



ReKINDLE

Relationship Counselling

Module 3

Written by Sian Hines

Module 3

Roles in Relationships

- Withdrawer and Pursuer
- Attachment styles
- Parent - Adult - Child
- Drivers
- Low Mood
- Distorted Ways of Thinking

Video Learning Discussion Point

Molly and Josh Couples Therapy Discussion Point

Roles in Relationships

There are two main roles in a relationship:

Withdrawer

Pursuer

Note: There can be a crossover between the two depending on circumstances but there will always be a dominant one.

What do we know about both roles

A **pursuer** may think & feel:

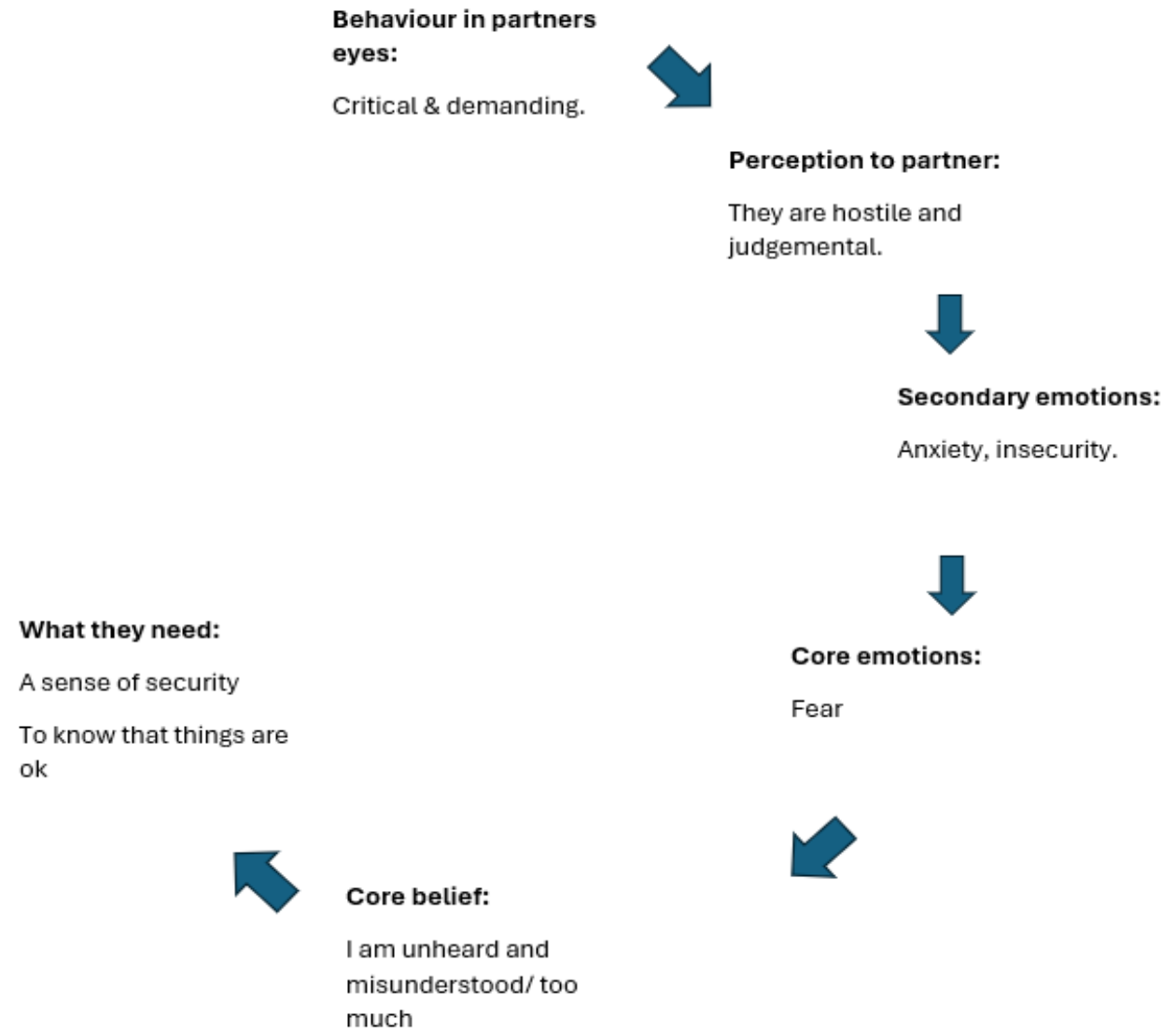
“I need to know what is happening, I must understand what has taken us here. I am confused and worried. I need them to understand that we must work on this now whilst it is fresh.”

What do we know about both roles

Pursuer - There could be:

- Fear that they are unimportant and unwanted by their partner.
- Fear of abandonment or triggers from betrayal.
- Struggles with feelings of hurt or shame because of rejection when wanting to talk.
- Fears that they are not being truly loveable.
- Fear that the relationship is ending.

Pursuer



What do we know about both roles

A **withdrawer** may think & feel:

“If I put myself out there, the other person will leave. I’m going to be blamed. I’m going to be criticised. We’re going to get into a big fight. I don’t want to do that because they are incredibly important to me. I don’t want to lose this person. It is best not to say anything and let things naturally resolve, I don’t know what to say”.

What do we know about both roles

Withdrawer - There could be:

- Sadness because they have let their partner down.
- Worry that they could be rejected from their partner for failing to meet their needs.
- Fear that they are not wanted or desired.
- Feelings of being judged and criticised.
- Confusion about not being understood.
- Anger at their self for not being able to respond in a way that helps.

Withdrawer

Behaviour to partner:

Avoidant and distant

**Perceptions to partner:**

They don't care

**Secondary emotion:**

Withdrawn, distant,
overwhelmed, anxious

**Core emotion:**

Angry and Fearful

**Core belief:**

I won't say anything right,
be quiet and small

**What they need:**

Space to think and time
to process for the right
response.

Video Learning

Watch a short video clip on recognising and working with the Withdrawer and Pursuer.

Therapists Corner

Mini Exercise

Ask the couples if they recognise:

- if this pattern is happening in your relationship?
- if this pattern happened in previous relationships?
- If this pattern happened in their parents' relationships?

Self-Reflection

- What do you recognise as your style?
- What do you know about yourself that fits in with the style?

Thinking Cap?



What else is comparable to the Pursuer or Withdrawer roles?

Withdrawer, Pursuer & Attachment Styles

Look at the ways we attach to people:

Secure

Anxious

Avoidant

Disorganised

3 Facts About Attachment Style

1. According to research 'Disorganised' is the rarest attachment style, as it is born out of childhood trauma, abuse and neglect.
2. The most manipulative attachment style is 'Anxious'.
3. 'Avoidant' attachments are more likely to break up partners as they can easily get flooded with uncomfortable emotions from their partners - Distance feels safer.

Attachment - Secure

As Children

- Separates from parent
- Seeks comfort from parents when frightened
- Greets return of parents with positive emotions
- Prefers parents to strangers

As Adults

- Have trusting, lasting relationships
- Tend to have good self-esteem
- Share feelings with partners and friends
- Seek out social support

Attachment - Anxious

As Children

- May be wary of strangers
- Become greatly distressed when parents leave
- Do not appear comforted when parents return

As Adults

- Reluctant to become close to others
- Worry that their partner does not love them
- Become very distraught when relationships end

Attachment - Avoidant

As Children

- May avoid parents
- Do not seek much contact or comfort from parents
- Show little or no preference for parents over strangers

As Adults

- May have problems with intimacy
- Invest little emotion in social and romantic relationships
- Unwilling or unable to share thoughts or feelings with others

Attachment - Disorganised

Disorganised

- Is shown in relationships by inconsistency and unpredictable behaviour, it can also be known as fearful Avoidant.
- They can act according to the Avoidant pattern but also the Anxious/preoccupied pattern, depending on their state of mind and the situation.

Attachment Style - Examples

Relationship Trigger "My partner said something that hurt my feelings"

	Secure	Anxious	Avoidant	Disorganised
Core Belief	"I trust that I am worthy of love. What is happening is a moment in time. It is as a result of things momentarily out of our control.	I am not loveable. This is further proof that my partner doesn't love me or care about my feelings	If my partner isn't happy about something, that means they think I am a failure	People can not be trusted. Nobody is safe. I have to be vigilant
Emotional Reaction	My feelings are hurt but I know I am safe	I feel rejected, sad and lonely. I can't cope by myself. I need my partner to love me	I feel rejected and alone, but I will hide the feeling and disconnect from them and pretend that they aren't there	I feel rejected, abandoned, afraid. I am in danger
Protection Reaction	My reaction is real and understandable. It is under control, I do not need to avoid this.	I am so upset, how can they do this to me. This feels so big	Pretend it is not there. Carry on	Enraged, Afraid, Conflicted.
Behaviour	To approach partner and talk about it, express feelings and negotiate a way forward	Shows lots of emotions, fear, worry, blames, criticises, clings,	Let it go, appease partner, leave the situation, pretend not care, be passive aggressive.	Go to extremes, withdraw before they withdraw. Silence and punish
Changing	No change necessary. Working perfectly	Learn to trust, develop self-awareness, communicate needs clearly, mindfulness	Learn to express needs and wants, understand your emotions	Learn to regulate emotions and to write thoughts down so that they can be seen first

Attachment – Anxious/ Avoidant Dance

One of the most common connections between couples is the Anxious partner with an Avoidant partner.

