

Anxiety
and
Addictions

break the cycle

by
B.R. Stone

BACP

Anxiety and Addictions – break the cycle
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BRS is a practising psychotherapeutic counsellor and a member of the BACP, with a diploma in Psychotherapy and Counselling. This book is based on not just his training but also his experiences in therapy sessions.

BRS Shorts

Depression – *bye bye*

Anxiety and Addictions – *break the cycle*

Identify the Abuser – *narcissists uncovered*

After Abuse – *your recovery*

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About This Book

Are you suffering anxiety, panic, worry or deep sadness? Self medicating with alcohol, drugs, food or gambling? Trouble sleeping? Things going round and round in your head? Not sure where to start? Feel a lack of control? Too much to deal with? Overwhelmed? Anxiety, upset and resulting addictions are some of the most common issues facing us in these times of uncertainty. This book has been written to help you deal with your situation, by giving you practical tools and explanations to help you break free.

I am a qualified, practising psychotherapeutic counsellor and these things come with many labels but the psychological processes are fundamentally similar and, no matter how alone, helpless or hopeless we are feeling, there is always a way forward. While therapy is great, the costs can be prohibitive and so can our anxiety about even getting therapy. *What will they think of me? Will I be judged? Will I look stupid?* Anxiety levels may also be so great we even reject the potential of therapy: *My situation is too complicated for anyone to help, I'm a lost cause.*

Addictions tend to result from issues of upset we don't feel able to deal with so self-medicate to numb the pain and feel better. My approach is not to focus on the addiction itself but on the upset causing the addiction, after which the need to self-medicate with it is naturally reduced; this may not cure the addiction, for there are also questions of habit and brain-paths that have grown to maintain it, but at least it can reduce the key drivers for it.

In summary, while no book can replace good therapy, this will help you learn more about yourself, that you are not a lost cause and that it is possible for your life to be so much better. Make a positive step towards a happier you.

Case Study

The Twins

Part 1: Aged 18

There were identical twins, Nella and Paula. They looked the same, had the same backgrounds, same upbringing, same education and had both been sent to help an African-aid NGO for a summer.

Nella arrived anxious, dreading all the things that could go wrong, all the unknown people and unknown situations she would face. She's never been in this environment before. It's hot, dusty, nasty flies everywhere; the locals look strange and the other volunteers even stranger. So many different languages. People look at her, open mouthed as she gazes around like a rabbit caught in headlights. The second she can, she's going to take some medication from her bag to feel better. What are the words in her head? *"I can't cope with this."*, with visualisations of catastrophes to match.

Paula is the polar opposite. To her the environment is interesting because it is unknown, as are the people and she can't wait to discover the new things to be learnt. She's already caught the eye of locals and volunteers with her smile and open eyes, rather than open mouth. Everyone is speaking English, just with different dialects and accents, and they all seem to be working well together. The second she can, she's going to drop off her bags and go say Hi to a whole bunch of them. What are the words in her head? *"This is brilliant!"*, with happy visualisations of working in a team, to help the locals.

What is different between Nella and Paula? Physically nothing. The only difference between them is their approach to not just their current situation but to life. Nella has already resorted to her path of drugs to help her cope with things but what is it that stops Nella being relaxed like Paula? Intrusive thoughts, which go back to an event when they were almost three-years old.

Part 2: Aged almost 3

While on a holiday in Cornwall, their family was picnicking by a stream and Nella challenged Paula to a bridge-building competition. Their parents agreed to be time-keepers and gave them 2 minutes to complete the task. It was fun rushing around to gather sticks and lay them over the stream, both giggling as they did so while their smiling parents watched on.

“Time.”, their parents called and they both stood back to admire their work, bridges almost identical in size and structure.

“Can you cross them?”, their parents asked.

“Sure.”, they both answered, throwing huge smiles at each other.

“Ready, set, go.”, said their parents and, on 'go', they both squealed with delight and ran over their respective stick bridges to the other side.

As Paula got to the other side, she heard a shout from Nella and turned to see what had happened.

Nella's bridge had broken. She was standing in the middle of the stream, skin on her shins scraped against the wood as she fell through. Her parents laughed, trying to make a joke of it but Nella's legs were in pain and now her ego was too. She felt a failure, felt she was being mocked. Paula's bridge still looked as good as it had before but hers was smashed and she had wet, cold feet too. She felt a disaster.

Still laughing, her parents came over to help her out and dried her off. For years to come, it would be a standing, family joke about how Nella shouldn't try building things. For them it was an innocent, playful joke, which Nella forced a smile to, but for Nella, every time they said it they reinforced her negative feelings from that day: of feeling useless and less than perfect Paula.

No-one bothered to investigate why Nella's bridge had broken. If they had, they would have seen it was nothing to do with her bridge building but her misfortune of grabbing sticks that were rotten. She wasn't even three years old so had no idea about good or bad wood. Yet that event, entertainment for the rest of her family, went so deeply into Nella's psyche that she began to focus on other negatives, even when there were none; telling herself, more and more: “I can't do it. I'm not good enough.” It started a changed in her entire outlook on life.

The case of Nella and Paula illustrates the ease with which, no matter how innocently it occurred, a negative event in early life can become the starting point of negative, intrusive thoughts that stick like glue to our subconscious and remain into adulthood.

Chapter 1

Understanding Anxiety

At its root, anxiety is fear. Fear of losing a job; losing a partner; not being able to deal with someone or some thing; what might happen next and of disasters that could happen at any time. What might start as a simple financial, relational, family, health or career problem can seem to spiral so far out of our hands it becomes overwhelming. Anxiety can also disrupt our sleep and lack of sleep leads to greater anxiety, which leads to even more disrupted sleep. Ultimately we can spiral into catastrophising everyday events: “What if the bus catches fire? What if the house catches fire while I'm out?”. We can get to the point where we feel unable to face even leaving the house; let alone going to work, the shops or school.

If this is you, you are not alone in feeling this way. While these feelings may have got worse with recent events, the root cause tends to be from negative intrusive thoughts from early childhood – just as happened to Nella. These intrusive thoughts become our core beliefs.

“You'll never be able to do what they do.”

“You're not clever enough.”

“That's too difficult for you.”

Such comments, often made flippantly by a parent and instantly forgotten by them, can go deep into our subconscious and stay there, endlessly repeating themselves like a mantra – making us believe it is all true. We may have long since forgotten about them but our brains remember and these core beliefs come back to us as voices of doubt in our heads – also known as our internal saboteurs:

“You can't do that.”

“Your not good enough.”

“That's too difficult, don't even try. You'll just look stupid, stupid.”

Being in our head only we hear them but hear them we do and the negativity can go even further – we can begin creating wild associations with small events, for example:

“I spilt coffee on my desk, today is going to be a terrible day.”

“I'm 24. If I'm not married by 25 nobody will want me. I'll be left on the shelf forever.”

“The computer crashed! I'm useless with technology, I can't do this.”

