

PRACTICING MINDFULNESS

The Difficult Child/Person as my Teacher

This assignment requires you to focus on the one child (or adult) who manages 'to push your buttons' and thus gets you worked up 'emotionally speaking'. Use your relationship with this child (or person) to gain more insight about yourself and explore the self-change you need to engage in to help you connect more effectively by responding (*you choose an appropriate behavioral response*) rather than reacting (*your emotions dictate your behavioral response*) to the child's inappropriate behavior. Follow the format outlined below and read the attached sample to help you with this process.

1) Situational Context (Who, What, When, Where, Why)

In a brief paragraph, describe or outline the circumstances involving you, the child, and any other players.

2) Triggers (External and Internal). The trigger can be BOTH external and internal.

The internal trigger refers to your emotional state prior to the situational context. For example, you left home in an 'uptight mood' because of a fight with a co-worker, your thoughts and emotions may be focused on this experience; therefore, you may be in a 'sour mood' when you return home. Emotional states can therefore be either positive or negative depending on the quality of your family relationships or the quality of your work experience. External triggers refer to the child's behaviors that pushed your buttons. What did he/she say that got you 'worked up'? What negative behaviors did he/she engage in?

3) Physiological Response

Under stress the body produces cortisol and adrenaline, chemicals that can contribute to a fight/flight/freeze response. As the brain stem controls reflexive responses, your body may respond with an accelerated heartbeat, high blood pressure, tense muscles, changed breathing pattern, sweating, a rise in body temperature, etc. Monitor your bodily response. In terms of your body's arousal continuum (calm, alert, alarm, fear, terror), identify your arousal level.

4) Self-Talk

What do you say to yourself every time this child acts up? It is ok - in this assignment - to confess that you actually entertained a few choice swear words to describe how you were feeling at that particular point in time. It's very important that you bring to consciousness the self-talk you typically engage in, more so under stress.

5) Beliefs

Beliefs shape our experiences of ourselves in relation to others and vice versa. As beliefs are part of our implicit memory, we aren't consciously aware of how they influence the present. Examples of beliefs that influence our daily lives/interactions are as follows:

- *"In order to make relationships work, I must go along with my partner's wishes/demands"*
- *"I can't count on others to take care of things, so I must rely on myself"*
- *"Only when I do for others do I feel valued/accepted"*
- *"If I am weak, I'll be pushed around, so I must always be strong and in charge"*
- *"Men/women are generally unreliable as they can't be trusted, and they will cheat on you."* (Men are unreliable due to mom having other men in her life. The belief would be, *"men are unreliable, because they just come in and out of my life."*)
- *"Children must always obey their parents"*
- An example of a belief that is actually reflected in self-talk, especially for adults with a background of childhood trauma is: *"You little shit, you will never amount to anything"*

Which of these beliefs seem familiar to you or can you now recognize other beliefs (review handout on core beliefs)? How do your beliefs influence your self-talk and your emotions in this particular situation?

6) Emotions

Which feelings come to the fore? Anger? Anger is usually a secondary response as underlying anger is a mixture of other feelings that are already being contaminated by your internal trigger or mood prior to this encounter. Underlying anger are such feelings as annoyance, irritation, hurt, grief, etc.

7) Behavioral Response

What was your first behavioral response to this child's negative behavior? Did you ignore him/her because you weren't too sure how to handle him/her? Did you order him/her to leave the room? Did you respond in a verbally/emotionally aggressive manner?

8) The Effect of your Behavior on the Child

How did your response affect the child? How did the child, in turn, respond to you? How did your response change over a period of time?

9) Family of Origin Insight

- a) What do this child's behavior and your response remind you of when you were approximately his/her age, especially as it pertains to the way your parents responded to you or your siblings? Any similarities between your response and your parenting style or your parent's parenting style?
- b) What is the connection between the child's negative behavior and the anxiety in the family environment due to stress generated by addiction, marital conflict, and fundamentalist belief systems, rigid authoritarian parenting style,...

What insights about yourself did this child pass on to you? How did you change?

