

I once had an older male client who came to me for some anger management issues. His concern was that he might explode with angry feelings and lash out and physically hit someone. One of the interventions used was to put his beliefs revolving around violence on trial. It's something straight out of cognitive behavioural therapy but is really useful in breaking things down to a factual level. Imagine a ledger, on one side is the evidence FOR the probability he would physically hit someone in the future. On the other side is the evidence AGAINST the probability that he would physically hit someone.

When asked for the evidence for, he responded with because he sometimes felt like hitting people. The felt sensation was accompanied by some imagery of him hitting the person who he conflicted with. This can be summed as saying there was a desire to be physically violent.

The other evidence he presented was that he got into a few fights previously.

The evidence against, was that when he did get into fights it was as a teen and young adult (in 20's). It had been 25 years since he was physically violent.

The other interesting thing is that when he did feel like hitting someone, he would take a time out, either by going for a walk or trying some relaxation techniques. In his mind though, because he felt explosive, it constituted a fact that he was going to be violent. This eventuated into him being overly self-critical and over time degenerated into self-loathing.

As we progressed through the list, the evidence against the probability that he would be violent, grew and grew and grew. I can remember the list going down the whole of the page, while the evidence for stayed at those two points mentioned previously. There was a marked difference.

A frequency count of this sort does not tell the whole story. For instance, why was this person having intense reactions to conflict in the first place? But it does give a good indication that the probability for physical violence was low.

On top of all that, he was in therapy trying to work through his issues revolving around anger amongst other things. He was trying to acknowledge a problem and was trying to deal with it more constructively.

The problem was more about learning to manage those intense feelings more constructively. For him those feelings and associated imagery were distressing. Framing the problem in terms of managing periods where the client was distressed brings the

situation a little closer to being factual.

The client had a violent upbringing where conflict would often end up in physical violence. One way of thinking about it, is that he was bringing his childhood reminders of anger and violence into situations of conflict in the present. In a sense the present is tainted by frequent abuse as a child.

Every time anger and hurt appeared in his life, it was met with a primitive childhood defence which primarily was centred on the flight/fight response. The keys to helping him was to untangle his childhood defences from his adult functioning.

This took time, energy and lots of persistence on his part, but he eventually he found that the 'desire to hit others' diminished with time and that he become adapt at managing his intense feelings.

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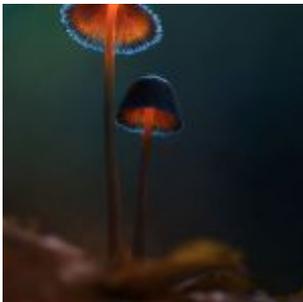
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The Fear of Being Alone with Thoughts



Mind Matter Connection



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