“DEAR DICK” - DEEP CONNECTIONS

articles are reprinted from The Local Bulletin, Brisbane

Table of contents

Chapter 1. Self talk **2**

“How to talk to yourself” 3

“My original stuff”.....4

“Talking to the Inner Child” Part 1 5

“Talking to the Inner Child” Part 2 6

Chapter 2. Voice Dialogue **7**

“Who’s in charge here?”.....8

Chapter 3. Deep connections **9**

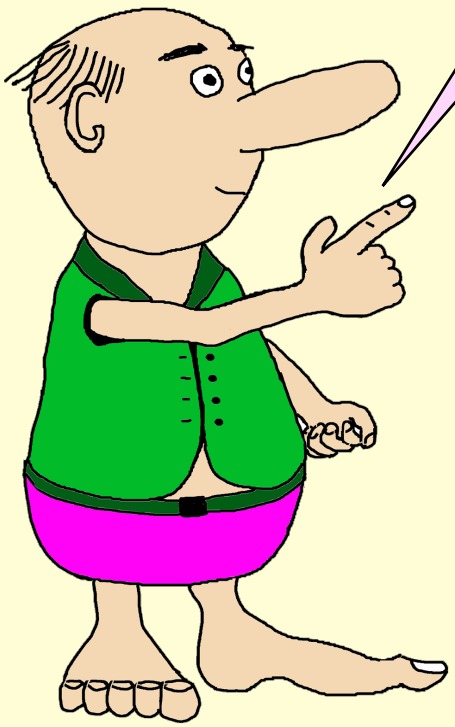
“Deep connection”.....10

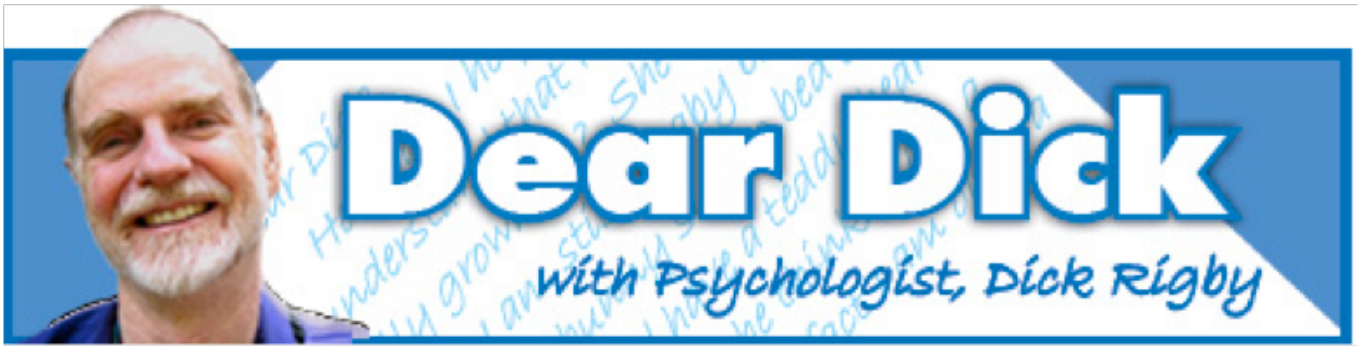
“In control of your body” 11

“Shifting the tough stuff” 12

“More about tough stuff”.....13

Chapter 1. Self talk





"How to talk to yourself"
October 2002

"Talking to yourself is the first sign of madness!" Or so they say. I think you would be mad if you didn't talk to yourself. We all do it any way. Some of us talk to ourselves silently and others mumble out loud while we are doing the gardening. However, talking to yourself can have some real benefits. There is a particular way that you can talk to yourself that can help improve your life and help with the healing process.

We are all made up of multiple parts. We have parts like "the Inner Critic", the Hurt Child", "the Fun Child", "the Aware Adult"; the list goes on. Many of our parts operate at a subconscious level. We may not understand them and sometimes we don't even know they exist.

When our life is going well, our various parts work in harmony. At other times, we can find ourselves doing things that we really don't want to do. These "compulsive behaviours" can get in the road of our health and happiness. An example might be lying awake worrying at 2.00 am when we know that we should be getting a good night's sleep.

