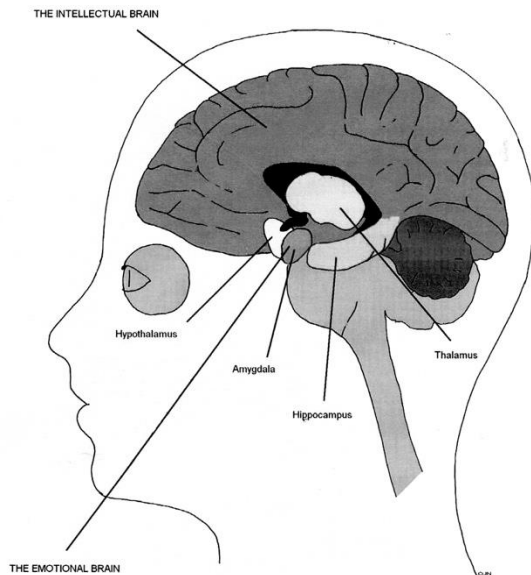


Solution Focused Hypnotherapy

An Introduction to Your Brain



Our brain is made up of 2 distinct parts, the Intellectual Brain and the Primitive/Emotional Brain.

The intellectual Brain is you, your conscious part, the part that interacts with the world. When we work from this part of the brain we get things right in life, it gives us solutions to problems based on a thorough assessment of a situation and is generally very positive.

The Primitive/Emotional Brain includes the Amygdala which controls our fight or flight responses, the Hippocampus which stores our primitive and inappropriate behavioural patterns

and experiences, and the Hypothalamus which regulates chemical responses in the body and the mind.

Why do I need to know this?

Imagine walking out of your door and finding an angry Polar Bear there! What would happen? Your anxiety levels would go up, you would lose intellectual control, and instead of working from your Intellectual Brain, you would start working from your Primitive Brain and experience a surge of adrenaline triggering the common anxiety symptoms of increased respiration (hyperventilation), raised heart rate, churning stomach, sweating and you would be off like a shot. Quite appropriate given the circumstances!

Unfortunately this also happens in our normal everyday lives. When our anxiety levels rise and it can be a gradual process, we lose intellectual control and the Primitive Brain takes over, if it thinks our life is in some sort of crisis it will step in to help, but this part of the brain always operates within the parameters of anxiety, depression or anger.

Why does this happen?

Anxiety, Depression and Anger are all primitive opt out clauses.



Think of the caveman. If he looked out of his cave and there was snow or ice or danger and he couldn't go out to hunt, he would go back inside his cave, pull his rug over his head and wouldn't interact with the world until the danger passed, we have adapted this to the modern day symptoms of depression.

Similarly if he was in the jungle in those days, he would have been very alert, aware of the possibility of wild animals or other tribes, constantly on the lookout for danger, ready to run, which is our modern day anxiety response.

And anger was simply a primitive way of increasing strength to defend himself against wild animals and other wild tribesmen

So why do these responses cause us problems?

The Primitive Brain is negative, it always sees things from the worst possible perspective, if you think about it, it has to for our self-preservation. When you run into that Polar Bear it won't say "Oh it's probably eaten" No quite rightly it says "That bear is going to eat you" that response is great when we run into a Polar Bear, but not so good when we face stressful situations in everyday life.

The Primitive Brain is also obsessional, if you did have a Polar Bear in your garden it would remind you of it constantly, you would have to keep checking.

It is also a vigilant brain, if you perceive danger all around it will keep you on red alert, constantly on edge.

And because the Primitive Brain isn't an intellect it can't be innovative, it can't think for itself, it has to rely on previous patterns of behaviour, if what we did yesterday ensured our survival then we are encouraged to do it again.

Where does all this anxiety come from?

It's not the events in our life that cause anxiety, if that were so then everyone would be suffering from panic attacks, stress and depression and we know that is not the case. It is our thought patterns that surround the events of our life that cause us to move from working with the Intellectual Brain, to working with the Primitive Brain.

