

Developing Secure Attachment through Creating a Coherent Narrative

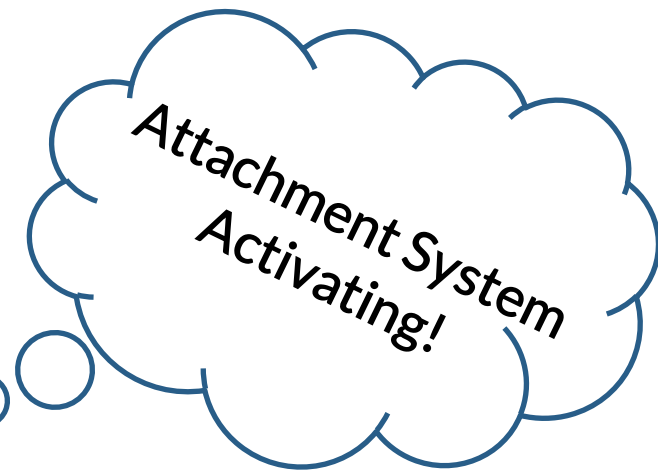
with Dr. Lisa Firestone

Learning Objectives:

1. Describe, using cutting edge neurobiological research, how clients can rewire their brains to feel more secure.
2. Explain how a patient, through the process of psychotherapy, can develop an earned secure attachment in adulthood.
3. Apply step by step guidelines for how to help clients develop a coherent narrative for their life.
4. Discuss a framework for helping clients resolve childhood traumas.

Attachment Theory Distilled

- ▷ Our attachment system is activated when we are distressed.
- ▷ The way our parents interact with us (particularly during times of distress) forms the basis of our attachment style.



We have different attachments to different people...



What is Attachment Theory?



How do I get these
people to take
care of me?

Clip 539B, Dan Siegel from our eCourse, Caregiving Shapes the Brain, .55

Attachment Theory Distilled

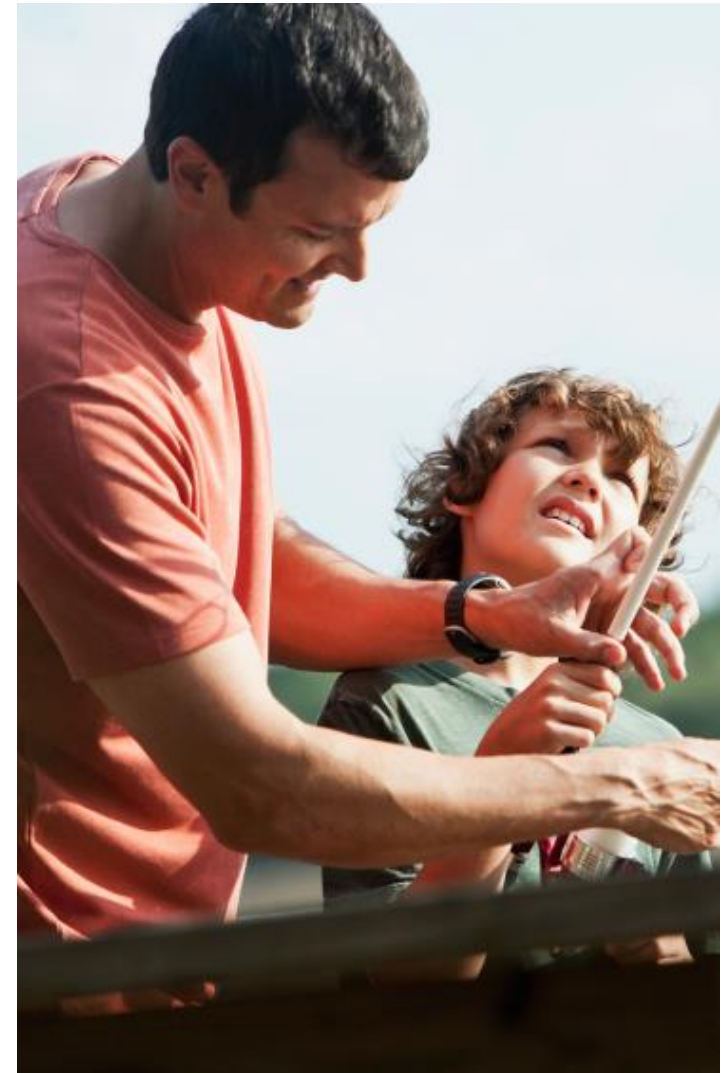
Humans rely on attachment figures for:

- ▷ Protection (**safe**)
- ▷ Support (**seen**)
- ▷ Emotion regulation (**soothed**)



Attachment Theory Distilled

- ▷ When threats abate, behavioral systems other than attachment (e.g., exploration, caregiving) can be activated, allowing a person to become more competent/ autonomous
- ▷ Attachment orientations, or “styles,” develop in relationships, resulting in systematic individual differences in attachment orientation: secure, anxious, avoidant...
- ▷ The theory applies from “the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby)



Attachment Theory & Research

“Attachment underlies later capacity to make effectual bonds as well as a whole range of adult dysfunctions,” particularly with marital bonds and trouble parenting.



Psychotherapy Relationship as Attachment

Psychotherapy relationship with an adult client exhibits all the essential elements of attachment bonds:

- ▷ They regard their therapist as stronger and wiser.
- ▷ They seek proximity through emotional connection and regular meetings.
- ▷ They rely upon the therapist as a safe haven when they feel threatened.
- ▷ They derive a sense of felt security from their therapist who serves as a secure base for psychological exploration.
- ▷ They experience separation anxiety when anticipating loss of their therapist.

From "The Psychotherapy Relationship as Attachment"

http://www.researchgate.net/publication/232509555_Attachment_patterns_in_the_pschotherapy_relationship_Development_of_the_Client_Attachment_to_Therapist_Scale/file/72e7e52b89f8021b12.pdf

The making and breaking of affectional bonds. II. Some principals of psychotherapy. The Fiftieth Maudsley Lecture

~ John Bowlby, *BJPsych*, 1977



“...a psychotherapist is seen to have a number of inter-related tasks: (a) to provide the patient with a secure base from which he, the patient, can explore himself and his relationships; (b) and (c) to examine with the patient the ways in which he tends to construe current interpersonal relationships, including that with the therapist, and the resulting predictions he makes and actions he takes, and the extent to which some may be inappropriate; (d) to help him consider whether his tendencies to misconstrue, and as a results to act misguidedly, can be understood by reference to the experiences he had with the attachment figured during his childhood...”

Measuring Attachment

The Strange Situation



The Adult Attachment Interview



Attachment Figures

Low Risk Non-Clinical Populations

- ❖ Secure 55-65%
- ❖ Ambivalent 5-15%
- ❖ Avoidant 20-30%
- ❖ Disorganized 20-40%

(Given a Best Fit Alternative)

High Risk, Parentally maltreated

- ❖ Disorganized 80%

Secure Attachment in Childhood



Secure Attachment Promotes

- ▷ Flexible self-regulation
- ▷ Prosocial behavior
- ▷ Empathy
- ▷ Positive sense of emotional well-being and self-esteem
- ▷ Coherent life-story



What causes insecure attachment?

