



This is a transcript of the video “AFC Connection Blog 06”  
from Alec at in8.uk.com

See: <https://www.in8.uk.com/2019/10/divorce-the-aftermath-picking-up-the-pieces/>

## Divorce: the aftermath, picking up the pieces

Hi. Today I want to share some insights that I gained after my first marriage fell apart.

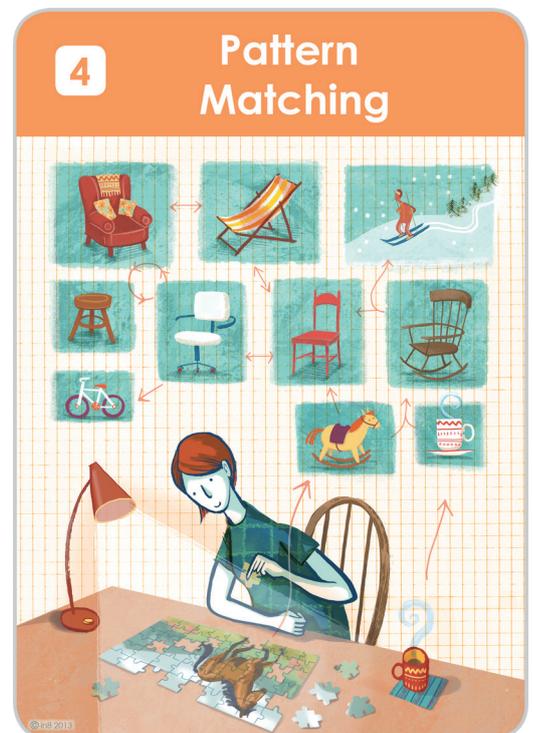
Now, this is the sixth video in a short series in which I’m taking particular episodes, incidents from my own life and using them to illustrate what I’ve learnt and how I’ve achieved a point now where I feel quite abundant in terms of emotional health and well-being. And I’m doing this really so that you too can live a life free from anxiety and stress.

And in each video, I’m picking a card from the Anxiety Freedom Cards to illustrate my message.

So first of all, I want to acknowledge some of the feedback I’ve been getting about these videos. I really appreciate everyone who’s commented, liked, or shared the videos. What I’ve learnt is that several of you would like to see more stories, more case histories, more examples of how the cards are used with clients in the therapy setting. So I’m planning to cover this and share some of those stories in forthcoming live Q and A sessions. So please stay in contact if you don’t want to miss out on seeing those. They’ll be done live on Facebook, and the first one will be later this week, although I haven’t chosen a time yet.

So back to my, the card that I’m going to use today is card number four. It’s “Pattern Matching”. And this is one of my, it’s one of the most interesting cards really because it’s a very simple concept, but it’s also quite powerful and quite a profound concept, and it takes a little bit of getting your head around it.

It’s about how human brains make sense of the world. One way of looking at it is to say our brain is a pattern matching organ. We look for patterns. When we



recognise something, we're matching to a pattern. Things are like other things. We understand something or get something when it feels familiar, and that means there's a pattern match to something we're already familiar with. And in practical terms, it means that the way we make sense of the world is often through metaphor, through story, through previous experience, through narrative. And pattern matching is really fundamental part of this process. So, yeah, this is about pattern matching. This is about story and narrative.



And going back to my story, we're going back more than 20 years ago when with my first wife, the communication between us broke down. It really stopped working. And we tried everything we could think of to reestablish it, but I'd broken trust, which wasn't great and wasn't a great help for that process. We tried the Relate marriage guidance system, and that didn't really work well for us. I tried therapy. But there came a point where we had to acknowledge that the marriage really was over. And I found myself living alone. And as I said in the previous video, this was an epic failure. This was not something that I ever anticipated happening.

Now, what was really interesting about the state that I went through in the next weeks after that pretty difficult breakup, and my kids were eight and 11 at the time, was that on bad days, I felt I was poor, misunderstood, rejected, middle-aged bloke who had failed at the one thing I cared the most about. And I was pretty low.

But there was also good days. And on good days, I felt like I was young, free, and single and I could explore the world and meet new people and be, kind of relive, well, live the teenage years that I didn't really get a chance to live at the time because my wife and I got together really quite young. So it was quite confusing. Was I poor, middle-aged, rejected bloke, or was I young, free, and single? It was also quite exhausting.

