’s view or opinion.

It’s not easy, I admit, and it requires constant vigilance!

I hope this provides a brief insight into some of the workings of counselling. It is perhaps worth pointing out that much of that discussed above is also relevant to the individual seeking counselling.

If the client is unable to bring complete integrity to the process, they will stand every chance of proving themselves right, self-prophesising any outcomes!

## **Was it the event, or my reaction to it?**

How often do you react to a perceived negative event, blaming that moment for ‘stressing’ you out, ruining your life... and catch yourself mumbling... **WHY DOES THIS ALWAYS HAPPEN TO ME?**

So you’re running late, and the lights all seem to be turning RED, damn those lights, all out to get me!

Every car user, every vehicle in front of you is so slow today... *why today?*

*Sound familiar? I know I’ve been there!*

Are the lights really conspiring? “Here they come; get ready... ha... got him”! *Really?*

What if you were enjoying a nice leisurely drive, perhaps because you had allowed plenty of time? Would those light turning red still be conspiring?

It really is a reaction to wanting things to be different because things are not how you want or ‘need’ them to be, your expectations are unmet!

What about those expectations?

If you left for the meeting late, can you reasonably expect the world going about ‘its’ business to make allowances for you? To even ‘know’ what your urgency is? Heck, I charged around (skilfully, of course!) for almost two decades as an emergency response unit, and others often didn’t make way. What chance have you got without ‘blues ‘n’ twos’?

Expectations. Ask yourself, are they reasonable?

*So, was it the event that stressed you... or your reaction to it? This is an important question; it’s a game-changer!*

Stop ‘case building’!

We all have days where things appear to go awry – all day long! If we choose to bring awareness to each event, dealing rationally with each set-back, we can deal effectively with them in that moment before moving on. Then, each event is managed based on its own merits and the importance we place upon it. We can then have more resilience to the next event, and so on. No more is the world conspiring.

This is life, one moment at a time, and anyway... what if most of these events had a positive side, what if there was a 'flip-side'?

Positivity – it's not all "*it's okay, it didn't matter!*"

It really is so common, once we have learned greater awareness for each moment, to reflect and see for ourselves how apparently negative and destructive moments turned out to be a great thing, and find positivity. *Give this some thought and tell me I'm wrong!*

There are so many examples to draw on in your life, but here are a couple of mine.

Before I was to prematurely retire from my beloved career, I went into self-preservation mode, trying to find an alternative job and career. I put all my stock into getting 'that' job, and just at a time when the 'credit-crunch' began.

*Thank goodness I didn't get those positions I was invited to interview for!* Had I have got any of them, I would not now be in business for myself, happier and healthier than in more than 20 years!

But at that time, I was devastated that I wasn't chosen! *What did I know?*

Similarly, things we desire to be different... pass! Putting all our energy into each thing that appears to be outside of what we wish in that moment is rarely productive. Often, to achieve the objective we need to do the opposite... and let go, having taken the actions to prepare, put in place the foundations required to allow something we wish for to happen, and then... let go!

So, I didn't get those that I thought were precious positions, great!

My career was lost due to physical conditions, great!

Otherwise I would still be in such distress, failing to 'listen' to my body and mind screaming at me to stop. There is life outside of this... and it's good! *Health over wealth* has brought me riches beyond my wildest imagination, but I needed to taste the privilege... the pain, to see it.

It is often a gift, things that appear to go wrong, things that are outside of our expectations, but because we are so fired up and conditioned to 'react', we do so based on false representations from our past.

It really doesn't have to be this way. We can choose an appropriate response if we just give ourselves a little time and awareness and place things into perspective based on the information available... in this moment!

So next time you get frustrated, upset and feel your body out of alignment, ask yourself if THAT served you and helped you overcome the obstacle, or could you have thought about the reality and observed for any positive possibilities? ...Then choose your own healthy response.

