

Self-attachment VR Intervention¹:

Detailed Protocols ²

Abbas Edalat

Algorithmic Human Development

Department of Computing, Imperial College London

Introduction

This document presents the detailed sub-protocols of the self-attachment VR intervention. Self-Attachment Technique (SAT) is a self-help method, based on creating an affectional bond with our child, for nurturing positive emotions and attitudes (such as compassion, cheerfulness and creativity), re-processing negative experiences, and developing positive cognitive, behavioral and interpersonal patterns. These goals are achieved through regular daily practice sessions involving reparenting one's child, reflecting on one's experiences and belief systems, and exercises to reduce negative affects, and develop and reinforce positive attitudes and patterns. The twenty subprotocols of self-attachment are presented weekly in an eight-week course for a group of participants.

Each participant selects a favourite and a non-favourite photo of their childhood and, based on the favourite photo, a customised childhood avatar is created for them. They download a VR environment on their mobile device that is created for this study and is attached to a Google cardboard. The environment includes several buttons that allow the user to animate their childhood avatar in any basic emotion (happy, sad, angry, fearful, disgusted, surprised, neutral). To practice the SAT protocol, the user can select any basic emotion on their childhood avatar and change the emotion appropriately.

¹ The methods for self-attachment are based on previously published articles in:

<http://humandevelopment.doc.ic.ac.uk/>

² VR Version 02/11/2021

Week One

Rules and regulations for the SAT course



1. Punctuality: Please take part in all classes and practice the exercises!
2. Please write about your experience of the daily exercises!
3. Please keep your phone off throughout the session!
4. Please keep your microphones off!
5. Please respect the privacy of other participants!
6. Please avoid open dialogues and discussions!
7. If you would like to make a comment about another participant, please mention their positive aspects before any critical comment!

Intervention through self-attachment

- Self-attachment (SAT) is a holistic approach for increasing positive emotions, which is in line with the concept of the human as an independent, purposeful creature.
- Socrates: An unexamined life is not worth living.
- In the SAT course everyone creates an affectional bond with their child and “re-parents” them for two months to reach their ideal goal.
- A person’s true inner self that determines what they really want in life is different from their persona, created and influenced by the materialistic society.
- In SAT the individual begins by pondering deeply on what they truly want and determine their real goal in life.



In the beginning



- This goal should be a non-materialistic goal that guides us towards growth and self-development in society; e.g. success in an academic, scientific, literary, philosophical, athletic, spiritual, professional, charitable, manufacturing, or commercial field.
- If we don't have a clear goal at the start of the program, we try to find it as we practice the protocols.
- SAT is to be taken seriously: it is necessary to have some 8 hours of sleep every night, and at least 30 minutes of physical exercise daily to be able to practice the protocols successfully.
- We avoid making important life decisions for a period of at least two months.

The inner world as a safe haven represented by a secure house



- The inner world of individuals suffering from chronic disorders resembles a derelict, shabby old house, not a suitable safe haven and secure base for life.
- The inner world of individuals with secure attachment resembles a robust, beautiful house whose solid pillars provide both a safe haven in the face of harsh conditions and a secure base to address all challenges in life.
- Throughout the SAT intervention we imaginatively repair the ruined and shabby house and in its place, construct a grand, robust and beautiful mansion.

The importance of imagination and creating a new house



- Children's early attachment in their first two years is created in the pre- verbal development when their visual experience is their most important tool for interaction.
- House building was one of the first activities of early humans and the instinct for it can be inferred when children start to play by creating little rooms and places.
- The objective in SAT is to empower the individual through their own actions and creativity for building a grand and robust mansion.
- Every stage in building the new house reflects the progress made in repairing the inner world and developing the new orientation in life.

Self-attachment as a comic game

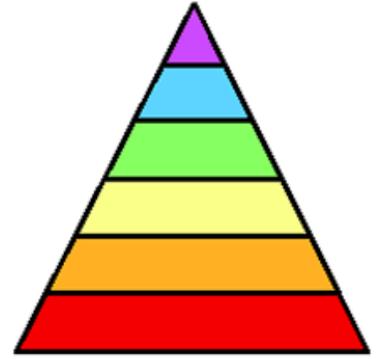
- SAT is a type of double role-playing game in which the individual plays the role of the child and the adult simultaneously.
- Donald Winnicott: “The general principle seems to me to be valid that psychotherapy is done in the overlap of the two play areas, that of the patient and that of the therapist. If the therapist cannot play, then he is not suitable for the work. If the patient cannot play, then something needs to be done to enable the patient to become able to play, after which psychotherapy can begin. The reason why playing is essential is that it is in playing that the patient is being creative.”
- Children learn what they learn and become creative through playing and laughing.
- Through comic role-playing, SAT enables the child to become creative.



Four stages of self-attachment

- Secure self-attachment simulates the relationship between a child and a good parent to turn our adult self, simply called adult, into a parent that can help the emotional development of our childhood self, simply called our child in these notes:

- 1- Introduction to attachment theory and SAT
- 2- Connection with the child
- 3- Falling in love with the child
- 4- Developmental training for the child



Stage One: Introduction to SAT

- SAT is a technique to enhance mental health.
- Like any other form of self-improvement method, SAT entails serious effort, patience and perseverance on our behalf.
- SAT protocols simulate the parent-child relationship, which may at first seem strange.
- Therefore, we should make ourselves informed by attachment theory in general and the scientific hypotheses of self-attachment technique.
- We must carefully review the text of the workshops.



