



story groups

Unlocking You

Online Story Group Curriculum

Participant Guide

From the Authors of This Course



Your Story Matters

We are all shaped and formed by the experiences, environments and relationships in our formative years. Our brain remembers some of these experiences clearly and some we completely overlook. When we begin to look at the forces that shaped us and put these experiences into a narrative form as stories; we step into a process of self-discovery. This story work process helps us develop a clearer picture of how we were formed by these early shaping events.

Simply put, telling our stories helps us to see ourselves more clearly. With this increased clarity, we are better able to understand what has gotten in the way of our ability to give and receive love, reconnect with the hidden or muted parts of ourselves, and engage our lives with more intention.

Additionally, telling our stories allows us to process moments or patterns of harm. For most of us, when we experienced harm or trauma in life, we lacked healthy avenues to express and process the experience. We certainly did not have language for the powerful feelings that arose in us. We also might have been too ashamed to bring up the experience with anyone or maybe we just did not have safe people in our life to confide in. Whatever the reason, these experiences stayed hidden in the shadows of our heart. Hidden, but not silent. These hidden experiences of childhood often exert power over us and create structures of shame and self-contempt in our lives. These patterns of shame further bind us. Telling our stories to one another in a supportive and structured environment gives us a chance to heal and finally process and grieve the stories that have kept us bound to shame.

We are so glad you have joined us on this journey of self-discovery and healing.

Much Honor & Respect,

Cyndi & Steve Mesmer





Welcome to Story Groups: Unlocking You

What You Can Expect

This course is designed so that each week you will learn a little bit more about yourself by looking at your life through different lenses represented by the teaching topics. It will be important that you see yourself as living a story and that you see yourself as the main character in that story. Armed with this insight, you can now apply the teaching material in this course by using this guiding question: How has my story and the character of me been impacted by _____ (fill in the blank with the current week's teaching topic). Engaging the course in this way will assist you as you shift your life narrative to one that is more accurate and engaging. Through this process you will be taught how to write, read, and engage stories of harm, as well as learn what to look for in your own and others stories as you grow in your knowledge.

Our hope for you is that you give yourself permission to take risks, be curious and engage as we learn together in this very important work.

Topics covered in this course with your group include the following. Videos are available from the authors of this course for each of the topics.

- Introduction to Story
- The Framework for understanding the past, present and future
- Ingredients to a great story
- How to write personal narrative
- How to attend to another's story
- How we are alienated from ourselves and the collective community through betrayal, powerlessness and marring: The orphan, stranger and widow
- Attachment: Its impact and healing
- What happens when we are misnamed
- How we invite and participate in reenactment of our core wounds
- What does it mean to grieve your story?
- Healing is a lifelong process

Take a peek at the back of this guide for a glossary which you may reference during the course.

Statement of Confidentiality

(Please read, sign and keep in this participant guide)

We desire for this group to be a safe place for all individuals to show up authentic, vulnerable and share struggles, celebrations and stories of harm. We are aware that humans are messy individuals and that at times we don't always show up in safe ways but we commit to move in a direction of being safe for one another. We all agree that ALL INFORMATION shared in our group time together including details of personal stories, additional personal information shared by participants, facilitators or guest's stories, personal examples in teaching used, and any video's shared be kept strictly confidential and not be shared with anyone outside of this group.

Please honor and respect their vulnerability by keeping any and all information shared confidential.

Additionally, in groups such as this, people can and will get triggered. I ask that group participants commit to address any group related issues or dynamics within the group. Please refrain from talking about group members with ill intent, or group issues outside of the group and instead readdress any concerns or triggers the next time group is in session. Additionally, should you feel a need to process how to bring an issue to group with me in an individual session, you will commit to bring that issue to the group when appropriate. Your signature represents a recommitment to this confidentiality statement. Thank you!

Signature

Date

Session One: Introduction to Story



Throughout this curriculum and group experience, you are invited into a powerful process of seeing your life through the lens of story. This framework will help you discover and unlock stories in your life that are robbing you of the life you are meant to live.

When we go through overwhelming moments in life, we often lack the resources and settings that can help us process these experiences. We don't have words to express the powerful feelings that arise. We might be too ashamed to even bring up an incident or we lack safe people to talk to about our experiences, whether those are personal experiences of harm, collective experiences or both.

Whatever the reasons, the result is the same: Harmful experiences remain unprocessed and hidden away inside of us. Hidden, but not silent. The unprocessed experiences of our childhood continue to speak and shape how we see ourselves and how we relate to others. And since these experiences are overwhelming and painful, we create defenses around ourselves to protect us from having to deal with the pain. Our bodies are wired to do so. Our bodies work hard at looking for possible threats and we will use whatever means to protect ourselves.

Why Groups?

Story groups are powerful because they place us in an environment where we invite others to identify our defense structures and help us engage our pain in meaningful and healing ways. When we courageously choose to lower our defenses and allow access into the hidden places in our hearts, change becomes possible. Telling our stories to one another in these supportive environments brings us into contact with our unprocessed pain. It is at this point we can begin to address and honor how these experiences have shaped and impacted us.

Why Story?

1. Stories are universally and deeply familiar to us. Intuitively, we attune to stories.
2. Our brain is wired for story. Researchers see our brains neurologically light up when both listening to and telling stories.

Session One:

The Framework For Understanding the Past, Present and Future

In Dan Allender's book, *To Be Told*, four core parts of story are introduced. These will be discussed in more detail later but this serves as an introduction:

1. Innocence
2. Innocence shattered
3. Innocence sought
4. Innocence reclaimed



Session One:

Ingredients of a Story

According to Donald Miller and others, a story is a character, within a particular setting, who wants something and overcomes conflict to get it. There are key components to analyze when looking at our personal narrative as a story:

1. Character:

A fully developing character makes a far more interesting story. However, when we look at our own life, we often see an undeveloped character because we have an inaccurate view of our own main character. This is often true of supporting characters in our stories, as well. Because of these blind spots, we need others' eyes to identify and name contradictions, missing pieces, and undeveloped character descriptions.

2. Setting:

Every story has a backdrop or a place and time. It's important to know if a story takes place in the 80's or the 2000's since different cultural climates and belief systems were in place. Additionally, it is important to understand the location of the story since culture impacts this as well.

