

Just Listen!

“You’ll be surprise how helpful that is”

by

mike o’sullivan

BACK COVER

Back cover ideas

Based on the research of notable psychologists, the author of this book is presenting a guide to a healthier personality based on the power of just listening. He shares his research on this subject from the following three perspectives:

- the healing potential of our **autonomic nervous system**,
- the life-changing effect of '**a good listening to**', and
- the belief-shaping influence of '**principle-based listening**'.

He believes that these three resources working together offer the reader the opportunity to nurture a more authentic and healthier personality.

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Another book by this author:

My mental jungle

About the author

Mike O'Sullivan is a trained counsellor and mentor. He is qualified in Re-evaluation Counselling, Neuro Linguistic Programming and Adult Education. He is trained in Transactional Analysis, Personal Construct Theory, Metaphor Therapy and Clean Language.

He has over 30 years of experience running personal and management development workshops for corporates and individuals. He was one of the earliest providers of Executive Counselling for senior management.

He is the author of *My Mental Jungle*, a semi-autobiographic study of the evolution of his mind (mental jungle). His own journey of self-discovery is a source of reference for his work. Although he has no formal medical training, he references the findings of many highly respected research psychologists whose work has informed modern mental health services.

His passion is to promote peace and harmony in a world blighted by anger and violence. His energy is focused on educating people on the benefits of self-awareness and self-disclosure as the secret to a healthier and more harmonious lifestyle.

PREFACE

As a young motor mechanic and later a computer engineer, I learnt it was crucial that I knew the components of a car and a computer and how they worked.

Later in life when I began working with people, it became apparent that I also needed to know how the brain worked. In particular, how our brain calmed and relaxed us after a state of high anxiety.

It is a subcomponent of our autonomic nervous system, known as the parasympathetic nervous system, that restores a stable state of mind.

In Chapter One, I begin with an overview of the autonomic nervous system and in particular, how it works to both to protect us from a threat and restore us back to a calm and peaceful state.

When left to do its job, our parasympathetic nervous system will recover us from a stressful or hurtful situation. But, if we continually focus on the stressful situation, then our sympathetic nervous system (the part that invokes our anxiety response) will be continually triggered and re-triggered. As a result, we will never get to feel the calming effect of our parasympathetic nervous system (the part that relaxes us).

We need to interrupt this cycle of high anxiety by taking the initiative to talk out our anxiety or hurt in a safe setting. The aim is to engage our parasympathetic nervous system, so we can regain a stable state of mind.

On offer in Chapter two is an approach that enables us to take the initiative and talk out our anxiety in a safe setting. It is called 'a good listening to' - the antithesis of 'a good talking to'. By setting up this type of listening session with an ally, we have began the journey of recovery.

In Chapter Three, I want to build on this approach to listening in a way that challenges beliefs that hold us back from finding our way forward. This extended approach is called 'principle-based listening'. As the listener you

are guided to ask questions related to a 'principle' that challenge the inhibiting beliefs held subconsciously in the mind of the speaker.

In summary, I believe that these three resources working in harmony offer the best opportunity to nurture a more authentic and healthier personality.

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Chapter One

Autonomic Nervous System (ANS)

It's natural to cry and 'run to mummy'

When a child falls over and hurts him or herself, he or she immediately cries and 'runs to mummy' ('mummy' here is used to denote anyone who the child sees as a safe person to go to). Within minutes the tears stop, the child regains his or her composure and goes back to playing.

When someone feels depressed they too are experiencing hurt, but feel too inhibited to cry and 'run to mummy'. Their cry is more of an inward cry, rather than an outward cry with tears. And, 'running to mummy' is replaced with distractions or addictions, such as a 'good night out' or a drinking session.

It took me a long time to change my attitude to my feelings of depression. Mostly, I hid my feelings in order to appear 'normal' and looked for relief in anti-depressants such as chocolate, smoking and valium.

If we were to receive the same safe attention we did as a child, then we would probably recover and go back to living. The point is, hurts to our mind and our body, generally receive a different response from the people around us.

My response was changed after attending a fundamental training course on Re-evaluation Counselling. It is a form of listening where two people agree to listen to each other without judgement or advice. (You can read more about Re-evaluation Counselling in the Appendix at the end of this book)

I began to realise that there was an alternative to hiding my feelings and relying on anti-depressants. Somehow, being payed 'good attention' whilst re-telling my upset had the beneficial effect I needed - just like 'running to mummy' did for me as a child.

Even so, I was unaware of how my brain was working subconsciously to restore calm and stability to my mental state. Receiving a 'good listening'

was only part of the answer. I needed my brain's restorative function to do its job too.

This began a new journey of discovery. I needed to understand how a part of my brain called the Autonomic Nervous System carried out the function of recovering my troubled state of mind.

Our brains' restorative function

As part of our involuntary nervous system, we have a restorative function that is essential to restoring calm and stability after a 'flight or fight' response to a perceived threat. It is a subcomponent of our Autonomic Nervous System.

The Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) located in our brains regulates our internal organs and some muscles within our body. Its primary function is to set up our response to a threat. And it also has another subcomponent whose function is to restore our mind and body back to its original stable state of calmness.

The following description of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) comes from the Free Wikipedia. I have shortened it in places to keep it relevant to our discussion on the restorative function of our brain.

(Start of extract from Free Wikipedia)

Our Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) controls the automatic functions of our body. It is sometimes called the 'involuntary nervous system'. It uses two subsystems to control our bodies' response to threats and stresses.

- The **Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS)** is activated when we perceive a threat or feel stressed. It is part of our "fight or flight" response. The sympathetic nervous system can increase heart rate; make bronchial passages wider; decrease movement of the large intestine; make blood vessels narrower; cause pupil dilation, goose bumps and sweating; and raise blood pressure. Everything needed to make our survival more certain.

- The **Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS)** does the opposite, It works to reverse the "fight or flight" stress response such as slow the heart rate down and lower blood pressure. When the parasympathetic nervous system is activated, it produces a calm and relaxed feeling in the mind and body, and returns us to our previous stable state of calmness. In this way, the parasympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems balance each other's effects.

(End of extract from Free Wikipedia)

These effects occur involuntary when our autonomic nervous system reacts to any stimulus perceived as a threat. To maintain a healthy state of mind and body, the Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS) has to balance out the Sympathetic Nervous System's (SNS) response to a threat.

