

# Necessity and Benefits of Interrupter-setting



circuit breaker symbol

*Self-control is learnable and useful*

 → [German Version](#)

## You feel attacked



*Photo: pixabay*

You know this situation: an **insolence**, an **impertinence**, an **insult**, an evil **insinuation** outrages you.

You want to ward off the **attack on your self-esteem and well-being**

- spontaneously, immediately, forcefully and authentically.

For example: "*Brazen! That is the very peak! You take that back immediately!*"

Then you may feel that you have been right in defending yourself, that you have "*really gave it*" to the wicked. That feels good, you might think. But probably only to you. What about him and the impression you leave on him? - We will come back to this at the end of this chapter.

You may have experienced from time to time that **spontaneous statements** do not prove to be happy in the end. It is a hard thing for many to confess afterwards. They are afraid that it could lead to negative judgments about their behaviour. So forget it? Better not - for the degraded will seek revenge in his wickedness. And observers of the conflict will shake their heads over both fighting cocks.

The competent handling of mistakes and criticism will be dealt with in detail in a later chapter. First of all the reference to already existing articles - for the time being only in German language: [1] "[Aus Fehlern lernen](#)" (that is "Learning from mistakes ") or [2] "[Kritik nutzen](#)" (that is "Using criticism").

## Spontaneous reactions

It is well known that all creatures can spontaneously react to attacks with three types of behaviour, namely **attack**, **escape** or **pretend to be dead**.

A [3] [video clip by @TrendNieuws](#) shows an impressive animal example of **conflict avoidance through pretending to be dead** and **escaping** after the end of the acute danger: A duck cowering on the ground in front of a dog. She knows that she can't save herself from the dog with either attack or escape. She expects the dog to lose interest in her if she plays dead. This happens in the same way. After the dog has turned away, the duck can flee safely.

For humans, the example may be worth imitating in a dangerous situation such as a shooting. In a vicious attack on your self-esteem, it might be helpful to "simply" pretend that the insinuations or insults do not concern you at all. However, most people find this very difficult. Even if you could, it might increase the malevolent's aggressiveness.

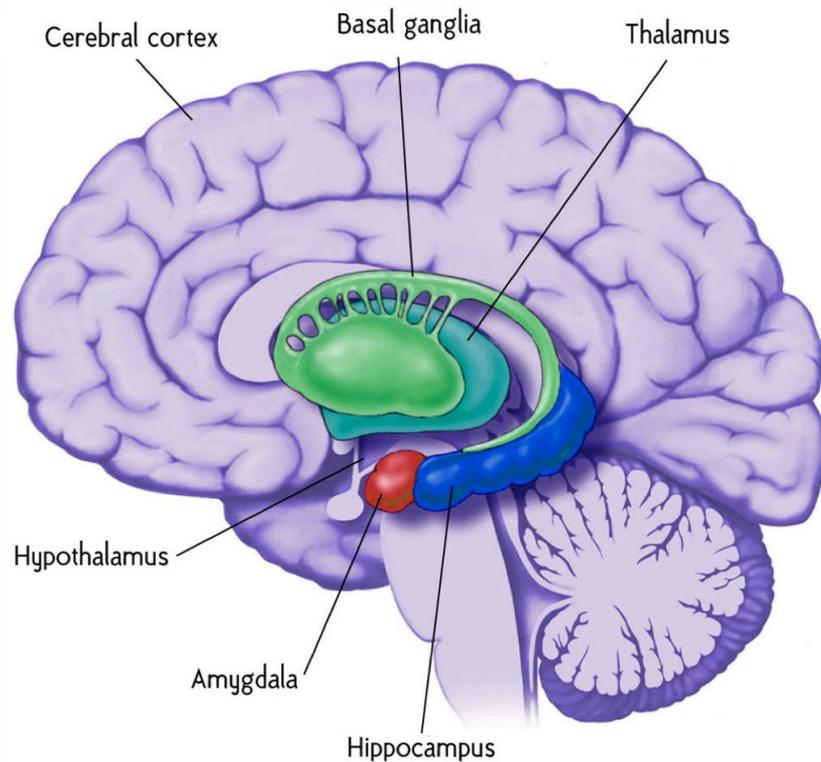
So just let the evil one stand and go away yourself? It's nice if he doesn't stalk you then. But that's not for sure either.

