

ONE Change is possible

Serenity is not freedom from the storm but peace within the storm. What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

How many times in a day do we think about change? How often when things go wrong do we wish it were different, that perhaps *we* were different? And how often do these wishes remain just wishes?

We might feel inside that something is wrong; we feel unhappy, lost, hopeless. Or, things go wrong outside: we don't fit in, our jobs perish, partners leave, or we can't rid ourselves of habits or thoughts that make us feel bad. So we try to make changes – a new look, job, partner, house – and for a while things are different. But then the same patterns arise and our hope of change fades. We might feel stuck or jinxed, and anger and helplessness begin to well up.

This book is about change. It sets out well-researched methods of identifying what we can *usefully* revise about learned patterns of behaviour, and suggests manageable ways to change them; and to hold onto those changes. It will provide methods for individual self-examination, for self-monitoring habitual patterns, for making personal maps to illustrate the kind of relational and thinking webs we weave that ensnare us. And it offers creative ways for changing the patterns that have become unhelpful.

- We *can* learn to become better observers of ourselves. And these observers can be kind rather than critical.
- We *can* identify the learned behaviour patterns of thinking and relating, based on our earlier need to survive, that have become unhelpful and which are redundant.
- We *can* then clear space for the potential of a kindly observer and healthy island within and practise different ways of expressing ourselves.

And we do this actively by:

- [1] Using the Psychotherapy File (see p. 273) to identify our problems, which in CAT are called traps, dilemmas and snags; and the thinking, feeling and relationship dance that accompanies them.
- [2] Finding creative ways to name the patterns of responses and behaviour we take for granted when they occur in daily life, and writing them down.
- [3] Making maps to keep close by so we can look at where we are in the pattern sequence day by day.
- [4] Making realistic goals for challenging and changing the sequences.
- [5] Writing our individual life story, and link what has happened to us with the traps, dilemmas, snags and unstable states that have become our everyday reality.
- [6] Finding resources to support this process of awakening and the shifts in perception that come with change as well as helpful ways to hold on to change.
- [7] As we begin to clear the ground of unhelpful patterns we feel more 'real', because for the first time, we have more space and energy. This space and energy helps us to nourish a healthy island within.

When we change problematic patterns, we change our lives.

We don't, however, change the fundamental core of our being, the individual seed of the self with which we were born. We all have our own unique character, gifts and tendencies, as well as our genetic patterning. In early life this potential self is a bit like a seed planted into the garden of the family. Using this image, it's easy to see that the seed's growth and development is bound up with the nature of the soil and its environment. We cannot isolate ourselves from our context within social culture, language, family, our own biology and history. And as people travel more widely, the culture in which we were brought up may have given us messages that conflict with the environment we end up in. All of us must find ways of dealing with these early experiences in order to survive. When life challenges us through difficult feelings or habits, or when things have gone wrong, we confront aspects of ourselves we had previously taken for granted. We all carry a part of us that is compromised or wounded in some way. How we carry this wound makes the difference between a passive attitude of 'I am a depressive, no one can help me' and the active 'There is a part of me that is depressed and I will address it and take care of it'. Once we engage with ourselves in this way we are more open to enjoy and use our inner world of imagination, dream and insight, and to accept ourselves, just as we are.

If we follow the idea of newborn humans being like seeds planted into the garden of life, we can imagine that each seed has to develop

a 'survival self' in order to manage what might be the less-than-ideal conditions. Few seeds are given the ideal soil and some find themselves on stony ground. Developing a survival self, with coping tactics for adapting to a difficult, hostile or just strange environment, is always necessary, and a mark of the human capacity for adaptation. Human beings are extremely creative!

Understanding and contrasting the difference in energy and flexibility between our learned patterns for survival, with possibly restricted ways of living and relating, and the potential of a healthy self that is able to reflect, observe and transcend identification with suffering, is at the heart of psychotherapeutic work.

Throughout this book we will be looking at some of the ways in which we have become accustomed to think and feel about ourselves and other people, and how this affects our relationship with ourselves and others. We now know from neuroscience that because of our brain's neuroplasticity, it is possible to learn new ways of responding and behaving that in time surpass the old. Once we start using strengths developed by actively thinking and reflecting, we often stimulate other changes. We find we have more inside us than we thought. We may find that the numerous threads running through our life carry more meaning, are even a gift. We begin to feel there is more in life than being on automatic, which many of us are reduced to when things are not going well.

Each of us can take up the challenge of looking at ourselves afresh: to see what things we can change and to accept those we cannot, and to know the difference. Setting aside time to ponder on what we can change, and actively working to achieve those changes, means that we free ourselves from the restrictions of the past, and that our changes are changes for the better.

This book seeks to spotlight *how* we live with what we feel and *how* we have adjusted, and what changes, if any, are needed. I would also like to add that I have met many people who seem to carry an overwhelming sense of pain and suffering for reasons that are unclear. Not everything has a linear cause. We can only bear witness to the suffering we experience in ourselves or in others, and honour its reality as it lives within the individual, and not seek to concretise or rationalise its source.