Unfortunately, we can interfere with this balancing act by chronically running our Sympathetic Nervous System or inhibiting our Parasympathetic Nervous System.

How do we get out-of-balance?

There are a million answers to this question because our minds are unique to us. What might stress me may not stress someone else, what might threaten me, may not threaten someone else.

In order to illustrate this important aspect of brain management, I want to use an example of the balancing function of the Autonomic Nervous System. I have taken extracts from an article contributed by Glen Schweitzer to the Healthy Hearing website July 1 2019. The full article can be found here:

<https://www.healthyhearing.com/report/52976-Tinnitus-and-meditation-a-success-story>

Tinnitus and meditation: A success story

Glen's story of tinnitus...

“When I was first diagnosed with tinnitus and Meniere’s disease, I thought my life was over. A mountain of pain and suffering stood before me and I could see nothing else. My ears screamed all the time and the spikes were unbearable. I was dizzy, struggling with hearing loss, intermittently incapacitated by vertigo attacks where the room would start spinning, and exhausted by brain fog and fatigue from the moment I woke up until the time I went to sleep. There was no light at the end of the tunnel. I had no hope.”

Author comment: Tinnitus affects approximately 6 million people in the UK - I am one of them. I have had this condition since my late teens, brought on by listening to live bands playing far too loud in the early sixties. At first it didn't bother me so much, but over time it increased not only in volume, but also in variation of sounds. I was told that there is no cure for this condition and I had to learn to live with it.

Back to Glen's story...

“When my tinnitus and Meniere’s disease were at their worst, my quality of life was in shambles and there were a lot of things I thought I would never be able to do again. Meditation was at the top of the list. I had been meditating daily for several years when chronic illness tore through my life. It had been a transformational practice, helping me to finally get my anxiety under control after more than a decade of panic attacks and generalized nervousness.

“But as my tinnitus worsened, it became impossible to meditate. I just couldn't focus anymore with the sound of sirens blasting in my ears and it was devastating. I had lost not just my quality of life, but one of the most powerful coping tools that I had relied on for years to maintain my wellbeing. Luckily, I never gave up or stopped trying to make it work. And my persistence eventually paid off.

“One night, lying in bed, once again struggling to meditate, I suddenly had an idea: What would happen if I stopped fighting to ignore the ringing while I tried to focus on my breath, and focused on the sound of my tinnitus

instead? At first, it seemed like such a crazy idea to focus on the sound that was driving me crazy. But I was frustrated, and I was willing to do anything at that point to try to fix the problem, so I gave it a shot. And the 15 minutes that followed changed everything.”

Author comment: I remember doing the same, I started to use a meditation technique suggested in a book by Erich Fromm, which directed me to focus on the sounds of my tinnitus.

“As I hesitantly shifted my focus to the sound of my tinnitus, the first thing I noticed was that it was difficult to do, but not for the reasons you would expect. Meditation is a simple exercise, but difficult in practice, because it’s hard to stay that focused on anything, regardless of what you choose as the specific object of your attention – even something as intrusive as tinnitus.

“So my mind wandered almost immediately. For a few minutes, I was entirely lost in thought – daydreaming about nothing in particular – when I suddenly caught myself and brought my attention back to the sound.”

“But this time, it suddenly occurred to me that when my mind wandered, it wandered away from the sound. The realization hit me like a lightning bolt. I couldn’t believe what had just happened. For those last few minutes, lost in thought, I didn’t hear my tinnitus at all. As I went back to the practice, I also found that I was able to fully concentrate for the first time since my tinnitus began.

“Once I stopped fighting to ignore the sound, I was able stay focused long enough to achieve the familiar state of relaxation and calm that had escaped me for months. And when I finished, the ringing didn’t seem as loud. It wasn’t actually quieter, it just wasn’t bothering me as much, so it seemed quieter and less intrusive. I was just so happy to have any relief at all.”

How does habituation help us?

His tinnitus did not magically go away, but he had found a way to habituate the sounds of his tinnitus.

Habituation is a mental process in which the brain filters out and ignores repetitive sensory information, such as sounds or images. Usually, it happens automatically, and without conscious effort on our part. It's why we normally don't feel our clothes against our skin or our socks against our feet. And why we stop noticing the smell of a stinky room after a period of time.

In his article Glen goes on to explain that there are two major obstacles that prevent habituation from happening naturally.

“The first obstacle preventing tinnitus habituation is that we evolved to use sound to monitor our surroundings for threats and experience a fight or flight stress response to any sound we interpret as dangerous.

“The second problem is that the brain often can't tell the difference between real and imagined danger. Public speaking is another good example of this. There is nothing dangerous about public speaking, yet many of us experience a panicky fight or flight kind of feeling in front of an audience.

“Fear is the underlying factor here. When we are afraid, our brain and nervous system react as if the danger is real, whether it's real or not. So we get stuck in a vicious cycle of fight or flight that never ends because the tinnitus never goes away. Instead, the resulting anxiety, frustration, fear, anger, and depression snowball into the reaction, becoming a part of the reaction.

“This prevents our brain from habituating to the sound. It's simply impossible to ignore a sound that the brain interprets as danger.”

Author comment: This story illustrates clearly and simply how we easily become stuck in a vicious circle of 'fight and flight response' to any event that causes us to feel fear or anxiety. It demonstrates the function of the Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) of our Autonomic Nervous System (ANS). It also demonstrates the effect on our health and well-being when the SNS is repeatedly triggered without the intervening recovering effect of our Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS).

Back to Glen's words...

“But you can change your reaction to the sound. And when you do, there is nothing preventing you from tuning out the sound of your tinnitus exactly like you do with all other meaningless sounds. What I discovered – entirely by accident – was that by focusing on the sound of my tinnitus during meditation, my brain was starting to associate the very positive experience of relaxation and calm with the ringing. And this new association slowly began to overpower the old association with suffering. Over time, the fear response diminished, and I found myself ignoring the sound more and more of time.”

Author comment: Although Glen’s story relates to tinnitus and its debilitating effects, the ANS ‘fight or flight response’ is triggered by any event that causes us to feel threatened. If it is repeatedly triggered as in his case, it becomes a chronic condition requiring drastic measures to resolve.

What he discovered by accident was a way to balance his chronic ‘fight and flight’ responses of his Sympathetic Nervous System with the ‘calming and relaxing’ response of his Parasympathetic Nervous System through meditation and mindfulness exercises.

