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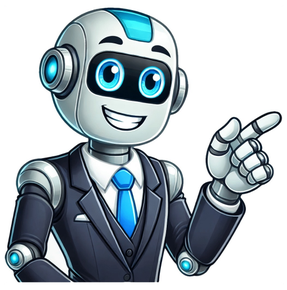

Photo by Ricky Turner on Unsplash We never fully grow up. At least not in the way we'd like to believe. Within us, there is an eternal child that always has something to feel or say. The question is, is that voice being heard? Is its laughter and cries a mere whisper or a deafening roar? Perhaps you've noticed that sometimes when a tantrum is about to incite within you, it is from an origin that feels all too familiar and personal, yet unacknowledged and therefore distant. How can you fully understand and unlock this estranged part of yourself you've spent all of your life unknowingly trying to repress, fold into a briefcase, and drag along to your next grown-up meeting? Commonly referred to as the inner child, this somewhat misplaced puzzle piece is actually an unconscious part of each person shaped during childhood that still begs for the space to be seen and heard. When it is healthy, we feel connected to its creativity, inspiration, and excitement. When it is wounded, we become disconnected from its invigorating qualities and are left feeling unhappy. Healing and reparenting the inner child is a journey, and it can become a lengthy process. However, the most important part about the healing journey is its commencement. What is the Inner Child? The inner child can be defined as the impressionable and vulnerable part of ourselves wounded and shaped throughout the earliest experiences and stages of our lives. The term inner child was originally coined by Carl Jung and recognized as an archetype or unconscious subpersonality. Its potential manifests through our behaviors and interactions with the external world. In our adulthood, some of these behaviors can stem from the trauma, pain, difficulty, and emotional and psychological neglect we experienced as children. Many of us try to protect ourselves from this suffering by burying these unresolved feelings and pain deep within our unconscious mind. Yet, they can return disguised as withdrawal, passive aggression, fear of abandonment, enabling, and much more. According to Thich Nha Hanh in his book Reconciliation – Healing the Inner Child, running away from our suffering doesn't end it, it prolongs it. Reparenting the inner child The process of "reparenting" was first introduced by Dr. Lucia Capacchione in the 1970s through her art therapy. Reparenting the inner child focuses on making sure it feels the value, love, and protection it lacked during childhood. By working with your inner child, you can isolate and integrate a very essential part of your being. Because the inner child holds enormous power over our thoughts, decisions, and relationships, it is important to introduce it to new approaches that help lessen unruly reactions and promote reflective responses. The practices below can be done when you begin your day, when it's coming to a close, or when you find yourself feeling upset or in need of support. Consider doing inner-child exercises when you are feeling anxious, angry, scared, or disappointed. As you become more in touch with your inner child, you will be able to recognize the signs of wounds and how they manifest themselves. It is also encouraged to have a therapist or a counselor present for these exercises if you feel your inner child wounds are much too painful to face on your own and further require professional guidance. Ways to Encourage Therapeutic Dialogue With Your Inner Child Write letters to your inner child One way to start a dialogue with your inner child is to write letters to yourself. Start by grabbing two sheets of paper and two envelopes if desired. These letters do not have to be sent—they are for you, and you only. A space to express, release, and heal. All of these roles will be taken on by you; the child and the adult; the student, the teacher, and the healer. "Dear (Adult or specific figure in line)" Letter The letters that go out to the adult version of yourself from your inner child should have zero boundaries. You can also address your letters to the people in your life who have called your inner child to the surface, such as a mother figure, a father figure, a close friend, or a significant other. If someone made you feel hurt, angry, or unloved, share your inner child's side of the story. This is the space to release raw emotion without any fluff or decoration. As you write, keep in mind that you do not need to rationalize your inner child's feelings. Set your inner child free and allow it to completely inhabit the page in front of you. No one is judging you in this letter, so let it all out. Dear "Inner Child" Letter In the letters that go out to your inner child, this is the moment to finely craft your words. Remember, you are talking to a child who will absorb your words and apply them consciously or subconsciously. This stage is all about reparenting your inner child, and providing it with the affection, validation, or support it may not have received at an earlier age. Some guidance: You can start off by acknowledging your inner child's suffering and pain so it feels both seen and heard. Always hold space for your inner child's experience. Next, focus on clearing up any shame and guilt it carries by explaining the origin and cause of its feelings. Remind your inner child that the fault is not theirs to bear if certain needs were not always met as a child. As you bring up this past pain, assure things will be different now that you are here to protect, love, and help it grow and heal. You can also write about whether or not you have been doing enough to make your inner child feel loved or understood. Add how you will improve in this area and also share the lessons you have learned that could be of insight. When you communicate with your inner child, picture yourself bending down to speak at an eye-level, actively engaging in conversation. Channeling this kind of endearing energy through words will make your inner child feel more safe, important, and in control. At some point in your letter, remind your inner child that certain reactions that stem from its wounds can turn into reflective responses with your continued guidance. Thank your inner child for its vulnerability, its bravery, and its strength. Close by sharing your love for your inner child and reassure your loving presence in their life. Communicate aloud with your inner child In this exercise, you can either sit or stand in front of a mirror or sit comfortably without one. If using a mirror, directly speak with your reflection; asking questions and answering them freely without restraint. If you feel strained or upset, comfort your reflection. Speak words you would want to hear from someone you love. Speak words you never heard as a child but desperately needed to hear. Say exactly what your inner child needs to hear right now. Remember, you are reparenting your inner child. Soothe its spirit, so that yours can also find some kind of peace and resolve. In addition, you can consider meditating to further communicate and connect with your inner child. Fortunately, there are many resources for guided meditations in the form of both audio and video that are available to you. Journal as your inner child and as the parent/adult For this exercise, consider using your nondominant hand to journal as the inner child and your dominant hand to journal as the adult. According to Dr. Lucia Cappachione's The Power of Your Other Hand: A Course in Channeling the Inner Wisdom of the Right Brain, this technique provides access to the right side of the brain which has strong connections with our intuition and emotional expression. Think of the nondominant hand as a child who is still learning to crawl or walk. It is unschooled, and has a fresh outlook on the world. With your nondominant hand, write what the inner child is feeling, and with your dominant hand, write what the inner child wants or needs to hear. With this distinct separation in dialogue, your mind will be able to associate the exercise as an actual conversation between two halves of yourself working together to heal and understand each other. Reparenting your inner child requires a dialogue filled with patience and understanding, so make sure to take your time with each response. Speak through artistic or creative expression Draw. Sing. Write. Dance. Play an instrument. What made your eyes light up when you were a child? What brought you inspiration, excitement, and release? Find an activity that pulls you into a creative space where you can get lost and also be found when you are ready. Let yourself communicate in a way that only you can understand and appreciate. By using art, dance, or music therapy, you can allow yourself to truly feel that mind-body connection. Your inner child will find its creativity and curiosity growing as it speaks a familiar language of movement, vibrations, and imagery. Set playdates with your inner child Allow yourself to engage in activities you enjoyed doing as a child. Watch your inner child come out to play, and make sure it's not playing alone. Respond to its playfulness, and allow its lightheartedness, curiosity, and tenderness to react through you. Consider making a list of all the shows, films, books, and activities you used to love as a child. For example, try re-watching some of the shows on your list or cracking open a book that pulls you into an entirely different world. Frolic in a field, visit an amusement park, or hit the batting cages. Similarly, maybe you could climb trees like a spider monkey or roll down hills like a snowball. It's okay if it feels somewhat childish or silly. Don't judge your inner child's personal joys, as those joys have the potential to bring you closer to your own. When reparenting your inner child, let some fun in. Start the healing process With time, effort and continued guidance, reparenting your inner child can open up new doors in your healing journey. Years of life have passed, yet your inner child still eagerly awaits you to wrap it in the most loving embrace it has ever felt. An embrace that you have the power to create and sustain. It's time to reintroduce yourself to the child within. Your healing starts now. References: Capacchione, L. (1988) The Power of Your Other Hand: A Course in Channeling the Inner Wisdom of the Right Brain. L Capacchione. Capacchione, L. (1991). Recovery of your inner child. Simon & Schuster. Davis, S. (2020). The Wounded Inner Child. 