From literally nothing, we have written off not just our day but ourselves as a person. These are known as irrational beliefs, for they have no rational basis. There is hope and we can unlearn these – our life doesn't have to be this way.

Depression

If we take irrational beliefs a stage further, we can get more extreme thinking that can get us down about everything. We can get to the point where we just want to curl up in bed, avoid contact with the outside world and cry, or take drugs/alcohol until we pass out and don't have to face it any more. In the worst case, we might think life is so not worth living and the only way to stop feeling so bad is to end it. Yet there is hope here too and we can unlearn these – your life doesn't have to be this way.

Self-Harm

This stems from a need to control anxiety by a physical outlet and distraction, in this case through physical pain and the marks to prove it. The intensity of these actions distracts from the anxiety and gives temporary emotional relief, but they don't deal with the root causes of our anxiety – all we are left with are the same anxiety-causing problems as before, plus the injuries. Learning to reduce

our anxiety reduces the need to self-harm.

Body Dysmorphic Behaviours (BDD)

We could be the most physically attractive person in the world yet view ourselves as hideous, or anorexic when not or obese when not. The negative thinking in our heads changes how we perceive ourselves to such a negative extent no evidence to the contrary is accepted. For example, the scales could show we are just 45kg but: “They must be faulty because I'm so fat.”

As with all such issues, we need to focus on the problem not the resulting symptom. Attempting to just fix the symptom is like painting over the top of rust on a car, it won't fix the issue of the rust and the rust will soon reappear.

Chapter 2

Understanding Trauma (PTSD)

Unlike anxiety issues, put into our heads in our early years, trauma can be created at any time in our lives. Traumatic events can happen at any time. Life-threatening accidents or attacks, terrible events in a relationship, rape, torture – anything that is so drastic it so overwhelms our brain's ability to cope normally. The best way to think of trauma is as 'trapped shock', where the event had such a huge impact on us, our brain was unable to process it into our hippocampus and it got stuck in our stress centre – with the amygdala.

If you find you get triggered (suddenly terrified, enraged, etc.) by otherwise minor events (balloon popping, someone shouting, getting in a lift, a voice from behind, etc.) you almost certainly have some level of trauma.

Traditionally, when people came home from wars or survived other traumas, there was no actual treatment, just the view that 'time heals' and statements like: 'you'll get over it'. These days we know this is not true. It's why you could still see tears in the eyes of British veteran Harry Patch, aged almost 110 at the time, as he spoke of the deaths of friends in war 90 years earlier, saying he still remember things as if it was yesterday. His trauma, his trapped shock was exactly that – it hadn't budged 1mm.

The only way to release trauma is through trauma therapy; a process which can be upsetting, as it involves revisiting the event, but this is done in a controlled manner; with the upset kept to a level that our brains can deal with. As the trapped shock is released, like the lancing of a boil, there comes relief, as the overwhelm leaves us and, like the calm after a storm, we get to see things we hadn't seen before.

In 2020, after three years of psychotherapy, it was obvious I still had trauma from events with my abusive wife and her attempts to kill me and the children.

With the help of my therapist, I went to a trauma specialist and he used a method called EMDR. It's a bit like something out of Star Trek, where your eyes follow a moving light, as you hold a vibrating ball in each hand and the therapist tells you what to tell yourself.

At the beginning my trauma event was graded 9 out of 10 (10 being the highest) and I wasn't even able to say: *“Even though I am still upset, I deeply love and respect myself”*. The words, the very permission to even consider: 'I deeply love and respect myself' had become so alien to me I couldn't move my jaw to say them. I just sat there, struggling to finish the sentence without success, tears streaming down my face. By the end of the session, my trauma level had dropped from 9 to just 2 and I was not only able to say: *“Even though I am still upset, I deeply love and respect myself”*, I suddenly saw how much I had been neglecting my own humanity and also my mother's too. We had both put our needs last, as we put everything into defeating a system hell-bent on supporting my wife, as the mother, despite a recording of stating she would kill our children. Although I finally got sole custody of our children and was able to save us all, eight years passed before getting that trauma therapy and, if I hadn't, have no doubt that trauma would still be stuck exactly where it was.

Criminal Trials

Some people ask why a trauma victim is denied therapy until after a criminal trial has been completed. The reason is this: when you've had trauma therapy and the trapped shock is released into normal memory, details about the criminal event can be rapidly forgotten. If trauma therapy was given before the end of a trial, the victim could be denied justice.

Self-Help?

Personally, I do not recommend any attempt at self-help for trauma. We

really need the guiding hand of a trauma specialist, to lead us through it in a way that does not re-traumatise us. For non-traumatic yet still significant events in our lives, including bereavement, we can use tools such as the ATET model, which I will cover in chapter 10.

Chapter 3

Our Biology

Before we get into other techniques, we need to consider two basics for our well being: sleeping and breathing.

Sleeping

We underestimate the importance of sleep at our peril. It is important not just for our bodies to repair themselves but also for our brains to organise all the input and thinking of the day. The kind of impaired brain function that comes from lack of sleep has been linked to a number of tragedies, including the high-profile Chernobyl nuclear disaster and loss of the Challenger Space shuttle, as well as countless surgical errors and traffic accidents.

We don't need to know technical terms like REM or slow-wave sleep, just think of our brains as a library of knowledge, where each day throws in a pile of new books and returned old books which all have to be organised and put on the correct shelves while we sleep. We only have one brain, one librarian, and to do this takes time. If we don't get enough sleep our librarian can't get all the books onto the shelves for the next day so we wake up tired and mentally disorganised, which makes us feel more anxious and gives our librarian an even bigger pile of books to deal with the next night. And guess what, feeling more anxious we won't get enough sleep the next night either, leads to an even bigger pile of books not on the correct shelves – the backlog getting worse and worse and worse...

This can make our anxiety levels escalate and lead us, in desperation, to self-medication through drugs, eating, drinking, gambling and smoking, with greater and greater negative impacts on our daily lives.

Breathing

This may sound silly at first, for obviously we are all breathing, or I wouldn't be writing this and you wouldn't be reading it. There are different types of breathing though. When anxious we may be barely breathing at all, while when we panic we tend to breathe in fast, sharp, gasps – which can lead to a full on panic attack and meltdown.

When we are anxious, we are closer to a fight/flight mode, which causes large amounts of the stress hormone, cortisol, to flood our body – making us feel exhausted, irritable and unable to think straight. We need to reduce our cortisol levels, to de-stress, and a way of doing that is to improve our breathing. Make a note in the box of how you are breathing now and how anxious you are feeling, from 1 to 10 (10 being the highest)

I am breathing (slow, fast, shallow, deep, short...):
My anxiety level is (1 to 10):

It is good to keep a log of how we are feeling so we can see our progress and get to understand exactly what is affecting us. Writing things down is particularly helpful, as most of us have visual memories and seeing it helps it 'go in'.