When I showed this article above to a fellow tinnitus sufferer, he wrote this to me...

“Hey, this is very true of my experience: I was stuck in that cycle viewing tinnitus as a threat and therefore exacerbating the symptoms.

“The moment, I stopped fighting it was the day things started to get better. I also used meditation and compassionate mindfulness to sort it out.

“Surrendering and looking for the positive has been instrumental in getting the right part of my nervous system in action and quietening the tinnitus.

“Listening meditation was really helpful to conquering the fear as well... I haven’t done it much recently, but not really felt the need to.”

The moral of Glen's story...

Our brain has a restorative function that subconsciously balances our feelings of threat with feelings of calm for the same event. It is a process that works to keep us healthy of mind and body.

I want to differentiate between the function of the brain and the workings of our mind. It is analogous to an automatic car that can perform many functions by itself (our brain), and the driver (our mind) that chooses how to use the automatic car.

When I use the word 'mind', I am referring collectively to our different states of 'mind' such as our emotional, spiritual and intellectual. It is not obvious which state of mind is connected to our anxiety until we start talking about it.

What I learnt is: if we repeatedly pay attention to our threats or anxieties (controlled by our minds), then it will inhibit the healing effect of the Parasympathetic Nervous System (automatic function of our brain).

This vicious cycle of 'fight or flight' will lead inevitably to a worsening of our mental health and well-being.

The questions it raises are:

- What can we do to prevent getting stuck in this vicious cycle of 'fight or flight'?
- If we are stuck in the cycle how can we break out?
- What's happens when this chronic behaviour is subsumed into our identity, i.e. we have an alternative sense of identity that has become part of who we are and others can see it but we may not?
- And lastly, what if this chronic behaviour has benefits which we want to keep?

Although our brain knows how to deal with a state of anxiety, it can be easily frustrated by our mind's chronic attention to an anxiety-raising event. By

continually re-triggering our sympathetic nervous system (flight or fight), we are inhibiting our parasympathetic nervous system from doing its job.

We are not helped by the stresses and strains of modern life which puts pressure on us to find time-saving remedies, such as medication or a 'good night out'. These time-saving remedies do not resolve our anxiety, they only suspend it for a while and if continued can easily lead to a dependency on drugs or 'nights out'.

In summary...

Our brains have a restorative function which works to keep our minds and bodies in a healthy state. To benefit from this self-healing process, we must understand how it works to keep us stable, and how we can use its healing power to recover from anxiety or depression.

The key points of Chapter One:

- There is an alternative to hiding our feelings and relying on anti-depressants.
- Receiving 'good attention' whilst re-telling our upset has a beneficial effect, similar to 'running to mummy' as a child.
- Uninhibited, our brain works subconsciously to restore calm and stability to our mental state.
- We need 'a good listening to' and the brain's restorative function to work together to recover our sense of well-being.

Chapter Two

A good listening to

Who can listen to me?

I might feel afraid to talk to someone, but I do believe there is someone who can listen to me in the way I need. It could be someone like a help-line, the Samaritan being probably the best known. Or, someone in the community who I can trust to be my confidant, like a religious or community leader. Or, maybe someone who is very well known to me, like an old friend or partner who has a lot of history with me and a proven track record of trustworthiness. Not forgetting the listening professionals, such as counsellors, therapists, mentors and support group leaders.

But are they safe enough?

For instance, do I believe they will not judge me, or tell me what I ought to do? This always stops me talking, but surely that is my problem, not theirs? If I am to take the first step of disclosing my long-held secrets, then I need to find the right person for me.

In general, the qualities we look for in a confidant are: non-judgmental, without an agenda, good listening and facilitating skills, trustworthy and confidential. These people will exist, but I need to be clear as to what I want from them. It is not enough to expect them to know. So best I am up front about what I want from them as my safe and confidential listener.

For example, I could ask them to sit and listen only and to say nothing. This is an amazing first step. Many times, it can be all that is needed. I could go further and ask them to listen and assist me to explore my situation. Their job is to ask me simple exploratory questions, like: “tell me more?”, “what was that like?”, “how did that make you feel?” and “what does that mean to you?”

The aim of the questions is not to inform their curiosity, but to assist me to explore my mind and inform myself on my situation. If trust grows and I start to feel safe, I could go further and start to express my feelings and emotions.

There are levels to listening, and each has its benefits. But, it is important to remember that we are in charge of what takes place, not the listener. It is our job to manage what we say, whether disclosing secrets or discharging emotions.

For me, these are the critical issues to be addressed: who is best to listen to me, and what guidance do I need to give them?

Fortunately, I have found people who listen to me in these ways, and consequently I have recovered from my early years' confusions and misguided beliefs - although it is still work in progress.

The importance of allies

If the above has inspired you to think about yourself then you are on the journey to a healthier well-being. But, it does not mean that you are confident with what might lay ahead. It is at this stage that our friends and allies can play a part - people who believe in us and want what's best for us.

It reminds me of having grandchildren, who have taught me the importance of allies for personal growth. I am a good ally and resource to my grandchildren. I am not obsessed with my parenting anymore, and I have plenty of time to listen.

This is who you need as your ally, someone who will help you grow in self-awareness and encourage you to take the risks you need to achieve your goals.

The caveat of course, is they must not take their role too seriously, and try to protect you or maybe take responsibility for you or your problem. This is where you need to put them right and lay out the rules for them to be your 'good listening' partner.

Not a counselling session...

'A good listening to' is not a counselling session, but can have the same benefits because the process is similar: a safe environment to talk, another human paying you attention, plus you have your built-in healing mechanism working for you.

The benefit of 'a good listening to' comes from telling your story to someone who reflects back your thoughts and feelings with understanding and without judgement. Whether in words or pictures, your thoughts and feelings are now available for scrutiny. It is your chance to make sense of your state of mind in relation to your story, as opposed to just re-experiencing it.

The process of 'mentalising' your thoughts and feelings was researched by Peter Fonagy and can be read in more detail in his book 'Mentalisation Handbook'. (More on Peter Fonagy and Mentalisation in the Appendix)

In the BBC Radio 4 programme called Life Scientific, Peter Fonagy said the following..

"One of our core human needs is to be understood."

This is the wonder of 'a good listening to', it enables you to take control of your thoughts and feelings as opposed to being controlled by them. And, your well-being benefits from the effect of being understood by another human being.