Why change?

There are really only two certainties in life. One is death, that one day we will die, and the second is that 'everything changes'. But it is these two certainties that we often run away from, seeking

escape or comfort in trying to control pleasure and pain. It's usually when we suffer that we wonder what we can do to bring about change. Everyone seeks change for different reasons – to feel less anxious, to overcome debilitating problems like depression or phobia, to feel more in control of life, to stop making destructive relationships. Or perhaps we seek change because we feel sad or bad, unhappy or empty; because things keep on going wrong. Learning to draft a 'road map' of our development as a person and finding exits to those knotty attitudes that need adjustment means that we take charge. Many people speak today of feeling caught up in social and work systems that are demanding, dehumanising, even punishing. Learning who we are and claiming freedom to be who we are is not simply a short-term solution to problems, it is one of our remaining enduring freedoms. This book might be a first step toward that goal.

Are there things better left unchanged?

The myth of Pandora's Box and the old superstition it 'doesn't do to meddle with things you don't understand' suggests that whatever we have locked away will wreak havoc once made conscious. Then there are the old adages 'Let sleeping dogs lie' and 'Better the devil you know than the devil you don't'. These are powerful messages that would stop us searching and ultimately using our power of choice. They encourage avoidance and ensure that we are limited by fear. But if we don't find out what our 'devils' are, they have a habit of being projected, seen as if they were in other people who become the very devils we fear; they pop up in relationships, in dreams and they bind us into traps and dilemmas. The 'shadow' in Jungian psychology refers to all that is not in the light, often all that we fear and dislike. Accepting this shadow as a valid part of being whole (there is no sun without shadow; no day without night) means we are willing to see it for what it is. We have it rather than it having us.

Through the exploration of our learned patterns we are often rewarded by the gift of insight. Insight – that feeling of 'ah, that's how it was' – is a leavening process through which we begin to trust that there is inside us something that understands what is going on. Just knowing rationally is not enough; we need to open up our other senses – sensing, intuiting, imagining; and then checking it out against what we have learned.

In her moving book *My Father's House*, Sylvia Fraser (1989) describes how for her first forty years she split herself in two – the self that had

a secret and the self that lived in the world. The secret self that had been split off leaked out via dreams, impulsive behaviour, irrational revulsions, in rages, incredible sadness and feelings of emptiness.

What is it that changes?

Human beings are not fixed, although patterns of thinking can feel very rigid and dominating. Subtle shifts in our perceptions, feelings and our thinking go on all the time simply because of ordinary living in a web of relationships. The call to homeostasis (balance) and to feel whole is strong and, as understood in Jungian psychology, is always inviting us to 'individuate', to become who we really are.

Two things can change. One is our attitude. We can breathe life into our experience by observing thoughtfully the hand we have been dealt, accepting that we have done the best we could with what we had at the time, without judging or getting depressed. Acceptance is a start, and it's never too late to begin. Every day is an opportunity to witness afresh what happens inside and outside of ourselves and to develop a kindness toward all that has happened.

The other is standing back enough to make conscious revision of the unhelpful patterns we have got used to inhabiting. In reading this book you are entering a new dance of relating: listening in relation to being listened to, and heard. Over time you might find that you become more accepting and kindly to yourself and to others in relation to feeling accepted and loved.

Old patterns that are redundant can be sloughed off like a snake's skin. We can free a space so that our natural self may start to breathe. But we cannot grow if we are living out of old ideas that need revision, that contribute to our feeling stuck. We cannot take in good things, however much they are offered, if inside we believe we are not entitled to receive them. We cannot relax or let go if we fear being persecuted or abused. And we cannot be assertive if we believe we will lose affection. In order to change and grow we must challenge the presumptions that limit our choices of how to be.

The dance of relating, with ourselves and others

Major studies of neurobiology suggest that our brains are embodied social organs, and that the neural pathways dominating our nervous system develop in accordance with our relationships with others.

Neuroscientists describe how from birth our infant brains are finely tuned for social engagement so that every sense of 'me' evolves from communications, through signs, words or sensations with others (Schore, 2003; Porges, 2005). During infancy and childhood our brains are tuned to be fantastically responsive and adaptive, and the wiring of our brains gets fired in relation to others. Professor of neurology and musicologist C. Trevarthen (1993) speaks about the music of preverbal contact between the infant and other, of how the baby will respond to the communicative sounds of the parent and then wait in anticipation of the continuing response, the baby altering its sounds as the parent alters theirs. The baby's tiny nervous system and brain is finely tuned in responsiveness, like a whole orchestra at concert pitch, waiting for the mutual chords to be struck, the dance of the conjoined music to begin. Professor of psychiatry and director of the Mindsight Institute Dr Daniel Seigel has researched extensively into how effective therapy stimulates neuronal activity and growth toward a more integrated state of being (Seigel, 2010a, 2010b).

