

ADULT ATTACHMENT PATTERNS

Individual or Group

-adapted from Dan Siegel's AAI-inspired questions from *Mindsight*, 2010

SO WHAT?

Why should anyone care about a research instrument? Well, in addition to its utility for the research community, this particular instrument is highly applicable to adults traumatized as children in clinical settings as well. The coded and interpreted interview is predictive of the adult's attachment style to his/her own children. However, in clinical settings it is multipurpose even without its official coding or interpretation.

1. Describe your early family situation: where you were born, where you lived, whether you moved around much, what your caregivers did at various times for a living.

2. Describe your relationship with your parents as a young child. Begin as far back as you can remember.

3. Please choose five adjectives or words that reflect *your relationship with your mother/caregiver* starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood—as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine.

MOTHER (OR PRIMARY CAREGIVER):

- a. _____ b. _____ c. _____
d. _____ e. _____

4. Think of an example for each word to illustrate a memory or experience that supports the word.

a. _____
b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

5. Please choose five adjectives or words that reflect *your relationship with your father/caregiver* starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood—as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine.

FATHER (OR OTHER CAREGIVER):

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____

d. _____ e. _____

6. Think of an example for each word to illustrate a memory or experience that supports the word.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

7. Which parent/caregiver did you feel closer to, and why?

8. As a child, when you got upset, what would you do?

9. What was it like the first time you were separated from your parents or other caregivers?

10. What was it like for you and for them during this separation?

11. If you were sick, injured, or emotionally distressed, what would happen?

12. Were you ever very afraid or terrified of your caregivers? If so, how often?

13. How did your relationship with your caregivers change over time?

14. As a child, did anyone close to you ever die or leave you?

15. How were those losses for you, and how did they impact you and your family?

16. Are you close with your caregivers now?

17. Why do you think they behaved the way that did?

18. What are the main things you've learned about caring for a child from your caregivers?

19. How do you feel all of these issues of your attachment history have affected your ability to be open, to attune, and to resonate with others in your personal or your professional life?

20. Did you find this worksheet difficult? What was most difficult about it?

WRITE OUT YOUR ANSWERS TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

Which description(s) above best fits your family of origin experience?

What role(s) best helped you live in your family of origin. *Hero? Overachiever? Rebel? Scapegoat? Lost child? Target child (i.e., singled out for abuse)? Clown? Other?* Give an example:

Describe a typical scene (or two) that illustrates *a day in the life of a child* within your family of origin:

If you are in a family now, choose the category above that best describes your family system:

Lenient/Permissive

Open

Closed

Dialogue with Your Child

A WRITING EXERCISE

INSTRUCTIONS:

You'll need a pen or a pencil, or if you are so inclined you may want to use several colored markers or crayons. On the following pages you will be writing the questions in the left-hand column and the answers in the right-hand column.

1. Using the following page for the writing assignment, begin in the *left-hand column*, using *your dominant hand* (the one with which you write).
2. Begin a conversation with your child part. You might begin with simple introductory questions (e.g. "How are you?" or "How are you feeling?"), whatever questions feel right for you, keeping in mind that the dialogue is with a child.
3. In the *right-hand column*, the child part will be responding to the questions. So, after you have the question written, switch your pen or pencil to *your nondominant hand*, or switch to using a marker or crayon (again hold it with your *nondominant hand*).
4. Read the question and, without forcing anything, wait and see what comes up. Just allow an answer to surface. The answer typically feels as if it is coming from another part of you. Because the dialogue is with the younger part of you, it shouldn't be surprising if the response sounds childlike.
5. When an answer does arise, write it down in the right-hand column.
It's not uncommon for there to be no response. After all, it's probably been awhile since you've connected to him or her. You may have to ask several times (and maybe on several occasions) before there is enough trust developed between you and the child part that (s)he feels safe enough to be exposed.
6. When the child part does surface, (s)he may write that (s)he is angry with or scared of you. To which you would further inquire as to why that is, and what you can do to help him or her to begin to trust you.
7. Like every other new relationship, its development is a process rather than a one-time exercise. The ultimate goal is to not only access the child part, but to become a nurturing figure to him or her.

Developing a Nurturing Voice

ATTACHMENT WORK

*. . . If you ever, ever feel like you're nothing
you're perfect to me.
You're so mean
When you talk about yourself,
you are wrong
Change the voices in your head
Make them like you instead. . .*

excerpted from "Perfect" by Pink

Developing a nurturing inner voice is one way to counterbalance the critical parental messages that so many of us have introjected—the voice that keeps telling you that you're not good enough, that something is wrong with you, and what a disappointment you've always been and will always be. Presently, that voice and its messages serve only to limit you and keep you stuck in the past, whereas creating a new one—a responsive, empathic one to calm, soothe and encourage you—would be much more helpful in the present.

EXERCISE 1

Ask yourself these questions:

1. Do I know anybody who has this nurturing quality? (S)he may be real or fictional, it really doesn't matter. Who is it?
2. When you've settled on one person, bring him/her to mind and allow him/her to truly come to life. Picture the person in his/her nurturing aspect. What does this person look like? What is (s)he doing? Perhaps singing to a child, stroking his/her hair? Using a calming voice, when a child is scared? Cooking a favorite meal? Reading a storybook? Whatever feels right.
3. Allow that scene of nurture to become as vivid as possible. Truly listen to the words being said and the tone of voice (s)he is using.
4. Now, imagine being one of the people in the scene, either the child or the nurturing figure, whichever feels right for you. What would it feel like to be that child/nurturing figure? Try taking on that role. Truly embody it for a few minutes.
5. Now imagine a time when you were criticizing yourself. Hear the words you said and the feelings that those words brought up for you.

6. Now consciously switch out of the critical voice and into this more nurturing one—words and tone.
7. Notice what it feels like to be responded to with kindness and compassion instead of criticism.
8. Practice this imaginally a few more times.
9. The next time you find yourself using the critical voice, once again consciously switch out of the critical voice and into this more nurturing one, both words and tone.
10. Practice switching voices as often as you are able.

EXERCISE 2

Remember a time when someone said, “thank you,” and you knew that (s)he truly meant it.