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Your generated images will be more polished than ever.See What's NewExplore how consumers want to see climate stories told today, and what that means for your visuals.Download Our Latest VisualGPS ReportData-backed trends. Generative AI demos. Answers to your usage rights questions. Our original video podcast covers it all—now on demand.Watch Now Source: Africa Studio/Shutterstock Two facts: We all have secrets, and most of us have had some wounding tied to our inner child. Perhaps our vulnerable and sensitive inner child needs healing. Whether our wounding was caused by a childhood friend moving away, physical or psychological abuse, or a broken family, the resulting pain will live with us for the rest of our lives; and we may be reminded of the pain unexpectedly. If we do inner-child work by connecting to the little boy or girl within us, we can reconnect with some of the reasons for our adult fears, phobias. and life patterns. When we begin to understand them, then magic, healing, and transformation can occur. When pondering how the inner child gets wounded, author Alice Miller suggested that German philosophers believed in stamping out a child's exuberance so that adults could control them. In my own European family, the philosophy was definitely that children should be seen and not heard, and I only realized in my adult years how wounding this was. When putting the finishing touches on my book, Writing for Bliss, I decided to include a section on inner-child healing. It wasn't in my original draft, but I noticed that many friends and colleagues inquired about it, reminding me how healing and transformative it would be to write about and access the wounded child. Around the same time, I'd just read Thich Nhat Hanh's book, Reconciliation, where the wise Buddhist said that inside each of us is a young, suffering child and that to protect ourselves from future suffering, we all try to forget the pain. Most often, when we feel pain from a deep place within, it's our inner wounded child who's calling. Forgetting the pain results in more pain. Writing about this pain can be one way to heal our inner child and help heal any negative emotions we might be holding on to. Research has shown that the body holds both emotional and physical pain, and even if we try to ignore that pain and forge ahead with our lives, chances are that it will always be there. It might also emerge at the most unlikely times, or during meditation or writing. Often, the baggage we carry from our childhoods can be very difficult to shake, especially when we've been exposed to deep trauma. In my writing classes, I tell participants that it's difficult to walk around a dark room all the time and that it's much easier when there's light streaming in. Thich Nhat Hanh suggests breathing in and saying, "I go back to my inner child," and breathing out and saying, "I take care of my inner child." You can take care of your inner child by writing some dialogue from your inner child's point of view. This gives a voice to your pain. Sometimes that's all the pain needs. Other times, it might need to be addressed through deeper psychological work. Acknowledging the inner child means treating him or her with respect and love. You can do so by saying, "I love you," "I hear you," "I'm sorry you feel this way," and "Thank you for being you." In his article "Essential Secrets of Psychotherapy: The Inner Child," Stephen Diamond (2008) advocates acknowledging our inner child and taking him or her seriously. Listening to and communicating with the inner child, whether on paper or during psychotherapy, is also crucial for transformation to occur. If, for example, you're considering writing a letter, tell your inner child that you recognize him or her and that your intention is to do everything in your power to heal his or her wounds. Some people say that after they've written a few letters to their inner child, they find that the child writes back. Sometimes many answers can emerge. In letters or verbal communication, it's important to ask the inner child what he or she is feeling and what is needed right now. By maintaining a dialogue, healing and transformation can more effectively occur. Only by loving and healing our inner child can we begin to love ourselves and then, consequently, others. It's also a way to empower ourselves and focus on mindfulness and the present… and not the past. How to connect with your inner child: Formulate a dialogue. Write a letter to him or her. Say nurturing things (I love you, I hear you, thank you, I'm sorry). Look at photos of yourself as a child. Think and write about what you loved doing when you were young. Engage in meditation and creative visualization. References Diamond, S. (2008). "Essential Secrets of Psychotherapy: The Inner Child," Psychology Today. June 7. Hanh, T.N. (2010). Reconciliation: Healing the Inner Child. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press. Miller, A. (2007). The Drama of the Gifted Child. New York, NY: Perseus Book Group. Raab, D. (2017). Writing for Bliss: A Seven-Step Plan for Telling Your Story and Transforming Your Life. Ann Arbor, MI: Loving Healing Press. Find a Relationship Issues Therapist Get the help you need from a therapist near you–a FREE service from Psychology Today. Atlanta, GA Austin, TX Baltimore, MD Boston, MA Brooklyn, NY Charlotte, NC Chicago, IL Columbus, OH Dallas, TX Denver, CO Detroit, MI Houston, TX Indianapolis, IN Jacksonville, FL Las Vegas, NV Los Angeles, CA Louisville, KY Memphis, TN Miami, FL Milwaukee, WI Minneapolis, MN Nashville, TN New York, NY Oakland, CA Omaha, NE Philadelphia, PA Phoenix, AZ Pittsburgh, PA Portland, OR Raleigh, NC Sacramento, CA Saint Louis, MO San Antonio, TX San Diego, CA San Francisco, CA San Jose, CA Seattle, WA Tucson, AZ Washington, DC More from Diana Raab Ph.D. More from Psychology Today If our needs weren't met when we were young, those memories and experiences can have a way of sticking around and resurfacing long into our adulthood. That's because who we've become as adults is directly informed by our childhood experiences. No matter what we've faced in the past, we all have an inner child that needs taken care of, especially if we've had past experiences that we haven't healed from or fully processed.Psychologist Susan Albers, PsyD, explains that healing your inner child is about learning how to move forward, rediscovering what you need, recapturing what you've lost and reparenting your younger self so you can heal from past experiences. Here's how you can begin to do just that.What is 'inner child work'?"Inner child work" is the process of acknowledging, understanding and healing the wounds of your inner child. This ongoing process requires unlearning past behaviors and replacing them with new ones that reinforce positive coping skills and present-day beliefs about who you are as a person.It involves taking inventory of your past experiences and evaluating how they make you feel in the present day. By recognizing the pain points of your life and areas you'd like to improve, you can override the ways you'd normally respond to other people, circumstances and events that cause your emotional triggers."It's about reparenting yourself and giving yourself the emotional response you would have needed or wanted as a child, but doing it right now at your current stage in life," explains Dr. Albers. "It's about understanding the very vulnerable parts of ourselves and nurturing ourselves with self-compassion and self-acceptance."The goal of healing your inner child is to make sure you fully process both positive and negative experiences from when you were younger so you can move past them with a renewed understanding of your worth as a human being with very real thoughts and feelings.Healing requires therapyOn one side, it's easy to see how even the most positive experiences you've had inform who you are today. But the negative experiences you've had, in particular, can make the process of healing your inner child more challenging. Because of this, healing your inner child often involves some form of therapy."Cognitive behavioral therapy is a valuable approach for healing your inner child," says Dr. Albers. "A therapist can work with you to uncover where your beliefs about yourself come from, especially those rooted in childhood. By making these connections, you can learn to change negative thoughts into more compassionate and supportive ones. This process not only helps heal your inner child, but also empowers you to face life's challenges with a healthier mindset."If you've experienced childhood trauma, abuse or violence at a young age, it's especially important that you work with a licensed clinical therapist who can help you navigate the healing process."It can be very painful to confront your inner child because it can tap into some very difficult, painful memories," notes Dr. Albers. "It can be helpful to work with a therapist who can walk you through visiting some of these things from the past in a patient and calm way so that you're not retraumatized by them."Ways to heal your inner childSo, how do you turn this all around? Healing your inner child is about making sure that little version of you feels safe, protected and loved so they're not popping up unannounced ready to wreak havoc. With the added help of a therapist, your journey of healing your inner child becomes much more manageable with these steps:Acknowledge your inner child and what they have to say. "When you listen to your inner child, you're allowing and validating any feelings that you may have," says Dr. Albers. "As a child, you may often be taught to cut yourself off from those feelings or ignore and avoid them. But as an adult, the first step is paying attention to when you are having a significant reaction to something and take it seriously." For example, when you receive critical feedback at work and feel a surge of shame, pause to acknowledge that your inner child is reacting to past experiences of being judged. "Instead of letting those feelings overwhelm you, remind yourself that this feedback is about your work, not your worth, allowing you to respond constructively and grow from the experience," she adds.Understand your triggers. Knowing yourself and what triggers your emotional impulses is key to finding out how to respond in a healthier way. "If you know yourself and you know you're incredibly sensitive to feeling abandoned because of a sense of abandonment you had as a child, you can watch out for it," illustrates Dr. Albers. "You can look for it in relationships with friends and other people around you, and spot when you feel oversensitive to abandonment."Journal about your experiences. Take note of when you feel your inner child popping up and write down how those moments make you feel and the kinds of responses they inspire. "Journaling can help you understand if there are any patterns of behavior you participate in," says Dr. Albers.Mirror your motives. Mirror exercises can help you flip the script so that you start to internalize more positive feelings about yourself. "Look at yourself in the mirror and start saying positive and healing statements as you're looking at your reflection to reformulate some of those automatic beliefs that pop into your mind," recommends Dr. Albers. "Tell yourself that you feel worthy and that you are good enough."Write a letter. Write a letter to your inner child, or try writing from the perspective of your inner child. "If you're writing to yourself, you're giving yourself the love, compassion and empathy you needed, and a sense of safety and trust," notes Dr. Albers. "If you're writing from the inner child's perspective, it can help to illuminate where these wounds are located inside of you and how they may be popping up." So, next time your inner child is triggered, try writing a mantra to yourself, something like: "Dear little me, I see your fear of not being good enough and I want you to know that you are loved, worthy and capable of amazing things — no matter what anyone else says or does." Sit with that, repeat it to yourself and really focus on believing it.Meditate with your inner child. "Imagine a version of yourself as a child sitting next to you. Talk to that child version of yourself and tell them what you wanted or needed to hear as a child," suggests Dr. Albers. "That often taps into very deep places for people to identify where your wounds are located."Don't forget about the positives. You want to focus on both the positive and negative aspects of your inner child because chances are, you had moments when you were young where you felt happy, safe and playful. "Those positive memories helped create your sense of the world," says Dr. Albers. "So, if you felt safe and comforted in a relationship with an adult or a friend when you were younger, you may also be able to identify and recognize when you feel that way again in a new relationship as an adult."Try something new. Many of these steps revolve around increasing your awareness so you can start to change the way you think and feel. But once you have insight into your inner child, it's