“If you always get what you’ve always got, you’ll always do what you’ve
 always done”[[1]](#footnote-1) or why therapy can be helpful.

What is it about therapy that can enable a change in our attitudes and behaviour? As I mentioned in the previous article we form our understanding of the world and our place in it *in relation to* other people. As well as beliefs developed in response to our own experiencing such as “I like the feeling of being in water”, “I do not like spiky plants under my bare feet”, we internalise other people’s value judgements about us and our way of being, and incorporate them in to our internal sense of ourselves, as *if* they were our own.

The boy then believes that it his own experience that leads him to look unfavourably on boys who cry, the girl that she dislikes girls who climb trees because they are “unladylike”. (see article “If you always do what you”)

In the same way, a child who learns that any time they express an opinion or talk about how they feel they will be humiliated or shut down will soon learn to stop. A child who learns that when they get upset or angry the adults around them withdraw and punish them using silent sulking will soon learn to adapt their behaviour to prevent this.

Whilst humans are very adept at modifying behaviour we are nowhere near as good at stopping the experiencing of our emotions.

We may be able to prevent ourselves from *acting* in a way that gives away our feelings but the feelings themselves do not then disappear. The feeling may be buried and “forgotten” but like a pressure cooker each new secret feeling gets added to the pot until the pressure gets too much and some relief is needed. This often comes in the form of inappropriately expressed anger such as road rage or is internalised and “soothed” by methods such as the use of drugs, alcohol, sex, gambling, self-injury, over exercising, disordered eating, the list goes on. Shame and guilt get added on to the initial feeling, *I shouldn’t feel like/think like this, I am bad*, when relief is sought by the coping strategies mentioned further shame and guilt are added *I am weak/other people don’t do this/I am bad.*

So much dis-ease is set up *in relation to*, with us being told what we should and shouldn’t feel or think. A strong therapeutic relationship, where the therapist works to understand the world from the clients point of reference and accept that this is *their* experience of *reality*, can offer the space to revaluate difficulties and find a way forward that has meaning *for them*.

Person-Centred Approach therapy is not about the therapist deciding what is *wrong* with the client and working towards “fixing” the problem; the therapist works to come alongside their client and accompanies them on their personal journey, providing a safe non-judgmental environment in which the client can explore, set and achieve their own goals.

1. Judy Knight [↑](#footnote-ref-1)