Types of Setting:

- Time
- Geography
- Cultural
- Micro Culture

3. Desire:

The main character's desire is the engine of the story. Therefore, uncovering what the main character wants is critical to understanding a person's experience. Desire is tricky. It both gets us moving and gets us in trouble. If our desire is fulfilled, it is fantastic but if it is unfulfilled, it is heartbreaking. Some characters try to kill their desires while others pursue them with abandon. Sometimes desires can appear foolish. Other times, desires are dangerous to reveal because they come at a high cost. Discovering the storyteller's desire will reveal much about your character's story.

Session One:

4. Conflict

Every good story involves conflict and every main character experiences hardship or trauma of some kind. As Steve explained in the teaching video, there are two types of conflict: Necessary or cocoon-like conflict, and overwhelming or mason jar conflict.

5. Resolve:

All stories seek resolution. Some resolutions are false or temporary. True resolve comes when we enter the pain of our thwarted desires and hold the grief of our stories of harm. We need the eyes of others in order to provide new perspectives. Resolve comes over time and from a willingness to see our stories more accurately.



Session One:

Questions to Consider:

1. What do you think of the idea of considering your life a story where you are the main character? Is this something you've ever imagined before?
2. Can you name one or two experiences in which you remember experiencing a moment of innocence when you were younger? What did it feel like?
3. Can you identify one or two experiences of shattering you experienced as a child?
4. Can you name one or two ways you attempted to protect yourself from possible future experiences of betrayal, powerlessness or mourning? (what defense structure might you have used?)



Session One:

At-Home Reflection Questions:

1. How would you describe you as the main character as a child?
2. What was the culture of your family of origin? What were the rules and norms in your family of origin that shaped you?
3. Name 1-2 things your character desired as a child.
4. Describe a time where your character faced overwhelming conflict. What did your character do in that situation?
5. Name a thwarted desire that your childhood character needs to grieve in order to find resolution.



Session Two:

How to Write and Attend to Another's Story

Story Assignment

1. Content:

Choose an event from your childhood that had a significant impact on you. And then write a story (600-800 words), describing the event. This event can be something that stands out in your memory as a personal tragedy or a confusing or painful memory that surfaces as you ponder this assignment.

And remember, even seemingly insignificant events, especially those that linger with you over the years, can be indicators of patterns of behavior, relationships or situations that need further exploration. The event you choose to write about may come from any of the following situations or something not listed below that stands out to you as having had a major impact on you or caused a disruption to your childhood norms. This may include:

- A move
- Divorce or remarriage
- Parental job loss
- A death that was significant to you
- Neglect or being left
- An awkward situation
- Any abuse of any kind (emotional, physical, sexual, spiritual)
- Death of a family member
- Unwanted comment or touch
- A sibling moving away
- A bullying experience
- Humiliation by a coach or a teacher

Our lives are filled with tragedy. It is in the midst of our tragedies, both past and present, that we will see how the waters of suffering have cut our terrain and formed the contours of our character. More than anything else, tragedies shape our identity and our character.

—Dr. Dan Allender, To Be Told

Session Two:

2. How to Write:

This writing assignment is designed to help you enter your story. There is a common saying writers use to guide their efforts: "Show, don't tell." For example, don't tell your reader, "The flower is beautiful." Rather, describe the details, such as, "The flower's petals were like velvet and made me wonder if this is what love feels like." This is the level of detail in which you should write.

When you begin writing your story, remember to include the setting details (the where and when your story occurred), some basic background information, and descriptive language about the characters in your story.

It is also important to know your characters' emotional experience of the event.

- How did your younger self feel before, during, and after the incident?
- What kind of emotions or lack of emotions did your characters display?

As you write and engage this story, note any emotion that surfaces for you: anger, sadness, anxiety, rage, disgust, shame. Use these emotions to help you connect and understand this younger version of yourself. Incorporate these emotions into the story. Finally, make sure you use your 5 senses when writing this piece. What do you smell, hear, touch, taste and see?

3. Reflect:

When you have completed the story, please reflect on and write a few paragraphs about how this story impacted you. How did life change for you after? How did you engage and relate to others in relationships after this story? Look for patterns and themes that may have developed because of the impact of this story. Additionally, reflect on what you learned from experiencing the events of your story. How did your younger self cope with and adapt to life after the story took place? Also include your reflections on how this story is playing out today in your relationships.

4. Deadline and Input:

Your facilitator will provide guidance about submitting your story to them prior to reading it. We suggest sending a copy to them no later than 7 days before your assigned reading date.

Session Two:

How to Attend to Another's Story

Check in with yourself and assess lens and heart when listening to the reader's story.

- Is your perspective one of great regard for the individual reading their story? Do you see this as a privilege?
- Can you appreciate the courage it takes to read their story?
- How do you come as you listen? Assess your energy level, your access to your compassion/empathy towards others and your ability to attend well to another. Be proactive in compartmentalizing your own life stressors so you can engage this work well.
- Always approach the reader with deep respect, non-judgment and vivid curiosity.

What is happening in the reader when a story of tragedy is being read?

- Readers are most likely feeling anxious and uncertain as they bring their story. This is true for all people reading a story but especially true for first time readers. Be mindful of this fact.
- The more connected the reader is to their story the more they will be IN their story. This means their body, emotions and mind will be re-living the actual experience. We therefore need to be aware that we are also engaging and talking to a younger version of the reader. For example, if the reader is a 40-year old female, reading a story that takes place when she was 8 years old, then the 8 year old version of the reader will also be present in the room.
- The reader does not see everything in their story because they are seeing their story from one perspective: Inside the story. The reader will have missing pieces to their story simply due to his perspective.
- Keep in mind that we are dealing with stories of harm. The nature of trauma is that it blocks our ability to see ourselves, other characters and themes within their story, accurately. The reader needs others to kindly and lovingly help them see what they may be unable to see. So, even though something might seem obvious to you about the story being read, keep in mind, it may not be to the reader. Your perspective, as the observer, is potentially helpful to the reader, but never superior to the reader.

Our role in listening to a story is that of an Invited Guest. We, as listeners, have been invited into a vulnerable holy space in the reader's life. "Take off your shoes" and



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honor the space you have been invited into. Keep in mind you can only enter the story with the reader to the extent they will allow you. Some spaces may be closed for now. Respect that.

At-Home Assignment:

1. Read through the “Story Assignment” and begin to identify potential stories of harm you might choose to write about for your group engagement. Make some initial notes about your character’s age, what your character wanted, the setting of your story, and the pressures and conflicts your character was facing.



If you have trouble remembering your childhood try breaking your childhood down into smaller sections. Some sample prompts are:

- Where was I in third grade (or any grade)?
- What was my school called?
- What was my teacher’s name?
- Did I walk or get a ride to school?
- What were weekday mornings like when I was in grade school?
- What did dinner time look like?
- What did specific holidays look like?
- Who was home when I came home from school?