What are the benefits...

Talking out what bother us to another person has several benefits:

- When we talk out our thoughts we get to see them in a more objective and disassociated way. They begin to change from the scary monsters lurking in our minds to something we can see more clearly and can therefore review and evaluate. How many time have you started to talk about something that bothers you and before you finish you know the answer?

- Another benefit is the effect that our Parasympathetic Nervous System has on our tensed state. You know that feeling of calm and relief when you tell somebody something that concerns you or stresses you.

A good example, is seeing a badly injured victim of a road accident which creates a shock reaction in your mind. To help relieve your mind, you tell someone about what you saw. And as you are telling them, the Parasympathetic Nervous System is returning your mind back to a calm and relaxed state. Usually, we need to tell the story more than once, and each time we do, it lessens the tension associated with the original scene.

You can now appreciate that underpinning ‘a good listening to’ are at least two benefits, possibly more. You see more objectively what is bothering you, whilst your parasympathetic nervous system is calming and relaxing you. So how do we set up ‘a good listening to’?

Setting up ‘a good listening to’

Most people think they are ‘good listeners’ and do not want to be told how to listen. Yes, many do know how to lend a sympathetic ear to a friend who maybe has just separated from a partner or has been badly treated by colleagues at work. Yet, when it comes to helping someone with a troubled mind or a need to make a life-changing decision, most of us don’t know how to listen.

It is important to acknowledge that ‘a good listening to’ is not hierarchical like a parent-child or teacher-student relationship. The listener is not expected to be the expert in your problem.

You are the expert...

We have been brought up to look up to people of authority like doctors, teachers, police, and parents. And, we assume that the person in authority will automatically take responsibility for our time together. But that is where this relationship is different.

In the case of 'a good listening to' relationship, you are the expert. It is all about you and what you want to change or explore. Assuming you want to change, then you must take responsibility for the time together and talk about how you want the relationship to work not only for yourself, but also for the listener.

Interestingly, we were never taught how to listen as part of our education at school, nor were we taught at home; unless we were very fortunate in our choice of parents or work. If we are to invite someone to listen to us in the most helpful way then best we tell them what we want from our time together.

Guidelines for good listening

Given the aim of ‘helping someone to talk out a troubling experience or make an important decision’, I have written the following guidelines which will benefit both the listener and the talker. Depending on your experience and the experience of the listener, you can choose the level you want to engage in with your listener.

Level 1 - just listen and no more...

At this level, the guidance is a simple set of rules for the listener to keep. It is a form of passive listening where the listener makes no interventions other than to encourage you to talk.

On its own, this level will encourage you to talk out more than you have ever done before. It is about speaking uninterrupted, without being judged or given advice. The most common mistake listeners make is they think you are asking them to solve your problem - you are not, just listen! Here are some ideas of what you might say:

- You may want to say, *“I know you will want to say things to me because you want to help me, but I don’t want you to do that right now, just give me your good attention and let me talk.”*
- You can add directions such as, *“I know what I say will raise questions in your mind or maybe some advice you want to give, but I want you to park those thoughts and allow me to continue without interruption.”*
- There maybe times when find it difficult to carry on talking. Tell your listener, *“Be patient, wait a while, because I will start again.”*
- You can also tell them, *“If I become upset or emotional in any way, do not worry. Continue to pay attention to me even though I am feeling upset.”*
- They must also realise that any sound or body movement that implies disapproval or criticism will stop you talking and effectively end your

session. You may want to tell them, *“I want you to reserve any judgement you might have on anything I might say.”*

- At some point, you may invite your listener to ask you questions like: *“and”, “tell me more”, “what happened next?”, “can you explain that?”*, but nothing more. These are called ‘Clean Language’ questions because they do not pollute what you are trying to explore in your mind with what is going on in their mind. (See the Appendix for more on Clean Language)
- At the end of your time together, you might want to say what was helpful and what was not, and ask your listener to do the same.

Level 2 - help your listener to understand your process...

This next level is helpful to both of you. It is about knowing what process you are about to engage in. It is better that you make your process known, rather than unsaid and therefore probably incorrectly assumed.

- Your listener needs to understand that when you speak out your thoughts and they listen without judgement or comment, you will begin to trust them more and that will encourage you to speak more. And the more you speak, the more you can reveal your inner thoughts.
- Your listener also needs to understand that talking out your thoughts enables you to see more objectively what you are thinking or feeling. This alone will enable you to review and re-evaluate your situation. Their role is to help you explore your thoughts and feelings. In that way they no longer remain hidden in your mind.
- Your listener needs to also understand that their unconditional attention is providing the right environment for your Parasympathetic Nervous System to counter the stresses and tensions in your mind, and associate a more relaxed and stable state with your stressful situation.

- Lastly, they need to trust the process of allowing you to speak out and not feel judged will enable you to see what needs to change or what new decision you need to make.

Level 3 - Take charge of your time together...

This level is about taking charge of your time together. It is about giving your listener clear directions on what to ask you and how to ask.

- It is not only ‘listening without judging’ but also ‘taking directions from you’ because you know what is going on in your head, they don’t.
- As a listener yourself, you may have learnt questions to ask that have worked effectively for others that you want your listener to try. Then try them and learn from the outcome.
- Offer them questions that you know will get you to focus on something you need to talk about, such as *“I am feeling very embarrassed about something”*, or *“I feel guilty about something”*, it begs questions like, *“what you are embarrassed about?”*, or *“what are you feeling guilty about?”*
- As you talk, things will crop up inside your head that you feel inhibited to talk about. Tell them the question that will push you to say what popped up inside your head, because that will be the best question to ask, such as, *“I just remembered something, ask me ‘what happened when...’”* or *“how did that make you feel?”*
- This is a partnership of two people, you with the knowledge of yourself and your situation, and your listener with the ability to listen and take direction while you talk. What enhances this partnership is that you both know the process and that you are in charge.

Chapter Three of this book takes listening to another level. It is a more active form of listening, in which the listener takes charge of the conversation.

The key points of Chapter two:

- Find an ally, someone who will help you grow in self-awareness and encourage you to take the risks you need to achieve your goals
- Talk out your thoughts so you can see them in a more objective way.
- Apart from feeling more understood, you will more easily find the solution you are looking for.
- You have a built-in Parasympathetic Nervous System that when engaged will return your tensed state to a calm and stable state.
- Remember, you are the expert, no-one else knows what is going on in your mind more than you.
- Take responsibility for the time together and talk about how you want the relationship to work not only for yourself, but also for the listener.
- This is a partnership of two people. What enhances this partnership is that you both know and trust the process of 'a good listening to'.

