

## **Why Explore Our Childhood?**

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For some people life does not look, sound or feel satisfying, too often. That was once true for me. Sometimes counseling is considered. That's the route I chose.

Inevitably clients ask "Why do I have to go back to those crappy, childhood memories? What's that got to do with my life now?" Many leave saying "counseling didn't work" wondering why the therapist didn't wave her wand or say the magic words. Fortunately, some stay engaged and decide to look into, clean and sort their old, haunted closets. In nearly 20 years of counseling the greatest compliment by a client was a description of me as her "safe and steady light guiding the way"—into her messy closet.

Who and what is in the closet? Disturbing experiences that were not resolved in acknowledgement, our parents and others of significant influence. Dr. Phil McGraw refers to "seven pivotal people." Of course, they did the best they could yet typically they believed that it was better to train children than listen to them. As Barbara Sher said, "The cost of forgiving the past before you've really confronted it, is that you blame yourself for everything that happened to you. You can't move an inch toward what you really want when you're beating on yourself." While it is not useful to blame our parents for what they didn't know or neglectfully didn't do or abusively did do, we can hold them responsible for not giving us what we needed to blossom into wholeness and peace.

Often we are still functioning with old, often unconscious beliefs and behavioural patterns that are well grooved into our habitual way of being. The work of differentiating from our beginnings is the task of adulthood. As children many of us were spoon fed messages that we were lacking. We often decided to blame ourselves and told ourselves "If only I was smarter, prettier, kinder . . . they would see me as lovable and capable." It was easier to accept blame as it gave us a sense of personal power.

Also when we were very young children we had our feelings of sad, scared, mad and glad to guide us. Then we were trained to contain them in tight stomach boxes locked with old parental and controlling messages. Without a full feeling repertoire we tell ourselves who we should be rather than experience who we are.

Why explore our childhood? Because it will help us unlock our core feelings. Because it will help us better separate the choice we HAD TO MAKE in childhood from our desired adult response. Because it will help us choose what kind of partner, friend, colleague, parent and person we want to be. It will lead us to a life of more authenticity, creativity and joy.

### **Ways to Explore Your Childhood**

1. Arrange some counseling. Six sessions is the average. Many workplaces have Employee Assistant Programs that provide free therapy.
2. Do the exercises in a self help book like Phil McGraw's **Self Matters** or Ronald Richardson's **Family Ties that Bind**.
3. If they are open to it interview your parents or key players. Ask questions about your own childhood that didn't make sense at the time. Find out about their childhood. This exercise allows us to see our parent's hang-ups as part of their childhood survival patterns and less about us.

**Ask:**

What was going on when I was seven years old that resulted in . . . ?

What was your childhood like?

What were some of your happiest moments?

What were some of your most disturbing moments?

Do you have any regrets?

How did your parents discipline you?

What were you taught about love, sex, money, religion, raising children and having fun?

Keep the conversation moving by saying "Please tell me more."

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