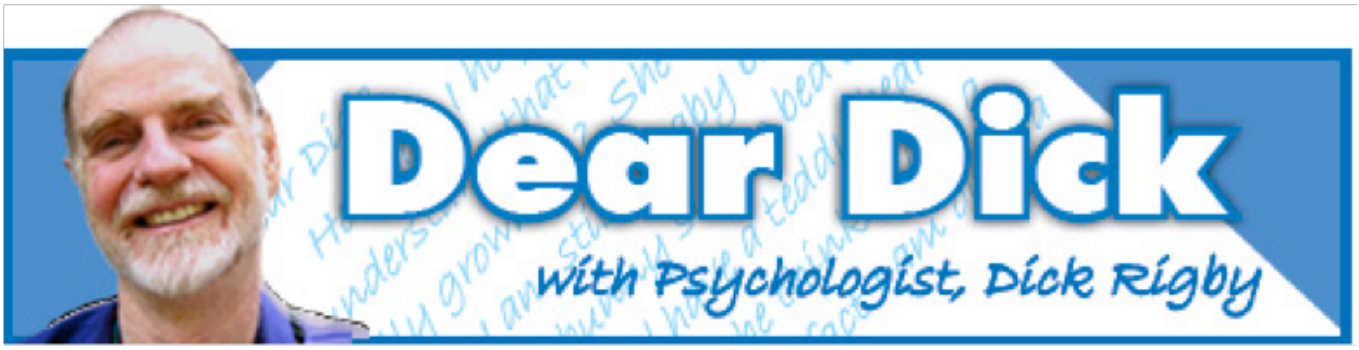
Jill had this problem. She suffered from insomnia. Her Aware Adult part knew that she should be sleeping. This rational logical part of her knew that she would not function well the next day if she did not get enough sleep. However, there was another part in charge of staying awake and worrying. This part we can call the "Worrying Child".

The Worrying Child knew that Jill had to keep planning for worst case scenarios just in case they happened. She would then be prepared. The Worrying Child was more powerful than the Aware Adult in this case, so Jill lay awake worrying night after night.

Jill saw a therapist who helped her to recognise that she needed to talk to herself in a helpful way. The therapist did some Voice Dialogue technique with her. Jill was able to separate the beliefs of the Worrying Child from that of the Aware Adult. Jill was able to have one part talk with the other.

I know that this sounds crazy. But it actually works. For some reason, nobody fully understands, Voice Dialogue does lead to people changing unwanted behaviour. It did in Jill's case. She still worries, but she learned to worry less. Most importantly, she now gets a good night sleep.

A victory for talking to yourself.



"My original stuff"
July 2003

I'll call him Zac (I can't reveal that his real name is Peter because of confidentiality). Anyhow, Zac was a very creative young man. He worked for a graphics design company and was highly paid. His work was excellent. His bosses told him as much.

But Zac lacked belief in himself. He couldn't accept compliments. He always found some way of disowning every compliment. When people told him that his work was very good, he said to himself that it was only because he was modifying some else's work. He did not believe that he could produce anything of quality that was his own idea.

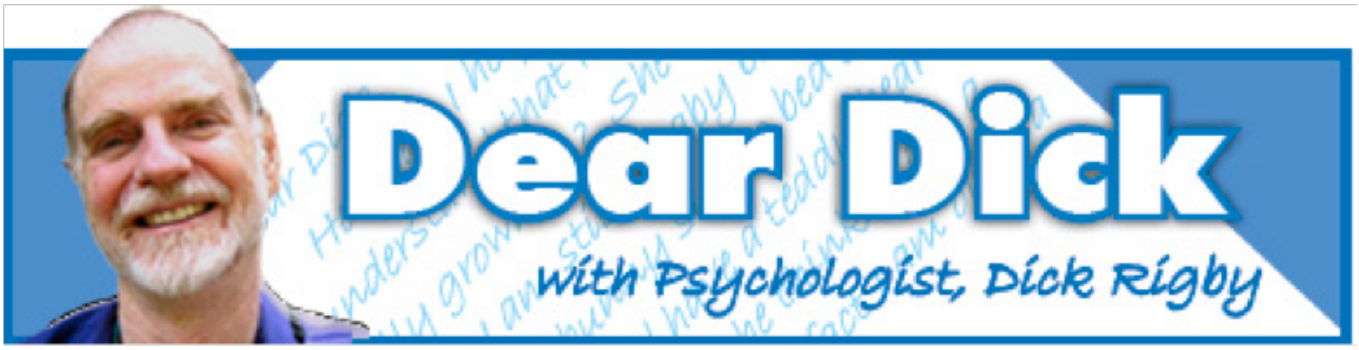
At night Zac played in a dance band. He was a good musician. He helped the band with arrangements of songs. (Always other people's songs of course). The band members were very pleased with what he produced. But Zac wasn't. He was not a happy Zac. He felt that everything that he produced was for other people. He didn't produce anything that was truly his own work.

