

FAST Pathways® Skills to Keep Stress Useful – Your Shield



We all have to deal with unpleasant people – rude, cross, selfish or spiteful people. People who seem able to sap away everything positive, like a Harry Potter dementor, leaving you drained and deflated. People who put their own interests way ahead of yours, whether deliberately or by accident. Their behaviour might have nothing to do with you – they might just be going through a difficult time themselves; but that doesn't make them any easier to deal with.

It could be a one-off encounter – someone cutting you up in traffic, or saying something insulting; or it could be someone with whom you come into regular contact, who seems to have a natural knack of upsetting you or winding you up.

Encountering life's bullies and mood-hoovers can be one of those situations where your on-purpose and outside-awareness thinking get out of step with each other. Consciously, you might know that it's silly to feel hurt or angry; but that doesn't take the feeling away - sometimes it can amplify it, as you get frustrated or upset at yourself, as well as at them; for feeling or responding the way that you do.

You could pour even more energy into this damaging spiral, trying to break it with willpower; or put effort into avoiding the person altogether. Left un-addressed, those kind of damaging relationships can have far reaching consequences. Instead, here's a way to access the thinking outside your awareness, and shape your response from there - how to harness your imagination to boost your own protection.

This technique uses your imagination. Kids are great at that, needing no excuse to immerse themselves in a world of fantasy. As we get older, we tend to curb our imagination, so it can feel a little strange to get into the parts of your thinking outside your awareness – but those are the parts which shape your experience of the world, and where you can make the most lasting change.

Ellie's Shield

Ellie was a confident and outgoing six year old. She loved school, and was well known for her ready smile and enthusiasm. But, this began to fade when one of the girls in her class started to make her cry - simple mimicking and pulling faces; but those things can be a big deal when you're only six. The more the girl did it, the more easily she was able to upset Ellie. It became a vicious cycle, and Ellie suddenly wasn't so keen to go to school.

She took to the shield technique instantly. She decided exactly how her shield looks, and was easily able to imagine anything unpleasant hitting it like water and running harmlessly away. In school, she could easily deflect the unwanted attention. No more tears, no drama; just a natural internal resilience which still serves her well to this day.



The intelligence of your shield can protect you against all sorts of things, not just other people's deliberately unpleasant behaviour. Perhaps someone close to you worries a lot, and you've previously found it difficult not to get drawn in, joining in their fears. Your shield can allow you to deflect the unhelpful emotional influence. You'll still be able to provide emotional support, perhaps even more effectively, once you're able to remain more objective about what they're experiencing.

Many people already have naturally effective shields: Emergency services personnel have to remain calm and focused, no matter what's happening around them. It's also important for people in the caring professions, to maintain separation between their own emotions and those of the people they're helping – it makes them even more effective at what they do, and helps protect them from burn-out.

Your shield isn't about making you more aloof, or emotionally distant; it's simply about giving you greater choice and flexibility – so that you choose which situations you want to emotionally engage in, and become better able to remain separate from the rest. It doesn't make you invulnerable, but it's a little extra protection.