

ClearMinds



Issue 2

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Peek Inside



What have we been up to? Webinars + continus training.



Did You Know? Addiction can rewire the brain's reward system.



Separation Anxiety – Learning to Say Goodbye



Why “Don’t Go To Bed Angry” Could Be Harmful Relationship Advice



Validating, Not Fixing: Helping Young Children Feel Seen and Understood



What Have We Been Up To?

It's been a meaningful season of learning and connection here at ClearMinds, and we're excited to share some recent highlights from our growing community.

October mental health awareness month was the month of a series of webinars :

In celebration of Mental Health Awareness Month, Clearminds hosted a series of free community webinars dedicated to promoting awareness and deepening understanding of key psychological topics.

The first session, presented by **Dr. Nardus Saayman**, explored **Neurodiversity**, offering valuable insight into the richness of cognitive diversity and the importance of inclusion. The second, led by **Yassine Tayi**, focused on **Separation Anxiety**, examining the emotional foundations of attachment and the experience of distance for both children and adults. The third and final webinar, to be held at the end of the month and presented by **Sara Caroppo**, will address **Enmeshment**, shedding light on how blurred emotional boundaries can affect relationships and personal growth.

Together, these events highlight Clearminds' ongoing commitment to making mental health education accessible, engaging, and meaningful for the wider community.



EMDR TRAINING IN PARIS COMPLEXE TRAUMA Yassine Tayi Msc



Earlier this month, Yassine Tayi completed the EMDR Level 2 training in Paris with Ludwig Comil, one of Francine Shapiro's students. This advanced training focused on working with complex trauma, childhood neglect, chronic PTSD, and attachment-related issues, while integrating EMDR with dissociative parts work. It also explored applications for depression, phobias, and OCD, deepening both clinical formulation and treatment strategies to support clients with more complex presentations.

Did You Know? Addiction can rewire the brain's reward system.

Have you ever wondered why it's so hard to "just stop" an addictive behaviour, even when someone really wants to?.



Dure Najaf , Msc

The Brain's Built-In Motivation System. Our brains are wired to seek out things that keep us alive focussing on essentials like food, connection, comfort, achievement. When we do something enjoyable, the brain releases dopamine, a neurotransmitter that signals "that felt good, do it again." Dopamine doesn't simply create pleasure; it teaches the brain which actions are worth repeating. In a healthy brain, dopamine levels rise in response to natural rewards, such as a good meal, laughter with friends, or completing a goal, and then return to baseline. This ebb and flow helps us stay motivated, balanced, and connected to everyday sources of joy.

What Happens During Addiction

When someone repeatedly uses a substance such as alcohol, nicotine, or drugs, or engages in an addictive behaviour like gambling, this natural system becomes overstimulated. Substances can release **up to 10 times more dopamine** than natural rewards. At first, that rush feels powerful, but over time, the brain adapts. To protect itself from constant overstimulation, it **downregulates dopamine receptors** and reduces its own natural dopamine production. The result? Every day experiences that once felt satisfying, spending time with family, listening to music, or pursuing hobbies, begin to feel flat or meaningless.

This phenomenon is sometimes called "**the hijacked brain.**" The reward system starts to prioritise substance over everything else. The brain learns: nothing feels as rewarding as the drug. This isn't a conscious choice; it's a neurological shift that makes the person crave the substance just to feel "normal."



The Vicious Cycle of Diminishing Reward

Because natural pleasures no longer produce the same dopamine response, the person may use even more of the substance to chase the original high. But the more they use, the more the brain downregulates dopamine. It's a loop that feeds itself; not out of pleasure, but out of a desperate attempt to escape discomfort or emotional emptiness. This explains why people in recovery often say they feel "numb" or unmotivated in early sobriety. Their brains are recalibrating. It takes time, sometimes months, for the reward system to rebuild its sensitivity and for natural sources of joy to feel meaningful again.

Hope and Healing: The Brain Can Rewire

The encouraging news is that the brain is remarkably plastic it can heal and form new pathways. With sustained recovery, therapy, and healthy routines, dopamine systems begin to rebalance. Small, consistent positive experiences like exercise, sleep, connection, creative activities, and mindfulness gradually retrain the brain to produce and respond to dopamine naturally. The process may be slow, but every small step literally reshapes neural circuits toward wellness.



The Role of Therapy and Support

From a clinical psychology perspective, recovery isn't just about stopping the substance; it's about re-training the reward system and developing new coping mechanisms. Therapies such as EMDR, Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT), Motivational Interviewing (MI), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) help individuals understand triggers, strengthen self-regulation, and reconnect with meaningful activities.

Equally important is connection; relationships and social belonging stimulate the same brain areas as chemical rewards. Human warmth, empathy, and shared purpose are some of the most powerful dopamine boosters we have.