Session Two:

2. Take what you learned in how to attend to another's story and practice these skills on a family member or friend this week. Practice listening with curiosity and a non-judgmental stance towards the person. Practice setting aside your agenda and focus and attend to where the other individual is as they share. Notice what you are experiencing in your body as you do this.



Session Three:

How We Are Alienated From Ourselves and the Collective Community Through Betrayal, Powerlessness and Marring

1. Innocence

Pure; not yet spoiled; Free from blemish, flaw and without stain.

We are all meant to be people that are full of _____, _____ and _____.

We function better as human beings when faith, hope and love are most vibrant in us.

- Faith/Trust: Having the ability to trust others, to trust in the goodness of others, to remember the goodness from the past that allows for trust in the present and the future. We can rest and be carefree because of trust.
- Hope: The ability to imagine and dream for the future. To get excited and anticipate goodness to come.
- Love: To both give and receive love and pleasure and shelter non-duality (either/or thinking).

2. Innocence Shattered

We all have experienced (and will experience) betrayal, powerlessness, and marring, which shatters our innocence.

- Can you identify experiences where there was a shattering of your ability to trust?
- Can you identify experiences where there was a shattering of your ability to hope?
- Can you identify experiences where there was a shattering of your ability to both give and receive love?

3. Innocence Sought

We attempt to re-establish some sense of innocence by trying to recreate a world absent of shattering. We reason, "I must avoid the experience of betrayal,

Session Three:

powerlessness and marring.”

So we attempt to recreate the protection that we were meant to experience. We attempt to recreate innocence. But we can't go back to not experiencing the harm. This recreating process plays out in our styles of relating and in the archetypes of orphan, stranger and widow.

4. Innocence Reclaimed

We step back into our stories of harm in order to reclaim that which was lost, specifically as it relates to the orphan, stranger and widow.

The Orphan:

When there is a shattering of innocence through betrayal, we often feel abandoned and our orphan comes up for our main character. What gets shattered most prominently for the orphan is the ability to _____.

Betrayal is experienced, leading to a feeling of:

- Doubt or suspicion (loss of trust)
- Insecurity (not being protected)
- Vulnerability (not provided for and thus on our own)
- Shame (not wanting to have needs – toughen up)

Ways the orphan shows up:

- Hypervigilant and suspicious
- Attempts to be needless and self-sufficient
- Difficulty receiving from others
- Refuses rest, comfort and care
- Exhausted
- Trusts no one but him or herself
- Can be bitter

Reclaiming innocence for the orphan looks like:

- Understanding and blessing the orphan part that showed up to protect yourself
- Naming betrayal in particularity
- Learning to admit and receive care



Session Three:

- Enter grief in the moments you did not receive care
- Become able to hold the tension of naming what you needed (sometimes getting it and sometimes not)
- Receive good care
- Commit to a life of lament and gratitude

A Priest/Mentor will slowly emerge as an orphan heals. The priest is a reclaimed archetype for the orphan. We have a priest in all of us. The priest is able to:

- Trust and welcome others
- Let go of things needing to be done our way
- Remember past change and movement
- Say yes or no
- Rest
- Ask for help and manage if the answer is “no”
- Mark both beauty and messiness
- Care for those around them
- Offer goodness from places of abundance rather than scarcity
- Create space for others
- Remember where they were when they feel hopeless
- Become a safe harbor

The Stranger:

When there is an experience of a shattering of innocence through powerlessness, that is when our stranger comes up for our character. What gets shattered most prominently for the stranger is _____.

Powerlessness is experienced, leading to a feeling of:

- Disillusionment (“I didn’t see that coming”)
- Lack of power or agency
- Profound disappointment
- Feeling like a fool

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Ways the stranger shows up:

- Will not hope again, reasoning it is foolish
- Feels indifferent: "If I can't control the future, I won't care."
- Withdraws and won't let others close
- May control all they can and stay away from what they can't control
- Will stay watchful and on "high-alert" to never be caught off-guard again
- May be cynical, feeling safer with cynicism as their friend

Reclaiming innocence for the stranger looks like:

- Understanding and blessing the stranger that showed up to protect
- Naming and grieving the harm that set up for needing the stranger to be birthed within
- Acknowledging that hope is both dangerous and beautiful
- Attending to your own heart
- Letting down walls of protection
- Attending to your own desire
- Dreaming of the future and imagining what could be
- Letting others into your dreams and desires
- Allowing others to celebrate with you
- Creating a community and finding your tribe

A Prophet will slowly emerge as a stranger heals:

- Has the ability to see others well
- Exposes the reality of the present moment
- Has the freedom to use his/her/their voice to speak against systems of oppression
- Uses what he/she/they sees and uses influence of power in service of others
- Invites others to dream and imagine goodness for the future
- Hopes on behalf of others
- Awakens hope and desire in others



Session Three:

The Widow/Widower:

When there is an experience of a shattering of innocence, we feel ambivalence and our widow/widower becomes present to our character. What gets shattered most prominently for the widow/widower is _____.

Splitting of ambivalence leads to experiences of:

- Ashes where there was once beauty
- Death where there was once life
- Hollowness where there was once intricacy
- Restraint where there was once freedom

Ways the Widow/Widower shows up:

- Has an inability or refusal to connect to desire
- Is fearful of vulnerability
- Polarizes into "either/or" (dualistic) thinking: Just give in to others and freeze desire OR Just take from others and enflame desire.
- Stagnated due to a resistance to allow life to be regenerated, often closing off authentic desire
- Often fears mourning losses because mourning brings access to desire
- Seeks the short and controlled bursts of pleasure from an addictive framework versus engagement with the fullness of life

Reclaiming innocence for the Widow/Widower looks like:

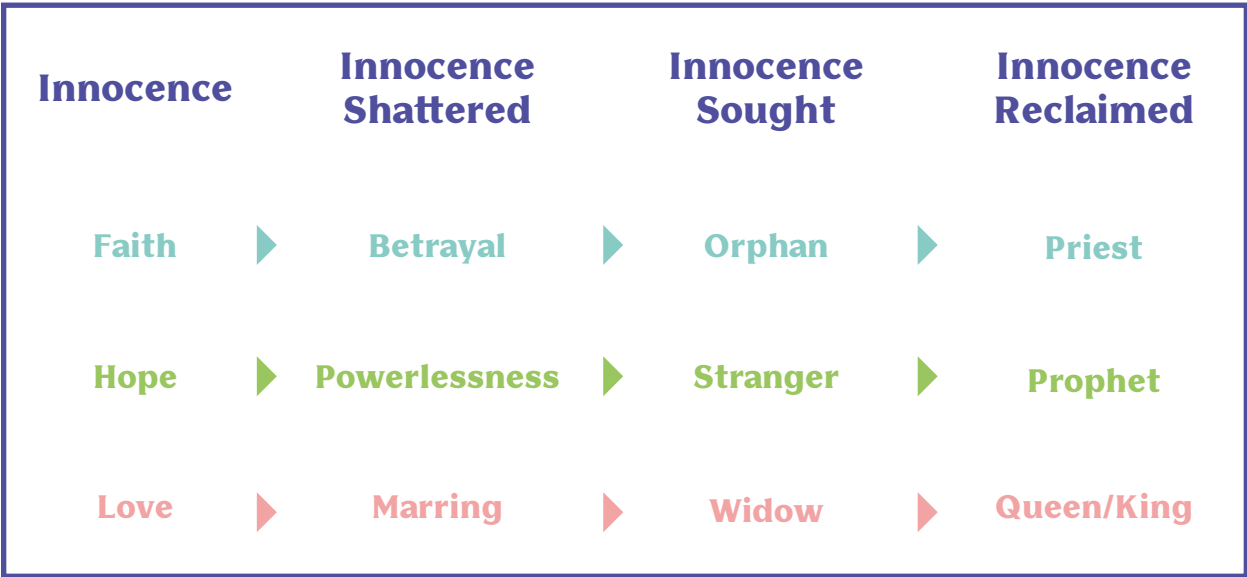
- Understanding and blessing the widow that showed up to protect
- Naming the painful experiences that split the ambivalence
- Naming the escape that the polarized tension created
- Reconnecting with desires, acknowledging AND grieving the ache of unmet desires
- Balancing the dynamic of giving and receiving pleasure
- Learning to celebrate the complexities and paradoxes of love
- Opening boundaries/walls to allow for vulnerability and a new understanding of safety
- Embracing love that is bold, expansive, accepting, complex and ever-surprising



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A Queen/King will slowly emerge as a Widow/Widower heals:

- Has the ability to hold duality, complexity and paradox
- Can invite others to more fullness of life and embrace their full self
- Has the ability to say yes or no
- Can lead their kingdom and hold mystery, complexity and paradox
- Shows up with a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset
- Makes space and creates room for the other; is inclusive
- Believes there is mutual flourishing for all
- The Queen/King fully grasps that love is for all, not just for him/her/them but meant for all people



Session Three:

At-Home Reflection Questions:

1. In what ways can you identify with the orphan and what situations or incidents may have set up for the orphan to show up for you?
2. What may it look like to move towards reclaiming innocence for your orphan part?
3. In what ways can you identify with the stranger and what situations or incidents may have set up for the stranger to show up for you?
4. What may it look like to move towards reclaiming innocence for your stranger part?
5. In what ways can you identify with the widow/widower and what situations or incidents may have set up for the widow/widower to show up for you?
6. What may it look like to move towards reclaiming innocence for your widow/widower part?





Session Four: Story Engagement Reminders

No teaching this week

These questions will not be discussed but should be considered as you begin this week:

1. How do you come as you listen to the story reader?
2. Assess your energy level, as well as your ability to attend with compassion toward another.
3. Be proactive in compartmentalizing your own life stressors so you can engage this work well.

Session Five: Attachment: Its Impact and Healing

Your style of attachment is developed and formed during the first two years of life. The remaining years of childhood are obviously important as well, however early experiences of attaching to a caregiver are foundational for human development. Early attachment failures are carried into your sense of being and is where your style of relating primarily comes from.

Early attachment often depends on how three needs are handled by primary caregivers.

1. Attunement: _____

2. Containment: _____

3. Repair: _____

There are four defining features of the attachment bond:

1. _____ to be physically close to the parent.
2. Feels _____ when separation occurs.
3. Experiences a safe haven and emotional _____ when reconnected with the parent or primary caregiver.
4. The parent provides a _____ for the child to explore his/her world.

What were your thoughts and feelings as you watched the "still face" video?

Session Five:

Attachment Styles

1. Secure Attachment

Children who are securely attached generally become visibly upset when their caregivers leave, are happy when their primary caregivers return and are easily comforted. Primary caregivers of securely attached children tend to play more with their children. Additionally, these primary caregivers react more quickly to their children's needs and are generally more responsive to their children than the primary caregivers of insecurely attached children.

Response of the child with a secure attachment:

- Able to separate from the parent
- Seeks comfort from the parent when frightened
- Greets return of parents with positive emotions
- Prefers parents to caregivers
- Is able to separate from parents and explore more, knowing the parent will be available upon return

The Secure Attachment Style in Adults: (check which ones you might relate to)

- They tend to have trusting, long-term, mutual relationships
- They have high self-esteem
- They have more resilience in recovering from stress, especially in relationships
- They seek out social support
- They have the ability to share feelings with other people
- They demonstrate the capacity to initiate and receive repair attempts
- They have positive feelings about their adult romantic relationships
- They have a functional radar for danger, not overly marked by hyper- or hypo-arousal



Session Five:

2. Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment

Children with an avoidant/dismissive attachment have primary caregivers that tend to be emotionally unavailable or unresponsive to them a good deal of the time. They disregard or ignore their child's needs, and can be especially rejecting when their child is hurt or sick. These primary caregivers tend to leave the child alone much. They also discourage crying and encourage premature independence in their children. There is not much play, eye contact, and little sweetness in their interaction with the child. They are often NOT AVAILABLE.

Possible Reasons Why the Primary Attachment Figure has Difficult Attaching to the Child:

- Lack of knowledge about how to offer support
- Lack of empathy skills
- Failure to develop a sense of closeness and no urgency to do so
- Parental history of negative attachment with rejecting caregivers and role models

Response of the Child with an Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment Style:

- They often show up contained
- They may be described as "little adults"
- They are disconnected from their bodily needs
- They minimize the importance of emotions
- They tend to seek proximity to attachment figures, but won't directly interact with them
- They tend not to be distressed by the separation of a parent and upon return the child avoids seeking contact
- They rarely show an outward desire for closeness, warmth, affection or love

The Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment Style in Adults: (check which ones you might relate to)

- They steer clear of emotional closeness in relationships.
- They may not get involved in romantic relationships
- They seek relationships and enjoy spending time with their partner but may become uncomfortable when relationships get too close.

