

Drives & feelings

We all have *drives* that come from our body and our brains instinctively in response to things that happen inside us and things going on around us. For example when someone approaches us we instinctively, unconsciously or semi-consciously, assess that person's behaviour, causing drives that lead us to respond in a particular way, for example (1):

- approaching the person with a smile, or,
- backing off and running away

Or an internal example of a drive coming from your body would be that when you eat something, your body instinctively and unconsciously 'responds' to this in a certain way, for example (2):

- stimulating stomach digestion, then passing food on into the small intestine for absorption of nutrients, or,
- rejecting the food as toxic and stimulating a vomit response

Such drives are often associated with strong *emotional or physical feelings*, which bring the situation to the person's conscious attention. This is because feelings are essentially a *signalling system*. They tell the brain to pay attention to the things that are going on inside or around about you. So in our example (1):

- the feeling associated may be one of anticipation of a pleasurable chat with the other person
- or a feeling of terror or fear, expecting threat from the other person

In example (2):

- the feeling may be of pleasurable taste, comfort and satisfaction
- or a feeling of disgust, nausea and abdominal pain

So in general, *vulnerable or negative* physical feelings (e.g. pain, cold, hunger) and emotional feelings (e.g. anxiety, anger, fear) *reflect unmet core needs*. These usually motivate an individual to keep trying to find a better way to meet that need. *Safe or positive* physical feelings (e.g. fullness, comfort, warmth) and emotional feelings (e.g. calm, confidence, excitement) reflect met needs. These usually motivate efforts to keep doing things the same, because it's usually working out OK. So the drives and feelings are part of a signalling system that can help people respond to things going on inside or around them.

Rapid response feelings system

This signalling system is great when it is working well, but it is just a rapid response system, that can be a bit off the mark, or sometimes even completely misleading.

If it works well, you instinctively respond in a way that does a reasonable job of meeting your needs. For example (1):

- you have a nice chat with someone who is friendly, meeting your need for nurturance and acceptance
- you run away from someone who is dangerous, meeting your need to be safe

Or in example (2):

- you enjoy eating some food that is, meeting your need for nutrition & nurturance
- you expel food from your insides that is toxic, meeting your need for safety

Unfortunately the feeling system can get **mis-calibrated** and the feelings can start misleading you, making you respond in ways that don't work out well.

For example (1):

- you feel fear and run away, when it was just a fear of being mistreated and you have missed out on a nice chat and your fear of people is reinforced and you don't get a chance to find this out

Or:

- you anticipate a nice chat but in fact the person criticises you unfairly and therefore it wasn't true that you should anticipate something positive coming from approaching them and you lose confidence in your judgement and fear people more

Re-calibrating the feelings system with Therapy

The **good news** is the feelings system can be **re-calibrated with your big brain!** In the short-term, you can't stop the initial feeling that gets fired out by your rapid response system, but over-time you can change it. If you learn to notice these feelings at a conscious level and notice your instinctive drive to respond a certain way, then your conscious brain can start to take control. You can weigh up the evidence in the situation you are in, draw on past experience and can decide if your feelings are helping you to respond to yourself or other people in a way that meets your needs, or not.

The tough part is you still feel the uncomfortable or negative feeling in the short-term, but gradually as you respond differently to it, you are **re-training your brain** not to send you those messages so often or so strongly. You start to learn that many fears that are

accompanied by anxiety or uncomfortable feelings (signals), are actually not based on reality, and so the fear and the feelings reduce.

So in summary:

