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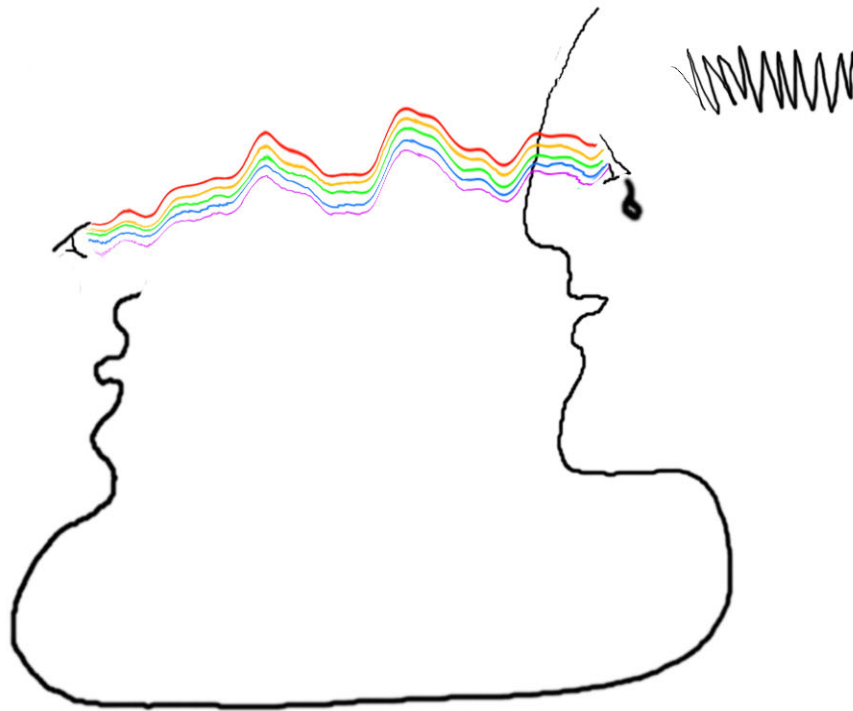
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Caption

CLIENT GUIDE
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Starting psychotherapy, counselling, mentoring or coaching means above all beginning a relationship. Unfortunately, qualifications provide little guarantee that any particular *psychopractioner will be right for you. This is because the breadth and depth of their lived experience matters as much as their technical and academic knowledge, and what matters most is their ability to get into rapport with you and your concerns.

If you have been in a psychotherapy working relationship for a while and are having difficulty seeing significant benefits from it check out the **Psychopolitics notes** or **Survival, Recovery and Flourishing** later in this section of *The Mind Gymnasium*.

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* psychopractioner is intended to include people who offer personal development, counselling, facilitation, coaching and mentoring.

Hiring a psychopractitioner

Hiring a counsellor, or psychotherapist can be a daunting task and the need to find someone often occurs at times of stress or distress when we are least able to choose wisely. Deferring to the power of an expert is tempting and may be unavoidable but it is anyway prudent to be adequately informed about what to expect from the relationship with your psychopractitioner and what sort of commitment it is likely to require from you. If possible choose someone on the basis of direct personal recommendation.

If you have already found a practitioner, or are contemplating beginning to work with a counsellor or psychotherapist, these guidelines are intended to help you with your initial choice of practitioner and with getting the best from the psychopractice relationship, whether it is new, or a continuing connection.

[more](#)

Clarify your intentions

Work with your practitioner to reality test what you want out of your time together. In this sense, 'paths', 'directions' and having maps and nourishment for the 'journey', may be more relevant than destinations.

Be aware:

That counselling/psychotherapy meets a wide range of needs in many different ways. For example, there is fire-fighting/rescue work, helping you get through/survive tomorrow/next week; recovery work, letting go of redundant learning; and flourishing work, re-inventing yourself, or creating a new piece of life.

That your practitioner is not there primarily to meet your needs but to help you identify your needs and help you find ways of meeting them yourself.

[more](#)

Questions for your practitioner

Feel free:

—to check out your practitioner's life experiences that may be relevant to your issues.

