



Rewired to Relate - Text

Chapter 1

Why do I behave the way I do?

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If you are here, the chances are that you want to improve how you relate to others, whether at work, at home or with friends. The first step is understanding what drives your reactions and behaviours.

Rewired to Relate is a journey of personal development. Based on neuroscience, it offers a compelling and practical route to increasing self-awareness. If we understand how our brain influences our behaviour, we are offered a portal into understanding ourselves and others.

Your brain is a social brain and all your working relationships are important to it. Your brain drives your behaviour and your behaviour impacts your relationships with colleagues all the time, often without your conscious awareness.

In this first chapter we will focus on building your self-awareness of what drives your reactions and behaviours and the impacts these can have on those around you.

Your instinctive reactions

Before we dive into the brain training, take a moment to think about the behaviours and reactions you currently experience and see around you.

You can probably tell very quickly when a colleague or friend is stressed, just from changes in their behaviour. Perhaps they withdraw into themselves, or their communications become short and snappy.

What about you? Are you satisfied with the way you react, especially when you are stressed?

You are not alone if you would like to improve the way you react and relate to your colleagues when you are under pressure. Your brain drives your behaviour and your behaviour impacts your relationships with colleagues all the time, often without your conscious awareness. But you can become aware of your brain's processes and learn to manage it better.

This programme will help you understand yourself and your brain so you can manage yourself more effectively, improve your working relationships and increase your ability to collaborate well with others.

The limbic system

The limbic system is an ancient region of our brain that has the job of keeping us safe. It pushes us away from situations that are dangerous and encourages us to move towards situations that are good for our survival.

The limbic system does this by releasing chemicals that create threat and reward feelings in us. It is these - mostly unconscious - feelings that direct our behaviour.

Threats

When the limbic system perceives a threat, it issues a fear response, which causes us to avoid the threat. These fear responses are often described in terms of fight, flight, or freeze – which are fundamental behaviours intended to keep us safe.

In today's world, fighting might show up as arguing, insulting others, or being quietly disruptive.

Flight might be disappearing, avoiding, giving the cold shoulder or ignoring someone.

Freeze might be actually freezing – not knowing what to say or do or maybe it shows up as confusion or overwhelm.

Rewards

If the limbic system senses an opportunity – something it interprets will be good for our survival - it releases feel-good dopamine (a reward) which encourages us to move towards that opportunity.

Five reasons to love your limbic system

You will see how over-sensitive the limbic system can be in its drive to protect you. Many times, it will interpret a situation incorrectly so this can be a problem, but sometimes it is on-the-mark and can be very helpful in alerting us to something going on that the conscious mind did not have the capacity to pay attention to.

So the limbic system is not a bad thing. It is a large part of what makes us human and it helps us with these five aspects of our life experience.

Emotion

The limbic system produces emotional responses that gives us a rich experience of life.

Motivation

The limbic system generates neurotransmitters (e.g. dopamine and adrenaline) that motivate us and get us into action.

Safety

The limbic system is always comparing current situations to the past and evaluating similarities. It lets us know when it senses danger by generating adrenaline and cortisol which helps us get out of sticky situations quickly.

Recall

The limbic system gives us fair warning by letting us know if we have “been here before” and if that was classified as good or a bad event.

Intuition

The limbic system takes in a vast amount of information compared to the conscious mind and can alert us to something that the conscious mind had not noticed. This is what we usually think of as intuition.

Be SAFE & Certain

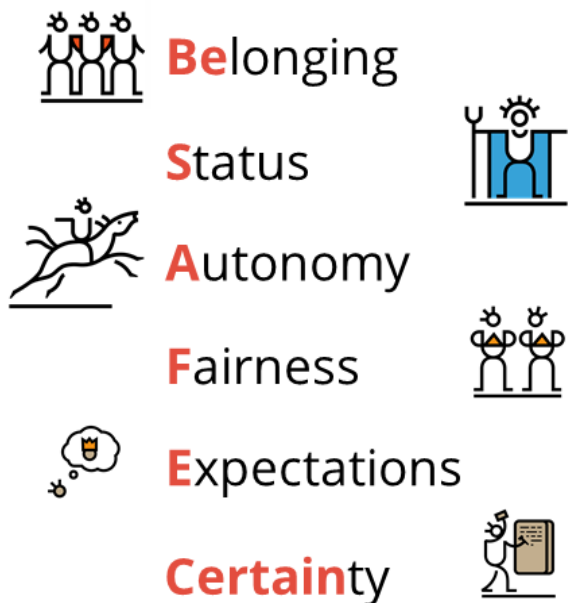
Once you understand the threat/reward system of the limbic system, you will start to notice just how powerful it is at driving your behaviour and the behaviour of those around you.