Our patterns of relating are founded upon the ways in which we are intimately bound up from the time of our conception with an 'other'. Our brain wiring and nervous systems develop in reciprocal relationship with 'others'; which dances are helpful and which are more problematic. Our model of 'other' may be built from a mother or series of mothers or fathers, by siblings or caregivers, and later in life by friends, partners, pets, employers or even the government. We carry different aspects of this learned 'other' inside us and learn to anticipate their responses. This lays down patterns for relating, both to other people, to the outside world and to ourselves. The strength of CAT is in its use of descriptions to name and map the different dances of relating we have learned.

If, as an infant, we get fed when hungry, warmed when cold, held when anxious, we learn that our non-verbal signals are effective, that we are understood and the appropriate response is given. *Imitation plus exchange is the basis of communication.* We learn that it is safe to be close to another, and this is how we begin to experience our value, to feel that we are worthwhile and lovable, and to love others. This secure attachment, and our anticipation of it, gives us the space and freedom to express ourselves in a natural way as we grow into maturity. We learn that it is OK to be ourselves, to be different, to be separate, to go our own way, all within appropriate limits.

Most of us experience 'other' as a mixture of good, bad and indifferent, sometimes there and sometimes not. Whoever is 'other' will have responses and actions based upon their own patterns and expectations. Because of our adaptability we learn to respond to

what our caregivers want of us and upon whom we are dependent. If our acceptance by 'other' is conditional upon our being always good, we may develop compliance, always wanting to please others, a placation trap might result. We may develop a rebellious style, refusing any kind of relationship because of its demands. We may develop a form of anxiety over 'other', fearing their disapproval, or abandonment, and become clingy and needy in relationships, which may last into later life.

If we experience 'other' as unsafe – perhaps as 'not there', as constantly changing, as unpredictable or neglectful – our natural anxiety rises. Our tiny autonomic nervous systems become flooded with adrenalin and cortisol that has no means of release. Our 'fight or flight' mechanism is not yet mature. We may 'freeze' and become flat, avoiding contact for fear of more anxiety; or, we may become hypervigilant, always on the lookout for something unpredictable or difficult. These patterns protect a young nervous system from more unmanageable fear and are to be welcomed and valued. However, the anticipation of responses from 'other' as being in a certain way governs our inner dialogue – the way we think about ourselves inside and what we allow outside, and continues into outside relationships. These patterns will continue in a variety of ways – some more problematic than others – until they are recognised and revised, and alleviated or replaced with other, more helpful, ways of relating.

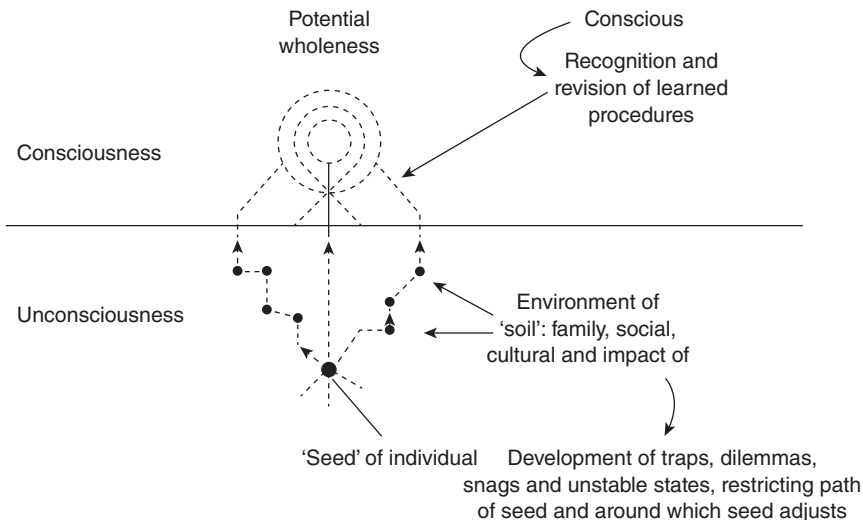


Figure 1.1 Seed and soil diagram of reciprocal role of seed in relation to soil

Problems in relationships occur when, in anticipation of 'other' being conditional or abandoning or rejecting, the individual sees even the slightest difference in attunement as extreme and reacts accordingly, as if it were a foregone conclusion. Because we are so helpless in infancy we make all kinds of arrangements not to be abandoned.

Understanding the fundamental building blocks of our engagement in the dance of relationships, the resulting emotional response and behaviour is the cornerstone of this book, and throughout the different chapters we will be returning to this in many different presentations.

Getting off the symptom hook

We need to get off the symptom hook and understand what patterns contribute to our symptoms. When we start to take our problems seriously and want to change our life, the most important first step is one *away* from the symptom we suffer – whether this is related to depression, relationship failure, dissociation, eating problems or addiction. This book invites you to look underneath your symptoms, diagnosis or questions about treatment. There is no specific list of symptoms but many symptoms and problems are referred to and included in the index. Symptoms can be seen as the 'tip of the iceberg', for what lies within us is a complex mixture of ideas and responses, and it is that rich inner world that we can get to know and make adjustments if needed.