Chapter Three

Principle-based listening

With the listener in mind

First I want to recognise the reward and gratification one gets from helping someone to find their way towards a healthier well-being and life-style. This chapter of the book is written for the listener as opposed to the previous chapter which was written for the speaker.

For over thirty years I have had the privilege of working with people. It started with personal development and management workshops in IBM. Later I become an executive counsellor for senior management whilst running life-changing workshops with my good friend Jeremy Clare.

My life had become one of learning how to listen in way that was helpful to others. As a result, I want to offer an approach for listening that I acquired over many years of working with people in many different settings.

Although we may see listening as a natural human capability that we are all born with. It is helpful to have a strategy that is specifically aimed at helping someone find their way.

Challenging limiting beliefs

This level of listening is an extension to 'a good listening to' written about in Chapter Two. Whilst still maintaining the rules of 'a good listening to', the listener can ask questions which challenge beliefs that limit the speaker's progress to recovery.

It is worth remembering that many of our beliefs were formed in our early formative years. Some were misguided or ill-informed because at the time we were too young to understand and accepted without question what we were told by authoritative figures in our life.

In this approach, the listener can ask questions that are based around a 'principle' and is relevant to the speaker's situation - hence the name 'principle-based listening'. Within this approach, there is room for interpretation, personal listening style and preferences.

Principles to keep in mind

The idea is to hold a 'principle in mind' that is relevant to the speaker's situation. You can then ask questions related to the principle that help them to challenge the belief or beliefs that are holding them back.

Some principles are universally applicable to most situations, whereas others are relevant to specific situations. You will know which one to choose as you read between the lines as you are listening. An example of a universal principle is...

Principle 1 - For every complex event...

"For every complex event... there is always a simple explanation"

For some reason, we humans like to make things more complicated than they really are. Maybe we need to feed our EGO, or maybe we just want to hide something that we don't want anyone to know, or perhaps we need to protect ourselves from feeling vulnerable. Whatever the reason, we know how to create a facade of complexity to cover up whatever we need to keep hidden.

If you want to help someone to make progress in their search for healthier well-being, then a challenge might be the smoke-screen of complexity that protects the simple explanation from being revealed.

In his observations, Sidney M Jourard presented what I believe is a controversial idea and yet interesting perspective on mental health:

"Neurotic and psychotic behaviours might be seen as 'smoke screens' placed between them and the outside world, or put another way 'devices to avoid becoming known' (Jourard, 1971).

His use of words here are fascinating. He is describing a mental health issue as a defence mechanism against being known.

A lot of psychic energy is needed to maintain this level of defence. Plus it is a barrier to any attempt to be known, which therefore inhibits the opportunity

to recover from a mental health issue. If there is a skill to be learnt, it is how to create a safe enough situation that ‘enables previously untold secrets to be told’.

Assisting someone to reveal the simple explanation is helped by keeping in the mind the principle ‘for every complex event there is (always) a simple explanation’. Your questions will focus on revealing the simple explanation, such as:

“what does that mean?”, or

“how does that work?”, or

“how does that help?”, or

“what is behind that?”, or

“what do you believe about that?”, or

“if there were a simple explanation for this what might it be?”, or

“if you could change any part of your situation, what would it be?”, or maybe

“it seems to me you do not want to change, as you continually find reasons not to reveal the simple explanation for your situation, is that true?”

This last question is often a game-changer. It is possible that receiving ‘a good listening to’ from you is what they really want and are desperate to keep. Whatever their reason, this question will either confront their smoke screen tactics or end the session.

Either way, it is their responsibility to decide which way they want to go, and for you as the listener to accept their decision and move on.

Principle 2 - The more you reveal...

“The more you reveal... the healthier you will become”

Another universal principle similar to and connected to the previous principle which relies on the direct correlation between ‘how much we reveal about ourselves and our situation’ and ‘our progress towards achieving a healthy personality’. Sidney M Jourard sums this up in his own words in his book entitled ‘Transparent-Self’:

‘Openness (transparency) with at least one significant person is an essential requirement for a healthy personality.’ (Jourard, 1971)

As a listener, this principle directs you to assist someone to talk out as much as possible. It will guide you to ask encouraging questions like:

“tell me more?” or

“what happened next?”

It is well researched that revealing oneself to a safe listener is often enough for someone to find their way to recovery.

A word of caution - you must observe carefully the effect of your listening. Ask yourself this question as you are listening: Am I promoting more disclosure with my listening or am I closing down their disclosure?

Principle 3 - Where you are is...

“Where you are is...where you have chosen to be”

As a listener, you will hear people say things like, *“its not my fault, they did this to me”* or *“you don’t understand, I didn’t ask for this to happen to me.”*

In these examples, they are putting the blame for their situation outside of themselves. The net result is they give away their power to change the situation. Only who or what they blame has that power. So to challenge this tactic, we need to use a specific principle such as...

“Where you are is where you have chosen to be”

This principle challenges the belief that our current situation is not down to us. For example, if we feel victimised then it could not have happened without us **deciding** to be a victim. That is the essence of this principle.

I know that this not what people want to hear, they would rather blame someone or something else for their situation than take responsibility for their own decision.

And of course, not all situations are caused or chosen by us, some are caused by outside events, such as a loved one dying of cancer or being made redundant. But in these situations, it is our response to the situation that we choose and therefore matters. The point of this principle is...

“Whilst we blame others for our situation, we have no power to change it.”

As their listener, you need to recognise that they talking about their story from the victim place. Be aware that they have **chosen** to take the victim place even if they don’t want to admit it. This ‘principle-based listening’ strategy prompts questions such as the following:

(I have added possible follow up questions which depending on their responses will enable the speaker to disclose more)

“Is this where you want to be?” (possibly followed by “so where do you want to be?”)

“Do you really want to change?” (possibly followed by “so you are choosing not to change, tell me more...?”)

“What is the benefit of keeping your situation as is?” (followed by “tell me more about...?”)

“What will you lose if you had the power to change your situation?” (followed by “what will happen if you did let go of ...?”)

