



DONALD WINNICOTT'S TRUE AND FALSE SELF: A THERAPIST'S PERSPECTIVE

Those who observe small children (toddlers) know how impulsive and ego-driven they are. Sometimes they throw tantrums (and food!), seeking attention, living for most of the time in a world of their own. This is the **'true self'** Winnicott described.

The child will test boundaries to see how the caregiver will respond. If the messages the child receives are consistent, fair and kind, the child will be able to engage with the **'false self.'**

The 'false self' is that part of us which has to abide by societal rules, such as going to school or thinking about others.

Our ability to engage with the demands of the world relies on us carrying those consistent, fair and kind messages through life, like a subconscious psychological comfort blanket.

Only when we have a safe, developed 'true self' can we engage with the world as it is not as we would like it to be.

Sometimes we meet clients who have not had consistent, loving early care.

As adults in the therapy room, this lack of a developed 'true self' may present as 'acting out', having a tantrum or passive-aggressive behaviour.

Clients who present like this are asking us for what they did not receive in childhood—a consistent, fair and kind 'good enough other' while providing safe and consistent boundaries.

Part of our work as therapists is to help the client develop that safe, loved child which should be part of all of us, to help them have their childhood again.