

Story MIND

An anxious stressed person came to see me in my clinic once, arriving in a very agitated state. She said,

“I was just nearly killed by an idiot driving a white van!”

She was extremely upset and angry, so I asked her to tell me what happened. She said she was crossing a road on foot and a white van came round the corner and drove straight at her and she had to jump for her life and run to the pavement. At this point she said she turned around and shouted, screamed and swore at the driver, who promptly screeched to a halt. After a pause, the truck drove away again. Sitting near to the person at a bus stop was an old lady, and she was very upset because of all the swearing. She complained to the person, who then felt a hundred times worse.

I commiserated, and asked her what else she wanted to say. She went on to tell me all about the driver, that it was a male, how old he was, where he came from, what his intelligence and parentage was..... I said, “Wow, do you know this man?” And she said, “No, of course not!” And I said, “Did you actually see him?” To which she replied,

“Well no, but you know the sort of person I mean!”

This got me thinking, and I said “Well hang on, what about if your mind made up a story, and it might not be that way at all?” What if he had just had an argument with his boss, he wasn’t concentrating and didn’t see you? He hadn’t actually tried to kill you at all, he just hadn’t seen you?”

I made up other stories and she found it very hard to accept them, until finally..... the penny dropped.

When you’re suffering from stress, your mind will often make up stories and leap to conclusions. You need to know this is happening so you can have a choice about how to **respond** to the stressful situation.

In the example above, the person didn’t respond to the situation, she **over-reacted**, and she had no choice in the matter. Moreover, she was telling herself all kinds of unhelpful stories about her ability to prepare for her exams too.

It didn’t matter to her mind whether they were true or false, the fact is, the stories her mind made up were really unhelpful.

What matters most is not listening, paying attention and following the stories your mind tells you, but knowing you have a choice about what to do with them.

Stories are just stories, not necessarily true, or real, and they don’t need an over-reaction. Sometimes they don’t need any reaction at all, just acceptance or a calm response.