Remember, the purpose for asking these questions is not to inform your curiosity. Rather it is to assist the speaker to explore and review their reasoning for maintaining their current situation. It is their uninhibited disclosure to a safe listener that enables the healing process to take place and for them to take back control.

Principle 4 - You limit another's growth...

"You limit another's growth... to the extent to which you take responsibility for them"

This principle is useful for anyone who takes on the role of ally, parent, teacher or mentor. Whatever role I have, when I take responsibility for another, I am not only inhibiting their growth, but also making them dependent on me - one way to develop a victim.

Perhaps in some parent-child relationships, having our child be dependent on us makes us feel important and loved. If that is the case, then it is at the cost of their self-reliance and autonomy, without which they will never trust themselves nor take responsibility.

In the 'giving a good listening to' setting, this is an important principle for the listener. It needs you to suppress any questions that imply taking responsibility or giving advice, and hand back the responsibility with questions like:

(I have also given example of what not to say):

"What are your thoughts on...?" instead of *"Have you thought of trying...?"*

"What do you think should happen...?" instead of *"Can I suggest you...?"*

"What do you need to think about?" instead of *"You should think about...?"*

"What is the right thing to do?" instead of *"I don't think that's right, do you?"*

The key to this principle is:

"To not take responsibility for another means listening without giving advice, or finding solutions or making judgement."

Principle 5 - Whilst you work to be 'liked'...

"Whilst you work to be 'liked'... you will not achieve your purpose, unless it is your purpose"

This is a simple principle, but in my experience one that needs a lot of self-awareness and discipline. Too often we are guided by our ego and not the real purpose of our work.

By the way, you can change the word 'liked' to any other word that fits the situation, such as, 'feel good', 'praised', 'rewarded' or 'loved'. The principle still works.

It challenges one's intentions in one's work and relationships whether personal or professional. Are you carrying out your profession to look good, win approval, get strokes for your ego or maybe just to be rewarded? Are you trying to impress someone to be liked or maybe employed?

On the other hand, if you know what the real purpose of your work is and regardless of what people think of you or the reward, you carry it out, then you are truly achieving your purpose.

How does this principle relate to listening? Let's assume our purpose is to achieve a healthy personality and change the word 'liked' to "get attention" then the principle would read as follows:

"Whilst you work to 'get attention from others', you will not achieve your purpose (healthy personality), unless it (getting attention) is your purpose"

In other words, if you want to get well and it never seems to happen, it is likely you are working on the wrong purpose - *seeking attention instead of seeking wellness.*

A word of advice with this principle, it applies to both the speaker and the listener. As a listener, you need to be aware of your own purpose for engaging in this process with someone.

Principle 6 - Solutions have a way...

“Solutions have a way of revealing themselves”

In the self-improvement process, it is essential that we let go of any pressure to make the right decision. We must learn to let go of the tensions that keep re-triggering our Sympathetic Nervous System - the state that continually prepares us for ‘fight’ or ‘flight’.

Usually the tension comes from having to ‘make the right decision’ or ‘not trusting the process’. Not only is it difficult to make progress, it also limits our creativity to find the simple explanation or solution.

You think more creatively when you allow your mind to muse without the stress and tensions of ‘having to find a solution’ or ‘making the right decision’.

In decision-making workshops, I asked participants to consider their situation whilst holding in their minds this principle...

“Solutions have a way of revealing themselves”

Without exception, they told me that the pressure of finding a solution was lifted. They talked about their situation in a different way, as if it was no longer theirs but someone else’s. It enabled them to disconnect themselves from their situation.

To disconnect or disassociate oneself from one’s situation is a very helpful way to find solutions. We all are better at solving other people’s problems, than our own.

When we stop feeling the pressure and tension of our situation, we stop triggering our Sympathetic Nervous System. Instead, we free up our Parasympathetic Nervous System to do its job of finding the mental place that calms us and frees our subconscious to reveal the solution.

Principle 7 - Trusting the healing potential...

“Trusting the ‘healing potential... of our brain’ again”

This is a new principle added to the ‘personal change’ list of principles and specifically aimed at self-healing. Although it is applicable in many other situations.

“We can only achieve self-healing, when we trust the healing potential of our brain to do its job.”

Once again simplistic in its intention, but presents us with a challenge. Trusting someone or something is our biggest human vulnerability.

We all need basic human values rooted in trust and affection. – Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama is saying our basic human needs are rooted in ‘trust’ and ‘affection’. We all know how important ‘trust’ is to us. In all our relationships, ‘trust’ is the part we depend on the most. Violating our trust is the worst act anyone can perform against us.

When do we learn ‘trust’?

It starts from the moment we are born. Without understanding the value we call ‘trust’, we experience our basic needs being fulfilled and over time we learn who to trust and who not to trust.

We also learn to trust ourselves or not trust ourselves. I learnt not to trust myself, my father taught me that!

I know when someone is unwell or hurt, I can trust my judgement to take the right action. But, when it comes to writing books, I do not trust my judgement and rely on two very competent supporters to help me get it right.

There was a time when we did trust the healing power of our minds, but something happened to destroy our trust in ourselves and rely on experts like doctors, lawyers and religious leaders.

We know how to trust someone who is helping us, whether that be a friend or a professional therapist. Trusting them means you believe their intentions are to help you and not hurt you. So 'trust' is a belief you hold about another and their intentions toward you.

How can we transfer that belief to ourselves? Surely, we need to believe that our intentions towards ourselves are benign and not hostile, and that we want only the best for us. And when we do, we stand a chance of trusting our inherent healing process to make us healthy again.

Like learning to trust someone in an important relationship, it takes time for us to trust. Learning to trust ourself and our built-in healing process takes time too. Best you start now because only you can do this.

Principle 8 - Our language is less contaminated...

“Our language is less contaminated... when we use ‘verbs’ instead of ‘nouns’.”

We usually respond negatively to criticism or judgement because it basically threatens what we believe to be true about ourselves. More importantly, it stops us talking, and talking is the most critical part of the self-healing process.

As we grow up we learn to use many words to describe people and events. Mostly, we use labels, such as: ‘She is a martyr to her children’ or ‘he is a tyrant to his work colleagues.’ When we could just as easily have said: ‘She gives her children all her love’, or ‘he keeps his workers on their toes.’

Can you see the difference?