A good beginning is to reach underneath our symptoms and find words or images that best describe the chronic emotional pain we carry that has been formed into a no-go area.

Chronically endured core pain

We may know some of our habitual patterns but not have named what feelings lie underneath. What CAT names as chronically endured emotional pain such as fear, hurt, crushed, humiliated, lost, neglected, are what our learned behaviour patterns have been trying to resolve. Finding our own words to describe what we feel inside might take time, but it's important. We have the opportunity during change to address the core feelings we have carried hidden under habitual behaviours for years. In this next section we look at some

descriptions of emotional pain that have become beliefs and the lens through which life is experienced. As you read, see if you can find your own words, and identify the relational dances you are invited into that maintain emotional suffering. These relational dances are described in CAT as reciprocal role procedures. They contain both the emotional pain-inducing and pain-maintaining experience – for example, criticising in relation to criticised; bullying in relation to bullied (see Part Two).

‘Whatever I do, it’s never good enough’

It’s as if, however hard we strive, we never get the approval or the love we long for. We may overwork or become addicted to work or give up and fall into depression. We may become a perfectionist and achieve a great deal. But whatever the fruits of our striving in the outside world, we are unable to feel good inside, and we are snagged by this core feeling of limitation and judgement. We may end up exhausted and martyred, suffer burn-out, or even suicidal urges.

A learned dance of *anxiously striving* in relation to *conditional and demanding* maintains the core pain feeling of rejection and worthlessness.

‘Everything has to be difficult, whatever I do’

This is a ‘yes ... but’ snag. It’s also a depressed way of thinking and being where no matter what improvements are made we cannot allow them in. The core pain feelings are connected to emptiness. The inner dialogue is between a restricting pessimist in relation to a restricted and defeated small self.

‘No one ever helps me. I have to do everything myself.
If I didn’t, nothing would happen’

This struggle grows out of an early environment where it was hard or impossible to ask for help and we were expected to do most things for ourselves. The harassed single mother or too busy parent may reward their child for self-sufficiency. In families where parents were ill or absent for long periods, or when children have been moved from one foster home to another, the art of self-sufficiency may be the only means of survival. As a child it is very hard to bear

the helplessness or inadequacy of a parent as well as our own. We may develop the fierce independence of a brittle coper, masking the unmet emotional need of our own helplessness, fear and loneliness. *This core pain may be maintained by the internal dialogue between our neglecting internal bully in relationship with our needy child self.*

In some of us this assumption is so well developed we have no concept of being allowed our own needs and feelings. We survive by our independence, 'gutting it' through many of life's crises without apparent difficulty. Problems arise when loneliness or exhaustion become severe. We may develop a cynicism and bitterness in our belief that we are the only people who do anything, and become exacting, demanding company. The fear of letting go enough to allow someone to help us or be close makes us cold companions.

Try the following exercise:

Exercise: 'No one ever helps me ...'

Monitor the number of times you find yourself doing things automatically with a resigned, sinking heart, feeling put upon and all alone, secretly grumpy and resentful. You might find yourself thinking: 'Why is it always just up to me?' Do this for a week. At the end of the week look and see how much this happens in your everyday life. Start questioning it. Need it be so, every time?

Experiment with putting off tasks for as long as you can bear and note the feelings that come up.

Note how much the presumption that things will not get done unless you do them actually heightens your anxiety.

Talk about what you feel to someone. Explain how difficult it is for you to leave things to others, but how you would like to do this more.

Can you identify the inner dialogue that might go something like 'exacting/demanding to inadequate and worthless'?

'I always pick the bad ones'

We may notice patterns of feeling excited and carried away by meeting exciting others, and having exciting experiences of which we have high hopes and often getting lost in the excitement. We project our ideal into the other person and become enthralled, secretly hoping they will offer all the comfort, love, nurture and satisfaction we have never had. In doing so we become passive, vulnerable to being victim. Sooner or later the rosy spectacles come off and the person,

ideology or group become just ordinary or worse, and we feel terribly let down, even abused by the loss of the projection of all our hopes. We end up feeling angry, humiliated, beaten, frustrated. We can get cynical and bitter, fearing that all experiences are the same.

The dance of relating is of a *neglected self* in relation to the *fantasy of perfect care*. We may also notice that throughout the day we have a number of different extreme feelings and no idea how we got from one intense feeling to another.

Notice these patterns in yourself. In Part Seven, 'Making the Change', we will be looking more specifically at how to nourish the neglected part of ourselves.

'Only if I am allowed to have what I want on my own terms can I feel I exist'

The core pain feeling associated with this is terror of annihilation, as if our only hope for staying alive, or sane, is to make sure we have control over every interaction. As a consequence, people experience us as rigid and over-controlling, and if we do not have things on our own terms we experience depression and its associated sense of annihilation.

The work with change is to find a way of stabilising the emptiness inside so that we can relinquish control in very small steps. At the end of this book there are exercises for befriending fear so that we can take more risks in varying our interactions. In Chapter 13 we see Alistair's diagram of the void and how he took these steps for himself.