If the wicked man should go so far as to approach threateningly and erratically, you could allow him to do so - and at the last second take a step to the side. That also needs to be practiced and will not succeed in every case. If it succeeds, the attacker may fall down. This may fill you with satisfaction. But the aggressor will probably become all the more angry. –

All spontaneous reactions described are therefore associated with the risk of failure and escalation. So what remains besides attack, escape or pretending to be dead? Before answering this question, take a look at the "control centre" for behaviour in dangerous situations, the human brain.

## **Spontaneous behaviour**

The choice between the three options (counter-) attack, escape or pretend to be dead happens unconsciously and in fractions of a second in an area of the brain that is not subject to rational control.



**Section through the human brain** (Figure from [www.goodair.ch](http://www.goodair.ch))

The amygdala ("amygdala core", red) evaluates the perception by comparison with the neighbouring hippocampus (as memory centre, blue) and triggers the release of nerve impulses for the movement centre in the near hypothalamus (above the amygdala, below the thalamus) if there is a recognised danger. The entire process takes no more than a few hundred milliseconds. This saves you e.g. from a car approaching you by a quick jump to the side.

With the reaction modes to a dangerous situation shown above, you would make use of this "short switching path". However, the reaction, which takes seconds and is not rationally controlled, has the disadvantage of failing or leading to an escalation of the conflict.

## **Controlled behaviour**

Healthy people, however, are obviously also in a position to make well-considered decisions in which the pros and cons are weighed against the foreseeable consequences. Such considerations are made by the prefrontal cortex ("frontal lobe") of the brain.

Because of its distance from the sensory organs and from the amygdala and hippocampus, the interpretation and evaluation of the situation, the impact assessment and the arbitrary triggering of the chosen behaviour take considerably more time than the spontaneous reaction. The quality and speed of your decision on your own behaviour are therefore contradictory. What remains to be clarified is how a controlled behavioral decision can be made at all in the event of danger.

## Set the interrupter



Photo: pixabay

Patients feel unable to control their own behavior. In order to dissolve such emotional self-blockades, a method is successfully applied that "dissociates" the patient, i.e. abducts him from his current state.

The therapist places a **separator** ("interrupter") by directing the patient's attention with a question or an order to an object or process that is in no way connected with the condition in need of treatment, e.g. with the question *"What time may it be now?"*



Photo: pixabay

The illustration on the left shows an electrical switching contact which - as indicated by the arrow - opens, i.e. interrupts the previously closed circuit. It symbolizes the process of "interrupter-setting" in an understandable way. The emotional "flow" of spontaneous reaction zeal or persistent self-blocking is to be deliberately interrupted in order to open the "deviation" via the instance of reason.

## Intermission



Even without the presence of a therapist, "interrupter-setting" can be used as a method for **self-control**. It consists in **not allowing a reaction** to an emotionally moving perception **for at least seven seconds**.

Photo: pixabay  
(modified)

## Why 7 seconds?

This time is sufficient for the human brain,

- to consciously perceive the situation,
- to subject the perception to control by the forehead lobe (prefrontal cortex), and
- to start looking for the best possible solution.

**More time therefore leads to better decisions.**

However, pausing for 7 seconds is not only unusual, but also difficult. The will succeeds only by practice, in repeating it with the **self-suggestive, unspoken order: "Stop!"**



The self-appointment can be strengthened with an individually selectable gesture. This can be, for example, an **indifferent smile**. But beware: Practice this in front of a mirror or a selfie camera so that it is **neither aggressive nor gloating, superior or repellent**. Even a familiar person can help you learn to smile indifferently.