time to put all of that awareness into practice by changing how you act and react to the world around you. Instead of doing what you've always done, try a different approach. "It's also helpful to let your partner know what you need," encourages Dr. Albers. "If you were a child who needed more hugs as a kid and you tell your spouse that when you're feeling down, you really need a hug, that's going to be more healing because it taps right into what your inner child needs in that moment."Be child-like. Allow yourself to let go every now and then and do something you once loved as a child. Be playful. Explore your curiosities. Pick up an old habit you let go of long ago. "For a lot of people who have inner child wounds, they didn't feel safe enough to play and experience joy when they were kids, so they often feel cut off from that part of themselves," shares Dr. Albers. "Tapping back into that as an adult helps you reparent yourself so that you learn it's OK to have fun and do things you did as a child that gave you joy."At the end of the day, your inner child has always been hidden somewhere inside you. By confronting your inner child, you can begin to protect them and support them the way you would protect and support any one of your own children."You're confronting your old belief system, noticing what needs to be worked on and what hasn't been working, and then replacing that old system with a new one that has a lot of empathy, kindness and self-compassion," says Dr. Albers.How you know your inner child is healingHealing your inner child looks different for every person. But the general goal is to increase your awareness of where your emotional triggers are coming from. By reducing the severity of your emotional triggers, you can then learn how to respond to them clearly in a way that's more in line with your foundational values."The healing process becomes very evident when you're responding and acting in a different way," says Dr. Albers.Let's look at two examples of how your inner child could show up and what it looks like when that inner child is healing.For the first example, let's say your parents argued often when you were a kid. In reaction to what was happening in your household, you tried to be invisible. You clammed up, never talked back and sometimes, tried to hide if the arguments became violent or abusive.You then carry those experiences with you into your current life as an adult by avoiding conflict in your relationships. You don't speak up at work or in other areas of your life when something upsets you. You don't want to ruffle any feathers, so you try to make yourself smaller in the same ways you did as a child. By doing this, you then sacrifice your own needs so that you're not upsetting others or worsening the situation.These trauma responses happen because your inner child is showing up in your current life as an adult and reacting to those past experiences."A sign of progress would be to speak up when you need to, set healthy boundaries and vocalize how other people make you feel when conflict is happening," explains Dr. Albers. "Those are very different responses than how you would have responded as a child, and they are signs that you're healing."For the second example, let's imagine that when you text your partner, they don't respond. Their lack of response then triggers feelings of abandonment and neglect. When this happens, you get angry and respond with a passive-aggressive text message or you get sad and automatically think something is wrong or they might be breaking up with you."Instead of giving into catastrophic thinking and feelings of abandonment, you talk yourself through it," says Dr. Albers. "You tell yourself this isn't a sign to respond with insecure texts, but to calm and comfort yourself in that moment and to be able to work through it in a new, productive, healing way."You know you're healing your inner child when:You can self-soothe when conflicts come up.You use healthy coping mechanisms when responding to uncomfortable situations.You openly express your needs instead of internalizing grief, guilt or shame.You can identify your emotional triggers and work through them.You act or react differently than you would in the past."Healing your inner child is about revisiting your values and morals and asking yourself what you need right now to feel safe, loved and supported," reaffirms Dr. Albers. "It's about identifying what you need to get your needs met and identifying where your needs are not being met." As part of the Psychosynthesis Module in Year 1 of the Diploma in Holistic Counselling and Psychotherapy, the Inner Child is explored and I hope the following short article is helpful to your adventure with your Inner Child. Charles Whitfield in his book Healing the Child Within writes "the concept called an Inner Child has been a part of the world for a very long time. Carl Jung called it the "Divine Child" and Emmet Fox called it the "Wonder Child." Alice Miller and Donald Winnicott refer to it as the "True Self." [1] The Inner Child refers to that part of each of us which is ultimately alive, energetic, creative and fulfilled; it is our "Genuine Authentic Self", who we know deep within us, our "Real Self." RRR Soothing Your Inner Child Adapted from the booklet: "Caring for the Child Within –A Manual for Grownups"[2] "Getting in touch with our inner children is not always easy. At first it might seem that they just want to cry and cry. That's natural. The parts of us that were split off at a young age had to go away for good reasons–abuse, fear, neglect, and misunderstanding. These young parts were not allowed to express their overwhelming feelings, so they took the feelings away with them. When we invite these lost inner children back into our lives, we have to be ready for them to express a lot of distress. But what do we do then? How do we soothe the inner child? First of all, it's a process and it won't get done all at once. You need to learn how to parent your own particular inner children. They will teach you what they need as time goes on. You will have to be just as patient as if you had adopted a real child with a troubled background. Second, you need to take those feelings extremely seriously. "Soothing" the child does not mean saying, "There, there, dear. It's OK. Stop crying." You may have heard voices like that in your past, but your job is to be a different kind of parent, one who really listens to the child's feelings. So the first part of soothing is to hear the feelings. The child might not be able to tell you why she or he feels sad or angry or scared. Your job is to pay attention to the feelings. If you can, find a safe a quiet place where you can literally sit down and listen. Let the feelings emerge. Accept all of them, even though it is painful. If you can't bear all of it at once, tell the child that you will listen for ten minutes, or five, or two minutes. Then promise the child to make another time later to listen some more. As the feelings emerge, focus on loving the child who is entrusting you with these valuable and vulnerable emotions. Tell the child that you are proud of her or him for coming forth. Sometimes you may feel completely overwhelmed and inside the feelings, like you are being the child. That's OK. If you can manage to stay in that place, try to do so. See if you can detect any shift where you might feel a little more like a grownup holding the child. Here's where the soothing comes in: Value all those difficult feelings and validate them. Let your body express the love you have for this child by holding a pillow or stuffed animal, rocking, humming, stroking, doing anything you'd do to comfort an actual child. Trust your instincts on this. Let the child tell you what feels good to her or him. Don't let any critical voices tell you that it's silly to rock and hum a lullaby. It's not silly–it is valuable practice in loving yourself. You will need to do this practice over and over as your inner child gradually learns to trust you. Over time you will learn to be the caring parent that this child never had. You will share your future with the wonderful, free, and loving spirit that is your inner child. Examples of some of the Children you might find inside are: The Playful Child That self that is naturally playful, creative, spontaneous, and fun-loving child. This self longs to play. Many of us have forgotten how to do this without guilt or anxiety that as adults we must be doing something that is worthwhile. The Spoiled Child That part of us wants what they want and they want it now, and if they don't get what they want, they throw temper tantrums. The Neglected Child The child self that was always left alone, without much nurturing and love. They don't believe they are lovable or worthwhile. They don't know how to love. They are depressed and want to cry. The Abandoned Child This child self has been left in some way like divorce or adoption or just left because the parents were kept busy working. They are always fearful that they will be abandoned again and again. This part of the self is starving for extra attention and reassurance that they are safe and okay. This self is very lonely. The Fearful Child This part has been overly criticised when they were small. Now they are anxious and are in panic much of the time. They need lots of encouragement and positive affirmations. The Unbonded Child This Inner Child never learns to be close to anyone. They are isolated. Intimacy feels alien and scary. Trust is a basic issue. The Discounted Child This is a part of the self that was ignored and treated as though they did not exist. They don't believe in themselves and need lots of love to assist and support them. These are all possibilities of the different Inner Children that might be inside. There are many other selves as well, perhaps the Ego self, or the self that holds shame, or the self that holds the information that was given to them by their parents or teachers or society as a whole." RRR As you can understand from reading the above, this is tender work so be gentle on yourself when working on your inner child in your personal therapy. [1] Whitfield, Charles L. Healing the Child Within. (1989) Health Communications Inc., USA [2] Rowan, Jane. Caring for the Child Within – A Manual for Grownups. (2011) Smashwords, USA In psychology, a person's childlike aspect For the episode of Fringe, see Inner Child (Fringe). For the album by Shanice, see Inner Child (album). This article needs additional citations for verification. Please help improve this article by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed.Find sources: "Inner child" – news · newspapers · books · scholar · JSTOR (September 2014) (Learn how and when to remove this message) In some schools of popular psychology and analytical psychology, the inner child is an individual's childlike aspect. It includes what a person learned as a child before puberty. The inner child is often conceived as a semi-independent subpersonality subordinate to the waking conscious mind. The term has therapeutic applications in counseling and health settings. The theoretical roots of the inner child trace back to Carl Jung's divine child archetype, which he saw as both an individual and collective symbol of renewal and transformation. [1] The Jungian Child archetype led to the concept of the inner child. It has been defined as "all the past hidden ages" within a person's life journey, consisting of memories and emotional layers from each stage of development that influence the formation of identity.