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# The Chimp Paradox

Prof Steve Peters

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## ***About the Book***

**Do you sabotage your own happiness and success?  
Are you struggling to make sense of yourself? Do your  
emotions sometimes dictate your life?**

*The Chimp Paradox* is an incredibly powerful mind management model that can help you become a happy, confident, healthier and more successful person. Prof Steve Peters explains the struggle that takes place within your mind and then shows how to apply this understanding to every area of your life so you can:

- – Recognise how your mind is working
- – Understand and manage your emotions and thoughts
- – Manage yourself and become the person you would like to be

The Chimp Mind Management Model is based on scientific facts and principles, which have been simplified into a workable model for easy use. It will help you to develop yourself and give you the skills, for example, to remove anxiety, have confidence and choose your emotions. The book will do this by giving you an understanding of the way in which your mind works and how you can manage it. It will also help you to identify what is holding you back or preventing you from having a happier and more successful life.

Each chapter explains different aspects of how you function and highlights key facts for you to understand. There are also exercises for you to work with. By undertaking these exercises you will see immediate improvements in your daily living and, over time, you will develop emotional skills

and practical habits that will help you to become the person that you want to be, and live the life that you want to live.

## ***About the Author***

Prof Steve Peters is a consultant psychiatrist and has worked in the clinical field of psychiatry for over 20 years. He specialises in optimising the functioning of the mind and also holds degrees in mathematics and medicine. Prof Peters is Undergraduate Dean at Sheffield University Medical School and resident psychiatrist with Sky ProCycling. He is also the consultant psychiatrist for Liverpool FC and, from May 2014, for the England football team. Steven Gerrard, Sir Chris Hoy, Sir Bradley Wiggins, Ronnie O'Sullivan, Victoria Pendleton and Craig Bellamy have all spoken publicly about how Prof Peters' unique model has helped them improve their performance.

Outside of elite sport, Prof Peters works with CEOs, senior executives, students, hospital staff and patients, helping them to understand why they think and act as they do and how to manage their minds to optimise their performance at work and in their personal lives. For more information visit <http://chimpmanagement.com>.

# **The Chimp Paradox**

**Prof Steve Peters**

**Vermillon**  
LONDON

# Introduction

# The Journey

## *Choosing the Sun*



Reading this book will take you on a journey of self-discovery and development. By understanding and applying the concepts within it, you will not only improve the quality of your life, but also significantly increase your chances of being happy and successful in whatever you do. The book is written around a model that I have developed called Chimp Management, which has helped many people understand themselves and learn how to work with their emotions. Some parts of the book will resonate with you more strongly than others. Select those parts that are relevant to you and work with them.

In my work as a psychiatrist and lecturer, people typically present me with comments or questions that are usually centred on problems that they don't understand or can't solve. For example:

- How do I become the person that I would like to be?
- I want to be confident in myself.



- How do I become more organised and successful in what I do?
- Why do I worry so much?
- How do I become a more effective leader?
- I want to be happy.
- How do I stop worrying about what others think?
- Why can't I make decisions?
- How do I motivate myself?
- Why do I have such a low opinion of myself?
- How do I stop emotions that prevent me from reaching my professional potential?
- I drink too much.
- Why do I often act against common-sense?
- My moods just go up and down.
- How do I stop overeating?
- Why do I sometimes become so irrational in my thinking?
- I can't control my anger.
- Why can't I remain faithful?
- I can't get on with my boss.
- Why do I feel judged all the time?
- How do I make my relationship work?

And the list goes on!

## **How we will go through the journey**

Chimp Management is based on scientific facts and principles, which have been simplified into a workable model for easy use. It will help you to answer the above questions, develop yourself and give you the skills, for example, to remove anxiety, have confidence and choose your emotions.

The book will do this by giving you an understanding of the way in which your mind works and how you can manage it. It will help you to identify what is holding you

back or preventing you from having a happier and more successful life. Each chapter explains different aspects of how you function and highlights key facts for you to understand. There are exercises for you to work through. By undertaking these exercises you will see immediate improvements in your daily living and over time you will develop emotional skills and practical habits that will help you to become the person that you want to be, and live the life that you want to live.

We will consider seven different areas to work on:

- Your inner mind
- Understanding and relating to others
- Communication
- The world in which you live
- Your health
- Your success
- Your happiness

To help you to understand and visualise these areas better, each will be represented by a planet, some of which have their own moons to stabilise them. The seven planets and their moons come together to form the Psychological Universe within your head! I will introduce each planet as we go through the journey across this Universe, which of course, strictly speaking is a solar system. (See [here](#) for a diagram of the Universe).