—to ask your practitioner where, and how, and with whom they trained. Remember in listening to their response that one of the functions of a psychotherapist or counsellor is to model being fully human. Zest, vigour, love, delight, wit, and even vulnerability may matter more to you in the long run than their Ph.D.s, psychology degrees, or other formal qualifications, including psychotherapy and counsellor trainings.

[more](#)

Questions to ask yourself

Is there a clearly enough defined contract between you for the work you are doing?

Is the work you do with your practitioner being driven by your needs?

Is the work confined to your sessions, with no homework between them? The effectiveness of the work is dramatically improved by you carrying it into your life. And in the long run it costs less.

Does your practitioner encourage you to take yourself seriously? To regard yourself as a project?

Does your practitioner hold a good balance between supporting you and challenging you?

Does your practitioner negotiate directly and openly?

Does the room you meet in unnecessarily limit the kind of work you could do together? Is it full of valuables, or so cramped, small or public, that you wouldn't feel able make loud sounds or vigorous body movements?

[more](#)

THE SHAPES OF HELP: survival, recovery and flourishing

The needs, wishes, dreams, or curiosity that lead us to seek out help from a guide such as *The Mind Gymnasium* are often indistinct, and they may be urgent. A relative is in obvious trouble; how do we support them in their difficulties? How do we avoid the life-labelling of conventional psychiatry? Would support only prolong their difficulty? How do we find help for our own troubles?

The mind, with its infinite extensions of meaning and feeling driven sometimes by a fiery intensity of emotion, can leave us buffeted and feeling adrift. Even in the calmer seas of a working life glued to others by financial and family commitments, the life of the mind can be hard work. Shall I leave this job/relationship? What do I tell the bank when they call? How come my boss doesn't seem to care that I have a sick child at home?

In seeking help from friends, or whomever might count as help, in this section I suggest that the notions of a *survival* mindset, a *recovery* mindset, and a *flourishing* mindset can aid in cutting through the confusions and misunderstandings that may arise when you need help with your mind.

Of course each is likely to be interlinked and thus working with them overlaps. Still, it's good to know that giving, or being given, help that is relevant for example to flourishing when we are struggling to survive the next day, or the next week, can often make a bad situation worse, or simply further burden an already overloaded mind. The same would be true for mis-matches between the other mindsets.

[more](#)

Survival

A long and disabling illness in ourselves or a partner can put us into a survival mindset, and so can financial difficulties, whether expected or un-anticipated, marital separation, bereavement and loss, or promotion that takes us out of the familiar into demands for which we are out of our depth or untrained. A survival mindset means that our coping capacity, perhaps undermined by deep fatigue, is at full stretch. We don't have any slack. Tiny extra demands push us into confusion or panic. Our attention becomes scattered; we are accident-prone; focus is lost, tasks are begun and dropped; Recognize any of this?

What kinds of help might we seek or give ourselves if we realize that we are struggling, or in danger of being overwhelmed, in a survival mindset?

If this is presently your normal or most common state of mind, then the help that is most urgently needed is any way of breaking into the chronic pattern. Is it, for example, one of demand and compliance? '...To make the kind of money that my life-style and status demands I have to travel three hours to work each day and work most weekends too....' Is it fed by a chronic pattern of guilt, feeling that whatever I do it is never sufficient, or never good enough?

All this is not to argue for the elimination of the survival mindset—a whole range of honourable and deeply satisfying life tasks may require that we push ourselves to physical and mental limits—and highlight previously hidden strengths. The key question is has it become chronic? Have we drifted into survival without noticing or assenting to it?

Interrupting chronic patterns often requires help from someone outside the situation such as a counsellor or therapist. Someone who can help us reality-test the survival mindset we inhabit.

A key question to ask yourself is... Is it sustainable? Do you really expect to be living like this in 2, 5, 10, 20 years time? If what you are up to is obviously not sustainable, then the range of choices about what to do often widens quite quickly.

Breaking into a chronic pattern of survival may not require anything more elaborate than rest. A holiday perhaps. Too often, because employers don't argue with sick notes, the break comes as illness, or sickness.

Beyond rest there is finding the time for physical exercise. As the military know well, surviving extended periods of stress requires matching levels of physical fitness.