Addiction changes the brain, but it doesn't destroy its capacity for joy. With time and the right support, the same system that once fuelled addiction can be rewired toward recovery, resilience, and genuine fulfilment.



Separation Anxiety – Learning to Say Goodbye

The delay and space between a need, and how (and when) it will be met—this is what we may call the first separation.



By Yassine Tayi, MSc

The Delays That Teach Trust

Separation doesn't start the day the parent leaves for work — it starts much earlier, in those tiny gaps between a child's cry and the parent's response. These delays are not harmful; they're how the child learns that someone will come. That trust becomes the foundation of attachment.

As the child grows, parents can't always be there immediately — and that's a good thing. Through these small absences, the child begins to build an internal image of the parent: "Even when I don't see them, they exist." This is the beginning of object permanence, and it's the first step towards feeling safe in the world.

Finding Comfort in What's Left Behind

When the parent isn't available, the child learns to soothe themselves. Sometimes it's the thumb, sometimes a blanket — later, it becomes what Winnicott called a transitional object. It's not "just a toy"; it's something that carries the trace of comfort, the feeling of being held.

Through it, children start to discover that comfort can be recalled. They can sleep through the night with their object instead of needing the parent's presence. They can play in another room while the parent cooks, still connected in some way.

The Play of Absence

Games like peekaboo or hide and seek aren't just for fun — they're early exercises in separation. In peekaboo, the baby learns that even when something disappears, it can come back. Later, hide and seek becomes a way to transform something once scary into something bearable, even joyful.

The game works because it has rules — a beginning and an end. If the parent never hides, there's no game. But if they hide too far, or for too long, the game stops being fun. That's a good metaphor for life: children need to face tolerable doses of discomfort, not overwhelming ones.

For Parents Too

It's not only about the child — parents also have to learn to tolerate their child's discomfort without rushing to fix it.

That doesn't mean being absent or cold. It means being present — available, calm, containing the child's emotion instead of immediately removing it.

Because part of growing up will hurt. A child will one day meet someone who's unkind, be left out, get disappointed. We can't stop that from happening — and maybe we shouldn't. No one here has had a perfect life, or perfect parents. The perfect parent doesn't exist.

The good-enough parent is the objective— the one who stays, listens, and holds space for what hurts. Interact, agree to disagree, but still shows up.

When It Becomes More Than a Phase

It's normal for young children to cry when saying goodbye. Separation anxiety usually appears around 8 months, peaks between 10 and 18 months, and fades around 2 years.

It becomes something to look closer at when the fear is excessive for the child's age, lasts for months, or starts interfering with their daily life — for instance, when they refuse to go to school or show physical signs of distress. In such cases, it's not about "spoiled" children, but about a system that got stuck somewhere between fear and reassurance. Therapy can help both the child and parents rebuild that bridge.

In the End

Separation is not just about absence. It's the space where we get to be creative. Every goodbye, every reunion, teaches the child that safety can exist even when love isn't visible. And for parents, it's a reminder that letting go — even a little — is part of love too.

And for adults, separation anxiety can still echo quietly in the background.

It can appear in our relationships, in the fear of being left, or in the need to constantly stay connected. Sometimes it hides behind jealousy, control, or difficulty trusting. Often, it's not about the present moment at all, but an old echo — the memory of a time when absence felt unbearable, when reassurance came too late, or not enough.



Recognising it is not about blame; it's about understanding the link between what once was and what still moves within us — and perhaps, finally, learning to say goodbye without fear.

Why “Don’t Go To Bed Angry” Could Be Harmful Relationship Advice

Not every storm needs to be weathered in one night – sometimes the most loving choice is to rest and return.



Moni ElRamlawy, M.A.

One of the common things I hear among couples I work with is how no matter what they go through, they never go to bed angry with one another. When I ask them “how does it feel as they wake up”, here are some of the answers I get – uncomfortable, confused, resentful, unheard, unseen, misunderstood, dismissed, etc.

The phrase “Don’t go to bed angry” is a widely cited piece of relationship advice that has been passed down through generations. It sounds wise, but it often creates more pressure than peace. I heard it myself and followed it by heart. It never sat well with me, and after going through it, studying couples therapy, and working with couples from many walks in life, here is why it doesn’t work!

- **Pressure instead of repair:** Forcing a resolution at night when you’re both emotionally flooded, triggered, and exhausted will only lead to more escalation, not less.
- **Rest matters:** When you get sufficient sleep when your mind and body need it, you can regulate your emotions better and therefore, better able to express your emotions and more open to receive from your partner.
- **Surface-fix:** When you force a “resolution” late at night when you’re exhausted, you rush into “making up” which is often a surface-fix rather than a real repair that addresses your underlying emotions and needs.

What to do instead?

- **Communicate care while setting a boundary:** It’s okay to say, “I love you and I really want us to find a way through this, but we are both tired and emotional, so I want us to continue when we are calmer, how about we get some sleep and revisit this tomorrow?”