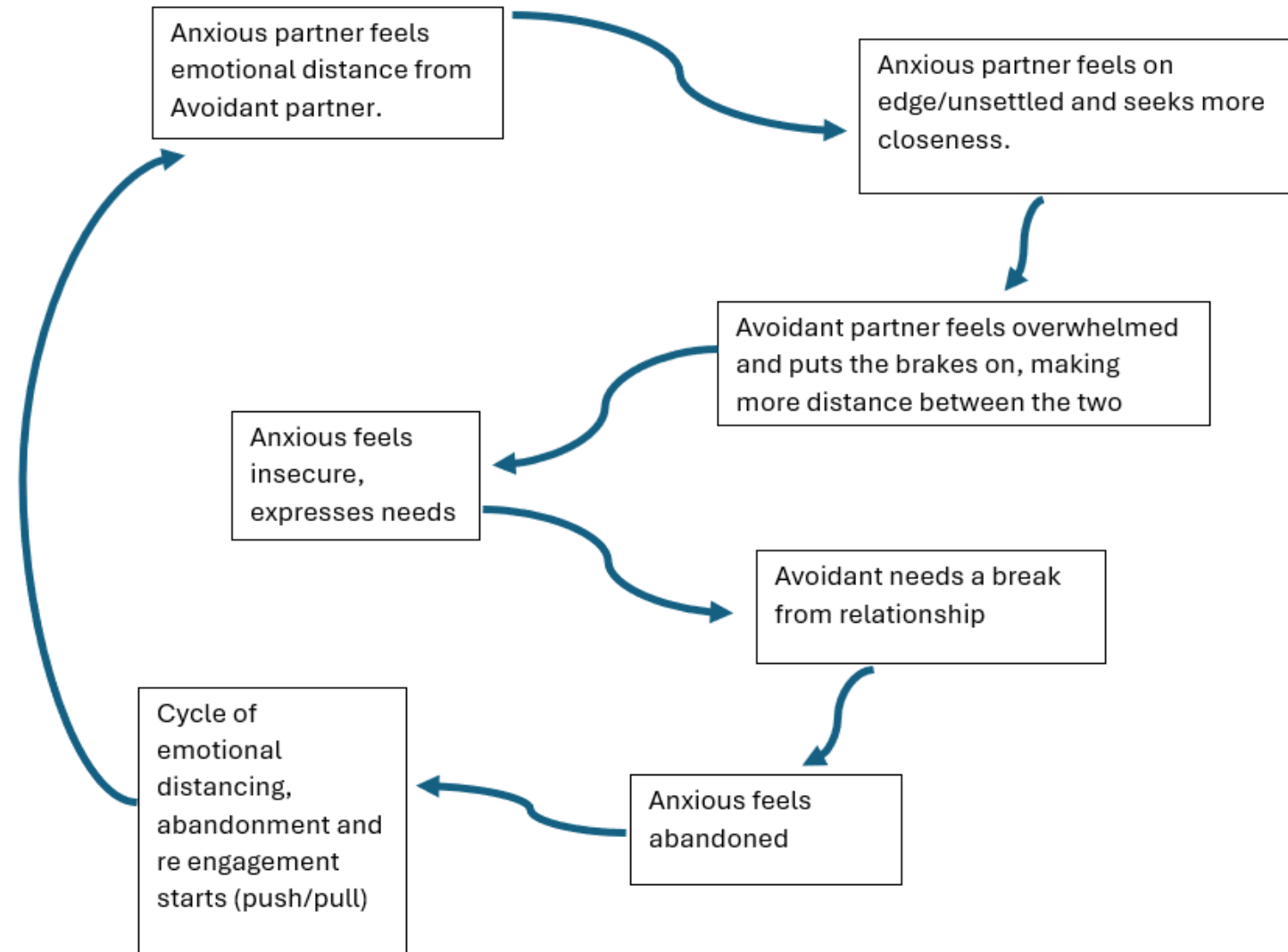
It shows up as a push – pull connection.

Thinking Cap?



Why do you think there is an Anxious/Avoidant connection?

Attachment Style – The Dance



Attachment Style – Avoidant & Anxious

When working with these two attachment styles (which btw is the most common issue within the counselling room)

- It's firstly important to get the couple to understand the pattern and why that attachment style is there - think back to EFT and De-escalation.
- Then 'restructure' – Think about encouraging understanding about:
 - What it is they need from each other
 - Having the ability to express it.

A way to work with this is talking through boundaries or expectations.

Working towards the following basics can help the relationship

Attachment Style – Avoidant & Anxious

Avoidant

Not allowing the partner to guess how you are feeling – Guess work creates a pathway to spiralling or anger.

Ensuring that its space that is asked for and not taken without explanation. Understanding that could be seen as a punishment.

Hot and cold behaviour doesn't create intimacy.

The partner also has needs and is it fair to expect them to adapt to your needs.

The need for space does not mean silence.

Attachment Style – Avoidant & Anxious

Anxious

Working on your own sense of self. Not merging your identity to match your partners. Stopping people pleasing.

People needing space and time apart does not mean I have done something wrong. It is not abandonment. Hot and cold behaviour doesn't create intimacy.

The partner also has needs and is it fair to expect them to adapt to your needs.

Communicating in a way that encourages understanding not reverting or changing into victim role.

Attachment - Session Work

Encourage clients to relay what they know about each other using the following questioning framework:

1. To help me with some understanding, could you tell me who was in your immediate family and where you lived?
2. If I were to ask you to close your eyes, could you think back to your earliest memories. Can you describe your relationship with your parents or caregiver(s)?
3. What memory or phrase comes to mind?
4. What parent or caregiver did you feel closest to and why?
5. When you were upset as a child, what would you do and who would you go to?

Attachment - Session Work

6. Can you remember and describe your first separation from your parent(s) or caregiver(s)?
7. Did you ever feel rejected as a child?
8. How were you disciplined as a child?
9. How do think your early childhood experiences have affected you in adulthood?
10. Do you have any theories on why your parents behaved the way that they did?
11. What do you know about their upbringing?
12. What does your partner not know about your childhood and upbringing?

Therapist Corner

How to identify the attachment style and work with it in therapy.

The link here is a robust and easy to understand way to identify attachment styles in an adult relationship. The questionnaire guides people to answer sets of questions based on their mother or equivalent, their father or equivalent and their partner or most recent partner.

It then calculates where they stand within the 4 attachment styles.

[Attachment Style Quiz: Free & Fast Attachment Style Test
\(attachmentproject.com\)](http://attachmentproject.com)

Attachment Style

One way to improve and change the attachment style and move it more towards secure is to encourage the couple to invest in value relationships, not just with each other but with others too.