## **Inner Child. How is Yours?**

It is a belief of many that we carry in our adult lives the influences of the child we were, the experiences and emotions we had then – an inner child. These emotions may be positive, nourishing and welcoming. They may also be adverse and appear to bring suffering, the cause of which is sometimes obvious, though more often, less so.

When as children we were unconsciously, or unintentionally provided with less than optimal compassion and love, such as can be found with appropriate communications from guardians who gave knowing looks or body language that said “I am here, you are safe and loved,” we may still feel the effects of this today, in adulthood. We may also bring this to our parenting and marital relationships.

Given greater awareness, we can more skilfully become aware of the influences of our childhood ‘today’ – in our day-to-day lives and interactions. When this occurs, it allows for greater understanding; we can choose what, if anything, we want to do with it!

Many of us find ourselves living with anxiety, or with low moods and depressive episodes lasting more than a few days. These states of mind may have become a common feature of our life, waiting for us when we wake, and still with us when we go to sleep. These states are bad enough for the discomfort they bring, but when we are also unable to be aware of why we are experiencing them, this adds to the distress and may lead to a sense of helplessness, and hopelessness.

And so, to ‘cope’ with these and other less than helpful states, we desire to want things to be different.

*When I get that thing, it will be alright. When I achieve that position or wealth, then I’ll be happy.*

We may indulge in excessive consumption of food, alcohol, illicit drugs, addictions or infidelity, in a vain attempt to satisfy our yearnings for ‘that thing’, that ‘state’ of fulfilment.

To come home to our true selves, we may need to be re-introduced to that inner-child, that former *you* who is still active today in your reactions and incorrect thought processes involving negativity and depression, anxiety and unhappiness.

*How might that be done?*

*With caution, with skilled guidance!* This is powerful and highly emotive stuff for many. It can take courage to 'meet' your young self!

*Before that opportunity is created, a state of self-awareness and introspection is necessary. Preparation for a journey such as this is crucial if we are to grow the trust in ourselves for such an undertaking. I have been there, and I have taken many there...*

A period of preparation for the persons I guide will often involve learning the art of 'mindfulness'. This is fairly easy for most, being straightforward to adopt and absorb with small incremental changes to the way we live and think.

Once the ability to create space in our thoughts has been found, the suffering many are experiencing can be skilfully addressed. This brings a catharsis, a eureka moment for many as they 'wake up' and start living true to themselves, giving the self-permission to be 'good enough' when self-esteem and confidence is an issue.

## **Nirvana and me**

It's the mid 70's and I'm in my parents' bedroom, 'nosing' through drawers in a dresser. At the age of eleven, I was the youngest son of three... and our mother had recently 'left' the family home – for good! She didn't say goodbye to any of us; it was a complete surprise when my eldest brother shared the contents of the letter she left on that Saturday evening.

My father, a placid man... and an alcoholic, was suffering the neurological effects of his illness with early onset dementia, aged 46. Our mother had decided she could no longer cope with his lying, and deteriorating mental health, and so had moved 180 miles north with another man.

As I explored the dresser, aged 11, smelling the remaining almost empty perfume bottles and various bits and pieces associated with our mother I discovered some papers. They appeared official and to my surprise seemed to have some information that might be about me!

I can't quite work it out however as the date of birth and first name appear to match mine – but the surname is different. I look at the heading of the document and fail to understand what '*fostering*' actually means and how that might relate to *me*?

My head spins at the possibilities! Unable to comprehend what this means I somehow know it's significant so I look further through the drawers and discover another document which makes more sense. The *Certificate of Adoption* was dated three years after my birth and with the name changes clear to see! *So who the heck were my brothers and parents?* I don't think my life was ever the same after this!

My eldest brother took over my parenting, and heroically managed to clothe and prepare me for my move to secondary school. To this day, no-one in the family has felt able to discuss the adoption with me.

Much later, aged 27, I sought and found knowledge of my birth parents. My father was a 'un-named' American serviceman who had left the UK shortly after my birth. I have made some enquiries over the years; it is highly unlikely I will ever be able to close that particular query, and it may be just as well! What I found out about the woman who gave birth to me, and for whom I had planned to 'forgive' everything for 'when' I would meet her shocked me to the core.