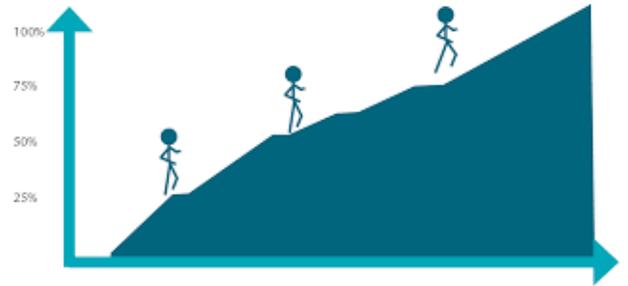
Role-play in SAT

- Our problems to properly manage our emotions is usually rooted in our childhood development.
- This means that we have not developed the skills to moderate our excitements, regulate our emotions, or have a sense of humour and laugh at times of stress.
- In SAT, the adult learns how a good parent interacts with a child, and through role-playing they become a parent for their child.
- The intervention strategy is based on collaboration between the adult and the child for regulating emotions and learning to laugh.
- The adult helps the child replace the old derelict house with a grand new one with the aim of realizing the child's potentials and higher goals.



Gradual development and improvement through SAT

- Since SAT takes place through acquiring new positive habits, sustainable improvement will only take place gradually and depends on the consistent and daily repetition of the protocols.
- Non-optimal thought and behavioral patterns are developed over the course of many years in our childhood, and then consolidated by repetition in later years.
- Creation of more optimal thought and behavioral patterns unsurprisingly takes months of consistent daily effort and thus requires patience and perseverance.



Stage Two: Connecting with the child



- We try to distinguish between our adult, i.e. our thinking and reasoning capacity that is more dominant when we are calm, and our child, i.e. the emotions and affects that become more dominant under stress and crisis.
- Looking at the two contrasting childhood photos, referred to for convenience as “happy” and “unhappy” photos, can help in making this distinction and is also required for other protocols.
- For convenience we refer to the child avatar as “happy” if animated to happy and as “unhappy” if animated to sad, angry, fearful or disgusted.
- By looking at these two contrasting photos/avatars and recalling past events and what we have heard from others about our childhood, we gradually think about our early years to construct a basic psychological portrait of the child and our feelings, affects and emotional problems with our parents and other significant figures in early childhood.

Compassion for the child

- One of the principles of self-attachment is to have a warm and compassionate attitude towards our child and their emotional problems. Later this compassion is extended to other people.
- We can find examples and role models of good parents interacting with their children in our family, among friends, in the parks and playgrounds or on the Web: they show affection without spoiling their children, hugging and caressing them at times of stress or even in ordinary circumstances:
- <https://youtu.be/apzXGEbZht0>



Exercise 1:

Connecting with the child

- In a quiet place, we try to first imagine our happy photo/avatar and reflect on the relevant positive affects and then imagine our unhappy photo/avatar and reflect on the relevant negative affects.
- We repeat this many times until such imaginings can take place easily and quickly.
- We imagine that the child as we were, in a happy or unhappy state, is near us.
- With closed eyes, we imagine embracing and cuddling the child, in a happy or unhappy state.
- We imagine playing with the child, the same games we used to play as a child.
- We develop a strong compassion for the child in his/her different emotional states notwithstanding what happened later in the life of the child.



First Week's Schedule

- Practicing Exercise 1 for at least 15 minutes, twice a day.
- Writing down our experience after each session in the diary.
- Making enlarged copies of the “happy” photo and keeping it in our room, wallet, mobile phone, and computer as every parent does with their child’s photo.
- Selecting one or more of your favorite happy songs or love songs in English or your mother tongue.



Week 2

Stage Three: Falling in love with the child

- In this stage we establish an imaginative but passionate loving relationship with the child.
- This falling in love will activate the reward system of the brain by releasing happy hormones and neurotransmitters, which create the motivation, capacity and energy needed to carry out self-attachment protocols to raise the child to emotional maturity.
- Throughout history, human beings have created passionate and warm relationships with animate and inanimate objects and concepts and have endowed immense significance to these relationships to use them to regulate their emotions.
- In self-attachment, the theoretical basis of falling in love with the child is primary narcissism or innate self-love, which is hypothesized to exist in all individuals.



Narcissism and falling in love with the child

- With emotional maturity primary narcissism is usually moderated by emotional development, but childhood trauma can cause its perpetuation and even aggravation.
- Self-attachment makes use of the existing primary narcissism in human beings, in other words our intrinsic love of ourselves.
- The goal is that by falling in love with the child, we become able to have a new emotional birth and growth that will eventually contain our narcissism.
- However, falling in love with the child is quite different from being in love with one's self.
- Our adult falls in love with our child as good parents are in love with their children, and attends to the child lovingly but at the same time contains the anti-social selfishness and unreasonable egoistic expectations of the child.



Exercise 2:

Falling in love with the child



- We place the selected happy photo in different areas at home and at work.
- We always carry the happy picture in our purse, wallet, phone, or laptop.
- We select one or two happy love songs that we have always liked and choose one or two exciting phrases from them.
- While looking at the happy photo/avatar, we first quietly, and later loudly, recite the selected happy love songs and imagine that in this way we are establishing a deep emotional bond in our mind with the child.
- While looking at our happy photo/avatar, we recite the selected happy love songs with a loud voice, gradually using our entire body (shaking shoulders and hands and moving the eyes and eyebrows), and imagine that in this way, like a parent, we are have a loving dialogue and are dancing with the child. When using the happy photo, we also shake our head (but not when using the avatar which can cause nausea.)

Examples of songs for falling in love with the child in English

My Heart Will Go On (James Horner)

Every night in my dreams
I see you, I feel you,
That is how I know you go on
Far across the distance
And spaces between us
You have come to show you go on
Near, far, wherever you are
I believe that the heart does go on
Once more you open the door
And you're here in my heart
And my heart will go on and on
Love can touch us one time
And last for a lifetime
And never let go till we're one
Love was when I loved you
One true time I hold to
In my life we'll always go on
Near, far, wherever you are
I believe that the heart does go on
Once more...

