

Putting the Past Behind You, Forever

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Have you harbored the fantasy that childhood is filled with lemon drops and lollipops, gummy bears and licorice sticks, snails and puppy dog tails, sugar and spice, and everything nice?

Childhood can be a time when a closet becomes a space ship or sheets draped over chairs become Aladdin's castle. For some adults, however, that fantasy was broken early in their lives and became a black magic nightmare, killing their fanciful dreams. Instead of a protective, supportive, loving family structure and framework, they received physical abuse, neglect, and/or damaging messages, intentional or unintentional.

While children's spirits can thus be easily and cruelly crushed, it is possible to repair them once they become adults. As adults, they can use and enjoy the process of parenting themselves, furnishing themselves with what they needed as children or would like to have had in the way of attitudes, words, and behavior from their parents, healing those past wounds.

Without fulfilling qualifications, filling out an application, taking psychological and other testing, interviewing for the opening, furnishing references, and given little if any training other than "on the job," one day, certain individuals simply find themselves with the position of PARENT. Despite their lack of appropriate background, they are then expected to know exactly what to do in any given situation and to carry out their "expertise" with the utmost aplomb and ease. The only real "expertise" they hold is what they learned from their birth parents or guardians and extended family and friends.

Some are lucky with respect to those they receive in the parent lottery. Others are not so lucky. A child expects a parent to behave as and be the "perfect" parent, knowing all there is to know about how to raise their child in a difficult world. Guess what! It doesn't happen. Though parents may have the best of intentions, being fallible human beings like the rest of humanity, they make mistakes. Often they try to compensate for their own past hurts with behaviors they decided would change their child for the better. Without appropriate training, they sometimes overcompensate or decline to deal with issues that touch on painful memories. Perhaps they themselves were not shown how a reasonable parent behaves.

An adult can help himself by deciding what he or she would have wanted as a child, i.e. how the parents might have behaved. Subsequently, that adult can act in a nurturing and caring manner toward him or her self to develop into a more mature person. Following this process, the individual stands a good chance of overcoming the inadequacies of his parents who presumably did the best they could with whatever tools and abilities they possessed at the time. Otherwise, he or she may find himself a perpetual "child" or "juvenile," an incomplete adult, adult in stature without the accompanying adult behavior and emotional patterns.

The process for learning to ***Become Your Own Parent.***

Sit down and grow very still, quiet, relaxed. In this relaxed state, close your eyes and go back to your early life to find something in your past that was good. Focus on two incidents when life was good for you with your mother, father, guardian, or role model. Extract from these instances

or incidents what good parenting meant to you. These examples would be occasions when you felt respected, protected, loved, and secure. It was a time of parental nurturing.

Now based on these incidents, compose a list of qualities and behaviors that you notice in the process of interaction with that parent. The following list includes sample traits and behaviors to assist you in designing your personalized list to fit your childhood situation. It is not to be considered definitive

How would you have wished your parents to treat you when you were a child?

My parent or guardian would

1. Bestow unconditional love and unselfish approval.
2. Possess such characteristics as openness, kindness, empathy, compassion, and concern.
3. Be trustworthy.
4. Practice what s/he preaches without being a hypocrite.
5. Be an assertive and interactive listener.
6. Be non-punitive. When I'm older, allow me to participate in the decision of what punishment would be appropriate. Make the punishment appropriate to the offense.
7. Distinguish me from my behavior.
8. Do nice things for me occasionally.
9. Take into consideration my desire if it conflicts with theirs.
10. Instill in me a sense of moral and spiritual values.
11. Be honest with all those whom s/he encounters, especially immediate family members.
12. Allow me to have some control by practicing decision-making appropriate to my age. I can practice deciding what is best for me, so that when I go out on my own, I will know how to make responsible decisions from personal experience.
13. Warn me about potentially toxic or harmful people.
14. Set boundaries for me and teach me to set them for myself.
15. Carry out the consequences when I cross those boundaries.
16. Not threaten without carrying through. If s/he discovers a mistake, apologize later.
17. Praise me liberally for what I do competently. At least recognize my effort when I have done the best I could, and the results fall short.

18. Refrain from qualifying praise with the word "BUT" such as: "But you could do better." Use "and" instead.

19. Refrain from making comparisons with anyone, especially with siblings. The closer in relationship they are to me, the more it hurts. Comparisons tend to dilute the concentration and focus on me and my feelings and behaviors at that moment.

20. Correct me when I make a mistake without exaggerating its importance, i.e. screaming about spilled milk.

21. Show me the importance of time. Model and explain its importance as a fulfillment of commitments. Do the same by taking prompt action when needed and avoid procrastination. Have me do my homework as soon as possible when I return from school or work while the assignment and how to do it are fresh in my mind.

22. Teach me how to take responsibility by assigning age appropriate household and personal care chores.

23. Be **consistent** in your treatment.

24. Use a non-judgmental rather than autocratic or dictatorial style of teaching me what I need to know for later in life.

