

INNER CHILD 101

Living to rebel against your parents &
living to please your parents have
similar outcomes - the loss of an
authentic self



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Elizabeth Earnshaw, LMFT

Many of us live our lives to rebel against or please our parents. The imagined moment we can get on stage, accept the award and say “this is all for you!” Or “this is all in spite of you!”

Many of us choose everything from our careers, our partners, our environment, and our style of dress based off of an internal drive towards or away from our childhood caregivers.

There is nothing wrong with choosing a path different than what your parents would have hoped. There is nothing wrong with choosing the path they encouraged.

The problem lies within the motivation. If your choices are guided by a need to please someone else or rebel against someone else then those people are having control over your life - not you. You risk losing your true and authentic self.

The most beautiful moment is being able to say “I am doing this because it is right for me, feels good for me, and is healthy for me” for no other reason than it’s your path.



You might remember never experiencing a birthday party or having parents that wished they could have done more but couldn't because they didn't have the means.

This might have hurt you deeply and perhaps you carry on the deprivation by saying things like "I survived it, they will too. It builds character" or perhaps you've said "that was horrible I want more for my child" but now overcompensate by hurting yourself financially or by setting them up for unrealistic expectations or by providing them with things rather than what they really need - love.

The legacy of wounding - oof. It's a big one. It's why generationally we see the same wounds being handed down over and over again OR the phenomenon of trying so hard to make it different that we overcompensate and in doing so create new wounds.

Harville Hendrix writes about the legacy of wounding and how it continues without self awareness.

Even when we think we are doing things differently, we might still be controlled by our "wound".

Take the example of feeling deprived of "things" as a child. Perhaps you wished that you were given toys or offered experiences and for whatever reason you weren't. Maybe you equated this to being unloved or maybe it made you feel less than.

Learning to stop the legacy of wounding means to look at what hurt you and then to consider what is truly good and healthy for you and how can you offer yourself to your children, partners, friends, and family in that healthy way.

How can you choose the healthy way rather than the wounded way?

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And to get a gold star for rubbing Jimmy's back on the playground when he scrapes his knee. "Aw, it's okay. I'm here."

To create harmony.

They'll love me for it. I'll get a kiss on the forehead at the end of the day because I do such a great job.

All of these things are unconsciously drilled into us as we watch the adults in our lives manage invisible labor.

And then we arrive.

We arrive at the moment it's real. At the moment when it's more than the bitty baby clothes but actually washing, sizing, and putting away the real baby clothes.

It's more than the cute picture on the holiday cards. It's remembering the date, the people it needs to be sent to, and worrying you've forgotten someone. It's finding the photographer, scheduling the date, picking out the clothes, making sure they're cleaned and ready.

It's more than picking out nice furniture. It's measuring it and ordering it. It's budgeting for it. Finding the movers and considering if it'll be liked.

Real talk: girls are raised to romanticize taking on the mental load. As young children, they see that the "mental load" is cute or loving or warm.

How lovely to write out cute holiday cards with beautiful photos of your family each season.

How lovely to be able to decorate the house.

To rock the baby. To know when to rock the baby. To pick their sweet clothes.

To make your partner's life easier by taking care of the home.

Remembering the likes and dislikes.

Remembering where things are "honey, where are the pillow cases?". How lovely to have an organized home.

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It's more than the warmth of a cozy home and the smell of a nice dinner. It's shopping for it, stocking for it, noticing when something is missing, delegating the chores and tasks.

It's more than knowing where the pillow cases are nicely stored. It is the telling. The responsibility for the organization. The heavy weight of having to know and of wondering what they'd do without you.

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It's more than being sweet. It's suppression of emotions. It's fighting the defensiveness of your partner just to get your point across. It's avoiding anger even when it's reasonable. It's more than offering emotional empathy. It's having to be hyper aware and "on" at all times or else you'll feel guilty and like you're missing something.

The tasks in the mental load are important. They keep homes and families and relationships together. They create consideration and empathy. But they are impossible for one person to carry alone.