1. How did it feel to be acknowledged, appreciated, or loved?
2. Embody that feeling for a few moments.

Now remember a time when a loved one acknowledged something good that you did or said.

1. How did it feel to be acknowledged, appreciated, or loved?
2. Embody that feeling for a few moments.

Now remember a time when you felt appreciated or loved.

1. How did it feel to be acknowledged, appreciated, or loved?
2. Embody that feeling for a few moments.

What do you value most about yourself?

Of the people to whom you matter (and who matter to you), if asked, what would they say they value most in you? What qualities do they admire?

Now, think of your closest friend. If asked, what would (s)he claim to value most in you? Are those things the same (i.e., do you value the same things in you that your friend does)?

What other things about you do you value, but others may not recognize? What are they?

**The following section includes imagery scripts designed exclusively
for furthering this work.**

WORKSHEET: BOUNDARIES

Healthy family functioning is characterized by emotional boundaries between individuals and subsystems that are permeable, but clear, whereas in clinical families, boundaries may be rigid, diffuse, or misaligned.

Rigid boundaries tend to be associated with *disengaged families*, where members are *psychologically distant* from one another.

Blurred and/or unclear boundaries tend to be associated with *enmeshed families* and involve an unhealthy amount of closeness and intensity between family members.

The two extremes, *disengaged* or *enmeshed* family systems, lead to considerable “boundary issues” in adult relationships. *Disengaged* families with rigid boundaries make it difficult for others to get close to them, while *enmeshed* families, with weak boundaries, tend toward overinvolvement with others, along with the sense of surrendering one’s own identity in the process.

INSTRUCTIONS:

Part One: Choose one of your parents (or primary caregivers) and answer the following questions:

In what ways was your parent *distant or withdrawn* from you?

Include:

- Incidents in which you ran to your parent with enthusiasm and (s)he turned you away without following up on your excitement.
- Events missed.
- Broken promises.
- Evidence that your preferences were unknown.
- Evidence that your thought processes were not understood.
- Evidence that your interests were missed.
- Being passed over when something concerned the whole family.

In what ways was your parent *enmeshed* with you?

Include:

- Ideas held by the parent that were forced on you.
- Preferences that a parent expected you to share.
- Evidence that your parent assumed you felt the way (s)he did.
- Parental ways you were expected to adopt.

In what ways did your parent use you to meet his/her needs?

Include the need for:

- Power
- Comfort
- Sex
- Stress relief
- Solution of adult problems
- Other

Part Two: Repeat this exercise with any other caretaker who assumed a parental role toward you.

Part Three: From what you know of your grandparents on both sides, what's your best guess about their boundaries? Write about each grandparent. Identify suspected patterns of enmeshment, withdrawal, coldness, intrusion, and the expectation that children existed to meet their needs.

WORKSHEET 1: ABOUT THIS RELATIONSHIP

This worksheet is designed to encourage the development of relational boundaries within relationships. Choose one of your current relationships. With regard to that relationship, complete the following set of questions:

1. What type of relationship is it?

2. Is it a time-limited relationship?

3. Is it an egalitarian or hierarchical relationship?

4. Do one or both parties initiate contact? Is that a general rule?

5. In this relationship, are there certain things that you would like to say to the other, but don't? What are they?

6. If you had the freedom, what things would you like to say to the other? What prevents you from saying these things now?

7. Do you feel that your personal boundaries are respected within this relationship? Give two examples of how they are or are not:

8. If you were able, what changes would you institute in this relationship?

WORKSHEET 2: BOUNDARY EXERCISE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. While you were in the *Maintainers* line:

How did you know when to say "Stop"?

What did you notice in your body before, during, and after you commanded your partner to stop?

Did you say "Stop!" at the time you thought you would?

How did it feel to create that boundary with your partner?

Do you recognize any similarities in your process between this exercise (setting a physical boundary) to setting an emotional boundary?

Do you think that it is easier or harder to stay "Stop" when it involves emotions?

2. While you were in the *Movers* line:

What did you notice in your body when your *Maintainer* partner commanded you to “Stop”?

How did it feel to respect someone’s boundaries?

Based on your relationship with your *Maintainer* partner, did you expect to be allowed as close or closer than you were?

Were you comfortable with the boundary that your partner established?

WORKSHEET: THE MANY ROLES PLAYED

Individual or Group

“Role playing is prior to the emergence of the self. Roles do not emerge from the self, but the self may emerge from roles.”

-Jay Moreno

Think about your behavior and roles in the past and present as a member of important groups throughout your life. Write down your responses regarding your role in each of the following groups:

FAMILY OF ORIGIN:

What role do you play in the family?

Why do you play this role?

What behaviors are associated with this role?

What do you feel you are/were able to say/do/feel in this role and what feels/felt unacceptable?

Has your role changed in any significant way? (Explain how and why.)

As your role changed over time, are/were you aware of any patterns that may have emerged?

SOCIAL GROUPS:

What role do you play in your social group?

Why do you play this role?

What behaviors are associated with this role?

What do you feel you are able to say/do/feel in this role and what feels unacceptable?

Has your role changed in any significant way? (Explain how and why.)

As your role has changed over time, are you aware of any patterns that may have emerged?

FRIENDSHIP GROUPS:

What role do you play in important friendships?

Why do you play this role?

What behaviors are associated with this role?

What do you feel you are able to say/do/feel in this role and what feels unacceptable?

Has your role changed in any significant way? (Explain how and why.)

As your role has changed over time, are you aware of any patterns that may have emerged?

WORK GROUPS:

What role do you play in your work group?

Why do you play this role?

What behaviors are associated with this role?

What do you feel you are able to say/do/feel in this role and what feels unacceptable?

Has your role changed in any significant way? (Explain how and why)

As your role has changed over time, are you aware of any patterns that may have emerged?

OTHER SIGNIFICANT GROUPS

(e.g., sports teams, military experience, group therapy)

What role do you play in this group?

Why do you play this role?

What behaviors are associated with this role?

What do you feel you are able to say/do/feel in this role and what feels unacceptable?

Has your role changed in any significant way? (Explain how and why.)