Session Five:

- They may perceive partners as “wanting too much” or “being too clingy” when the partner expresses desire to be more emotionally close.
- When a threat of separation or loss is felt, they tend to either focus on other things or withdraw and cope alone.
- They tend to deny vulnerability and use repression to manage emotions.
- When seeking help, they tend to use indirect strategies such as hinting, complaining or sulking.
- They report very few memories of their early relationship with parents
- They report very few memories of their early relationship with parents but may describe their childhood as happy and their parents as loving; however they are unable to give specific examples to support these positive evaluations.
- They are overly focused on themselves and own creature comforts, and may largely disregard the feelings and interests of other people.
- They have difficulty disclosing their thoughts and especially their feelings to their partner.
- Their response to conflict or a stressful situation is to become distant and aloof.
- They tend to have an overly positive view of themselves and a negative, cynical attitude toward other people.
- They tend to react angrily to perceived slights or threats to their self-esteem.

The Avoidant/Dismissive Attachment Style May Have Critical Inner Voices Such as:

- “I don’t need anyone.”
- “Don’t get too involved. I will just be disappointed.”
- “People wont commit to a relationship.”
- “People will try to trap me.”
- “Why does he/she demand so much from me?”
- “I’ve got to put up with a lot to stay involved with a partner.”
- “There are other, more important things in life than romance.”
- “I’ve got to protect myself. I’m going to get hurt in this relationship.”
- “I’m too good for him/her/them.”



Session Five:

3. Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment

The main factor in a child developing an anxious/ambivalent attachment is inconsistent attunement in the relationship with their primary caregivers. The primary caregivers are inconsistent and erratic in regard to attention and attentiveness. When primary caregivers vacillate between attunement and neglect or anger, their child becomes confused and insecure, not knowing what kind of reaction to expect. The primary caregivers tend to be manipulative and the parenting tends to be focused on meeting the primary caregivers needs above the child's needs. They are often INCONSISTENT.

Possible Reasons Why the Primary Attachment Figure has Difficult Attaching to the Child:

- The parent has a history with an anxious/ambivalent attachment caregiver.
- They act in ways that are insensitive and intrusive as they confuse emotional hunger with genuine love for the child.
- The primary attachment figure confuses feelings of longing and desire toward their child for actual love and concern for the child's well-being.
- The primary attachment figure tends to be overprotective.
- They tend to use the child as a way to meet their own emotional needs.
- The primary attachment figure lives vicariously through their child and is overly focused on the child's appearance or performance.
- The primary attachment figure tends to over-step personal boundaries of the child by touching them excessively or invading their privacy.

Response of the Child with an Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment:

- They may cling to attachment figures.
- They act desperate for their attachment figure's attention.
- When reunited, they feel confused, dazed and agitated, staring off into space and avoiding direct contact with the attachment figure.
- As a child, they are unable to be satisfied or comforted.
- The child hungers for closeness and love along with a disabling fear of losing it.
- The child tends to be distrusting and suspicious of the parent.
- The child limits exploratory play.

Session Five:

The Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment Style in Adults: (check which ones you might relate to)

- They are self-critical and insecure.
- They seek approval and reassurance from others but tend to distrust the reassurance.
- There is a deep-seated feeling that they are going to be rejected. Therefore, they experience excessive worry and difficulty trusting.
- They are rejection-sensitive, looking for signs of a partner losing interest.
- They generally have positive views of others, especially parents and their partner but a negative view of themselves.
- They rely heavily on partners to validate self-worth.
- They might be demanding and possessive, and can tend to be perpetually vigilant and somewhat emotionally dramatic.
- They are resentful and angry when their partner doesn't provide attention and reassurance.
- There is a belief that unless they dramatically express anxiety and anger, it's unlikely another will respond to them.

The Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment Style May Have Critical Inner Voices Such as:

- "It's obvious that he/she/they are losing interest in me."
- "Why isn't he/she/they more affectionate?"
- "He/she/they always has an excuse for not wanting to make love."
- "I'm so needy and dependent. No wonder she (he) doesn't like me."
- "My partner doesn't love me as much as I love him/her."



Session Five:

4. Disorganized/Chaotic Attachment

Disorganized attachment arises from fear without solutions. Primary caregivers in this attachment style often frightens their children in different, often unconscious, ways. When primary caregivers or caregivers are abusive, the child often experiences the physical and emotional abuse as being life-threatening. The child is stuck in an awful dilemma: his or her survival instincts tell them to flee to safety, but the only safety they know is the very people who are frightening them. The primary caregivers are the source of the child's distress. They often have NO PROTECTOR.

Possible Reasons Why the Primary Attachment Figure has Difficult Attaching to the Child:

- There is unresolved trauma and loss in the caregivers' life. Significant trauma that is not resolved in the parent is passed on to the child. Consequently, there is no way of making sense of their trauma and they are more likely to engage in triggering and disorienting behavior with their child.
- There is an inability to tolerate the range of emotions in moments of stress.
- The parent has active addictions or personality disorders.

Response of the Child with a Disorganized/Chaotic attachment:

- The first impulse is to seek comfort from the primary attachment figure but when they get near, they feel fear.
- They express odd or ambivalent behavior toward the attachment figure, such as first running up to them, then immediately pulling away, perhaps even running away from the parent, curling up in a ball or hitting the parent.
- They disassociate from themselves.
- They may feel detached from what's happening around him/her/them.
- They experience feeling blocked from their own consciousness.

The Disorganized/Chaotic Attachment Style in Adults: (check which ones you might relate to)

- They struggle to make sense of their experiences.
- They struggle forming a coherent narrative.
- Their stories are fragments and they have difficulty expressing themselves clearly.



Session Five:

- They don't have healthy ways to self-soothe.
- They tend to respond in relationships as very hot and cold.
- They may have trouble socially or struggle in using others to co-regulate their emotions.
- It is difficult for them to open up to others or to seek out help.
- They often have difficulty trusting people, as they were unable to trust those they relied on for safety growing up; therefore, they see the world as an unsafe place.
- They struggle with poor social or emotional regulation skills.
- They may find it difficult to form and sustain solid relationships.
- They often have difficulty managing stress and may even demonstrate hostile or aggressive behaviors.
- They may lack empathy skills and show a sense of remorse when they hurt another.
- They can come across as selfish and controlling in relationships.
- They may refuse to take responsibility for their actions, disregard rules, and can be abusive to others.
- There is a high risk for substance abuse or other addictive behaviors.

