

Explanation of Emotional Wounds

You grow up, through usually no one's intentional thought, to be sensitive to certain feelings: Your dad was critical, and so you became sensitive to criticism. Your mom was distracted and preoccupied, and so you became sensitive to feeling neglected. You worked hard, but regardless of how well you did you felt unappreciated. They hurt your feelings, and you felt that you couldn't change their behavior toward you no matter how hard you tried. The wounds are usually one or two of a handful—control, criticism, lack of appreciation, neglect, or not being heard.

You had to cope and endure, and as a child you had only three ways of dealing with these wounds: follow the rules and avoid conflict; withdraw; or get angry. You were usually bouncing off of siblings—maybe your sister was the “good” one and so you got angry. Whatever path you chose, it worked—at least in that you survived your childhood.

The problem occurs when, as an adult, others, particularly those close to you, inadvertently trigger these old wounds—your friend doesn't return your call quickly and you feel neglected; your supervisor doesn't seem to notice you working overtime and you feel unappreciated; your partner complains about how the apartment looks and you feel criticized.

When these situations arise, and they will, your wounds are triggered, and your 10-year-old self kicks in—you withdraw, you try to be good, you get angry. But because these emotions are part of your

past and your view of life, because you are *wired* to be sensitive to and respond to these emotions in a certain way, you may hate how you feel but put up with it. Someone else with different wiring would draw a line: You can't do this or I'm gone. Instead, for you, your little-kid brain kicks in and says, *If I can figure how to do just the right things, how to say things in just the right ways, solve the puzzle that is this problem, the other person will stop treating me this way.*

This childlike thinking is the psychological equivalent of Groundhog Day. You continue trying, long past when others would, to tolerate what is hurting you and trying to find the right combination of actions and reactions that will make it stop.

You can't. You either have to stop being tolerant and get out, or respond with *adult* thinking and stay in.

The sticking point here is that the solution you came up with at age 10 doesn't fit the adult world. It's like putting old software into a new computer. To break out, you don't need to solve the problem and do better and try harder; you need to become more flexible—to expand and update the software. Usually this means doing what seems simple but can be emotionally hard: You need do the opposite of what you usually do.

So if you tend to withdraw, you need to step up. If you tend to get angry, you need to calm yourself down and use your anger as *information* about what you need and talk to your partner about it. If you tend to be good, you need to figure out what you *want* and communicate that to others rather than walking on eggshells.

It doesn't matter what the topic or situation is, it's all about breaking out of old patterns and going against your grain.

The starting point is realizing when those old buttons are getting pushed—when you are overreacting, when you feel like the 10-year-old, when your professional or rational mind goes out the window and old emotions take over. Watch your emotions; see if you can tell when you are overreacting and feeling like a child again.

If you can recognize when old emotions are being triggered, you have an opportunity to step back from it. At that point you need to do a voice-over in your head and say, *I'm getting triggered, this is old stuff from the past, I'm an adult, I can handle this in an adult way.* Take several deep breaths.

Next, you do the opposite of what you may instinctively do—step up, calm down, be assertive, upgrade the software, be more adult. This includes saying to the other person what you could not say to your parents—that the criticism hurt your feelings, that you need more positive feedback from your supervisor, that the unreturned phone call left you feeling unimportant. Hopefully, this will prompt the other to change her behavior. But she may not.

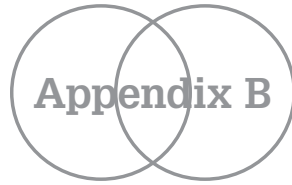
Appendix A

At that point, you have to decide whether to leave or to find some way to think about the situation from a more reality-based adult lens—that these disappointments in the relationship are in fact relatively rare and that the good times significantly outweigh the bad; that you realize you are in fact contributing to the problem and accept responsibility for your end of it; that the job is only a job, that your boss is stressed, and that you can usually look to others for appreciation. What you don't want to do is fall back into old patterns, react with little-kid angst, and believe that the situation will get better only if you do better, solve the puzzle, and break the code. That only drags you back into rewounding.

Will you feel automatically better if you try to change the ways in which you react? Absolutely not.

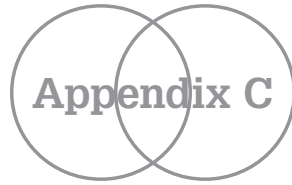
But if you can begin to do this, in baby steps, in the smallest of situations that trigger you, you begin to rewire your brain. You become less sensitive to those old wounds, and develop other mental and emotional skills to counteract them. You are not so easily triggered, and these triggers begin to dominate your life and relationships less.

Does this make sense?



