



Understanding NLP

how it can help you

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What is Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP)? This is a question which gets asked regularly and I think it's useful to provide a comprehensive explanation in therapeutic terms, which also explains what kind of situations NLP can be effective for. NLP is also used in business and learning settings, which will be considered in a later article.

Explanation of specific terminology

Neuro refers to the brain and the nervous system. The brain and the nervous system connect everything in your body – immune system, organs, skeleton etc.

Linguistic refers to the study of understanding the natural language of the brain and nervous system, i.e. how it absorbs external information through the senses, and how it codes and stores this information. It is in fully understanding this language that we can effectively 'talk' to the brain and nervous system, and gain direct communication.

Programming refers to the way your brain, mind and nervous system are all connected, and set up to do or not do certain things. It can be seen like computer programming, i.e. the 'software' of the brain. If you think about a computer, you have the screen, the hard drive and the keyboard – the 'hardware'. In order to do anything with it, it needs to have software too, e.g. Word, Excel, email, internet. What we can do with it depends on what software we have. It is the same for our brain. We need to 'programme the software' to be able to function, i.e. to have a personality, to have thoughts, feelings, emotions, beliefs, responses and behaviours.

The good news for computers and brains is if we do not like the way it is running, we can effectively re-programme the software to change what it does now, and get it to do more of what we want instead. If you had a problem with your email on your computer, you would try and sort it out yourself, or get someone to help you change it so it does what you need it to do. Using NLP with your brain is exactly the same thing

How did NLP start?

NLP came about in the 1970s in California at the time hypnosis was popular. Hypnosis (and hypnotherapy) developed through the recognition that most of our beliefs and behaviours were generated unconsciously, e.g. we are unaware of it happening. If these were less than useful, a good way to change them was by putting our conscious mind (i.e. our aware, thinking mind) into a trance, and talking to the unconscious directly. However, with performances by stage hypnotists and various concerns raised within religious faiths, hypnosis was getting a bad name. At that time, mathematician Richard Bandler and assistant professor of Linguistics John Grinder recognising the importance of this unconscious part of the brain, thought there had to be a more ethical way to access the mind.

They studied the works of eminent psychotherapists: Gestalt therapy developer Fritz Perls, family therapy pioneer Virginia Satir, and medical doctor and hypnotherapist Milton Erickson. These practitioners achieved amazing results with their clients, and Bandler and Grinder were interested in their approach to bring about such positive change in people and empower them to continue living a happy life.

