

The Bully Attack Mode

When the Bully-Attack mode is activated within our personality system, we become aggressive and confrontational in our behavioural responses. Primarily, this will result in us trying to cause some sort of pain to the person our system has perceived as a threat. The pain we attempt to inflict on other people can be caused either verbally, emotionally, or if this part is inclined to respond this way, with physical aggression too. This behaviour is usually intended to fight against the story being generated by our own Internal Critics in reaction to the dominant schema in our system. For example, if I am afraid of being abandoned or rejected by a loved one, so my Schema of Abandonment is dominant in my system, I would react in an angry aggressive way, calling the loved one names, belittling their experience, and lashing out in a hurtful and demeaning way.

These actions are often a completely subconscious, an automatic response to fear, as part of our Fight or Flight system. If this is the case, this automatic response is not part of any deliberate behaviour pattern, and usually leaves us filled with guilt and shame once we have defused from the part that's conducted itself this way. Working with the Bully Attack Mode is a difficult thing to do, it begins with building awareness for the underlying emotion the part is trying to protect. All of our angry parts are coping mechanisms for the vulnerability that's perceived to be under threat, which is why we say that Anger can be an addictive coping mechanism. Keep in mind, there's nothing wrong with anger, it's an important and necessary emotional experience for us to have. At the same time, there's a distinct possibility of it becoming a dominant coping mechanism if we learn it at an early age.

“Protecting my Vulnerable Child was often a full-time job, and when there was a significant threat to my system, it was not unusual for me to go on the attack using the words and actions specifically associated with a bully attack mode.”

~Steven Morris RP

Shame was one of the most dominant emotions connected to the Vulnerable Child at the core of my personality. My system was set up to avoid it at all costs. The irony of my coping skills was that they often induced the very thing they were trying to avoid. This was definitely the case for my Bully Attack Mode. While it wasn't the first line of defence for me, it was usually the last resort, it would always leave me sitting in a space of guilt and shame that was associated with its actions. Words can be an extremely powerful weapon when used in a way that is designed to inflict emotional pain and suffering. And, when my Bully Attack Mode was in full swing, my words were definitely intended to do just that.

At this point in time, my system was usually beyond the point of no return, and I was defending myself from the threat I was facing with the vigor and aggression of a man possessed. Anger and

rage would overwhelm the healthy parts of my personality in an attempt to defend my vulnerabilities. Once my rage had eventually subsided, and my words had destroyed the environment in the exact same way a tornado devastates every inch of the landscape it touches, guilt and shame would consume my system. The very thing I was usually trying to avoid was now the dominant emotional state, and my internal critic was fully engaged constantly pointing out the values and beliefs I had neglected to follow.

The Bully Attack mode is another one of our defence mechanisms that can be hard to accept. Working from a space of “No Bad Parts” is an essential place to start, as Unconditional Self-Acceptance is the goal we are trying to achieve. This starts with appreciation and gratitude for the mode of behaviour we are trying to accept, but what is the purpose of a bully’s actions and why is it currently acting out? When I actually spent the time considering the answer to this difficult question, it was easier to find than I originally thought it to be. Fear was the reason my bully was defending my Vulnerable Child, and facing this fear was exactly where the work began for me. Living the Life I want to Live means turning towards the things I have been avoiding for most of my life, soothing the parts of my personality that are afraid of rejection and shame.

Next, let’s check in to see how you relate to this Mode in your own behaviours. Answer the questions below based on your personal experiences and the rating scale provided.

| Never 0 | Sometimes 1 | 50/50 2 | Often 3 | Always 4 |
|---|----------------|------------|------------|-------------|
| Description | | | | Score |
| When I am activated, I try to demand respect by not letting other people push me around, and I push back with aggressive and hurtful words and actions. | | | | |
| When I am upset, I find myself using language that could leave other people feeling belittled, unappreciated, and sometimes hurt by my words and actions. | | | | |

Based on the scores you gave for the questions above, and the way you relate to the description provided on the previous pages, how Relevant is the Bully Attack Mode to you in your life? Add the two scores together to calculate your prevalence score. On a scale of 0 – 8, 0 being not present at all, and 8 being present in my life every day, rate your experience of the Bully Attack Mode.

My Bully Attack Mode has a prevalence score of ____/8.

On the next page, take the time to explore your experience of the Bully Attack Mode, see if you can identify how you feel when this Mode is active, how you are thinking when this Mode is active, what you do when this Mode is active, and what situations you might need to be aware of that can activate this way of thinking in your personality system.

- a. When I am in the Bully Attack Mode, I experience the following feelings (List the emotions you experience in the Bully Attack Mode, focus on the feelings in your system when you're holding onto feelings of rage with a desire to get revenge, or inflict hurt of some kind on other people).

- b. When I am in the Bully Attack Mode, I am having the following thoughts (List the thoughts you are having when you're in the Bully Attack Mode, be specific, focus on thoughts that point out how the story in your system is an accurate one, how the narrative has to be true, and how there is no alternative to what you are hearing).

- c. When I am in the Bully Attack Mode, I behave in the following ways (List the things you do, the way you act, and how you react when you're in the Bully Attack Mode).

- d. The following situations are likely to be involved in triggering my Bully Attack Mode (List the situations you are aware of that have activated this mode of behaviour in the past).

- e. When I am in the Bully Attack Mode, I can use the following skills to support me with the emotional distress I am experiencing in my personality system. List the different skills of Dialectical Behaviour Therapy you can use to manage the emotions being held by the Bully Attack Mode. Try to list the skills in the order they will be effective for you to use. Start with Mindfulness, then focus on Distress Tolerance, and then look at Emotion Regulation.

- f. The ways I can practice these skills to develop them as part of my ability to cope with the emotional experience of my own Bully Attack Mode are as follows: Describe the way you can practice these skills, what would it take to implement them into your daily routines?