He had a strong yearning to write an original song. But every time that he put pen to paper, his creative juices dried up. Zac was so frustrated with himself that he decided to get some help. He told his therapist about his lack of creativity. His therapist encouraged Zac to start looking at why he could not accept compliments. Those of you who regularly read my column will anticipate that Zac found out that he had an overactive Inner Critic. His Inner Critic was particularly critical if Zac tried to do anything original.

It didn't take much for Zac to work out that his Inner Critic behaved exactly as his father had towards him was he was growing up. Zac began to change his approach to writing a song. He stopped trying to compose a great song. He set himself the task of writing an "ok" song and coming back to it later on to improve on it.

He was able to accept that good song writers produce lots of not-so-good songs before they get one that works. When he removed the "perfectionist" demands of his Inner Critic, he was able to get his creative juices flowing.

So far he has written five ok songs and one good one. Everyone is pleased. He can now accept a compliment. Now that wasn't so hard, was it?



“Talking to the Inner Child” Part 1
December 2010

“It’s so frustrating – I just can’t get through to him” Jenny said to me about her husband Peter. I know how she feels. I find it difficult to try and talk to someone when they get all defensive. They wont listen to what I am saying, and what they say in reply just doesn’t connect with what I just said.

Jenny gave me an example of the conflict they had been having. She had asked Peter if they could have Christmas day lunch with her parents. Peter immediately got annoyed and defensive. “That’s right, your family always comes first” Peter snapped. Jenny knew to drop the issue, because to continue would have ended in a fruitless argument. What Peter said wasn’t either fair or reasonable. They had gone to his parents for Christmas day lunch last year. But Peter felt that what he said made perfect sense. He was in an “Inner Child” state. In this state he felt that he was the victim of unfair treatment.

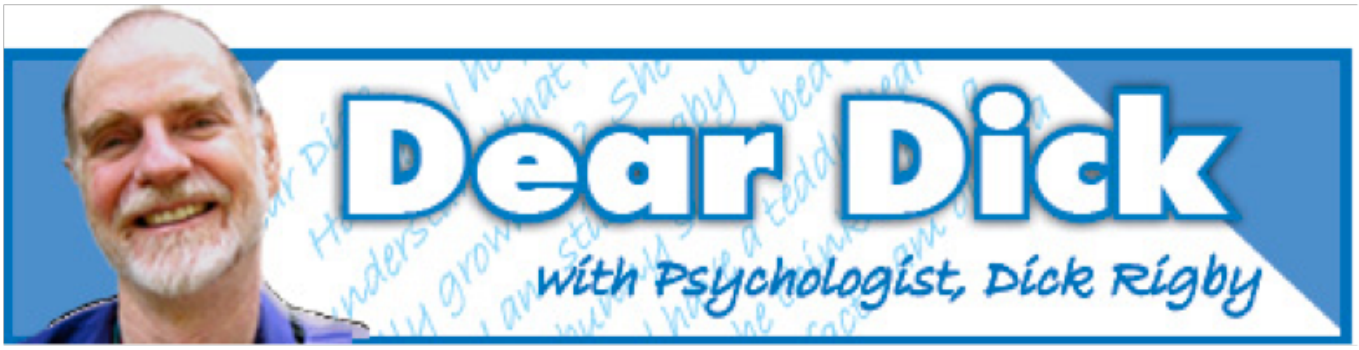
Let me explain what I mean by the “Inner Child” in this context. Peter did not connect with what Jenny was saying because he was in an altered state. His Inner Child believed that Jenny put her family ahead of him. There was nothing that Jenny could say to alter this belief because Peter would only hear the information that supported his belief. When this “Inner Child” part takes over, any chance of reasonable negotiation goes out the window.