What A Wonderful World (Sam Cooke)

Don't know much about history
Don't know much biology
Don't know much about a science book,
Don't know much about the French I took
But I do know that I love you,
And I know that if you love me, too,
What a wonderful world this would be
Don't know much about geography,
Don't know much trigonometry
Don't know much about algebra,
Don't know what a slide rule is for
But I do know that one and one is two,
And if this one could be with you,
What a wonderful world this would be
Now, I don't claim to be an "A" student,
But I'm tryin' to be
For maybe by being an "A" student, baby,
I can win your love for me
Don't know much about history,
Don't know much biology
Don't know much about a science book,
Don't know much about the French I took
But I do know that I love you,
And I know that if you love me, too,
What a wonderful world this would be

Restoring the derelict house and building a grand new house

- Through imagination or by drawing, we begin to restore the derelict house and build a grand, new, stable house in its place.
- Some of the pillars of the new house are intended to provide the safe haven of secure attachment, and others establish a safe base for addressing and tackling life's challenges.
- The new house has bright and sunny rooms and we imagine that the self-attachment exercises are carried out in one of these rooms, i.e., in a bright and sunny environment.
- For instance, we imagine that we are singing the happy love songs in one of the rooms of this house.
- The unrestored basement of the new house is the remnant of the derelict house and is still awash with negative affects including fear, rage and despair.
- When we suffer from these negative emotions we imagine that our child is trapped in this basement and he/she gradually learns to use his/her will to open the door of the basement, walk out and enter the bright rooms reuniting with the adult.

Exercise 3:

Vowing to adopt the child as own child



- After falling in love with the child, our adult imaginatively adopts the child as our own child.
- In a carefully organized and memorable ceremony, we loudly and solemnly pledge that from now on, like a devoted and loving parent we will consistently and wholeheartedly support the child in every way possible.
- This means that the adult vows to intervene, to attend to, and to comfort the child, any time and any place, in any depressive or anxious condition and in any crisis.
- This pledge must be as strong and consistent as that which good parents have for their children. They do everything they can for the health and emotional growth of their children.
- This must be a life-long pledge: optimal thought and behavioral patterns must be constantly strengthened with self-attachment protocols to remain effective in the face of non-optimal thought and behavioral patterns that are deeply rooted in our childhood.

Speaking out loud to the child

- In the process of adopting the child and afterwards, like any real parent, the adult must speak out loud to the child.
- Even though we cannot see our child the area of our brain that relates to long-term memories can hear our voice and recognize its kind content.
- If our name is Anne, we call the child, “Dear Anne”, and if it is Mark, we call him “Dear Mark”.
- The purpose of speaking out loud to the child is to create an emotional bond with them and help in their emotional development, to higher levels of maturity.
- It is through speaking loud with the child that we can develop into a compassionate, creative, happy individual and reach our goals.



**Speaking out loud:
Child and adult**



- In childhood, speaking to one's self in a loud voice plays an important role in emotional and cognitive development and the establishment of an internal dialogue.
- During school years, discipline often leads to the elimination of talking out loud with one's self.
- Often, this is also suppressed at home.
- Research shows that adults who speak out loud with themselves when solving cognitive problems are often more successful.
- Thus, speaking to one's self out loud, whether as a child or an adult, is a sign of emotional and cognitive maturity and not a sign of madness.

A real example of “self-attachment”:

Nick Yarris

- Suffered sexual abuse and brain trauma at the age of 7, in Pennsylvania, USA
- After finishing only 8 years of school he turned to drugs, alcohol, and stealing cars.
- At age 20 he received a death sentence for a murder he had not committed.
- At Huntingdon Prison he suffered torture and severe beatings.
- He practiced what is like a sub-protocol of self-attachment in prison, using a photo from his teenage years and vowing to support that child to succeed in life.
- He taught himself psychology and philosophy by reading thousands of literary, psychological, and philosophical books.
- He remained in prison for 23 years until he was released in 2005 after a DNA test proved he had not committed the crime he was incarcerated for.
- His story is most striking that one can learn from.



Performing a kind of self-attachment in prison in Nick Yarris's own words



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/b084bn5n>

BBC radio 4 (interview)

Starts 22min 45 sec finishes 31min 28

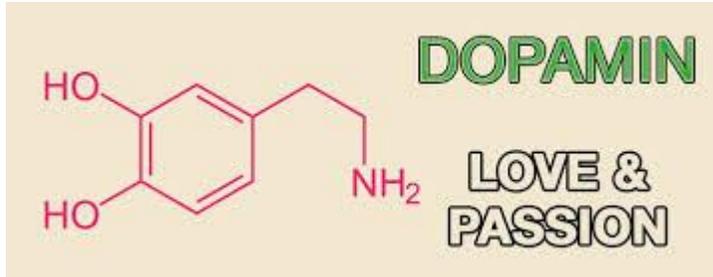
(24min 43sec --- 28min 55sec)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFsan_5sRzw

2h 15m (interview)

(7min 54sec --- 9min 34sec)

