

A Client's anonymised reflections on experiencing the Reflective Mind and Reactive Brain/Body model in therapy and integrating it into day-to-day life.

Introduction

This client was asked if they might share their experience late on in the work at a point where confidence was high that they were very unlikely to agree if they felt it was not appropriate for them. They were given time to reflect rather than provide an immediate response.

They have agreed that it can be shared and have ongoing authority to have their reflection removed from the website.

This type of reflection later in the work can also be a useful therapeutic experience consolidating new self-awareness and awareness of the resources a client has available to them to self-manage their system in a more resilient way.

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"I started studying the Reflective Mind, Reactive Brain, Reactive Body in therapy and have found this, with time, patience, and practise to be a hugely useful tool.

I have now got to know myself well for the first time and can see the familiar reactions both physical and emotional of my reactive behaviour. Racing heart, clammy hands, a sense of panic, feeling tearful, wanting to run away, scared, overwhelmed. These are feelings I have had for as long as I can remember and crop up, uninvited on a regular basis and can be dangerous, exhausting and take a long time to recover from.

Practising Reflective behaviour does not stop the old behaviours immediately. The panic, racing heart and other symptoms still come when the triggers arrive. However, with (A LOT) of practise, the Reflective mind can stop their unwanted influence in their tracks and just ask for some time out.

In my world, my Reactive brain is the high-speed train charging out of the station with the doors still open and passengers falling over on the platform. The Reflective mind is a Buddha type or Indian Yoga guru, sitting cross legged with eyes closed, breathing deeply in a place of deep tranquillity.

I see my triggers and quite honestly, my Reactive brain and body see them before I do and start flapping about in a panic of chaos and drama. My Reflective mind spiritual Guru says "hold on a moment.... Let's just have a look at this. Let's just count to 10 and consider ... this has happened before and will happen again. Let's look at this for a moment and figure out the worst-case scenario and work backwards"

I have learned to welcome and embrace my triggers as an opportunity to learn about and develop my Reactive behaviour. I have certain situations in my life that are hugely painful and very difficult but the flapping, crying, hyperventilating, and running away has not stopped them. They are still there. The Reflective skills are to look at them and think "Ok, well here you are, and you do not frighten me anymore" - the sense of achievement when I can manage a trigger in a calm and rational way and walk out the other side is immense and hugely empowering.

My Reactive brain and body are so used to being dominant and are still vying for the lead role. It is a familiar behaviour that I know well. My Reflective mind, however, is gaining strength and is offering space, perspective, and kindness to a vulnerable and wounded soul. The Reflective Mind acknowledges that it is painful, difficult, and cruel but that maybe this exact

situation today is not the problem but that it is reminiscent of a problem that happened 30 years ago that is no longer here. The perpetrator is long gone so why spend any more precious energy on reacting to the pain that they inflicted when they are not even present? The Reflective mind says "ok, Reactive brain has leaped to defence, Reactive body is prepared to fight or flee but this is exhausting, hugely traumatic and quite honestly, just not worth the effort so let's stop, count to 10 and re-evaluate". The Reflective mind does not criticise the Reactive activity - it merely passes me a blanket to wrap around myself for a few minutes and asks me to stop, breathe and then re-join the situation. The reactive brain and body will fight this bitterly as they have had full responsibility for the over-reaction and subsequent fall out but just like giving up sugar in your tea or packing up smoking, the craving slowly starts to weaken.

I used to smoke and whenever I speak to one friend who still smokes, I immediately think of a cigarette despite not having smoked for years. I see this as a sort of Reactive/Reflective behaviour. The Trigger presents itself and the Reactive brain and body are so closely associated that they leap into action, and it is for me to constantly repeat the behaviour in the shape of the Reflective Mind who marches

in and says "stand down please - I have this under control"

It is not easy, and it takes a huge amount of work but then if it was a long time coming, it will be a long time going and that is just the way it is. I am learning a new simple language and it is only by practising regularly and challenging myself that I can become fluent. Most importantly, I do not feel bad or guilty about my Reactive brain and body behaviours. I thank them for all the support and care they have provided in the face of some dreadful situations throughout my life. They did their very best for me and that is a part of my life that I will always acknowledge. I have no need to deny them.

However, as I grow and evolve, I now see that that type of care and support is no longer appropriate, and I choose to seek another source that will be less exhausting, more empowering and enable me to feel proud rather than ashamed. The triggers are still there and there are sad events that will never change but I use my Reflective mind to put them into perspective and accept them. My Reflective mind also gives me another super-power which is to see the triggers for what they are and no more. My Reflective mind works along the theory of "charm to disarm" - at least in my head - those triggers didn't finish me off last time and they won't this time. See them,

acknowledge them, and then let my Reflective mind remind me that just for now, for a minute or an hour or a day, they can wait as I am not reacting to them yet. It is not convenient, and I am in control, and I will say if and when I feel like dealing with them, but they are not just barging in uninvited and causing chaos anymore. "