Photo: pixabay (modified)

An indifferent smile is always helpful if you want to gain time to examine a statement or situation sceptically. Your smile may even cause insecurity with your counterpart.

With the statement *"I need some time to think"* you can relax the situation.

You also make it clear to an informed counterpart that you are currently interrupting the "fast bypass" (amygdala - hippocampus) in favour of the "bypass" over the prefrontal cortex.

## Always a smile?

The actor *Charly Chaplin* (1889 - 1977) is credited with the saying:

**"If you see someone without a smile,  
give him yours!"**

Accordingly, a friendly smile is also called **"disarming"**. It is capable of taking the peak of a conflict by expressing without words: *"I am not angry with you and want to get along well with you"*.

People with **charm and charisma** are masters of the art of smiling in a winning way. Those who are not born with these characteristics can at least decide to practice and apply a *friendly* smile instead of an indifferent one.

Of course there are situations - e.g. in connection with a tragedy - in which smiles would be inappropriate. Here a completely **neutral facial expression** in connection with "*Please let me think for a moment*" can be as helpful as appropriate. If you don't like to smile or say anything, you can also combine any other action, such as straightening the left hand palm, with the **self-suggestion** of "*stop, stop!*" to "**anchor**" it. This is what NLP experts call connecting an inner posture with an outer action. It is based on the experience that a practiced outer action makes it easier and safer to adopt the assigned inner posture.

**Role plays** with two or more participants are excellently suited for practicing "interrupter-setting". This is explained in more detail in exercise 4 of my book [4] "[Schulen brauchen gute Lehrer](#)" (that is "Schools need good teachers").

## Finding a solution

The conscious perception of the situation goes hand in hand with its intuitive interpretation. This interpretation must also be made conscious and examined sceptically. You can initiate the sceptical test as effectively as simply by asking yourself the simple one-word question: "*Really?*" - The question "*What other possible interpretations are there?*" initiates a change of perspective. This, in turn, leads to the question "*What kind of action does this open up for me?*" and finally "*Which action is best for me, my counterpart and the situation itself - now and in the future?*"

This search for a solution is a complex process that requires sufficient time for reflection. This is what article [5] "[Bedenkzeit für bessere Lösungen](#)" (that is "Reflection time for better solutions") deals with.

## Success

Already with the expressed desire for sufficient time for reflection your counterpart will perceive you as **thoughtfully** reacting and **self-controlled**. In this way you will already achieve **a success of respect for yourself**. This is a good prerequisite for the acceptance of a well-considered proposed solution. With this, you have already won much more than if you had simply "*given*" it to your counterpart, haven't you?

## Note of thanks

Translation of this article into English with the generous support of [6] [Sabine Gessenich](#).

## LINKS



German Version of this article:

<https://p-j-r.de/publicationes/bildung/selbstkompetenz/235-unterbrecher.html>

- [back to top](#)

[1] Aus Fehlern lernen:

<https://p-j-r.de/publicationes/bildung/kompetenzentwicklung/68-aus-fehlern-lernen.html>

- [back to \[1\]](#)

[2] Kritik nutzen:

<https://p-j-r.de/publicationes/wissen/psychologie/155-kritik-nutzen.html>

- [back to \[2\]](#)

[3] Video von @TrendNieuws auf Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/TrendNieuws/videos/2234601033452274/>

- [back to \[3\]](#)

[4] *Peter Denker*, "Schulen brauchen gute Lehrer":

<https://p-j-r.de/publicationes/pd-nachrichten/207-sbgl-dokumentation.html>

- [back to \[4\]](#)

[5] "Bedenkzeit für bessere Lösungen":

<https://p-j-r.de/publicationes/bildung/selbstkompetenz/236-bedenkzeit.html>:

- [back to \[5\]](#)

[6] *Sabine Gessenich*:

<https://sabine-gessenich.com>

- [back to \[6\]](#)

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### Teaser:

To react to bad behaviour of others or frightening situations self-controlled and well-considered is a good thing. This can be learned and practiced. The "interrupter-setting" thereby proves to be necessary and useful.