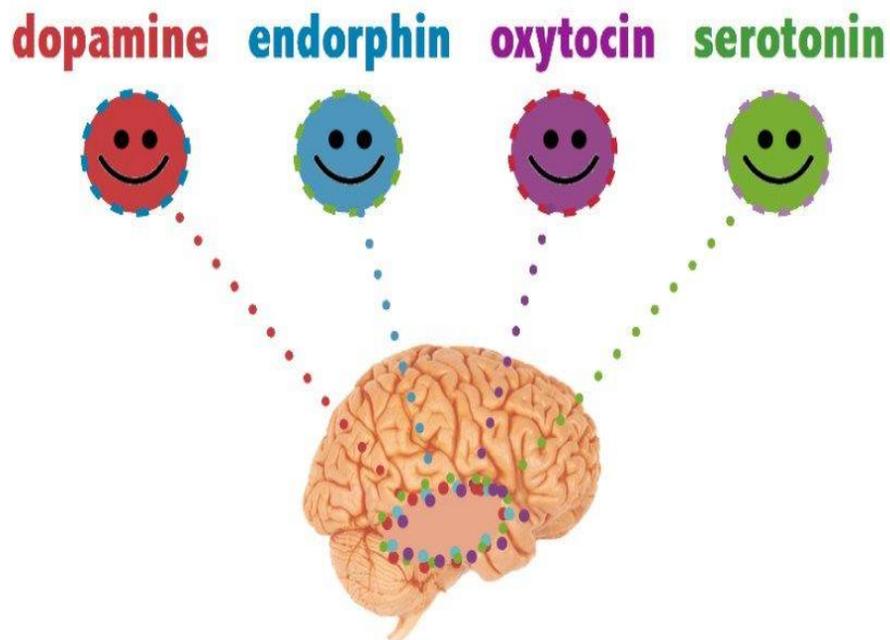
Examining “being in love” under fMRI



- The foundation for developing secure attachment is a parent’s unconditional and consistent love.
- As seen in the workshops three different experiments have had similar results.
- The brain activity of the following groups is measured under fMRI:
Mothers and young lovers look at the photos of their children and loved ones respectively; similarly, devout protestants pray.
- The activated area of the brain in all three groups is in the caudate nucleus, which is the reward center of the neural network.
- In all three groups the area of the brain that is de-activated is in the frontal cortex, which is related to negative affects and social judgment.
- In all these cases love and emotional relations activated the reward center of the neural system, and led to the secretion of dopamine, resulting in hope, motivation, and energy for interacting with the loved one.

Love and affection

- Along with the secretion of a considerable amount of dopamine, neurotransmitters and hormones that result in joy, affection, and care are also produced.
- John Bowlby: Bonding is created through “falling in love” and maintained through “loving”.
- Parental love and love between adults both include eye gazing, hand holding, caressing, smiling, etc.
- Hormones and neurotransmitters like serotonin, oxytocin, vasopressin, and natural internal tranquilizers strengthen parental behavior and emotional connections between parents and children.
- Oxytocin reduces anger and fear that is produced in the amygdala, and therefore leads to positive affects.



Falling in love with the child

- Self-attachment hypothesis: The process of falling in love with the child through singing to him/her happy love songs while looking at childhood pictures leads to the secretion of dopamine in the brain's reward center, which in turn leads to hope and motivation for carrying out the self-attachment protocols.
- The secretion of dopamine also leads to the secretion of serotonin, oxytocin, and vasopressin, which prepare us for loving and taking care of the child.



Week Three

Stage Four: Reparenting

Exercise 4:

Maintaining our love with the child



- Our adult must always remember the vow for the unwavering bond with the child.
- We choose a short phrase such as “You are my beloved”.
- We repeatedly utter it loudly while we look at the happy and unhappy photos/avatars; the aim is to become habituated to uttering this phrase.
- We recite one or two examples of the happy love songs we selected in Stage Three.
- We loudly repeat these songs using our whole body.
- The goal is that by memorizing these songs, we will get used to reciting them, and as a result always keep the relationship with the child in mind.

Maintaining a loving relationship with the child

- Habituation to singing the selected happy love songs is so strengthened in this way that we develop a tendency to spontaneously, unintentionally and effortlessly engage in reciting these songs in all kinds of circumstances.
- As we become more habituated to singing these songs, we will be able to engage in reciting them even when we are depressed or anxious.
- This will help reduce our pain and remind us of the loving relationship with the child.
- These exercises help keep the secretion of serotonin, dopamine, and other mood enhancing neurotransmitters at a high level.
- This will lead to more hope, motivation, and energy, and will have a moderating effect on depression and anxiety.

Exercise 5

Protocols for creating zest for life

- Looking into a mirror, we imagine our image to be that of the child and in this condition, we loudly recite the selected happy love songs using our entire body, i.e., shaking our head and shoulders and moving our eyes, eyebrows, hands and arms.
- We repeat the songs and poems as many times as possible in different circumstances, such as while walking on the street and doing house work, to integrate them in our new life.



Exercise 6

Loosening facial and body muscles

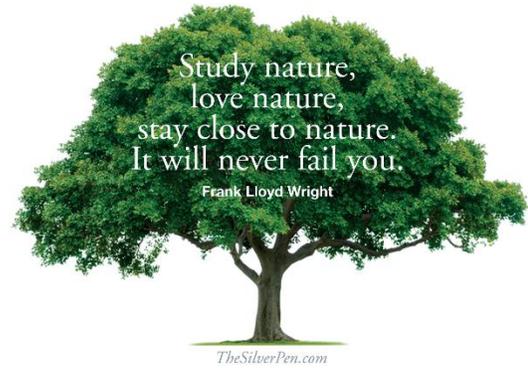
- Just as negative patterns can cause rigidity in our mind and behavior, they can also lead to rigidity in facial and body muscles, and thus prevent the emotional development of our child.
- It is therefore vital to loosen up facial and body muscles as we sing our selected songs to simulate and encourage the spontaneity of the child.
- Loosening the body and mind at least twice a day we systematically engage in playing, dancing, laughing and having fun with the child as parents do with their children.



Exercise 7:

Protocols for love of nature

- Attachment to nature is an effective way to increase joy and reduce negative emotions.
- But creating an attachment to nature is only possible through falling in love with nature.
- Now, we should keep in mind poems about love of nature (Ex. from Armstrong)
- On a day when we have enough time, we head to a park or forest and spend some time admiring a beautiful, glorious tree. It is as if we are seeing the glory of its branches and leaves for the first time, and lovingly admiring it.
- We repeat this process continuously and with different trees, until we feel like we have developed an attachment to nature that can help us regulate our emotions and excitements. This will make us want to spend a certain amount of time in nature every day.



Week Four



Next: Learning to laugh

- We learn from our family and cultural experiences when to laugh and when to refrain from laughter.
- In optimal settings, children learn to laugh in almost all contexts without contempt and without ignoring life's pain and problems.
- They learn to find something positive and humorous behind every tragedy.
- Charlie Chaplin: "To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain, and play with it."
- And, "Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot."
- Nietzsche: "That which does not kill us, makes us stronger."