Unresolved trauma/loss in the life of the parents statistically predict attachment style far more than:

- ▷ Maternal Sensitivity
- ▷ Child Temperament
- ▷ Social Status
- ▷ Culture



Implicit Versus Explicit Memory

Implicit Memory



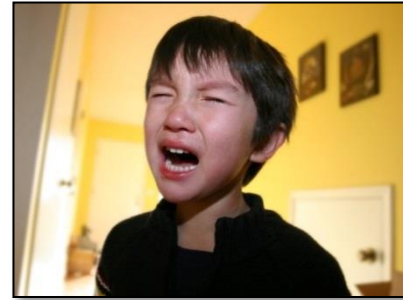
Explicit Memory



How does disorganized attachment pass from generation to generation?

Implicit memory of terrifying experiences may create:

- ▷ Impulsive behaviors
- ▷ Distorted perceptions
- ▷ Rigid thoughts and impaired decision-making patterns
- ▷ Difficulty tolerating a range of emotions

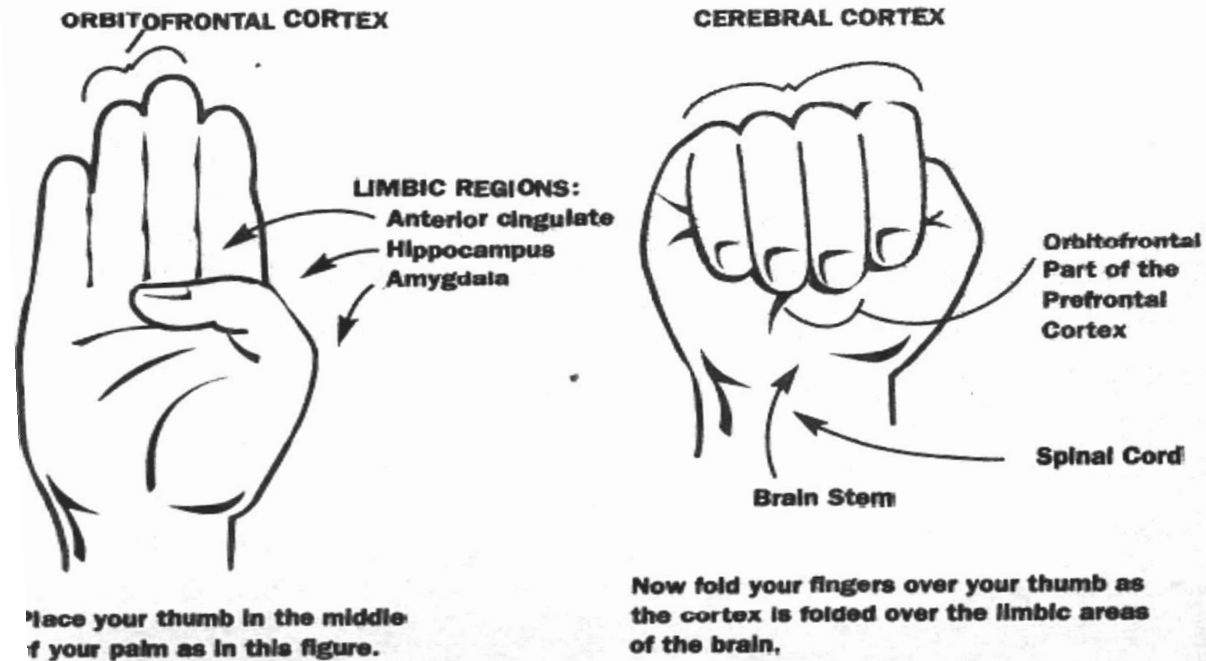


Clip 555, Garbarino traumatic memories don't decay, 2.30

The Brain in the Palm of Your Hand

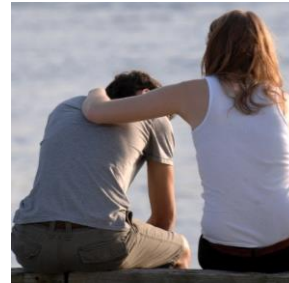


Daniel Siegel, M.D. – Interpersonal Neurobiology



9 Important Functions of the Pre-Frontal Cortex

1. Body Regulation
2. Attunement
3. Emotional Balance
4. Response Flexibility
5. Empathy
6. Self-Knowing Awareness (Insight)
7. Fear Modulation
8. Intuition
9. Morality



Avoidant Attachment in Childhood



Clip 492, Julie Patty avoidant attachment, 3.48

Ambivalent/Anxious Attachment in Childhood



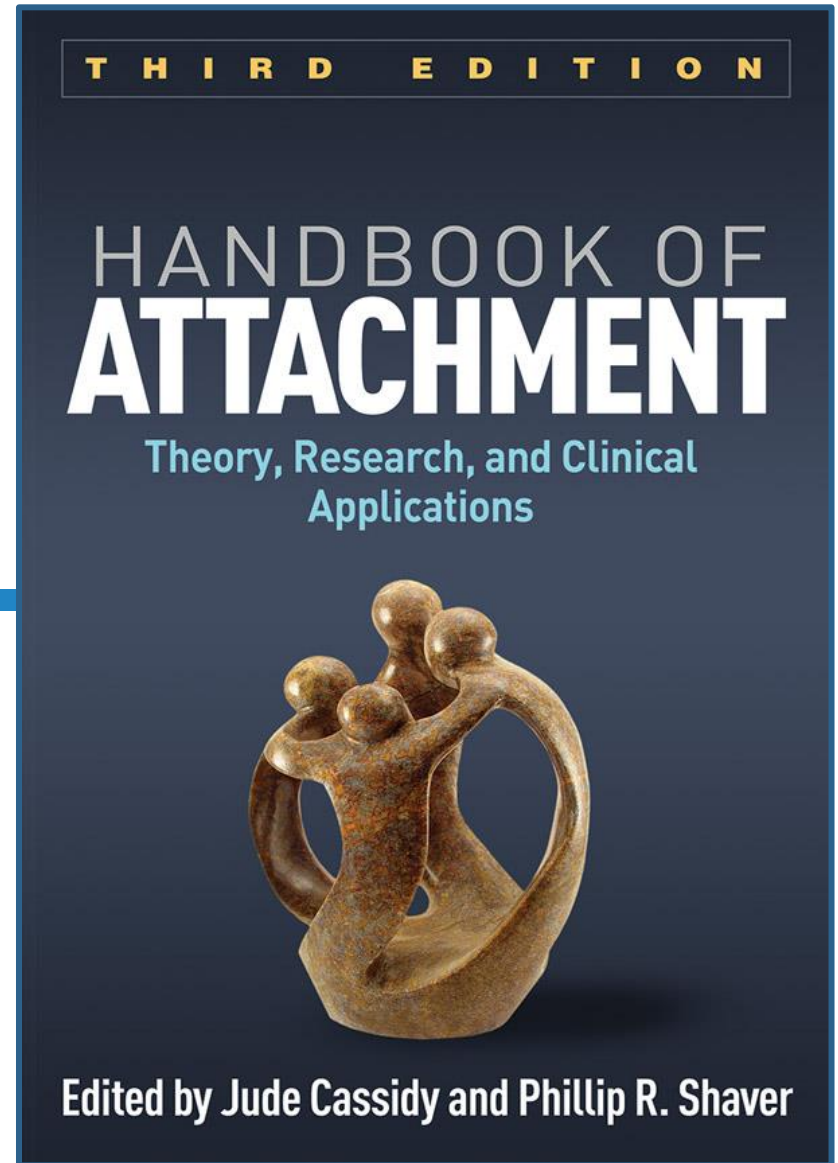
Clip 491, Arlene Erica role reversal, 1.24