'When I have something nice it is bound to be taken away from me'

The core pain here is unbearable loss. We may have experienced the actual loss of someone precious early in life. Perhaps we carry an irrational guilt about something for which we were not responsible which makes us unconsciously sabotage anything good. It's as if, because of our loss, we have vowed never to let anything become important to us again. We might feel as if we are living 'on hold', lonely, unable to get close or be happy, and our core pain may present itself as phobia, isolation or chronic anxiety. There are exercises designed to work through this in Part Seven.

You will see from these examples how important it is to get beneath our symptoms or problems to reveal the underlying patterns. The symptoms or problems that entrap us and the core emotional pain are maintained by the internalisation of our early dance of relating. We absorb these learned patterns of interaction which then influence both how we relate and anticipate relating with others and also the conversations we have within ourselves.

How to begin the process of change

In this section we look at different ways to begin to reflect on change. As you read, imagine yourself on a journey of exploration about yourself and the mysterious inner world that accompanies your every day. Use a notebook or tape recorder as you start to make connections with what goes on inside you.

Drawing the life line

As we reflect upon the entrenched old beliefs and core pain we carry we start to see the patterns of thinking around them, so it's useful to look back and get a sense of when these patterns started. Take a clean piece of paper, or a new page in your notebook, and spend a few moments feeling into what kind of original seed your own being might have had: any image you like. Work with what arises. Then see that seed planted into the soil of your original garden. Notice which words, images or qualities arise for this environment. Draw a line emerging from the seed and begin to mark the transitions or changes that altered the natural direction of the seed. Most of us have had to bend away from our natural growth in order to accommodate our environment and this is all part of who we are. In making your own drawing, look at transitions formed by going to school, births and deaths, house moves, and take your life line through infancy and childhood into adolescence and adulthood. See what arises and what you notice. Write down words or find pictures or images to describe these lines of your life. Notice anything you had to do to compensate for failures in your environment. Remember that the small person inside us does what he or she can at the time with what they know or do not know. We can learn to develop compassion for ourselves, for the self that made the journey so far. If you like, you can experiment with making a dotted line to illustrate how you would have liked things to have been. What we are looking for

in all the exercises in this book is greater awareness, not blame, and awareness can be developed, through understanding and with the practice of mindful attention. Have a look at Darpana's life line (Figure 1.2) as an example.

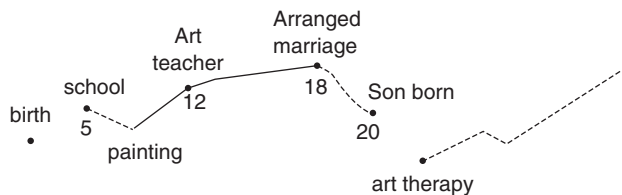


Figure 1.2 Life line from Darpana illustrating two episodes of feeling invisible: birth to 5 years, and at 20 to 25 years during post-natal depression

When I see someone for the first time as a therapist I usually hear a phrase that tells me something about the story of survival and begin to sense the feeling of the reciprocal roles that have been learned. This often arises from what occurs in the space between us. For example, I might start to feel invited to rescue a 'helpless victim' survival self; I might start to feel as if my open questions are being experienced as critical or powerful and the other person feels put down or judged; or, I might feel small and inadequate in the face of experiencing the other's powerful need to control or blind me with their own science. This is all good! It's all information, letting me know the nature and feeling of the survival pattern.

Take a few moments now, to experiment with this:

Exercise

Imagine sitting with someone you know well. See them in the chair in front of you. Without struggling, see if you can find words that describe the invitation from the other – that you are 'nice', or 'clever' or 'in charge' or that you are just happy as yourself. Find words that might describe the dance of relationship between you.

Traps, dilemmas, snags and unstable states of mind

Survival patterns tend to decree that *only* certain ways of behaving are valid, thus presenting us with a very limited range of options and choices about how to express ourselves. In this book, we describe

these limited options as traps, dilemmas or snags, and as difficult or unstable states of mind.

A **trap** occurs when we carry on with our adaptive behaviour beyond its sell-by date. Rather than protect us when we are vulnerable, it actually leaves us feeling worse. For example, if the habit of pleasing and smiling even when we are hurt seems to save us from others' anger or rejection, it tends to lead us to feel used and worthless. We feel angry and resentful underneath but have not developed the skills to stand up for ourselves and we feel defeated, stuck in the trap of placation.

When we have bargained with ourselves in a black-and-white way, either 'I'm this', or 'I'm that' - or we think, 'If I do this ... then I am this ...', we end up living at one end of a **dilemma**. For example: 'If I'm not living on a knife edge of having to strive constantly to be perfect, I will make a terrible mess.' Dilemmas can also form an 'if ... then ...' quality: 'If I get close to other people *then* I will have to give in to them.' Either I try to look down on other people, or I feel they look down on me.

And a **snag** occurs *internally* when we unconsciously create a pattern of self-sabotage. We are just about to take up a new job or relationship, for example, when something goes wrong and prevents us from being happy or successful. Or, *externally* when we fear the response of others to our success, as if this would hurt or deprive others.