She had committed suicide when I was 7! *I was heartbroken!*

My new school provided the opportunity to fight everyone within the first few weeks promptly followed by years of truancy, accidents fracturing many bones and one incident leaving me critically injured, not to mention the brushes with the law...

Between the ages of 13 and 15 I worked hard doing jobs such as delivering milk with an abusive milkman for 18 months for 25 hours a week, and doing paper rounds and helping market stalls. I seemed to mature prematurely, at least in some ways.

At 16 I started my first full time job as an apprentice, and this lasted just four months. The other qualified hairdressers could be uncomfortably 'bitchy'!

Despite the recession, I managed to secure another job, this time in retail. However, made redundant after 18 months I struggled to find new, permanent work, managing to get temporary or work experience positions instead. The retail sector appeared to be a route that I could focus on and I found myself becoming more and more ambitious, though I had no idea why!

I bounced around from job-to-job trying to find something that was a 'fit' and that would satisfy me, but that something seemed elusive. You could say I was 'unsettled'!

At 21 my father died from cancer, and my fiancée ditched me rather suddenly shortly afterwards. I think she was probably right to do so, but maybe could have been a little kinder in the delivery!

The experience I had gained during one particular spell of unemployment, 'temping', put me in a great position to get a job advertised as a 'call taker' for the ambulance service. This job would see the start of a highly successful and award winning career that would last until my premature retirement in 2011 due to a spinal injury.

The privileged, yet tough roles I held over almost two decades taught me to be even more compassionate, as well as a problem solver. During this time, I also still had to cope with depressive episodes that had first become apparent in the mid 80's. Although I was successful and privileged, I still experienced huge emotional turbulence that made life, relationships, play and work a constant challenge.

But here's the thing. With age, experience and a steely determination to learn and observe for opportunities to make positives, out of hitherto negative scenarios, my life changed.

I have always believed that everyone has something or someone that is a key to their own fulfilment; the game changer, if you will.

The positive mentality I discovered has been about observing in context what is happening rather than the happy clappy '*everything is ok*' mantra.



I had until recently found no one person or helpful information (to me) that would provide the key to unlock my emotional instability.

I have since discovered new-found positive selfishness. I started to actually spend time trying to solve my problems achieving happiness and some peace within; and it was outside of a strict religion too.

Meditation and elements of spirituality touched me and provided respite the likes of which I had never known. I know this has created a difference because my life just keeps getting more and more successful; I want for less, I have a quieter mind... and people notice me in a more welcoming way which has improved my self-esteem.

I was able to quickly overcome the disappointment of 'losing' my beloved and successful career, rather seeing it as an opportunity to consolidate the knowledge so many years as an attending paramedic brings, whilst learning challenging new skills that would allow me to give value to myself and my family, whilst still continuing to meet and help others.

Finding that 'key', whatever it is for you, is what really matters. I can now accept my fate in a way I never could before. *I guess I have found my nirvana!*

It feels that life is just beginning – I'm as busy and passionate as ever.

It is natural to still have duvet days and low moods; I accept and share that, knowing that it will pass. I now live 'mindfully' in the 'here and now' allowing the past to be a place of reflection for learning, or to place things in context. The future is being built by the actions here and now and all of this has provided greater focus, creativity and peace for me.

I am reminded of gratitude to lift me when I feel less than. No matter how tough or turbulent life is, finding gratitude for 'something' will help you overcome the most stubborn of unhelpful emotions.

Perhaps now you can see why I have become '*poacher turned gamekeeper.*'

Wishing you peace,

Thank you for reading.

If you enjoyed this first volume, please sign up for subsequent releases, or my regular blog posts – and do feel free to connect, to share and let others know.

Feedback is always appreciated! Please do leave yours at any of the following platforms, or direct to me at: [info@angliacounselling.co.uk](mailto:info@angliacounselling.co.uk)

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