Disorganized Attachment in Childhood



Clip 495, Sonya Gavin disorganized attachment, 1.30

A 1000-page summary
of basic and applied
attachment theory and
research



From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.

Our Approach



Separation Theory

Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.



Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought

Core Conflict:

Two kinds of emotional pain:

UNDEFENDED



DEFENDED



INTERPERSONAL

EXISTENTIAL

FANTASY BOND

CRITICAL INNER VOICE

Division of the Mind

Parental Ambivalence

Parents both love and hate themselves and extend both reactions to their productions, i.e., their children.

Parental Nurturance



Parental Rejection, Neglect Hostility



Self-System: Parental Nurturance



Unique make-up of the individual (genetic predisposition and temperament); harmonious identification and incorporation of parent's positive attitudes and traits and parents positive behaviors: attunement, affection, control, nurturance; and the effect of other nurturing experience and education on the maturing self-system resulting in a sense of self and a greater degree of differentiation from parents and early caretakers.

Personal Attitudes/Goals/Conscience

Realistic, Positive Attitudes Towards Self

Realistic evaluation of talents, abilities, etc...with generally positive/ compassionate attitude towards self and others.

Goals

Needs, wants, search for meaning in life

Moral Principles

Behavior

Ethical behavior towards self and others

Goal Directed Behavior

Acting with Integrity



Anti-Self System

Unique vulnerability: genetic predisposition and temperament

Destructive parental behavior: misattunement, lack of affection, rejection, neglect, hostility, over permissiveness

Other Factors: accidents, illnesses, traumatic separation, death anxiety



The Fantasy Bond (core defense) is a self-parenting process made up of two elements: the helpless, needy child, and the self-punishing, self-nurturing parent. Either aspect may be extended to relationships. The degree of defense is proportional to the amount of damage sustained while growing up.

Interpersonal Reconstruction Therapy



Lorna Smith Benjamin investigated the mechanisms responsible for the repetition of defensive behavior patterns from childhood in a new adult relationship.

Problem patterns are linked to learning with important early loved ones via one or more of three copy processes: (1) Be like him or her; (2) Act as if he or she is still there and in control; and (3) Treat yourself as he or she treated you. (vii)

Anti-Self System

Self-Punishing Voice Process

Voice Process

1. Critical thoughts toward self



2. Micro-suicidal injunctions



3. Suicidal injunctions – suicidal ideation



Behaviors

Verbal self-attacks – a generally negative attitude toward self and others predisposing alienation.

Addictive patterns. Self-punitive thoughts after indulging.

Actions that jeopardize, such as carelessness with one's body, physical attacks on the self, and actual suicide

Source

Critical parental attitudes, projections, and unreasonable expectations.

Identification with parents' defenses

Parents' covert and overt aggression (identification with the aggressor).

Anti-Self System

Self-Soothing Voice Process


Voice Process



1a) Aggrandizing thoughts toward self.



1b) Suspicious paranoid thoughts towards others.



2) Micro-suicidal Injunctions



3) Overtly Violent thoughts

Behaviors

Verbal build up toward self.

Alienation from others, destructive behavior towards others.

Addictive patterns. Thoughts luring the person into indulging.

Aggressive actions, actual violence.

Source

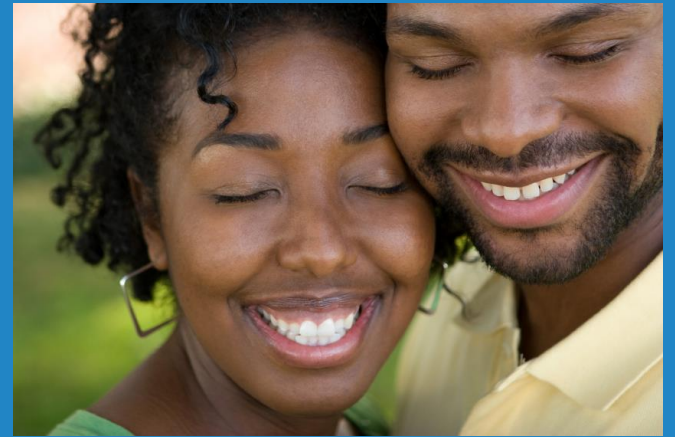
Parental build up

Parental attitudes, child abuse, experienced victimization.

Imitation of parents' defenses.

Parental neglect, parents' overt aggression (identification with the aggressor).