THE 3 TYPES OF RELATIONAL MESSAGES

All relational messages fall into one of three categories:

1. **Affinity:** the degree to which people like or dislike one another. A glare or angry word shows the level of liking just as clearly as a smile.
2. **Respect:** it is possible to like others without respecting them or vice-versa. Example: you have a high regard for a co-worker who is honest, hard-working, reliable and talented; however, you do not particularly enjoy his/her company.
Sometimes being respected is more important than being liked.
3. **Control:** refers to the degree to which parties in a relationship have the power to influence one another.

Light Control occurs in everyday life in relatively tension free settings when people are giving orders, instructing, advising and selling.

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LIGHT CONTROL

Light control occurs when:

- a. Exercising legitimate authority (parent) - "No candy, John, we're about to eat."
 - b. Establishing expectation - "Dinner at the Henry's is at 6:00 p.m.. We're all going together."
 - c. Dividing everyday responsibilities - "Scrub the kitchen while I vacuum the living room."
 - d. Conveying messages signaling tension or dissatisfaction - "Next time you're going to be late, give me a call."
 - e. Encouraging good behavior - "You did a great job cleaning the car."
 - f. Asserting your expertise - "Here, let me show you how it's done."
 - g. Letting off steam - "I've had a rough day. I need some time to relax."
- Vocal qualities: firm, authoritative

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HEAVY CONTROL

Heavy Control: used in situations involving considerable tension and strong feelings. It can be very active or very passive, but in both forms it is aggressive and the goals are similar: to force change or to resist change.

You are into heavy control if you try to force agreement or force an outcome without regard for your partners feelings or what your partner thinks or wants.

In the long run, heavy control undermines self-esteem and relationships.

In addition to forcing or resisting change other intentions of heavy controllers are:

- * hurting others
- * making others feel guilty/ashamed
- * winning
- * protecting and defending self
- * avoiding responsibility

ACTIVE BEHAVIOR OF HEAVY CONTROLLERS

- * Labelling/name calling - "What a sissy"
- * Blaming - "It's your fault"
- * Accusing - "You're always out. You don't love me anymore."
- * Threatening - "This is your last chance."
- * Demanding change - "Stop crying, damn it."
- * Evaluating - "You're always screwing up."
- * Put Downs - "You women/men are all the same. You can't be trusted."
- * Ordering - "Stop it right now."

TWO CHARACTER PROFILES OF HEAVY CONTROLLERS

A. The Interrogator

Her/His aim is to become the dominant judge of other peoples' lives; he wants other to defer to his world view. He/She is always watching out, ready to criticize your behavior and attitude, and making corrections (e.g My, my, your children are wild). The criticism throws you off balance and makes you unsure of yourself.

As the recipient of the Interrogator's style of communication, you always get the distinct feeling that you are being monitored, judged and evaluated. You get the sense that, relative to his/her standards, you are inadequate.

B. The Intimidator

He/She says and does things that suggest she might erupt in rage or violence at any moment. Example: She/He may show us the extent of her/his anger by breaking furniture or throwing things across the room.

This communication style's strategy is to gain our attention and energy by creating an environment in which we feel so threatened, we are totally focused on the intimidator. Thus in the presence of the intimidator's energy field, we feel drained, uncomfortable, unsafe and even in danger.

PASSIVE BEHAVIOR OF HEAVY CONTROLLERS

- * Complaining - "How come I'm always doing the dirty work?"
- * Self-protecting - "That's not what I said"
- * Disqualifying - "I didn't mean it that way"
- * Withholding - "I told you once already. I'm not going to repeat it."
- * Poor me - "I wish things would go my way just once"
- * Foot dragging - "I'll get to it when I have the time"
- * Assuming blame - "You're right, it's all my fault."
- * Being a martyr - "It doesn't matter. I've gotten used to his abusive behavior."
- * Acting self-righteous - "How dare you accuse me of something like that."
- * Keeping score - "I'm not gonna forget this."
- * Speaking for others by using "we"
Example: "We would like to ----"
"We agreed that ----"
- * Not answering your partner's questions
- * Changing the topic/refusing to discuss topic "I don't want to hear about this anymore"
- * Indirect communication - e.g. Do you guys usually start this late? - Referring to meeting times.
- * Staying Aloof - Maintaining distance, avoiding straight answers, conveying a sense of detachment

CHARACTER PROFILE: PASSIVE BEHAVIOR

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The Poor Me

This person seeks to win deference and attention through the manipulation of sympathy. As a recipient of this style of communication, you feel guilty for no reason. He/she might say,

"well, I expected you to call yesterday, but you never did." or

"I had all these bad things happen to me and you were nowhere to be found" or

"All of these bad things are about to happen to me, and you probably won't be around then, either." or

In the Poor Me's world, the only reasonable way of acting is to bid for sympathy through guilt trips and perceived slights.