Learning to laugh



- Belly laughter or Duchenne laughter increases positive affects, and is spontaneous, involuntary, and a reaction to a “harmless incongruity”.
- Duchenne laughter is known as the best medicine for many problems.
- People laugh 30% more in groups than they do alone.
- Only 10-15% of group laughter is due to a comic content. Most often group laughter occurs in response to mundane sentences like: “Where were you?” or “Mark’s here!”
- With the previous exercises we have become aware of our emotions and have acquired the ability to enhance our positive affects. We have come to experience joy and learned to accept ourselves more.
- Now we can learn to laugh and not take life as seriously all the time as before.

The comic game of life

- With the various role-playing exercises, we are now at a stage where we can play the main game, the comic game of life.
- In this comic game we allow ourselves to interpret life as a comedic screenplay, where we can begin to laugh without hostility or mockery at things that until now we have taken very seriously.
- Laughing at things that we have taken seriously is being playful, and not a sign of disrespect or contempt for anyone including ourselves.
- Our laughter takes place with compassion and love for the child.
- The goal is come to believe that unlike the past, in this game we can see our problems and issues in a positive light and with a sense of humour and joy.

**Life is a
comedy for
those who
think, but a
tragedy for
those who feel.**

What makes us laugh?



Chaplin Kant Plato

- 1- Superiority (Plato): We laugh when we see ourselves as superior to someone
- 2- Incongruity theory (Kant): We laugh in hearing a joke when its punchline violates the expectation built earlier in the joke.
- 3- “Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot.”
(Charlie Chaplin)
- 4- Evolutionary theory: Laughter developed in higher primates as a play signal.

Exercise 8:

Laughing on our own



- Every long journey begins with a small step (a Chinese proverb).
- The first laughter in this game is laughing with ourselves for being successful in accomplishing something, however unimportant and trivial.
- This successful act can be going for a walk, doing some sport, doing housework, like cooking, cleaning, shopping, talking to another person, or reading an article.
- In people with physical disabilities, the accomplishment can be succeeding to walk, or simply breathing.
- With every small accomplishment we smile victoriously, and gradually turn this smile into laughter, and over time make our laughter last longer and longer.
- The motivation for this laughter: 1. The silliness of the exercise itself, and 2. Our present superiority compared to our past.
- After becoming skillful in this game we are ready to smile, and eventually laugh without any contempt at some of the things we have done or said in the past, while at the same time maintaining our compassion for the child.
- Laughing on our own, and especially at ourselves is a sign of emotional maturity, and it is uplifting.

Exercise 9:

Laughing at our two childhood photos



- Next, we will learn to laugh at our two childhood photos.
- What are our reasons for laughing at our two childhood photos?
- We can laugh at these pictures without any contempt for three reasons:
 1. “Life is a tragedy when seen in close-up, but a comedy in long-shot.”
(Charlie Chaplin)
 2. The emotional incongruity between the two pictures (Emanuel Kant)
 3. Our sense of superiority today when we can laugh at these photos,
compared to the past. (Plato)
 4. Our playfulness. (Evolutionary theory of laughter)

Mental Exercise - Learning to laugh

- Physical exercise is necessary for a healthy body and mental exercise is necessary for a healthy mind.
- Reading, playing mental games, learning new things, and meditation can all be considered mental exercises.
- But the most important mental exercise for a healthy mind and soul is one that makes us happy.
- William James: Do we laugh because we are happy or are we happy because we laugh? In fact, it is because we laugh that we are happy.
- Therefore, an important mental exercise for a healthy mind is learning to laugh.
- We walk, swim, and run for fitness, not to get from one place to another, but because these exercises keep us healthy.
- We can also learn to laugh as a mental exercise without an accompanying humour.



Exercise 10

Continuous laughter

- In self-attachment continuous laughter allows us to continue the comic game of life using the least amount of energy.
- At a time when we are alone we open our mouth slightly, loosen our face muscles, form a Duchenne smile, and slowly and continuously repeat one of the following tones:
 - eh, eh, eh, eh; or ah, ah, ah, ah; or oh, oh, oh, oh; or uh, uh, uh, uh; or ye, ye, ye, ye
 - If you need a subject to laugh at, you can laugh at the silliness of the exercise!
 - Continuous laughter can be the best antidote to stress, leading to a constant secretion of euphoric neurotransmitters (dopamine, serotonin, etc.)



WEEK FIVE

Next: Processing current negative emotions



- These exercises are meant to contain current negative emotions – such as anger, rage, fear, anxiety or depression – in relation to family, friends, work, or society.
- With closed eyes we imagine the unhappy photo/avatar and project our negative emotions to the unhappy photo/avatar representing the child.
- By projecting our negative emotions onto the child in this way, we connect to our adult who is now responsible to attend to the problems of the child, supporting the child and modulating the child's negative emotions.

Type 11 exercise

Processing current negative emotions



- While projecting our negative emotions to the unhappy photo/avatar and the child, with eyes closed
 - (i) we loudly reassure the child, and,
 - (ii) give our own face/neck/head a self-massage (by removing the Google cardboard if necessary);
 - (iii) we repeat (i) and (ii) until we are calmed and comforted
- The reassuring and cuddling continues until we contain the negative emotions and switch from imagining the unhappy photo/avatar to focusing on the happy ones.
- These exercises help secrete oxytocin and vasopressin that act as natural tranquilizers and help reduce negative emotions.

Next: laughing at our own misfortunes

- We gradually learn to laugh at challenges that are caused by unpleasant events in our lives.
- Harmless incongruities can be the foundation of our laughter (Kant).
- Not only have we survived these events, they may have even been useful for us. Perhaps they have placed us on a creative path, or taught us lessons that have made us wiser and more mature.
- Yet we continue to perceive these events as “painful” because we have become habituated to considering ourselves victims of these events.
- Discovering this harmless incongruity can be a motivator for us to laugh; just as we learned to look at a black vase differently and see it filled with whiteness.



