

## THE NEUROTIC PARADOX

This is elicited when mental mechanisms fail to help someone feel comfortable in social situations where they are being rejected or diminished.

The neurotic paradox is a term that describes a reflex response that occurs when an individual fails to gain approval in a social situation and feels ignored and rejected. This unconscious reflex sets in action a range of behaviours (termed 'attention seeking' or 'difficult' behaviour) which, far from being useful, have the effect of alienating those from whom the individual most needs approval. **The 'paradox' is, that the more a person needs to be liked and approved by the people around, the more these people become threats that have to be countered or avoided.** The more this reflex is called into play, the more extreme the behaviours become, eventually leading, over time, to 'neurotic' disorders. When these disorders are severe enough to warrant treatment, it is understandable that the 'paradox' engenders severe ambivalence for the sufferers in their relationship with the treatment and care team, and equally, for the members of the treatment and care team.

*People undertaking the care of others have to learn to recognise both attention-seeking behaviours and their own attention-rejecting behaviours and, through understanding, gain the skills that will enable them to be kind and accepting, thus meeting the others' Social Needs, raising their self-esteem, and giving them social confidence. Where the problem is severe it takes time and good teamwork, and much testing by the patient, before the strategy can be effective, and this is the core skill of Mental Health Nursing/Caring.*