Every negative thought we have is converted into anxiety. We can create anxiety by negatively forecasting the future, big things eg "I'll never be able to afford that...", "I'll never find another partner" or small things, maybe an interview you're not looking forward to. Believe it or not the mind can't tell the difference between imagination and reality, so intellectually you know the interview is going to go ok, but you start to think about what could go wrong. You think about it 50 times? The actual interview goes quite well but your brain thinks you have attended 51 interviews and 50 of them were disasters.

We can also negatively introspect about the past, constantly going over a past event instead of moving on.

So what happens to all that anxiety?

Every negative thought we have is accumulated and stored over the course of the day in the subconscious brain, we say it is stored in a stress bucket. Thankfully we have a method for emptying our stress bucket, it is known as REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep. At night we re-run events of the



day and change them from being an emotional memory in the Primitive Brain, to a narrative memory in the Intellectual Brain, a memory we have control over.

But is your stress bucket empty?

It would be great to think we could all wake up every morning with our stress buckets empty so we can start the day with no anxiety, anger or depression. You don't? Why?

If we have a lot of anxiety in our lives we pile too much into our stress bucket, unfortunately for one reason or another REM is usually restricted to just 20% of our sleep patterns, if we try and overdo that then our brain will wake us up, you know when it is your brain waking you, because you wake up wide awake, typically around 3-4am feeling quite miserable, often you can't get back to sleep again. This creates a vicious circle, the more you have in your stress bucket, the more time you will spend in your primitive brain and the more you are encouraged to be negative.

If we find ourselves in the grip of depression our brain can encourage us to sleep more and more and therefore dream more and more, in an effort to empty the stress bucket. Unfortunately REM, or dream sleep, uses huge amounts of energy, which is why those with depression can sleep for many hours but still awaken feeling worn out and even more depressed.

The Phobic or Post Traumatic Response

Why do some people develop phobias when others in the same situation don't? Well a lot depends on our individual personality, how we react (positively or negatively) to the situation and the amount of stress already in our lives (how full that bucket was)

We develop phobias when our primitive brain attaches so much emotion (fear) to an experience that the memory won't move out of the bucket. It stays in the primitive brain with all of the emotion still attached to it and is seen as DANGER (just like the Polar Bear).

Remember, the primitive brain doesn't know the difference between reality and imagination, this is how we can develop phobias of things that we have never experienced. We are not born phobic, it is something we LEARN but we can UNLEARN it.

There are several ways in which we can develop phobias.

- i. By going through a bad experience.
- ii. Seeing or hearing about someone else having a bad experience.
- iii. Seeing someone else with a phobia.
- iv. Films, TV, books etc especially horrors and disasters that really fire up the imagination.

So how are we going to sort this out?

First of all we need that bucket to be as empty as possible.

The first few sessions of hypnotherapy will be all about teaching you how to relax and you will continue this at home with your CD.

The questions I ask are designed to change your way of thinking so that you can look at what is already good in your life, we will also be looking for the exceptions, ie the times when the phobia isn't a problem. When you are looking for the positives you don't fill up that bucket.

The Rewind Method.

The Rewind is generally thought of as being the most effective way of dealing with phobias.

The more relaxed you are, the more effective it is.

You will feel relaxed and perfectly safe.

It is good to imagine that you are relaxing in a favourite place like on a beach or in your own room or other special place.

We take a memory of the phobia, either the earliest or most significant or even something you have imagined and we play it over and over in your mind backwards and forwards a bit like film 17 times!

Your brain gets so bored with that memory that it moves it out of the bucket and into your intellectual brain where all the emotion (fear) is taken away.

The Reframe

Around a week later we do a reframe, this is a story about you being faced with that phobia and coping really well with it, your intellectual brain knows that this is just a story and isn't happening but your primitive brain thinks that it is real and that you have been through that experience and coped really well, staying calm and in control.

Occasionally depending on the severity of the phobia we may have to do more than one rewind/reframe combination with different memories.

Emetophobia

Some phobias are classed as specific phobias, these are usually things like spiders or flying, you only get scared when you have to face that specific thing.

Example: Rachel is terrified of spiders, she finds a spider crawling up her kitchen wall, her brain immediately triggers the anxiety response, she starts to breathe rapidly and might feel faint, her heart is pounding, she feels sick and she's sweating and quick as a flash she's running away, the spider has gone and slowly she calms down and returns to normal.