When one person carries it they can't live freely and authentically and it disrupts true connection. The other person misses out, too. They don't get to live life fully aware of and connected to it. They also don't get to learn how to truly take care of themselves.

Changing this dynamic is so important for the emotional health of everyone in the family.

And it's so important for future generations of children as we create a world that does not romanticize gender roles that are rigid and unhealthy.

The dysfunctional family's impact on adult relationships:



SETTLING FOR SECOND BEST
CONFUSION BETWEEN COMPASSION and
LETTING THEM OFF THE HOOK
OVER RESPONSIBILITY
GUILT
LACK OF IDENTITY
FANTASY RELATIONSHIPS



Elizabeth Earnshaw, LMFT

In dysfunctional families the unmet needs of the parents/adults become so overwhelming that the task of raising children becomes secondary to their own attempts at managing and fulfilling their needs.

Many times, we can understand why a parent is overwhelmed AND we can also understand that in some cases the unresolved emotional wounds of the parents impacts the child.

A parent that is absorbed into their own inner developmental needs will neglect the child's needs for safety, respect, growth, and comfort.

They will also use the child for their own emotional needs - either as an "object" to express anger towards or an "object" that should perform in order to bring the parent a sense of accomplishment.

These experiences develop the child into an adult that might do the following in their relationships:

1. Settling for second best.
2. Confuse compassion with letting someone off the hook.
3. Become overly responsible.
4. Feel guilt.
5. Have a lack of identity.
6. Develop "fantasy" relationships where they believe relationships can dramatically change.

How to grow in an overbearing family

1. Be clear on your boundaries.
2. Start paying attention to your legitimate needs and tending to them.
3. Learn to be comfortable with the idea that you cannot change people.
4. Learn to empathize & have compassion for other's rather than feel responsible for them.
5. Create connections outside of the family.
6. Recognize the guilt tripping & free yourself of it.
7. Become mindful of your thoughts & feelings.
8. Have a goal and go for it.



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Here are some tips on growing within the “i i i e l .”

The key is finding ways to create autonomy (independence) and a sense of self because enmeshed families often prevent that.

You want to consider what do I need to do to physically, spiritually, emotionally, and mentally be myself?

We grow up so afraid of our own anger that we never give ourselves an opportunity to express it well.



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People are afraid of their own anger.

We are taught that anger is bad. That it is an emotion that signifies being out of control.

We are taught that if we express anger it won't go well. We will lose it. The other person will lose it. If they don't, and pretend to listen and care they will still walk away and tell everyone we are crazy.

Yet, anger is a FULLY valid emotion. Sometimes it's an emotion that covers softer emotions like disappointment, fear or sadness. Sometimes it's just anger.

Anger is a sign that something has crossed a line for you.

To know you've stubbed your toe you need to feel the throbbing of the injury. To know someone crossed you then you might need to feel the anger.

Anger is NOT a behavior. Anger is a feeling. You can be angry and still behave in a way that falls in line with your values.

You can also be angry and let people know. You can expect the people that love you will want to hear you. This does not mean you expect someone to listen to you screaming and watching you throw things or call them names. There are other ways to express anger.

Anger is NOT the problem. Behaviors and expectations can be.

If not expressed and honored, anger can become self aggression or outward aggression.

It's time to unlearn the fear of anger and learn to explore & embrace it.

The brain from birth until 7

In a theta (hypnotic) state

Is downloading massive amounts of information to survive

Inability to consciously evaluate the information downloaded

Parents statements are downloaded as truth



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The importance of learning to understand and release yourself from your past is not just psychobabble.

It is rooted in the way that our brains work. When a therapist says “so tell me about your childhood?” they aren’t just being nosy or trying to dredge up old stuff unnecessarily.

The therapist understands that the experiences you had in the first 7 years of life are important to explore and bring into consciousness.

This is because your childhood is mostly lived unconsciously in a theta state

The child brain is downloading massive amounts of information in order to survive. The information is downloaded in the form of memories. The child also takes things literally. They aren’t able to evaluate information, to understand that

opinions are just opinions, or that what their parents do or say isn’t socially or relationally acceptable. They just download it for what it is – information that guides them to create a sense of themselves and the world.