Very often the same kind of abusive people the Poor Me fears are exactly the ones allowed into their lives.

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All of the above are powerful tactics for indirectly expressing your feeling and manipulating your partner.

The typical vocabulary of the heavy controller includes: should, ought, have to, always, never, every, right, wrong, good, bad.

Voice qualities: harsh, emotionally charged threatening/sarcastic tone, loud and negative sounding or soft and whiny rapid rate.

TYPES OF CONNECTION BIDS

TURN TOWARDS

- Passive responses/low energy
E.g. Wife: "How was school kids?"
Child: "Ok I guess"
Friend 1: "Look at this sweater"
Friend 2: "Oh neat!"
- Attentive responses
E.g. 1) Wife: "Could you make me a sandwich please?"
Husband: "Sure honey" (action) Or
2) Wife: "I had an awful day"
Husband: "You do look exhausted. (validating)"
3) Husband: "Can you scratch my back? (laying on stomach)."
Wife: Responds by tickling soles. (funny action)

- High Energy
(Full attention and eye contact)
E.g. Hugs, handshakes, joking, attentive listening

WHEN YOU TURN TOWARDS OTHERS, YOU'RE SAYING:

- I hear you
- I'm interested in you
- I'm on your side
- I'm prepared to listen even if I disagree
- I'd like to help you
- I like/respect you

TURNING AWAY

- Preoccupied Responses
(Doing something else while somebody is talking to you).
Or husband trying to be romantic and wife pushes him away.
- Disregarding Responses
A request is ignored or met with silence
- Interrupting Responses
Unrelated matters or counter-bids
E.g. Child: "Our dog is missing"
Parent: "Geez, look at the mud on the floor."
- Mindless Behavior
You are unaware of how your responses are affecting others.

WHEN YOU TURN AWAY, YOU ARE SAYING:

- I'm not interested in what you are talking about
- -I'm too busy to pay attention to you
- I want to avoid topic
- I've got other things on my mind

EFFECT ON OTHERS

- Feel hurt, because of being ignored
- Bidder loses, Confidence and Self-esteem
- Feel defeated (physically: shoulder crumples)
- Children feel lonely in their emotions
- Self-talk: "Why bother, it's no use."
- Habitual turning away leads to a pattern of attack-defend. Read e.g. Pg. 48-50 (Gender differences).

TURNING AGAINST

- **CONTEMPTUOUS PUT-DOWNS**
 Child: "I don't understand this math homework."
 Dad: "Duh, is there anything you understand?"
- **BELIGERENT (Looking for a fight).**
 Child: "Mom, look at my drawing."
 Mom: "Stop bothering me."
- **CONTRADICTORY**
 (Less hostile than Bel, but still looking to argue.)
- **DOMINEERING**
 (Controlling other/ getting other to submit).
- **CRITICAL**
 "You always....."
 "You never....."
 Child: "Dad stop the car. I need to go to the bathroom!"
 Dad: "You never learn do you? You were supposed to go to the bathroom before we left." (You are attacking the person's character).
- **DEFENSIVE**
 (To avoid responsibility or defend self).
 Wife: "I'm worried about the bills."
 Husband: "It wasn't my idea to buy the car."

WHEN YOU TURN AGAINST YOU'RE SAYING:

- Your need for attention is annoying
- I feel hostile toward you
- I don't respect you
- I want to hurt you
- I want to drive you away

EFFECT ON OTHERS

- Anxiety-Suppressed Feelings-Avoid Conflict
- You stay in the relationship but quit interacting

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Mindfulness

Family Violence

Incident:

My co-worker walking into work and passing by my office with her keys making the sound of keys banging together (clanging sounds). She's playing with her keys as she walks by. When I was younger, 7 years old when I was in the care of my bio-parents. My father hit my mom with a set of keys; he threw them across the table to hit her in the head. As me and my little brother 2 years old watched as he violently started hitting our mother. The sound of the keys being throw across the table is still there.

