

When Your Brain Knows, but Your Body Doesn't

Have you ever thought:

- "I know it wasn't my fault, but I still feel guilty."
- "I know I'm safe now, but I still feel anxious."
- "I know I should move on, but I can't seem to let it go."

Knowing something and feeling something can be two different things.

Cognitive Acceptance vs. Emotional Acceptance

Sometimes your mind accepts something before your nervous system does.

Cognitive acceptance:

- "I know I can't change the past."
- "I know this relationship is over."
- "I know I need to let this go."

Emotional acceptance:

- Thinking about it less often
- Feeling less emotional intensity when you remember it
- Noticing less of a physical reaction
- Being able to remember it without becoming overwhelmed
- Naturally paying more attention to what is happening now

How We Learn

Our brains learn from both **information** and **experience**. If you are learning to swim, you can read about swimming, understand the strokes and movement patterns, and learn water safety, but you still have to get in the water for your body to learn how to swim.

You can understand something and still have a strong reaction to it. Understanding is important, but it doesn't automatically change a learned response. You may know you are safe while your nervous system is still reacting based on older experiences. Processing helps create new learning through experience. Over time, you may move from, "*I know I'm safe*" to "*I actually feel safer*." Rather than trying to change what you think, you give your brain and nervous system new experiences to learn from.

1. Explicit Learning: What You Know

Explicit learning is what you can think about, explain, and remember. It helps you understand what happened, remember facts and events, make sense of your experiences and learn new information.

2. Implicit Learning: What You Experience

Implicit learning comes from experience and repetition. It helps shape our automatic reactions, emotions, body sensations, and expectations. These reactions are not usually conscious choices. They are patterns your brain and nervous system have learned over time.

You may notice it as:

- Your chest tightening before a presentation
- Automatically apologizing
- Bracing for criticism
- Freezing during conflict
- Feeling guilty even when you know you did nothing wrong

Rumination vs. Processing

Rumination

- Repeats the story
- Searches for certainty or an answer
- Stays mostly in thoughts
- Tries to think your way out of the feeling
- Often leaves the same reaction in place

Processing

- Notices what is happening right now
- Makes room for emotions and body sensations
- Allows new information and experiences
- Doesn't require you to immediately explain or fix the feeling
- Can gradually change how you respond

Rumination can feel like you're working on something because you're thinking about it a lot. But more thinking doesn't always create new learning.

Therapy Can Work With Both Types of Learning

Emphasis on understanding and conscious skills:

- Talk therapy
- CBT
- Psychoeducation
- Problem-solving
- DBT skills
- ACT

These approaches can help you understand patterns, learn skills, and make intentional choices.

Directly involve experience and automatic responses:

- EMDR
- Somatic therapies
- Sensorimotor Psychotherapy
- IFS
- Exposure therapy
- Attachment-focused approaches
- Mindfulness and other practices that focus on direct experience
- The experience of safety and co-regulation within therapy

These approaches may feel like you are doing less because you are talking less, but can help you notice and change automatic emotional and body responses.