Adult Attachment



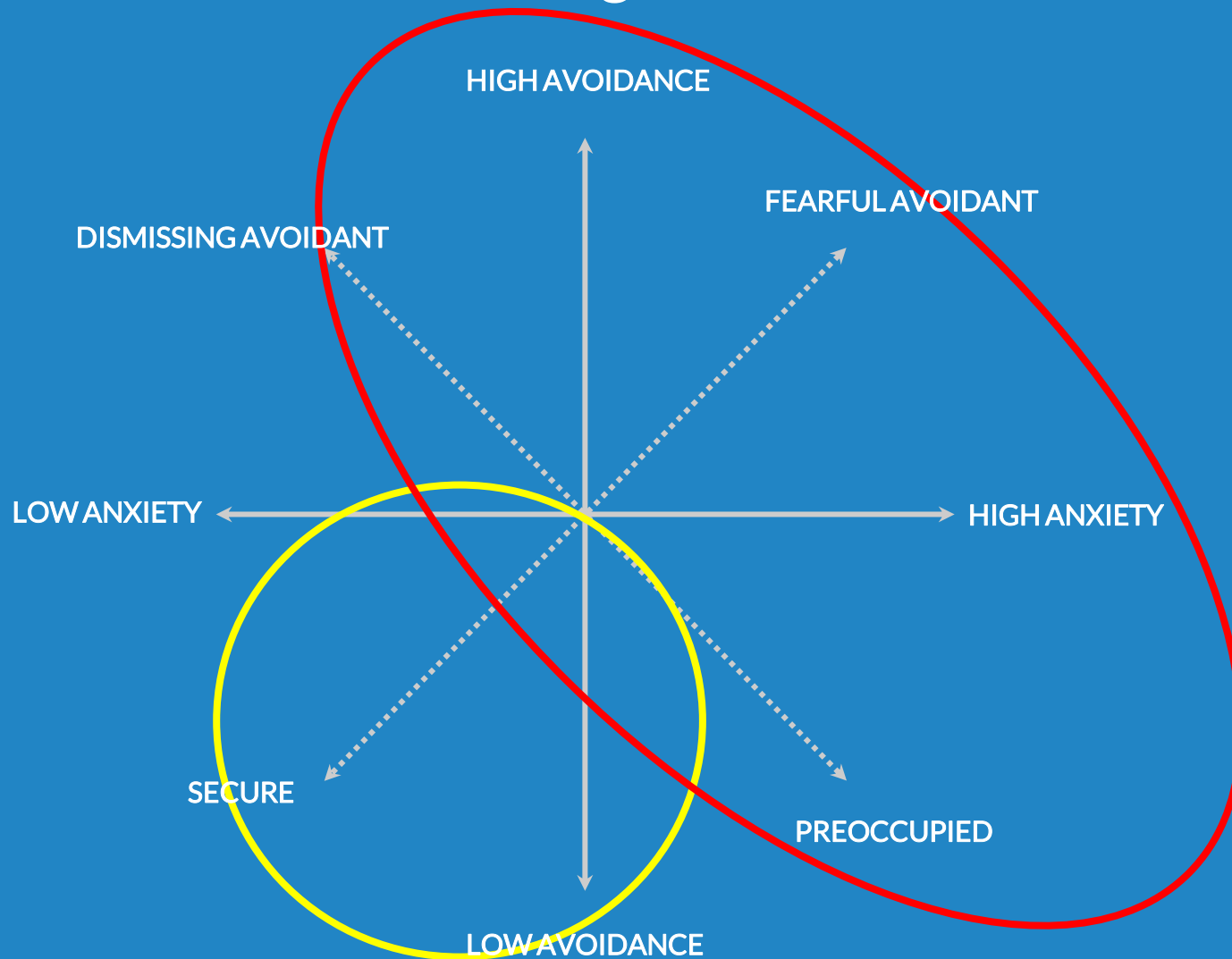
Maternal caregiving at 18 months predicts self-reported anxiety and avoidance at age 22

(Zayas, Mischel, Shoda, & Aber, SPPS, 2010)

- ▷ Attachment anxiety at age 22 correlated $-.75$ with maternal sensitivity measured 20 years earlier, and $.70$ with maternal controlling. Avoidance at age 22 correlated $-.73$ with maternal sensitivity and $.52$ with maternal controlling.
- ▷ These correlations were much higher than similar correlations with self-reported attachment to mother at age 22.



Adult Attachment Styles: Regions in a 2-Dimensional Space



From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.
Adapted from Ainsworth et al. (1978), Bartholomew & Horowitz (1991), Fraley & Shaver (2000)

Clip 594, Dan Siegel & Lisa attachment styles, 4.31

Clip 561, Dan Siegel on recreating our past, 6.50

Clip 547B, Avoidant Attachment, 1.55

Attachment and Caregiving

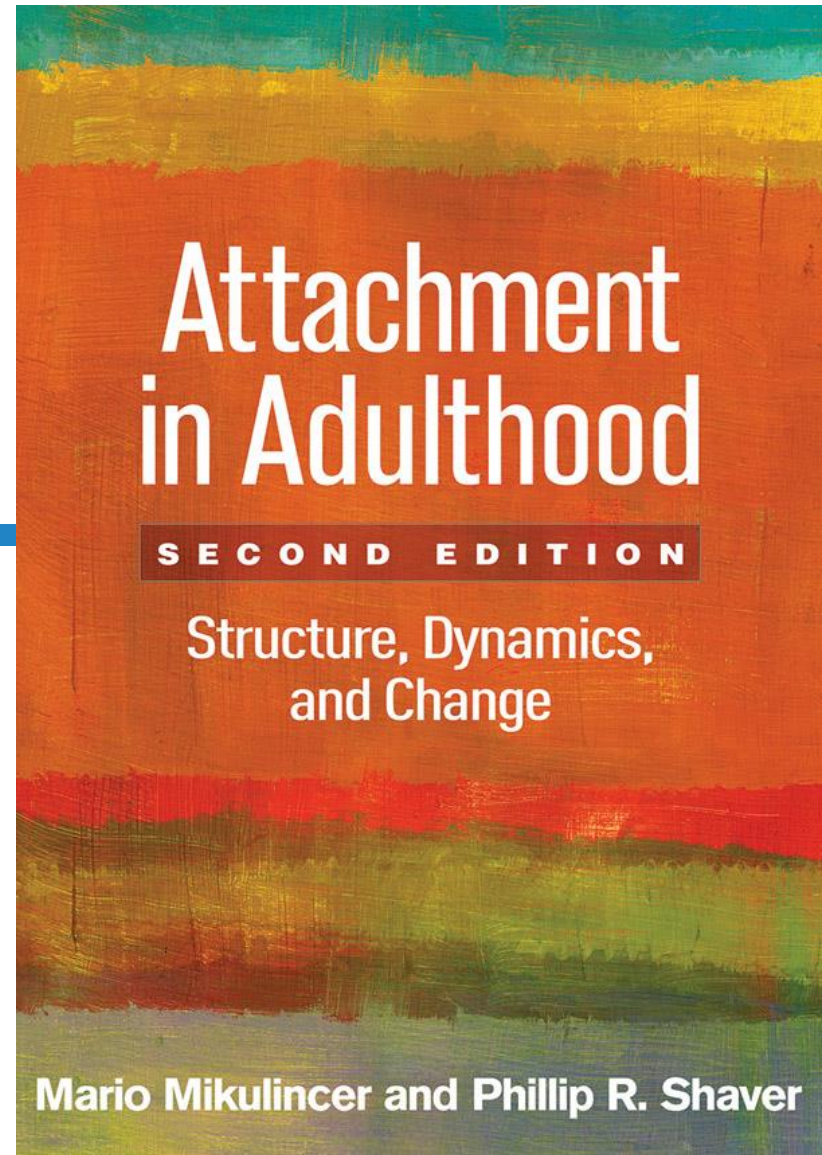
Many studies have shown that attachment anxiety and avoidance are related to deficits in caring for relationship partners and engaging in altruistic behavior more generally (e.g., Kuncze & Shaver, 1994; Gillath et al., 2005).

Anxious people tend to be self-focused when engaged in supposedly caring/altruistic actions, leading to intrusiveness, poor assessment of others' actual needs, and personal distress.

Avoidant people tend to be less interested in helping others and to derogate needy others. They are relatively deficient in the domain of compassion and love.

Since Hazan & Shaver (JPSP, 1987)...