Other phobias are classed as non-specific, you don't need to come face to face with the scary thing for the anxiety to be triggered, lots of things can feel just like it.

Emetophobia is a non-specific phobia and as you know you don't have to be sick yourself, or see someone else being sick for the anxiety to be triggered.

Anxiety about anything can make you feel sick. It is a normal physical reaction to stress, any stress.

When we are anxious and getting ready to run away from something, the blood which usually supplies our digestive system is diverted to our muscles, we don't need our tummy to help us run, we need muscles, so it is quite normal in that situation to feel like our mouth has dried up, our throat has closed over and the tummy and intestines churn.

Someone without emetophobia might not even notice these symptoms they're too busy running away from that spider, but those with emetophobia suddenly have a whole new level of fear.

This is where the cycle of anxiety begins. Maybe you feel stressed because you have a really busy day, as a reaction to that stress your tummy starts to churn (as it does for everyone) but of course it's your worst fear, your stress levels rise even higher, your tummy churns even more, you convince yourself that you're ill, and that leads to panic, the more you panic the more your tummy churns and the more you're convinced that you're ill and need to escape.

If you run away from the situation your primitive brain thinks it has done a good job, you've 'survived' after all, unfortunately next time you get anxious (about anything) and those same normal symptoms appear your brain will do exactly the same thing and give you a panic attack again.

So how do we stop it?

- i. Thoughts, and our physical reaction to those thoughts whizz through our brain incredibly fast, the first step to beating a non-specific phobia is to recognise those faulty thoughts.

Eg, You're stressed about something....instead of thinking "my tummy is churning, I feel sick, I must be ill, I'm going to be sick, what if I'm sick in front of everyone" etc etc etc. You recognise that you are stressed for a reason, you have are busy, it's normal to feel a bit nervous, lots of people feel nervous, you're not ill, you're not going to be sick, your brain is just getting you prepared for the challenge of a busy day.

- ii. You learn how to control a panic attack. Our own faulty thoughts create panic attacks, we do it to ourselves and as we create them so we can stop them.
Breathing in a controlled way (and this must be practiced) a short in breath, a pause, then a long out breath.
Relaxing something, unclench your teeth, let your shoulders drop or even just relax a hand, clench a tight fist and then release it and feel the relaxation spreading up your arm. Both of these will send a message to your brain, it knows that if your breathing is controlled and you are relaxing something there can't be anything to be running away from, and slowly you calm down.
- iii. Physical exercise, especially something you really enjoy. When we are stressed we have an almost constant flow of stress hormones buzzing around our body keeping us on 'red alert' Physical exercise helps to burn off all of those stress hormones, helping us to relax and feel good.

These few simple things will be enough to start the process of your recovery, the more that bucket in your brain empties the stronger and more confident you will feel.

A Note about Brain Physiology.

You may have heard about a neurotransmitter called Serotonin. When we are producing a constant flow of serotonin we are nice, happy, coping, brave little souls. We produce Serotonin when we interact with others in a positive way, are active in a positive way (exercise) and think in a positive way. It gives us motivation and helps us cope with day to day activities, fear and physical pain. When we are depressed we don't produce Serotonin and when we are anxious we produce an overload of adrenaline and stress hormones, great for when we run into Polar Bears, not so good for running our daily lives.

How does Hypnotherapy help?

Hypnotherapy can help to reduce your anxiety and increase positivity. Your relaxation cd will help the process, it will enable your brain to get used to the sound of my voice, ensure you have a better quality sleep, and is an essential part of the therapy, not an optional extra. Many people find they benefit most by listening to it every night as they are falling asleep.

Each session of hypnotherapy will last 1 hour and we will begin by discussing what has been good about your week as an exercise in positive thinking, before moving on to scaling how happy you feel between 0-10 and discovering your strengths and goals.

Trance

Next time we meet we will start to use trance. Trance is very ordinary and is a state we all enter many times a day, when we are driving, watching television, reading etc. It is nothing like the hypnosis you may have seen on tv. You remain in control, you will not be asleep or unconscious, you will be able to hear me talking to you as well as any other sounds inside or outside the room, and you are capable of getting up and walking away at any time.