Using words loaded with judgement leaves it open to varied and subjective interpretation as to what is meant by ‘martyr’ and ‘tyrant’. Whereas using verbs informs us exactly as to what they do. So here is a principle that helps with using clean language:

“Our language is less contaminated when we use ‘verbs’ instead of ‘nouns’.”

How is this useful? It is natural to respond to any feedback that implies criticism. Usually, it will stop us talking or at least limit what we might say from then on.

For example:

‘Sounds like you were a bitch to your friend, is that what you want to be?’
or...

‘Sounds like you treated your friend badly, is that what you want to do?’

Which one would you prefer to receive?

The moral of this principle is

“People respond more positively and productively when feedback is observational (what you see or hear using verbs) and uncontaminated by subjectivity (nouns which imply judgement).”

Principle 9 - What benefits you the most...

“What benefits you the most... is what matters the most.”

For example: if what benefits you the most is the attention you receive from having an illness or condition, then it is likely to be what matters the most.

The idea that someone might believe they benefit from their illness condition more than getting well needs to be out in the open. I know people who use their condition to get the attention they seek so desperately, and talking about it was only token agreement to ‘getting well’.

The danger is over a long time, our illness or condition, because it matters the most, becomes subsumed into our identity. Therein lies our real challenge - changing our identity back to what it was. Anyone who wants to challenge someone’s ‘alternative-identity’ takes the risk of losing their friendship or significant relationship.

Once again, this is the connection between ‘what I believe’ and ‘survival’ as described earlier in the book under the heading of: “A case of alternative-identity”. Just to remind you that this happens when one’s identity has coalesced around a condition or illness and one benefits from the sympathy or special attention one gets, and it will not be easy to give up on it.

A breakthrough can happen when someone understands why their alternative-identity matters to them and then they can start to reassess what really matters to them. Questions like the following can help:

“What really matters the most, ‘getting attention’ or ‘getting well’?”

“Is this who you really want to be?”

“What needs to happen for you to let go of your alternative-identity?”

“What resource if you had it today would help you change?”

“Do you really want to change?”

Final Thoughts...

Ever since I realised the beneficial effect of increased self-perception, I have wanted to learn more about myself and how my mind works.

It hasn't always been easy. There were moments when I wished I had never started this journey of self-discovery. Especially when I became aware of my many dysfunctional traits. It did diminish my desire for change, but once I realised the beneficial effect of being authentic and genuine I was no longer put off.

I am reminded of the book written by Dr. Susan Jeffers, 'Feel the fear and do it anyway'. She wrote about how to change the negative thoughts that stress us into more positive thinking that calms and relaxes us. I believe she is right about 'feel the fear and do it anyway'. Unless we confront our fears, we will always be slave to them.

As you can tell from my books, I am highly influenced by past and present writers on the subject of being human (see the Appendix). It sort of fits with my life goal of 'knowing everything there is to know about me before I die'. That might sound a bit morbid, but it does give me inspiration and purpose for being alive.

Without it, I would have died years ago and spent the rest of my life engaged in 'pastimes' and 'games' as documented by Eric Berne in his book Games People Play. In his view, we learn to play 'games' in our significant relationships in order to avoid 'real intimacy', something we have been programmed out of. In his book, he says...

*"For certain fortunate people there is something which transcends all classifications of behaviour, and that is **awareness**; something which rises above the programming of the past, and that is **spontaneity**; and something that is more rewarding than games, and that is **intimacy**."*

You now see how he has influenced and inspired me. In my search to know myself, I am growing in **awareness, spontaneity and intimacy**. If you haven't already, I recommend starting the journey of self-discovery that

raises your awareness, spontaneity and intimacy too, and enables you to achieve a healthier and more rewarding life.

Moving on to my all-time hero, Sidney M Jourard. He helped me start my journey of self-discovery by giving me the simplest principle for achieving a healthy personality...

'Openness (transparency) with at least one significant person is an essential requirement for a healthy personality.' (Jourard, 1971)

This principle alone proved to be the one most powerful learning of my journey of self-discovery. By implementing this principle and nothing else, you would make massive progress to achieving a healthy personality and well-being.

It is an essential part of authenticity because as we talk out our undisclosed thoughts to another we increase our sense of 'genuineness' to the outside world. And 'genuineness' has the same powerful effect as 'authenticity', we are suddenly freed from the pretence that protected us from being known.

There you have it, simple higher level principles have the potential to help you achieve a happy and healthy life where more complex techniques and detail may not.

Let me end by me reminding you of the life-changing principle:

"where you are is where you have chosen to be (always)."

Bon voyage

Mike O'Sullivan

Appendix

Authors I have read...

Let me introduce some authors and their books that inspired and informed me in the writing of this book.

In their research, they each developed their own concepts, theories and therapeutic practices. Even so, I want to pull out the common threads that underpin their findings and support the aim of this book.

They all rate highly self-awareness and self-disclosure as essential activities necessary to achieve a healthy well-being and personality.

They all support the concept of 'a good listening to' and the benefits that ensue. The simplistic notion that 'being known all the way through by at least one person' has great merit in all forms of therapy. And, it maybe all that is needed to restore our troubled minds back to a stable state.

Transparent Self by Sidney M Jourard

Sidney M Jourard was a clinical psychologist in the 60's and 70's who researched and worked in the field of self-disclosure. His book entitled 'The Transparent Self' (Jourard, 1971) opened my mind to a very important concept:

'Openness (transparency) with at least one significant person is an essential requirement for a healthy personality.' (Jourard, 1971)

Simply put, a healthy state of mind is directly linked to how much we reveal about ourselves to another significant person. The more we reveal, the more authentic we are, and the more healthy we become.

For me, the word 'transparent' in 'transparent self' means opening ourselves up to someone to know us. This type of disclosure brings about change all by itself. Sydney M. Jourard identified the direct relationship between healthy well-being and self-disclosure, and promoted its use in therapeutic relationships.

Whatever your state of mental health, I highly recommend Sidney M Jourard's concept:

'Being known all the way through by at least one significant person is an essential requirement for a healthy personality.'

Re-evaluation Counselling by Harvey Jackins

Harvey Jackins originated the practice of co-counselling in the 1980's amidst bad press regarding some of its practices.

The Co-counselling process involves two people, trained in the fundamentals of Re-evaluation Counselling, where agreeing equal counselling time is an important principle.

The theory of Re-evaluation Counselling has merit and stands along side other counselling disciplines as an effective way to recover from early distresses.

