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Emotional cleaning

As a baby you develop unconscious, emotional defence systems which will help you as a infant. But when you are an adult these defences can be very stressful. Psychologists/writer Ingeborg Bosch explains how we can get rid of these mechanisms.

What are emotional defence systems?

Ingeborg Bosch: “experiences we had as a child have coloured the glasses through which we look at certain situations. This still determines unconsciously the way you interpret, feel and behave in situations. Because of these coloured glasses a small event can arouse enormous irritation which is totally out of proportion. You

have little or nothing control in how you respond. When you dismantle the emotional defence system you can respond from an adult consciousness that is more balanced and therefore you can see the present as it is without colourations belonging to your past. You can live your life in the present, guided by your heart and with a clear head and at the same time conscious about your feelings and consciously choosing how you want to react. Confirm my theory, this is only possible when you structurally dismantle and structurally put aside your emotional defence system.”

Why do we develop as a child an emotional defence system?

“You can look at it as a psychological immune system. It prevents severe emotional events from entering your consciousness. This is absolutely necessary because a little infant can't handle too much emotional stress. As a baby, you can't see things in perspective and you can't help yourself. That baby is totally dependent on his parents, who won't be able to always provide what it needs. A defence system as the ‘denial of needs’ is a very effective solution for that. You learn how to deny your needs so you won't feel any pain of the unmet needs.”

But generally speaking, most of the people had a good childhood?

“Most of the people indeed feel and think this way. And you will think as an adult that some of the experiences are harmless, but for a little child it can be enormously stressful. Take for instance the situation of being in a complete dark room, getting little to no attention, and no recognition of emotions, the death of a pet or grandma and grandpa suddenly disappeared out of your life. For a little child these events are deeply traumatising. Most of the time you can't recall the way it felt.”

Isn't it a bit too easy to pinpoint your childhood as the cause of emotional bumps in your life?

“It is undeniable that in the first three years of your life you will go through an enormous emotional and neurological development. Everything that had happened in those years will have a lot of influence and impact on the rest of your life. It is as if there is a program running. If you have children of your own it is very important to be conscious about your behaviour and the effect on your children and that you acknowledge them in their feelings. By doing this, emotions will be archived in the right position and won't continue influencing the rest of their lives. So for instance if a child starts to cry when you have to go away, don't say: ‘don't

The defence mechanisms

There are five defence mechanisms that everybody uses, according to psychologist Ingeborg Bosch. The extent to which the various systems are active, varies per person. One defence can easily pass over into the other defence.

1. Fear

this defence will give you anxiety

be such a cry-baby', but acknowledge: 'I can see that this makes you very sad'. It's not about providing in every need, that's impossible, but it is about supporting a healthy emotional development of your child. You need to recognise and acknowledge these feelings and learn how to deal with them in a healthy way."

What role has pre-disposition?

"Pre-disposition plays a big role. You'll be born with a cupboard full of CDs, but the environment and the upbringing in these delicate first years will determine in a dominant way which music will be played and heard. Some of the baby's will be born more sensitive or with more anxiety. If they will be born in an insensitive environment, they will develop strong defence systems. Others will be born more solid, less anxious and will have less strong defence systems. But every child is vulnerable and therefore will develop defence systems anyway.

And what is the reason that we have to get rid of them?

"You don't need them any more. And they will give you emotions and behaviour which are not good for you. If somebody is not responding to something you are telling you can find yourself exploding with anger when the defence system False Power is active. When the reality can be that this somebody has just too much to deal with at the moment. Or if you often deny your needs, the so-called 'don't worry be happy' type, this will stand in the way of you having meaningful contact with others and can be the cause of your relation problems. The Primary Defence in which you find the causes of all things in yourself can lead to depression. And if you have too much False Hope, you're not really living. All defence systems prevent you from living in the now. You're not really present. Your reaction is not appropriate to what is going on."

feelings or thoughts in situation with no real threat. For instance in the situation of having to speak in public. Or you're afraid of driving a car, fear of being alone at home. The result will be that you will avoid things that can bring you further ahead in your life and make your life also more worthwhile.

2. Primary defence

this defence will give you feelings and thoughts that make you believe that you're no good, like: I can't handle it, I am not good enough, I'm boring. This will lead to a low self-esteem and costs a lot of energy. In extreme cases this will lead to depression

3. False Power

this defence will give you thoughts, feelings and behaviour that say: there's nothing wrong with me, but everything wrong with somebody else. You feel victimised and

become angry. It will give a lot of conflicts with other people, and high blood pressure or migraine.

4. False hope

the false hope system gives you feelings like you have to do a lot of things and absolutely immediately, even when this is

“As a society, we are massively expelling loneliness, with shopping, dating and watching television”

If somebody is treating you with contempt, isn't it logical that this will cause irritations?

“If something makes you react so strongly, you're in a defence mechanism. You don't think something is just a bit annoying, but instead you think, this is very irritating or painful. If you want to live that way, that's your own choice. Especially the people with strong denial of needs will go living in the same old the way. They will keep on suppressing feelings of discontent. But many people don't want to be hit by intense emotions suddenly coming upon them and respond in a way in which they will say afterwards that it was disproportionate.”

“The so-called ‘don't worry be happy’ type isn't able to have meaningful and true contact with others”

not the case. You are thinking for instance: I have to answer my e-mail now. This will give you stress, perfectionism, or sleeplessness. You are focused on things outside yourself, especially on recognition and approval of others and you do not focus on your own needs.

5. Denial of needs

A mechanism that is difficult to recognise. It seems to be that there is nothing wrong, but the problem is that there is a lack of feelings and emotional responses. Your brain doesn't register or recognise feelings any more. This can lead to postponing behaviour, irresponsibility and empty relationships with others.

What is the most common old pain?

“A lot of people experience, deep inside themselves, an intense feeling of loneliness. To be alone is almost impossible for them. This feels so impossible because being alone as an adult touches the old pain of those moments that we were alone as a child, in need of our parents to be there. For a baby this fact is devastating and too much - the baby shall suppress this experience. And because every child in one way or another has experienced this, the whole society is suppressing those feelings of loneliness. We fill our days and every moment with working, shopping, dating, watching television. I don't say that this is all wrong, but you could wonder sometimes what the reason is of your behaviour. Am I drinking wine because a friend came over? Or do I drink every night to relax myself? Am I watching television because there is something interesting or funny to watch? Or am I using it to suppress boredom, emptiness or avoiding to think about something that is not okay in my life?”

You have developed a method that will help you to dismantle your defence system: Past Reality Integration (PRI). Can you tell us what it is?

“With this method you are going back to the experience in your childhood that has given you emotional pain and from where your defence system is developed. If you can totally experience these childhood pains, then you are processing them. By doing that the defence will loose its dated function, and you will find yourself more able to response without defences, according to the real ‘now’ situation, from your heart and with a clear head. A lot of other therapies will take the client back in time, back to the old pain, but encourage the client to positively change that situation. It is my theory that you have to undergo the pain, open yourself up for the total experience of the pain. And by doing this you will notice that you can go through it and therefore be able to process it. And then destructive feelings will diminish and you will feel less overwhelmed by them. The old pain will lose its grip.”

Let's put everybody in therapy then?

“In reality most of the people only come when they're stuck in life. If the way they are living their live is not working any more. But more and more you see also people who want to be more conscious about their emotions and their behaviour and they don't need a negative experience for wanting this change. They want to live consciously. I think that PRI can help everybody with this wish.”