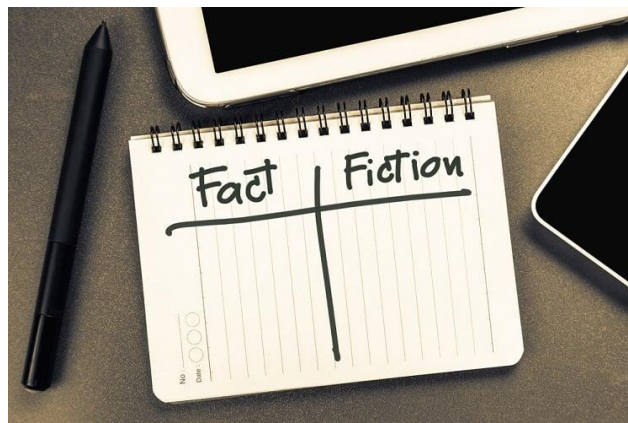


Exercise 3

Separating Fact From Fiction

As usual, read the whole exercise through before you start, in order to help you gain a better feel for it. Be Aware always that there is no perfect way to do any of these exercises. The more you have a go at doing them, the more Awareness they will help you gain and the more skilful you will become in your own process of healing and growing.



Sorting out the facts

1. In your journal, write in detail about the problem or issue that you want to deal with.
2. Without trying to analyse it or edit it, describe what you think and feel about the situation and the people concerned. Put your raw emotions and thoughts on the page.
3. Now take two separate pieces of paper and place a different heading on each one. On the first piece of paper, place the heading, '**Facts**'. On the second piece of paper place the heading,

‘Fiction’. Now prepare to be absolutely honest with yourself.

4. On the Fact page, read through the notes that you have written about the problem that you want to deal with and list in point-form the things that you actually **know** about the situation and the people in it.
5. Be Aware that no matter how intuitive we think we are, we cannot read another person’s mind – certainly not with any real accuracy. We rarely even know the motives behind *our own* words and actions. Motives are complex and multi-layered. We cannot truly know what the complex motives are behind what another may say or do. All we can ever do is guess or speculate. This list is about what you actually know. It is *not* about what you speculate.
6. The only real way to find out about the motives of another’s behaviour is to communicate to them. In the process we must be prepared to genuinely listen to them with an open mind and talk things through with them. That way the person in question is given a chance to process their own thoughts and feelings and understand their own behaviour, which they, themselves, may not understand at first either.
7. When we do try to talk to the person in question, he/she may not be very receptive. He/she may be evasive or even a bit aggressive. We don’t know the reasons behind that either. The person might be afraid to open up because of his/her own personal struggles with their past conditioning. Most people, if approached with kindness and patience however, will open up in time. With the right approach, most issues can be resolved.
8. The vast majority of people do not want to be in conflict with us, any more than we want to be in conflict with them. The unnecessary conflict occurs because we are all just jumping at our own shadows or jumping to unfounded conclusions or both. Learning to skilfully own and manage our own fears, insecurities and expectations is what can make the difference between conflict and connection.
9. We cannot gain the clarity to approach communication constructively until we can see above our own fears, insecurities and expectations.
10. Complete your Fact list and review it a few times to make sure it contains no non-factual information.

Sorting out the fiction

1. Now, in your Fiction list, write down in point-form all the imagined information that you wrote about the problem. Review the list a few times to make sure you have all the non-factual information.
2. Consider what I mentioned before about how the mind is searching for fulfilment or trying to protect itself from past painful memories by projecting imagined information onto the moment.
3. Observe how you feel about people who are different to you. Explore why you feel that way.
4. With Self-Acceptance/Compassion, write about each point from these new perspectives and do your best to identify past conditioning, whether it is painful memories, social conditioning or the way you personally relate.
5. Write down the insights that come to you and also anything that you still don’t understand.

6. Finish the exercise by exploring better ways to approach this situation where you are not making other people wrong because of your own fears, insecurities and expectations.
7. Most importantly, make sure that you don't make *yourself* wrong for being human. All these exercises are for the purpose of Compassionately caring for your own mind and setting yourself free from suffering.
8. Remember, it is still important to set boundaries to other people's inappropriate behaviour, but we are learning to discern these healthy boundaries from the perspective of genuinely and responsibly Caring for ourselves. Therefore, the boundary is about Self-Acceptance and Personal Responsibility and not about projecting our fears and insecurities onto other people. It is not about punishing others. It is about responsibly Caring for ourselves, which doesn't make people wrong for being human. What our Self-Care does give us is discernment. We can observe whether the other person is, or is not, Aware enough to Accept themselves enough to be Responsible for their own fears and insecurities.
9. When we set boundaries with our Conscious-Awareness, they tend to be more empowered, because we have a greater clarity and conviction in our decision. We are more likely to stand firm and avoid manipulation and arguments. Such a boundary also tends to be more respected by others for the same reasons.



It is unlikely that you will gain all the clarity that you need from one examination of a particular issue. Clarity takes time as our Awareness grows with education and experience. The fog is slowly but surely lifted by our Awareness by regularly engaging in these and similar exercises. It would also be greatly beneficial to review what you have revealed in this exercise with a counsellor/therapist/mentor.