Sometimes the way we experience ourselves keeps shifting and it is difficult for us to be consistent. It's as if in our early life we have had to keep on the move from contact with 'other' in order to avoid feeling overwhelmed. These **unstable states of mind** may include intense or uncontrollable emotions, being unreasonably angry with others, blanking off or feeling unreal. They may include experiences of dissociation or depersonalisation. **Depersonalisation** means feeling detached from one's body; it's familiar in phobic anxiety and panic attack. **Dissociation** means that we cut off and dissociate from whatever is going on in the moment; it develops as a way of dealing with unbearable pain or terror.

We may have compartmentalised aspects of experience that have, in the past, become unbearable. When something in current time triggers an unbearable feeling we cut off, usually without being aware this is what we are doing.

Fear, stress and self-regulation

Skirting around no-go areas and living 'as if' we had only a limited range of options keeps us linked, through fear, to the past. Many of

us carry a lot of fear in our bodies. We might not know it as fear, it might just be that sometimes we blank off and other times we feel highly on alert. When the chemistry of fear is dominant we may find that our sensory experience overwhelms us and stops us being able to reflect or take stock of what is happening. This is called stress. Learning to really listen kindly and gently to our bodies and what they are trying to tell us is an important step in the creation of a reparative inner dialogue with ourselves. It takes courage and some skills, which you will be learning throughout this book.

The diagram in Figure 1.3 helps us identify when we are in hyper- or hypoarousal – when our responses are dominated by the body reflexes of flight/fight or freeze.

Spend a few moments considering where you might be on the diagram right now. Make a copy for yourself and carry it around with you. Whenever you feel you are out of the 'window of tolerance' stop and try one of the self-regulation exercises you can find described on the companion website to this book. Whenever you can, just try to notice the triggers to getting stressed and write them down.

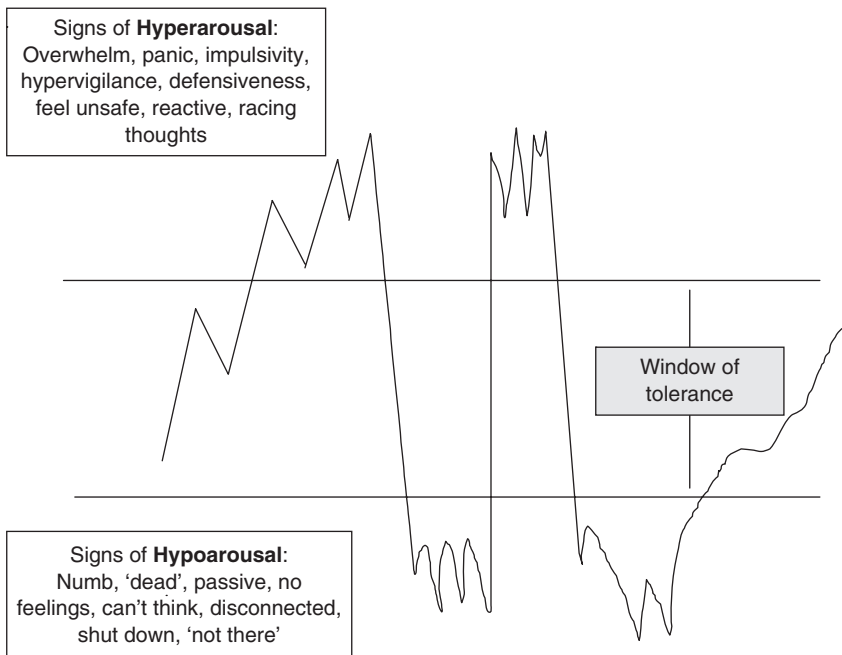


Figure 1.3 The autonomic arousal model. (Reproduced from Ogden and Minton (2000) *Traumatology*, 6 (3), 1–20, by kind permission of Dr J. Fisher, Center for Integrative Healing, Boston, USA, and Dr Pat Ogden, Sensorimotor Institute, Boulder, Colorado.)

Finding ways to recognise when our stress response inhibits self-reflection, and learning how to stay within the 'window of tolerance' is a first step to taking control of our stress responses and to change. In regulating stress we are freer to think clearly about ourselves and others.

Our internal core pain will be unique to us. It is based upon what, for us, was both the nature of, and our response to, the people, atmosphere and events of our early life. Many people carry a strong sense of 'past', contained within the stories and myths of their families, tribes or cultures. This may affect their lives deeply, and may require acknowledgement rather than psychological analysis. The task of the focused psychotherapeutic approach outlined in this book is to offer the tools for revision, adjustment, healing or forgiveness only *where they are needed*.

The need to tell our own story

We are all embedded in our own story. And we are not the story! But stories are important, the fabric of everyday events into which our own individual pearl is sown. They shape the context in which we find ourselves, we cannot escape our story, but we can make it work for us.