This gives your partner reassurance that you’re not leaving the conversation because you don’t care, but because you’re protecting your relationship.

- **Set a time to revisit:** Ask your partner when a good time for them would be to talk the next day – after work tomorrow over coffee/dinner? Agree on a time.
- **Regulate first, then sleep:** Take time to calm down your nervous system individually before going to sleep. Try journaling, deep breathing, or having a short walk.

What would happen if, instead of forcing a late-night resolution, you trusted that your relationship is strong enough to hold the tension until tomorrow?

The goal is not to repair quickly or to “never go to bed angry”, it’s to make sure repair and understanding happens in a safe way.



Love isn't measured by how quickly you resolve a fight,
but by how gently you find your way back to each other.



Validating, Not Fixing: Helping Young Children Feel Seen and Understood

Children rely on adults in their life to help them make sense of what they are feeling, and why.



Dr. Dalea Alawar, Psy.D.

When a child cries or gets frustrated, an adult can be quick to say, “Don’t be sad” or “It’s not a big deal”, in a caring attempt to make the child’s uncomfortable feeling go away. Despite the good intention, in the long run, this teaches the child that uncomfortable emotions should be avoided or suppressed. A helpful approach would be to validate the child’s emotions. This helps the child feel understood and it communicates that it is okay to experience any emotion.

What is validation? It is the act of acknowledging a child’s emotional experience and allowing it to occur without judging it or needing to change it. It can sound like, “You are sad that your toy broke because you really like this toy”, or “You wanted to keep playing and it’s hard to stop when you are having fun”. You are not trying to fix

the situation; you are simply showing the child that their emotions make sense.

Why is this important? For children, emotions feel confusing and often overwhelming. They rely on adults in their life to help them make sense of what they are feeling, and why. When an adult can validate their emotional experience, the child learns that emotions are safe to experience, even if they are uncomfortable. Over time, this teaches them how to regulate their own emotions, it builds a sense of trust between child and adult, and it allows for self-worth to build.

What if they act in inappropriate ways when expressing an emotion? For example, the child who hits someone when they are angry. Validating an emotion does not mean accepting a behavior. Children are learning how to appropriately express their emotions, and so they need guidance on how to do so. In this situation, a helpful statement can be, “It is okay to feel angry because he took your toy, but it is not okay to hit him. Let us find another way to express your anger”. After setting the limit, guide the child toward safer alternatives, like squeezing a pillow, stomping their feet, or using words. Once the child has calmed, revisit what happened: help them name the feeling, understand what triggered it, and practice expressing it differently next time.

How to Practice Validation

- Pause before reacting. Take a moment before correcting a behavior or trying to solve the problem. This allows you to try to understand what happened and why the child is feeling a certain way so you can effectively validate.
- Name the feeling. Use simple language: "You look disappointed," or "You seem angry that it's bedtime."
- Show calm presence. Children co-regulate through your tone, body language, and steady attention (and not so much your words!). Your calm helps them find theirs.
- Resist the urge to distract. Distraction can temporarily stop a tantrum, but it doesn't teach understanding. Instead, stay with the feeling until it naturally settles.
- Offer comfort, not correction. A hug, gentle touch, or quiet reassurance tells the child that emotions can be safely felt and soothed.



What is the Long-Term Impact of Validation?

Children who grow up feeling validated develop a stronger emotional awareness and empathy towards themselves and others. They learn to identify what they feel, express it appropriately, and extend the same understanding to others. This allows for healthy and fulfilling relationships with themselves and with others.

Of course, to genuinely teach a child that all feelings are welcome, the adult must believe it themselves! This is an opportunity for the adult to do their own work regarding their relationship to their feelings, which can effectively be done in the context of individual therapy.

To genuinely teach a child that all feelings are welcome, the adult must believe it themselves.



Quiz Time : Myth or Fact ?

Take a guess (Myth or Fact)

Test your psychology knowledge!

EMDR is a form of hypnosis.

☛ *Myth. EMDR keeps you fully awake and aware; it relies on bilateral stimulation (eye movements, tapping, or sounds), not hypnosis.*

EMDR can help with trauma, anxiety, and phobias.

☛ *Fact. EMDR was first designed for trauma, but research now shows it's effective for anxiety, depression, phobias, and even grief.*

You must talk about every detail of your trauma during EMDR.

☛ *Myth. Unlike traditional talk therapy, EMDR doesn't require sharing all the details – processing can happen internally.*

EMDR changes how the brain stores distressing memories.

☛ *Fact. It helps the brain reprocess traumatic memories so they lose their emotional intensity.*

EMDR is only for adults.

☛ *Myth. EMDR can be adapted for children using storytelling, drawings, or play – with gentle bilateral stimulation.*

You can process trauma too quickly with EMDR.

☛ *Myth. A trained therapist always works through a stabilisation phase first to ensure safety before reprocessing.*



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