“To truly laugh, you must be able to take your pain, and play with it.”

Laughing at the harmless contradiction of deep-rooted beliefs



- “To those human beings who are of any concern to me I wish suffering, desolation, sickness, ill-treatment, indignities—I wish that they should not remain unfamiliar with profound self-contempt, the torture of self-mistrust, the wretchedness of the vanquished: I have no pity for them, because I wish them the only thing that can prove today whether one is worth anything or not—that one endures.” Nietzsche.
- This makes sense with his famous: “What doesn’t kill me makes me stronger.”
- Nietzsche’s wish is funny and a harmless contradiction of our deep-rooted beliefs.
- As we read the quote above, we remember our past sufferings and begin to laugh out loud when we get to “...I wish suffering...”

Laughing at our pains



1. First, we visualize a painful event that took place in the distant past that we have struggled with for a long time, and despite its painfulness we try to see a positive impact it has had.
2. We must start with a painful event that happened in the distant past, so that by now we have been able to contain our negative affects toward it.
3. After repeated daily exercises, once we have experienced the forceful effectiveness of laughing at distant problems, we can gradually begin to laugh at more recent painful memories.
4. This laughing exercise may take a few minutes and has two parts, as we will next describe.

Exercise 12: Laughing at our pain

- The first part includes ordinary instructions often suggested by friends or specialists.
- The second part is a non-serious incongruity that is funny and intended to make us laugh whole-heartedly for a minute or two.
- In the expectation of hearing a funny joke we loosen our facial muscles, slightly open our mouths, and to grasp the incongruity in the joke we move our eyebrows up as a sign of surprise.
- As we repeat the sentences in these exercises out loud, we slowly begin to laugh in the first part of the exercise as we wait for the second part. And once we get to the first sentence of the second part, which is in complete contrast to our beliefs, we laugh out loud.



Exercise 12 (continued):



- Not only we should (as our friends and counselors/therapists suggest), bear it, accept it, try to deal with it, tolerate its memory, try harder to endure its memory, adapt yourself to its memory, analyze and understand it and by doing so contain your negative emotions and learn lessons for the future, try to soften your thoughts, depressive emotions, anxieties, etc.
- But also we should (as in Nietzsche's wish), consider it a cherished treasure (ha ha ha...), treasure it with great love (ha ha ha...), welcome its challenges with all your heart (ha ha ha...), consider it a good omen with all your heart (ha ha ha...), consider its challenges a great fortune (ha ha ha...), celebrate its memory (ha ha ha...), celebrate its memory with great joy (ha ha ha...), consider it a true love (ha ha ha...), consider it a true love with great passion and intimacy (ha ha ha...) ...

Laughing at our pain

- The laughter that results from these exercises is a Duchenne smile and non-malicious. What leads to laughter is the incongruity between the first part and the second part, which is inconsistent with our beliefs.
- Laughing exercises are like an antidote for depression, because it turns the topic of depression into a cause for whole-hearted laughter, which ultimately leads to the secretion of euphoric neurotransmitters.
- After repeated practice of the laughing exercises we can begin to apply it to things that worry us in the present and the future.
- The repetition of laughing exercises 18(ii) transforms the way we look at the world and is the foundation of creativity.



Week Six



Perspective change for getting over negative emotions

- When we get deeply stuck in the storeroom of our negative emotions we become stuck in the gravitational field of powerful negative patterns.
- This is like staring at the Gestalt vase in the figure above, which is full of dark and negative emotions. The more we stare at it the more we get drowned in its darkness and negativity.
- It is like seeing a glass half-empty instead of half-full.
- However, having acquired some mental flexibility by previous exercises, our attention can be switched away from seeing the black vase to the two white faces.

Exercise 13

Perspective change for getting over negative emotions

- When negative emotions overwhelm us, it is like we have drowned ourselves in the black vase.
- However, having created a positive powerful pattern of love with the child through the previous exercises, we can now depart from the strong gravitational field of negative patterns by spontaneously singing our happy love song. In this way we can enter the gravitational field of love for the child instead.
- This is like changing our interpretation of the above image and instead of seeing a black vase of negative emotions discovering two white faces, interpreted as that of the child and the adult who are now looking at each other.
- In other words we can also see the glass as half-full.



Next: Socializing the child

- By consistent repetition of protocols 1-13 we are gradually able to reduce negative emotions and increase positive affects.
- We will gradually be able to carry out the protocols with eyes open rather than closed, and can integrate most of them into our daily life.
- The adult is now gradually able to extend the compassion he/she had for the child to other people too.
- The adult slowly becomes aware of the narcissistic tendencies and anti-social feelings of the child, feelings like envy, jealousy, greed, hatred, mistrust, malevolence, controlling behavior and revengefulness.



Exercise 14

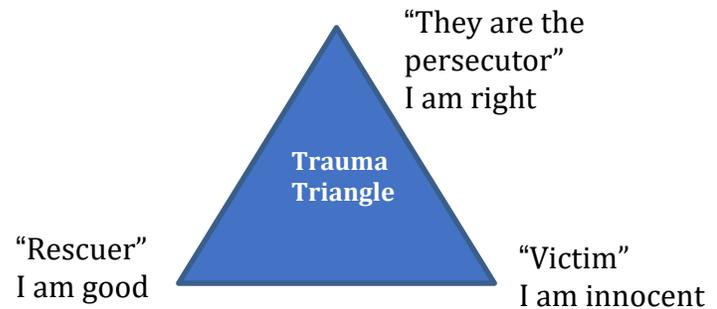
Protocols for socializing the child



- The adult can behave like a good parent here:
- We contain and discourage these anti-social feelings and attitudes of the child by expressing affection to the child and simulating cuddles by giving ourselves a face/neck/head self-massage.
- The adult tries to redirect the child's anger and negative energy (shown through their excited antisocial feelings), toward play, creativity, and development instead.
- As the child's positive affects increase and his/her negative affects decrease, by expressing positive emotions he/she can attract more positive reactions from others, and in turn gain a more positive outlook toward others.
- Destructive aggression can be sublimated to creativity.