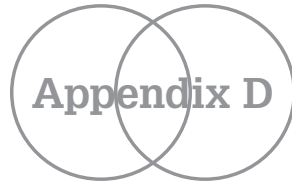
Instructions for a First-Aid Plan for Violent Couples

1. As soon as you can tell that a conversation is getting out of control, you want to signal a time-out. Use the nonverbal signal that we discussed in the session and say that you need to take a time-out.
2. Next set a timer for 45 minutes. Again doing this lets your partner know that you will come back when the timer goes off to try the conversation again.
3. Next do whatever you need to do not to reengage—leave the room, leave the house, sit in the car or bathroom. Use this time to center yourself. Do not reengage!
4. After the timer goes off, see how you feel. If you are still upset, say so and reset the timer. If you are more settled, start the conversation again. If the conversation heats up, once again take a break.
5. Only start the conversation when you are both emotionally settled.
6. If you can't do this exercise on your own, that's fine. Agree to not discuss the topic at home and bring it in to our next couple session.



Instructions for Meditation

1. Sit comfortably in a chair, feet flat on the floor. Have a clock visible but no alarm set.
2. Close your eyes and start by taking deep breaths. Just focus on your breathing as you breathe in and breathe out.
3. When you feel ready, begin to say to yourself “one” each time you exhale. Continue saying “one” to yourself over and over each time you exhale.
4. If you find yourself thinking about something, simply stop what you are thinking about and come back to “one.”
5. After 20 minutes, stop saying “one” to yourself and just sit quietly with your eyes closed. If your body feels heavy, slowly begin to move your fingers and your hands. When you are ready, open your eyes.



Instructions for the Emotional Freedom Technique

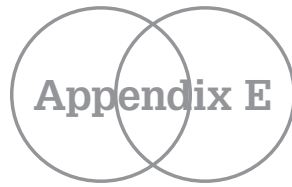
1. Think of the problem/situation, visualizing it as though it was a scene from a movie. Make it as clear as possible.
2. As you think about it, rate how strong your feeling is from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest. If it is below a 6, see if you can tweak the image to make it stronger.
3. Tap with your fingers on the side of your hand. While doing this, say to yourself, "I deeply and profoundly accept myself with all my problems and limitations." Say this three times.
4. Rate the feeling again. See if it has changed. Don't worry if it has not.
5. Make up a phrase for the problem. Using two fingers tap on the corner of your eyebrow, under your eye, under your nose, under your lip, under your arm about 4 inches down from your armpit, on your chest about 1 inch down from where your collarbone dips as you say the phrase each time.
6. If anger is part of your problem, include in the sequence tapping on the inside tip of your pinky finger, and as you tap finish the sentence "I forgive _____ because _____." You don't have to believe what you say, but do make up some response. Say it three times while tapping.

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Appendix D

7. If guilt is part of your problem, tap on the outer side of your index finger. As you tap finish and say this sentence three times—"I forgive myself because _____."
8. While tapping between your fourth and fifth fingers on the back of your hand, close your eyes, then open your eyes, look down hard to the left without moving your head, look down hard to the right, make your eyes go around in a circle, go back the other way, hum a tune, count to 3, then hum again.
9. Think about the problem and rerate the feeling.
10. If the feeling has become less intense, repeat the process again. If there is no change: Do a karate chop, with the side of one hand against the palm of other, while saying to yourself, "I deeply and profoundly accept myself even though I still have some of this problem with (say the phrase)—say this three times. If the rating has gone up, this probably means that new problem has replaced the other—in that case revisualize the scene, rerate it, and start over.
11. Repeat the entire sequence until you are down to a 1 or 2. While tapping between your fourth and fifth fingers, slowly look from floor to ceiling without moving your head. When you get to the top, hold your breath for a few seconds, and then relax.

A YouTube video of this can be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=1wG2FA4vFLQ or at *Tapping.com*.



Instructions for Using Mindfulness to Reduce Anxiety

1. Sit quietly and think about a topic that makes you feel anxious. Allow your anxiety to run.
2. After about 10–20 seconds, say, “Stop” aloud and now shift your focus from your anxious thoughts to the room. Feel your body on the seat of the chair; observe your breathing; listen for the ticking of the clock; notice the color of the carpet, the plant sitting on your desk, and any sounds outside the room.
3. Shift your focus and again go back to your anxious thoughts. Again let them run, then again tell yourself to stop, and refocus on the room.
4. You can practice several times a day as an exercise to help you learn how to shift focus, but you also want to learn to catch your anxious thoughts and feelings when they arise. As soon as you notice that you are worrying, that your anxiety is running, say stop to yourself and shift your focus.
5. At first you will have to do this many, many times a day. With practice, however, this to become more automatic and easier.