As your role has changed over time, are you aware of any patterns that may have emerged?

Questions to consider regarding your responses:

1. Do you think that other members of your groups would agree with your assessment of your roles?
2. Do you recognize patterns across groups?
3. How are your roles similar/different in each group?
4. Why do you think they are similar/different?
5. Were you surprised by any of your answers?

WORKSHEET: IMPLICIT CHILDHOOD MESSAGES

Think back to your childhood.

What messages or instructions were part of your daily life?

What messages did you receive about your body?

What messages did you receive about honesty?

What messages did you receive about morality?

What messages did you receive about sex?

Now reflect on how many of these early instructions you still follow.

Have you freely chosen these instructions as an adult, or do you just live by some of them without question?

Do any of these instructions presently warrant further review?

Body Scan: Awareness of the Felt Sense

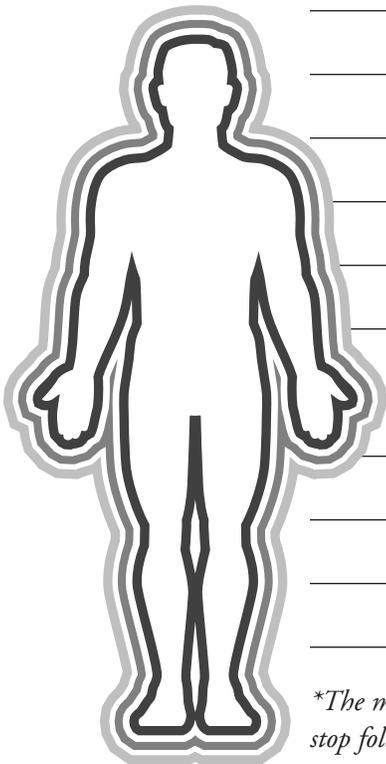
INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP

EXERCISES

Use the diagram on the following page. First, you will scan your body, noting your sensations on the lines next to the image.

Begin in a comfortable position—sitting or lying down. Now, breathe deeply as you focus inward. Begin with the first segment—focusing your attention and awareness on just that part of your body. (Although, most people begin at the top of the head, you should feel free to begin wherever you like. If you choose to skip any section, just note that.) After a few breaths into just that part, note what is/was present—however it is . . . and however it may have changed. Then, using the following outline, take a moment to write your awareness on the lines next to the outline.

SENSATIONS



**The moment doing any exercise feels wrong in your body, stop following the instruction, and back up slightly. Stay there with your attention until you can sense exactly what is going wrong.*

~Gendlin

Drawing Out Emotion—Awareness of the Felt Sense

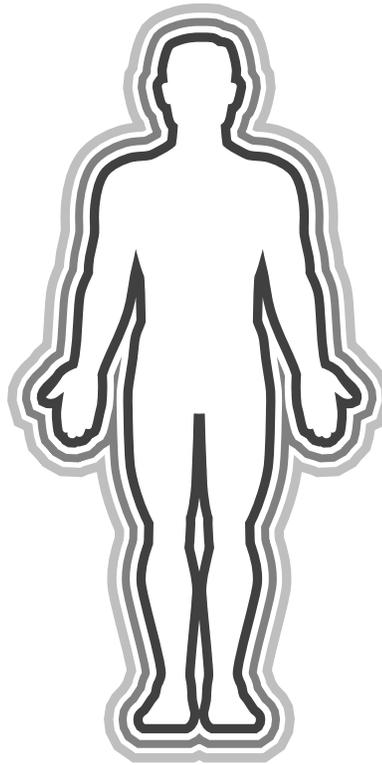
The following pages present a series of emotions. Each page contains an emotion along with space for a label and a drawing. The instructions are the same for each emotion:

1. Reflect on the emotion. Try to bring up a specific incident when you experienced this emotion strongly. Allow the space for it to expand. Pay attention to the way in which you physically experience the emotion (i.e., what body sensations do you notice? Where in the body are the sensations the strongest?).
2. Using your nondominant hand, label the emotion. You may use the word or any other word or phrase that conveys its meaning for you (e.g., fear). You may write the word *FEAR* or you may want to write *afraid, scared to death*, etc.
3. Again, using your nondominant hand, draw a picture of the emotion. Use the colors, textures, and strokes that you feel appropriate to each emotion.
4. Reflect on the finished drawing.

On the lines provided, use your dominant hand to write out any of your observations and reactions to the drawing.