Poly-vagal Exercise

Go to a room or place where you can sit without being interrupted. Sit comfortably, ideally in a supportive chair, we're going to do some relaxation. Poly-vagal refers to many physiological elements that affect our heart rate and feelings associated with the vagus nerve – a major nerve system in our body and a key part of our autonomic nervous system, including the parasympathetic system. In short, it's important.

Sit Comfortably

Sit in a supportive chair, both feet fully on the ground, back straight but not tensed, backside fully on the seat. Try and chose a place where you are unlikely to be disturbed and not going to hurt yourself if you fall asleep.

Begin breathing in slowly through your mouth, deep into your belly rather than your chest, then exhale slowly through your nose. Try to breathe in for a count of five and out for a count of seven; if you can make it seven in and eleven out, even better – though don't strain yourself or it will be counter-productive.

Rest an open hand on each thigh, palm down and look at some point or thing ahead of you. Let this become your focus, not the things bothering you. This is your time now. You are important.

Relax your jaw, releasing any tension there, and move your head side to side to help relax your neck and roll your shoulders. Releasing tension is key and we work our way down our body, area by area, consciously relaxing each as we go: from head to neck, shoulders to arms, hands, fingers – give them a waggle. From neck to torso, hips, thighs, calves, feet and waggle your toes.

All the time we do this, we maintain our slow in – slower out breathing, and let ourselves relax. If you want to, close your eyes and think of a peaceful place, somewhere you feel safe (beaches are popular choices for these) – remembering not to fall asleep and fall off your chair. Be aware of the noises around you, such as voices from outside or from other rooms – we hear they are there but (fire alarms and the like aside) do not focus on them – they are not important to us. This is our time.

Sit breathing like this for a few minutes and, when you are ready, open your eyes (if you closed them) and come back into the room. Don't try standing up yet. How do you feel now? How do your feelings compare to before starting the exercise?

I am breathing (slow, fast, shallow, deep, short...):

My anxiety level is (1 to 10):

Make sure you feel fully awake before standing up.

You can do this exercise as often as you want – it is a great way to lower feelings of anxiety and help clear intrusive thoughts. The more you try it the more you can develop your safe place, adding more detail to be enjoyed.

Chapter 4

Anxious About?

'Knowledge is power' has never been a truer saying than in helping our psychology. What events are making you anxious in the now are something only you can answer. A way to get these answers is to make a list of everything bothering you now, in 'My List' below. Try brainstorming, putting down everything no matter how small – if you need to use additional paper, please do. Once you have made the list, give each item a rating, from 1 to 10, for how anxious they make you feel now – 1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest.

Here is an example:

Anxious About (31 / May / 2021)	Level
Work	7
Friends blanking me	8
My health	6
Money	6

Your List:

Anxious About (/ /)	Level

Please continue on another piece of paper if necessary.

Once you have rated the level of anxiety for each item, we start by looking at the one rated the highest, the one causing you most anxiety. In the example it was *'Friends blanking me'* so bear this scenario in mind as we go through some general steps, which can be applied to most anxieties.

Step 1: When Did It Begin?

Think back to when it started. What was the trigger? Was it after some event? Was it something you did? Did you do something wrong? Did you do something deliberately? Are you to blame? What did you intend?

Step 2: Am I Being Unreasonable?

Having identified the event, have you been reasonable about it? Apologised if at fault? Given them any time they need to process what happened?

Step 3: Are They Being Reasonable?

Have any others involved been reasonable? Are they reacting reasonably or do they seem to be over-reacting? If they seem to be over-reacting do you know why? Can you find out? Perhaps they were already feeling low because of something else and what you did gave them overwhelm. On the other hand, sometimes people like an excuse to put us down.

Step 4: Have I Done Everything I Reasonably Can?

You are only human, we all make mistakes and forgiveness is a part of life, where we draw a line in the sand and move on. If you have done all you reasonably can and they still decline to re-engage with you, they may have decided what you did was so terrible they feel unable to forgive you or they may have issues within them they feel too afraid and unable to deal with. In either case, things can't truly go forwards unless both sides wish them to.

Step 5: I Have Done Everything I Reasonably Can

Once you have done all you reasonably can to repair things or at least prompt for positives, you have done all you reasonably can. Life is too short to go in circles being bothered by something that is out of your control – that is how anxiety, stress, depression and addictions can start. We have to accept the reality, no matter how much we may wish for a different outcome, and live our lives.

Core Beliefs

To help us understand why certain things bother us much more than they should, we need to understand our core beliefs – the fundamentals of our thinking and behaviour. They include things like approaches to honesty, integrity, respect for others, respect for ourselves, love, kindness and self-belief. Negative ones can enter our minds as intrusive thoughts; also known as our internal saboteur, and can result in anxiety. Positive ones appear as positive thoughts and encouragements. Our core-beliefs are, as with most of our psychology, rooted in our early childhood. What core beliefs can you identify in you? Examples of negative core-beliefs can include I'm: 'Ugly', 'Unlovable', 'Stupid', 'Useless'....

If you feel anxious before you start, you can repeat the relaxation breathing technique we covered earlier. Remember, no-one is judging you. There are no

right or wrong answers, only helpful insights.

My Core Beliefs

I am:

People, including ourselves, judge situations and others according to our core beliefs. For example, if we are trustworthy we expect others to be trustworthy and if we are faithful, we expect others to be faithful. The reverse is also true.

We also judge others according to our experiences, which can impact on our core beliefs, as well as being impacted by them. If we have been cheated on, we may expect others will cheat on us too. If we have been cheated on a lot, we may resign ourselves to this as 'normal'.

We need to be honest with ourselves, not just to admit if we did do something wrong and seek to make amends for it but to also value ourselves. By that I mean love and respect ourselves and not automatically assume someone is against us and 'nobody loves me'. We have to be able to validate ourselves, our self-worth, rather than relying on others to do so. What happens to us if they never do?

Remember, people might go against us because of their issues, not ours. They might be jealous or simply projecting their own issues and insecurities on us. Projection and deflection are favourites of those with narcissistic tendencies and being able to identify such people, especially if you have experienced an abusive relationship, can be very useful.

Chapter 5

Identifying a Narcissist

If you are having difficulty in a relationship, it is usually down to issues on both sides but, in some cases, the person you are finding it difficult to deal with could be a narcissist. Or are you a narcissist?

Narcissism, along with all mental health conditions, including sociopathy and psychopathy, can affect people to different degrees. On one end of the spectrum, people can have mild narcissistic traits, while on the other end of the spectrum it can be a full-blown disorder. Clues to narcissism are the same regardless.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to put yourself in another's shoes and 'feel' what they are feeling. The less empathy someone has the more serious their condition is likely to be. Those with full-blown disorders can stand there watching someone writhe in the most awful agony possible and not feel the slightest bit of empathy towards you. They might even enjoy watching it.

Criticism

Despite acting all tough and strong, narcissists actually have very fragile egos and inside are incredibly weak. The less they are able to take criticism, even constructive criticism, the stronger the condition they are likely to have. On one end of the spectrum they might just deflect from answering your criticism by accusing you of something instead. On the other end of the spectrum, they might go into meltdown and rage a tirade of vitriol your way – see below.

Rage

Disagreement with their opinion can result in anything from disapproval of you (you go into their bad books) to a red-faced, tear-filled rage accusing you of everything under the sun then storming off or physically attacking then storming off; without answering a single question you have raised – no matter how reasonably you raised it.

Reason

The final indicator I'll give here is 'reason' or rather lack of reasonableness. If you can have a reasonable, constructively-critical discussion with someone, without them getting incensed or responding by throwing accusations back at you, they are very unlikely to be a narcissist. If such a discussion is impossible, they quite possibly are. The way I summarise it when encountering a narcissist is this:

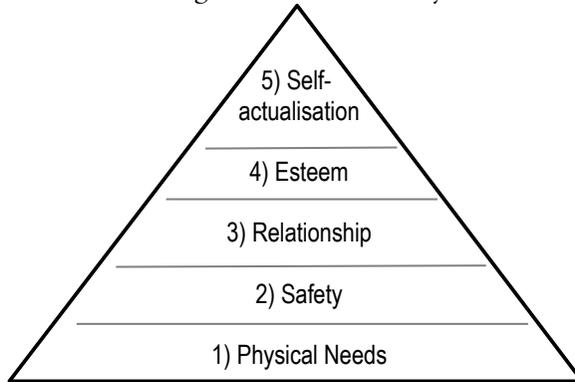
“You can't reason with an unreasonable person.”

When I encounter people like this, after all attempts to reason with them have failed, I stop trying. There is no point. It is their issue, not mine and life is too short to waste it listening to their endless re-cycling of nonsense. They will almost certainly never change, for change would involve admitting they have been not just wrong but also behaved wrongly – their weak egos simply can't stand admitting that.

Chapter 6

Expectations

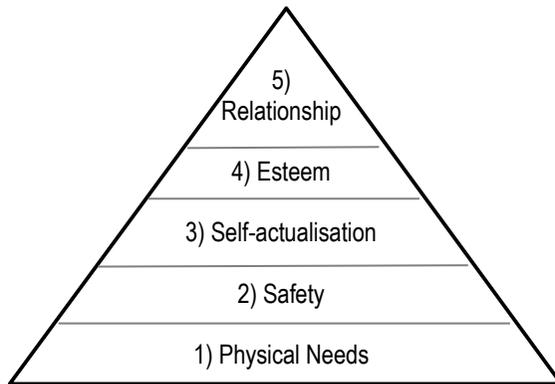
It is human nature to have expectations about our lives. We expect our parents to look after us when we are young, our friends to stand by us and an ambulance to come if we have an accident. These can be considered realistic expectations, as they work for the majority of people in the western world. Psychologist Abraham Maslow gave these a hierarchy.



Maslow's traditional hierarchy of needs.

We start by needing basic survival: food, water and air. Once we have this, we seek safety, in home and environment. Then we seek security in relationships, followed by a sense of self esteem in society and, once achieved, we seek to become the best we can be. It is a step by step process, each level building on the firm foundations of the ones below.

However, in our current world of social media making fame and fortune seem not just the norm but a God-given right, for many the hierarchy of needs has changed.



Modern, quick-result focused needs.

How many talentless wannabes have you seen on shows like X-Factor? Why are they even there? Because social media has spent years bombarding them with famous people's lives and fortunes, to the point it becomes the only 'normal' they want to relate to and think they should have.

We can't all be rich and famous, only a minority are and very often it takes years of hard work, which the wannabes subconsciously ignore and focus instead on getting it right now. They don't want to spend years working their way up a business, they want to be advising the managing director from day 1 and taking over their job from week 2. They focus on a mantra saying 'everyone has an equal right for everything', subconsciously ignoring that those more suited to any 'thing' (i.e. talented for that position) are also more likely to get it. We don't just get to win X-Factor because we say we: "I believe I deserve to win."

In the modern-view needs triangle, above, you can see 'self-actualisation' has become a need directly after safety; yet without firm foundations of relationships or self-esteem. The result? Mostly failure of self-actualisation, without the support of relationships or self-esteem. People with unrealistic expectations, endlessly disappointed as they almost certainly cannot be achieved, leading to

depression, addictions and general misery in day to day life. A generation of unhappy people, endlessly disappointed at not being millionaire film stars, singers, celebrities or married to one.

While it is great to have ambition and aim high, we also need to have at least one foot on the ground to stop us from falling when life knocks us back. The balance of what is or is not a realistic expectation is something only you can decide but, if you are feeling endlessly disappointed with your life, maybe change your expectations or at least your focus on how you live it. Most success doesn't come without an awful lot of hard work and set backs, along with a healthy dose of good fortune. Rather than getting downhearted at setbacks, take them as opportunities not to make the same mistakes again and keep going forward.

Chapter 7

Our Imagination

Everything we experience is a feature of our brains. We are ruled by them and our brains are ruled by our imagination, based on triggers from past experiences, thoughts and evolution, as well as day to day events.

Our brains have evolved to incorporate three brains in one. The most basic is called the reptilian brain, which evolved first and takes care of our basic survival, including breathing. After this we evolved the mammalian brain, which gives us the higher functions needed to function in mammalian life, including emotions and newborns seeking out the breast. After this we evolved the neocortex (new brain), which enables social interaction, language and all the highest level functions of cognitive thinking unique to humans. For the neocortex to develop properly in each individual, for us to become balanced, social creatures, we need to be taught social skills and interactions with those around us. Neglected babies and those shown only hardship, not caring or love, can suffer irreparably poor development of the neocortex, especially the prefrontal cortex and orbitofrontal area, which controls how our emotional responses are managed with regard to what is going on around us. If the orbitofrontal development is impaired, the individual can suffer difficulty in social interactions and ultimately disorders, such as narcissism and even psychopathy.

While our environments have changed a lot since the Stone Age, our brain cores have not and, under the surface, basic survival instincts still operate – as if we still live in the wilds, where a strange shape in the trees could be a bear or a sabre-toothed tiger about to eat us. If we allowed our emotions and imagination to run away with us we'd run down the street, screaming like a lunatic. We mostly don't because the balance to reactions the orbitofrontal area can bring – avoiding us going straight to fight/flight mode and seeing the object in the trees

is just an old lady, leaning against it for a rest, not a bear.

It's a similar process for anxiety, worry and panic attacks. While finances are not going to come and eat us, the threat of a financial meltdown or loss of job, can threaten our survival in a very real way, and can trigger the same cortisol (stress hormone) release into our blood but, as there is no perceived escape, the rush of adrenalin and stress has no outlet or end so our bodies remain flooded with the anxiety of the perceived threat. The feeling of anxiety and stress remains palpable and, without finding a way to deal with the triggering event, i.e. lack of job security, the anxiety becomes a looped process. We continue worrying about the lack of job security, which increases our anxiety and cortisol levels further, which makes us more on edge and more worried, ruining our sleep in the process. And so it goes on – a self-perpetuating cycle we need to regain control of.