The clues to Peter’s Inner Child behaviour were that he; interrupted Jenny before she could finish her sentence, he raised his voice, he distorted what she was saying so it sounded like she was attacking him. Finally, he accused her of not listening to him.

When Peter behaved like this he genuinely felt that Jenny was being unfair. He wasn’t trying to be difficult, but in his altered state he was not able to see that Jenny wasn’t treating him unfairly.

In the second session of counselling with me, Peter reacted the same way to me. He repeatedly misinterpreted what I said as attacking him. When he was in this altered state, there was nothing I could say that would make a difference. He stuck to his guns and argued that I had said something I hadn’t.

This seems like a no win situation, but there is a way out. I will let you know how this was resolved in the next exciting episode of “Dear Dick”.



"Talking to the Inner Child" Part 2
January 2011

In the last Dear Dick, I talked about the many arguments that Peter and Jenny were having. Peter would go into an altered state which I called his "Inner Child" state. He would then distort everything Jenny said to make it appear as an attack on him.

I asked Peter to be patient as we explored how he could change his reaction to perceived criticism. I suggested three ways that he could stay in a reasonable state of mind. He could:
1. develop strategies to help him identify the early signs of defensiveness,
2. recognise this defensiveness and then admit to it,
3. move out of the defensive "Inner Child" state back into the "Rational Adult" state.

The key to staying in the "Rational Adult" is to support the "Inner Child". Once Peter was able to recognise when he was beginning to get upset, he could then offer inner support and comfort. He could say to his Inner Child, "You don't need to be upset – she is not attacking you". As he calmed his Inner Child, he could then listen very carefully to what Jenny was saying. He could acknowledge her intent was not to attack, but rather to communicate. Only then could he reduce his defensive reaction.

This approach is very powerful and can work for all of us during a domestic disagreement. It's not easy, but when couples use this approach, disagreements are more easily resolved.

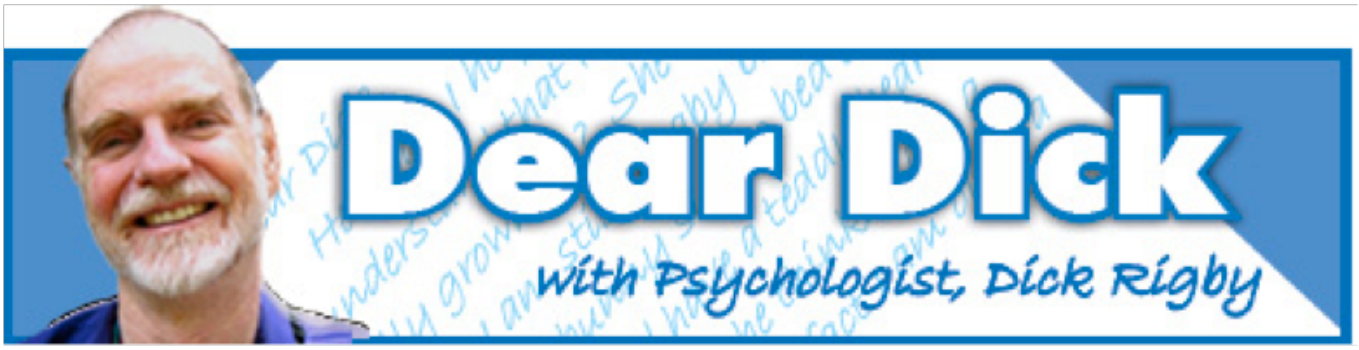
There is another issue. How could Jenny be sure that she was being reasonable herself? Jenny often faced a niggling doubt that it might be her that was being unreasonable. Jenny's self doubt sapped her ability to stick to her guns with Peter.

I helped Jenny look for signs of her being unreasonable. The clues include; frequent interruption before the other person has finished, expression of anger such as a raised voice, distortion of what the other person is saying.