Even when a parent has a “logical reason” for being distant or critical the child will still develop attachment styles and self esteem issues that correlate with this.

The child isn’t able to say “my mom/dad criticized my clothing because when they were little they were bullied and they’re trying to protect me.” The child instead internalizes that criticism to mean that they are criticizable.

The child whose parent goes to the hospital for a long period of time doesn’t say “I understand they were sick and had to leave me.” They just say “people leave me.”

Adults forget that children live with a child’s mind and not an adult mind. It’s important to remember that children do not take context into consideration or nuance. They simply download information as it is.

So why, then, is it important to talk about your childhood?:

Because when adults have an opportunity to create context and nuance around their childhood. They release themselves from the child’s version of the story, and this is a first step towards creating a secure mind.

Many conflicts in relationships are the result of an unspoken desire to continue or extinguish patterns from childhood.

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Do you have the types of arguments with your partner that never seem to go anywhere?

It's always the same. A little issue turns into a big issue, you fight about it, you get nowhere, and you give up. It hums under the surface somewhere until a little issue becomes a big issue again.

If this is a pattern you're experiencing, you might be fighting because of unarticulated dreams you or your partner have in regards to childhood experiences.

You might be in conflict over a desire to extinguish or continue something that you experienced as a child. And, finding that your partner doesn't have the same dream.

If you're able to move into the conversation in this way, you are creating an opportunity to move from a gridlocked conversation to a conversation that creates understanding.

So, next time you get into one of those cyclical, repeating fights wait until things calm down and then ask your partner "Baby, what do you believe about this issue we are having?" and "do you think this is related to your background in anyway?"

Understanding must always precede finding a solution in types of fights like these.

Most of the time, your childhood wounds had nothing to do with parental love.

They had to do with the fact that your parents are imperfect adults.

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Childhood wounds create a sense of “unworthiness”. As children, we try to make sense of why the adults aren’t giving us what we need. Children are what we call “egocentric”. This means that they only understand the world as it relates to them.

In the child’s mind when a caregiver isn’t giving them what they need or is actively harming them they believe it is their fault. They don’t ascribe blame to the parent because that would make the world far too scary to believe the people they rely on for survival are, in fact, imperfect.

Part of healing yourself is to develop the understanding that your parents mistakes had nothing to do with how much they loved you.

Most parents (99.99999%) love their children. But they are also imperfect adults (just as you are).

Most childhood wounds are created because of the adult’s unhealed childhood wounds, misguided parenting styles, or life stressors (financial issues, illness, etc). As well as, lack of access to information or mental healthcare. In other, fewer instances, it can be because they truly are horrible and terrible selfish people, but this is rare. And, for them to become so terrible what must their traumas be?

To be fully empowered (and to get rid of your sense of unworthiness) you must be able to accept this reality.

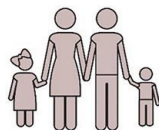
Your parents loved you. You were worthy. Your parents were imperfect adults.

By extending this understanding you are empowering yourself to no longer live within the child’s egocentric belief that their adult behavior was all about your unworthiness. It was not.

This does not mean that you excuse their behavior. This does not mean they aren’t responsible or accountable. This doesn’t mean that you forget your boundaries. It means you release yourself (and, if you want to, you can release them from their misguided and imperfect attempts at parenting, too)

PS: your parent(s) might be reading this too, both nodding their heads about their own difficult feelings towards their parent AND wondering about the many ways they might have hurt you.

**To have healthy relationships you need to
unlearn the unhealthy shit you learned from
your family**



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When we try to improve our relationships we often focus on what we need to learn - listening skills, intimacy tools, and conflict resolution.

This is all necessary. But, we also need to unlearn a lot of really unhelpful and unhealthy things from childhood.