To progress, find out from the couple who they invest in:

- Step one - Identify the people who matter most in their life.
- Step two - Select up to four relationships that are valued and explore the reasons why.
- Step three - Reflect on how much time is invested in these relationships.
- Step four - Find ways to invest more time in these relationships by initiating connection, showing appreciation, being present, and listening.

Thinking Cap?



Think back to the Stages of Emotionally Focused Therapy. Where does the Avoider and Withdrawer pursuit and attachment work fit in?

Case Study Discussion

Couple, together 8 years. Lots of trauma on both sides.

Female has anxiety and has had for years. No help apart from self-help.

Male has struggled with depression in the past. Again, no help apart from self-awareness.

2 children under 4. Youngest child seriously ill and in hospital for a period.

Unexpected third pregnancy during the time that youngest was ill.

Termination agreed.

Male shut down emotionally

Female struggles to hear his feelings

What would your steps be to move forward?

What type of questioning would you take?

What is the pattern of behaviour that is possibly taking place, what are you alert for?

Parent Adult Child Ego States

P

The parent ego state, this is our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and beliefs that we have been copied, taught or learnt by our parents, parental figures or other significant adults in our lives.

They do not have to be biologically connected to us but someone that has influence or power over us.

A

The adult ego state is based on what is happening in the here and now, it focuses on facts, it enables us to see bigger picture thinking, allows us to respond calmly and reflectively. The adult ego state does not have any of the influences that comes from the parent or child ego state.

C

The child ego state is nothing to do with being childish but is more to do with how we reacted to things as a child. How situations, people and events made us feel and the responses we automatically did. Some of these responses however can be negative and as a result stops us from having the right form of growth.

Parent Adult Child Ego States

NEGATIVE PARENT/CHILD

Negative Parent also known as Controlling Parent. Can be seen as critical, judgemental, controlling, demanding, suffocating. If this was modelled to you as a child it is highly likely you will model this behaviour yourself or become a negative child ego state, if it was not modelled to you as a child but react this way in situations you have fallen into a Negative Parent ego state.

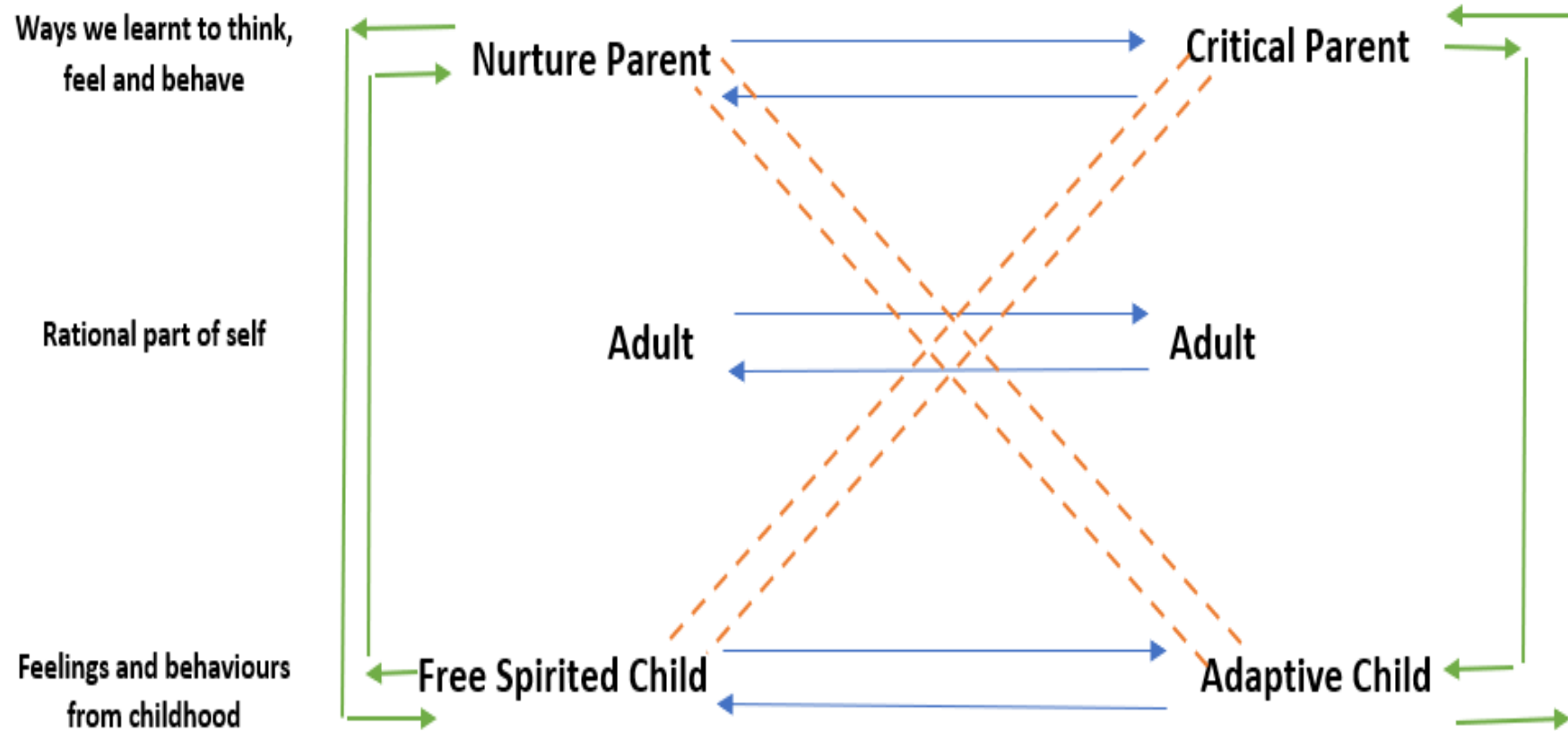
POSITIVE PARENT/CHILD

Positive Parent also known as Nurturing Parent. Seen as supportive, caring nurturing. A safe space to go when needing encouragement. This ego state is rooted in understanding and wanting to help people feel good about themselves.

