

Whats happening to your brain in the Red Zone

Today, what I want to talk about is the **psychological Red Zone**.

In my last article, I introduced this concept of the psychological Red Zone. Considering that distress or negative emotions, go from zero, none at all, to ten out of ten.

The **psychological Red Zone happens when we're at a seven out of ten, or higher**. A seven and eight and nine or ten, that is when we are in the Red Zone. And in the Red Zone, you don't always think or act rationally. In the Red Zone, I don't always think or act rationally. **And let's talk about why that is. What is going on within us?**

We'll **start by focusing on the Green Zone**. A zero, one, two, three, low levels of distress. When you are experiencing low levels of distress, you're using more of your frontal lobe. The beautiful structure that differentiates you from other animals. It allows you to engage in executive functioning, right? Problem solving, perspective taking. When you're in the Green Zone, you can see different perspectives. This is where resiliency happens. "Yes, times are tough, and I know I can handle it." This is where confidence happens. "I'm not perfect, but I believe in myself." This is when someone, say a child or a partner, does something that's kind of annoying, like, "Not a big deal." You can see all perspectives, you can see the good and the not so good.

As you go up on this distress scale, your focus narrows. So that when you get into a seven and eight and nine or ten, you're focusing almost exclusively on the negatives.

When I'm in the Red Zone, I'm focusing almost exclusively on the negatives. And there's a biological reason for this. Because in the Red Zone, your limbic system, that fight or flight part of your brain, tends to hijack rational thinking. And this makes sense evolutionarily.

Think about your cave ancestors, if they heard a rustling in the bush, and thought, "It's probably nothing," they may not live another day, right? Instead, they took care of the animal. They either got rid of the animal or got away from the animal. Source of stress was gone, they came out of the Red Zone, and they moved on with their life pleasantly.

What happens currently is our brain still functions like that. But our sources of stress aren't as short term like an animal present or not present, right? **Our sources of stress tend to be more chronic.** Maybe it has to do with applying for colleges, what's going on socially, health issues, financial issues, work, whatever it is. And so a lot of people are spending a lot of time in the psychological Red Zone. But they're not thinking rationally a 100% of the time.

In the Red Zone is when we engage with that negative filtering, focusing on what's wrong. So we focus on what's wrong, and we can't see the whole picture. This is when we might be more irritable with others. This is where we might procrastinate and avoid something because it's just so challenging. This is where it may be difficult to focus or even sleep, because you're so stressed out.

That's the psychological Red Zone. Remember that thing that your kid or your partner did in the Green Zone, you're like, "Not a big deal," they can do the same thing when you're in the Red Zone, and you'll have a very different reaction.

What I want you to do is **start to be aware of where you are on this scale.** Noticing when you get into the Red Zone. And in our next article, we'll talk about specific signs to know that you are in the Red Zone. And to also let you know that other people may be in the Red Zone. But for now, just be aware of where you are on this continuum, when you're in the Red Zone. And be aware that your thinking is very different when you're in the Red Zone, as opposed to the Green Zone. And it has nothing to do with intellect. It's the way that your brain is wired. **Start noticing what you're saying to yourself and others in the Red Zone versus in the Green Zone.**