

R.A.A.V.E.N

In its basic format, the RAAVEN skill was put together so we can use the skills of DBT, integrated with the theories of Schema Therapy; to change the way we communicate with the many different parts of our own unique personality system. Normally, this internal narrative can take on a very rigid and critical perspective, so the RAAVEN skill offers the possibility of turning this into a more compassionate, caring, and validating intrapersonal communication style. This new way of speaking to ourselves, and therefore our parts, can feel a little awkward and mechanical at first. At the same time, when done consistently, it often promotes some significant behaviour changes. The primary focus of the RAAVEN skill is to provide the narrative we need to re-educate the parts of our personality that have been moved to take action by the active and dominant schema in our system. These parts are probably just trying to get through the situation, one that's seen as being dangerous, by using the modes of behaviour they think are necessary to survive.

“The primary focus of the RAAVEN exercise is to provide the narrative we need to re-educate the parts of our personality that are initiated by the dominant schema that’s active in our system.”

~Steven Morris RP

When our parts are activated, it's usually with a single purpose in mind. At the time of their original creation, every part of our personality has a specific job to do. For example, it's often the case that the Emotional Child parts of our personality are stuck in a time when their job was definitely needed. Unfortunately, they actually don't realize that they no longer need to do the thing they do because that was then, and this is now, and we aren't in those situations anymore. Following the steps of the R.A.A.V.E.N skill, and completing the worksheet associated with it, provides us with the narrative we use to re-educate these parts of our personality. Bringing them into the here and now and releasing the burden of responsibility being held to protect.

When practiced on a regular basis, this new internal narrative will allow the part to feel heard and understood. This can cause it to let go of the desire to protect the vulnerable child with such an all or nothing purpose. Creating the possibility of finally Live the Life we Want to Live, stepping into the new world of possibility that we have now created. In the PDF at the bottom of the page connected to this particular video, you will find a basic run down of how we use the RAAVEN skill effectively. Keep in mind that making this a usable skill means turning it into a short and to the point internal narrative that, when practiced on a regular basis using the Planning Ahead to Build Mastery skill, will kick into gear when the part gets activated in what are perceived as emotionally difficult situations.

“Like any other skill, learning to use the RAAVEN Skill effectively, takes practice, practice, and even more practice, then when you think you’ve practiced enough, practice it some more!”

~Steven Morris RP.

In my one-on-one work, I often find, when people first start using this skill, they tend to over do it with words that complicate the entire process. If you find that your RAAVEN skill is taking a lot of words to explain and you’re using additional paper to justify what’s going on in your system, save this type of exploration for your journal. This isn’t what the RAAVEN skill is for. Journalling is an essential part of building and understanding, an appreciation, and a gratitude for why parts do what they do. This is really important to have before you start to complete the RAAVEN worksheet. Mindful Journalling is a specific thing to do that will help you build this knowledge, so look out for the video on Mindful Journalling to help you develop this skill too.

Next, we’re going to go through the steps of the skill itself. Once you are familiar with them, try to incorporate this way of speaking to your parts into your daily practice. This will be difficult to do at first, it may feel strange and a little mechanical or clunky. Like anything worth doing, with practice it will become easier to do. Over time, you will begin to experience the benefits of this skill, in particular when it comes to the area of unconditional self-acceptance. The narrative will shift from being clunky and mechanical to feeling natural and organic, like you’ve always talked to yourself this way.

Recognize and Acknowledge the Part:

The first step in this process is to recognize and acknowledge that there is a, thought, a feeling or a physical sensation like an urge to do something that you're experiencing as a result of the situation you are currently in. For some people, this is an easy thing to do. For others, this can be challenging. If you have been developing your Mindfulness Practice as a part of your Recovery Lifestyle, this will probably be an easier thing for you to identify, as it is part of the observing phase of the S.T.O.P Skill. Observing and Describing the part that's present in our system is the essence of unblending, it allows us to Defuse from the thoughts and feelings we're experiencing so we can identify and name them simply as parts of our personality, nonjudgmentally Observing and Describing what's happening in our own internal world.