Trigger:

My triggers are the sound of the keys clanging together as my co-worker walks by. I automatically freeze and stay still. A feeling comes over me of 'being scared' and waiting for something to happen.

Bodily Reaction:

I get an extremely scared feeling when I hear the sound of keys clanging together. I automatically freeze and don't move. I almost feel as if I don't want anyone to hear me breathe as it will go away. I get an anxious/panicky feeling also my palms and hands start to sweat and I feel clammy. When the feeling(s) starts to go away. I usually start to feel angry. I feel angry for the fact my dad did that in front of us and he wouldn't stop when me and my brother cried and screamed for him to stop. I have questions as to how my bio-father has grown up and how he was raised. I don't know his story and I would like to learn it someday.

Self-Talk:

When I feel the stress, anxiety/panicky feelings coming on after I hear the sounds of keys clanging together. I have to stop what I'm doing and refocus. If I'm in my office I usually shut my door and light my smudge and sit there in prayer for a couple of minutes. That's the best way to calm myself. If I'm elsewhere for example a meeting or somewhere away from the office I have to step out and gather my thoughts to calm myself. I usually sit and not think and try not feel and wait until the feelings pass. I know this is an issue I haven't dealt with because of the fact; to this day some 29 years later I still have all the feelings of being 7 years old.

Emotions:

The emotions I get are just like I'm 7 years old. And here I am 36 years old and I feel like I'm in the middle of my parents fight. Trying to protect my brother from what is happening and

comforting him telling him everything will be ok. Consoling him to stop crying so dad doesn't get mad at us for 'crying'.

My Behavior:

I usually exit the room as fast as I can wherever I hear the keys clanging together. A co-worker has actually asked me if I was ok, she noticed my facial expressions in a meeting when another co-worker's keys were banging together. I informed her I was ok just needed to be alone for a couple of minutes. My behavior is to be alone and be away from everyone else.

Effect on Family:

All of the violent outbursts from my father was not a good environment to grow up in. It affected me and my little brother a lot as we experienced and seen a lot of the violence from my father. My 2 younger sisters were not as exposed to it as me and my brother were. To this day I have a distant relationship with my bio-family. I do not have a father-daughter relationship with him either. When I was younger he would not listen to me and just shut me up, because to him I did not have a voice. There are many reasons as to why my father does not have a relationship with any of his bio-children. As I am growing and learning I do know he has a story and I hope to hear it one day. I can't imagine the environment he grew up in.

Family of Origin:

As our family grew my 2 younger sisters came years later. I was the oldest of my parent's children. It was a very toxic and unhealthy relationship between my parents. They eventually divorced in 1996. Since then my parents continue to have a toxic friendship/relationship. Also my siblings and I don't have a relationship with our father. My father now has mental health issues as he has grown. I believe he has some type of psychosis, as my aunty keeps me updated on my father's progress. My aunty is his next door neighbor and ensures he's ok, as we live a couple of hours away. I ran into my dad in August 2016 and I didn't recognize him and he barely knew who I was. I introduced my daughters to him and gave him money to buy food. I also gave him my phone number to keep in contact with me. I also informed my aunty I need to become more involved in his life as we are getting older. He really has nobody except a few of his family members alive. My grandmother that raised him passed away in 2002.

Self-Reflection:

The more I grow and learn I do know my dad did not mean to do all that in front of me and my brother. If he knew it was wrong I'm sure it would be a different story today. I don't blame him for all I have experienced and I am open to self-healing as there are issues that I continue to carry with me from my childhood. My mother also has a story I would like to hear someday. I am extremely grateful my grandparents took me at 10 years old when they did. When I went and lived with my grandparents that was the best thing to happen in my life. That is where I can identify healthy attachments to my grandparents. My grandpa/dad has taught me so much in my life. I am grateful he was a part of my life for 33 years.

This is a great self-reflection tool as I never would of thought about these issues consciously and they would continue to be buried deep in my core.