Stories have been an invaluable form of communication since time began. Long before psychology, the storyteller was often experienced as the one who 'knew things'. Stories honour experience, giving it shape as well as containment. The continuum of past, present and future widens the way we collect our ordinary life together. Stories, even about the most horrible and painful of situations, help to bring a dignity to our individual lives when it is *our* story: this is what happened to *me*; *I* felt this, *I* did this, *I* went there and it was as if ...

In CAT the retelling of the life story is one of the foundations for shared communication. It pays particular attention to the learned patterns of coping and survival, and is called **reformulation**. This reframes our personal journey and places us as a hero or heroine of that journey. In a CAT therapy this process is a shared collaboration between therapist and patient. It offers a witnessing process that helps us to feel understood and respected, and provides us with an opportunity to understand and respect ourselves. In the therapeutic story we find descriptions for the adaptation we want to change and we add intention for change and hope for the future. As we look at the patterns in our own life story we may find associations with themes from well-established stories: 'Sleeping Beauty', 'Bluebeard', 'Hansel and Gretel'. The recognition, as well as wisdom, in these

ancient stories can help us to feel not so alone. Others have come this way and their patterns of suffering have been woven into story and fairy tale.

The stories that will be shared within the pages of this book are all from real life, woven with threads that illustrate each person's struggle to live a life and have the courage to change. I thank again all those people who have given permission for their stories to be included here so that their themes can inspire us to look at our own lives afresh.

Developing an 'observer self'

We can prepare for and assist the process of change by developing new, non-judgemental 'awareness and observation muscles'.

We can train ourselves to:

- notice
- reflect
- revise
- try something new
- accept our every effort, whatever outcome, including our forgetfulness!
- learn kindness to ourselves and others

Psychotherapy nourishes flexible mind muscles, and fosters self-observation and self-reflection. Some of the changes we make concern shifts in thinking, perception and attitude. What may take longer is becoming more aware of what non-verbal stories are carried by our bodies. We may know 'about' our lump in the throat, pain in the heart, ache in the back, but we may not have asked 'if you could speak, what would you say?' In Chapter 14 there are suggestions for exercises to help support our explorations.

We might also want to consider practising each day a few moments of:

- awareness of our breathing and body sensations
- awareness of our feelings and emotions
- awareness of thoughts and what follows from thoughts

Preparation for your own therapy

This book might be a useful way to find out what patterns contribute to difficulties and may help in the decision to invest in personal therapy.

There is no substitute for the journey of therapy with another human being. The therapeutic relationship is a gift well worth giving to yourself, an investment in your emotional future.

This book can also be seen as a helpful companion whilst undergoing a personal therapy. It may also be an accompaniment to understanding the process of someone close to you who is in therapy.



The first task is to complete the Psychotherapy File, which you will find in Appendix 1, with an extended version available on the companion website to this book. This helps to distil the issues you are currently struggling with and the patterns of behaviour to which you have become accustomed. Keep a journal for thoughts or ideas, responses from completing the exercises in each chapter. Allocate special time for yourself in a way that you may not be used to, even five minutes may be new. Mark out time in your diary, or set aside particular days which you devote to self-reflection and keeping an eye on your aims for change. In each section there are instructions on how to proceed, and examples from people who have already travelled along this path.

Notebook, pencil, colours and loose paper

We have already discussed keeping a notebook, small enough to fit into your pocket so you can jot down thoughts and reactions as you go through each day. It's useful to record dreams too, and ideas and fantasies. A larger notebook is useful for any drawings, cartoons, or doodles, open letters to people who come up for you in the course of this programme, your life story, your target problems and aims, and anything else that intrigues you. Keep your notes and thoughts as *you* would want to, not for others.

Creating a safe space

Find a place to sit where you feel warm and comfortable. Close your eyes if you are OK with this. Invite into your awareness a time when you felt safe and loved, however fleeting this experience. If there are no times, find a place you know, or one you imagine, that is safe. Notice the atmosphere, the colours or shapes, the people. Notice how this feels in your body, place your hand where you most connect with a feeling of safety and know that you can return to it at any time.

It is useful to keep the image of the safe place close to you. A photograph or magazine cutting posted by your fridge or bathroom

mirror can help remind you. If at any time you realise you are becoming disorganised in your thinking, overly distracted or ruminative, in the way described on page 20, return to the feeling of the safe place. When you have restored regular breathing and the 'window of tolerance' (Figure 1.3), note down what seemed to be the triggers. Knowing your 'triggers' helps you to anticipate or prepare throughout your day.

Once we have made maps that outline the way our survival self has had to operate we need techniques for managing the feelings we are going to allow to emerge for the first time. At first this might mean simply naming them: 'afraid' or 'angry' which allows recognition, and gives a small space from feeling engulfed. We can also ask: what does this feeling most need right now?

The early five minutes

It is a very good idea when beginning a programme of self-examination to start each day with a few minutes' silence. For the first few weeks don't try to 'do' anything with this time, just quietly reflect; on how you feel, how your body feels, and simply notice thoughts and stream-of-consciousness impressions. Writing down these early morning experiences helps us to validate them. Most of us give very little time, if any, to pondering on how we feel emotionally or physically, and when we have problems we tend either to shut down and go onto automatic, or feel flooded with uncontrollable feelings. This early five minutes will be a kind of anchor, a chance to be in silent communion with yourself. And, as you write your own story and goals for change, each day will feel different.