[2] Psychologists have explored the role of the inner child in influencing adult behaviour. Lamagna (2011) explored how overwhelming emotional experiences in early life can shape present-day emotional functioning and relational patterns by remaining outside of conscious awareness. [3] The inner child is often considered as the vulnerable and hidden childlike part of a person with playfulness and creativity, but also accompanied by anger, hurt and fear from the early childhood experiences with caregivers. [4] The concept became known to a broader audience through books by John Bradshaw and others. Bradshaw (2005) emphasised that by acknowledging the inner child, individuals could awaken their true selves and heal past emotional wounds. [5] These perspectives collectively affirm that the inner child will continue to influence an individual's sense of identity, emotional well-being, and relationships throughout life. Sigmund Freud emphasised the lasting impact of early childhood experiences on adult emotional life, especially unresolved conflicts and repressed memories from psychosexual developmental stages. [6] Although Freud did not use the term "inner child," his work laid the foundation for later theorists. Carl Jung expanded on these ideas with his theory of archetypes, introducing the "Divine Child" as a symbol of innocence and potential, and later the "wounded child" as part of the individuation process of integrating unconscious material into a unified self. Jung's ideas contributed significantly to the symbolic and psychological basis for the inner child. [7] In the late 20th century, the inner child became a prominent theme in therapeutic and self-help literature focused on healing childhood trauma. One method of reparenting the inner child in therapy was originated by art therapist Lucia Capacchione in 1976 and documented in her book Recovery of Your Inner Child (1991). Using art therapy and journaling techniques, her method includes a "nurturing parent" and "protective parent" within "inner family work" to care for a person's physical, emotional, creative and spiritual needs (her definition of the inner child). It also posits a "critical parent within" and provides tools for managing it. Charles L. Whitfield dubbed the inner child the "child within" in his book Healing the Child Within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families (1987). Penny Park's book Rescuing the Inner Child (1990) provided a program for contacting and recovering the inner child. In his television shows, and in books such as Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child (1990), John Bradshaw, a U.S. educator, pop psychology and self-help movement leader, used "inner child" to point to unresolved childhood experiences and the lingering dysfunctional effects of childhood dysfunction: the sum of mental-emotional memories stored in the sub-conscious from conception thru pre-puberty.[8] A range of therapeutic modalities incorporates the concept of the inner child to address emotional wounds rooted in early life experiences. Bradshaw's Recover Therapy is designed to help patients reconnect with their inner child to address maladaptive emotional and behavioural patterns developed with early childhood experiences. It involves group therapy and the practice of reparenting. Group therapy allows group members to express themselves and receive peer feedback to learn new behaviours and interactions that can be transferred to the real world. Reparenting means learning to acknowledge and love one's inner child. This allows an individual to offer oneself the care and support that may have been absent in childhood, improving emotional stability. [5] The concept of the inner child is also present in psychosynthesis and psychotherapy. Within the framework of psychosynthesis, the inner child is often characterized as a subpersonality[9] or may also be seen as a central element surrounded by subpersonalities.[10] Therapy in this tradition aims to bring these inner parts into the conscious part of the personality and foster their integration in a more unified self. Internal Family Systems therapy (IFS therapy) posits that there is not just one inner child sub-personality, but many. IFS therapy calls wounded inner child sub-personalities "exiles" because they tend to be excluded from waking thought in order to avoid/defend against the pain carried in those memories. IFS therapy has a method that aims to gain safe access to a person's exiles, witnessing the stories of their origins in childhood, and healing them. Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), although not traditionally centred on the concept of the inner child, shares some conceptual similarities. Aaron Beck's discovery of automatic thoughts emphasises how early experiences shape ongoing emotional and behavioural patterns. Beck found that these automated processes can be brought into conscious awareness and examined during therapy. These automatic thoughts can be seen as manifestations of the "inner child" in the adult self. [11] In CBT, individuals can identify and modify beliefs and behaviours shaped by childhood experiences. This process parallels inner child therapy in its focus on addressing patterns rooted in childhood to support emotional well-being and behavioural change. Music therapy may also incorporate inner child work. Techniques such as vocal holding and regression are used to access repressed emotions and experiences. Therapeutic regression enables clients to revisit events, regain lost feelings, and reunite pieces of themselves. Vocal holding can evoke a pre-verbal, early-attachment phase in a client's life because no words are used. These are combined with re-examing prior events and experiences to help clients understand and connect with suppressed emotions and facilitate self-acceptance. [12] While the concept of the inner child is mainly metaphorical, it has been extensively researched in terms of therapeutic approaches. These studies suggest that inner child-oriented therapies may improve mental conditions by addressing unresolved childhood experiences. A clinical trial by Hodgdon et al. (2021) examined the efficacy of IFS therapy in adults with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and histories of childhood trauma. The study found statistically and clinically significant reductions in PTSD and depressive symptoms. At a one-month follow-up, 92% of participants no longer met the diagnostic criteria (DSM-IV-TR) for PTSD, indicating the potential of IFS therapy in addressing trauma-related psychopathology through inner child-focused subpersonalities.[13] Moreover, Edalat et al. (2022) evaluated the effectiveness of a reparenting-based intervention using the self-attachment technique. It focuses on building a nurturing bond between the adult self and an internalised childhood self, aiming to heal emotional wounds. The results showed statistically significant improvements in the symptoms of chronic depression and anxiety among female participants with a large effect size after eight one-to-one sessions. [14] Attachment theory also provides an indirect empirical foundation for inner child concepts. [15] Bowlby's model suggested that early attachment experience creates 'internal working models' that influence emotional regulation and attachment patterns throughout life. [16] This framework resonates with the inner child concept, where unmet childhood needs continue to affect later life. Despite some promising therapeutic outcomes, the inner child concept has been subject to significant academic criticism. Critics argue that the inner child lacks falsifiability, an essential criterion for scientific validity according to Karl Popper (1963). Since it is framed metaphorically and not operationalised in measurable terms, it resists empirical testing and classification as a scientific theory. [17] This challenges its standing as a psychological construct. Furthermore, most studies are based on qualitative data or self-report measures, which lack validity. Lilienfeld et al. (2013) argue that cognitive biases can influence subjective reports from clients and clinicians and, therefore, cannot replace controlled empirical research. [18] Moreover, many studies supporting inner child-based therapies rely on small sample sizes, lacking generalisability.[13][14] This makes it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about the effectiveness of inner child therapies. Large-scale, controlled studies directly validating the inner child as a psychological construct remain limited. Most available research assesses outcomes of therapeutic practices referencing the concept, rather than testing it as an independent variable.[18] Codependency – Type of relationship where one person enables the other's self-destructive tendencies, a consequence of dysfunctional families Developmental needs meeting strategy – Psychotherapy approach for adults with psychological trauma Dysfunctional family – Family dynamic in which conflict and child neglect or child abuse occur regularly Inner critic – Concept in psychology to describe a subpersonality that judges and demeans oneself Schema therapy § Schema modes – Momentary mind states in response to difficult situations ^ Jung, C. G., & Kerényi, C. (1969). Essays on a Science of Mythology: The Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis. Princeton University Press. Internet Archive ^ Firman, J., & Russell, A. (1994). Opening to the Inner Child: Recovering Authentic Personality. Synthesis Center PDF ^ Lamagna, J. (2011). 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These feelings might be the echoes of your inner child—an essential part of your subconscious that carries the joys, fears, and wounds of your early years

validating. Let’s look at some real-life examples of individuals who have successfully healed their inner child and transformed their lives.John always struggled with feelings of anger and resentment, often stemming from his childhood experiences of being neglected. Through therapy and inner child work, John learned to acknowledge his inner child’s pain and provide the love and validation he had missed. By practicing self-compassion and mirror work, he gradually released his pent-up anger and developed a healthier, more positive self-image. Today, John describes himself as more peaceful and emotionally balanced.Example 2: Sarah’s Story of Overcoming AbandonmentSarah’s parents divorced when she was young, leaving her with a deep sense of abandonment. This fear affected her adult relationships, making it hard for her to trust others. By engaging in techniques like writing letters to her inner child and participating in inner infant meditation, Sarah was able to address and heal these deep-seated fears. She now enjoys healthier relationships and has a strong sense of self-worth.Lisa had a happy childhood until her family faced a traumatic event. She lost her sense of joy and playfulness, becoming overly serious and anxious. By making time for playful activities and revisiting happy childhood memories, Lisa reconnected with her inner child. This process helped her rediscover her creativity and zest for life. She now incorporates play into her daily routine, which has significantly improved her mental health.Hearing from experts can provide additional insights and strategies for healing your inner child. Here are some valuable perspectives from psychologists and therapists who specialize in this area:“Self-compassion involves treating yourself with the same kindness, concern, and support you would show to a good friend. It’s essential for healing because it allows us to be kind to our inner child, understanding its pain, and offering the love it needs.““Reconnecting with your inner child requires courage and a willingness to revisit painful memories. But through this process, you can reclaim parts of yourself that have been lost and build a stronger, more integrated self.