LABEL: _____

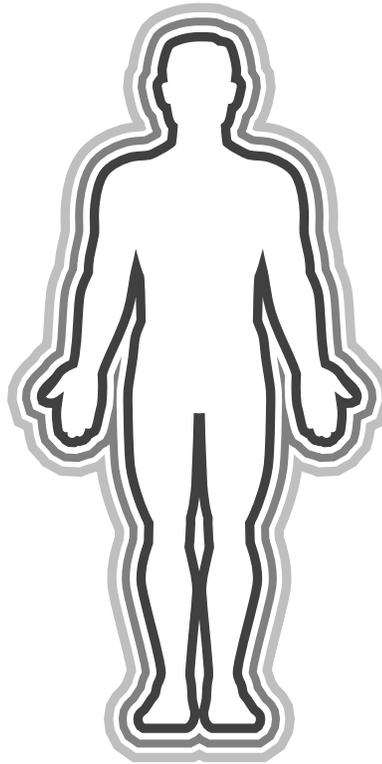
ANGER



REFLECTION

LABEL: _____

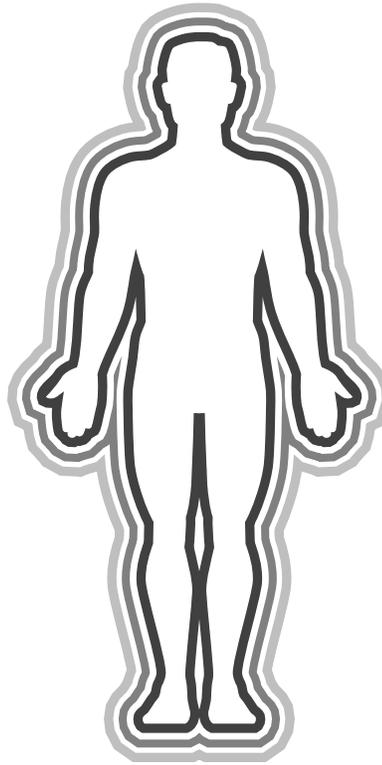
SADNESS



REFLECTION

LABEL: _____

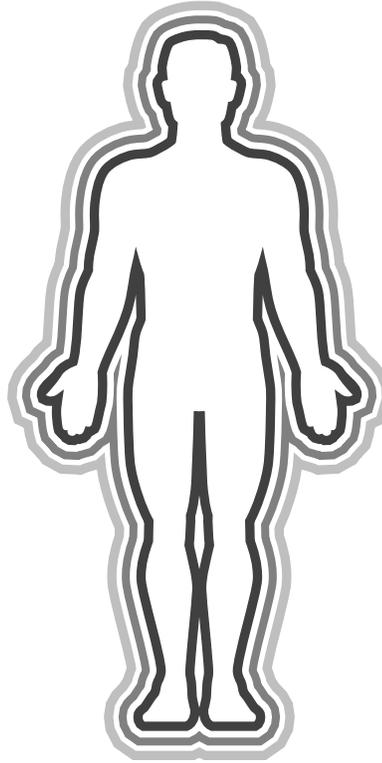
FEAR



REFLECTION

LABEL: _____

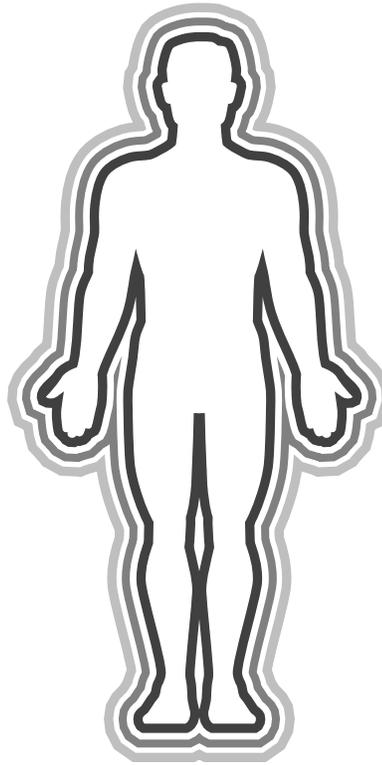
TERROR



REFLECTION

LABEL: _____

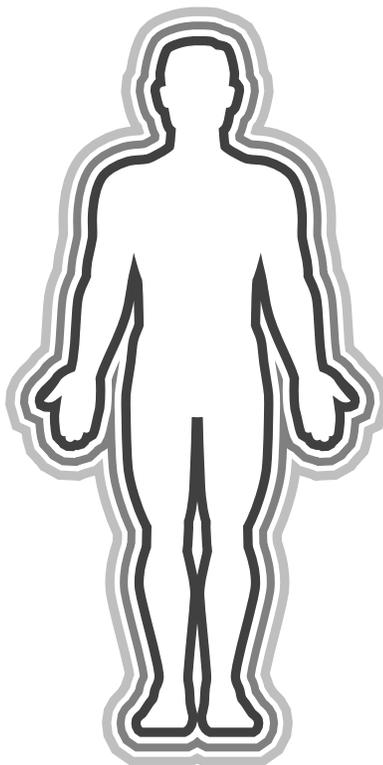
RAGE



REFLECTION

LABEL: _____

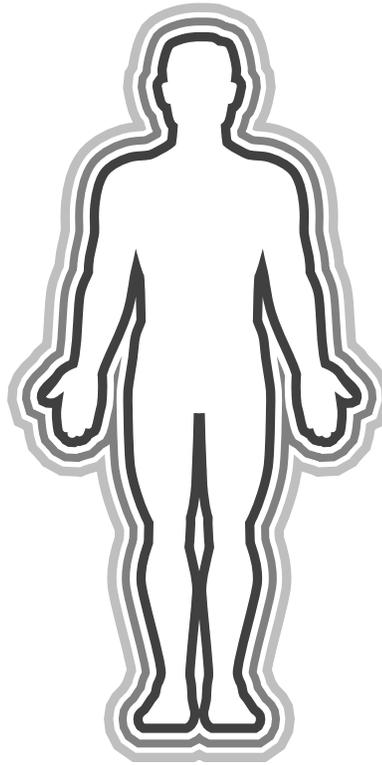
CONFUSION



REFLECTION

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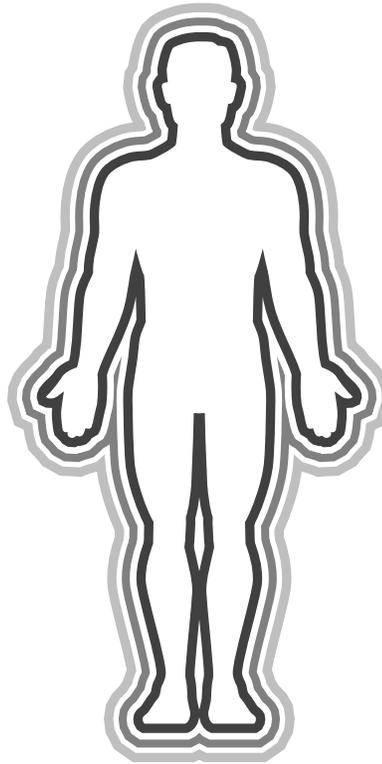
JOY