In its effort to keep you safe, the limbic system is constantly monitoring social interactions, watching for potential opportunities for and threats to your survival.

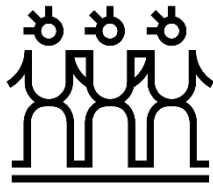
The more aware you become of your brain doing this, the more you can intercept your reactions. The Be SAFE & Certain model can help you understand where these reactions come from.

We have brought six social elements together in **The Be SAFE & Certain model** so you can see how and why your limbic system influences you.

Be SAFE & Certain



Belonging



A feeling of being a part of a group, team or tribe

With a **preference for Belonging** and to get a dopamine reward, it's likely that you will:

- create a sense of team spirit with your team
- invest in relationships
- prefer harmony and you will strive for peace in your team

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses.

When you **experience a threat to Belonging** you may feel:

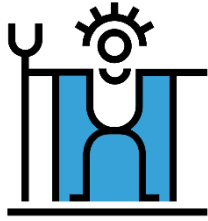
- rejected, abandoned or left out
- a need to get back into the tribe
- nervous around people who may have the power to reject or accept you

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses, so **to meet your need for Belonging**, your limbic system will encourage you to:

- distract yourself from entering a difficult conversation; this may lead to misunderstandings being left to fester
- avoid giving feedback or delivering bad news
- continue hanging around people who aren't necessarily good for you or stay with a project or at a company longer than you should; you feel that belonging to something unpleasant is better than not belonging at all
- be manipulated by someone influential; you might do something you don't feel good about if they imply that you will then belong to their club; your need to belong will overpower any rational sense you have about good or bad and you follow through with the hope that you will become a part of that tribe

If you notice yourself in any of these situations, this may be because your limbic system craves a feeling of belonging and it can run you in unhelpful ways.

Status



A feeling of importance relative to others, knowing our place and role in the group or tribe

With a **preference for Status** and to get a dopamine reward, it is likely that you will:

- want to clearly know your role and responsibilities - and help others know theirs
- you will be proud of your contributions and want to be seen as contributing successfully
- strive to do a good job
- aspire to a greater position

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses.

When you **experience a threat to Status** you may feel:

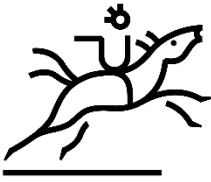
- competitive or envious of others and their position
- frustrated that others don't understand what you have contributed to a project
- that you are never enough, or you never have enough
- that you don't deserve your position

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses, so **to meet your need for Status**, your limbic system may encourage you to:

- unconsciously put others down in your need to have recognition
- try to do or own the right things that prove you deserve your position
- make decisions that show you belong in the position you are in

If you notice yourself in any of these situations, this may be because your limbic system craves a feeling of **Status** and it can run you in unhelpful ways.

Autonomy



A sense of freedom, independence and having a choice

With a **preference for Autonomy** and to get a dopamine reward, it is likely that you will:

- enjoy creating new ideas
- enjoy working on your own
- want to use your own ideas and create your own plans
- feel uncomfortable with people telling you what to do

The limbic system will indicate danger by using threat responses.

When experiencing **a threat to Autonomy** your limbic system will likely create an experience such as:

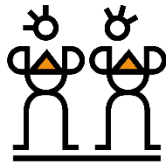
- feeling frustrated at having to align with others' ideas
- feeling annoyed when having to collaborate
- rarely be satisfied with other people's ideas and you might even find them to be substandard compared to your own
- having low respect for authority and rules

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses, so **to meet your need for Autonomy**, your limbic system may encourage you to:

- fight against people who try to impose their way or their ideas on you
- isolate yourself
- be stubborn

If you notice yourself in any of these situations, this may be because your limbic system craves a feeling of **Autonomy** and it can run you in unhelpful ways.

Fairness



A perception of fairness, equality or justice

With a **preference for Fairness** and to get a dopamine reward, it is likely that you will:

- feel good when a fair deal is struck between people
- try to ensure that everyone is treated fairly
- fight for justice or equality

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger or get back to safety by using threat responses.