And it puzzled me that I could be in such different places. And it wasn't until quite a lot later in life that I figured out how this works, and it came to me clearly through understanding Polyvagal theory.

Now, in Polyvagal theory, we have three essential states that we transition between, and they're smooth transitions. And I'm just gonna do these really quickly because if you're interested, read the book by Stephen Porges or by Deb Dana, because they go into much more detail.

But basically when we're happy and we're in a social frame of mind and we are relaxed, we might be energetic one moment. There might be laughter. There might be food. There's kind of a connected aspect to our being. We're social. We're in the ventral vagal state. That's kind of the top of the ladder.

When we're in fight and flight, we're in an active mode. Our sympathetic nervous system is fired up. We try and take action. We try and predict outcomes. We're busy, busy, busy. And we can maintain that for awhile in order to get things done.

And when we're in the dorsal vagal state, that's the state in which we give up. We close down. We withdraw from other people and from the world. We go into energy conservation mode. It's like the freeze state, if you like.

Now, what I realized is, by studying this, is that on a good day, I was in ventral vagal. I was young, free, and single. I was ready to connect with people. I felt happy and confident about myself. On the days when I was struggling, I was in dorsal vagal mode. I was shut down, and I was poor, misunderstood, rejected, middle-aged bloke.

Now, what's really important about understanding here is that state precedes story. Our body's state is determined by an unconscious process, by neuroception, by our perception of danger or otherwise. So when we feel that we're in danger, our body will go into either sympathetic nervous system arousal where we get active and busy. In fight and flight, we set boundaries. We assert ourselves. We might become a little bit angry. And if that doesn't work, then we go into

shutdown. Ah, I give up. Can't be done with it. Close down. That's the dorsal vagal state.

If you consider the phrase "I'm done," just those two words, "I'm done," and you say it in, let's say, in dorsal vagal state. If you say, "I'm done," it means I'm giving up. I'm fed up. I've tried everything. I'm done. It's got a very negative feel about it.

We're you're in the sympathetic state, that's the energized state, you go, "I'm done!" It's more assertive. It's more angry. It has a completely different feel about it. And in ventral vagal you might say, "I'm done," which means I'm finished the task. Maybe there's agreement about it. There's an optimism about it.

The state that we're in proceeds the story that we tell ourselves to explain that state. So state proceeds story. And the point about the pattern matching card is that story is the narrative. It's the way we explain the state that we're in. The past and the future don't really exist. Narrative is the connecting medium, if you like. It's the pattern that we're currently living. It's the story we're telling ourselves about where we're at and why we're there.

First of all, what this means is that, first of all, we have to control our state, our bodily state. We have to get into situations where we feel lit up, energized, friendly, happy, and relaxed. And then once we've done that, we can choose the story that we choose to explain the situation that we're in. So state comes first and narrative comes second.

But choosing the right story is key. And you'll learn in a future video how I related to the metaphor, the story of rock bottom being the lowest you could get, and once you reach rock bottom, there's only one way to go, and that's back up. So eventually, later on, that was the story I began telling myself because I did become depressed after this experience, which was kinda stressful.

Understanding our pattern matching brain makes it clear also why it's so important to use metaphor and story in the therapy that we do with our clients. Pattern matching is largely an unconscious process. So if you can establish a new pattern by introducing a story or a reframe for your client, then you can get new behavior, new beliefs, new actions.

So, yeah, pattern matching, narrative, vital part of understanding ourselves and of helping our clients in therapy.

Now, if you find this useful, please scroll down. Let me know where you're at regarding this kind of thing, this perception of narrative and pattern matching. I've talked about pattern matching. I've talked about the importance of recognizing the state of our autonomic nervous system and the power of narrative. And I've related that to one of these cards there, the pattern matching card in the Anxiety Freedom Card set.

So, yes, as I said, if you think this is making sense, please interact in some way. My work involves talking to a lot of people. They're usually struggling. They're usually stressed out. And I know that I've helped people by talking to them about these kind of things in the past. And if you interact with me, if you share or like this post or comment on it, it'll help me to reach more people, and that will mean I can help more people. So please let me know what you think.

And whatever else you're doing, don't forget to keep breathing.

Thank you.

