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What to Expect in McInnis Method Therapy

Why Therapy Here May Feel Different

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What looks like personality is usually a sequence.

The first guide explains what the McInnis Method believes. The second explains how people become organized. This guide explains why therapy here sometimes feels different.

Some parts of therapy here may feel unusual. I may slow you down when you want to move ahead. I may ask what a familiar word means. I may spend a long time on one moment, bring the conversation back to you, or become quiet after something important.

None of those things are accidental. They are not separate techniques. They are different expressions of the same way of understanding people.

The purpose is to help reality become stronger than adaptation.

The Method follows a seven-stage spine:

REALITY → THREAT → PROTECTION → FUNCTION → COST → CAPACITY → ACTION

REALITY	<i>What is actually happening, and what actually happened.</i>
THREAT	<i>What you learned to expect or organize around avoiding.</i>
PROTECTION	<i>What you built in response.</i>
FUNCTION	<i>What the protection still does for you now.</i>
COST	<i>What maintaining it is taking from your current life.</i>
CAPACITY	<i>What ability exists or remains available now.</i>
ACTION	<i>One real step the old protection would not have let you take.</i>

Every chapter in this guide is another way of understanding that movement. Almost everything we do together is an attempt to see reality clearly, understand what became threatening, identify the protection and what it still accomplishes, establish what it costs, locate what capacity is available now, and create enough safety and challenge for one real action to become possible.

WHY DOES HE KEEP ASKING WHAT I MEAN?

Language can hide adaptation.

Words like fine, selfish, needy, weak, toxic, disrespectful, and shut down are often carrying more than they appear to carry. You may have used one of them for years without ever having to say exactly what it means.

That matters because a vague word can quietly organize an entire life. If being needy means asking anyone for help, then every request begins to feel dangerous. If conflict means any sign of disappointment, then honesty can start to feel like an attack.

So we slow down until the word becomes real again. Not because the therapist is being difficult, but because we cannot examine a rule that remains hidden inside a summary.

"It was fine." → "What does fine mean here?"

"I shut down." → "What did shutting down actually look like?"

Ambiguity recruits adaptation. Specificity recruits reality.

When something becomes specific, reality has a chance to challenge the meaning that protection has been supplying automatically.

WHY DOES HE ASK WHAT HAPPENED BEFORE AND AFTER?

Widen the frame

The first version of an event is almost never the whole organization.

People naturally begin with the loudest moment, the biggest argument, the strongest feeling, or the conclusion they have already reached. Those things tell us something, but they are rarely enough to explain why the pattern keeps repeating.

So we widen the frame.

What happened before this? What happened afterward? Has something like this happened before? What stayed the same? What changed? What problem was this solving?

The goal is not to collect more information for its own sake. It is to discover the organization that a single moment cannot reveal.

A person may describe an argument as proof that their partner is impossible to please. Widening the frame may reveal that they had already been scanning for disapproval, withholding what they wanted, and waiting for the other person to notice. The argument is real. It is simply not the whole sequence.

Many problems stop looking random when they are placed back into the sequence they came from.

The organization is usually larger than the moment that first caught your attention.

WHY DO WE SPEND SO MUCH TIME ON ONE MOMENT?

Increase reality density

People naturally summarize important events.

"We got into an argument."

"I shut down."

"It was awkward."

Those summaries feel complete because you lived the event. But a summary leaves out most of reality, and adaptation does its best work inside what gets left out.

So we reconstruct the moment.

Where were you standing? What was actually said? What happened immediately before that?

What did you notice in your body? What did you do next?

Each concrete detail adds another piece of reality. As the scene becomes more complete, explanations become easier to test and protective stories have less room to fill the missing pieces.

This is not an interrogation, and it is not an attempt to catch you being inaccurate. Memory is selective. That is not a flaw. It is part of how protection works. Attention is organized. The details you skip first are often the details your protection has trained you not to notice.

We are putting enough reality back together that the organization underneath can finally be seen.

WHY DOES HE NOT IMMEDIATELY SOLVE THE PROBLEM I BROUGHT IN?

Follow the pain, not only the presenting problem

People usually come to therapy with a problem they want solved.

"I need to stop overthinking."

"I want to be more confident."

"I need to stop arguing with my wife."

Those concerns are important. They are the reason you came. But they are rarely where the organization begins.

Instead of organizing the entire therapy around the stated problem, we also follow the places where something becomes emotionally alive. The moment your voice changes. The sentence you rush past. The memory that seems unrelated but suddenly carries weight. The contradiction you didn't notice until you said it.

Pain is often pointing toward the organization that built the problem in the first place.

The presenting problem is the doorway. The pain is the room.

That does not mean we ignore the problem you came in with. It means we treat it as the doorway rather than the destination. Advice may reduce the immediate difficulty.

Understanding the organization makes it possible for the same protection to stop rebuilding the problem in a different form.

WHY DO WE MOVE TOWARD WHAT I'VE BEEN AVOIDING?

Avoidance works. That's why people do it.

If something feels dangerous enough, moving around it can make life easier for a while. But each successful avoidance gives the old rule another reason to stay.

Sometimes therapy means getting closer to what you've learned to move around. Not all at once, and not simply to prove you can tolerate it. Close enough to let present reality test what the protection still expects.

Challenge without safety strengthens protection. Safety without challenge creates stagnation. Growth requires both.

WHY DOES HE POINT OUT SMALL CHANGES WHILE I AM TALKING?

Name the process, not the conclusion

One of the easiest mistakes a therapist can make is explaining a person before fully observing them.