In my words the basic theory of Re-evaluation is:

"When we are given 'a good listening to' in a nonjudgmental setting, we are encouraged to talk out patterns of distress formed at a vulnerable age.

"It is this talking out and the re-expression of associated emotion in a safe setting that enables us to use our good thinking to re-evaluate the original trauma.

"It is the discharge of associated emotion together with the unconditional attention that creates the healing effect."

What stops us using counselling disciplines like Re-evaluation Counselling is our reluctance to re-experience the original trauma and associated emotion.

As a result, our reluctance holds our chronic patterns in place. Bear in mind that the pattern's purpose is to protect us from re-experiencing the original

hurt. Although good intentioned, it does hold us back from taking risks and fulfilling our potential.

The 'discharge of original emotion' has the effect of lessening the intensity of our response to the stimulus of the original trauma. We are freer to use our intelligence (rather than our highly charged emotions) to re-assess the situation and come to a new understanding and behaviour.

An unanticipated benefit is that we survived re-experiencing our original hurt and its associated emotion which contradicts our 'pattern's reluctance to ever go there again'.

As a result, we challenged the chronic pattern's intention of holding us back and keeping us safe. By itself, contradicting a chronic pattern frees us up to recover our original autonomy and intimacy - what we are born with.

If you want to find out more, I recommend you read his book entitled 'The Human Side of Human Beings' by Harvey Jackins.

Clean Language by David Grove

Clean Language was devised by David Grove in a counselling setting to help patients resolve traumas and phobias. It basically guides us as the listener to use language that does not pollute our client's agenda but instead makes use of their own words. It shifts the focus of disclosure from the therapist's agenda to the client's.

By using Clean Language questions, people are encouraged to explore their own mental landscape based on their own thinking.

Earlier in this book I gave some example of Clean Language questions, they were:

- "and",
- "tell me more",
- "what happened next?",

- “can you explain that?”,

Here are more examples of clean questions, but this time they include the words used by the talker as follows:

- "Is there anything else about... ?"
- "What kind of ... is that ...?"
- "What would you like to have happen?"
- "Whereabouts is...?"

Clean Language helps us as ‘the listener’ to keep our minds away from ‘influencing’ or ‘polluting’ the thought process of ‘the talker’. This approach helps ‘the talker’ to explore their minds without the need to react to ‘the listeners’ curiosity, or shut down because they feel under scrutiny or attack.

In summary, we make more progress towards resolving our inner struggles when we are free to explore our vulnerable thoughts and feelings without needing to contend with ‘the listeners’ personal analysis or agenda.

Games People Play by Eric Berne

An introduction to the work of Eric Berne...

Eric Berne was a Canadian-born psychiatrist who created the theory of transactional analysis as a way of explaining human behaviour. His theory of transactional analysis was based on the ideas of Freud but was distinctly different.

In his book ‘Games People Play’ Eric Berne describes our fundamental human need is to seek the physical intimacy that we initially experienced as a baby. Below is a quote which defines simply the use of the word ‘Games’ in his book ‘Games People Play’

“Games are a compromise between intimacy and keeping intimacy away.”

He goes on to explain that as part of growing up, society forces us to compromise our need for physical intimacy and seek 'strokes' through recognition instead.

As we become more sophisticated, so does our individual quest for recognition. It is this hunger for recognition that forms our societal structure. Every role we take on within the society relies primarily on our hunger for recognition and not on our original need for physical intimacy.

How we view ourselves (our internalised identity) is reliant on recognition hunger. We work to maintain the recognition we receive from society which relies in its early stages on others providing it, such as parents, family and teachers.

If we do not receive sufficient recognition-intimacy we will wither just as babies do when deprived of physical-intimacy. It explains our addiction to seeking recognition whether it be a title, like doctor or lawyer, or an achievement such as gold medalist or pop star.

In the survival of the species, this shift from physical hunger to recognition hunger serves a purpose. It ensures we maintain a healthy mind and body whilst our only form of physical intimacy - sexual intimacy - ensures the continuation of the human species.

Stroking...

Eric Bernes talks about 'Stroking' as a way to describe physical intimacy, such as touching or hugging. It is how we satisfy our physical-hunger. Similarly, by recognising another's existence, it has the same effect of satisfying their 'recognition-hunger'.

According to Eric Berne a 'stroke' is a unit of social interaction, and when we exchange 'strokes' he calls this a 'transaction'. In his book 'Games People Play' he describes in great detail, how these 'transactions' when played out in a series of patterned communication form 'the games people play'.

His view is that these 'games' are substitutes for the living of 'real intimacy' in our relationships as they are seen as 'preliminary engagements' rather than 'real intimacy'.

In Chapter 18 of his book, he reveals (in my opinion) his feelings of hopelessness for the majority of the human race. And yet he does not completely close the door on us, by adding that there is hope for the individuals who are prepared to rise above their conditioning.

Here is an extract from CHAPTER 18 of 'GAMES PEOPLE PLAY by Eric Berne...

*“For certain fortunate people there is something which transcends all classifications of behaviour, and that is **awareness**; something which rises above the programming of the past, and that is **spontaneity**; and something that is more rewarding than games, and that is **intimacy**.”*

If you are experiencing dysfunctional relationships with partners, friends or family members, then I highly recommend his book. When you can recognise a 'game being played out' then you have the possibility to stop taking part in the 'game' and freeing yourself from these unhealthy and dysfunctional relationships.

Mentalisation... by Peter Fonagy

Peter Fonagy, OBE, FBA, FAcSS, FMedSci (born August 14 1952) is a Hungarian-born British psychoanalyst and clinical psychologist. He is Professor of Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Developmental Science and Head of the Division of Psychology and Language Sciences at University College London,

Together with Professor Anthony W Bateman MA, FRCPsych they coined the term "mentalisation" which refers to the ability to talk about and understand one's mental and emotional states. It helps us understand what lies behind our behaviour. It has been described as "Thinking about our thinking".

Through the process of mentalisation, children learn to develop their sense of identity. Without this capacity, they will have trouble in later life recognising their own and others' feelings.

Mentalisation reinforces the concepts written about in this book. By revealing your thoughts and feelings to another person, your true identity becomes transparent to another person.

From the place of objectivity, you can begin to rethink your thoughts, re-evaluate your beliefs and take charge of your emotions.

You can find more details on mentalisation in Peter Fonagy's book entitled 'Mentalisation Handbook'.