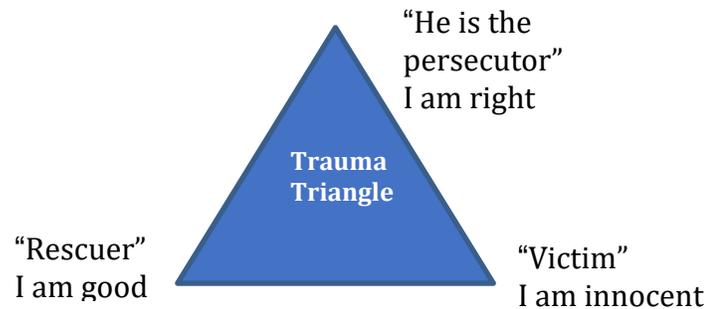
Next: Internal persecutor

- The experience of violence in childhood can lead to the development of the trauma triangle.
- We subconsciously develop an internal aggressor. (identification with the aggressor: Sándor Ferenczi, Anna Freud)
- Following the pattern of the aggressor, we subconsciously develop an internal persecutor.
- With the experience of extreme violence in childhood the pattern of “victim”, “rescuer”, and “internal persecutor” takes shape in us and in turn leads to narcissism and the suppression of creativity.



Internal persecutor hinders creativity

- The trauma triangle does four things against creativity:
 1. It subconsciously draws us to situations like our initial trauma (repetition of trauma).
 2. In times of stress the internal persecutor internalizes negative thoughts and emotions and awakens our sense of being a “victim” (i.e. in chronic depression, anxiety, perfectionism, nail biting, etc.).
 3. When faced with a crisis in a personal/social relationship, we project our internal persecutor on to the other person and like a victimized child, we see them as a new aggressor. With a sense of narcissism and righteousness we try to control this person and others.
 4. We project our internal persecutor on to political and social figures and with a black and white point of view we blame them for all our problems.



It also reinforces several types of extreme and unhelpful thought patters:

- (i) Black and white thinking, inability to see the gray scale and nuances
- (ii) Paranoid thinking, routinely assuming people are set to harm us
- (iii) Catastrophizing, blowing up any problem and difficulty
- (iv) Overgeneralizing, applying a negative experience to all possible settings.

Exercise 15:
**Recognizing and containing narcissism
and the internal persecutor**



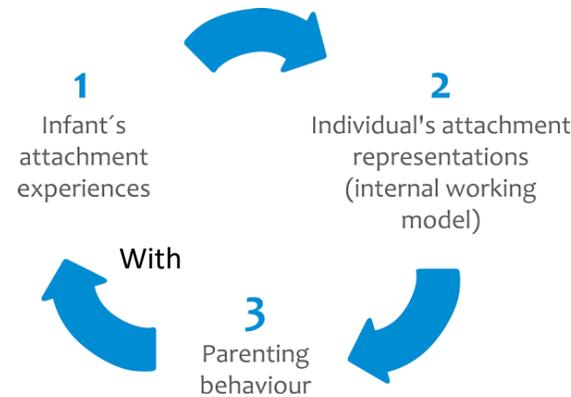
- The adult becomes aware of the facets of the trauma triangle: internal persecutor, victim, and rescuer.
- The adult examines the effects of this triangle (narcissism and lack of creativity) in daily life and previous experiences.
- The adult reviews their important life experiences and their social and political points of view as an adult, with awareness how the internal persecutor operates.
- The adult creates a list of examples from their own experiences for the four different ways the internal persecutor operates.
- The adult carefully analyzes their life experiences for examples of being drawn to trauma, being traumatized by the internal persecutor, and projecting the internal persecutor onto others.
- Based on the above, the adult re-evaluates their experiences, contains the internal persecutor and narcissism, and allows for the development of creativity.

Week Seven

Exercise 16:

A more optimal internal working model

- negative emotions reduced, positive emotions increased, with a reduction of anti-social feelings and awareness of the internal persecutor and tendency to control others, the child gradually feels, based on their emotional development, that they need not consider themselves a prisoner of their early family environment and its consequent emotions.
- Guided by the adult, the child learns that narcissism and projecting the internal persecutor on to others blocks their creativity and does not serve them.
- The child feels that through secure attachment to the adult they can develop a more optimal internal working model to interpret and maintain relations with others to enjoy a sense of inner calm with themselves and with others.



Next: Crisis in personal relationships

- In secular societies individuals face personal relationship crises (with parents, spouses, friends, coworkers, etc.) without the help of an internal dialogue with God.
- In these situations, negative feelings such as humiliation, pain, and indignity, along with hatred and revenge, overwhelm the child, who becomes dominant with respect to the adult.
- In these circumstances the adult is so influenced by the negative feelings of the child that they are unable to find a solution to the crisis.
- In such crisis, we start by consistently practicing the protocols for moderating current negative affects and inducing laughter to contain the childhood's negative affects and arousal level.
- As a result, we avoid behaving and saying things in a reactive manner that can worsen the crisis.
- Practicing the protocols for containing negative affects we learn patience and self-control.

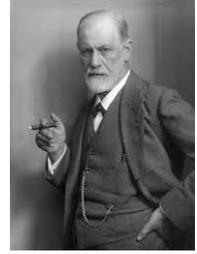


Exercise 17: Solving personal crisis



- After the child's arousal level is reduced and as we continue to practice the protocol for modulating negative affects, and the protocol for laughter, we ask our child the following:
 - How can you see the crisis as a way of becoming stronger? (ha ha ha)
 - How can you interpret the crisis as a way of reaching your high goal? (ha ha ha)
 - Has the internal persecutor been projecting onto others again?
- The adult asks the following questions:
 - What is the similarity between this crisis and ones I have faced before? How is it similar to the family crisis I experienced as a child? Aren't the other person's positive attributes greater than his/her negative ones? How would a mature person interpret the crisis in comparison to my child? Can I see it from the perspective of someone else? Can I put myself in their place and understand their affects? Given my new inner working model can I find a way to calm the people involved in the crisis so we can find a better solution for it?
- If not, can I respectfully maintain my distance and end the argument?