Negative Child also known as Adapted Child. Here the negative reactions to words or situations come out. Such as defensiveness, jealousy, anxiety, rebelliousness, sulkiness, people pleaser.

Positive child also known as Free Child. This part of the self is the happy, spontaneous, playful part. Resilient, able to adapt through life's changes from child up until old age.

Parent Adult Child Ego States and transactions



Parent Adult Child Ego States

How to use the model in the counselling room.

1. **Help the couple to recognise their current natural ego state** in a safe way. Couples can learn to recognise which ego state they are operating in during interactions. For example:
 - A **Parent mode** might involve giving advice or being judgmental.
 - An **Adult mode** focuses on problem-solving & understanding.
 - A **Child mode** may react emotionally or regress to past patterns.
2. **Discuss communication - current and ideal**
 - Encourage both partners to communicate from their **Adult ego state**. This promotes rational discussion and reduces emotional reactivity.
 - Avoid **Parent-Child interactions**, as they can lead to power struggles or defensiveness.
 - Foster empathy and active listening to create a supportive environment.

Parent Adult Child Ego States

3. Ensure that the couple understand the transactions between the two of them:

Parent-Parent Transactions: When both partners communicate from their Parent ego states, it can lead to power struggles, criticism, or judgment.

Child-Child Transactions: These interactions involve emotional reactions, such as tantrums or sulking, this may escalate conflict.

Adult-Adult Transactions: The ideal scenario. Partners communicate rationally, empathetically, and without emotional baggage.

Crossed Transactions: When partners communicate from unmatched ego states or unexpected ego states, this will result in misunderstandings and conflict will occur.

Parent Adult Child Ego States

Adult worded question

I noticed that we went over the food budget when eating out last week. Can we sit down and talk about it so we can get back on track?

What could happen next?

Adult response - Absolutely we can. I wonder if we can look at our budget in other areas to see if we can increase it in the food area.

Adaptive child response - Erm why are you checking up on me? That's not fair (They feel defensive and sulky)

Critical parent response – Well I think we should also look at your spending on things that are not important. (Critical and falling into tit for tat)

Parent Adult Child Ego States

4. **Self-Reflection**, apply the Adult-Parent-Child model for self-reflection as part of the session:
- *Observe thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in various situations.*
 - *Identify which ego state is predominant and reflect on how it influences each person's responses.*
 - *What elements of the Child or Parent ego states have been absorbed into their own thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours?*
 - *When talking to others, check in with yourself or each other by asking:*
1. What ego state is being activated in how I talk to people or have people talk to me. (look at self, partner, friends, family)
 2. What ego state response am I or the other person expecting?
 3. Is there a pattern, is one ego state constantly being activated?
If so, when or with who?

Video Learning

Here is a short video that shows how you can bring Parent Adult Child into the couples counselling session.

Let's watch this, then a short discussion together about how you use PAC in your own therapy practise.

Something to think about?

Parent Adult Child with a Neurodivergent twist.

We as counsellors might have to realise what aspects of PAC will not work with clients that are neurodivergent.

This does not mean that you cannot work with this aspect of therapy, but you may have to rethink how you approach it.

Thinking Cap?



Think back to the Stages of Emotionally Focused Therapy. Where does PAC work fit in?

Therapist Corner

Discuss with the couple when growing up what they learnt and from who:

Child:

When you were a child, what do you remember feeling? Anxious, sad, loved, happy?

Were you fighting for attention?

Did you feel unconditional love?

Did you feel that you needed to prove yourself?

Parent:

When you were a child how do you remember your parents behaving – were they critical, distrustful, supportive, calm and who were those feelings directed towards?

What were their beliefs about the world, money, people etc?

Video Learning

Another couple's therapy example.

We are in Series 3, and this is Episode 10

Introducing Sean and Erica

Make notes on key facts about

- Their relationship.
- Thoughts about the 'type' of couple.
- Emotions.
- Attachment style.
- Evidence of Parent, Adult and Child.

What else can you see happening?

Take 15 mins in small groups to discuss.

We will then watch a second short clip of this couple and repeat the process, before watching the final third clip including some supervision.

