

Returning to the Scene of the Crime: The Seminal Confrontation

A Process of Healing Emotional Wounds

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EPSY 6393 - Marriage and Family Counseling

The following exercise is designed to facilitate the healing of emotional wounds inflicted by family members, and to free you from whatever self-defeating programming that may have grown out of these painful events. The whole exercise can be done in private, through a combination of journaling and imaginary enactment, or “roleplaying.” It is advisable to obtain professional guidance throughout the process -- especially if you plan to actually confront family members as a culmination of your work.

As a standard technique throughout this exercise, you will need to use the “two chair technique.” It’s really very simple. Whenever you speak to the other person, speak to an empty chair, and imagine that the person is present, seated before you. Whenever you need to find out what the other person might say in response to you, simply change seats and imagine yourself responding as the other person might.

Step One: Remembering what happened

The first principle of this process is: *There can be no healing without remembering your painful memories.* So, go back over the painful events, experiencing any feelings that might arise.

Record the events in detail along with your feelings that arise. If you cannot access the memory *or* the feelings that “should” arise, then you might consider doing some deepening work such as holotropic breathwork, bodywork, or trancework.

If you are not sure if you have been able to fully re-access your memory and the “appropriate affect” associated with the memory, think of the event happening to your own child, or to a child you love. If your feelings are *stronger* when you imagine it happening to this other child, then you need to do some more work getting back in touch with the event: You may still be somewhat in denial about what has happened to you. Or, in contrast, if the memory overwhelms you with emotion, you might need to employ other techniques to give you the distance that you might need to recall the events, such as Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), or inner child rescue (a hypnotherapeutic technique).

Step Two: Communicating what happened

Imagine yourself telling the person who hurt you, or the one who did not protect you (two separate exercises, both important to do), *exactly what happened.* You are no longer protecting anyone: You are telling the raw, and unlaundered truth.

Change chairs and respond as the other person.
Write down what transpires.

Step Three: Expressing your feelings toward the person responsible for the painful event

Imagine that the person is present in the room with you. Communicate the full range of your feelings toward the person. Be as exhaustive as possible, and as angry as you need to be.

Change chairs and respond as the other person.
Add additional exchanges as necessary.
Write down what transpires.

Step Four: Express your sadness, grief, anger

While still imagining that the person is present, express your feelings over the impact that the event has had on your life. Speak of what might have been different if the painful event had not happened.

Change chairs and respond as the other person.
Add additional exchanges as necessary.
Write down what transpires.

Step Five: Ask questions

Now ask whatever questions come to mind that you've never been willing to ask. Be as bold as you need to be.

Change chairs and respond as the other person.
Add additional questions/responses as necessary.
Write down what transpires.

Step Six: Request remedies

Come up with one to three *concrete* things that the other person can do now to assist you in letting go of your pain. This is not blackmail; stay focused on actions that will not degrade the other person, but will demonstrate to you that they are serious in wishing to make amends to you.

Change chairs and respond as the other person.
Add additional exchanges as necessary.
Write down what transpires.

Step Seven: Redefine relationship, and set new boundaries

Imagine stating the conditions under which you will continue to be in relationship with this person. Let the person know what you will continue to accept, and what you will no longer accept from them; and what you are willing to do, and what you are no longer willing to do in relationship with the person.

Change chairs and respond as the other person.
Write down what transpires.

Step Eight: Going home as an adult for the first time

Consider whether you need to do this work in front of the other person. By the time you have done the above steps, the odds are you will want to do this. So make a plan: Do you need to have a face-to-face meeting, or only a written exchange? Would a preliminary letter make sense?

Before you do a written and/or face-to-face confrontation, ask yourself one question: *Am I attached to the reaction that the other person will have to my communications?* If you are worried about his or her reaction, you are **not** ready. Explore your remaining resistances with a professional before taking this process any further.