

## Beyond Self Care to Supportive Self Talk

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What's all the fuss about attending to our own selves in the middle of family responsibilities? Certainly even pop psychologist Dr. Phil tells mothers, "If you truly love your children, and I know you do, then you will take care of their mother." But don't we all know about taking a bubble bath, calling a friend and eating healthy foods? Probably, but often there is a deeper dynamic requiring more than simple self-soothing behaviours. You might call it *Re-Parenting, Rewriting Family Scripts or Supportive Self Talk*.

Herbert S. Strean in *Raising Cain* states, "Studies by prominent researchers in child development reveal that parents play out their conflicts through their children. A parent may use one child as a whipping post, another as hero or as a 'savior' from the parent's depression." It is what psychologists call "generational patterns." Parents tend to act out unresolved patterns from their childhood with their children—either repeating history or reacting to it.

With each stage our children enter we tend to be triggered into old childhood memories of images, authority messages, and emotions. Oftentimes we remember with delight; however, if that stage had "unfinished business" or "unresolved pain" we will either avoid or indulge the issue at hand. It is as if we shrink in age. Sometimes, it feels like mom or dad is three years old trying to deal with a four-year-old.

We are in no way laying blame here on parents. We all want the best for our children, but some of us are burning out trying to make them happy while missing the point. We have forgotten to look in the mirror at their main role models. Most of us have needs that we unsuccessfully try to fill in our role as parent. If, as children, we did not have the opportunity to learn certain development tasks or did not make some fundamental self-esteem decisions about ourselves, we are most likely to replay those needs with our children. Many parents unintentionally arrange for their children to fill their needs in an unconscious effort to heal themselves.

How many times have you found yourself reacting, saying and doing something you vowed you wouldn't? You swore: "I'll never treat my children like my parents did me!" Then one day you found your finger shaking in your dear one's face yelling, "Smartin' up or else . . .!" It felt shaming yet so familiar. Children, of course, take in the worst and best of our messages.

There are ways of tracking the unconscious messages we absorbed from our caregivers and transforming them into new family lines and stories. Jean Illsley Clarke describes this process as “growing up again.” She says, “Growing up again and again is getting what we missed earlier so we don’t have to go on living without what we need now. We grow up again so we can do better parenting; so we can feel more alive.”

Clarke in her book *Growing Up Again: Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children* provides clues to help us decide if we would benefit from some internal changes. Here are some questions to ask yourself to evaluate if you are triggered by unmet childhood needs followed by lines of nurturing self talk.”

1. **AGE Birth to Six Months** developmental need is to **Decide to Be** in the world.

**Ask Yourself:** “Do I confidently attend to my basic and personal needs such as hunger, rest and hygiene? Do I ask for care from others so that I can function at my best?”

**If Not, New Story Self Talk:** “I feel glad to be alive. I can feel my emotions. I am glad to be me. I deserve support, care and love from myself and others.”

2. **AGE Six Months to 18 Months** developmental need is about **Trust**.

**Ask Yourself:** “Do I trust that the world is basically a safe place to be and that I can explore my options?”

**If Not, New Story Self Talk:**

- “I do my best with what I know.”
- “I can explore, change my mind, make mistakes and learn.”

3. **AGE 18 Months to Three Years** developmental need is to **Develop Thinking** capabilities.

**Ask Yourself:** “Do I feel self-assured about thinking and making decisions for myself?”

**If Not, New Story Self Talk:**

- “I express what I feel and think.”
- “I freely and appropriately say *no* and *yes*.”
- “I can feel and think at the same time.”

4. **AGE Three Years to Six Years** developmental needs are to establish a **Separate Identity and to Learn Functional and Relationship Skills**.

**Ask Yourself:** “Do I express and share my unique gifts and abilities? Do I accept responsibility for my choices? Do I feel powerful and will I ask for help when needed?”

**If Not, New Story Self Talk:**

- “I accept responsibility for my choices and make amends if I cause harm.”
- “I continue to learn while feeling competent and capable.”
- “I feel powerful even when I ask or accept help.”

**5. AGE Six to 12 Years** developmental needs are to establish an **Internal Sense of Structure, Discipline and Personal Power.**

**Ask Yourself:** “Do I know when, where and how to disagree and still feel okay about who I am? Do I learn from my mistakes? Can I find ways that work better just for me?”

**If Not, New Story Self Talk:**

- “I can disagree without either attacking or feeling defensive.”
- “I have an attitude of “I am OK and you are OK.”
- “I learn from my mistakes and move forward.”
- “I like to find ways of doing things that support my goals?”

**6. AGE 13 to 19 Years** developmental need is to **Individuate with a Separate Identity.**

**Ask Yourself:** “Am I proud to be the woman/man I have become? Do I know the difference between non-sexual and sexual touch and get my touching needs met appropriately? Am I making the best use of my skills and abilities? Do I honour and maintain my values when others challenge them?”

**If Not, New Story Self Talk:**

- “I get my touching needs met in a healthy and responsible way.”
- “I continue to mature and grow by learning, questioning and being open to options.”
- “I operate in an interdependent way, giving and receiving support and care.”
- “I have a sense of my weaknesses and strengths while basically loving myself as much as any of my good friends.”

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