The Disorganized/Chaotic Attachment Style May Have Critical Inner Voices Such as:

- "I'm unlovable."
- "Don't trust anyone."
- "I'm just too terrified to _____."
- "I can't."
- "I feel like I'm going to lose it."

What is your attachment style? Which one do you relate most with?



Session Five:

Can One Heal From a Past Failure in Attachment? YES!

Ways to develop a more secure attachment:

1. Make sense of your _____.
2. Form a _____ narrative.
3. Step into _____ trauma and loss, facing and feeling the full pain of experiences and offer kindness and attunement to those younger parts.
4. Develop healthy relationships which allow for trust and resolution of _____ issues.

Attachment theories have been well-researched. This material comes from a number of sources including, but not limited to John Bowlby, Amir Levine, M.D. and Rachael S.F. Heller, M.A., Peter Levine, Diane P Heller, and Abby Wong-Heffter.



Session Five:

At-Home Reflection Questions

1. Write about your primary caregivers. Who were they? What were they like? How did they manage their emotions? What do you know about what was going on in their life at the time you were conceived until you were about 2-years old?

2. What type of attachment do you think you had? Why?



3. What adult-like attachment patterns do you most relate to? In which ways?

4. What people and relationships do you currently have to help develop a more secure attachment style? If you feel this is lacking, what might you pursue to work towards developing more connecting and trusting relationships to help heal?

Session Seven: What Happens When We Are Misnamed

Humans are capable of doing what are often considered “evil things” to one another. Even though we desperately want to make sense of the bad things that happen to us we sit in the uncomfortable reality that unfortunately, we do not have all the answers. Rather, we can meaningfully look at the impact these bad experiences have had on our stories. Sometimes that impact comes from another human being’s harm or from a family system or structures of power within our local and broader cultures.

This week, we bring language to these experiences of harm and learn some ways to begin to heal looking closer at the setting of our stories.

When bad things happen to us as humans by other humans, what do we do to protect ourselves from the pain and full impact? Consciously and unconsciously in an attempt to protect ourselves, we find ways to cope that unfortunately deepen harm in the long run.

To help provide greater understanding, we have identified four ways misnaming occurs:

1. Destructive naming
2. Agreements
3. Vows
4. Unhealthy bonds

1. Destructive Naming

Destructive naming is any verbal or nonverbal message that is destructive to our hearts, bodies and souls. These come in the form of direct or indirect assaults and accusations that seep into our very being, wounding us significantly. Destructive naming has intent to harm and/or destroy something in us. This naming can be experienced through language, non-verbal behaviors or gestures and facial expressions.

Destructive naming is also where collective communities name specific people groups, especially when BIPOC or LGBTQIA folks are named as a whole. So they are not just individually named but whole people groups are named in destructive ways. These agreements tend to add up and form a kind of lens that changes how we see and interpret our world.



Session Seven:

Examples may include conveying the message: "You disgust me. You won't amount to anything. I hate you," and others.

Can you name some destructive naming that you have experienced either verbally or nonverbally as a child?

2. Agreements

Agreements occur when we take on the destructive naming as true. This happens when we agree with what has been named about us and thus make a judgment against ourselves. This judgment creates a kind of opening in our heart that makes us even more susceptible to lies, accusations and destructive naming about ourselves. We make agreements with shame, guilt, fear and accusations.

Examples may include the silent (or verbal) message: "I must be disgusting. It's clearly my fault and always my fault." "I am too much." "I'm stupid."

Can you name a few examples of agreements you have made?

3. Vows

A vow occurs naturally to alleviate the pain of our agreements. As a way to cope, we create "sealed agreements" or vows in order to lessen the pain and shame we feel. Vows are more than an agreement.

Vows are more powerful because it comes with resolution. A decision of action has been added to save myself from the turmoil of an agreement. It helps resolve the inner

Session Seven:

turmoil an agreement creates; therefore, we tend to like our vows and often want to hang onto them for dear life. Because of this favorable view of vows, a vow becomes entrenched in our way of being and makes us complicit. Where there was once a feeling of powerlessness and ambivalence there is now a recovery of power. This is intoxicating.

Examples may include the silent (or verbal) resolution: "I will never be like my mom/dad. I will never be that vulnerable again. I will never commit to someone. I will always be on guard. I won't get my hopes up again."

Can you name any vows you have made as a way to help resolve some of your inner pain and turmoil of an agreement?

4. Unhealthy Bonds

Bonds are a powerful alliance or connection between two people. Relationships have varying degrees of healthy and unhealthy bonds. Healthy bonds are based on love, trust, kindness, containment and goodness. Unhealthy bonds are marked by anxiousness, fear, rigidity or hyper closeness, often based on consumption, possessiveness, fear, lust, envy and chaos.

Who in your life has traces of healthy and unhealthy bonds?

What are some ways we can recognize, break and heal from destructive naming, agreements, vows and unhealthy bonds?



Session Seven:

At-Home Reflection Questions

1. Identify an experience where you experienced directly or indirectly destructive named.
2. Think about and pinpoint an agreement(s) or vow(s) you may have made in your life out of these destructive namings.
3. Can you identify how you might currently live as though these lies are true?
4. Can you identify healthy and unhealthy bonds that were formed, as well as the effects of that bonding today?
5. What might be 1-2 ways of moving towards breaking any unhealthy bonds?



Session Eight: Stories This Week

No teaching this week

Remind yourself of the first week of group. What caused you to join the group? Have you had a taste of freedom thus far? If so, how? Do your best to describe how you may feel different? Also, be patient and trust the process knowing even small shifts take time.

Session Nine: How We Are Invited and Participate in Reenactments of Our Core Wounds

How Our Bodies Respond to Trauma

When we experience trauma (betrayal, powerlessness and marring of ambivalence), our limbic system takes over and we are mainly operating from this survival part of our brain. The trauma triggers us into a fight, flight, or freeze response. And since the limbic system is determining that we are in danger, it is in control and we do not feel safe; therefore, our prefrontal cortex fades into the background which leaves us without access to language and problem-solving capabilities. All trauma then is preverbal, meaning we are cut off from language and trapped in speechless terror.

Trauma Demands Repetition

Christine Langley Obaugh states: “We repeat what we do not repair.” Trauma trapped in our bodies unconnected to language is unrepaired trauma. Trauma demands repetition. It demands remembering – literally the “re-member-ing” of our fragmented self.

