

FRONT AND BACK BRAIN SPACES IN TRAUMATIC STUCKNESS

Front Brain

'ANPs' (Apparently Normal Parts of the personality)

Green zone

Higher thinking

Daily life mode

Thriving

Strategic/responsive

Conscious choices

A mental/emotional/physical 'space' in which:

- I can identify the problem
- I gain knowledge
- I develop skills
- I can be curious
- I stay calm
- I am reflective
- I can marshal my resources
- I can gain collaborative support from others
- I can develop a strategic plan for change, monitor my progress, and make adaptations to the plan to improve it
- I feel energised and motivated to change
- I can break down change into daily, attainable steps
- I can think globally and insightfully into all the factors contributing to the problem, and how to address them
- I can be empathic and understand the perspectives of others, as well as receiving empathy and compassion from others

Back Brain

'EPs' (Emotional Parts of the Personality)

Amber zone or red zone

Lower thinking

Danger mode

Surviving

Survival/reactive

Unconscious actions

A mental/emotional/physical 'space' in which:

- I feel stuck
- I feel helpless
- I feel disempowered
- I feel hopeless
- I don't know what the problem is or how to fix it
- I feel in need of support or rescue for things to improve, but that help seems out of reach
- I feel self-critical and ashamed
- I feel demotivated and sapped of energy and the capacity for change
- I feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the change involved and don't know where to start
- I have rigid, fixated thinking centered around self-blame or blame of others
- I feel the problem is due to intrinsic badness or inadequacy
- I struggle to step back from my experience and see alternative perspectives or other people's mental states (including empathy and compassion)



Trauma pushes us into a survival-based 'back brain space', which is focused on imminent threat and rapid reactions in the service of survival, but which is not ideally suited to reflective, strategic thinking, perspective-taking or problem-solving. Chronic trauma during childhood therefore often impedes opportunities to develop a consistent 'front brain space'. Many of the coping strategies we use to deal with that trauma in adulthood (such as numbing with dissociation, substances or self-harm) then also impede its development and keep us stuck in a back brain response. Part of the process of recovery from trauma includes strengthening the ability to operate more consistently from this green-zone based, front brain 'space'.



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