Remember, if this emotional experience becomes too overwhelming for you, if it's not the right time or place to do this work, then it's ok to take a step back, go to your safe place, practice mindful breathing, and try again another time. Have your list of ACCEPTS at hand so you have an idea of how you can distract and avoid in a healthy way. If it is the right time and place, and you feel confident and safe to do the work, go ahead and name the part of your personality, non judgementally, that is present in your thoughts at this time. Acknowledge the emotion this part is holding onto by saying out loud, "I am noticing there is a part of me that is ..." it can also be helpful to look at the journal you completed earlier to get a perspective from the point of view that this part has, as this will assist you in getting to know this part of your personality and increase your chances of un-blending from it when it tries to, metaphorically speaking, drive your bus.

Appreciate the purpose of Part:

Once we've recognized and acknowledged the thought, feeling, or emotion, and used this to nonjudgmentally label the part of our personality attached to this internal experience, the next step is to let it know that we appreciate why the part does what it does. This will lead us towards the unconditional acceptance of this part, and its behaviour, which is an essential piece of the long-term process, as we have to work from a space of "no bad parts." It's important to understand that this is not about the part being right or wrong, good or bad, just simply that it's there, it's not possible to get rid of this part as it's an important part of our personality system, as are each and every one of our parts. It's simply about understanding the intent behind the parts behaviour. What is its purpose in our system, and why does it react the way it reacts?

Building this appreciation is done away from using the RAAVEN Skill in the moment. Curiosity and compassion are key, taking the time to mindfully journal from the parts perspective gives us the ability to build this appreciation, and at times gratitude for its presence within our personality system. At the time this part was created, it must've served a purpose, the behaviour it uses to cope with the feeling was an appropriate behaviour at some point in the past. See if you can empathise with why the part behaves this when you're emotionally activated. Ask yourself, "what is this part trying to protect me from?" sit with the behaviour and see if it is connected to behaviours from the past, and empathise with the child at that time, trying to deal with the situation the only way they know how, in a space that was probably filled with fear. Bring compassionate conversation to your system, so you can authentically understand the purpose of this part.

Validate the part of you that's holding the emotion:

The next step is probably the most important part of this process, simply because it is the one that is almost always lacking. Learning the skill of self-validation is a key component to developing a healthy relationship with the many different parts of our personality, and ultimately getting comfortable within our own skin. Self-validation takes us into, and from, our ability to practice the skills of self-empathy and self-compassion, both of which are also essential in the journey towards unconditional self-acceptance. Usually, without self-validation, we obsessively seek our validation from others. This is one of the ways we try to fill an internal void with external resources (AKA The PIG), and when we do not receive the external validation that we're looking for, it leaves us feeling empty, worthless, helpless, or unlovable in some way.

Validation does not mean we praise the part for the behaviour we are trying to work with or change, it simply means we understand why the part wants to behave this way, why it feels the way it does, and how it came to the point in time where it believes that this is the only option you have to deal with the situation you are facing. Sometimes self-validation can be as simple as saying "I completely understand why you feel the way you do", and other times it can be a little more complex.

Remember, the validation has to come from a place of sincerity and authenticity as a result of using our journals to build compassion, empathy and understanding for why this part is doing what it does. A lack of authenticity will lead to our system feeling manipulated which will often cause an issue with Self trust, so please don't skip over this practice, or use the words to tick the proverbial box of completion, this will only keep you stuck if you do. Whichever way you find works for validation, start by letting the part you're working with know that you understand why it feels the way it does, given the things it's experienced and the tools we previously had at our disposal, then see where that leads you.

Educate the part:

Once you believe that the self-validation is complete, you will sense that the part you are working with feels safe and accepted in your system, the next step in the process is to educate the part about the current situation. We do this by literally speaking directly to this part of our personality, either in our thoughts or out loud, either way works, it's about figuring out which way works for you. Educate the part about the situation you are in, let it know how you are aware of the problems of the past, but you are older now. Let it know that you have the skills you now have to deal with the situation, and if necessary, list them out so there is complete awareness in your system for what you can do.

Often, these parts of our personality will be trapped in an emotional time from our past, so spending some time letting them know where we are now, how we aren't in any danger right now, can be all that's needed to bring peace to our system. If its just an emotion that we're noticing as a "problem", and there is no external action that is needed, let the part know that you can handle your feelings now, that they are not a "problem", and emotions don't have to overwhelm you if you don't want them too.