REFLECTION

LABEL: _____

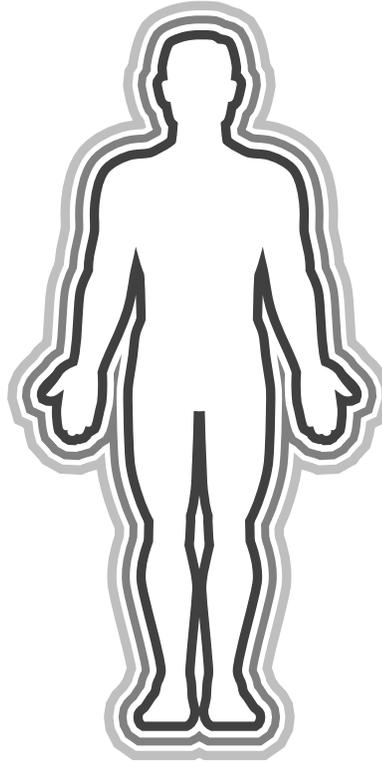
SHAME



REFLECTION

LABEL: _____

SURPRISE



REFLECTION

Focusing on Sensations—Awareness of the *Felt Sense*

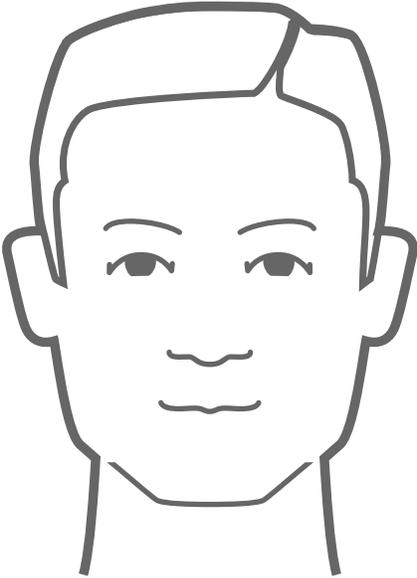
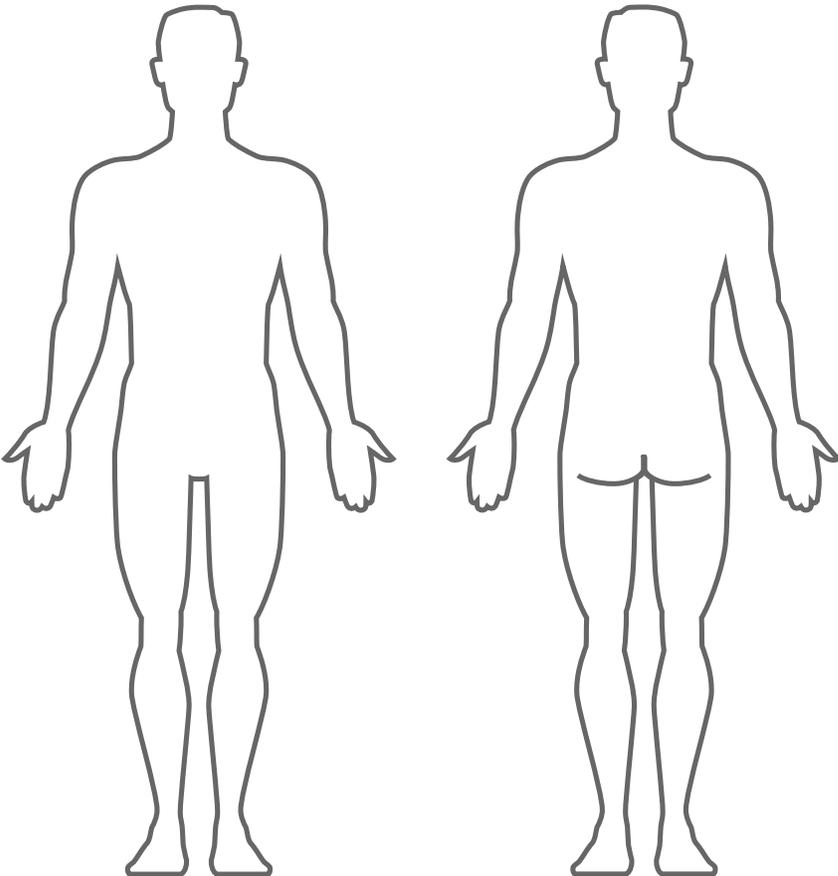
INSTRUCTIONS:

There is no right or wrong approach to this focusing exercise; it is a process piece. Whatever you create will be right and appropriate.

EXERCISE #1

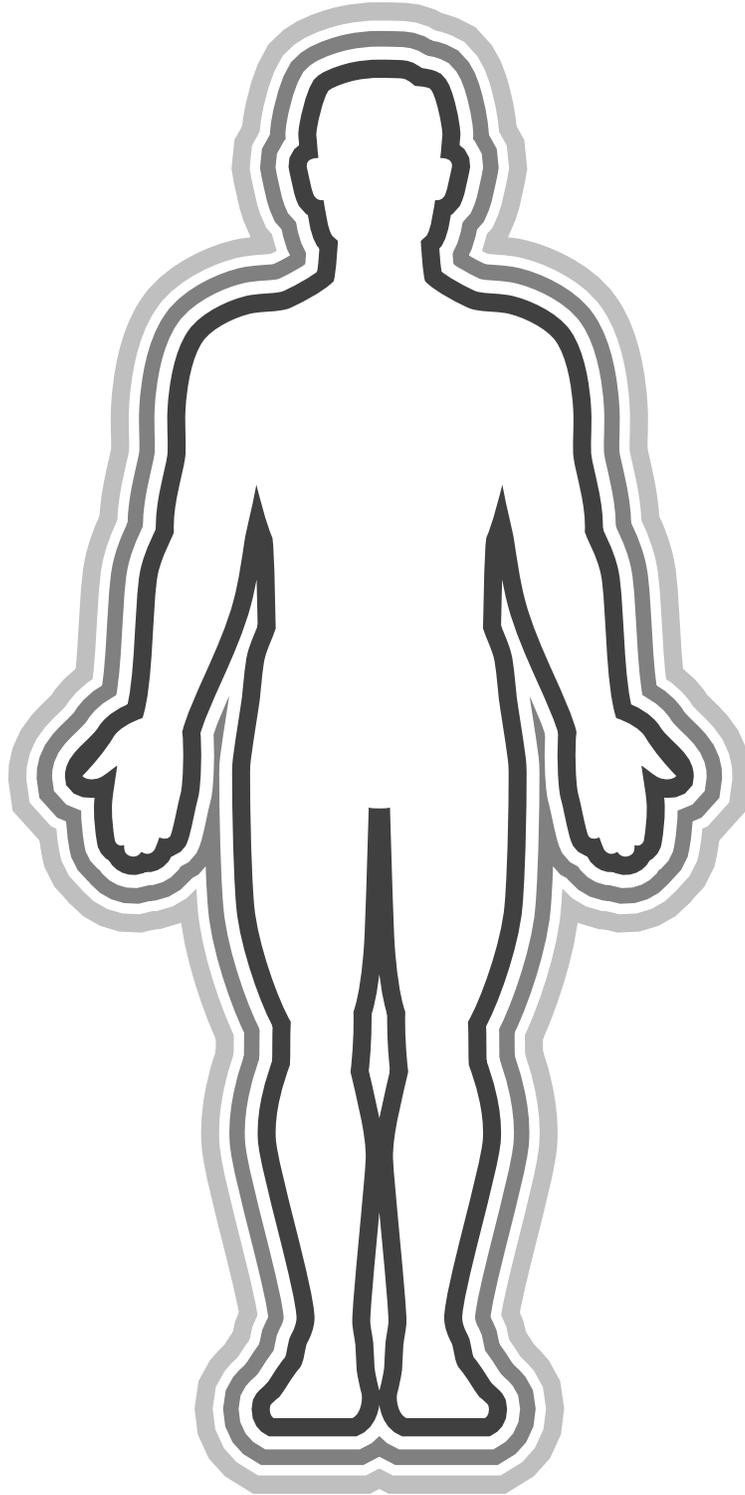
On the body map, color in the areas where you most often experience discomfort, tension, tightness, or pain. Color in the areas where you are presently experiencing discomfort, tension, tightness, or pain. Use those colors and the type of strokes that you feel best represent the particular body sensation that you are experiencing in each area of the body. For example, if you feel jittery and nervous in the stomach, you might pick a bright color and draw something that represents electricity in the stomach area. If you feel flighty and not really present, you might choose a light color and draw wispy lines wherever that sensation is noted.

