

A Different Relationship with the Same Person

Preview extract from a book in development

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Chapter 4: Theory of Change
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Author's introduction

This passage introduces how I'm thinking about change in Intrapersonal Relational Psychotherapy, the model I'm developing and writing about.

MANUSCRIPT EXTRACT

The previous chapter described distress as intrapersonal warfare: the person caught in a relationship with themselves that wounds, withholds, condemns or abandons. It considered how knowledge of our vulnerabilities can become ammunition against us, and how the attempt to escape that internal battle can shape the decisions we make outside it. The question now is what makes a different relationship possible. How does a person come to stand beside themselves when they have become accustomed to standing against themselves?

Intrapersonal Relational Psychotherapy understands constructive psychological change as a transformation in how a person knows, treats and directs themselves. A person may begin to recognise a need they previously dismissed, respond to a mistake without a prolonged attack on their worth, or make a decision that reflects their values rather than the fear of somebody else's disapproval. These are changes in the organisation of the inner relationship. As they become more available and more dependable, the person moves towards what IRP calls Intrapersonal Sovereignty.

Relief from symptoms matters. Being able to sleep, experience less anxiety or get through a day with less suffering can make a profound difference. The relational question sits alongside those outcomes: what happens between this person and themselves when life becomes difficult again? Someone may appear calmer because their circumstances have improved, because they feel emotionally numb, or because they have become more able to care for themselves. These possibilities have different meanings. IRP attends to the relationship beneath the visible result.

The aim is a stable, compassionate, reality-based and self-directed inner relationship. Stability here means a growing capacity to remain in contact with oneself and to return after disruption. It leaves room for grief, anger, uncertainty and the need for other people. The person who reaches for help while frightened may be exercising precisely the self-regard that was once missing.

Which idea would you like me to explore next?

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