Quick Help: If you feel anxiety running away with you, clap your hands together hard and shout: “**STOP!**” Obviously not recommended if you are driving or in a public place where you might give someone a heart attack but it can be very effective. The physiological process of this intense action breaks our anxiety cycle and enables us to take deep breaths and return to our logical brains.

See The Future

Visualisations are very important in many aspects of life. High achievers use them all the time when setting their goals. Jim Carey, the actor, motivated himself by writing himself a cheque for \$1,000,000 – his aim was to become successful enough to be able to cash that cheque, which he has now achieved several times over. We all use visualisations, consciously and subconsciously, all the time. If you are suffering anxiety, worry or addictions, these will have mostly

been negative, which means you have come to the right place.

If we suffer from anxiety, our thoughts are filled with catastrophe and impending disaster: loss of work, partnership, home, health – all worries about things that might possibly happen, although they almost never do.

If we suffer with addictions, our thoughts are filled with impossible desires: such as the return of someone who has passed so we can do things differently; turning back the clock on a decision that ruined our career; take back stupidity for trusting someone who was betraying us; wishing for someone or something to never have happened – all desires to change the past.

We don't have to suffer, we have the ability to change the negatives into positives. Whether from anxiety, addictions or depression, it is not so much our situation but our view of our situation and refusal to accept the now that is getting us down.

Chapter 8

Multi-Mind

Are you old enough to remember John Pertwee playing Worzel Gummage? Don't worry if you're not, I'll explain. Worzel Gummage was a scare crow that came to life and, being a scare crow, his straw head could be taken off and replaced with another. While it could have been made into a horror, rather than a teatime children's programme, each of Worzel's heads had a special function. He had a thinking head, a teaching head, a farming head, a cooking head, etc. and he would choose the head that best suited the occasion.

We aren't scare crows and if we took our heads off anxiety would be the least of our concerns. Instead we adapt the heads we were born with using multi-mind. In multi-mind we create not heads but personas to suit the situation in hand. For example, if nervous for an interview, we could create a *Confident Colin* or *Caroline*. If we are scared about something physical we could create a *Brave Brian* or *Beth*. However we need to be for a difficult situation we can create a suitable persona and then act as if that is really us. Think of it as an actor going on stage. I can stop being a *Blubbing Brad* and stand in front of the audience as a *Brave Brian*.

It gives our brains a more positive focus and can help in any difficult situation. When I became an English teacher I didn't know about multi-mind so used Worzel's technique and psychologically put my 'teacher head' on – it's basically the same process. A persona to better fit how we need to be. I've even used it to help when giving a eulogy.

Here are some possible personas:

Multi-mind Personas

- Confident Colin/Caroline
- Brave Brian/Beth
- Happy Harry/Harriet

The possibilities are endless, why not make up some positive ones of your own?
You could try using them to help you in some situations:

Chapter 9

The CBT Model

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has its origins in Rational Emotive Therapy (RET), developed by Ellis in the 1950's. These days it is very popular with the UK's National Health Service, as it can give some great results for minimal financial/time investment. Personally, I find it quite limited for many client issues. Why? Because it requires you, the client, to be in your logical (cognitive) brain in a relatively calm state of mind which, with the emotions anxiety and most other issues are likely to cause, you are unlikely to be.

We, by our very nature, are not Spock from Star Trek but emotional – especially when distressed – and these emotions can take control of our logical brain. In other words, to deal with our negative emotions CBT requires us to be able to step away from them *before* it can be effectively applied. You might still find it useful though, so here is an example of a version I use, the ABCDE model.

Jane is worried about starting a new job so we take her through the ABC and then get her to D, where she reconsiders her B in a more positive way, which results in E, a more positive C (outcome).

A Activating event	B Basic Response	C Created Outcome	D (B2) Better Response	E (C2) Better Outcome
I start a new job today	I think I'll do everything wrong and get fired.	Anxiety, fear and mistakes at work due to it.	It's my first day – everyone makes mistakes on their first day.	Accept will make some mistakes and will learn from them.

Try a couple for yourself:

A Activating event	B Basic Response	C Created Outcome	D (B2) Better Response	E (C2) Better Outcome

A Activating event	B Basic Response	C Created Outcome	D (B2) Better Response	E (C2) Better Outcome

Chapter 10

The ATET Model

Like CBT, the ATET model is also a brief Solution Therapy, using a series of columns and stages of emotional impact, but that is where the similarity ends. This version was developed by Dr George Booty, head of Convergence College, where I began my training.

In CBT we need emotional calm before we can logically change how we perceive something emotionally, often a Catch-22/chicken or the egg situation. I find ATET better as it is able to work while we are still emotional. We no longer need to be Spock and, as thoughts naturally follow emotions, this makes it a more holistic and brain-friendly approach – which in turn makes it able to help deeper, more intrusive issues.

Looking at the example below, in ATET we first consider the situation as we encounter it now and:

- 1) write the Activating Event into column A.
- 2) Write the current Template of how we feel about this even in T.
- 3) Write the Emotion that follows this in E.
- 4) Write the Thoughts that follow this emotion in T.

Now we want to create a more positive Template for this event. A more positive way of looking at it. Although still cognitive, this is a more emotional process that allowed for in CBT. In the example below we got from feeling really sad someone has gone to focusing on how great it was to know them.

- 5) We write down the new, positive, Template in the bottom section of T.

6) We write down the new, positive Emotions that follow in the bottom section of E.

7) We write down the new, positive Thoughts that follow from the more positive Emotions in the bottom section of T. This is our new outcome.

We can clearly see the difference in not just the thoughts but how we now feel regarding this event. Yes, grandad has gone but we are now focused not on the sadness of the loss but on the wonderful things he did and times we had while he was here.

ATET Example:

A Activating event	T Template	E Emotion	T Thoughts
My grandfather died when I was 15 and I still really miss him.	<i>Original (-)</i> I'm really sad he's gone.	Sadness, crying, feeling empty.	I want him back, life is not fun without him.
	<i>New (+)</i> It was great to know him	Happy for the good times together.	Thank you, grandad. I'll never forget you.

Over the page are some blank tables, so you can try some for yourself.

Try some for yourself.

A Activating event	T Template	E Emotion	T Thoughts
	<i>Original (-)</i> <hr/> <i>New (+)</i>	<hr/>	<hr/>

A Activating event	T Template	E Emotion	T Thoughts
	<i>Original (-)</i> <hr/> <i>New (+)</i>	<hr/>	<hr/>

Understanding Addictions

While the root of anxiety is fear, the root of addictions is pain, and there is a lot of truth in the old adage of: “A fine line between pleasure and pain.”