Childhood is where we first experience relationships. It's where we come up with a "template" for what they should look like and feel like. We subconsciously move through life looking to replicate these relationship styles because even if they're unhealthy they are also comfortable.

Here is a list of some things we've learned from our families:

- Repressing our feelings to protect others.
- Being guilted and guilted others.
- Passive aggressive communication.
- Being critical.
- Being defensive.
- Gender roles that are no longer working.
- Cutting off when things get hard.
- Holding people to unfair standards and expectations.
- A family pattern that you see not working (history of divorce, history of marrying the wrong person, substance use, etc).
- Being enmeshed.
- Avoiding conflict.
- Creating conflict.
- Perfectionism.
- Complaining.

And, so much more...
What unhealthy tendencies do you need to unlearn?

Unaddressed Childhood Pain “Contaminates”

Your Life

- Codependency
- Offender Behaviors
- Narcissism
- Trust Issues
- Acting Out/Acting In
- Magical Beliefs
- Intimacy Dysfunction
- Nondisciplined Behaviors
- Addictions and Compulsions
- Thought Distortions
- Emptiness



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From John Bradshaw's Homecoming

You are the sum of all of your parts. When you turn 18, there is not a magic moment where “poof” your childhood is gone. The things you experienced years and years ago impacted the way you see the world & how you engage with it.

When people don't address their childhood wounds, they can continue to wreak havoc on your life.

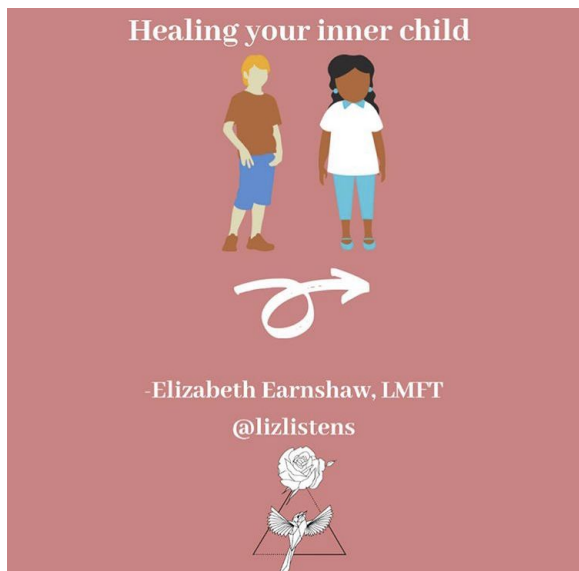
Ignoring this, ignores that you're a human, being impacted by your experiences (especially those between 2-7 when you're in a mostly hypnotic state) and that all of your experiences have molded and shaped who you are.

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These are:

- Codependency.
- Offender Behaviors- Violent and harmful behaviors.
- Narcissism.
- Trust Issues.
- Acting Out/Acting In - quick to anger, defensiveness, fight mode or self harm, self criticism, physical manifestations of emotions.
- Magical Beliefs - waiting for the “moment” when life will be better, “When I get married I'll be so much happier.”
- Intimacy Dysfunction - attachment issues, fear of abandonment/ fear of engulfment.
- Undisciplined Behavior- procrastinating, impulsivity, “wanting it now”, or rigid (overly disciplined).
- Addictions and Compulsions- a need to alter your mood through addictive “digestives” (like alcohol), activities, emotional patterns, or thinking styles.
- Thought Distortions- thinking the way a child would think - in absolutes, universalizing, thinking egocentrically, etc.
- Emptiness- Feeling like life is mostly dull & meaningless.

The lovely thing about being an adult is that your brain is no longer in a hypnotic state. This means you get to bring awareness to what you think and feel. Than make decisions for yourself on how to deal with it. This is why change is possible in your life, if you're willing to be aware of the things that are preventing it.



Healing your inner child means seeing yourself as a child, speaking kindly to the child, and allowing the child version of you to have a voice.

It means connecting with your body again by paying attention to what it needs & feels.


It means playing and experiencing joy. Noticing that whenever you numb the joy or stop the play that it's the adult repressing the child again.