““Healing from trauma involves understanding the fragmented parts of ourselves and working to integrate them. This includes acknowledging the inner child and providing the safety and support it needs to heal.”Engage in Regular Therapy Sessions: Working with a therapist can provide a safe space to explore and heal your inner child. Look for therapists who specialize in trauma and inner child work.Join Support Groups: Sharing your experiences with others who are on a similar journey can provide validation and support. Online forums and local support groups can be valuable resources.Practice Mindfulness and Meditation: These practices can help you stay present and connected with your inner child. They also promote emotional regulation and reduce stress.Read and Educate Yourself: Books, articles, and online courses can provide additional insights and techniques for healing your inner child. Continuous learning can deepen your understanding and support your healing journey.Healing your inner child is a transformative process that can lead to profound emotional growth and a more fulfilling life. By acknowledging and nurturing this part of yourself, you can break free from past traumas and build a healthier, more integrated self.Embarking on this journey requires courage and commitment, but the rewards are immense. Take the first step today by acknowledging your inner child and exploring the techniques we’ve discussed. Remember, you deserve love, kindness, and compassion—both from others and from yourself.If you found this article helpful, please share it with others who might benefit from it. Healing is a journey best taken with support and community. We encourage you to start your healing journey today and reach out if you need professional help.By continuing to engage with these practices and seeking further education, you can nurture your inner child and achieve lasting emotional well-being. Inner child exercises — like self-compassion, the butterfly hug, and writing letters to your younger self — can help you heal from painful childhood experiences.Inner child work teaches you to parent and nurture your wounded inner child. Painful early experiences often stick with us into adulthood — from being yelled at by a teacher or rejected by playmates to experiencing childhood trauma. You might even feel “stuck” at the age of trauma, unable to move on emotionally without first processing your past. “Inner child work is the process of re-parenting the ‘littles’ that were neglected, abused, abandoned, etc. during childhood,” says Dr. Charity Godfrey, LMHC, therapist and founder of Lifescape Integrative Therapy in Ft. Myers, Florida.“It’s during the formative years of childhood — 0 to 9 years — that we learn about emotions, safety, and who we are in the world and form connections.” When an experience feels unsafe at that age and no adult steps in to offer comfort, the pain and shame can linger for years to come. Inner child exercises are one way we can access that younger self and offer them the comfort they needed but didn’t have access to at the time. Your inner child is not a “childlike personality.” Rather, it’s the part of your subconscious mind that experienced and still remembers your childhood moments and emotions, both good and bad. Above all, your inner child feels safer when they know you’re paying attention to them. It can help to simply acknowledge them, remind them you’re looking out for them, and send them your love.Even if the conscious mind doesn’t have the words to talk about it, the body remembers trauma. Supportive physical touch can help you soothe your inner child.Holding your inner child can bring them comfort. “Rock if necessary,” says Godfrey. “Hold tight to yourself and let the tears flow — or, just as powerful, smile big and know that healing is happening.” You might try doing this for 3 minutes a day.To practice the butterfly hug:cross your hands over your chestlink your thumbs together to form the butterfly’s bodyposition your fingertips just below your collarbonestap your chest by alternating the movement of your hands — tapping with your left hand, then your right handtake slow, deep breaths and gently observe your thoughts and feelings without judgmentYou can find a video of how to do the butterfly hug here.Bringing yourself back to safe, calm memories can help you soothe yourself when you feel overwhelmed.Can you remember the happiest moments of your childhood? Maybe it was baking cookies with your grandma or going to the zoo. Spend a few minutes remembering how it felt — the pictures, sounds, smells, and feelings.Notice how it feels in your body to experience this sense of security.If you can’t remember a happy moment, it’s also effective to imagine one. What would you have loved to have experienced? Grab your inner child by the hand and go there together.“Negative constructs, such as “I don’t matter,” or, “I’m not good enough,” are often formed in childhood from mistreatment/abuse during these years,” says Godfrey. Mirror work can help you move beyond these narratives and work on developing a loving connection with yourself. Godfrey recommends looking deeply at yourself in the mirror each day and making a powerful healing statement, such as:“I matter.““What I want matters.““I will not stay silent.”It’s not always easy to be kind to yourself. If you tend to judge yourself harshly, practicing self-compassion can help you improve your relationship with yourself.Research by Kristin Neff, PhD — a leading expert in self-compassion — suggests that being kinder to yourself can reduce anxiety, stress, and depression.self-compassionate journalingpositive self-talkself-compassion meditationchallenging your inner critic“Don’t delay what you need any longer,” says Godfrey. “State the words in your journal and read them out loud. Read the words you wished you would have heard with love, kindness, and compassion.”If you’re right-handed, use your left hand (or vice versa) to let your inner child express themself with a story or a picture. You can also converse with your inner child by alternating between your right and left hand. This non-dominant hand technique is explored in depth in the classic book “The Creative Journal” by Lucia Capacchione. It contains more than 50 prompts to help you release feelings, explore dreams, and solve problems.What makes you instantly upset, angry, or fearful? Can you trace them back to negative experiences in childhood? Perhaps your dad never truly listened to you, so now you feel rejected when your partner is too busy to pay attention. When you identify where this pain originated, reassure your inner child that they are safe, loved, and heard.Try spending time doing what you loved to do as a child. Get out the coloring books, listen to music, play with clay, write a story, run barefoot in the grass, or watch an old cartoon. The important thing is to feel creative and inspired again.Play is built into our schedules as children — but play in adulthood is just as important.In general, practicing meditation regularly can help people heal from past traumas. Research from 2017 suggests it may reduce stress and the effects of childhood trauma and improve health outcomes in adulthood.Inner infant meditation is a powerful meditation developed by John Bradshaw, the pioneer of inner child work and author of the book “Homecoming.” In this meditation, you go back to reclaim your infant self and bring yourself “home.” You can listen to Bradshaw’s inner infant meditation here.There are numerous books and online resources to help you on your inner child journey. As mentioned above, “Homecoming” by John Bradshaw is a classic on healing your inner child. These simple at-home techniques can help support the deeper work you complete with a therapist in session where you can begin to reconstruct your sense of self to say, “I am enough,” or, “I do matter,” says Godfrey.People with a history of repeated abuse or neglect may experience complex trauma as adults.If you experienced trauma as a young child — particularly if it involved your parents or living situation — inner child work might be right for you. This therapeutic technique allows you to work through the coping mechanisms you’ve developed along the way, so you can finally connect with your true authentic self. If you have experienced trauma, consider contacting a mental health professional. There are many effective therapies for trauma to help relieve post-traumatic stress. If you think inner child work could help you, you might reach out to a therapist specializing in this technique. For many years I’ve considered myself to be very unattractive and unworthy of love. Does that sound harsh? Trust me, I’m not looking for sympathy. I’m not even asking that you agree with me. I’m just explaining my experience and inner reality. For years I struggled with this feeling that I’m physically unappealing. But I found ways to work through these feelings and heal my wounded inner child. Are you feeling inadequate, ugly, or like there’s something wrong with you? We’ve all been there, and that’s why you might find these exercises that I’ve tried helpful as well. Here’s how it works: 12 powerful exercises for healing your inner child 1) Close your eyes and travel back in time I don’t know what your childhood was like. One thing I can say is that I often find myself missing my childhood. It wasn’t perfect, but there were so many memories and special experiences that made me who I am today. The first powerful inner child healing exercise is to close your eyes and travel back to your childhood. Think of five things that made you happy at that early stage of your life. For example: Playing with your siblings Eating delicious food Running in the forests Feeling endlessly curious Playing sports like cricket These can be really simple things you did growing up that brought you joy. Reliving them in your mind gets you in touch with your inner child, which is the more innocent and emotionally raw part of yourself that still exists. You may see images of yourself and your appearance, and that’s fine! But the focus here is on the emotions and experiences you had that brought you joy. Your inner child is inside you and is you. He or she would love the chance for adult you to get back in touch and show some appreciation to again love the same things you once did. The inner child’s line of communication is now more open. 2) Interview your inner child The three primary kinds of inner child are: the abandoned child, the playful child, and the fearful child. The abandoned inner child didn’t get much love and attention. This may have been because their parents were too busy, abusive, or neglectful. The abandoned child is terrified of being judged as not good enough and left out, left behind, and left without love. The fearful inner child is scared of being judged as inadequate. They received a lot of criticism from an early age and it left them craving validation and approval. Even the slightest feeling of being “bad” or not good enough makes them hurt deeply. The playful inner child grew up in a way that didn’t have much responsibility. Their childhood was defined by having fun, being free, being cared for, and feeling spontaneous and joyful. Restrictions, judgments, and rules of adult life can leave the playful inner child confused and disappointed. Your job is to approach that inner child in your mind and reach out to them. You might seem a little skeptical about how you’re supposed to get in touch with these younger versions of you, but I have just the right method to get you started. Getting in contact with your inner child requires you digging a little deeper, often made easier through mindfulness and meditation practices. This free guided Self-Healing Meditation is in this case the perfect tool to get you started. It enables the everyday thoughts pulling you in different directions to quieten down and make space for you to get in contact with your inner child. Click here to access the 20 minute meditation. Once you’re done, look in their eyes and ask them how they’re feeling. Then you’ll know which kind of inner child you have and we can proceed to step three. 