Hundreds of studies using self-report attachment measures have been conducted



Overall Conclusions

- ▷ Attachment theory has proven to be a very fruitful framework for studying social and psychological processes
- ▷ Our priming studies show that security infusions, whether administered consciously or subliminally, have beneficial effects on mental health and interpersonal relations
- ▷ This suggests that insecurity lies at the heart of many psychological and social pathologies (as Bowlby suspected from the beginning)
- ▷ Similar mental and social processes occur in different contexts: romantic relationships, teacher-student relationships, leader-follower relationships, etc.; and many attachment-related mental processes occur in religious/spiritual contexts (prayer, meditation)
- ▷ Humans' social-relational nature shows up everywhere and perhaps can eventually be conceptualized in a general theory

Developing a Secure Attachment

- ▷ It is never too late to develop an Earned Secure Attachment. Models of attachment are changeable, but only if we come to understand them.
- ▷ Feel the full pain of your childhood and make sense of it.
- ▷ Grow toward security by developing integration from non-integrated brain functioning.
- ▷ Because our attachment ability is broken in a relationship, it can be fixed in a relationship. This can be with a romantic partner, a close friend or a good therapist. It takes time to develop an Earned Secure Attachment in a relationship. Stick with it!

Why is it important to make sense of your life?

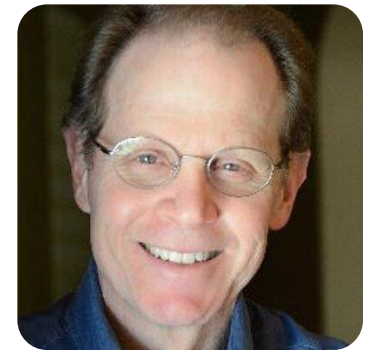
Research shows that with self-reflection and understanding, we can free ourselves from the limitations of our upbringing.

Making sense of our lives by writing a coherent narrative allows us to have a sense of who we've been, who we are now, and who we'd like to become.



“Research reveals that the more coherent a narrative we have of our own attachment issues in childhood, the more we’ve made sense of how our early life experiences have shaped us, the more likely our children will have a secure attachment to us and the more rewarding in general our interpersonal relationships will be.” ~ Dr. Dan Siegel

“When we create a narrative of who we are, we link past and present so we can become the active author of a possible future, too.” ~ Dr. Dan Siegel



Questions for Self-Reflections

The following questions are designed for self-reflection, guiding you to think about your early life experiences. These questions were adapted from Dr. Dan Siegel's book *Brainstorm*. In your journal, write responses to each of the following questions. Your responses can be as long or as short as you like.

▷ Family Background

- Who was in your family? Include significant adults, siblings, etc.
- What was it like growing up in your family?
- What was your parents' philosophy about raising children?

▷ Family Relationships and Attachment

- Was there anyone in your life, other than your parents, who served as a parental figure or to whom you felt attached? Please state a few words to reflect your relationship with those individuals as well.
- What were the major conflicts in your family? Did you have conflict with anyone?
- Was there anyone you could turn to or any place you could go to help you feel comforted during difficult times?

▷ Childhood Experiences

- Did you ever experience a long separation from your parents in childhood? What was that like for you?
- How were you disciplined as a child?
- Have you ever felt threatened by your parents?
- Have you ever felt rejected by your parents?

Looking Back on Your Early Relationships

Choose five adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother or mother-like figure. Try to think back as far as you can remember to your early childhood.

Now, try to think of a memory or an incident that would illustrate each of the words you chose to describe the relationship. Write these memories or incidents down.

Adjective 1:

Memory :

Adjective 2:

Memory :

Adjective 3:

Memory :

Adjective 4:

Memory :

Adjective 5:

Memory :

Clip 548B, Dan – Integration, Brain Changes, 1.05

Tips for Writing a Coherent Narrative

- ▷ Write as an adult.
- ▷ Write rationally.
- ▷ Write autobiographically.
- ▷ Write intuitively.
- ▷ Write with feeling.
- ▷ Write about how the past influences your present.
- ▷ Write with balance.
- ▷ Write with self-compassion.



Forming a Story: The Health Benefits of Narrative

~ James Pennebaker & Janel Seagal, Journal of Clinical Psychology, 1999



“Writing about personal experiences in an emotional way for as little as 15 minutes over the course of three days brings about improvements in mental and physical health.”

“...writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences.”

“...the formation of a narrative is critical and is an indicator of good mental and physical health.”

“Forming a story about one’s experiences in life is associated with improved physical and mental health across a variety of populations.”

Interpersonal Neurobiology

Curious



Open

Accepting



Loving

Self-Compassion

“Being touched by and not avoiding your suffering”



From Kristin Neff:

Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation. It is not a way of judging ourselves positively; it is a way of relating to ourselves kindly.

Three Elements:

1. **Self-kindness** Vs. Self-judgment
2. **Mindfulness** Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
3. **Common humanity** Vs. Isolation