Trauma literally calls us to the work of putting back together the shattered and displaced parts of ourselves. However, since we are compromised and without language in this healing work, our traumas routinely reproduce not as a memory, but as an action: A reenactment. If we can understand language and integrate these traumas, we can decrease the chances of being caught in destructive reenactments.

Examples of Reenactments (maladaptive ways):

A young boy needed his parents praise and approval but instead received criticism, verbal assault and disinterest. As a young adult, the boy has become an overachiever but “tunes out” or seemingly “doesn’t care” when receiving criticism or accolades. To him, this stance feels empowering and like he has a sense of control over experiencing the emotional reactivity and criticism of another. This response will invite the same response from his friends and colleagues since they will experience him as over-confident and not in need of feedback..

Session Nine:

A child was ignored by her father, and she blamed herself as not being worth his time. Later in life she chose a husband who is also self-centered and then works really hard in attempts to get him to see and attend to her. If she can get her husband to respond, this is her way of trying to get rid of the feelings of self-blame and worthlessness.

A woman abandoned by her father now has intense fear of being abandoned so she becomes clingy and possessive creating others to feel overwhelmed and ultimately leave her.

A boy experienced significant rejection from his parents and has not worked through and named the neglect. Today, he becomes flooded with rage, hurt, terror and unworthiness when a friend fails to return a call or fails to include him in activities. He experiences the situation as a confirmation that he is not cared about which is a reenactment of his earlier relationship with parents.

A woman who grew up in an alcoholic home learned to focus on others and deny the existence of her own needs. As a result, she has an underdeveloped ability to ask for help and identify and articulate her needs. This underdeveloped resource set her up for choosing relationships based on attending to and caring for others. She takes responsibility for others' thoughts, feelings and behaviors which invites the same dynamics of her childhood home.

Adaptive ways: Intentionally stepping into past trauma for the purpose of creating corrective experiences.

Examples of Correcting an Experience (adaptive ways):

Narrative Work/Story Groups: Counseling or story work are examples of adaptive ways of choosing to step into discussing current reenactments and past traumatic events. Doing this work will trigger similar feelings and allow a therapist or skilled listeners to attend to us, challenge our distorted beliefs and increase our ability to tolerate the distress of these past experiences. The goal is to rework the biochemical memory patterns of the past and begin to integrate our traumatic past into a redemptive present. The particularities of the story need to be engaged for healing to occur. You may be a part of a group made up of different ethnicities, sexual orientations, cultures, and genders which will intensify reenactments.

Somatic Body Work: Learning to indwell your own body and your own story can enable

Session Nine:

you to work through experiences that have been unresolved.

The relationships, healing, and life that you are desiring comes through engagement of all of your senses. Fulfillment is not just a mental experience- and neither is healing. You may experience present moment feelings and sensations as you talk through different relationships and memories. A trained somatic therapist will help you find curiosity and engagement of sensations that may arise. This will grow your tolerance and presence from the inside out. Having healthy relationships with others begins with a healthy relationship with your body-mind. (Jenny McGrath from Indwell Counseling)

[Information compiled from: *The Body Keeps Score, Brain, Mind and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, by Bessel Van Der Kolk; *Healing The Wounded Heart*, by Dan Allender; Jenny McGrath from Indwell Counseling, A helpful way to conceptualize and understand reenactments, by Michael S. Levy, PH.D. *The Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research*, 1996.]



Session Nine:

At-Home Reflection Questions

1. Identify one or two experiences in which you think you reenacted a core wound. Describe.
2. Can you see your contribution in the reenactment? Can you identify any agreements and vows that were made that may have contributed to the reenactment?
3. Groups are perfect opportunities to reenact old wounds. Can you identify a group you are in, this one or another, where there may be a reenactment playing out? If so, what does it look like?
4. What core wound or trauma are you prompted to step into more fully as a way to grieve and receive healing care?





Session Ten: The Spectrum of Compassion and Truth

No teaching this week

These questions will not be discussed but should be considered as you begin this week:

Are you starting to become more aware of your style of relating? Consider how you show up in this group and other groups of people? Do you show up as quiet? Do you invite others to see you as confident and fine? Do you show up provocative, inviting contempt? Do you feel a pull towards wanting others, especially those in leadership roles, to see you in good favor? As you start to notice, can you be curious how these tendencies might be connected to your story.

An example might be: *I show up confident and without needs. This usually sets others up to think I am fine and then I don't get attended to or receive much care. I can see how in my own family growing up, it was not safe to have or voice needs as it would be met with either anger or humiliation.*

Session Ten:

To Be Completed Prior to Session 12: Offering a Blessing for Group Members

1. Come prepared to explain a significant moment, insight or interaction that occurred for YOU – something that you believe will stay with you long after our group time has ended.

2. Come prepared to give a blessing to each member of the group (facilitators included). Think of each of them by name and what you have seen and experienced from each and offer that individual a blessing in the form of ONE or TWO words or phrases to describe them. There is no right way to do this. The only guideline is to direct your thoughtful feedback to the uniqueness of the individual in question. This exercise is designed to bless the individual and encourage them to continue the hard and rewarding work of growing in personal responsibility, maturity and humility.

Feel free to contact your group leader if you have questions.

GROUP MEMBER NAME (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

_____ (1-2 words): _____

(Don't forget to include your leader or leaders in this exercise!)



Session Eleven: What Does It Mean To Grieve Our Stories?

Francis Weller writes about the need for all of us to undertake an “apprenticeship with sorrow” (The Wild Edge of Sorrow). In this apprenticeship we must learn from our mentor sorrow, known as the “art and raft of grief” and discover the profound ways it ripens and deepens us. Entering into an apprenticeship with grief, to say the least, is not easy. Many of us would rather decline this invitation. Unfortunately when we do, we tend to ignore, disavow and push away the feelings of grief. When we push it away, we delay our healing and prolong our shattered state.

Grieving is essential to finding and maintaining a feeling of emotional intimacy with life and relationships. Maybe, we can even come to view grief as a ‘holy visitor’ that always leaves gifts, restoring parts of us with greater empathy and an increased capacity for life.

What does it mean to grieve?

Grieving is the intentional process of allowing your body to feel the emotions related to a lost connection with a _____, _____,
_____ or _____.

Unpacking our definition

Intentional process:

Emotions:

Lost connection:

Session Eleven:

The process is: Feel - Together

1. Feel:

Feelings are crucial to the grieving process. In fact, you cannot heal what you do not feel.