3) A unique and powerful exercise to flip the script As I said, I developed a specific exercise to work with my inner child and face this feeling of being ugly head-on. It brought up some tough emotions, but it’s been a very worthwhile endeavor for me that’s completely shifted how I view my place in the world and my worth in physical terms. Many people on my videos told me I look unattractive and I’m ugly. I admit that it hurt because it tapped into the longstanding insecurity I’ve had that I’m not very good-looking and that my face is asymmetrical. I agree that I’m objectively not a Greek god and that I’m not what most women would consider especially handsome. So here’s what we do… First, find that inner script about your appearance inside your head. Look at your reflection on the screen. Think of the words that come up: “chunky,” “weird nose,” “baggy cheeks” or “goofy eyes,” whatever it is you feel is “ugly” about you… Now come up to your five-year-old you. This is your inner child! Tell him or her what’s bad about them using these scripts. “You look chunky,” “you have a weird nose,” and “your eyes are messed up!” How do you feel as you tell your innocent younger child they’re an ugly bastard? You’re likely going to feel kind of ridiculous and realize how cruel and strange it is to see yourself in such a limiting way as “ugly.” Watch the video below where I take you through this exact exercise. When you watch it, keep in mind that you can replace my experience of feeling like I’m ugly with whatever issue you’re currently facing. 4) Meditate on a time you felt much better There was a time when you felt free from the issues you’re currently facing. And that time was likely when you were much younger. Let’s now go back to that time so you can get in touch with your inner child. What you do is sit down peacefully and close your eyes to meditate. I’ve already stressed the importance above, so if you haven’t already: Click here to access the 20 minute free guided meditation led by Rudá himself. Meditation sessions such as these activate your brain and focuses and soothes you, especially when difficult emotions or thoughts come up. Begin by simply breathing deeply and relaxing. Let your thoughts pop up and glide by, observe them but don’t interpret or react to them. Go back to find your inner child again and ask them what is hurting them. You may get an answer, you may not. It often comes in the form of strong emotion from your inner child straight to the adult you who is meditating. Don’t react too much, just absorb what you’re feeling. It’s all valid, even feelings of confusion or not being sure what your inner child wants to say. This could go by quickly in a few minutes or take hours. Roll with it. Here are more pointers on embracing meditation effectively and how to avoid some common mistakes from the legendary Zen Buddhist and philosopher Alan Watts. 5) Get out a pen and paper and get ready to write… Next up, there is a powerful writing exercise that’s great for inner child healing. Sit down with a pen and paper and write a letter to your inner child. This is your apology for the ways you’ve judged and devalued your inner child, including the way that you’ve focused on devaluing their appearance. If you’re looking for inspiration, here was my letter to my inner child. I’m sharing it with you because Ideapod is all about radical self-honesty and sharing what we’re going through in a real way. Hey Justin, I’m writing this to you from 2022. I’m doing pretty well! I’ve got a great job and friends I care about, and I and my brothers are happy. But I want to tell you something. When I grew up more I started to believe some things about myself. I thought I was ugly. Some of the other kids said it a few times, and I wouldn’t have cared… But I think I was already worried they were right. And it hurt a lot. I got upset, and I started to feel really bad about myself. I started to think I was worth nothing and forget all about you and our life growing up. I want to say sorry for that. You deserve more! And from now on, I’m giving us both the respect we deserve, mate. The truth is I’m not a supermodel! But I think I have a kind of nice smile, and my last girlfriend even said so! We always did have a charming grin, didn’t we? I think my eyes could be worse, too. But the point is, even if I was a walking Halloween monster I’d still know now that I’m not only defined by my outside appearance and that being a bit less great looking is perfectly fine! In fact, it’s kind of cool, because you can see how people treat you when they don’t think you’re that handsome and see how that changes how they act! It’s like a truth potion for people’s character. So, I guess what I’m trying to say is you keep being your mate! I’ll never forget the times we shared, and I value you. You rock! Signed, Old Justin. 6) Identify your inner child’s beliefs and fears Your inner child is a person just like you, especially because they are you. Just an earlier version. Your inner child isn’t really the same as simply the “kid” version of you, they are the subconscious and less-formed version of you. This means that they are essentially the authentic core of who you have become. They are not fully defined but are in the midst of the authentic experiences, joys, traumas, and confusions that shaped you into who you became. They are the source, the genuine energy which you can tap into in order to go back to the roots of your insecurities and suffering. Our inner child doesn’t have a filter. They experience life as it comes, and beliefs that are imported to our inner child can cause major confusion and pain. Connecting with your inner child is all about identifying their beliefs and fears. These may often come in the form of emotions and vague sensations. For example: “I feel unsafe and exposed.” “I feel not good enough.” “I feel left behind.” “I feel unheard.” “I feel that I am completely alone.” Be honest about what your inner child is telling you, and grapple with it as much as necessary. This struggle will bring you to a new place of understanding of how deep the roots of feeling ugly can extend. 7) Build your resilience Do you know what holds people back from overcoming their past traumas? What keeps people in a cycle of pain? A lack of resilience. Without resilience, it’s extremely hard to overcome all the setbacks that come with life, never mind an upbringing that still haunts you. I know this because until recently I had a tough time overcoming my inner-child demons. I knew I wanted to better my life, but I struggled to find my inner power. I had no direction, no idea of how resilient I was. That was until I watched the free video by life coach Jeanette Brown. Through many years of experience, Jeanette has found a unique secret to building a resilient mindset, using a method so easy you’ll kick yourself for not trying it sooner. And the best part? Jeanette, unlike other coaches, focuses on putting you in control of your life. Living a life with passion and purpose is possible, but it can only be achieved with a certain drive and mindset. To find out what the secret to resiliency is, check out her free video here. 8) Find those who value you for who you truly are Another important exercise for inner child healing is to reflect on all those who value you for who you are and see your beauty. Your inner child may feel left behind or devalued, but your life now is your chance to redeem that. Embrace these hard feelings and accept them, but also reflect on all those surrounding you and around you who tell you they value you, they find you attractive and they care about you. If you want to doubt their word you’d have to say they’re all fake, and I’m guessing they’re not! There is nothing worse than being patronizing, but a real friend never is. They will tell you the truth straight up. And so: I want you to go to those friends and ask them just how ugly you are straight up. Take it straight to the face. Let them roast you like a back circuit comedian in the slums eating Mr. Noodles from the garbage can. Let them make fun of your nose and your face and whatever else they want, and then laugh. So, you’re not the most gorgeous person on this planet? No problem. 9) Understand your wounded inner child Many of us have a wounded inner child who wants nothing more than to be talked to. They just want to know that they matter and that they are good enough. Emotional wounds don’t just go away. They linger and can become chronic, especially when it’s something like feeling you’re inadequate, look bad, or are “weird” or unwelcome. The basic feeling of being rejected, alone, or misunderstood cuts very deep and lasts long. When you feel invalidated, ugly, unwanted, or unneeded it leaves an imprint. Then, the many situations which come up later in life that can reimpose this sensation hit ten times as hard. You’re left in the throes of incredible pain and frustration without quite knowing why. This is an excellent video from Dr. Dawn-Elise Snipes Ph.D. about healing the inner child. 10) Practicing self-compassion in a real way We’re often told that it’s important to value ourselves and have solid self-esteem. True self-compassion isn’t about self-talk or just telling yourself that you shouldn’t feel bad. Feeling “bad” is your right, just like feeling “good” is your right. The point is that true self-compassion comes from mindfulness about your inner child and the experiences they went through. None of this is about telling them that their fears and insecurities were hyped or are not reasonable. It’s simply about observing, being present, and allowing your inner child to know that they are valid, wanted, and important. Your job is to make it clear to them that they’ve heard and valid in the first place because that’s generally at the core of the emotional wound which was inflicted growing up. 11) Breathe through it Breath is something we often take for granted. After all, short of a medical emergency, strenuous exercise, or a sudden crisis like losing oxygen in a plane, we don’t need to think about breathing. But breathing is unique because, unlike our digestion, say or our reaction to strong heat or cold, breathing is something we can consciously control. We can choose to let breathing go on autopilot, but we can also consciously think of it and begin to decide how we breathe. This makes breathing a powerful bridge between our conscious and unconscious minds. Our intake of oxygen also has a deep relation to our own ability to be grounded, present, and well. And it’s also a bridge to getting in touch with your inner child and healing the divide between you and that deep feeling of being unworthy due to your physical appearance. If you want to know how to breathe in a powerful way that will get you in touch with your inner child, I highly recommend watching this free breathwork video, created by the shaman, Rudá Iandê. The exercises he’s created combine years of breathwork experience and ancient shamanic beliefs, designed to help you relax and check in with your body and soul. After many years of suppressing my emotions, Rudá’s dynamic breathwork flow quite literally revived the connection. And as this relationship with myself strengthens, I find it easier to work through past issues from a place of love and understanding. And that’s what you need – a spark to reconnect you with your feelings so that you can continue on your healing journey. Here’s a link to the free video again. 