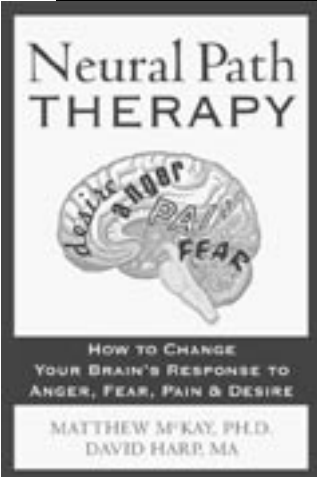


Neural Path Therapy Uses Cutting-Edge Science of the Brain to Put Us in Control of Our Emotions



It's not your crazy boss, the upcoming mortgage payment, or the rush-hour traffic jam that causes you to be angry, anxious, and frustrated. It's your brain. In *Neural Path Therapy*, cognitive scientist David Harp, MA, shows you how to get control over it.

Neural Paths: A Short Tour. Although neurons are found in nerve tissue throughout the body, most of them compose the grey matter of your brain. Neurons have dendrites, which take information into the cell body, and axons, which take information out of the cell body. A single neuron can't transmit information very far. But neural paths, the chains that form when they link to each other axon to dendrite, can. Every time we learn to perform a new action or think a new thought, a string of neurons connects together, end to end, to form a

neural path. Why is this important? Because neurons are the building blocks of your brain and neural paths are the building blocks of your mind and your personality. So, they have a tremendous effect on your thoughts, emotions, and actions. *Neural Path Therapy* begins with a simple, but not simplistic, lay person's primer on how neural paths trigger and then exaggerate emotional reactions like fear, anger, desire, and pain.

"The better you understand a tool, the better you can use it. And your brain is the best tool you'll ever have."
~David Harp

From Flight-or-Fight to Relax-and-Release. Some paths are hardwired in us. The fight-or-flight response is one such path. This is the physiological response to a threatening stimulus, which allows you to act fast when you're in danger. It's why if you were walking down the street and a car came barreling over the curb and straight for you you wouldn't stop to weigh your options. Your heart rate and blood pressure would increase, adrenaline and other hormones and chemicals would flood your brain, and you'd get out of the way *fast*. You'd act without thinking, because in this situation thinking could get you killed.

The trouble, says Harp, is that "in many, many circumstances of modern life, the fight-or-flight response does more damage than good. It may not be obvious, but it is the power behind the scene—the biological mechanism that brings anger, fear, desire, envy, jealousy, and other negative emotions into your life." If you're like most of us it's not hard to recall many times when you've become angry or anxious and acted without thinking—even though the situation was far from life threatening. Perhaps it was even a thought about something like an annoying coworker or a frightening political situation that triggered the fight-or-flight response. Luckily, there's another path that's hardwired. It's called the relax-and-release response (R & R response), and it's one that you may not even be aware of. The R & R response is what kicks in after you've safely dodged the car. Your heart rate slows down, your breathing returns to normal, and you pick yourself up and get on with your life. In *Neural Path Therapy*, Harp shows you how to minimize the flight-or-flight response and strengthen the R & R response. You'll learn:

- Simple breathing exercises that can actually change how your brain responds to stressful situations;
- Cognitive techniques that can remap your neural neighborhood and keep you calm;
- How to use self-compassion (*not* self-pity) and compassion for others to strengthen your innate relax and release response;
- How "softening around pain" can provide relief more quickly than reacting to it.

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NEXT: About David Harp and 3
Sample Exercises from *Neural*
Path Therapy

Neural Path Therapy: How to Change Your Brain's Response to Anger, Fear, Pain, and Desire
by David Harp, MA, & Matthew McKay, Ph.D.

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About David Harp, MA



Photo by Andrew Klein

DAVID HARP, MA, has created close to two dozen instructional methods, including *The Tree Minute Mediator*, *Instant Blues Harmonica*, and *Music Theory Made Easy*. A much sought after corporate speaker, Harp has been testing and refining neural path therapy in groups ranging from a few dozen to thousands. His trainings range from stress reduction training for hospice workers to workshops on Peak Communication™ during crisis situations for an international symposium sponsored by the FBI. In addition, his corporate clients include:

- Ben & Jerry's
- The Red Cross
- Merck Pharmaceutical
- Kraft Foods

For over two decades Harp has worked with psychology clinics, suicide hotlines, meditation retreats, and hospice facilities. In 2004 he received the Hospice Partner of the Year Award for his volunteer efforts, and every summer he does pro bono work for Paul Newman's Camp for Sick Kids. A well-know blues harmonica player, Harp uses his harmonica to teach breathing techniques to his clients. He loves to jam with musicians in blues clubs across the country.