It's being a good parent to yourself by saying no to the things - patterns, people, activities - that aren't good for you. It means making sure you eat and you sleep and you move.


It likely will mean you need to distance yourself from certain people and environments. Either people that are repeating unhealthy patterns with you now or the caregivers that hurt you in your past.

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Look at a photo of yourself as a child.




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**Speak to your inner child:
“I love you”, “I hear you.”, “what happened wasn’t right”.**




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Write a letter from adult you to child you & express love and empathy




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Allow play in your adult life. Do what you loved to do when you were little.



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Practice meditations where you visualize & talk to your inner child.

“Little me, when was the first time I experienced trauma? How did you feel?”



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Act like a good parent towards yourself

Notice your basic needs - like sleep and food, ask yourself how you are feeling, give yourself a structure that makes you safe.



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Avoid toxic people & environments while your wound heals.



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Reconnect with your body



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A wounded little child in an adult body is a
recipe for difficult relationships.



-Elizabeth Earnshaw, LMFT

A wounded child in an adult body is a recipe for difficult adult relationships.

You are not separate from your child self - you are the sum of all of your parts. So, to be fully aware and awakened person you need to be willing to see all of the parts and tend to them.

What does that mean?

It means that you have to understand that most of us do not leave our childhoods unscathed. To deal with it, we learn unhealthy coping mechanisms that keep us separate from ourselves and others.

The way we view the world and the way we view the self is created in our subconscious at a very young age. We live on autopilot with these views. And, when difficulties come up that remind us of the pain we had in childhood our child self will appear.

This is the impulsive self. This self that does things because it “wants what it wants right now”. And, it wants whatever will remove the discomfort fast.

A small child is also egocentric. This means they aren’t able to understand themselves in relation to other people. As you can imagine, being egocentric in an adult relationship will limit empathy and connection.

This might mean ignoring your partner when you feel overwhelmed because you “don’t want to be bothered right now”. It can also mean violating your partner’s boundaries when you feel abandoned because you “want them to respond this second,” so that you can feel reassured.

When you bring awareness to the child self you will bring awareness to the ways in which the child self is in charge.

You can extend compassion to this part of you and you can also act like a good parent. Telling the child self “I’m the adult now, so I get to make the choices.”

This is the path to creating a conscious adult relationship.

If you were neglected, abandoned, or betrayed by your parents it had nothing to do with you. You were a perfect soul. It was because they were neglecting, abandoning, and betraying themselves.



-Elizabeth Earnshaw, LMFT

If you were not treated well as a child, please whisper this to your inner child:

“It was not your fault. In fact it had absolutely nothing to do with you. Your parents couldn’t even see you because they couldn’t see themselves”.

Abandonment, neglect, betrayal, abuse is the fault of the adult. The adult that does these things to a child is an unhealed person who cannot see themselves (their feelings and behaviors). They are dissociated. They live on autopilot.

If they couldn’t see themselves clearly then they couldn’t see you clearly.

This means that you were not a “you” to them but an inconvenience or an extension of them.

You were meant to make their dreams come true, you were blocking their dreams from coming true, you were

making them actually work on themselves, or you were giving them a reason for other people to think they were awesome and to brag. So at the end of the day it was all about them.

Like all children, you were a perfect soul. You were ready for love and deserving of love.

You were more important than their career, their relationship drama, their financial stress, their alcohol or drug use, their greed to get more, their need to be popular, their need to be funny, their need to seem cool, their need to be isolated, their inappropriate conversation, or their hatred. They didn’t work on themselves enough to see that. They were also more important than those things but their shame, trauma, anger, addictions, etc didn’t allow them to believe that THEY were important.

Healing involves releasing your parents and embracing yourself. Removing your own shame, working through your own trauma, feeling and expressing your own anger, paying attention to your own addictions, and remembering that YOU are important.

Healing yourself does two things:

1. It helps you see yourself clearly.
2. It helps you see others clearly.

And, this, is a gift to the world. This type of healing is what changes things for your friends, children, families, and your world.