12) Rediscover the days of play and spontaneity One of the best ways to heal your inner child is to play with them. Leave the judgments and insecurities aside for the moment and travel in your mind to a simpler time. The smell of fresh-cut lawns, summer days of swimming, and watermelon. The taste of cramming a big slice of pizza in your face. These are the joys of life. These are beautiful moments that defined you then and define you now. What if you’re still struggling? Tuning into your inner child will take some time. It’s normal for it to feel a bit strange and foreign. Give it time. You can try them again and see how it feels. If these inner child healing exercises start to feel like they a the beginning of a new sense of healing, I suggest you take it further and try Rudá Iandê’s shamanic breathwork masterclass. The exercises shared in Rudá’s masterclass combine many years of breathwork and ancient shamanic practices to help you connect with yourself at a very deep level. I’ve felt a difference because it takes me out of my mind and puts me into the experience of my body and deep inner child. Breathwork is a great way to continue your inner child healing process. It helps you to move beyond your thinking mind to get to a much deeper place. Because the reality is that we can’t think our way out of our issues. Instead, we need to go much deeper. Inner child healing is powerful in a similar way to shamanic breathwork. I highly recommend checking out this masterclass. It’s extraordinarily powerful. Click here to watch the free video. Did you like my article? Like me on Facebook to see more articles like this in your feed. Deep beneath the insecurity, chronic pain, anxiety, and emptiness many of us feel hides the wounded inner child who longs to be seen and loved. If you grew up with inconsistent, immature, sick, or abusive parents or caregivers, chances are you have a vulnerable and young inner part known as the inner child who needs healing. Personally, learning to reparent myself has been one of the most profound soul work practices I have ever committed to doing, and that’s why I want to share it with you today. Being a lone wolf and a spiritual wanderer is a sacred calling in life – a unique and alchemical path of awakening. You don’t need to feel lost, alone, or stuck on your journey any more. It’s time to meet your soul’s deep needs for clarity, self-acceptance, and empowerment. Let us show you how … Start Your Journey of Transformation I share a bit more in this short YouTube video, including one of my favorite all-time practices: Reparenting your inner child is a soul work practice because it helps you to gain more access to your inner authentic essence. Qualities like joy, spontaneity, playfulness, curiosity, and openness emerge when you take the time to befriend and be the parent your inner child always needed. In this article, I’ll share some of the best and most effective reparenting techniques out there. But first, let’s explore a basic definition. Photo by Mohamed Awwam Reparenting yourself is a self-healing inner child work technique that offers the childlike part still alive within you the love and care that was absent or lacking as a child. In essence, when you reparent yourself, you become your own compassionate parent. This is a healing practice that isn’t just emotional, but also extends to taking better physical and psychological care of yourself. Photo by Annie Spratt Learning to live from the heart and feel ensouled, where we feel connected to our innermost True Essence, requires deep and long-term reparenting work. □□□□□ "Shadow and Light’s weekly guidance always rings true to my heart. Thanks for acknowledging my shadows and inviting my inner light. I always get excited to open the Shadow and Light emails on Sunday!" – Angela M. There’s simply no way around this fact: if you don’t welcome back home your wounded inner child, they will find a way of getting your attention, usually in destructive ways. As writer and teacher Jeff Foster writes in The Joy of True Meditation, All feelings are only looking for a home in you. Unfinished, stuck feelings, energies that have been resisted, pushed away, denied, banished, do not actually disappear. They live on in the darkness of the Unconscious, homeless and hungry for love, pulling the strings in our relationships, our bodies, our work in the world, getting in the way of our joy. Screaming for attention, deep down in the Underworld, they sap and drain our vitality and self-expression, cause us to become reactive, compulsive and obsessive, depressed and anxious, and ultimately affect our physical health … all in their attempts to get us to listen. We can see these ‘feelings’ that Foster is speaking about as our various inner child parts. Internal Family Systems therapy refers to this rejected energy within us as our inner exiles – not all of our exiled parts are childlike, but many of them are. The solution to healing these exiled inner child parts is to welcome them back home. So, how do we go about reparenting our wounded inner child? Here’s how to get started: To be your own loving parent, you must first know how to show love and kindness to yourself. There’s no use trying to befriend your inner child if you have a mostly destructive and self-critical relationship with yourself. In other words, if you’re dominated by the inner critic, you need to work with that part of yourself first. You need to learn to detach and disidentify from your inner critic/judge, and only then will your inner child feel safe enough to be seen and reparented. Self-love can happen through many paths. Reframing your inner self-talk through positive affirmations, practicing meditation and mindfulness, and learning to take better care of your needs are some common methods. For more suggestions, I recommend you check out my How to Love Yourself guide. To get powerful, in-depth support, I recommend our guided Self-Love Journal, which is available in our Inner Work Journals Bundle. We'll email this article to you, so you can come back to it later! Your information will never be shared. Here’s what Jerlyn, one of 200+ reviewers, has shared about this bundle: “Thank you for creating this exquisite masterpiece that has significantly improved my life.” You can purchase these three journals here. As I explored in the video at the top of this article, mirror work is my favorite reparenting technique. Not only does it feel very intimate and direct, but it can easily be incorporated into your daily routine in a quick and simple way. Here’s how you can get started: After showering or taking a bath, gaze at yourself in the mirror and offer kind words to your inner child. Talk to them and tell them that you’re there for them, that you see and care about their needs. Do this with feeling and sincerity. This is a short and sweet practice that can take anywhere from thirty seconds to two or more minutes – it’s totally up to you and however much time you’re working with. I’ve been doing this work consistently for about five years now, and the transformation I’ve experienced has been deep and beautiful. Unlike the mirror work practice I’ve just explored, this inner journeying method is more targeted and temporary. It’s particularly helpful if you experienced a specific painful situation in childhood that you’re struggling to move on from. Please note that if you experienced a severely traumatic experience (as in the case of sexual, physical, war, or other abuse), you’ll want to do this with a trained mental health professional. Please don’t retraumatize yourself here. Take care, be gentle, and be safe. This technique helps with a painful experience that led you to feel rejected, worthless, or ashamed as a child. For instance, if you were bullied, left alone for a prolonged period, put in a situation you hated, experienced the divorce of your parents, and so on, this is an excellent technique. In his book Self-Therapy, psychologist Jay Earley describes how to do this practice, using the term “exile,” which we can see as the inner child in this situation. When he refers to “Self,” he is referring to the calm, curious, and compassionate essence of you that we can call the Soul: Here is how you reparent the exile: In your imagination, you join the exile in that original childhood situation. For example, if the memory involves being ridiculed by your mother for the way you are helping her in the kitchen, you imagine yourself in that kitchen with that child part and your mother. Make sure that you enter the situation as the Self—with all your adult knowledge and capacities, enhanced by the qualities of the Self, such as compassion and calmness. Be with the exile in the way she needed someone to be with her then. She may need understanding, caring, support, approval, protection from harm, encouragement, or love. Sense what she needs from you in that situation to heal her and redress what happened. For example, she might need to be seen or to be reassured that she isn’t bad—that whatever happened wasn’t her fault. In addition to sensing what the exile needs from you, you can ask her. When you understand what she needs from you, give it to her through your internal imagination, including visual image, body sensing, emotional contact, and talking to her. From Self, you have the capacity to reparent the exile—to be the good parent that she needs. Good parenting isn’t just about showing care and compassion. It’s also about setting boundaries, rules, and limitations. While that may sound strict or boring, it doesn’t have to be. Without setting rules for yourself, such as how long you’re going to stay up at night, you may not get enough sleep, which negatively impacts your mood and energy levels. Without setting limitations on junk food, you may gorge yourself and become sick or chronically ill. Setting boundaries is the yang to compassion’s yin energy. We need both yin and yang energy to help our inner child find balance and healing. Here are some examples of boundaries you can set with yourself and others: Find your spiritual purpose. Deepen your self-understanding. Learn to embrace who you are. Let us show you how … Not overworking or overcommitting yourself to projects to avoid burnout Not staying up past 10 pm to ensure you get proper sleep Not letting toxic or narcissistic people get too close to you to preserve your sanity Not eating processed foods so that you can stay healthy Not letting people pressure you into doing things you’re not comfortable with Not letting the inner critic overtake your psyche to care for your mental wellbeing Not skipping exercise on work days to ensure that your body is fit and strong Not being too serious and disciplined all the time, and allowing yourself to unwind Boundaries are a form of inner self-fathering – or if you don’t resonate with that label, self-parenting. They help you to tune into, protect, and preserve your authentic needs. I have journaled ever since childhood, and it has helped to keep me sane, centered, and grounded in some of the most chaotic and traumatising situations. Once I started exploring my wounded inner child and her needs through journaling, I took this practice to the next level. Keeping an inner child work journal can be as simple as asking each day, “What does my inner child need?” or “How is my inner child feeling today?” It can also be as intense as exploring past traumas, unpacking triggers, and learning about the gifts of this vulnerable part of you. Understandably, this work can feel a little overwhelming to some people. That’s why I created the guided Inner Child Work Journal, which hundreds of people have found to be a powerful and transformative ally on their path. If you’d like to get started keeping an inner child work journal, check it out here as part of our Inner Work Journal Bundle. Buy the Inner Child Journal! I mentioned setting boundaries above, and that took into account some level of