3 Sample Exercises from *Neural Path Therapy*

Sample Exercise #1: The Least Favorite Person Exercise

This exercise is designed to illustrate how your thoughts can trigger the fight-or-flight response

Imagine, for a moment, your least favorite person in the world, whether it be an ex-lover from Hades or an unscrupulous politician, the car salesman who sold you that lemon or a frightening terrorist. If you really hate or fear this individual, you'll more than likely notice that you have a physical reaction to his or her image as it appears in your mind.

Perhaps you experience a tightening sensation, a clenching of teeth or hands (the better to bite or choke you with, our primitive ancestors might say) as anger arises, or perhaps butterflies in your stomach, shallow breathing, a chill up the back—if the image brings fear. Either way, you've just demonstrated for yourself that a mere phantasm in the mind—a thought—can trigger the fight-or-flight response, resulting in anger or fear.

We can sum up this sequence of events, from trigger thought to fear or anger, with what we call the emotion equation. An emotion is produced by a thought or event that triggers a fight-or-flight response.

It doesn't matter whether the response is triggered by a mental event (a thought) or a physical event—the fight-or-flight response is the same. It doesn't matter whether the triggering thought or event has any intrinsic fear or anger potential. For example, imagine watching someone catch a butterfly. If you are a fanatical and competitive butterfly collector, the thought of a rival netting a lovely specimen of *Erikssonia acraeina* might drive you mad with jealousy. But the same thought (or the actual event) would mean nothing to a collector of antique gas station signs. What's the difference? For the sign collector, that thought or event does not stimulate the fight-or-flight response, so the thought remains just a thought, and the event remains just something that has been perceived.

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Sample Exercise #2: The Compassionate Response Exercise

This exercise is designed to identify your innate compassion response

1. Spend a moment with your favorite breathing exercise.
2. When you feel relaxed, bring an image that you think may elicit a sense of compassion into your mind. For many people, a beloved childhood pet (especially a kitten or puppy) is a good compassion object. It may seem silly, but some people find that the image of the sickly, helpless extraterrestrial ET in the movie of the same name is a good compassion object (the design of the alien was clearly chosen to elicit the viewer's compassion, with its large head and oversize eyes and weak, spindly appendages).
3. Look inside to perceive physical sensations of the compassion response, such as warmth in the center of your body, a melting feeling, a silent "awwww" vocalization. If your mental image brings up many thoughts or paths other than compassion, you may need to try another image. Or you can simply notice, "Ahhh, that's just my mind telling stories again..." and return your attention to the compassion object.
4. If the first thought that you attempted to use to trigger the compassion response did not seem to work, just try another one. Perhaps a character from fiction (Tiny Tim, of Charles Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, is a classic compassion object) or a scene from a movie might do it. The image of the *Pieta* (a grieving Mary holding the body of her dead son) is often a good compassion object for people of the Christian faith or for anyone who can feel the power of a great work of art. It may be that for some of us, especially the "birds", (that is, those who find it easier to concentrate mental attention visually, just as "bats" prefer an audio focus, and "bees" and action to focus on) a visual image—a photo or picture—will make it easier to stimulate the compassion response. Sadly, it's not too hard to find a tragic image of a young child, in these warlike days, which just proves how crucial it is to develop compassion.

Sample Exercise #3: The Hot Sauce Exercise

We often treat the sensation of pain as an emergency—as though we must do something about it right away. Yet, pain does not always require immediate action, and sometimes softening around it, rather than reacting to it is the more effective response. This exercise illustrates that.

Although overuse of hot sauce or chile peppers can be momentarily unpleasant, it is not physically harmful, and it's an experience of limited duration. So it's a good way to practice softening around pain. If you are not a fan of spicy food, choose your condiment carefully, as even a single drop of some of the extreme hot products (whose names, like "Suicide Sauce" or "Insanely Hot Salsa," give clear warning) can be excruciating to nonaficionados.