Once you have completed the body map, you will be using your nondominant hand to label the colored areas with emotion word(s). Finally, on the back of the page with your dominant hand, write down any observations you have about your body map.



PART TWO:

Choose the area that was signaling the loudest—the one with the strongest sensations of pain, tension, or tightness. In the outline below, mark that body area.



PART THREE:

In the space provided, you will be writing out a dialogue between you and that body part. You will be using both hands, therefore both hemispheres of your brain. With your dominant hand, you will write out the questions, and with your nondominant hand you will answer the questions:

- What are you?
- How are feeling?
- How long have you been feeling bad?
- What has you feeling like that?
- Is there something you want or need from me? Is there something I can do to help you?
- Is there something I need to know from you?
- Is it okay to stop now?
- Should I check in again?

DOMINANT HAND QUESTIONS	NONDOMINANT HAND ANSWERS

WORKSHEET: LIFE'S PURPOSE/CORE VALUES

My life's purpose is:

My personal guidelines for living well in the world are:

Core values that reflect this purpose are (e.g., if your life's purpose is to advocate for the less fortunate, you might write "compassion," "courage," "generosity," etc.):

One instance in which my core values(s) made a difference in my life was:

Using your core values as intentions, list the concrete actions and necessary behaviors to realize these intentions (e.g., if your life's purpose is to advocate for the less fortunate the necessary behaviors might be working with a charitable organization, donating time and money, etc.).

The concrete actions to accomplish these intentions are:

AN ACTION PLAN: "WILLINGNESS"

My (specific) goal is to:

The values underlying my goal are:

The (specific) actions I will take to achieve that goal are:

1.

2.

3.

4.

In pursuit of my goal, I am willing to open up to and make space for all of these memories, thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, longings . . .

Memories:

Thoughts:

Feelings:

Sensations:

Longings, needs, and urges:

It might be useful to remind myself that:

If necessary, I can break this goal down into more manageable steps, such as:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The smallest, easiest step I can begin with is:

I will begin on ____/____/____ @ ____:____ (I will take the first step.)

WORKSHEET: IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

A Writing Exercise

WHO I AM

Today I am . . .

Yesterday I was . . .

In the past I have been . . .

I am becoming . . .

I define my identity as . . .

I am known by all of these names . . .

The parts of myself that I reveal to others are . . .

The parts of myself that I conceal are . . .

I have worn masks and played many roles. The ones that I have worn and since discarded are . . .

I would define my authentic self as . . .

I share my true self with . . .

WHY I'M HERE

My purpose for being in this place right now is . . .

I have to learn . . .

I have to teach . . .

The following experiences in my recent past have prepared me to be here . . .

This is how I got here . . .

Do I want to stay here?

Where do I want to go next?

What does this present moment offer me?

What do I bring to the present moment?

WHAT I WANT

For myself, I want . . .

For others, I want . . .

This is what I want to do . . .

I want to be . . .

I want to have . . .

The most important thing for me to do is . . .

In order to do this, I need to have . . .

In order to do this, I need to know . . .

In order to do this, I need to do . . .

Do I have what I want?

Do I want what I have?

WORKSHEET: THINGS YOU MIGHT NOT KNOW ABOUT ME

Couples

Both people should answer the following questions. The information is then shared and processed, usually within a couple's session.