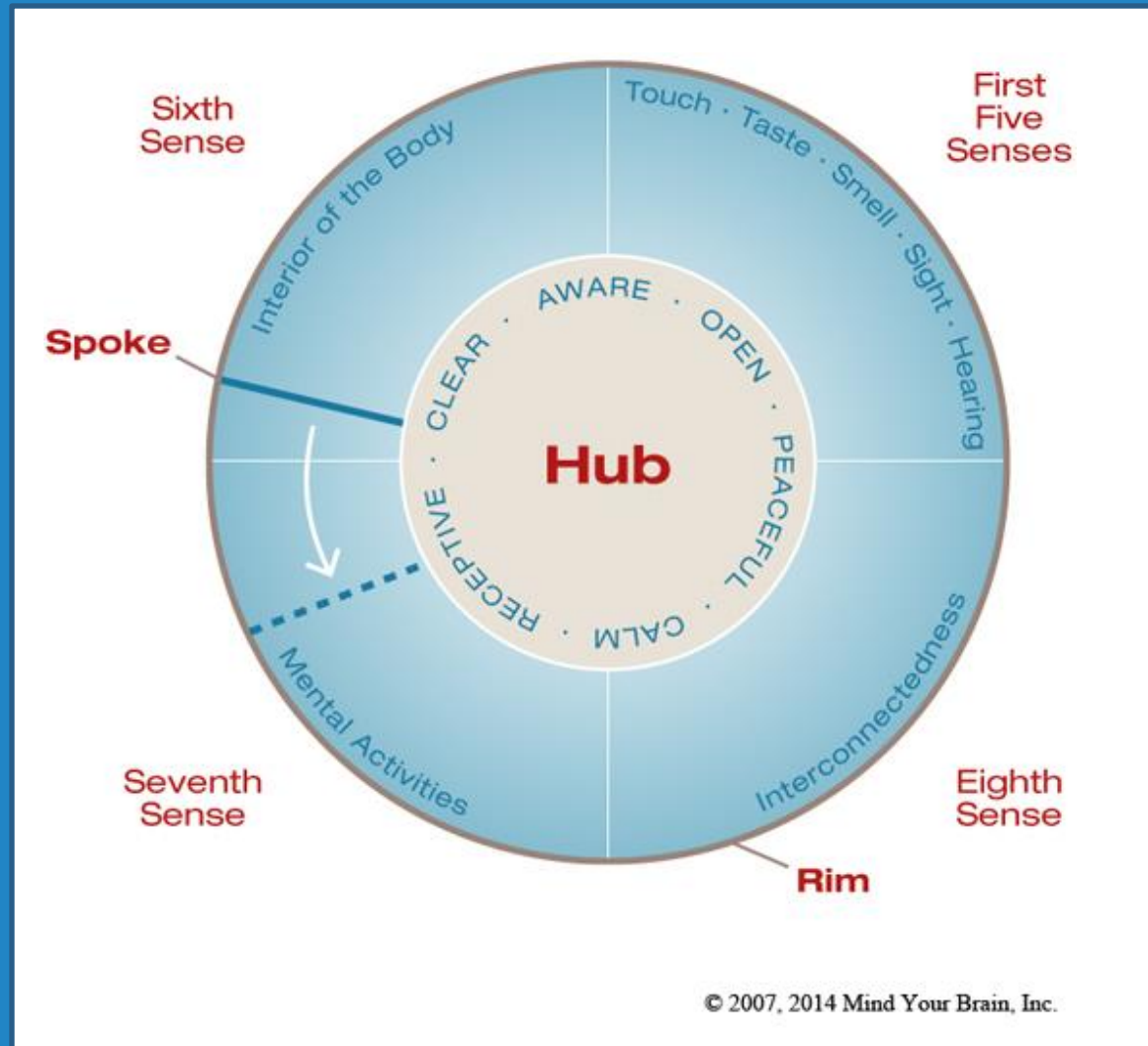
Toolkit

- ▷ Name It to Tame It
- ▷ Wheel of Awareness
- ▷ RAIN Approach
- ▷ Balancing the Mind
- ▷ Strengthen Your Internal Observer

The RAIN Approach

- ▷ **R**ecognize
- ▷ **A**ccept/Acknowledge/Allow
- ▷ **I**nvestigate
- ▷ **N**on-Identification

Wheel of Awareness



Access on: http://www.drdansiegel.com/resources/wheel_of_awareness/

Clip 542B, Dan's Dog Story, 8.37

Identifying Traumas

List some emotional or physical traumas or traumatic events that have happened in your life. These do not have to be “Big T” traumas. A trauma can be any significant, distressing event or incident that shaped you as a child – things that made you feel bad, scared, ashamed, etc.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Clip 543B, Dan – Unresolved Triggers, 5.32

Understanding Your Triggers



How Elements from our Past Trigger Us in the Present

Clip 544B, Triggers, .43

Think about a recent time that you got triggered...

How did you feel at the time?

What event or feeling in your childhood do you think led you to feel triggered in the recent situation?

Write a story that makes sense out of why you felt triggered.



Exercise: Choose Your Words

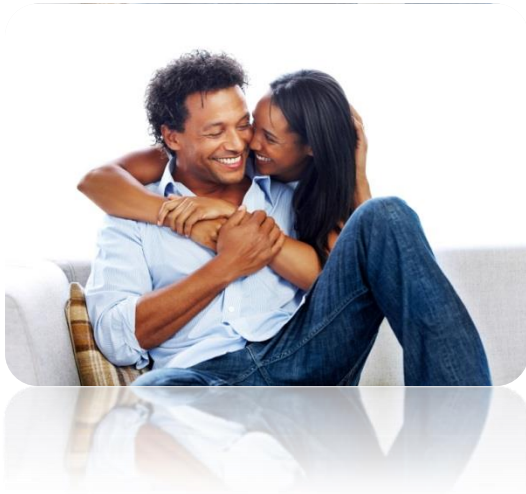
Choose from the descriptive list given below and pick the word that best describes the deeper emotion that comes up when you get triggered emotionally. This is often some kind of fear about yourself or how others feel about you. It may be some kind of anguish or hurt.

Lonely
Overwhelmed
Hurt
Intimidated
Rejected
Sad
Lost/Confused

Let down
Vulnerable
Worried/Shaky
Unimportant
Scared
Hopeless
Panicked

Inadequate
Failing/Ashamed
Humiliated
Small/Insignificant
Unwanted/Dismissed
Helpless

Strategies for Developing More Secure Attachments



Strategies for Success in Developing More Secure Attachments

Practice Integrating Your Brain



Mindfulness helps integrate the brain for all attachment patterns.

Practice Integrating Your Brain

Avoidant Attachment:

- ▷ Become aware of non-verbal signals. Try watching TV without the sound on.
- ▷ Build autobiographical memories. Write down the details of what you did today.
- ▷ Pay attention to any desires you have to be closer to people in your life. Reach out to another person to express your feelings of wanting to connect.

Practice Integrating Your Brain

Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment:

- ▶ Cultivate the ability to name your internal emotional states (“name it to tame it”). Simply describe what you feel, you don’t need to explain it.
- ▶ Write in a journal. Use your left hemisphere drive to tell a logical, linear, language-based story.
- ▶ Pay attention to when your attachment system goes into overdrive. Focus on keeping an internal state of calm at these times.

Practice Integrating Your Brain

Disorganized Attachment:

- ▷ Keep a journal and be sure to write about times when you feel triggered or your internal world may feel fragmented.
- ▷ When investigating your past, try to use the RAIN approach: recognize the trauma or loss, accept that it has occurred and may be in a state of being unresolved, investigate the nature of the experience in our past and present lives, and have non-identification with the experiences (meaning the events don't define you).
- ▷ SIFT. Pay attention to your sensations, feelings, thoughts and images, as they arise.

Develop Security in Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is an excellent vehicle to develop an earned secure attachment.

Find a therapist that resonates with you. Stay in therapy for two to five years.



Treatment



Attachment Theory-Based Interventions

Most existing therapies use techniques and principles that are in line with attachment theory.



For example, healthy therapeutic relationships, exploration of significant relationships in past.

Implication of Attachment Theory for Treatment

- ▷ Behavioral and family systems therapies focus on making procedural memories conscious and available for inspection.
- ▷ Cognitive therapies focus on changing family semantic generalizations.
- ▷ Psychodynamic therapies focus on retrieval of forgotten episodic memories in order to process them through to resolution.
- ▷ Meditative therapies emphasize the need to attain distance from distressing life events in order to achieve integration.

Psychotherapy promotes self-understanding by illuminating how clients' internal working models as opposed to external forces are what shape the present quality of their interpersonal relationships.