Self-monitoring

One of the most useful methods of keeping aware of what is happening inside is through self-monitoring. You might like to start by monitoring the number of times you think negatively or unkindly about yourself. Keep a note of the time of day, what is happening, what you are thinking, who you are with.

You can also monitor feeling depressed or any physical symptoms and panic or phobic attacks. Monitoring helps us connect feeling or symptoms with beliefs. Monitoring the occasions when certain traps and dilemmas operate in your life can offer a space for insight and control, where we choose to think and behave differently.

Co-counselling

If you decide to share the process of reading this book with a friend, set aside a certain time each week to meet in the privacy of one of your homes, and treat the time as you would a counselling session with a professional. Keep to your own individual reflective time in between, for recording the process. Take turns at being counsellor and client and go through the findings from the Psychotherapy File with each other. You will enter a collaborative dialogic process, each helping with the process of identifying attitudes, thinking and problem areas, and in answering the questionnaires. Part Six, 'Gathering Information', is laid out in such a way that the 'counsellor' may read out questions and allow the 'client' time for reflection. Helping each other in writing the life story can be enlivening.

Learning mindfulness and compassion

A basic definition of mindfulness is 'moment by moment awareness'. This awareness helps us to stay present, with whatever is arising, so that we may experience it fully. Developing the capacity for mindfulness helps us in the journey of exploring our inner worlds. It helps us to see things clearly and also to develop calm. Buddhist nun Pema Chodron describes how the investigative aspect of mindfulness helps to begin to melt the frozen ice in oneself in order that we discover our potential for a more fluid nature.

On retreat at Arnhem in Holland in June 2006, Zen Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh said:

The practice of mindfulness is to remain in the present moment without trying to change or avoid it. It has the quality of attention that notices without choosing, a sun that shines on everything equally. The energy of mindfulness carries the energy of concentration and establishes us in the here and now. It allows us to touch the island within. Only when mindfulness is established can we know what is happening in the present moment.

Practising mindfulness can help us gain insight, and also wisdom. In Appendix 2 there are some suggestions for practical exercises and meditations, and there are more on the companion website to this book.



The CAT structure offers a container for naming and changing the problematic patterns that have had a hold on our lives. Just as important

is to value the things we *have* done that we can feel good about, and in doing so we nourish our healthy island. To have survived a childhood of loss or abuse and be making our way in the world, working at what we can, trying again and again to make a relationship, is brave. Observe your own braveness, and wonder at your resilience!

Survival procedures and irrational guilt often prevent us from choosing joy or happiness. Several people I have met have said that they could envy a dying person, because they no longer had to struggle at life, they could just let go. It is a sad thought that we have to wait to live until we are about to die.

Maybe we all need permission to be happy in the present moment. Traditional Mindfulness meditation is taught with an emphasis on **Maitri** – a Sanskrit word meaning ‘unconditional friendliness’ or ‘loving kindness to oneself’. During conflict, distraction or difficulty, remembering to practise Maitri helps a hardened attitude to be more flexible. This is rather alien to Westerners, who regularly suffer from low self-esteem, self-criticism and self-dislike which are less known in countries where a contemplative way of life is predominant. The Tibetan people who fled to Northern India, North America and Europe after the invasion of China, with all the problems of being refugees from their own land, do not suffer low self-esteem.

The formal practice of Maitri, called Karuna or loving kindness compassion, begins with practising loving kindness first toward ourselves, then to those closest to us, then someone neutral, then someone we have difficulty with, and then all people, plants and animals. (For a loving kindness meditation, see Appendix 2.) The concept is that we need to learn to love and accept ourselves in our humanity before we are able to love others.

In my practice as a psychotherapist I describe Maitri and invite people to practise with it. In Chapter 11 Susannah shares her journey of therapy, where she used Maitri to help her challenge a reciprocal role that dominated her relationships where she felt merged and lost.

Sometimes just saying ‘yes’ to life and choosing a joyful attitude makes a difference: to walk in the street and see what is happening rather than what is not; to greet a person and recognise what is in their hearts rather than defending against what might hurt us. And the poets have been there before us. Their words can help:

Kindness

Before you know kindness as the deepest thing inside,
you must know sorrow as the other deepest thing.

You must wake up with sorrow.

You must speak to it till your voice
catches the thread of all sorrows
and you see the size of the cloth.
Then it is only kindness that makes sense any more,
only kindness that ties your shoes
and sends you out into the day to mail letters and purchase bread,
only kindness that raises its head
from the crowd of the world to say
It is I you have been looking for,
and then goes with you everywhere
like a shadow or a friend.

(Excerpt from 'Kindness' from *Words Under the Words: Selected Poems*
by Naomi Shihab Nye, copyright © 1995. Reprinted with the permission
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