self-care. But I want to make this a point itself: taking care of yourself on a physical level is extremely healing when it comes to reparenting. Our inner child needs good sleep, hygiene, food, water, sunshine, exercise, and play to thrive. Are you meeting those basic needs? Have a look at your daily habits and explore whether you would be comfortable applying most of them to a five-year-old version of you. Photo by Juliana Araujo If you lacked attentive and attuned parents or caregivers growing up, the concept of nurturing yourself can feel a little strange. That’s why I recommend finding a nurturing role model, or someone loving, who can show you what genuine self-compassion looks like. This figure may be a fictional character in a movie or TV show, a grandparent, a public figure, a religious or spiritual being, or even a therapist if you choose to work with one. Although I’m not religious (and certainly not Catholic), I use the Virgin Mary as a symbol of the Divine Mother and a focal point of my inner reparenting work. In fact, I have about five or six statues of her around my house to remind me of the healing power of love. At other times, I have used Buddhist images of Tara and Quan Yin, as well as pagan images of Gaia or Mother Earth, to connect me with my inner mother. As someone who identifies as female, this resonates most with me, but it could be different for you. Your nurturing role model could be of the same or a different gender than you, or even a spiritual being who is genderless (such as a being of light). Whatever the form, finding an example of compassion to emulate is a profound way of becoming your own loving parent. *** The day the child realizes that all adults are imperfect, he becomes an adolescent; the day he forgives them, he becomes an adult; the day he forgives himself, he becomes wise. – Alden Nowlan Learning how to reparent yourself is a long journey, but a deeply enriching one. It’s a path that can move you from self-hatred to self-compassion, inner emptiness to inner fullness, and pain to a sense of empowerment. Tell me, what transformation do you believe you might undergo if you embark on the journey of reparenting yourself? I’d love to hear below in the comments. When childhood trauma isn’t addressed, it can resurface in new ways throughout adulthood. However, it’s never too late to work toward healing.Everyone has an inner child. You might see this inner child as a direct representation of yourself in your early years, a patchwork collection of the developmental stages you’ve passed through, or a symbol of youthful dreams and playfulness. An awareness of your inner child can help you think back to lighter, carefree years, explains Dr. Diana Raab, author and research psychologist. “Being in touch with the joys of childhood can be an excellent way of dealing with challenging times.”Not everyone associates childhood with playfulness and fun, though. If you experienced neglect, trauma, or other emotional pain, your inner child might feel small, vulnerable, and in need of protection. You may have buried this pain deep to hide it and protect yourself — both your present self and the child you once were. Hiding pain doesn’t heal it. Instead, it often surfaces in your adult life, showing up as distress in personal relationships or difficulty meeting your own needs. Working to heal your inner child can help you address some of these issues.Healing your inner child can take time, but these eight tips are a good starting point.To begin healing, you first have to acknowledge your inner child’s presence. As Kim Egel, a therapist in Cardiff, California, points out, anyone can get in touch with their inner child — if they’re open to exploring this relationship. If you feel doubtful or resistant to the idea of exploring the past, you’ll have a harder time beginning the healing process. If it feels a little strange or awkward to imagine opening up to your child self, trying thinking of inner child work as a process of self-discovery.Briefly set aside the existence of your inner child and just think of a few key childhood experiences. While some were probably positive, others may have hurt or upset you. Perhaps you still carry the emotional pain from those events today. The process of acknowledging your inner child mostly involves recognizing and accepting things that caused you pain in childhood. Bringing these hurts out into the light of day can help you begin to understand their impact. That said, many people do find it helpful, even soothing, to address their inner child as they would a living person, so don’t feel afraid to give it a try. After opening the door to a connection with your inner child, it’s important to listen to the feelings that enter.“These feelings often come up in situations that trigger strong emotions, discomfort, or old wounds,” Egel explains. If you can trace these feelings back to specific childhood events, you may realize similar situations in your adult life trigger the same responses.Your partner suddenly becomes busy with work and doesn’t have time for the big night out you’d planned. While you know they’d prefer to spend time with you, you still feel rejected and frustrated. Your disappointment manifests in a childlike way, with you stomping off to your room and slamming the door. Considering what happened through the eyes of your inner child can offer some valuable insight in this scenario.You realize your partner’s sudden need to work made you feel just as you did when your parents canceled plans, playdates, even your birthday party, because of their busy schedules. In this way, listening to the feelings of your inner child and letting yourself experience them instead of pushing them away can help you identify and validate distress you’ve experienced — an essential first step toward working through it. To open a dialogue and start the healing process, Raab recommends writing a letter to your inner child. You might write about childhood memories from your adult perspective, offering insight or explanations for distressing circumstances you didn’t understand back then.Maybe you didn’t know why your brother always shouted at you and smashed your toys, but you learned to fear him all the same. If you’ve since realized he experienced years of bullying and abuse, his rage may begin to make sense. Sharing this revelation with your inner child can help soothe some of that lingering pain. A letter can also give you the chance to offer messages of reassurance and comfort. A few questions can also help keep the dialogue going:“How do you feel?““How can I support you?““What do you need from me?”Sitting with these questions can often lead to answers, though it may take some time before your inner child feels safe and secure. Those questions you asked your inner child? Meditation can be a great method of opening yourself up for answers. Meditation has plenty of benefits for physical and mental health, but a few of these relate directly to inner child work. For one, meditation boosts mindful self-awareness, teaching you to pay more attention to feelings that come up in daily life. Greater mindfulness around your emotions makes it easier to notice when specific situations trigger unhelpful reactions.Meditation also helps you get more comfortable with unwanted emotions. Children often have a hard time naming uncomfortable emotions, especially when they aren’t encouraged to express themselves. They may repress or bury these feelings to avoid punishment or earn praise from caregivers for being “good” or maintaining control. Emotions, positive or negative, are meant to be experienced and expressed. Repressed emotions usually just show up somewhere down the line, often in unhelpful, even harmful ways.Meditation helps you practice acknowledging and sitting with any feelings that come up in your life. When you get used to accepting emotions as they come, you’ll find it easier to express them in healthy ways. This helps validate your inner child’s feelings by sending the message that it’s OK to have emotions and let them out. Many people find journaling a helpful way to sort through challenging or confusing experiences and emotional turmoil. If you keep a journal, you might already get a lot of benefits from this coping strategy. Just as journaling can help you recognize patterns in your adult life that you want to change, journaling from the perspective of your inner child can help you recognize unhelpful patterns that began in childhood. For this journaling exercise, set your present self aside for the moment and channel your child self. Try photos or a brief visualization exercise to help recall how you felt at the specific age you’re intending to explore.Once you’re in the right mindset, write down a few memories and any emotions you associate with those events. Try not to think too carefully about what you’re writing. Just let the thoughts flow onto the paper as they come up. Expressing them in an unchecked way can help you get to the heart of your inner child’s pain. Adulthood certainly comes with plenty of responsibilities, but relaxation and playfulness are both essential components of good mental health.If your childhood lacked positive experiences, getting back in touch with your playful side and making time for fun can help heal the pain of missing out on what you needed as a child. It’s also important to enjoy small pleasures, like ice cream after a walk, games with your partner or children, and laughter with friends. Whatever you do, making regular time for fun and lightheartedness in your life can help rekindle the positive emotions of youth. Healing doesn’t always have a definite end. It’s often more of an open-ended journey. You’ve started the process by reaching out to your inner child. Now you can cultivate this newfound awareness and continue listening for your child self’s guidance as you move forward. Your child self may have more to reveal about challenges from the past. But you can also learn to become more spontaneous and playful and consider what life has to offer with a greater sense of wonder. Staying in tune with your inner child can lead to a more complete sense of self and boost confidence and motivation. Reinforce the connection you’ve opened by affirming your intent to continue listening, offering love and compassion, and working to heal any wounds that remain open.Past trauma can cause a lot of distress. Therapists attempt to create a safe space for you to begin navigating this emotional turmoil and learn helpful strategies for healing your inner child. Therapists typically recognize how childhood experiences and other past events can affect your life, relationships, and overall well-being. But not all types of therapy prioritize exploration of past events or related concepts, such as the inner child.Cognitive behavioral therapy, for example, is considered a highly effective treatment approach, but it generally focuses on your experiences in the present. If you’re interested in doing some exploration of your past and getting to know your inner child, try looking for a therapist who has experience in this area. Typically, psychodynamically oriented psychotherapy can be a good fit.Inner child therapy, also called inner child work, specifically focuses on this process, but other types of therapists can also offer support. It always helps to let potential therapists know the specific concerns you’d like to explore. When needs for love, recognition, praise, and other types of emotional support go unmet in childhood, the trauma that results can last well into your adult life. But it’s never too late to heal. By learning to nurture your inner child, you can validate these needs, learn to express emotions in healthy ways, and increase self-compassion and self-love.

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