Ah—you may think this is very easy to say, survival is a tough place to be. That's right. It can be very difficult to haul ourselves out of a mindset where the lack of slack means that there is no time or energy for the other choices, other perspectives. And where, if hidden personal strengths were to emerge into the light, we wouldn't necessarily recognize them let alone put them into practice.

Key points:

A survival mindset is likely to be associated with a chronic pattern of behaviour: lack of 'slack'; scattered attention; lack of focus; accident proneness.

Unless a survival mindset is life-threatening it may be initially more helpful to interrupt it, than trying to overturn, or halt it.

Check out how sustainable your survival mindset is.

A survival mindset is often unhelpfully sustained by recurring sickness/illness.

See also ▾

more

Recovery

While a survival mindset suggests immersion in life's demands and opportunities—a loss of perspective—a recovery mindset arises from a perceived need to heal, transform, or transmute some traumatic event. The difference being that while we may not understand the effects that the event is having, we are aware that it occurred. So a recovery mindset is a more conscious one of inquiry and research, even psycho-archaeology.

An example would be my own need to recover from growing up in a household where there was very little social contact. We rarely had any visitors and then only close relatives, there was hardly any contact with neighbours, no parties, or celebrations. Recovering from the effects of these missing social comings and goings is a continuing project for me and of course it is a minor matter compared with some recovery projects.

A recovery mindset is likely to be relevant, either now or at some point in your life, if you have suffered any of the following **life events**: loss of parents, siblings or partners through fatal accidents, active participation or involvement in wars or rebellions; or prolonged hospitalization while a child; sexual or other abuse; mugging or other street violence; involvement in a near fatal accident; persistent bullying or mobbing. The extent to which such events cast a shadow over later life is dealt with in several sections of *The Mind Gymnasium*, check out 'see also' opposite.

A recovery mindset to match such experiences can be adopted, built or perhaps more often, developed, and this is exactly the kind of task where it makes sense to engage the

help of practitioners such as counsellors or psychotherapists who have the knowledge and experience to accompany you in the inquiries that recovery entails. Not infrequently and usually beneficially, such practitioners themselves have deep experience of recovery.

Keep in mind that all work with our minds benefits from community. While for survival a community of me and a helper may be all there is slack for, recovery often seems to benefit from a larger range of contacts with others recovering from similar difficulties. A good example is the 12 Step programme of Alcoholics Anonymous and its related organizations which bring substance abusers together, both in direct conversations and in networks of support. They have had remarkable success in supporting recovery, or 'Recovery' as I guess AA would call it.

A recovery mindset has both value and potential limitations.

Drawbacks

Psychotherapy and counselling often correctly focus on the traumatic events that have shaped our present preferences and aversions, or in the full-out version—our obsessions and phobias. Exploring and working through these if they have skewed or distorted our lives can bring a remarkable sense of freedom. If the person(s) who helps you explore are able to share some of their own experience of recovery, this may be helpful but is probably not essential.

However, if the basis of such work depends too much on a notion of cure in the medical sense of symptom—diagnosis—treatment—cure, you may indeed be 'cured' but only of

your ignorance. So that after years of effort and expense you end up knowing everything there is to know about what happened to you and how it has affected your present life but none of this has been resolved into new actions, new choices, new, more fruitful, behaviour. If the form of counselling or therapy you follow precludes 'education', 'learning', or 'skills development' I suggest you be actively sceptical of the recovery mindset to which it subscribes.

Why so? The danger is that a recovery mindset that doesn't actively support behavioural change, may open up your story so clearly and powerfully that it subtly but decisively supports the notion that you are a powerless victim *now*. That you were a powerless victim at some time in the past may not be an issue, but that was *then*, this is *now*. And *now* is a different territory, rich with different opportunities, challenges, and ways to move on, if the recovery mindset you inhabit is open to them.

Benefits

The value of a recovery mindset can be incomparable as I hope you will already have found from *The Mind Gymnasium*. Discovering, if this is your story, that much of our present time behaviour is contaminated, and thus driven, by the **re-stimulation** of early distress can lead to an exploration of formative experiences that hugely increases our capacities for **love, understanding and choice**.

