

AMYGDALA THREAT RESPONSES

When the amygdala goes into overdrive, it activates the limbic area of the brain, which stores all of our old memories.

Emotional threats send us into states of fear. In addition to picking up nonverbal threats, we can also be threatened by the power of one word. Words—especially those spoken by leaders in positions of authority—carry greater weight in our minds than words spoken by those in less power.

Once we have a bad experience and begin to become distrustful of someone, that notion becomes embedded in our brain and can be difficult to dislodge. Unless we learn to hit those pause and rewind buttons to review exactly what happened, we can find ourselves in a stressful situation.

The Power of One Word



Tone
Humiliation
Rejection
Exclusion
Anger
Territoriality
Status

The promising news is that if we learn to identify the signs of developing distrust before the amygdala is triggered, we can activate the higher-level brain functions in the executive brain, where empathy, judgment, and our more strategic social skills reside. When we learn to down-regulate, or reduce, the effects of fear, we can up-regulate, or increase, the impact of the executive brain.

This helps us form social connections, strengthening our ability to bond with others instead of withdrawing from them. In fact, researchers have found that by learning to read the signals sent by the amygdala and head them off, we become far more effective at embracing trust—and we become more conversationally intelligent.

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Reading the signals:

- Noticing how we react to threats – noticing if we go into ‘flight, fight, freeze or appease’
- Labeling our reaction as normal
- Noticing if we always choose the same reaction to threat (flight, fight, freeze or appease) and noticing how much the threat impacts us
- Choosing an alternative way to react at the moment of contact – (breathe in, breathe out; choose to go into ‘discovery conversations’; choose to share how you are feeling at the moment; choose to stay calm and do nothing)
- Becoming more aware of our responses and realizing we can override our emotions and can ‘shift’ into other responses. We are building our Third Eye capabilities- that is, we perceive what may happen before it happens and we interrupt that pattern.
- Transforming fear into trust is the heart of Conversational Intelligence.



Happily, strong bonds of trust serve up a cocktail of the brain’s feel-good natural chemicals like oxytocin, dopamine, and serotonin. Put in practical terms, bonds of trust generate conversational cocktails that change neurochemistry and trigger the trust network in our brains.

When we trust, we feel better and more positive. When we experience high levels of trust, we feel empowered to work out issues and challenges, open ourselves to new experiences, and link with others in a way that is sometimes called synchronicity.