1. What do I need to do or be in order not to engrave "*if only . . .*" on my gravestone?

2. If I could change only one thing in my life, what would that be and why?

3. In what settings am I the happiest/eager/most comfortable?

4. In what settings am I the saddest/unsure/afraid?

5. In a typical day, what do I find myself thinking about the most?

6. What do I feel is my greatest accomplishment to date? Was it done alone, or were others involved?

7. Presently, what major regret do I have in my life? If it is reparable, what would be required to repair it?

8. What other things do I want to change now, and why?

9. Who was my best friend in grade school, in high school, in college, and why?

10. Of all the people I have ever known, read about, or dreamed of, who is the worst, and why?

11. Of all the people I have ever known, read about, or dreamed of, who is most heroic, and why?

ASSESSMENT OF CONTACT FUNCTIONS

VOICE/SPEECH CONTACT FUNCTION

1. How would I describe this person's voice?

2. What do I feel in response to this voice?

3. What emotions do I imagine this voice best expresses?

4. How does this person use his/her voice?

TOUCH/MOVEMENT CONTACT FUNCTION

1. What do I imagine I would feel if this person touched me?

2. What do I imagine each of us would feel if we were to touch?

3. Would I like to touch him/her?

4. How does this person use his/her body in relation to space?

5. Are his/her movements fluid, controlled, or rigid?

6. How does this person use the furniture (floor, pillows, etc.) in terms of support?

7. How does the person move?

LOOKING/SEEING CONTACT FUNCTION

1. When does the client look at me?

2. When does the client look away from me?

3. How do I feel about the way in which the client looks at me?

4. How would I describe this person's eyes and the way in which they look?

5. What emotions do I feel that these eyes would most easily express?

6. What are my visceral reactions to being looked at by this client?

LISTENING/HEARING CONTACT FUNCTION

1. Does this person appear to hear me with ease, or does (s)he seem to struggle to hear me?

2. Does this person hear what I am actually saying, or does (s)he hear something else?

3. Do I feel that I am easily heard and understood by this person?

APPEARANCE

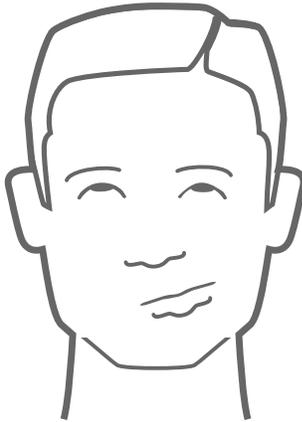
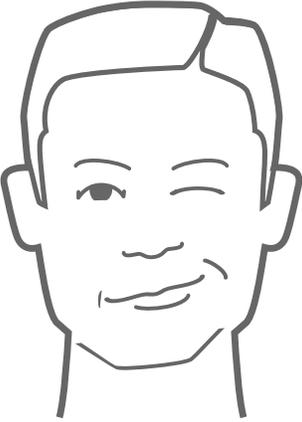
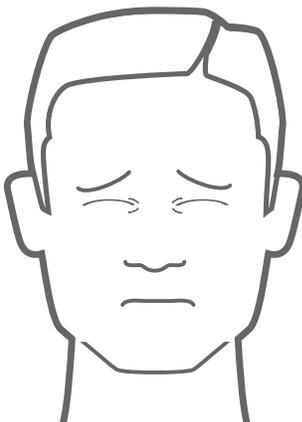
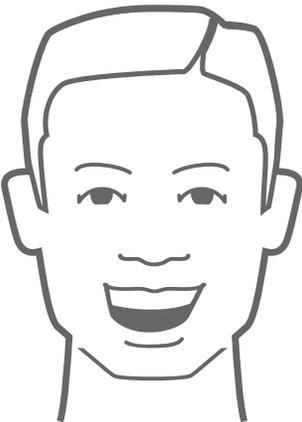
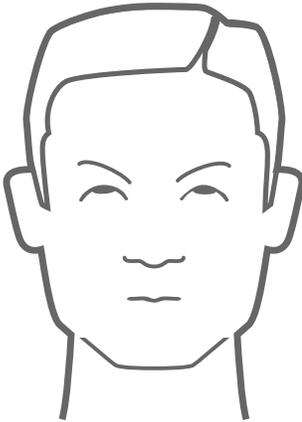
1. How would I describe this client's features?

2. Which features stand out for me (e.g., stiff upper body, tight or locked jaw, jittery legs, ever-moving hands, frozen expression, etc.)?

3. How would I describe the client's manner of dressing?

4. What is my impression of his/her overall level of self-care?

EMOTIONS



EMOTION PROFILE

1. List some things that tend to make you angry:

2. List some things that make you feel sad:

3. List some things that make you feel guilty:

4. List some things that make you feel shame:

5. List some things that make you feel happy or joyous:

6. List some things that make you feel scared:

7. List some things that make you feel fulfilled or satisfied:

8. List some things that make you feel discouraged:

9. With which of these emotions are you most familiar?

10. With which emotions are you most unfamiliar?

Consider your answers to #9 and #10. What would you like to change in these answers?

Three Blessings

(Adapted from Seligman.)

INSTRUCTIONS:

Every night for the next week, just before you go to bed, think about anything good that happened to you during that day. Write down three of these things.

Remember exactly how each good thing happened, then—even more important—think about *why* each thing happened. Make a point to recognize the giver behind the gift (i.e., think about the person who made this pleasant thing happen). For example, maybe a coworker brought you a cup of coffee or a friend called just to check in. Maybe somebody held the door for you or let you merge into traffic. Maybe you witnessed an act of kindness. It doesn't matter whether the experience was big or small. Bring it to mind: relish your good fortune or savor the kindness. It's been shown that the longer one holds an emotionally charged event in his/her awareness, the stronger its trace in memory (Lewis, 2005).

1. *What*: One good thing that happened today:

2. *How*: It happened like this:

3. *Why*: It happened because:

WORKSHEET: *FORGIVENESS: WHAT IT IS . . . AND ISN'T*

Regardless of whether forgiveness is a worthy virtue, a moral duty or something altogether different, in psychological studies, it happens that forgiveness is closely correlated with increased happiness and improved mental health. It seems that most of us would welcome happiness and better mental health. Right? Well, like everything else, that would depend on the personal cost involved:

- Am I required to condone the behavior of the perpetrator?
- Does it mean that the behavior was okay? (I should put up with it, because there was no *real injury*.)
- Must I develop selective amnesia and simply forget all about it . . . or at least pretend to?
- Must I pardon this person—allowing him/her to continue causing more damage?
- Must I reconcile with this person? Or get back into a relationship, where I'll get hurt all over again?

NO. The answer is no to all of them.

The quintessential nature of forgiveness: it is *a voluntary decision to acknowledge the offense, move through the resultant feelings, set aside the resentment, and release the anger, so you may move on with your life*. You **need not** condone, excuse, forget, or reestablish a relationship with the perpetrator.

Pardoning: It is problematic when forgiveness is coupled with, or equated to, pardoning. Freedman and Enright (1996) believe that a person can forgive, yet still expect justice. As they view forgiveness and justice to be in harmony with each other—both inviting and provoking change and growth.