The two main types of addiction are emotional and physical. In each case the addiction is there to make us feel better, varying from a numbing of a pain to the elation of a high.

Addictive Personalities

Some people are more susceptible to being addictive than others. Addictions can be constructive and destructive – for example racing drivers, extreme sports fanatics, gym bunnies, workaholics and even coffee addicts. Why some people seem prepositioned to having an addictive personality is beyond the scope of this book and less important than being aware that such personalities exist.

I myself have an addictive personality. In my life, have gone through addictions to sex, martial arts, cycling, alcohol, fast cars, computer games and caffeine (coffee). Being aware of having an addictive personality has helped keep me alive; for example, I have deliberately avoided trying drugs or riding motorbikes, as both could take me down roads I might not survive.

Addictions Through Pain – Emotional

My dad died when I was a teenager and, as upsetting as that obviously was, I didn't turn to negative addictions – for I was too numb to really take it in. Instead I joined a karate club and enjoyed it so much I ended up training four, sometimes five times a week, subconsciously deflecting away from the loss and ensuring I would be able to physically fill his shoes in terms of being the

protector of the house. This was broken when I went to university, began living in a student house and took on a new addiction: alcohol.

Going out most evenings with house mates, pub to pub, and having a brilliant time together. By the time I graduated, my brain had made a clear association between alcohol and happiness. It became my turn-to process when I felt emotional pain, such as the loss of a partner I very much loved. Of course, I knew alcohol couldn't change anything or make anything actually better, but it took me back to the original associations with drinking to the point that I drank harder, as if able to push away the emotional pain. What we know logically doesn't always empower us to change emotionally, which is what we need to do to break a habit.

Addictions Through Biology – Physical

Although I've mentioned alcohol in the emotional category, our minds and bodies work in levels of grey, not black and whites, and alcohol, along with many other addictions, can very much have a (physiological) impact on both our bodies and brains. Narcotics can be even worse though, especially some modern drugs where they have been scientifically modified to increase their impact on our brains – increasing both the strength of the addiction and the pain of withdrawal if we try to stop.

Cold Turkey

The term 'cold turkey' where an addict is suddenly and completely denied their substance of choice, has long been a method used in rehab centres and the impact on the person can be extremely harsh. Where viable, there is an argument for a more gradual reduction in the substance. Why?

Our biology is as much a system of habit as our brains. Consider alcohol: if our liver has had to deal with daily, high-doses of alcohol and suddenly this

alcohol does not arrive what do you think happens to all the enzymes it has been geared up to produce? My understanding is, it will still produce them, only now they have no alcohol to break down so they could start breaking down other things instead - including the liver itself. I've seen similar cases with heavy smokers, who suddenly stop completely only then find themselves going down with all sorts of serious ailments as their bodies struggle to adjust.

While gradually reducing our addictive intake can be a far gentler way of doing things, it is not always possible. In many cases, unless the addict has therapy and guidance towards an alternative lifestyle, the same response to any amount of the addictive element can remain: one drink turns into 10, one spliff into five, one line into oblivion. If the root issue that caused the addiction in the first place is still there, the need for the addiction will be too.

Chapter 12

Pain, Pain Go Away...

...and don't come again another day.

Where does your emotional pain come from? What is the thing(s) that are driving the need for the addiction? Bereavement, relationship breakdown, job loss, financial stress, boredom...? It is important to know and one method of discovering this is to think about what you would like your life to be like in an ideal world, where you would no longer need an addiction.

First, use the table below to list all the things driving you to drink, drugs, whatever. As with the anxiety exercises, scale the impact of these from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. There is no such thing as a right or wrong answer, only your answers.

Causes	Level

Now, armed with a clearer awareness of what is most impacting you, go

through the relaxation breathing exercise in Chapter 3, and then try to imagine what your ideal world would be like. A life where there is no need for your addiction. Where would you be? How would you look? How would you behave? Write it in the box below and date it – to give yourself a reminder of your better future.

My ideal life would be:

Dated: _____

Now we know what our lives can be like, let's look more at dealing with what is holding us back.

Chapter 13

Frames of Reference

We have seen that unrealistic expectations can give us anxiety and addictions can stem from how we perceive a loss – all are based on our frames of reference. For example, we may feel we will never find such a wonderful partner again, drinking ourselves into oblivion each night to numb the pain, yet is that really true? How do we know someone better is not around the next corner and we are now free to get to know them. Whether or not you have faith in a higher power or God, there is a lot of truth in the old adage: “God moves in mysterious ways.” As with the death of a loved one, part of moving on is acceptance of the painful truth, without viewing it as the end of the world but re-framing it as the beginning of the next chapter in your life.

When I was about 13, I used to love a TV series called the Bionic Woman. I grew obsessed with the character and wrote a long, loving letter to Lindsey Wagner, the actress who played her. To my utter surprise and delight, Lindsey wrote back with some kind words and included an autographed photograph. I was delighted, for had never expected any response let alone kind words and a signed photograph – which I still have by the way. Imagine a different scenario though, one where I had expected her to jump on the next plane to England and rush to me as my girlfriend, because I loved her so much. Putting aside the age issues, such an unrealistic, poorly-framed expectation could only ever be met with disappointment. My point is: life is as wonderful as we choose to perceive it to be – ups and downs are simply a part of that and, without the downs, we would never strive for or appreciate the ups.

Thinking of expectations that have not materialised and still bother you that they haven't, why not try re-framing them? In the table below, write those

unmet in the left column and think of alternative, potentially more realistic expectations in the right column. There are no right or wrong answers, this is simply an exercise to illustrate how it can be our expectations rather than actual events that cause us upset.

Unmet Expectations	Alternative Expectations

As with all things in life, there needs to be balance. If we never expect anything good we won't be disappointed but will we ever find happiness? Probably not. Going back to the Bionic Woman example, it would have been unrealistic to believe we could ever be together, but taking good points about her, character and actions, it was realistic to find a partner with such qualities, if not the bionics. Dreams may be just dreams but what they can inspire us to strive for can bring us great happiness and joy.

Chapter 14

Acceptance

Loss of someone or something can leave a massive hole inside us. Death of a loved one is considered the biggest loss of all, yet such a bereavement is also finite, absolute and undeniable. If a loved one has died we need to let ourselves grieve, accept they have gone and are not coming back. One way to help deal with this is to focus not on the loss itself but on the good memories and impacts they had on our lives. The ATET model, covered in Chapter 10, can really help us to reframe how we think about such loss. Why not try another one here:

ATET for bereavement:

A Activating event	T Template	E Emotion	T Thoughts
	<i>Original (-)</i>		
	<hr/> <i>New (+)</i>	<hr/>	<hr/>

While a death is the most absolute bereavement of all, in psychological terms a relationship breakdown can be more damaging. Few relationships break down cleanly and can often leave us in a kind of endless limbo of 'what ifs' and 'maybes' that stop us accepting it is truly over and harbouring some kind of hope things can be rebuilt when, in most cases, the relationship was never good in the first

place. Such limbo can be incredibly damaging, for not only do we refuse to release this painful event in our lives but we are also in limbo in terms of moving on. Here are some methods that might help, simply adapt them to your specific situation:

1) Write a letter to your lost one, putting heart and soul into it, no holds barred – as you saw things. End it with thanking them for the good times and unconditionally wishing them well. Do not send it. Keep it, re-read it everyday for a week and then see how you feel. Do you want to send it or just tear it up? If you want to send it, first ask yourself: “What for?” and imagine how you will feel after sending it. If the feeling is positive, then maybe you should send it. It is important to recognise your true feelings and be loving towards yourself.

