



## **UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD TRAUMA**

*Base Instincts* refer to the survival needs of the body/mind. These are primal functions that are there to keep the body alive and functioning in the world. Such primal survival instincts include: safety, comfort, reproduction and sustenance. They are naturally self-centred for survival reasons and therefore have a tendency to be unaware of the needs of others. When threatened, it protects itself with fight-or-flight. The fight-or-flight protective tools available to this primal level of self are: run away, suppress emotions that are too painful, aggression.

A vital capacity of our base instincts is our primal ability to adapt, which is fully switched on at birth. As a newborn baby our brains are mostly developed, but the synaptic pathways are only ten percent wired up. From birth up to around five-years-old, one of the mind's main survival concerns is to be emotionally/psychologically bonded to an adult carer. If this bond is not established, the child may be abandoned by the carer and perish. The smell of the baby, the cuteness, and instinctual tendency to grasp and hold on, are all designed to enhance this initial bond with a carer, especially the mother. The next level of this primal survival instinct is the child's mind's need to quickly adapt to his/her immediate environment, regardless of what that environment is, because it is all the child has to enable it to survive. Therefore, the child, even though it has its own unique character, has to literally become its parents while at the same time trying to somehow be itself. Again, this is to ensure that it does not get abandoned, but

also so it can quickly learn how to actually exist in this world. At this stage, the child has little to no capacity to reason. It can't tell the difference between what is good or bad for it in the long term. This primal level of the mind is just indiscriminately recording what it frequently experiences and this information goes directly into the subconscious/unconscious mind. It has been said that from the age of zero to seven, the child is basically in a state of hypnosis.

At this stage, the child feels more than thinks, and what it mostly feels is being connected to its carer or not connected. Being disconnected means danger, I could die, I don't exist, I am not important, I am a vulnerable and alone, I am unworthy. Being connected means I am safe, I exist, I am loved and important, I am worthy, I am whole. To this young vulnerable child, the bond with its carer is literally life itself. This is the foundation of our conditioning that colours all our perceptions from then on.

It is essential, therefore, for our primal mind to have this ability to form habits. There is a huge array of behaviours that we don't want to have to think about, like the simple act of walking, going to the toilet, riding a bike, reading and writing, driving a car and so on. This frees up our consciousness to deal with anything that is new in the moment. These habits almost become hardwired into our brain, so we can do these things without thinking. It is difficult to change those habits for a reason. If such habits could be easily disrupted, we could suddenly forget how to walk. Our lives could be suddenly thrown into disarray. Here our minds are serving our higher awareness by strongly hanging onto these habits. They become like synaptic highways in our brain.

***Habitual Thinking/Conditioning:*** Thoughts also become habit, which makes up our psychological conditioning. Again, this serves our higher awareness as our environment becomes familiar, making interaction with our environment so much more efficient. For our primal child minds, the environment that we grow up in is our world, and we assume the rest of the world is like the little world of our childhood environment. This is not a problem so long as our environment was consistently loving and supportive, and those adults around us mentored us in how to constructively interact with our community. Here we grow up feeling secure, confident and capable. We can trust our ability to manage our minds and can openly interact with the world. This confidence and openness enables us to continue to adapt, and our view of the world naturally expands as we get older and experience more of the world outside of

our childhood environment. To us, the world is an interesting place full of opportunity.

However, if our childhood world was unsupportive, scary, unpredictable and even dangerous, we grow unconsciously assuming the rest of the world is the same, which is unlikely to be the case. Our ongoing stress and anxiety causes our protective fight-or-flight instincts to be on high alert, ready to be activated at the slightest hint of anything that could be dangerous. We react to innocent situations as though they are dangerous and we take the traumatic environment that we grew in wherever we go, and perpetuate that environment wherever we go with our reactions. This impedes our ability to adapt because our primal minds hang onto these thinking habits all the more tightly in order to protect us, not realising that the traumatic environment is now being carried in our own minds. We are not confident and we are not open. We are vulnerable, closed and defensive. *This is not our fault.* As that child, we had no power over how our environment conditioned us. Nevertheless, as adults, our mind is now ours, and if we want to be happy, at peace, and able to engage in the world constructively, we must find a way to reprogram/re-parent our minds. This is what the “Five Step Process” is designed for.