Condoning: Forgiving the perpetrator for his/her action(s) does not mean you stop judging the deed. You forgive the person, not the action. Forgiveness allows you to live in the present and leave the past behind. Forgiveness will bring you peace. Freedman and Enright (1996) posit that condoning denies the resentment and the offense, which is likely to exacerbate and complicate the hurt and injury. In contrast to denial, forgiveness vanquishes the resentment with love and compassion.

“Resentment is like taking poison and hoping the other person dies.”

~Augustine of Hippo

Reconciliation: It is possible to accept, even love a person and still choose not to be in a personal relationship with him or her. Aponte states, “Reconciliation is distinct from the moral decision to forgive. The choice to forgive [only] opens the door . . . to reconciliation, if **safe, prudent, and right**.” In contrast to the notion that forgiveness be offered by the offended person, Freedman and Enright (1996) believe that reconciliation is the offender’s responsibility and occurs when the offender recognizes his/her wrong and takes actions to correct the offending behavior. Further, forgiveness may take place when the offended gives up feelings of hatred or resentment, but does not necessarily restore the relationship with the offender.

FORGIVENESS: MYTH BUSTING

EXERCISE:

This experiential format can be used to address the modern myths and misconceptions around the concept of forgiveness.

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Print, distribute, and have participants read the worksheet, **Forgiveness: What It Is . . . and Isn't**.
2. Write each of the following myths on separate pages.
 - *If I forgive this person, it means that I'm condoning the behavior of the person I'm forgiving.*
 - *If I forgive this person, then my relationship with him/her will certainly improve.*
 - *If I forgive this person, then I won't be angry about what happened.*
 - *If I forgive, I give up my right to feel hurt, angry, or sad.*
 - *I haven't really forgiven that person when I remember what happened.*
 - *I should only have to forgive once (i.e., once I do it, I'll never have to think about it again).*
 - *I forgive, not for me, but for the sake of the other person.*
 - *If I forgive this person, I must remain in a relationship with this person.*
3. Read each myth aloud; then place the page on the floor, announcing to the group that this area is now dedicated to that myth.
4. Invite each participant to walk around the room, to reread each one.
5. Once read, (s)he should then choose the one (s)he feels the most energy around or the most identification with and stand in that designated area.
6. Once all of the participants are in a designated area, begin with the least populated area and invite each group member in it to share:
 - Why (s)he chose the one that (s)he did.
 - How (s)he identifies with the myth.
7. Moving on to the next group, repeat the process for each myth.
8. After everyone has spoken, have participants return to their seats.
9. Process the experience in a *go-round*, allowing participants to share thoughts and feelings regarding any aspect of the exercise and/or any aspect of forgiveness itself.

WORKSHEET: STAGES OF FORGIVENESS

STAGE ONE: IDENTIFY PERPETRATOR AND TRANSGRESSION

- I know who it was that has affected me negatively.
- I know what specific behavior(s) it was that has been physically, emotionally, or spiritually damaging to me.

STAGE TWO: IDENTIFY, EXPERIENCE, AND PROCESS THE EMOTIONS

- I have felt the emotions associated with the offensive, damaging behavior. I have found a safe place to process these feelings.
- If it was safe to do so, I have spoken to the person regarding the adverse effects I endured as a result of his/her behavior.
- If it was not safe to do so, I was able to do it in therapy using an imaginary technique (e.g., role playing, psychodrama, the empty chair, etc.).

STAGE THREE: UNDERSTAND THE NEED FOR FORGIVENESS

- I understand the benefits of forgiveness (see Worksheet: *Forgiveness: Why Should I?*)
- I have reached a point where I recognize what has transpired, have begun developing compassion for myself, and am now able to see the perpetrator as a human being.

Important Distinction: Many people, including clergy members, philosophers, psychotherapists, and psychologists, *erroneously* believe that full forgiveness requires the victim to accept the perpetrator back into the relationship. What is actually required of the victim is that (s)he accept the perpetrator back into the human race (i.e., (s)he is no longer stripped of his/her humanity, regardless of whether the victim chooses to reestablish a personal relationship with him/her).

As Joan Borysenko states in *Guilt Is the Teacher, Love Is the Lesson*

Forgiveness is not a lack of discrimination whereby we let all the criminals out of prison: it is an attitude that permits us to relate to the pain that led to their errors and recognize their need for love. (1991, p. XXX)

STAGE FOUR: SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES

- I have set clear boundaries with the perpetrator:
- I understand the need for and my right to protect myself.
- I feel competent in setting and maintaining these boundaries to keep me physically and emotionally safe.

STAGE FIVE: INTEGRATE THE PAST AND BEGIN RECREATING THE FUTURE

- I have made an internal choice to forgive and have willingness to recreate a meaningful life for myself.

WORKSHEET: CRISIS To-Do List

Breathe: Take a few deep breaths, and mindfully observe the breath flowing in and flowing out.

Notice: Take note of your experience in this moment. Notice what you are thinking, feeling, and doing. Allow room for each feeling. Open up to each thought as well, without clinging or holding onto any of them. Remind yourself that there can be space.

Right now I am thinking:

Right now I feel:

Breathe into each feeling, allowing each the required space. Without pushing them away, remind yourself that they—like everything else—are transient. Allow them to move through you . . . observing them, without becoming them.

Once you've given space to the thoughts and feelings, begin the inquiry:

How do I want to be in the face of this crisis?

What values matter here?

How would I like to behave?

Do I need some help? Or advice?

Who can I call on for support or assistance in this situation?

Has something like this happened before? If so, what did I do?

What did I learn that might help now?

Was that action or reaction helpful
... in the short and long term?

... in the next half hour?

... in the next few hours?

... in the next few days?

If truly nothing can be done to improve the situation, am I willing to practice some acceptance skills?

Given the givens: What's the most constructive thing I can do here?

What can I learn from this situation?

How can I grow from this experience?

One final question: "If someone whom I love and care about was in this same situation, (thoughts and feeling included), how would I act toward him/her?"

What things would I say?

What advice might I give?

Is it possible to act "as if" you were that person who deserves that type of love, compassion, and support?