The first stages of this can be a bit shocking and often lead to a morass of emotional reactions and memories that may not feel like progress. However, persistence and skill and love from the companions we choose to accompany us can

help us emerge from the swamp of mere survival on to the dry ground from which the swamp is visible but we are not in it. Not only that but we are in a position to appreciate that beneficial change often opens up of itself once we make a start, to switch metaphor, on extricating ourselves from whichever corner we have become painted into.

Few of us are likely to be free of the need for some version of a recovery mindset; accidents, sexual abuse, street violence and illness are no respecters of social or financial status. What I hope to emphasize here is the value of acknowledging to yourself that at certain points in life, time and resource can very helpfully be put into actively seeking to recover from psychic damage. This is not to argue for life to stop while this occurs; more usually and usefully, the recovery mindset is one strand in the texture of a continuing daily life.

Key points:

Recovery from damaging experiences can be vital for health and well-being.

In the early stages recovery may seem worse than the previous state.

Recovery is helpfully supported by mutual aid.

An inadequate approach to recovery may unhelpfully set you up as a victim.

more

Flourishing

I suspect that the mindset that most people wish for or dream about but yet feel least informed about, and are may be least equipped to pursue in an intelligent way, is flourishing and the corresponding notion of a flourishing mindset.

What I mean by flourishing is a state of being where detailed knowledge of our personal antecedents and continuing efforts to resolve any wounding or damage that may remain, become transformed into a less compulsive, more present base from which to create a life we want.

A flourishing mindset is intrinsically creative. It seeks to facilitate the unfolding of the creative intelligence that everyone, whatever their state of life embodies. A flourishing mindset is driven by *liking*. Knowing what we like; doing what we like; and liking what we do.

I'm not talking about padding out our comfort zones—of promoting a huge increase in retail therapy. Nor am I talking about eliminating everyone and everything from our lives that doesn't mirror us or adopt this notion.

In favouring and moving toward what we *like*, a flourishing mindset is synonymous with living-from-love and it presupposes that others may do the same. My flourishing cannot be at the cost of yours, thus a flourishing mindset values both distinctness and community, mutuality and co-operation, diversity and co-responsibility and bringing others with us.

A flourishing mindset also seeks to move living-from-love out of the domain of religiosity and the mood-making of too much spirituality into the lived experience of taking out the garbage, mending the roof, and cooking lunch.

What does it mean in practice? Here is a list of flourishing definitions that a group researching flourishing came up with.

flourishing requires participation in community

flourishing is fun

flourishing involves creating something that doesn't exist—
order—relationship—connection

flourishing requires that we (occasionally) dance chaos
thoroughly

flourishing means recovering lost intentions

flourishing is undermined by fear

flourishing is about identifying, owning and naming our
inner inklings

flourishing implies ruthless focus

flourishing requires courage. It is being yourself in the
moment and going for what you want with your whole
being all the time, using your will to be alive.

to regain your joy over and over again, however dire the
circumstances

flourishing is about taking care over whether, and how, we
name our experiences

flourishing is about grounding your dream

flourishing depends on an ability to dance between
distinctness and whole-hearted participation

pre-requisites for flourishing include preparation, rooting,
support, opportunity, climate, good psychic weather,
nourishment

flourishing is a value, a direction in life, an orientation, a myth
to live by

flourishing may be expected to be intermittent

when we see others flourishing we don't see the rest of the
iceberg of life and preparation or the courage or the
origins that precede it.

flourishing arises in a life that is awaredly created
 the grain of our flourishing may run parallel to, or be congruent with, early learning, or maybe in a different direction altogether, even in a different psychic universe
 flourishing may not apply to all, or even much of life, but it reminds me of the possibility that I can extend flourishing to more and more of my life
 flourishing is dancing on the edge of precipices
 flourishing is hopping about
 flourishing is daring to be different
 flourishing is knowing what I want and seeing who congregates around it.
 flourishing requires planning, the minimum needed to take us forward to the next choice point.
 flourishing is a cyclic process. The iris bulb, invisible in the bog, becomes the flower we see, and the scattered seed, following which it shrinks back into its bulb. If we are connected to this flourishing cycle then we won't despair at being in the dark quiescent part of the cycle.
 life lived as an inquiry would really loosen up life.

because feeding the zizz of life as we find it necessarily involves confronting that which is soul-destroying in ourselves and others. This may often mean standing aside from the herd, a difficult and sometimes risky thing to do. Not least in the face of the churning culture of positive feedback, where the broadcast and print media tend to claim the moral high ground of 'giving people what they like', while omitting to mention that this is not out of love but out of desire for profit.