Once Jenny was able to tick the check list to establish that she was being reasonable, she became more confident and assertive in her discussions with Peter. If he started to distort what she was saying, she was able to gently and firmly point this out. Peter and Jenny both used these tools to stay in their "adult state" at times of disagreement.

Couples that learn how to follow these rules have fewer conflicts and remain better connected. Of course, there are times when you are being criticized and you have to defend yourself. But that's a story for another day.

Chapter 2. Voice Dialogue



"Who's in charge here?"
May 2000

Many clients who seek help from a psychologist experience feelings that they don't want to feel. Maybe they are too anxious and they want to be more calm. Maybe they are too tense and they want to be more relaxed.

Sometimes a client might be behaving in a way that they don't want to. They might be too quick to lose their temper. Maybe they want to stop smoking. Maybe they want to lose weight. The list goes on and on.

A person comes to a psychologist to learn how to change these things. They have tried to stop many times, but just can't. So who's running the show?

Our sub conscious parts of course. We can't stop feeling or doing these things until something changes at the subconscious level. Put simply, getting control over these feelings or behaviours is about learning how to communicate and negotiate with these subconscious parts. That is the art of therapy.

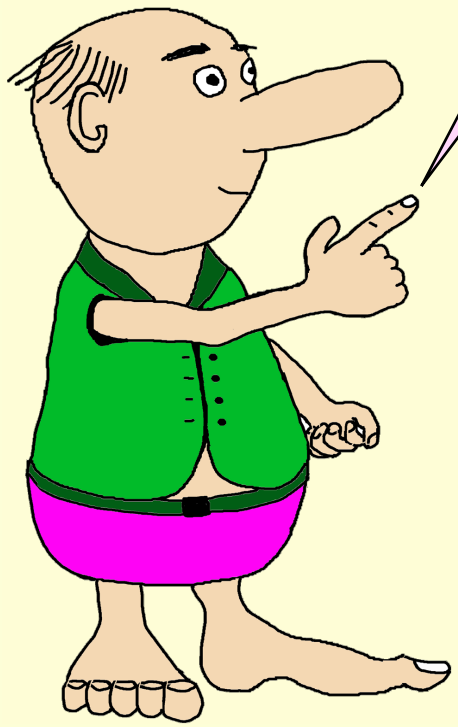
Let me share the case of Alice with you. Alice is 30 years old. She had been very over weight since she was a teenager. She had been on many diets over the years. She had lost weight on many occasions, but always put it back on again. A familiar story no doubt.

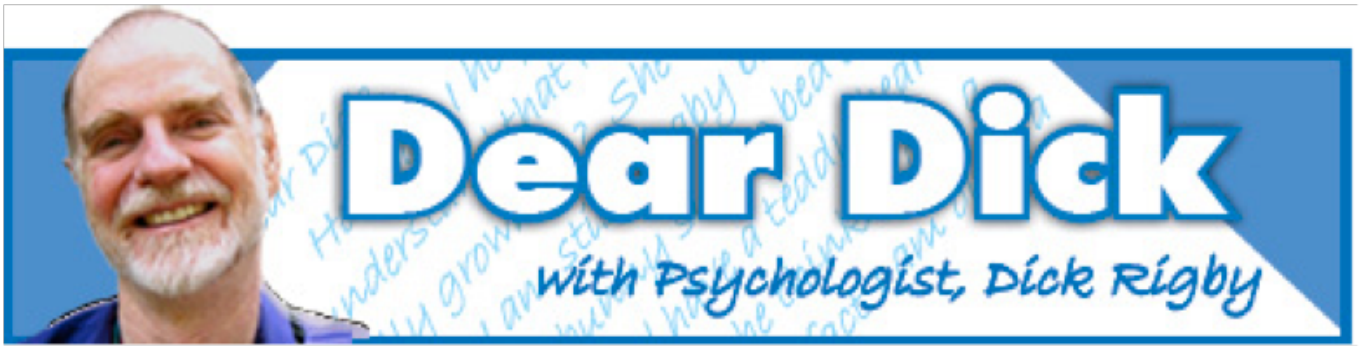
Alice's problem was one of communication. Communication within herself. Alice had a powerful subconscious part that believed that the extra weight kept her safe from being hurt. This subconscious part believed that, if she was fat, this would stop her getting into a relationship with a man and therefore she would not get hurt.