Instead, we begin by naming what is happening right now.

"You paused."

"You smiled when you said that."

"You became quieter."

"You moved past that pretty quickly."

Those are not explanations. They are observations.

We do not begin by deciding what the change means. We first make sure we both agree that it happened. Once something becomes visible, we can become curious about it together.

Sometimes the meaning is exactly what you expected. Sometimes it is not. A smile can protect against grief, signal embarrassment, invite reassurance, or simply reflect habit. The visible action is not enough to tell us which organization produced it.

Observation earns interpretation.

Naming the process keeps therapy grounded in what is actually happening instead of what either of us assumes is happening. Once we both see the process, we can begin asking what it is protecting.

WHY DOES HE KEEP BRINGING THE CONVERSATION BACK TO ME?

Attention is organized

What catches your attention first, what you overlook, and what keeps pulling your attention back are usually not random.

They are organized by many of the same protective rules that organize behavior.

Someone organized around rejection notices criticism immediately and overlooks ten expressions of acceptance. Someone organized around danger notices every change in another person's tone while overlooking signs that the relationship is safe. Another person can spend an entire therapy session explaining everyone else without noticing their own experience.

Attention is doing a job before behavior ever begins. It directs you toward information that once carried consequences and away from information that once felt dangerous to notice.

This is why I may acknowledge what another person did and then ask what happened inside you. That is not dismissing the other person or blaming you for what happened. It is making sure the hour does not become an investigation of someone who is not in the room.

The part of the situation available for therapy is the part happening in you.

Sometimes the most important change is not a new behavior. It is seeing something that has been there all along.

WHY DOES HE SOMETIMES BECOME QUIET?

Earn the silence

Silence is one of the most powerful things that can happen in therapy. It is also one of the easiest things to misuse.

Silence is not therapeutic simply because nobody is talking. A therapist can become quiet because they are uncertain, distracted, or waiting for something to happen. That kind of silence usually leaves people feeling alone rather than understood.

The silence we are looking for is different.

It comes after something real has happened. After a contradiction becomes visible. After an emotion finally has words. After an old rule is recognized. After reality becomes clearer than it was a minute ago.

Only then do we stop and let it sit for a moment.

The purpose of silence is not to create insight. It is to give insight somewhere to land.

When silence follows genuine contact, people often finish the thought themselves. The therapist does not have to rush in and replace your discovery with another question.

That is the silence worth protecting.

DOES THE THERAPIST ALREADY KNOW WHAT IS WRONG WITH ME?

We watch the organization emerge

At the beginning of therapy, neither of us fully understands how your experience fits together. That is normal.

The therapist is not trying to locate one hidden answer as quickly as possible. We are watching the organization reveal itself across moments, relationships, language, attention, emotion, and action.

We notice what repeats. We notice what changes. We notice where emotion increases. We notice contradictions. We notice what becomes easier to talk about and what becomes harder.

Little by little, the organization becomes clearer.

This protects you from being reduced to a diagnosis, a single memory, or a therapist's favorite explanation. It also means that therapy may remain productively uncertain for a while. Quick certainty can feel reassuring, but it often organizes treatment around an explanation that arrived before the person did.

Good therapy feels less like being explained and more like discovering something together.

The goal is not for the therapist to know you faster than you know yourself. The goal is for both of us to see something that neither of us could see clearly at the beginning.

WHEN DO WE ACTUALLY DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

Understanding must become action

McInnis Method therapy is not meant to become an endless explanation of why you are the way you are.

Once we can see the old organization clearly enough, we look for the capacity that became unavailable inside it. Honesty. Restraint. Anger. Tenderness. Curiosity. The ability to ask, receive, refuse, tolerate disappointment, or remain present.

The capacity is often not gone.

It became unavailable where protection still believes it is dangerous.

Therapy is often less about creating something new than recovering something that became unavailable. It may still be working in another part of your life. You may speak directly at work and disappear in your marriage. You may show patience with everyone except yourself. We study the difference because the difference tells us what the protection still considers dangerous.

Then therapy asks for one real action.

Not “communicate better.”

Say what you’ve been avoiding saying.

Make the request.

Stay in the room.

Let the answer be no.

Do something the old protection would not have let you do.

The action should be specific enough to happen and real enough to teach us something. The purpose is not to perform therapy correctly. It is to let present reality provide information that the old adaptation has never received.

Insight reveals the old rule. Action tests it against reality.

WHAT THIS ADDS UP TO

Helping reality become stronger than adaptation

Therapy here may feel slower in the moment because we are not rushing past the places where organization becomes visible.

We clarify language because vague conclusions protect old rules. We widen the frame because one moment rarely contains the whole sequence. We increase reality density because adaptation thrives inside missing information. We follow pain because it often leads closer to what organized the problem than the stated problem does. We name what happens before explaining it. We follow attention because what you notice and overlook are part of the organization. We protect silence after something real has landed. And we turn understanding into one action that present reality can answer.

The goal is not a life without uncertainty, conflict, grief, disappointment, or fear. It is meeting those experiences with reality instead of adaptation.

You are not being turned into someone else. You are becoming less governed by a protection built for conditions that may no longer exist.

What looks unusual in the room is the craftsmanship of the Method. Each part serves the same purpose: helping you see what is actually happening, understand the adaptation that organized around it, recover what became unavailable, and take one real step into your life.

Therapy is not about becoming someone new.

It is about becoming more available to reality than to adaptation.

That is the work of the McInnis Method.

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