A few of Many Clinically-Oriented Books Based Partly on Shaver's Research

- ▷ Johnson, S. (2008). *Hold me tight: Seven conversations for a lifetime of love*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- ▷ Johnson, S. (2013). *Love sense: The revolutionary new science of romantic relationships*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- ▷ Levine, A., & Heller, R. (2010). *Attached: The new science of adult attachment and how it can help you find – and keep – love*. New York, NY: Tarcher/Penguin.
- ▷ Marmarosh, C. L., Markin, R. D., & Spiegel, E. B. (2013). *Attachment in group psychotherapy*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- ▷ Obegi, J. H., & Berant, E. (Eds.) (2008). *Attachment theory and research in clinical work with adults*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Clip 564, Dan Siegel on making sense of your past, 1.03

eCourse



**MAKING SENSE
OF YOUR LIFE**

Understanding Your Past
— to Liberate Your Present —
and Empower Your Future

An eCourse with
Drs. Dan Siegel
& Lisa Firestone

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Child Self



Real Self



Parent Self



Becoming Differentiated



“To lead a free life, a person must separate him/herself from negative imprinting and remain open and vulnerable... As children, people not only identify with the defenses of their parents but also tend to incorporate into themselves the critical or hostile attitudes that were directed toward them. These destructive personal attacks become part of the child’s developing personality, forming an alien system, the anti-self, distinguishable from the self system, which interferes with and opposes the ongoing manifestation of the true personality of the individual.”

~ Robert Firestone, Ph.D.

Steps of Differentiation

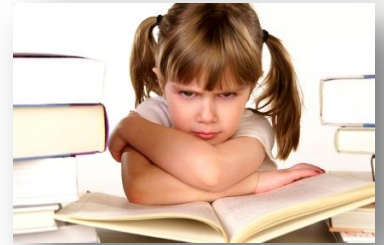
Step 1: Break with internalized thought processes, i.e., critical, hostile attitudes toward self and others



Step 2: Separate from negative personality traits assimilated from one's parents



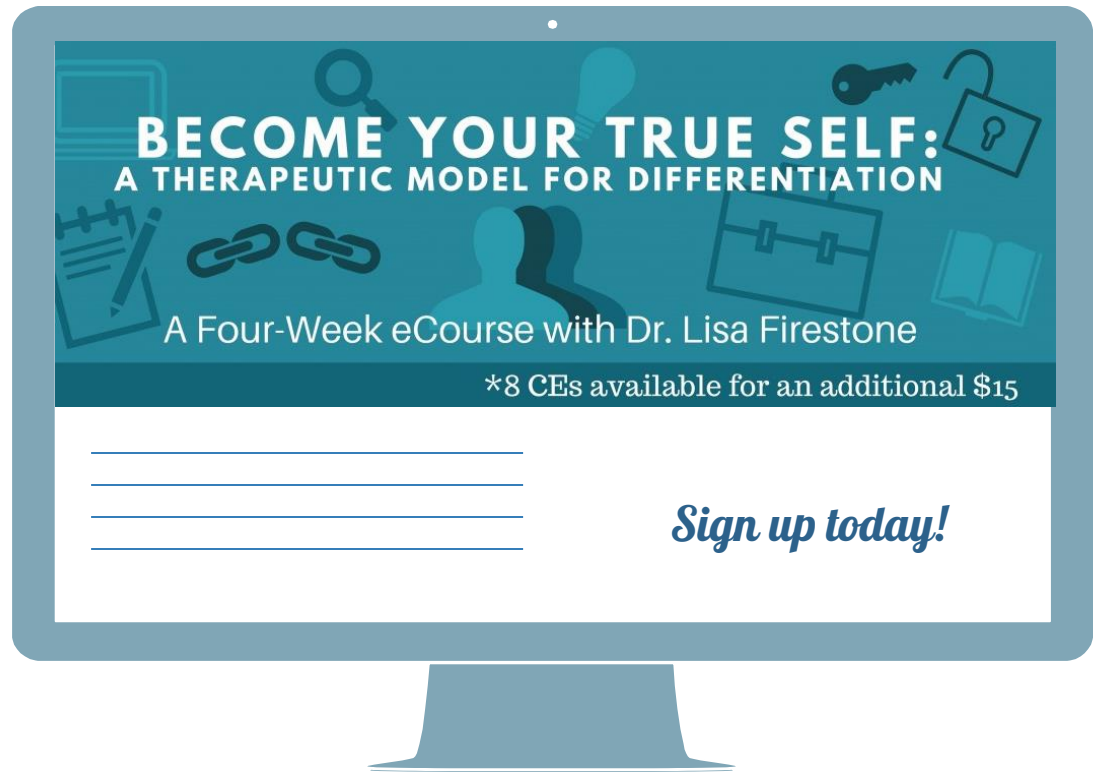
Step 3: Relinquish patterns of defense formed as an adaptation to painful events in one's childhood



Step 4: Develop one's own values, ideals, and beliefs rather than automatically accepting those one has grown up with



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Overcoming Negative Thoughts Exercise

Write down the negative thoughts you have about yourself on the first half of the page. As you write your thoughts, use the second person or “you” statements.

After you have written your negative thoughts down, come back to each of the thoughts and try to answer them positively. Practice self-compassion in your answers, as you respond to your self-attacks rationally and realistically.

Negative Thoughts

Example: “You’re so stupid.”

Compassionate Responses

Example: “Sometimes I struggle with work, but I catch on quickly and do a good job.”

Differentiation Exercise

What negative behaviors or undesirable traits of your parent or parents are you re-enacting in your own life? How are you re-enacting your parent's negative behaviors and traits in your current relationship, for instance?

In your journal, quickly list the ways you re-enact a parent's negative behavior or traits in your life today.



Saying Goodbye to Your Parents

Write a letter saying goodbye to one of your parents.

The purpose of the letter is to say goodbye to them as your parent, not as a person. You might express the following:

“I don’t need you anymore as a mother/father.”

“I’m an adult.”

“I’m a separate person from you.”

You might describe elements of your relationship, how you felt as a child, and how you will no longer engage in certain dynamics.

You will not send this letter.



Saying Goodbye to Your Childhood Self

Write a letter saying goodbye to your childhood self.

Imagine looking at yourself as a child. What would you like to convey to that child?

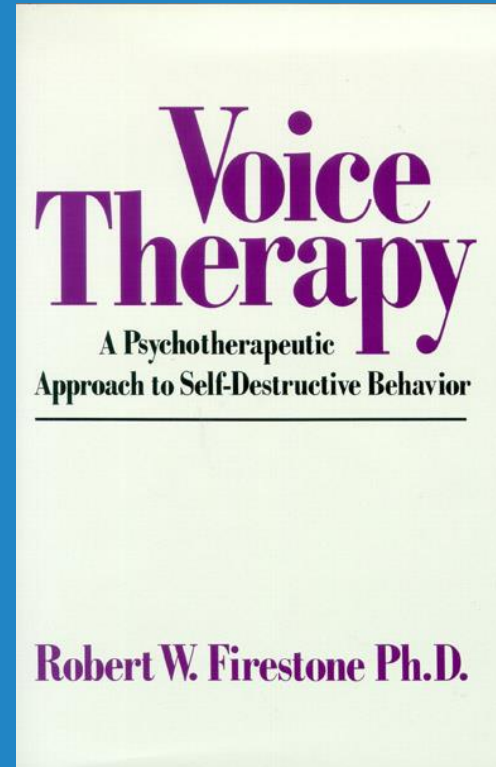
Describe yourself in a balanced way; as you write about yourself as a child, use both compassion and objectivity.