In therapy, she learned how to communicate with this subconscious part and start to negotiate change. In therapy, the subconscious part learned that she would be able to protect herself in other ways if she was slimmer. Once this happened, she began to lose weight.

Over many months, she was able to lose a considerable amount of weight and this time she kept it off. This success story was because Alice learned to negotiate with the part that was in charge

Chapter 3. Deep connections





“Deep connection”
September 2004

When it’s time to change an old habit, making that change can be very frustrating. We make our new resolution and then find it doesn’t stick. Even when we do make a change, it’s so easy to slip back into the old ways. Any one who has tried to loose weight knows what I am talking about.

Just what are those magic ingredients that leads to real lasting change? For a behaviour that is difficult to change, we have to find a way of connecting with the belief systems that run that unwanted behaviour. This is what I call a deep connection.

There are many ways of making such deep connections. Techniques that are useful include Hynosis, Voice Dialogue, EMDR and NLP. Let me illustrate one of these techniques with a case study. Laurel was a severely shy 25 years old. She was too shy to go out socially.

When she first came to see me, she was quite depressed about her situation. She could see that other people of her age were going out and having fun. She had tried to be brave and forced herself to go to a friends party. But she had a miserable time being the proverbial wall flower.

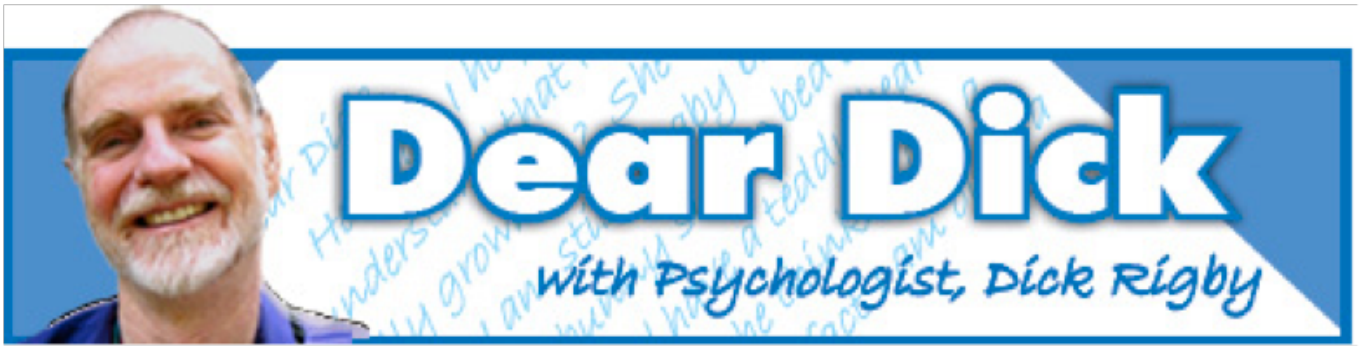
I used the Voice Dialogue technique to work with her. At first, she wasn’t able to tell me why she was so scared. So we went in search of the part that held the beliefs that made her so frightened. She was able to identify a part we called the “Frightened Child”.

So began several sessions of dialogue between her Adult Part and the Frightened Child. This separation of parts allowed for the deep connection which is the key to change. As the dialogue progressed, she was able to identify the hidden beliefs that the Frightened Child held. One of the beliefs was that people would find her empty and boring.

Her Adult Part was able to find lots of evidence that she was a complex and interesting person. Her Adult was able to dialogue this information with the Frightened Child. This led to a marked reduction in the social fear that she had suffered from.

Now this all sounds a bit way out and alternative. But it works. We don’t know why Voice Dialogue works. Somehow the technique allows us to make deep connections that we can’t make in ordinary conversation. It is a way of unlocking the door to a hidden pathway that leads to lasting change.

Yes, it can even lead to weight loss.



"In control of your body"
July 2004

How many times do we hear "If you don't look after yourself, you will get sick". Well it's true. If we are stressed and our eating patterns are poor, our immune system is lowered and we are more prone to get sick. So what's new. You already knew that.