Just as the sun is the centre of the physical solar system, your Sun is the centre of your Psychological Universe and represents self-fulfilment and what you believe to be the meaning and purpose of your life. The Sun has the best chance of shining when all of the seven planets in your Universe are spinning correctly and in harmony. Therefore, in order to make your Sun shine you have to work on each area in your life and get it into a good place. So let's choose

the Sun and begin our journey of self-discovery and life-changing attitudes.

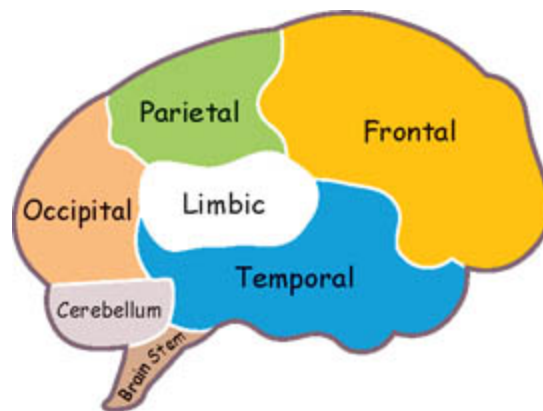
# **Part 1**

## **Your Inner Mind Explored**

# Chapter 1

## The Psychological Mind

AS WE BEGIN our journey across the Universe we need to have a basic understanding of what is inside our head and how it works. The human brain is complicated so we will look at a simplified version. It is easiest to consider the human brain as a system of seven brains working together.

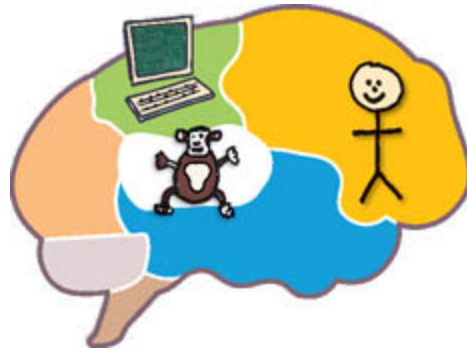


The human brain simplified

Within the Chimp Management model, three of these brains – frontal, limbic and parietal – combine to form the ‘Psychological Mind’ and we will only look at these brains. Remember that scientifically this is far from accurate but it will give us a working model. Strictly speaking, the other brains significantly contribute to emotions, thinking and memory but for our purposes we will dramatically simplify things.

The three psychological brains in our model, the frontal, limbic and parietal, are called the Human, the Chimp and the Computer. For convenience, we will let the parietal lobe

represent many parts of the brain, which makes our diagram more straightforward. Although these three brains try to work together, they very frequently get into conflict and struggle against each other to gain control, with the Chimp (limbic brain) often winning!



The Psychological Mind

## **Introducing the Chimp**

When you were in the womb two different brains, the frontal (Human) and limbic (Chimp: an emotional machine), developed independently and then introduced themselves to each other by forming connections. The problem is that they found they were not in agreement about most things. Either of these two brains, or beings, could run your life for you but they try to work together, and therein is the problem. The Human and Chimp have independent personalities with different agendas, ways of thinking, and modes of operating. Effectively there are two beings in your head! It is important to grasp that only one of these beings is you, the Human.

The Chimp is the emotional machine that we all possess. It thinks independently from us and can make decisions. It offers emotional thoughts and feelings that can be very constructive or very destructive; it is not good or bad, it is a Chimp. The Chimp Paradox is that it can be your best friend and your worst enemy, even at the same time. The main purpose of this book is to help you to manage your

Chimp and to harness its strength and power when it is working for you and to neutralise it when it is not.

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### ***Key Point***

*The Chimp is an emotional machine that thinks independently from us. It is not good or bad, it is just a Chimp.*

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When people have accidents that damage their frontal lobe or where they have a disorder or illness affecting the frontal lobe, their personality alters. Effectively the Human part of the brain stops working and the new personality that presents is the Chimp. Very often, people affected in this way will become disinhibited and lose their judgement or they can become apathetic or have outbursts of aggressive behaviour.