25. Remember s/he is the parent. I am the child. Don't confuse roles. It's your job to take care of me, not me you.

26. Role model what it is to be an adult.

Add other qualities as you see fit.

Use the following examples to interpret your own list of parental traits. Think of particular events that apply.

How would you translate the previous statements?

1. Give me love regardless of whether I deserve it or not.

2. Characteristics:

A. Being open means being flexible, physically relaxed, with good eye contact.

B. Being kind means to treat me as you want to be treated.

C. Being empathetic means putting yourself in my shoes. I might hear such statements as "I can understand how you feel," and then be given sound, relevant reasons for that understanding.

D. Being compassionate means recognizing how destructive behavior hurts no matter the source of that behavior, whether it be at the hands of a parent or at those of a relative, friend, acquaintance, or stranger.

E. Being concerned means caring about how I survive and thrive.

3. Trustworthiness means to give me a sense of intimate attention by allowing me to share personal events and inner thoughts and feelings that I wouldn't want to tell others without being made fun of or teased. These would not be shared with others without my knowledge and approval to help me develop respect and trust.

4. A good listener fully listens without interruptions or unasked for advice, preaching, or nagging.

5. Non-punitive behavior means refraining from abuse, physical or otherwise, such as raising the voice in shouting or screaming, physically striking, or being overly aggressive. Be assertive but not aggressive. Deal with issues or situations in a straightforward manner without making a mountain of a molehill.

6. Non-judgmental words and behavior means being non-critical or non-blaming about situations that cannot be changed. Teach the lesson at the time something happens or soon thereafter. Make me aware that I must take responsibility for my actions. Teach me how to assume this responsibility as I am ready for it.

Continue to interpret your list according to how it applies to you.

Parenting Myself in the Present

The following represents a way of conducting myself on a continuous basis that I can easily carry out to enhance my quality of life.

I will be nice to myself by regularly indulging in small but meaningful activities.

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| a bubble bath | a good movie |
| a visit to a museum | a nap |
| a short trip | a physical checkup |
| a pat on the back: "Atta, Boy! Atta, Girl!" | a relaxation exercise |
| a soothing comment: "Good try!" | regular exercise |
| a fulfilling hobby | gardening |
| travel near and far | volunteer time and effort |
| meditate | ride a Harley |

I will set goals: short, mid-term and long term, most of them practical, some fanciful.

I will remember what I've accomplished, not just what I've done wrong or haven't done yet.

I will be nice to me by planning ahead for larger gifts.

- a special trip
- a significant purchase even if it's frivolous
- I will work to fulfill my goals

I will encourage and educate myself as much as I need to have a rewarding career

How can I apply these principles?

Read and think about them. Begin to act accordingly. Make it a pattern of regular behavior. If it isn't illegal, immoral, or unethical, say to myself, "If I can make only one person happy, that person can be me." That attitude is not a selfish one; it is acting with self-interest. Self-interest means to be concerned with what I prefer or choose while taking into consideration the desires of others. Selfish means concerned with what I prefer regardless of what others want. When a conflict occurs, I will choose my own desire if it does no harm, and I have carefully considered the ramifications.

What happens with my significant relationships if I am acting with self-interest? As I treat myself well, I am letting others know I am concerned with my welfare. I am saying, "I'm worth it." It does not mean I am not also concerned with theirs. Why should someone treat me well if I do not hold myself in high regard?

I will frequently tell myself I am a worthy person despite being a human being prone to fallible behavior. If I make a mistake, I know it is a behavior, not my personhood. I am not my behavior. When I make a mistake, I will forgive myself and renew my pledge not to make that mistake again. I will consider it a lapse in judgment. I will then use the mistake as a learning opportunity.

In addition, I will refrain from censuring, criticizing, blaming, or condemning myself. If I am engaging in this behavior, I will remind myself to cancel the negative self-appraisal and substitute positive or realistic self-talk. If my behavior falls short, again I will remind myself to correct it. I will apologize if I hurt someone, make amends where possible, and move on without guilt or shame.

If I furnish myself unconditional love and acceptance, others will be enticed and encouraged to act similarly towards me. If they don't, that's fine. So what! I can give myself the love and approval I require. I can allow others to have the same treatment - unconditional acceptance. I can also regard life itself with unconditional acceptance, realizing it is neither for nor against me. It acts in a random manner, sometimes working out well, other times not so well.

Another technique to re-parent myself is to visualize myself talking to my **self** as a child explaining what's going on at that time. This method is highly useful for those particularly poignant painful memories.

Regardless of what happened to me in my early years, as an adult, I would be wise to choose to parent or re-parent myself to fill the gaps of insufficient attention and nurturing I received as a child. Especially will I remind myself to be generous with treats; small and large, deserved or undeserved, on a regular basis.

I will take responsibility for my thoughts, emotions, and behaviors without considering myself a victim. I was a child then and as such was somewhat helpless. That is no longer the case. I can take charge of my life and treat myself with respect, dignity, and joy.

I will become entire – I will become all the ADULT I can be! I will not allow the hardship of the past to rob me of the present.