Key points:

flourishing is intrinsically creative

flourishing runs on liking

flourishing seeks to install living-from-love

flourishing requires mutuality and co-responsibility

flourishing is about direction, vocation and calling

See also ▾

more

A flourishing mindset is less concerned with reaching life targets and more concerned, for example, with the quality of the life in this moment we are in together. Above all a flourishing mindset is pre-occupied with finding our unique direction in life, what others might think of as 'vocation', or 'calling'. Put another way it is living with the grain, the zizz of life, of seeking out and honouring what wants to emerge into life. A flourishing mindset will also have a political dimension

Mindcare: good practice

Good practice comes in a wide range of varieties. There are lots of different styles of psychotherapy and counselling, probably many hundreds. Some involve physical contact, many don't. Some are primarily verbal, other styles favour imagination and psycho-drama. These variations are often more a matter of starting points than of fundamental differences.

It is good to remember that while life experiences are widely divergent, in many respects our bodyminds are strikingly similar. Because of this, therapies or counselling that are effective in helping us, for example, to deal with grief and anger, or fear, seem likely to share many common elements.

[more](#)

Pointers to good practice

Your practitioner has good rapport, by which I mean s/he has good attention, listens well, responds warmly and with feeling, where appropriate.

Your practitioner acknowledges/values a variety of ways of working with clients. S/he presents from time to time an array of models, maps, schemes, or other nourishment for the work you do together.

Your practitioner is careful to distinguish between propositions, suggestions, advice, recommendations, and their opinions, whether personal or as a practitioner.

Your practitioner holds a balance between psychological, political, and structural origins of the issues you bring to the sessions.

Your practitioner is actively engaged in helping you take charge of your work in, and between, the sessions (essential for primal and other deep/advanced levels of work).

Your practitioner holds that healing and change come less from the therapist than from you as a client; and more than either from the rapport between the two.

Your practitioner will be open to objections from you and will be able to admit to any mistakes they happen to make.

Your practitioner is scrupulous about the confidentiality of what goes on between you. This confidentiality extends to any supervisor with whom s/he discusses your concerns. (Perhaps the only exception would be a situation where your practitioner believes that a third party may be in danger).

Your practitioner negotiates clear agreements about:

How much you have to pay.

How long the sessions are.

Arrangements about cancellations.

Whether and when you can phone up.

How many sessions you may need.

Arrangements around holiday.

[more](#)

Mindcare: bad or inadequate practice

A practitioner who creates recurring entanglements between you around agreements/disagreements, session etiquette, arrangements/bookings/payment etc. which then have to be unravelled in the sessions.

A practitioner who is rigid about cancellations, postponements, or changes to session times regardless of whether there is adequate notice of the alteration.

A practitioner who doesn't openly and directly negotiate changes in the contract between you, including implicit contracts based on custom and practice. Especially if this involves physical contact.

A practitioner who constantly talks in medically related language, i.e. about mental illness, treatment, sickness, pathology, cure, normality.

A practitioner who offers no suggestions of causes and origins, or maps of the territory you are exploring.

A practitioner who psychologizes everything, including the relationship between you and him/her, particularly when you express dissatisfaction with lack of progress or development, or change.

A practitioner who politicizes everything, so that all your difficulties are ascribed to capitalism, 'men', 'women', 'the state' etc.

A practitioner who too often pours out the riches of their knowledge and skill, so that you feel swamped.

A practitioner who rarely or never discloses anything about themselves.

A practitioner who constantly directs all your work toward catharsis and who is unwilling to help you with planning, or problem-solving etc.

A practitioner who seems unwilling, or unable, to handle your deepest/strongest emotions.

A practitioner who seems unwilling, or unable, to openly discuss/deal with sexuality.

A practitioner who seems to lack a spiritual and/or political perspective.

A practitioner who seems unable to demonstrate the qualities that s/he recommends or admires.