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### **The case of Phineas Gage**

An early example that demonstrated there could be two different personalities in one head - represented by the Human and Chimp - was that of Phineas Gage. In the late nineteenth century, Gage was employed by a railway company to clear the way for the tracklayers by blowing away any boulders that were too big to move manually. To do this he packed explosives beneath the boulder and then tamped it down with a thick iron rod before lighting the fuse. Gage had been chosen to do this dangerous work because he was judged to be careful, sober and responsible. However, one time, Gage allowed himself to be distracted at a crucial moment and caused the rod to strike the boulder, which created a spark. The resulting

explosion jettisoned the iron bar into Gage's eye socket, through the front of his head and out the top of his skull. As it exited, it took with it a clean core of brain tissue from his frontal (Human) lobe.

Apart from being blind in one eye, Gage made a full recovery. However, his personality was completely altered. He became foul-mouthed, aggressive and impulsive. Effectively, his Human had gone and he was now left with just the Chimp!

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You can recognise the difference between your Chimp thinking and Human thinking without knowing any of the science. How many times have you talked to yourself, reassured yourself or had battles within your own head? Often you have thoughts and feelings that you do not want and even carry out behaviours that you know at the time are not really what you want to do. So why are you doing this? How can it be that you do not have control over what thoughts or emotions you have and what behaviours you carry out? How can you be two very different people at different times?

Technology can go some way to answering this question. Functional brain scanners show the blood supply in your brain going to the area that is being used. If you think calmly and rationally then we can see the blood going to the frontal area, the Human in your head, and you become the person that you want to be and that you really are. If you become emotional and somewhat irrational, especially when you are angry or distressed, then we see the blood supply go to your Chimp, and you would usually say this is not how you want to be and that you don't want this. The truth is that it is your Chimp, an emotional machine, that is overpowering your Human mind.

This starts to explain many things, such as why you worry or why you say things in the heat of the moment and



then regret them, or why you can't stop eating or why you don't exercise when you really want to but just can't get your act together. The list is endless. Wonder no more: it is not you doing these things, it is your Chimp that is hijacking you. Having a Chimp is like owning a dog. You are not responsible for the nature of the dog but you are responsible for managing it and keeping it well behaved. This is a very important point and you should stop and think about this because it is crucial to your happiness and success in life.

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### ***Key Point***

*You are not responsible for the nature of your Chimp but you are responsible for managing it.*

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## **The Chimp within**

To reiterate, the Chimp within your head is a separate entity to you. It was born when you were born but actually has nothing to do with you as a Human. It is simply part of your machinery. For example, when you were born you were given a certain colour of eyes. You didn't choose this colour, it was given to you. It was in your genes. There isn't much you can do about it, so you accept your eye colour and get on with your life. Similarly you didn't choose your Chimp, it was given to you and you need to accept it. It has a mind of its own and thinks with original thoughts that are not yours. It is a living machine that is built to serve a purpose, which is to ensure the next generation. It has a personality of its own and it can run your life for you, usually not very well, but it can do it! It is an extremely powerful emotional machine.

You might wish to give your Chimp a name and introduce yourself because it plays one of the biggest parts in your life. Throughout your life, you (the Human) and

your Chimp (your emotional thinking machine) will often do battle.



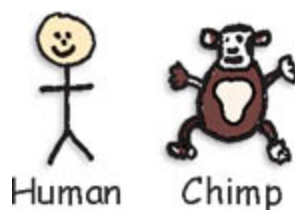
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### ***Key Point***

*One of the secrets of success and happiness is to learn to live with your Chimp and not get bitten or attacked by it. To do this, you need to understand how your Chimp behaves, and why it thinks and acts in the way that it does. You also need to understand your Human and not muddle up your Human with your Chimp.*

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The Psychological Mind therefore has two independent thinking machines that also independently interpret our experiences.



The two beings that think and then interpret

- The Human is you, and you live in your frontal lobe.
- The Chimp is your emotional machine, given to you at birth, and it lives in your limbic system.

## **The third part of the Psychological Mind**

The 'Psychological Mind' also has a storage area for thoughts and behaviours called the Computer, which is spread throughout the whole brain.



The storage of information for reference

The Computer stores information that the Chimp or Human has put into it. It then uses this information to act for them in an automatic way or it can serve as a reference point.

So now that you have a basic understanding of what is inside your head, let us start the journey across the Psychological Universe. We can see how you are operating with your Human, Chimp and Computer in different circumstances and how you can use them to your advantage and understand yourself better.