The purpose of the letter is to let go of any identification you still have with being that child. Even though your childhood shaped you in many ways, that is not who you are anymore. The goal is to live life fully in your adult self and in the present moment.



Clip 252, bob mentally healthy, 3.02

Voice Therapy



Cognitive/Affective/Behavioral Approach

Clip 60, VT steps, 1.32

Self

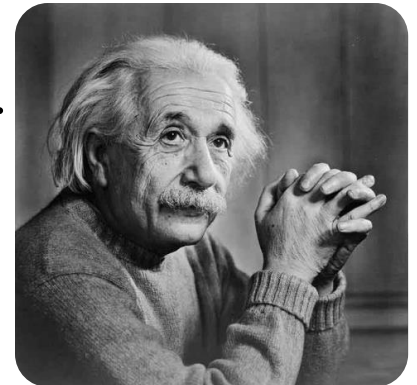
Anti-Self



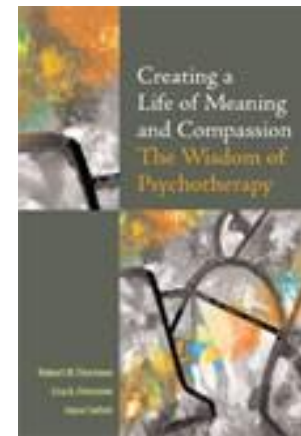
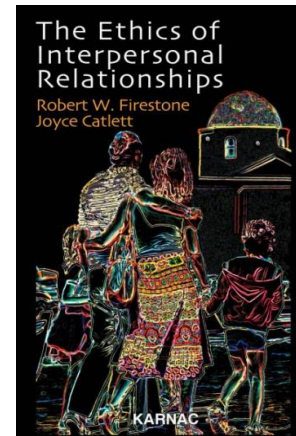
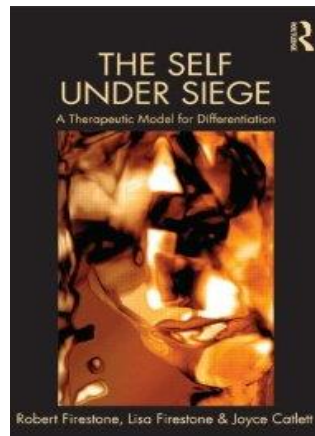
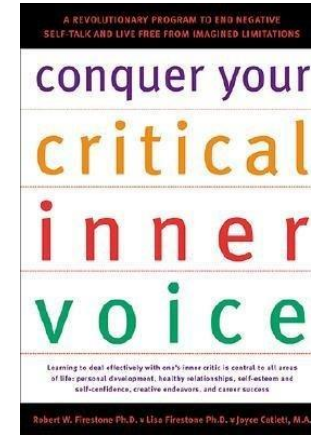
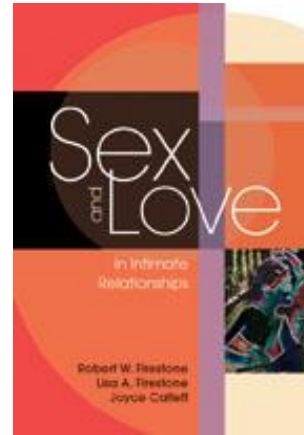
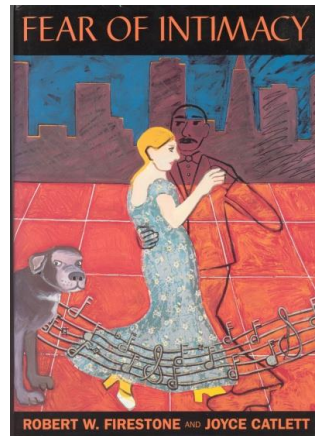
Albert Einstein



“A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.”



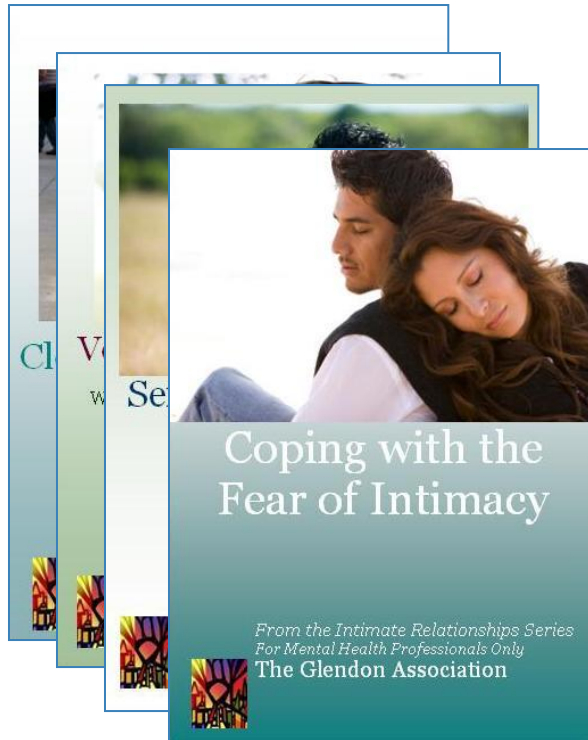
Resources: Books



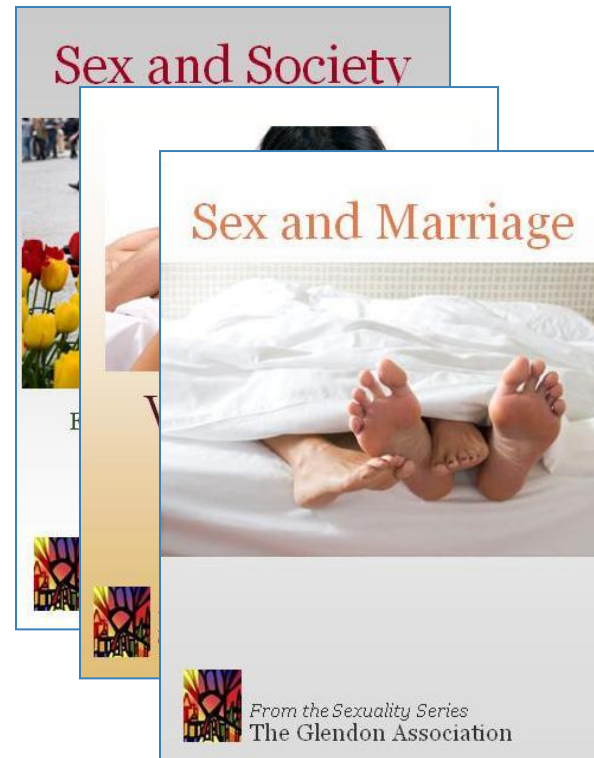
visit www.psychalive.org for resource links

Resources: Films

Intimate Relationships Series



Sexuality Series



visit www.psychalive.org for resource links

Contact: Glendon@Glendon.org or 800-663-5281



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