Clean Pain:

Dirty Pain:



*"Welcoming everything that comes to us is the challenge.
This is the secret to being fully alive."*

—Francis Weller

Session Eleven:

2. Together:

Grieving must be done in community otherwise it easily slides into private suffering. Once we begin to feel what we need to feel, we need to share that with others. We all need at least one person to bear witness to our loss.

Bear Witness:

Simply, "I see your pain." _____

Attunement:

_____ :

the ability to let what's happening in another's body resonate in mine.

Attunement is _____ : _____ , _____ ,

_____ .

Self Attunement: _____

Grieving is the process the body wants to go through that allows us to metabolize the powerful emotional experiences we encounter in the shattered places in our stories. Knowing that we need to give our body permission to feel those feelings and that we need others to bear witness to and engage us in our grief; gives us the container we need to heal.

*"Trauma always carries grief...
Therefore, grief work is a primary ingredient in the resolution of trauma."*

—Francis Weller

Session Eleven:

At-Home Reflection Questions

1. How do you typically deal with or manage the grief of your losses?
2. What are the feelings you currently experience in a loss you may currently be facing or in the recent past? Can you identify times in which your pain was “clean pain” versus “dirty pain?”
3. Have you ever allowed someone to bear witness to a loss you were going through? If so, describe what this was like.
4. Notice how you are doing “self-attuning.” How is your heart towards the younger versions of you? Can you resonate with the younger version of yourself in your story? If not, what judgements get in the way?



Session Twelve: Healing Is A Lifelong Process

Healing our past trauma is a lifelong process, not a destination we arrive at. Like most things in life the healing process will ebb and flow. As you continue to engage your personal and collective stories of harm, keep in mind the following as you progress in this work and commit yourself to a lifetime of growth.

1. Keep naming the _____ of harm. This is difficult to do since it often involves people we love.
2. Continue to see your life as a _____ where you are the hero.
3. Tell the truth about the _____ in your story – not for the sake of blame but in order to love and honor yourself and them.
4. Study closely the _____ you played in your family.
5. Kindly give yourself _____ to grieve the harm and unmet needs in your past, times you experienced betrayal, powerlessness, and marring.
6. Look closely at the ways you _____ in order to survive the environment of your family. Continue to name the agreements and vows that shaped you.
7. Observe the trauma patterns you still _____ today. Notice how you, consciously or unconsciously, set yourself up for repeated harm and relational patterns. Be intentional about changing those patterns.
8. Know this work is difficult and _____ the shifts and healing you experience.
9. Allow yourself to _____ the moments of peace, sweetness and goodness in your life with gratitude for your hard and courageous labor.

Glossary of Terms

Agreement – A lie we believe that brings some level of solace in the midst of shattered faith. For example, after being verbally abused for making a mistake, one might make this agreement, “I will never do too well in my job because I am not very smart,” or in the wake of a significant rejection or betrayal, one might make this agreement, “No one will ever want to marry me because I am too flawed to be loved.” Evil uses agreements to bind us in the wake of painful life events.

Ambivalence – Simultaneously holding contradictory feelings. In abuse, this typically includes intimacy (aliveness) and disgust or shame.

Arousal – One’s natural response of being awakened. This not only applies to sensual touch but one’s sense of being alive. When someone is misnamed or their passion is marred, it may lead to one’s war with their body and their desires.

Attachment – A well-researched theory that prior to age two each individual develops patterns of relating based on how they were attuned to by primary caregivers.

Attunement – The awareness and attention needed for someone to truly be understood, seen and delighted in.

Complicity – The belief, often accompanied with contempt and shame, that one is at fault for being aroused, particularly in the midst of harm. Naming that one feels complicit allows shame to lose some of its power, often leading to healing and some freedom.

Containment – The act (and art) of delicately keeping something within limits. In the context of a group, this typically means listening to someone while also bringing honor to a group’s restrictions, such as time, pace, or emotional bandwidth. Within a family, it is a primary caregiver’s role to “hold” the complex and often confusing emotions of a child in a way that is protective and caring.

Contempt – To despise or disrespect. Often, with issues of harm or neglect, a feeling of contempt is held for oneself (and his or her body) or others and what they represent.

Covert (abuse) – A kind of binding to another where a child is chosen and yet also set-up to fuse pleasure with shame. (see Grooming and Triangulation)

Disassociate – A natural response to detach from an experience or memory.

Glossary of Terms

Faith – The ability to rest and trust in goodness leading to delight.

Family of Origin (FOO) – The family (biological or other) in which one grew up.

Grooming – A process by which someone in power observes one’s vulnerabilities to gain access to one’s heart. When continued, subtle (often caring) touch is introduced which creates a sensual bond. With time, intimacy may be intensified with sexual touch and threats and privileges are used to sustain control.

Hope – The capacity to imagine and move into the future.

Hypervigilance – Exhaustive watchfulness, often due to betrayal, suspicion, and self-doubt.

Love – The capacity to give and receive pleasure and goodness, sharing mutual delight and honor.

Lust – The idea that we use people to fill a basic emptiness.

Naming – The process of truthfully stating something, particularly if it is vulnerable. In regard to harm, naming specific behavior as “abuse” for instance, usually leads to a sense of relief, grief, and freedom.

PCG – Primary Care Giver

Reenactment – To repeat a pattern of relating, particularly one that leads to harm. Because our brain has a natural impulse to resolve that which is interrupted, these patterns continue until the source of harm is exposed and rewired.

Repair – One of the basic needs of a child (and adults) to have another own mistakes made. Few people have had good models of repair where specific places of harm are named with remorse. A fine line exists. A child should experience a parent’s “I’m sorry” without shame so that a child does not end up caring for a repentant parent.

Shame – An experience of exposure (being seen) that reveals something repulsive, ugly, toxic or bad about oneself. Shame is a sense that delight and honor are ruined and will remain forever. Shame is bound to a particular moment which is why entering that moment brings release from shame.

Glossary of Terms

Trigger – To initiate or activate. In the case of harm done in the past, a present-day event can set off a bodily response or alert that feels threatening even if no threat is near.

Unhealthy Binds – An attachment where one is bound to another, often based on conditions, fear or abusive patterns. Often soul ties are rooted in insecure attachments in the formative years of development.

Vow – A resolution that seems to make it easier to live without hope, usually accompanied by an agreement. For example, “Since I am not smart (agreement), I will never take on projects that demand too much (vow).” or “Since I am so flawed, I will never let a person pursue me that I really care about.” A vow is a way to manage the future without having to risk, dream, or experience more loss.





story groups

Unlocking You

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