### **Summary key points**

- The Psychological Mind is made up of three separate brains: Human, Chimp and Computer.
  - You are the Human.
  - Your Chimp is an emotional thinking machine.
  - Your Computer is a storage area and automatic functioning machine.
  - Any one of them can take complete control but usually they work together.
-

## **Suggested exercise:**

### *Development time*

#### **What is 'development time' and why have it?**

Simply put, 'development time' is time specifically set aside that is dedicated to reflecting on how you are managing yourself. You will benefit most from the model of the Chimp, the Human and the Computer if you spend time thinking through the concepts involved and then implementing them. The best way to make sure that you establish 'development time' is to make it into a habit. Habits are formed when they are easy to do. Therefore, setting aside a specific time in the day that is sacrosanct for development thinking will increase your chances of it happening regularly. This session must be easy to do otherwise your Chimp won't agree and you won't do it! So making the session just ten minutes long is more likely to establish the habit than making the session an hour long. Try to establish ten minutes a day. By reflecting during development time, the Human is reviewing what is in the Computer and modifying it. As we will see in future chapters, this is critical to managing your Chimp.

#### **What to do**

During this time, you need to look back over the last 24 hours and reflect on how you managed it. Keep a logbook and write only one or two lines for each day, which will help focus your mind on how you can improve the way that you do things or how you are thinking. It will also help you to work through the points raised in this book.

#### **An example**

Here is a suggestion for the first few sessions. Try to improve your ability to recognise when your Chimp is hijacking you with thoughts, feelings and behaviours that you don't want to have. By doing this, you are learning to recognise the difference between yourself and your Chimp and who is in control at any point in time. This will help to make clear that there are two brains operating within your head and only one of them is you.

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## Chapter 2

# The Divided Planet (PART 1)

*How to understand yourself and your Chimp*



THE FIRST OF the seven planet systems consists of the Divided Planet and the Guiding Moon. It represents your inner mind and the battle that goes on inside your head. This is the most important planet system in your Universe because if it is not in control then it is unlikely that any of the other planets can function properly.

The Divided Planet is where the Human and Chimp live. You and your Chimp typically have an uneasy relationship that frequently involves compromise and conflict. It is often a battle for power between the two of you. As the Chimp is far stronger than you are, it is wise to understand it and then nurture and manage it.

To understand how you and your Chimp work differently, we will approach this in a systematic way by looking at four aspects:

- Ways of thinking

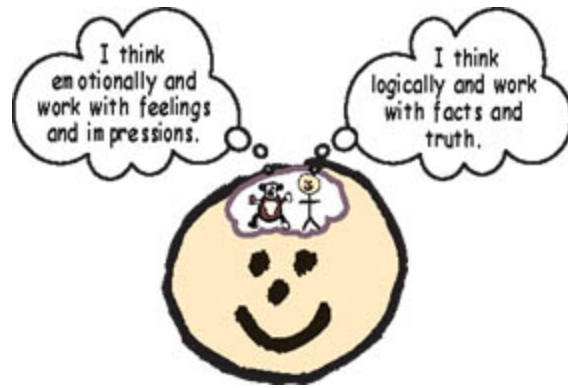
- Agendas
- Modes of operating
- Personalities

## **Two different ways of thinking**

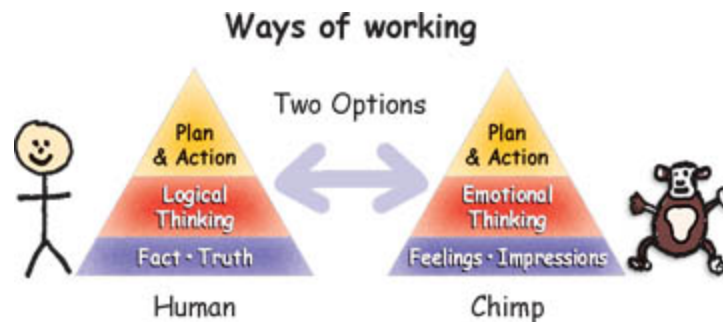
You and your Chimp think in very different ways. As we go about our day we are continually receiving information from around us. The Human and Chimp both receive this information and then interpret it.

The Chimp interprets this information with **feelings** and **impressions**. When it has got a feel for what is going on, it then uses **emotional thinking** to put things together and to work out what is happening and form a plan of action. All of this process is based on emotion. Emotional thinking means that the Chimp makes guesses and fills in detail by assumptions that are typically based on a hunch, paranoid feelings or defensive thoughts. The chances therefore that the Chimp will get the right interpretation as to what is happening may not be so good; however, sometimes the gut feeling it has is right. It can only think and act with emotion.