What's new is the subtle stuff. There are many ways that our subconscious mind can sabotage our health. For instance, the workaholic pushes himself (or herself) to the point of exhaustion. This may be done in order to be acceptable or "good enough" in the eyes of others. Too much stress leads to low immune system, leads to poor health.

In some people, the subconscious mind may make sure we get sick in order to get attention. Lyn was a sickly child. Her mother looked after her well when she was sick. The problem arose when Lyn was well. Then her mother was too busy to spend time with Lyn. At a very young age, she learned that being sick was associated with getting attention.

The mould was set in her childhood. When Lyn turned 30, she was still prone to frequent illnesses. When she got sick, her husband paid her attention. When Lyn was well, her husband was too busy with other things. Lyn married her mother. It was all in Lyn's subconscious.

Lyn did the rounds of the doctors and none could help because the heart of the problem was not medical. It wasn't until Lyn received psychological help that she started to become aware of her patterns. Then she started to get control over her health.

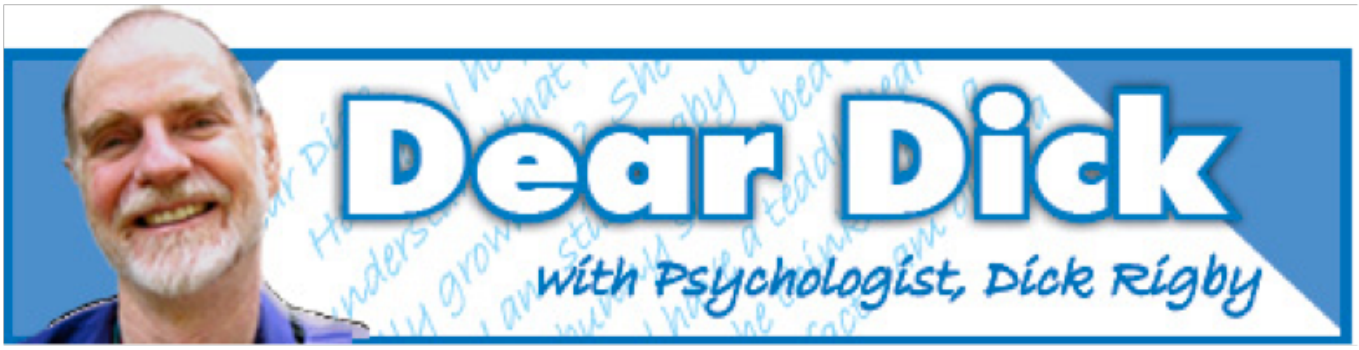
Since Lyn has been gaining insight, her health has steadily been improving. She is still getting help from her dietician and her GP, and now their help is effective because Lyn is no longer sabotaging her health.

Some people get really upset if you suggest that their illness is all in the mind. When Lyn first heard that her condion could be partly psychosomatic, she was really offended and felt that people were accusing her of faking it.

She wasn't. The illnesses that Lyn had were real. She got infections, she had asthma, she had very painful periods. All these conditions were real.

What she hadn't reaLyned was that by changing her psychology, she could improve the way that her body went about healing itself.

Staying fit and healthy is not just about doing the right things, it is also about having the motivation to do the right things.



"Shifting the tough stuff"
June 2007

It's always been a challenge to psychologists to figure out how to shift the "tough stuff". I call the tough stuff our obsessional thoughts, unwanted fears, addictions, depression etc etc. Most of us have some of these.

Hundreds of techniques have been tried over the years with varying degrees of success. Psychoanalysis started out with Freud. It's still used by some psychologists, but its slow. There is good old CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy). This is widely used by psychologists today. It think it is a very effective technique, but I have not found it very useful in shifting the tough stuff.

Then there are lots of techniques where the therapist waves a magic wand. These include hypnosis, Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and EMDR (eye movement technique). These are good at shifting the tough stuff, but they have their limitations.

Then there are the cathartic techniques involving emotional release including; shouting, primal screams, bashing cushions and rebirthing. These were very popular in the 1970's and 80's. They are not so popular now days. I think it is because the same results can be achieved in much more gentle ways – and it's easier on the ears!