This is often challenging to do at first, and will probably feel a little strange, as it's not something we are used to doing, but the more we practice the easier this will become, and the more effective the skill becomes. This is the process of re-educating, and the words are words of a Healthy Adult, Good Parent, that's trying to teach an emotional child how to do things in a way that will promote emotional growth. Many parts of our personality system are not used to this type of communication, so you may feel like giving up and walking away at times. Try to stick with it and return to the first step in the process if you are finding it difficult to stay on track.

Negotiate with the part.

The final step in this exercise is to negotiation with the part to create a committed action moving forward. To obtain it's permission to allow you demonstrate the new way of being. This action may be internal or external, depending on the situation, but it is important to create one regardless of the circumstance. The committed action you take is a symbol of growth, it allows us to create something new and grow with each new achievement. It is ALL about meeting the unmet childhood need, what is it that this part of you is protecting, what is it that your system needs. Remember, achievement doesn't mean you stop doing what you're doing, it's just another stop on the journey of your life, we continue going in the same direction, regardless of the achievements we have along the way. Creating and carrying out a committed action is also an opportunity to acknowledge progress, give yourself the proverbial pat on the back, which is the only way to develop continued *internal* motivation.

Negotiating with the part may be simple at times, creating a plan to physically do something to bring you back in line with your values and beliefs, or asking an emotion to soften off while you complete your current task. However, sometimes it may be a little more complicated, particularly if you are feeling the emotional reaction begin to overwhelm your system. If this is the case, take a step back and bring the DBT S.T.O.P skill back into play. Try going to your safe place again or using the skills of mindful breathing to bring you back into the current moment. Once you feel that you are ready, go back to the beginning and start the process again, with practice this will begin to get easier, only with practice will this become a valuable tool for your emotional wellbeing.

On the following page there's a worksheet you can use to develop your use of the RAAVEN Skill, along with an example of what the RAAVEN narrative can look like. Remember, this is a formula that we need to use in our own language, not word for word as it is in the written format. use your mindful journal to highlight specific parts of your personality that require this type of work for the stories they are attached to. Create your own mindful meditation, specific to the needs of your system. Use Planning Ahead to build Mastery to practice this narrative every day, make it part of your morning and night routine to increase the probability of it landing with the part that's in need of hearing these words.

Imagery visualization is key to making changes, especially for the process of making them permanent, so take your time and notice any unrelenting standard you may have about how fast this is supposed to work, as that will only hinder the process, making it slower overall. Remember, this is only meant to be a short and concise narrative. It's intended to be said in about 30 to 60 seconds. So, if you find this is taking too long, you're probably using this as a journal, and that's not the point.

RAAVEN Example Worksheet

Recognize and Acknowledge:

I am noticing that there is a part of me that's...
feeling really angry right now.

I hear you and I see you in my system.

Appreciate and Accept:

I appreciate you because you...
are trying to protect me from the people who are crossing my boundaries, you believe I am in a dangerous situation, and you are trying to keep me safe.

Thank you, I appreciate the fact that you are doing this for me.

Validate:

I completely understand why this is because...
I value respect, I value honesty, and I value integrity, and the way my friends are pushing me right now isn't cool at all, it's really disrespectful and it's bordering on bullying.

It's totally ok that you feel this way, there is absolutely nothing wrong with your emotions, and you're allowed to feel the way you do.

Educate:

In actuality, what's happening is...
I have a story of shame that's activate in my system, and my vulnerable child is under threat, right now, this threat is not at a level that requires this kind of reaction, AND it's completely understandable that he's reacting that way

Negotiate

Moving forward, I would like to...
take a deep breath before I react, use my tools to deactivate my fight or flight system by focussing on my breath, and use the STOP skill to help me get through this situation.

If you allow me to do this, I will show you...
That we have the skills to do this, and we won't experience the shame we feel when we express our anger the usual way.

RAAVEN Worksheet

Recognize and Acknowledge:

I am noticing that there is a part of me that's...

I hear you and I see you in my system.

Appreciate and Accept:

I appreciate you because you...

Thank you, I appreciate the fact that you are doing this for me.

Validate:

I completely understand why this is because...

It's totally ok that you feel this way, there is absolutely nothing wrong with your emotions, and you're allowed to feel the way you do.

Educate:

In actuality, what's happening is...

Negotiate

Moving forward, I would like to...

If you allow me to do this, I will show you...