2) Remind yourself there are some 3 billion other potential partners out there and this breakdown has freed you to find a better one. No matter how much you love(d) your ex, if they don't love you there is no relationship to be had.

3) We need to be able to focus on us; on accepting and loving ourselves first. It is totally fine to tell yourself you are great and wonderful – don't believe anyone who tells you it is arrogant to do so, it is not. You are a fantastic person with or without anyone else and, by believing in yourself, you won't feel a need to rush into another relationship to validate your worth; for when you have self-worth, no rejection by any others can take that away from you.

The above thinking also applies to a loss of a business, a job or a thing – you are still wonderful you without them. You are still a unique soul, with unique soul qualities and you are still here for a positive reason.

Chapter 15

Wiring and Firing – PPF

Before we delve into what I've termed our Positive Pleasure Focus (PPF); in neuroscience there is the expression: “What fires together, wires together.” It means our brains naturally put associations together, building a path (wire) between them and creating a behaviour pattern; a habit, where one thing becomes associated with another.

A practical example of this is having a cigarette with a coffee in a café or a drink in a pub. Both elements are adopted to boost our endorphin levels and if we get the two boosts at the same time, we get a bigger endorphin surge than from just one. From a pleasure point of view, this is great, and the more we do this the firmer the link (stronger the wire) between – them. We get to a café or pub, sit down with our drink and get out a cigarette, almost without thinking. This effect can become very powerful and lead to addictions but being mindful and knowing how the process works can help us change negative behaviours.

Let's start by writing down things that give us pleasure: physical, mental, anything – we can grade them from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. For our new Target Level (need), we write the level we want it to become.

Here's an example:

Pleasurable things	Pleasure Level	Target Level (Need)
smoking cigarettes	7	2
drinking alcohol	7	3.5
drinking coffee	6	6
driving	7	7
chatting	5	7
walking	6	6
gym	7	10

In these example cases, both smoking and drinking give a level 7 rating for pleasure but the target level for cigarettes is 2, while drinking alcohol is 3.5; indicating a desire to stop smoking almost completely and to halve the current positive so lets focus on these.

Remember that each pleasurable thing, by itself, can increase our endorphin levels. If we can combine pleasurable things together, we further increase our endorphin levels. The combined pleasure level from the habits we want to reduce is 14 (7 smoking, 7 drinking). What pleasure level can we get by combining the more positive habits? Which of them can go together? Driving and drinking coffee (ideally at break stops) certainly can. Doing this would give us a pleasure level of 13 (6 coffee, 7 driving) which isn't quite as big a hit as smoking and drinking. Chatting (5) can be added to both sets of habits.

Consider this, using this example we could drive, have a coffee and go for a walk, which would give us a total pleasure rating of 19 (6 coffee, 7 driving, 6 walking). If we feel really energetic we can also add gym (7) giving us a total hit level of 26, almost double that of smoking and drinking combined. Of course we can't drive and walk at the same time, unless we have Fred Flintstone's car, but we can do them all as part of the same event, which means our brains can begin to associate all these neural firings as related and begin to wire them together.

There are many different approaches to such things but I prefer this one as it offers us the pleasure levels we need by focusing only on positives. When we have sufficient pleasure from the positives, the need for the negatives naturally becomes diminished. Who needs to sit smoking with a beer or a glass of wine when more pleasure can be had by other means?

Now it's your turn. List all the things you do for pleasure, give each a pleasure level rating and a target level. Put down as many as you can think of and then go through all the positives, thinking of ways in which you can combine them to get your very own PPF outcome(s).

Pleasurable things	Pleasure Level	Target Level (Need)

As well as the pleasure aims themselves, there is also the function of the brain paths towards them.

Brain Path Growth

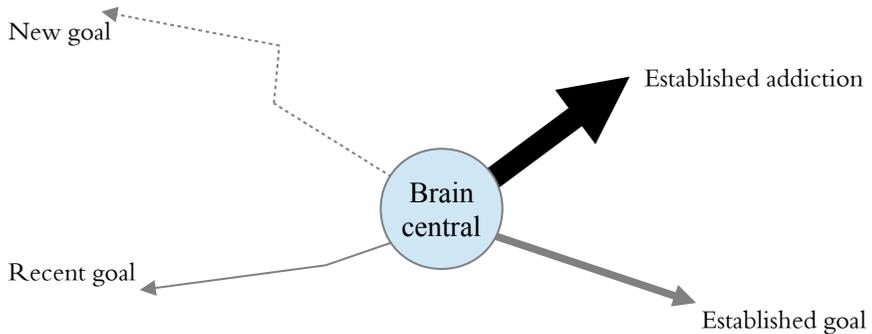
Think of brain paths between thoughts as having different levels of paths. When we first make new brain paths, such as throwing our first ball, it is like a barely visible, meandering of slightly bent grass. The more we throw the ball the clearer this path becomes. Keep practising and the path gains clear ground as the grass gets eliminated. If we keep practising the path becomes stronger and straighter, even paved. With obsessions (including addictions) the path becomes a country lane, then a road, then a dual carriageway, then a motorway. A super-fast, super direct neuron-highway towards the end goal.

In terms of drug taking, they can become some massively addictive so quickly because they don't wait for our brains to build bigger paths, they come with an entire chemical work crew to do that for us.

Now, imagine your brain centre, with an array of paths coming out of it, all heading towards different pleasure goals. The paths towards addictions and obsessions are going to be very direct and very fast, while new paths and paths

towards lesser goals, will be much slower and less well established. Below is my illustration of this.

Brain path development:



Notice the difference between the strength and directness of the neural pathways. The relative weakness of a new path is why new goals can struggle to become established above a current one, especially if it is an established addiction. This is where conscious effort, motivation and potentially support is required. It takes time to establish new paths but the more we repeat them the more established they will become and the easier it will be to move away from the negative super-highways to addictions.

Breaking habits associated with where/when the addictions occur can help too. For example, if it is your usual habit to sit alone in front of the TV at 6pm and drink whisky until you pass out, avoid sitting alone in front of the TV at 6pm. Busy yourself with something different and positive until that habitual time has passed, for example 9pm, and you are closer to sleeping naturally. Even if you still feel like drinking some whisky, then you are likely to drink less than from 6pm.