Indications that you are **experiencing a threat to Fairness** include:

- wanting to get back at perpetrators of inequality and injustice
- feeling angry about the injustices in the world
- finding yourself regularly complaining about injustices, small or large
- feeling righteous
- feeling great when you do get some kind of revenge or "put someone in their place"

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses, so **to meet your need for Fairness**, your limbic system may encourage you to:

- fight for rights and continually try to solve problems of injustice (and potentially wear yourself out)
- risk your own well-being for the sake of more fairness in the world
- "build a case" (convincing yourself this person is wrong or bad) against someone because of how they treat others, then try to do something about it
- interpret something as unfair without real evidence

If you notice yourself in any of these situations, this may be because your limbic system craves a feeling of **Fairness** and it can run you in unhelpful ways

Expectations



Anticipating how things will turn out

With a **preference for Expectations** and to get a dopamine reward, it's likely that you will:

- love to dream about what could be
- enjoy creating goals and plans, even if you don't follow through
- buy a lot of books or clothes that don't currently fit
- thinking, "yes, I can do that!"

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses.

When experiencing a **threat to Expectations** you may feel:

- deep disappointment when something doesn't happen the way you expected
- frustration with outcomes of a project and blaming others for lack of performance, even though they didn't know about your expectations
- continual disappointment about your lack of progress, e.g., not getting a promotion, and you don't know why

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses, so **to meet your need for Expectations**, your limbic system may encourage you to:

- believe something (perhaps passionately) that isn't possible
- lash out at others because they didn't meet your expectations
- stop dreaming and only set low expectations so you can avoid future disappointment

If you notice yourself in any of these situations, this may be because your limbic system craves positive **Expectations** and it can run you in unhelpful ways.

Certainty



Feeling clear about where we are going and how we will get there

With a **preference for Certainty** and to get a reward, it's likely that you will:

- enjoy creating specific and detailed plans
- enjoy details
- like to share your plans with others
- want to have structure and specific steps to follow

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses.

You will notice **a threat to Certainty** when you:

- are destabilised when things don't go according to plan
- get confused and upset when there is a lack of certainty

The limbic system guides you to avoid danger by using threat responses, so **to meet your need for Certainty**, your limbic system may encourage you to:

- control other people
- micro-manage
- tell others what to do

If you notice yourself in any of these situations, this may be because your limbic system craves a feeling of **Certainty** and it can run you in unhelpful ways.

So what?

We move towards rewards and run from threats. We are drawn towards the person or situation that provoked a reward. If we feel threatened, the reaction is much stronger and quicker and we will attack or actively avoid whatever provoked the threat response. All of this happens unconsciously because the limbic system is always on and it is more attuned to potential threats than to potential rewards.

We often don't know why we like (or dislike) some things, people or situations. Now that you have knowledge of the limbic system, and with the language of the **Be SAFE & Certain model** you will start noticing that your reactions can usually be traced to a threat or reward response.

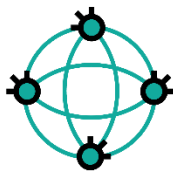
You will be drawn towards others if you feel that you belong to the same tribe, if they preserve or enhance your sense of status, you feel a sense of autonomy around them, if they are fair, they meet your expectations and/or they create a sense of certainty.

You will avoid or want to hurt people if you feel that you will be rejected, if they insult you, if they try to control you, if you feel they are unfair, if they don't meet expectations (they let you down), and/or they create uncertainty.

Things to keep in mind

As you have seen, the limbic system and your Be SAFE & Certain preferences play an important role in determining how you react to different situations. But there are some other factors to consider as you reflect on how they affect you and those around you.

Reactions are contagious



A complicating factor is that limbic reactions are contagious. When one person around you has a limbic reaction, it is likely that you too will react as will others involved in the situation.

In addition, the chemicals and feeling of that reaction will stay with you as you move to other situations where your behaviour could create reactions in others for completely unrelated reasons.

This is one of the reasons the limbic system is so powerful and can enhance or destroy team performance quite quickly. But we can't control other people or their behaviours; we can only control ourselves. The best way to contribute to good team performance is to learn to not let yourself get hooked into other people's reactions.

Limbic reactions are subjective

Your limbic system is subjective. It reacts to your interpretation of a situation and is coloured by your biases, beliefs and assumptions.

For example, we may perceive a situation as unfair because of what we believe is right or wrong. The effect on our brain and body is the same as a truly unfair scenario.

The brain wants dopamine

Your brain is full of dopamine receptors. It is always looking for opportunities to create dopamine to keep those receptors topped up.

When the receptors are empty, we are left with a limbic need for more. This can create cravings or lead to neediness.