

REAL SELF, IDEAL SELF AND CONGRUENCE

Understanding the gap between lived experience and who we think we should be

AT A GLANCE



The real self reflects present experience. The ideal self reflects hoped-for or expected qualities. Congruence describes greater alignment between experience, awareness and expression.

KEY IDEAS

REAL SELF

Current feelings, needs, values, strengths and limitations.

IDEAL SELF

Who you hope, expect or feel required to become.

INCONGRUENCE

A painful gap shaped by denial, pressure or conditions of worth.

CONGRUENCE

Greater openness to experience and alignment in how you live.

WHY IT MATTERS



Exploring the gap can reveal unrealistic 'shoulds', support self-acceptance and clarify authentic growth.

PUTTING THE IDEA INTO PRACTICE

1

NOTICE THE GAP

Where am I performing or concealing?

2

CHECK THE SHOULD

Whose expectation is operating here?

3

ACCEPT EXPERIENCE

Allow what is true now to be acknowledged.

4

CHOOSE AUTHENTICALLY

Move towards values rather than an impossible image.

REFLECTION PROMPTS

1

Which parts of myself do I own?

2

What ideal am I measuring against?

3

What would greater alignment look like?

Use this resource as a starting point for reflection, not as a test or diagnosis.

Different experiences, cultures and circumstances may require different understandings.