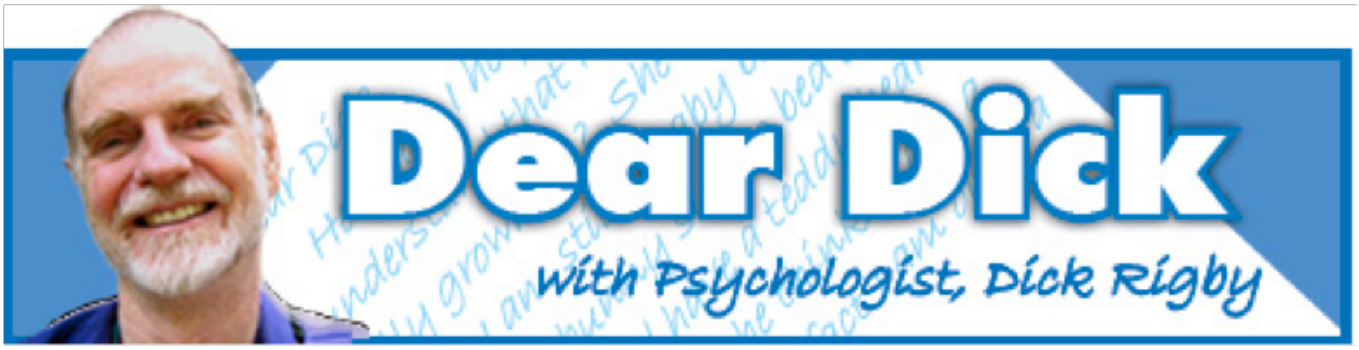
There is another group of therapies which includes Gestalt, psychodrama, Voice Dialogue. These are also quite effective in shifting deep stuff.

In order to shift the tough stuff, we need to reach down deeply enough to where the tough stuff lives. The techniques that I find most effective in getting to these deep levels are the energy techniques. Last year you may have read my article discussing EMT (Emotional Freedom Technique). This is where a client taps with his finger tips on certain parts of his body while repeating the statement that the therapist is making.

The reason I think EFT is so effective in shifting the tough stuff is that it works with the energy systems of the body in a very physical way. Also it is effective because the therapist can be quite directive in guiding the client towards a desired outcome.

But with all therapies, their effectiveness depends on the therapists intention. If the therapist is coming from a loving and giving position, the therapy will be much more effective than a therapist who is applying a technique in a mechanical way.

The therapist needs two things to help shift the tough stuff; the right technique and a loving supportive attitude.



"More about tough stuff"
August 2007

I have received a lot of positive feedback on my article called "Shifting the tough stuff", which appeared in the June edition of the Local Bulletin. I mentioned there that the tough stuff is our obsessional thoughts, unwanted fears, addictions, depression etc.

Let me tell you a story about Betty. Betty is now 73 years old and she is fairly set in her ways. She has been a creature of habit for many years now. Her husband, John died six years ago and Betty found it difficult to adjust. She never learned to drive and always relied on John to drive her places and help her with other things.

The last person that Betty wanted to see was a psychologist. She didn't really believe in all this pampering and indulgence. She was of the school that, if life dealt you a hard blow, you just took it, and got on with the job.

But then strange things started to happen to Betty. Every time she left her home she would get a very strong and uncomfortable feeling of dread. She loved the social contact at her social club, yet this feeling of dread was even making it hard for her to get down to the club.

She tried all the techniques that she knew about ignoring the feelings and just getting on with it. She told herself "Don't be so silly". But the feelings of dread just didn't go away.

Eventually a dear friend of hers recommended that she see a psychologist. She picked a nice sounding psychologist (Louise) from the phone book and rang to make an appointment. When she met Louise, Betty apologized over and over for wasting Louise's time.

Then it got down to tin tacks. Louise took a history and found that there had been a gradual build up of fear in Betty following John's death. The feelings of dread kept getting worse. Louise used Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) and started to work through the layers of Betty's fears.

Louise kept in mind that, in some ways Betty was a very competent women, and in other ways she was quite dependent. Louise worked at building on Betty's strengths. The tapping reinforced Betty's self confidence, and it also gave her a technique to take away and use next time the feelings of dread struck.

Betty made a full recovery. What was impossible "tough stuff" just dissolved, using a combination of caring therapy, the right technique and a sound knowledge of what to do.