Resetting our arousal continuum

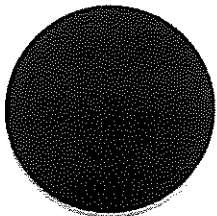
First of all we need to be mindful of our body's response to being triggered. Pay attention to the language of sensations which is associated with the brain stem: racing heart-rate (at over 100 beats a minutes, the 'thinking' brain shuts down), elevated blood pressure, change in skin temperature, butterflies in our stomach (this explains stomach ache complaints that children, in a state of anxiety, are prone to), tightness in the chest, lump in the throat, trembling, teary eyes, accelerated shallow breathing, muscular tension, and so forth.

Reset Method

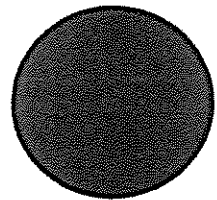
When the above described signs are evident in your body, immediately visualize a red traffic light signal and say "STOP" to yourself. Dr. Deepak Chopra and one of his colleagues suggest using "STOP" as an acronym to allow yourself to experience the following process:

S.T.O.P.

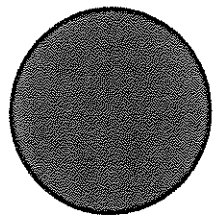
Stop right there.



Take three or more long slow deep breaths to slow down the flow of stress chemicals (cortisol/adrenaline) in your body. While engaged in this breathing exercise, visualize the color yellow and associate this color with a pleasant, loving memory that brings a smile to your face. The pleasant memory activates the release of good chemicals in your brain (endorphins). Stay with the Yellow traffic light signal, the long slow deep breathing, and the pleasant loving memory until you feel a state of calmness. Next,



Observe what is happening *in* you and *around* you while still waiting for the yellow traffic light to change to green. Finally,



Proceed with awareness and kindness once you've rehearsed the use of the "I message" to convey your feelings in a neutral tone of voice.

PLEASE NOTE: Practice this process for the next 30 days to ensure your brain rewires itself. The most important part of this process is grounding yourself in the 'pleasant loving memory' which brings a smile to your face. You should actually smile so as to signal to your brain that this is a pleasant memory. The visual cortex part of your brain which replays the memory actually 'lights up' as evidenced in brain scans when participants engage in this exercise.



Enhancing our Ability to Self-Regulate

Introduction

As many of us have experienced childhood trauma, our brains are wired at the alert/alarm level on the arousal continuum (calm, alert, alarm, fear, terror). As such, we tend to over-react emotionally and annoyance easily escalates into anger. This arousal continuum that is continuously set on alert also explains our vulnerability to anxiety.

The body responds the same way to *acute* stress (short-term) and *chronic* stress (long term).

- All stress triggers the 'fight or flight' response where *hormones* (cortisol /adrenaline) and *extra glucose* give you an enhanced ability to respond quickly; running or fighting from 'threat' uses up the hormones and glucose and your body quickly regains an internal balance
- With **chronic stress**, the 'fight or flight' response doesn't turn off, stays on perpetually for long periods of time and is not healthy for anyone; (very troublesome for diabetics who do not need the additional glucose being continually released into bloodstream – this is in addition to what is taken in from food)
- *For many people, chronic stress is in their relational context and embedded in family states of addictions, violence and chronic poverty. Even at a resting state such individuals are in a continual state of alert/alarm.*

Calm Alert Alarm Fear Terror

AROUSAL CONTINUUM

(source: Bruce Perry)

Body-Brain Connection

We have three distinctive brain responses that function as one mind, and each part speaks its own language. In the book *Trauma Through a Child's Eyes* this is described as follows:

- The neocortical or thinking brain is responsible for problem-solving, planning and perception as well as social functioning. This part of the brain *speaks with words*.
- The mid-brain or limbic system (the emotional brain) processes memories and feelings and uses the *language of feelings* such as anger, sorrow, joy, disgust and fear.
- The lower brain/brain stem is responsible for survival by regulating heart rate, blood pressure, body temperature, breathing, etc. and speaks the unfamiliar but important language of sensations which is our *physiological response* to stress. This language of the lower brain acts on our behalf when in danger, when unexpected changes occur, or when we are in a chronic state of anxiety.