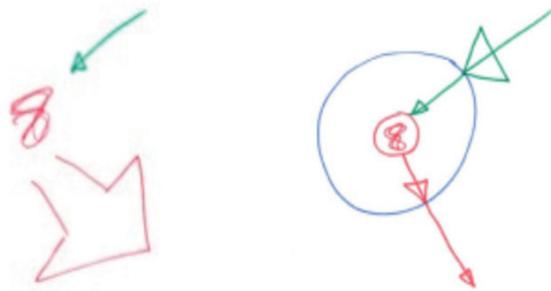


The Importance of Reframing our Experiences

by Benjamin Fry

In freeing ourselves from a dysregulated nervous system, an important step is learning how to reframe our experiences. We need to do this so that we are no longer subject to learned ways of behaviour that negatively impact our lives and the relationships we have with others.

The goal is to go from the diagram on the left below to the one on the right.



In the diagram on the left, in which our baggage is represented by the red squiggle, triggers are the green arrow, and our reaction is the red arrow, you can see a dysregulated nervous system - one that overreacts to the trigger. The diagram on the right represents a nervous system that is well regulated as a result of using boundaries and containment.

To reframe our experiences, we must bring attention to our triggers, our baggage, and our reactions. It's easy to consider ourselves the victim in situations that trigger us and make us feel unsafe, but there is very little we can do to control what life throws at us. What we can do, however, is use boundaries and containment to lessen the impact that our triggers have on our baggage. When we do this, we create something like a shield around that vulnerable, wounded part of ourselves.

Boundaries and containment are a good idea, in theory. The problem is, they can be a pain to apply consistently in the real world in practice. It means looking after yourself. It means trying your best not to do any damage to other people in the process. Both can be surprisingly hard to do, particularly if your nervous system is dysregulated. Others' behaviour can alarm us, and our own behaviour can frighten us too. If we make a dent in filtering out some of that alarm and fear, then our nervous systems get to experience the same events in relationship with others in a safer way.

This gives us some breathing space, allowing us to look within and consider what our triggers actually are, what is the baggage they're provoking, and how we react to it all. If we constantly see ourselves as the victim, it's unlikely that we will find the strength and motivation to change. But if we move away from this victim mindset and towards one of responsibility and autonomy of our nervous systems, we can begin to shift our perspective in a way that allows us to understand our experiences and reframe them so that baggage from the past doesn't run our lives in the present.

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Benjamin is the Founder of NeuralSolution, Khiron House and Get Stable. Find out more at benjaminfry.co.uk