1. Prepare an appropriate amount of hot sauce in a teaspoon—perhaps half again as much as you'd normally consider eating by itself. If you like hot stuff, this will be easy to judge. If not, try a single drop of a mild hot sauce (your local supermarket sells clearly labeled bottles of this for less than a dollar).
2. Spend a moment with your favorite breathing exercise, then take the hot sauce into your mouth (don't just swallow it).
3. Notice the sensation of pain. Then try to return your attention to the breath.
4. If you've administered a proper dosage of hotness, you will want to act. To rush for a glass of ice water. To be angry at this book or at yourself ("What a dumb exercise!"). To cry? Your body or jaw may tense up. Instead, just notice your thoughts, and try to return your attention to the breath.

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5. Continue to divide your attention between the breath, the desire to act to reduce the hotness, and the sensation of hotness itself, until the sensations subside.

6. If you end up running for the ice water, this exercise can still be a success. Instead of softening around the pain of the hotness, you can simply soften around any pain or self-criticism over not "doing the exercise properly."

Sample Interview Questions for David Harp

1. In the preface of *Neural Path Therapy* you say that, "The better you understand a tool, the better you can use it. And your brain is the best tool you'll ever have." Can you give us a lay person's anatomy lesson of the brain? What do you think are a few things everyone should understand about it?
2. To a non-scientist "neural path therapy" may sound a bit daunting, yet you offer it as a program that anyone can use. Can you give us a nutshell explanation of what neural path therapy entails and how it can be used to overcome anger, anxiety, and other emotional difficulties?
3. The subtitle of your book is *How to Change Your Brain's Response to Anger, Fear, Pain, and Desire*. Most Westerners don't think of desire as a problematic emotion. After all, it's what leads us to achieve and consume: two activities that lay at the heart of contemporary life. So why do you group desire with these other, troublesome emotions?
4. Most people would probably say that they don't have a choice about how their brain responds to something like anger or fear. Aren't these responses hardwired and doesn't that mean they're unchangeable?
5. For over two decades you've been a corporate presenter who's shown clients ranging from the FBI to pharmaceutical company executives how to relax. You say you use the "humble vehicle of the blues harmonica" in your presentations. Can you explain this?
6. What is automaticity?
7. In *Neural Path Therapy* you talk about two neural paths to avoid. What are these and why do you urge readers to stay away from them?
8. Some of your exercises take place at "the point of no return." What is this?
9. Throughout your book you talk about compassion. What role does this play in neural path therapy?
10. You talk about developing self-love without self-pity and narcissism. Why are these two such common pitfalls in trying to develop self-love?

NEXT: Raves for David Harp

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Raves for David Harp

"...the most popular speaker of our three day event.."

~**American Red Cross**

"An absolutely amazing teambuilding event, and we have lots of them."

~**Jerry Greenfield**, Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream

"...(David's) presentation was exactly on target and was perfect."

~**American Society of Criminal Laboratory Directors/FBI Symposium**

"The evaluations are in and the results are astounding."

~**Plante & Moran, LLP**

"In his own way, from his little corner of this big ole world, David Harp is doing things to make this a better place to live."

~**Charlie Musselwhite**, blues harpist extraordinaire

Raves for The *Three Minute Meditator*, Harp's Earlier Book

"If you want to begin meditating, this book is good. The exercises are excellent, the explanations clear and very good humored—but you actually have to try them to see. Go ahead. In three minutes, how can you go wrong?"

~**Jack Kornfield, Ph.D.**, author, *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path*

"David Harp's book, in it's playfulness, refreshes as it instructs. Had this book been available 25 years ago, it would have saved me a lot of trips (!) of all sorts."

~**Baba Ram Dass** (Dr. Richard Alpert), author, *Be Here Now* and *Still Here: Embracing Aging, Changing, and Dying*

"A lovely book indeed."

~**Stephen Levine**, author, *Who Dies?: An Investigation of Conscious Living and Conscious Dying* and *A Year to Live: How to Live this Year as If It Were Your Last*

"Though it may seem odd for a harmonica teacher to write a book on meditation, it would be even stranger to remain unchanged after reading *The Three Minute Meditator*."

~**EastWest Journal**

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