Transactional Analysis - Drivers

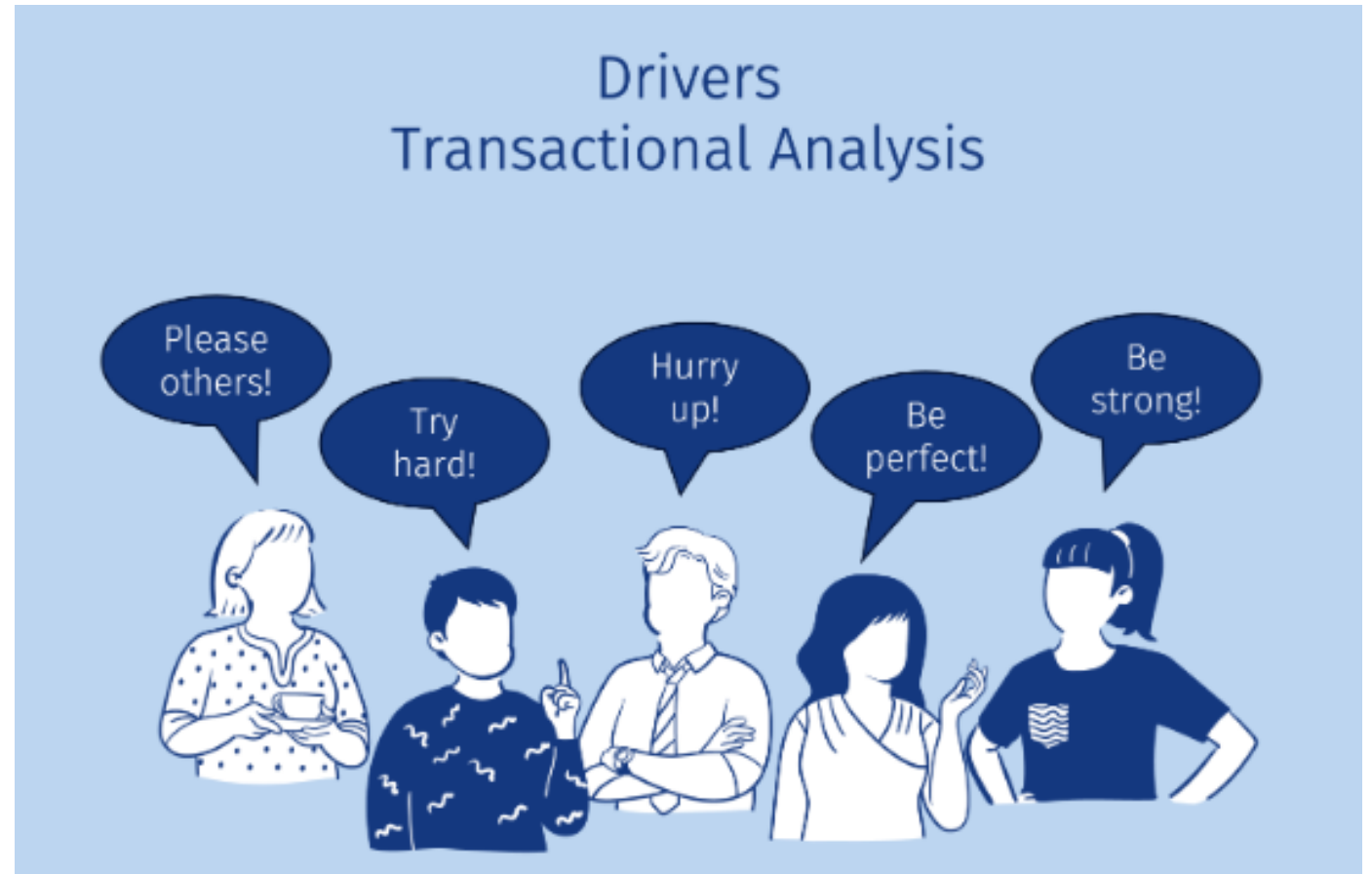
Really good icebreaker for couples

Knowing their driver gives so much insight. Drivers are unconscious patterns of behaviour. They are core scripts given to us by our parents or other significant people to us.

Using drivers helps the couples to understand their behaviour in the relationship and the dynamics of their relationship.

If they know their driver you can bet that they are not working with it or considering it within the relationship, so reintroduce them to Drivers.

Transactional Analysis - Drivers



Identifying the drivers helps to increase self-awareness, promote self-reflection, improve ways to communicate and eliminate unhelpful thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Transactional Analysis - Drivers

Driver	Overt Message	Reinforcing Message	Permission message	Allowing message
BE PERFECT	You're only OK if you do everything perfectly and get everything right	You are no good if you get anything wrong	It is OK to be 'enough', sometimes get things wrong i.e. be human	learn to ease off the self-criticism and produce whatever they do to a good enough level. There are many things that really do not require perfection and are either done or not done.
PLEASE OTHERS	You're only OK if you are pleasing and doing what is right for other people	It is wrong/selfish to ask for what you'd like or do things for yourself	It is OK to sometimes please yourself too!	To do things that please yourself. By doing things for yourself and asking for what they want, the resentment of being "missed" by others is removed and they can learn that they are OK if others are not happy with what they do.

Transactional Analysis - Drivers

HURRY UP	You're only OK if you do everything right NOW!	It is never OK to do things in your own time	It is OK to take your time over things	<i>To take Your Time.</i> "Slowing everything down and taking the time to enjoy things. For example, driving (far <u>less</u> speeding tickets and increased safety), eating (better digestion and weight loss)
----------	--	--	--	---

Transactional Analysis - Drivers

TRY HARD	You're only OK if you keep trying hard to do things	Trying hard is better than succeeding	It is OK to just DO it - success doesn't always have to be hard work.	<i>Do it. "<u>A</u> try hard"</i> behaviour often gets into a struggle with things and flap around the periphery without getting stuck in and completing things. By just doing it they can teach themselves that they can be successful and don't need to do all the faffing to achieve.
----------	---	---------------------------------------	---	--

Transactional Analysis - Drivers

BE STRONG	You're only OK if you always cope – and hide your feelings and wants from people	You are weak/bad if you show your feelings or express any needs	It is OK to be open and to take care of your own needs	Be open and express your wants. “Be Strongs” sometimes find it difficult to ask for what they want and tend to take themselves off by themselves to get their needs met. By activating the allowor message you can start to ask for what they want with other people and see that they don't have to be alone to get what they want.
-----------	--	---	--	---

TA Drivers Reflective Questions for couples

Be Perfect - When in your relationship do you expect:

- Perfection from yourself?
- Perfection from your partner?

