

Unlocking your **PAST DEMONS**



Something that happened in your childhood could be still having an impact on your life – without you even realising. But, says Trevor Silvester, hypnotherapy could help you move on to a happier future

Put in the simplest terms, your past can come back to haunt you. The way you feel about a particular situation is because of similarities or differences that your brain finds between your current situation and things that happened to you in the past. So, if you tripped up in the school playground (aged seven) and everybody laughed, your brain might associate this with humiliation and see any future ‘performance’ in front of people as threatening. For someone else,

it might represent positive attention and so any future ‘performance’ is seen as something to look forward to. As people, we’re motivated to do things we think are going to be rewarding, and avoid things that could hurt us. Most of the time our brain does this without us even realising it.

Fight or flight?

Essentially, nervousness is just part of our ancient defence mechanism, the fight-or-flight response. If your brain has decided that a situation is dangerous, loads of adrenalin is dumped into your bloodstream to make you more efficient at fighting or running away. But, unfortunately, it also diverts blood from the brain so the more anxious you get, the more stupid you get. That helps in situations the response was designed for – like fighting sabre-toothed tigers – but not with modern problems such as job interviews, first dates, sales meetings or presenting TV shows. My job as a cognitive hypnotherapist is to help clients work out how and why their brains treat situations that are fine for other people as some kind of threat – and change it. And it’s not rocket science: usually people can notice a marked difference in their problem in a

matter of hours.

With cognitive hypnotherapy, we use regression to take people back to past events that are connected to their problem to help them change them. People sometimes worry about regression, but if I ask you what you had to eat last night or where you went on holiday, then I’ve just regressed you. It’s something we all do every day.

We have many ways of achieving this, and the method used will depend on the client – nothing works the same way on everyone. A nice thing is that now modern neuroscience has shown that our memories aren’t these fixed events that are written in stone, they’re actually malleable and quite easy to change. That means we’re not stuck with our past and, by changing it, we gain more control of our lives.

Thinking positive

But our past is only part of the equation; we also need to tune our brains to anticipate positive things. If you’re used to believing that speaking in front of people will be a disaster, then that’s the



picture your brain will create to guide your responses. If your brain imagines a disaster when it thinks about something you've got coming up, it's going to kickstart the fight-or-flight response – a feeling we usually call nervousness – and as the occasion gets closer, the response gets stronger until you have a panic attack or manage to wriggle out of it.

That situation gets added to the memory bank your brain uses to calculate the next similar situation, so you begin a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If, instead, we can train the brain to anticipate the public speaking as being successful, then the brain releases chemicals which leave us

feeling relaxed and we feel motivated to do it.

In my opinion, good hypnotic suggestion can help people to achieve this. I nearly always give my

clients a short burst of what we call 'wordweaving' as a recording so they can listen to it every evening. It seems to accelerate the improvement.

Lisa Butcher's story...

It's hard to believe that someone with the style, success and beauty of top model-turned presenter Lisa Butcher could suffer from a lack of confidence. The fact that this is true, and that Lisa sought help through hypnotherapy to overcome her nerves in front of the camera, goes to prove that most of us suffer from insecurity in one situation or another. But why is this?

In Lisa's case, she felt confident in one performance situation, yet completely ill at ease in another. 'I was discovered at 15 and soon got used to the catwalk,' she says. 'When I feel like I'm doing my job and that I know what I'm doing, then my confidence is fine. But I'm actually quite a shy person, and I can lack confidence in situations that are new to me. The TV programme *What Not to Wear* is a great example. All of a sudden I was in front of the camera having to just be myself and I found that tremendously hard – and I didn't quite know why. I'd get

really nervous and tongue-tied, and it seemed to build. Luckily, a friend recommended Trevor. It's quite amazing the difference that just a few sessions made. I saw him just before the filming of the second series, and everybody commented on how relaxed I was.'

Lisa's cognitive hypnotherapy sessions included uncovering memories and events that had been buried deep in her unconscious. 'Trevor regressed me to events in my childhood that I hadn't associated with my nervousness, but when I reviewed them they made obvious sense. As children, we aren't equipped to make conclusions about what happens to us, but that clearly doesn't stop us. It was quite a shock to realise that my adult life was being obstructed by decisions I'd made as a child – and not because of big things that happened, just things that seemed important at the time to a child.

'One of the things I like about Trevor's approach is the way you always feel in control. And it's a really interesting process that helps you understand yourself. Some of it is just about understanding how your brain and body interact when they're getting things wrong.'

Having completed her hypnotherapy sessions with Trevor, Lisa is full of admiration for the impact the whole process has had upon her. 'Trevor uses language in a really interesting way – half the time it seems you're just having a normal conversation but later you realise that the way you're behaving in a problematic situation is somehow better. Amazing really. If only people were taught from an early age that we're not stuck with things we don't like about ourselves, imagine the difference it would make.' **LL**

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Trevor Silvester runs the Quest Institute (www.questinstitute.co.uk), which specialises in cognitive hypnotherapy and neuro linguistic programming, offering training courses to people from all walks of life. He also runs a practice in Harley Street.

POWER OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS



She's perhaps best known for doing Celebrity Fit Club, but hypnotherapist Marisa Peer also deals with

addiction. Clients come to her with problems relating to everything from smoking and drinking to confidence and self-esteem and she says that compulsive behaviours are all linked, like the branches of a tree. 'Hypnosis helps to change the pictures that you make in your head,' says Marisa. 'Once you find out why people have learnt to link pain to things, then you can change it.'

Marisa's new book, *Ultimate Confidence*, £10.99 (Sphere) is out on 5 March.