Notes To Self

This is the tool I used to break my remaining drinking habit and it can be applied to pretty much any regular activity you want to change.

As a single parent, after the loss of my best friend on top, my evenings had ended up revolving around feeling bored and lonely. My brain had good associations with alcohol from my student days so I'd open a bottle of *Good Emotions*, otherwise known as a bottle of *Merrydown cider*. In the morning, lying in bed after rather too many *Good Emotions*, I'd tell myself I wouldn't drink the coming evening.

The coming evening would arrive and so would my usual feelings of boredom and loneliness; strong enough to disregard my decision that morning and I'd grab a bottle of *Good Emotions*, repeating the cycle. When I tried to break this and kept failing it began to annoy me but the only person there to tell me to stop was myself, and I come the evening I was too keen for *Good Emotions* to tell it. So I had a plan, something basic but which proved effective.

I set an alarm on my phone, to go off three days a week, at a time just before I'd normally start drinking. It need to be before because if it was after I'd started I would probably ignore it. I called this alarm: *None tonight*, and it worked.

The first day it went off, I was really keen for *Good Emotions* and struggling to comply but I also knew if I gave in I would be losing my best chance of breaking the cycle. I had to comply with this firm reminder of my thoughts that morning and, knowing I only needed to wait 24-hours before I could have more *Good Emotions*, made me able to stick to it.

The importance of sticking to it those three nights a week was more than just those three nights, it was the breaking of the habit. Of being able to find better, more productive, not to mention healthier, evening alternatives. In my case, I went back to martial arts – which I have always loved and my kids, now adults, come too.

Chapter 16

New Shoes

So far you've been taken through a variety of self-analysis, CBT, ATET, re-framing and PPF. Here is another process, involving new shoes.

We have all, at one time or another, admired someone famous for how they behave, on-screen or otherwise. When I was a young teenager, frustrated with many things, I had the occasional but very intense anger outburst in the privacy of my bedroom. Thankfully my room was never tidy so it didn't look particularly different after I had thrown things around in a rage but I do remember thinking, after one such outburst, that I couldn't go through life like that. It occurred to me that if I did, allowing the rages to get worse and worse, sooner or later I'd end up in prison. That was the last day I had such a rage but it wasn't just the decision to change that enabled it, I was helped by an on-screen character: the Man with No Name, in *A Fistful of Dollars*, played by Clint Eastwood. Clint was tough and a hero but you never saw him lose his cool or even look bothered when people were mocking him.

In some ways it was similar to multi-mind but, where as multi-mind is more a specific character for a specific occasion, this was more a general way of behaving. Obviously, there needed to be a balance. For a start, at the age of 13, I wasn't going to get a pistol and start smoking cigars, but it gave me a framework for changing not just my behaviour but also the way I viewed events in life. It was also a good fit for many of my existing traits of independence and not being too bothered what other people thought of me. It wasn't a case of trying to walk in his shoes but of changing my own, metaphorically, to take on the positive traits I was seeking.

What negative character traits do you have that you wish to change? The wish to change is important, for if there is no wish to change there is no point

even trying. Take your time, think about it and then note them down; grading them from 1 to 10 can help identify those to be focused on most.

Negative Traits	Level

Now you know the traits you wish to change, which person/character can you think of that displays positive alternatives? It doesn't have to be someone famous, it could be someone you know. It can also involved more than one person. For example, another person I admired was David Carradine in Kung Fu, who walked the land standing up for others, which was a good fit for my desire to help others. I also liked the Banana Splits, which was a crazy kids' show – and which probably explains a lot about my 'non-standard' way of thinking.

You don't need to tell anyone who you choose to be like, it is more for you than them. Just keep the adopted character traits balanced and positive. If we start thinking we are the other person, it is probably not going to end well – remember our shoes need to fit us well or we'll never feel very uncomfortable.

Gestalt Therapy

No book on anxiety and addictions, even one as brief as this, would be complete without a chapter on gestalt therapy. As with all therapy methods, the details and processes can be interpreted and adapted in differing ways, yet the basics remain the same. In gestalt we consider the progress of an activating event, within the context of some background narrative – often referred to as 'figure' and 'ground'. *Here's an example:*

A) Imagine you are driving on a journey (ground) and feel hungry.

Activating event = hunger (figure). Hunger is now on your mind. You begin thinking of ways to get some food.

B) You see a sign for a service station 2 miles ahead.

Activating result = decision to stop at the service station.

C) You stop at the service station, get food and eat.

End result = needs met, journey resumes.

This is all well and good but now consider this possibility.

C2) You stop at the service station but it is closed.

Your needs have not been met and now you are focused even more on your hunger, feel annoyance and may avoid resuming your journey until you have found a place to eat.

Although this is a very simplistic example, it shows how unmet needs can have a big impact on our journeys through life. It is how we deal with these unmet needs that defines what happens next.

Using the above example, if we accept the closure of the service station and that we cannot get food there, we can continue our journey despite our hunger. In this example, it isn't ideal but it isn't life threatening – it isn't more important than the journey itself. Or, we can allow our hunger or stubbornness to get food now to become more important than our journey and potentially make ourselves lost or late by letting it take us over. Which would you do?

In life we repeatedly face unmet needs, ranging from failed projects to simply missing a bus. If we let our thoughts cling to the failure rather than the journey we are pointlessly clinging to the negativity. Imagine an airline pilot doing that when approaching a runway badly and stubbornly still going for it – it could be disastrous, which is why they are trained to be pragmatic and not stay focused on negative events but to accept it is a bad approach, forget it and go around for another attempt. Only when the aircraft has been landed, meeting the needs, will they reflect on what went wrong, not to cling to it but to know what not to do in future. Going back to our hungry driver, if they accept the service station was closed and resume their journey – once they arrive at their destination they can eat and reflect on what to do better next time; either check the opening times, making sure they eat before leaving or take a snack with them.

It is all about being mindful of our thinking and accepting the now; accepting what we cannot change, including the past. The pilot could not erase the bad landing attempt and the driver could not change the service station being closed. For us to keep going forward in life and not get stuck on negative events, when things happen that we didn't want to happen, we simply need to accept they have happened. If we let the negative event stop the progress of our journeys we are simply empowering the negative to keep affecting us and we may never get to our desired destination, of health, happiness and success – in what ever way we value that, as individuals.

Final Word

I hope you have found this book helpful. Am always happy to hear constructive criticism, as well as compliments.

It is beyond the scope of this book to cover everything about anxiety and addictions but everything has to start somewhere and future books will follow.

If you found this free to share book helpful, it would be really appreciated if you could give some positive feedback on Amazon. You may also like to look at the other books in my [BRS Shorts](#) series – a new one is currently being written every month.

At the end of the day, believe in yourself. If others don't, it's their issue, not yours.

Take care,

BRS