[more](#)

JUNIOR DOCTOR'S FIRST DAY AS A PSYCHIATRIST.
 "Psychiatry. Six diagnoses. Twenty drugs. It's fine." He smiles, perfectly, with perfect teeth. "There are no psychiatric emergencies. Take your time, find your feet, ask for help, just be nice, smile a lot, don't run over time. Just do what you do. All psychiatrists are weirdos anyway."

MICHAEL FOXTON
 THE GUARDIAN G2, 14.0.2002

Abusive practice

A practitioner who seems to rely a lot on authority in a way that frequently invites you to defer to their expertise.

A practitioner who seeks any kind of contact outside of the meetings—more specifically—one who offers or accepts sexual contact.

A practitioner who often seeks to tell you what to do outside the meetings through advice, recommendations, or judgements.

A practitioner who asks curiosity questions, such as ‘How can I invest in the company you were talking about?’, or seeks favours, i.e. ‘Will you use your influence to get me an appointment with Mr X.’

[more](#)

[See also ▾](#)

If you feel mistreated

If you can, raise your concern right away.

Even if your concern is unclear, or has been growing gradually over a period, don't let this stop you from raising it.

Consider leaving the relationship and finding another practitioner. If you can, say why you are leaving.

Keep in mind that an actual present-time grievance may also carry a emotional overlay from some similar episode from your past.

If raising your grievance isn't given a hearing, or there isn't enough of a recognition of your concern from the practitioner, ask to make contact with their supervisor, or practitioner support group, or the organization through which they are accredited/accountable.

In the UK, POPAN is a voluntary organization that offers support and advocacy to people who consider that they have suffered abuse from psychopractitioners.

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Mindcare: psychopolitics notes

Many practitioners in what I think of as the ‘caring-for-the-human-condition trades’ see a clear trend in this work that is unhelpful to service users.

What was a fluid, open, highly creative and often anarchically chaotic field of creative development, is becoming closed, academic, and fear-driven due to moves toward statutory regulation. These regulatory initiatives make spurious, untested claims that they will ‘protect clients’ from abusive practitioners, and look set to undermine one of the mostly profoundly valuable and important developments of the second half of the 20th century.

The Emperor’s New Clothes

The claims of ‘client protection’ insulate the moves toward licensure, registration, centralized standards, measurable outcomes and legalistic complaints procedures from discussion of their harmful effects. The notion of ‘client protection’ also serves to hide the commercial agendas of training organizations, drug manufacturers and insurance companies that stand to benefit from the professionalization of psychotherapy and counselling.

The need for client protection from aberrant or abusive psychotherapists is nowhere near large enough to justify the scale of bureaucratic consolidation that is planned. As I write, mid 2003, the significant levels of abuse of clients in the UK in recent years have occurred not in psychotherapy or counselling but inside the highly regulated medical profession. Yet it is the institutional arrangements of medicine that are being lined up for use as the template for state regulation of psychopractice.

I am strongly in favour of practitioners being held in an accountability process. It needs to be one that features an ongoing feedback loop with other practitioners who know each other’s work well enough to be in a position to affirm, or deny their fitness to practice, their competence for the clients they seek to work with, and their ethical commitment, plus of course adequate supervision.

Current and proposed plans for licensure will enable practitioners to avoid the key element of this, the ongoing exposure to feedback from people who know them well as persons. They are unlikely to be even marginally more effective in eliminating client abuse than the regulatory procedures of medicine have been in surfacing medical malpractice.

How does this affect you as a client?

If you choose a registered, or licensed practitioner, the cost of the unnecessarily lengthy and expensive training, and the registration procedures that are being put in place, will be passed on to you. You will be paying for your own protection whether or not you feel you need it.

As the balance of power in the training institutions shifts toward high-status academic attainment, this is tending already to exclude the many people whose capacity for rapport and empathic divination exceeds their capacity and inclination for theory-driven compliance.

Lastly, the economic imperative to stay licensed as a psychotherapist tends to lead to a safe, sanitized style of practice that denies the intrinsic riskiness of the open-ended exploration that effective psychotherapy is likely to entail.

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An interactive guide to personal and professional development

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