

THE INVISIBLE THREAD: HOW CONTEXT SHAPES OUR LIVES (AND SAVES OUR RELATIONSHIPS)



In our fast-paced world, it's easy to get caught up in the immediate, the obvious, the headline. We process information in snippets, react to what's directly in front of us, and often, we miss something crucial: context.

Think of context as the invisible thread that binds everything together. It's the background, the history, the hidden motivations, and the surrounding circumstances that give meaning to facts, feelings, and actions. Without it, we're essentially looking at a single puzzle piece and trying to understand the whole picture - impossible, right?

When we ignore context, our minds tend to fill in the blanks, usually with fear, assumptions, or negativity. This leads to a whole host of "thinking traps":

- **Black-and-white thinking:** Seeing things in extremes, with no middle ground.
- **Overgeneralisation:** Believing one negative event means everything will always go wrong.
- **Mental filtering:** Focusing only on the bad and ignoring any positives.
- **Mind reading & Fortune telling:** Assuming we know what others are thinking or predicting the worst possible future.
- **Catastrophising:** Blowing minor issues completely out of proportion.

These distortions create what we call a "contracting mindset." Our cognitive and emotional range shrinks, making us rigid, judgmental, and prone to conflict. A terse email from your manager, for example, might send you spiralling into thoughts of getting fired, when the manager is simply stressed and juggling multiple deadlines. Without the context of their workload or communication style, our minds create a worst-case scenario.

The good news is, we can actively seek context and expand our perspective. This means becoming a "researcher" of life, asking better questions, and slowing down our interpretations.

- **Ask "What else could be true?":** Before reacting, pause and consider other possibilities. What might you be missing? What's the story behind the story?
- **Slow down your judgments:** Your first thought isn't always the most accurate. Give yourself time to explore different explanations.

- **Practice perspective-taking:** Try to genuinely see the situation from another person's point of view. What might they be feeling, thinking, or fearing?
- **Self-contextualise:** When you're being hard on yourself, ask: "What's the context for my behaviour right now?" Often, what we label as "laziness" is a coping mechanism for fear, grief, or perfectionism.

Understanding context is incredibly powerful for our relationships, both with others and with ourselves. When we fail to consider the full picture, we misinterpret actions, assign blame, and dig into our "I'm right, you're wrong" stance. Arguments about small things often hide deeper fears or unmet needs that only surface when context is explored.

Imagine a couple arguing about money. Without context, it's just about spending habits. With context, they might uncover that one partner grew up with financial scarcity and values security, while the other grew up with freedom and values generosity. Suddenly, the argument isn't just about numbers; it's about deeply ingrained fears and beliefs.

In a hyperconnected world that thrives on snap judgments and simplified narratives, choosing to explore context is a radical act of love. It replaces knee-jerk certainty with curious compassion, allowing us to see people and situations in all their complexity.

So, the next time you find yourself jumping to conclusions or feeling stuck in a rigid mindset, remember to pause. Become a researcher. Ask yourself, "What's the context here?" You'll be amazed at how much understanding, empathy, and peace you can unlock.

[Listen to podcast Episode 52 - The Power of Context](#)