Next: reprocessing painful childhood events



Freud

- Childhood trauma can produce strong, negative mental, emotional and behavioral schemas.
- Sigmund Freud was discovered this, and labeled its dramatic consequence “repetition compulsion” – repeating a traumatic event to gain control over it.
- If we are now stronger with more positive emotions, we can reprocess our traumas, challenging negative episodes and replace them with positive patterns.
- In self-attachment one initially gains the skills to enhance positive emotions before tackling childhood traumas through revisiting and reprocessing them.

Exercise 18:

reprocessing childhood traumas



- With closed eyes, we recall a painful episode from our childhood - such as emotional/ physical abuse - with all the details we still remember; associating the face of the child we were in the past with the selected unhappy photo/avatar.
- As soon as recalling the associated emotions such as helplessness, humiliation and rage, with closed eyes we imagine our adult intervening in the episode by
 - (i) approaching the child quickly as any good parent with their child in distress,
 - (ii) loudly reassuring the child that they have now come to save them, by standing up with a loud voice to the perpetrator, for example: “Why are you hitting my child?”, and, by supporting the child with a loud voice, for example: “My darling, I will not let them hurt you any more.”
 - (iii) imaginatively cuddling the child, by a face/neck/head self-massage, and
 - (iv) repeating (i) and (ii) until they feel comforted and soothed.

Exercise 18 (continued):

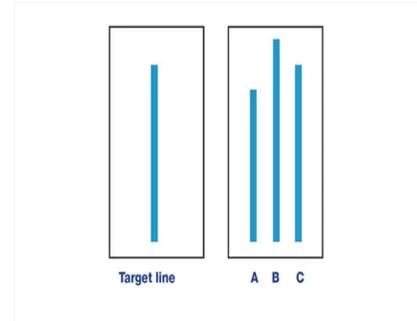
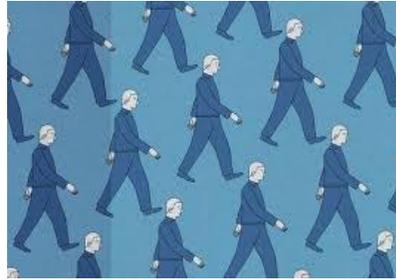
- These exercise sessions revisit and challenge the entrenched patterns of past traumas.
- Hypothesis: By inducing oxytocin and vasopressin and natural opiates they build new more optimal neural circuits against the old ones.
- These sessions are repeated for different types of traumatic patterns and scenes until they are effectively processed emotionally, and new neural patterns are experienced in relation to them.



WEEK EIGHT

Next: enhancing creativity

Psychology of conformity



- “Man is born free but everywhere he is in chains.”
Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*
- Asch Experiment (1951): 75% of participants vote with the majority even when it is clearly wrong.
- In people who insist on their position despite the wrong vote of the majority, the amygdala in the limbic system becomes active as a sign of anxiety and fear of the majority.
- Rumi: Die, die in this love
- Nietzsche: Herd mentality
- Current standards of “majority” for controlling society

Reviving the creative child mode

- The capacity to be alone in the presence of their primary caregiver develops in children with secure attachment enables these children to find their **true self**, the source of creativity, independence, and spontaneity. (Winnicott)
- He goes on to say that otherwise the child will only develop a **false self** that is created in reaction to their environment.
- Self-attachment also creates the capacity for our child to be alone in the presence of our adult by creating secure attachment of the child with the adult.
- The revival of the child creates a context where we can be creative.
- When they are three or four-years-old, children can quickly learn to pretend (imagination), do associative thinking (relationship between phenomena), as well as analogical reasoning (similarities and differences between phenomena), which are the basis of creativity.
- Spontaneous children don't have any preconceived rigid framework in understanding events. But with outside pressure spontaneity can gradually be replaced by schema and mental coherence.



Exercise 19:

Updating our beliefs to enhance creativity

- We challenge our usual ideological framework to weaken any one-sided patterns and encourage spontaneity and the examination of issues from multiple perspectives.
- We practice this with subjects and themes that we have deep-rooted beliefs and are excited about:
- This may include anything from political/social issues to ideas on marriage and sexuality.
- For instance, we examine the topic of racism and consider whether we have any latent racism, and we consider this subject in the dual role of proponent and opponent.
- We do the same thing with the topics of marriage and sexual orientation, where we may have stronger views.
- If we are politically in the center, we consider the subject both from a leftist and rightist point of view and try to understand both sides of the issue and challenge our dominant ideological framework to see the subject from three perspectives.



Next: strengthening the Adult to improve the child's growth and development of creativity

- For our adult to play the role of a new parent he/she requires the necessary strength and capability in different areas.
- If we have had any weaknesses in our relationship with our parents in childhood, we may not have the necessary tools for playing the role of parent.
- To help the child's emotional development and creative progress the adult needs to be patient and show perseverance in dealing with problems and challenges, and to not lose hope in response to setbacks with respect to these challenges.
- How can we develop a strong, persistent parent that can ultimately help the child develop these same qualities?



Exercise 20: Practicing Affirmations

- Put together a list of instructive sayings by prominent figures.
- Choose the ones that have an impact on you from the start, providing you with strength in the long path for reaching your goal.
- Read them out and repeat to become habituated to them.
- A couple of examples by Nietzsche again:
- “My formula for greatness in a human being is Amor Fati: that one wants nothing to be other than it is, not in the future, not in the past, not in all eternity. Not just bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism in mendacious in the face of what is necessary—but love them.” (Nietzsche)
- “I assess the power of a will by how much resistance, pain, torture it endures and knows how to turn it to its advantage.” (Nietzsche)