Then, how do you feel:

- When you fail to be perfect?
- When your partner fails to be perfect?

Please Others - When in your relationship do you recognise:

- That you are pleasing your partner or others to excess.
- That you are feeling resentment because it feels unbalanced.

Then, how do you feel when:

- Your partner fails to please you.
- Your partner expresses that you have not pleased them.

TA Drivers Reflective Questions for couples

Hurry Up - When in your relationship do you recognise:

- That you expect to speed through situations without stopping to ask how they are feeling?
- That you expect your partner to respond quickly without any overthinking.

Then, how do you feel when:

- You are criticised for rushing when you feel you are doing your best?
- When your partner fails to understand your need to move quickly?

Try Hard - When in your relationship do you:

- Know that you have tried hard, and it has been missed?
- Realise that your partner has tried hard, but you did not acknowledge it?

Then, how do you feel when:

- You realised that you missed an opportunity to show gratitude toward your partner for something they did for the relationship?
- You realise that your partner is missing how hard you tried for something in the relationship?

TA Drivers Reflective Questions for couples

Be Strong - When in your relationship do you:

- Show elements of being too strong and not reaching out and sharing how you are feeling?
- See your partner being too strong but silently getting on with it, what are the signs that you see?

Then, how do you feel when:

- People see how strong you are being but cannot see how much you need help?
- You realise that your partner has been sinking and now that you have spoken, the signs were obvious?

TA Drivers Reflective Questions for couples

Finally, for the couple together:

- What do you do when you feel this way (for example, overeat, avoid your partner, shout, etc.)?
- What messages might you give yourself to show more kindness and compassion to yourself and your partner?

Working with the activated drivers in this way will help each client to understand their triggers far more and what they can both do together to minimise negative impacts.

Therapist Corner

Mini exercise – Ask your couples:

- What driver do you think is your strongest and where do you see it in action in your life?
- In your relationship how do the driver's impact communication, connectivity, emotional vulnerability, and conflict.

Video Learning

A clip from series 1 of 'Couples Therapy'.

Watch for the examples of 'Drivers' in action.

We will watch this then discuss in small groups what you have identified and what you would suggest going forward.

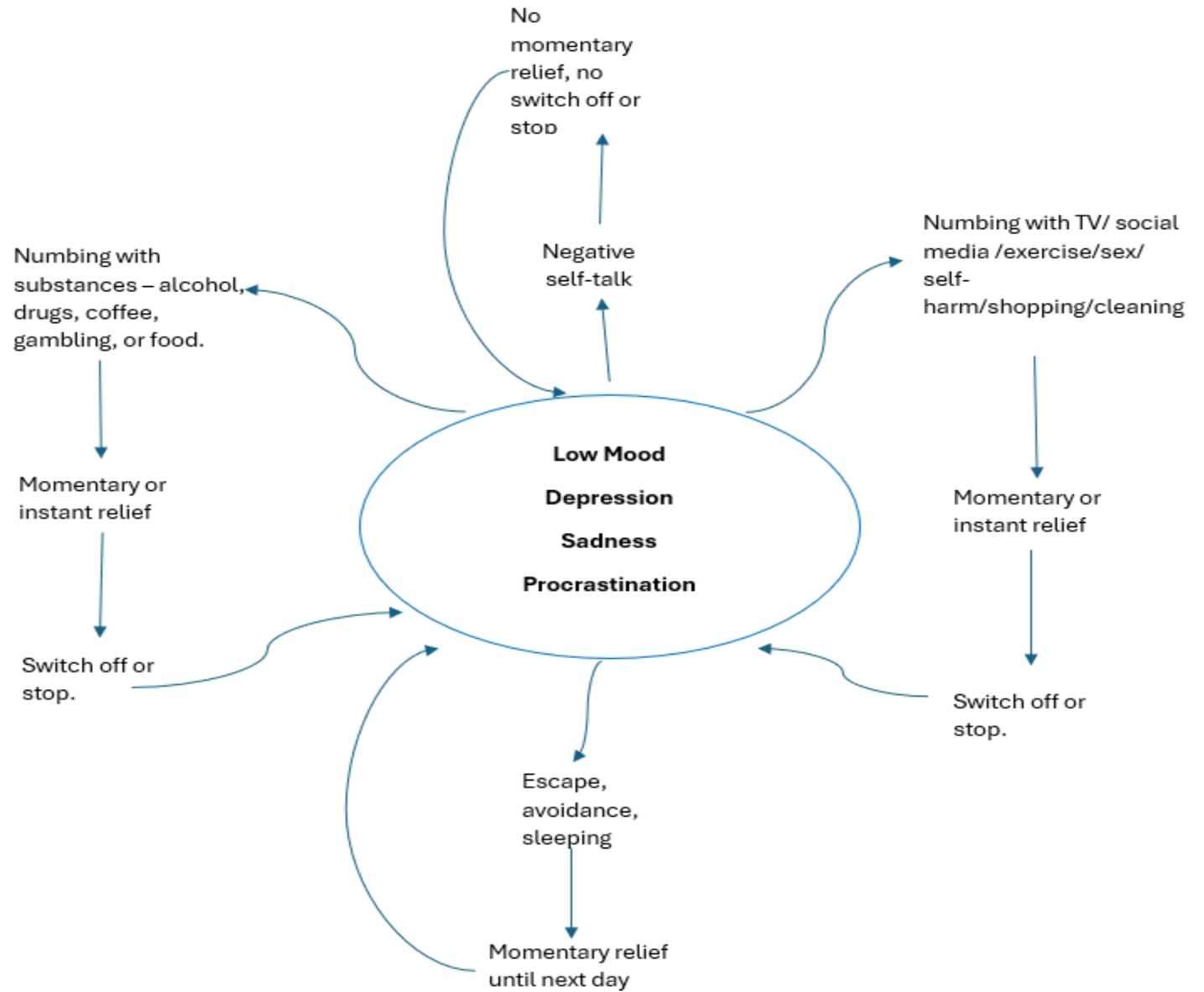
Think about:

- Which 'Drivers' you heard in action
- Ego states
- Any Attachment Identification
- Types of couples
- Emotions

Also watch the therapist and how she reacts to these moments - Calm, reflective, taking advantage of silence.

- Is there anything else you have noticed?

Identify Relationship Impacts



Therapist Corner

Work with the couple?

- When you are feeling low – what are your 'go-to' responses?
- Does the 'go-to' response give instant relief from the low mood?
- How long has the 'go-to' response been there?
- What does the 'go-to' response cost? (money, time, effort, health, progress)
- How does the 'go-to' response impact the partner?

Suggestions to work with:

- Brainstorm and identify possible ways forward using solution focused and motivational interviewing questions.
- Having a single session to understand more on both sides.
- Suggest visit to G.P. for physical health.
- All round health check.
- Ideals for what both want to minimise/stop relationship impact - working with what is practical.
- Reminders that changing pathways in the brain is a slow steady process full of appreciations and gratitude's.

Look out for 4 horseman, PAC and drama triangle in responses. Work in Radical acceptance coping strategies which come under DBT techniques.

Distorted Thinking with Thought Bias

Negative distorted thinking (NDT) can massively impact a relationship.

There is no convincing explanation on how NDT developed, research suggests that people may have developed NDT to cope with adverse life events.

The more prolonged and severe those adverse events are, the more likely it is that one or more cognitive distortions will form. Humans might even have developed cognitive distortions as an evolutionary survival method.

In other words, experiencing stress could cause you to adapt your thinking in useful ways for immediate survival. But these thoughts often aren't rational, useful or healthy long-term.

Working out what negative thought bias is present in the relationship from both is crucial so that it can be challenged, and each partner can work on a plan to continue gently challenging it outside the therapy room.

What is your own negative thought bias... have you looked at it yourself?

Distorted Thinking with Thought Bias

Thought Bias	What is it	An example
All or nothing thinking	This is thinking in the extreme, it is black and white thinking.	I must get 100% on everything otherwise I am stupid. I must look perfect otherwise I am not going out.
Over generalisations	Taking one event or situation and using the outcome of it in a negative way and attaching it to other events	I failed this test; my life is ruined. That friend is cross with me, I will never have any friends, I will be alone forever.
Disqualifying the positives	This is where we experience something that is happy, uplifting, positive or just plain neutral, but we convince ourselves that it is not positive. Instead, we reject what is happening as anything good.	Taking a person's compliment to you and twisting it into a failure on yourself.
Jumping to conclusions	A negative interpretation of something even though there is no evidence to support your thinking.	They are laughing about something....it must be me
Mind reading	Making the wrong assumptions on what people may be thinking or feeling based on something that happened.	They have not called me in ages, they must hate me
Musts and shoulds	Unreasonable expectations put on yourself. These expectations are designed to make you feel bad about your capabilities.	I must be perfect. I should work harder or longer hours.
Emotional reasoning	I feel it, therefore this feeling must be true.	I feel guilty, I feel sad....I must be a bad parent.
Catastrophising	Worst case scenario thinking. A situation that is happening is magnified and the worst possible outcome is thought about.	I have an exam, I am going to fail it, then I will fail the class. I won't get into college or get a good job, no one will want to know me.

Case Study Discussion

Married couple, together 12 years. 2 children, both teenagers (14 and 16).

Female has an excessive need for order and tidiness around her. Anything must be done quickly and has a need to know everything that is happening. Always in pre anticipation mode to stop problems from happening.

Partner feels incapable to do anything in the house and shuts down.

Children don't do anything around the house.

Source of a lot of tension.

What would your steps be to move forward for both?

What do you need to know about both?

Considering what we have learnt this module, what type of couple could they be? What would you want them to aim towards?

Video Learning

It's useful practice for training relationship counsellors to watch more examples from 'Couples Therapy' on BBC iPlayer.

Suggestion:

Series 3, Kirsti & Brock. Watch episodes 10, 11, 12 and 13. Then note down what you saw, recognised and what you would do going forward.

We can discuss key facts and thoughts at our next module.

We will be coming back to this series in future modules, so you don't need to watch them all 😊

See you next time

From all of us at ReKindle... bye for now.