

A SCHEMATIC EXPLANATION OF EVENT PROCESSING.

This flowchart was initially developed as a method of explaining an element of Critical Incident Debriefing (CrID) when describing the process to delegates at a seminar. The simplicity of this chart enables therapists to help individual clients, who present with symptoms related to past trauma or stress. Using this chart enables them to develop an understanding of why they re-experience a traumatic event in some way, and thus it facilitates resolution. I accept that there may well be discussions regarding the total accuracy of this chart but in the interests of simplification and client understanding this is an acceptable model that readers may find useful.

EXPLANATION

Starting from the bottom at external stimulation.

EXTERNAL STIMULUS

All of our senses are connected to the most primitive part of our brain. Everything we experience is deciphered in terms of feeling elsewhere. At this level we are merely interested in the possibility of danger

FIGHT FREEZE OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

At this level we are only concerned with 'is the experience dangerous and or fight, freeze or flight responses are triggered. Our hand moves from the heat without thought, it is a reaction directed by this response

PATTERN MATCHING

Once this basic survival instinct has served its purpose we then start to try to make sense of what happened. At this point we decide how we feel about the event 'does it make us happy or angry or what?' if we can identify the event in some way, we are able to allow it to be stored in a part of our long-term memory (LTM). An easy way of considering this is to think of LTM as a series of filing cabinets holding memories of past events and all of the details relating to those events. Other filing cabinets hold other subjects, a numbers cabinet, a language cabinet etc. We look into the events cabinet to see if there is a file that we can put what happened into. This is what we refer to as pattern matching.

SHORT TERM MEMORY

If we are not able to identify the correct file it is because the event is outside our normal terms of reference and we can't make sense of it. At this point we hold the event in our short-term memory and use our Altradian rhythms, or dreams (waking or sleeping) to 'make sense', identify which file we can put the event in and stop it from interfering in our life.

LONG TERM MEMORY

Once an incident is rationalised (we make sense of it) we file it away into our long term memory for access when required. If we fail to make sense then we begin the processing again through dreams, flashbacks etc. This may lead to acute stress disorder or posttraumatic shock.

I am delivering a two day seminar regarding CrID in March 2005. If you would like to know more about this method of intervention that can be used in either a group or one to one setting please contact me.

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