The Human, on the other hand, will interpret information by **searching for the facts and establishing the truth**. When it has done this, it will then put things together in a logical manner using **logical thinking** and form a plan of action based on this. So logic is the Human's basis for thinking and acting.



Both processes can be healthy, but lead to different interpretations of what is happening and how to deal with it.



So whatever you are doing, there are two of you interpreting what is going on and forming an opinion as to what you should do. Sometimes the two of you agree on what to do and there is no problem, but often the two of you disagree. When you disagree, the Chimp is the most powerful and therefore gets control of your thoughts and actions. However, if you recognise what is happening, and have strategies for managing this, you will gain control of your thinking and then you can act in a logical manner.

### **John and the parked car**

Let's start with a simple example to demonstrate the differences in thinking between the Chimp and the Human within the head of someone called John.



John is telling his wife, Pauline, that the man next door had blocked his car in by parking across the driveway and he had to go and tell the man to move the car. John (the Human) is telling the story in a matter-of-fact way and his inner Chimp is calmly listening.

Pauline then responds by saying, 'I don't know why you are making such a deal of it; it got sorted didn't it?'

John and his Chimp have both heard this response but have very different interpretations and reactions to Pauline's comment. The Human in John, being reasonable, may think, 'I wasn't really making a deal of it but clearly Pauline doesn't want to hear, so I will just let it go,' or 'It did get sorted so she has probably got a point and I need to move on and not react.' The Human has remained calm and has already moved on without a problem.

The Chimp in John, however, may react in a very different way. The Chimp has taken the remark personally and has become agitated. It may interpret the comment as a direct criticism, and therefore the Chimp will go into defence or attack mode. It is likely to raise its voice and say something like, 'Why do you never support me?' or 'I am not making a deal of it, what is your problem?' or 'I only made a comment that I thought you, as my wife, might be interested in.'

You can imagine how the conversation goes downhill from this point on. If we had stopped the scenario after Pauline gave her remark and we asked John how he would like to respond, then it is likely that he would choose to be Human and let it go. However, as the Chimp within us is far more powerful than the Human, it is more likely that the Chimp will speak before the Human gets a chance to take control, and this will end up leaving John wondering why he didn't just let go of the remark in the first place.

### **Sarah's comment**

Let's have another example of the different thinking patterns between the Human and the Chimp. Rachael is at work when Sarah makes a comment to her, saying that Rachael looks like she is tired.

The message always goes to the Chimp first (this is one of the rules of how the brain works). The Chimp reacts in an emotional way and typically thinks it is being criticised so it becomes agitated, possibly annoyed, possibly upset (it all depends on the nature of that particular Chimp and what mood it is in). The Chimp now uses emotional construction to understand the remark. So it may say something like, 'She really means you are looking old,' or 'She is insinuating that you are not working hard enough,' or it may have any other unhelpful or destructive interpretation. Alternatively, the Chimp might think positively, such as, 'She is concerned for me,' or 'She is probably right and I need to slow down a bit,' or some other constructive thought.

The Human, on the other hand, if it were unsure of what was meant, would have calmly checked what Sarah implied. It would have done this by establishing what the facts of the comment were. Then, having clarified what Sarah meant, it would have responded to it in a rational way. Now we can answer one of the questions posed at the start of the book.

### **Why do I sometimes become so irrational in my thinking?**

One of the opening questions was: 'Why do I sometimes become so irrational in my thinking?' The answer may now be clear. It is not you thinking at all, but your Chimp taking over and thinking for you. The solution therefore is to understand how your Chimp thinks, recognise when it is taking over, and intervene.

What you are experiencing when you have strong emotional reactions is very natural and the sign of a healthy mind. However, emotions can shift ground quickly and therefore the Chimp's thinking is relatively unstable and inconsistent. Therefore, the Chimp is less predictable than the Human when it comes to decision-making and the process is often irrational. Because of this unpredictability, it is usually unhelpful to let the Chimp think for us, so we need to address it. First we will understand how a healthy inner Chimp thinks.

## **Understanding the Chimp - emotional thinking**

### **The basis of emotional thinking is impression and feeling**

The Chimp does not necessarily work with facts but it works with what it believes is the truth or with a perception of the truth or, even worse, with a projection of what might be the truth. It is quick to form an impression on little, if any, evidence and usually won't give way. Of course, some impressions that the Chimp gives us are accurate and helpful, but they can just as easily be wrong. Searching for some accuracy and truth would help us to reach a sensible conclusion.

Your Chimp typically forms first impressions when you meet new people by reading body language. If you know that your Chimp is often wrong then it can be helpful to see if a friend's Chimp is more skilled in doing this and rely on them! We know that some people's Chimps are naturally good at judging the character of people, whereas other Chimps are not so good.

Chimps like to work on feelings and often start their conversations with 'But I feel...' or 'I don't feel like...' Their feelings are very important to them and they usually fail to recognise that all feelings come and go. Of course, it is

good to have feelings from the Chimp and they can be a very useful indication for us to know what to do. However, they are not always reliable and can change quickly. So working with feelings can be helpful or unhelpful. Sometimes the Human needs to say to the Chimp, 'I don't care how you feel we have to do it,' or 'I don't care whether you are in the mood or not, it is not about mood.'

## **Here are some of the traits of emotional thinking**



- Jumps to an opinion
- Thinks in black and white
- Paranoid
- Catastrophic
- Irrational
- Emotive judgement

### **Jumps to an opinion**

The Chimp is fast to reach a conclusion and doesn't wait for all of the information to come through before reaching its conclusion. The Chimp forms an opinion based on its feelings and impressions and then fixes its opinion. It then searches out evidence to back up its opinion and prove its point. In doing this, it typically twists the facts to fit its opinion and is very unreasonable and irrational if challenged.

### **Thinks in black and white**

Inner Chimps are very much like children, they think in terms of black and white. They can be very unforgiving and will not discuss shades of grey. Adult Humans are more able to appreciate that very little in life is black or white. As Chimps think in black and white, they become very judgemental and are quick to respond. When you are

thinking with your Chimp you tend to see only one possibility. Chimps don't usually consider alternative interpretations of what might be happening.

### **Paranoid**

The Chimp needs to know that it is safe, so it is vigilant and continually looks for danger and therefore is prone to paranoia. It thinks that it is far safer to be a bit paranoid and wary towards others or a situation than to relax and lose your life. Therefore it is not unusual for our Chimps to be suspicious of others and have some mistrust. The more vulnerable that a Chimp feels, the more paranoid it will become in its outlook.

Chimps that are insecure may read lots of things into harmless situations. They can also read intrigue and malice in comments or statements that others make and then allow their imaginations to run wild. When the Chimp has an opinion it will become even more paranoid about defending it. The Chimp will often take things out of context and also become very defensive. Dealing with paranoia in your Chimp is a skilful business and will be addressed in the Chimp Management section.

### **Catastrophic**

As Chimps are constantly vigilant to danger, they tend to think catastrophically. They overreact to situations and fuel them with high and intense emotion. Whenever they perceive something is wrong, they have a tendency to start worrying about what might happen and then get things completely out of perspective. This frequently leads to terrible feelings of gloom and doom and stomach-churning moments. These moments are often linked to black-and-white thinking, which means you are left with a feeling that there is no way out or there can be no recovering from what you are going through.

The emotion the Chimp then offers to the Human is horrendous and extreme, causing much pain. Think how many times you have been through emotional turmoil at the hands of your Chimp, only to look back wondering why you allowed yourself to be put through it.

## **Irrational**

The Chimp does not work rationally. It doesn't try to decide if something is likely or feasible but typically jumps to conclusions and fills in missing details with anything it chooses. It can therefore become very unreasonable and end up looking foolish. If the Chimp manages to get control of your mind and then interprets what is happening to you, the reasoning it offers is likely to be silly and unfounded. There will be little, if any, logic shown. Sadly this irrational approach will lead us into uncomfortable situations and when the truth appears we may want the ground to swallow us up. Let's look at an example of how the Chimp works:

Rob is waiting for his girlfriend, Sally, at a cinema and they have agreed to meet at 8.30. The time is now 9.00 and there is no sign of her. His Chimp has got control and is on the warpath. His Chimp thinks emotionally. 'It is late; she has not told me what is happening; I am wasting my time; I may as well go into the cinema; she isn't worth it; she has let me down; she shouldn't do this to me; she has humiliated me; I am angry; I am upset,' and so it goes on. Suddenly Sally arrives and, before she has the chance to say anything, his Chimp attacks - 'Why have you turned up late? You have made me look like a fool; what's the point of going in now it's too late?' and many more attacks. Then he stops and Sally speaks.

'Someone has been knocked over just round the corner. I went to help and they were using my mobile to get an