



SOULFUL LIVING

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Your Inner Child – Part I



“The closer we get to uncovering ourselves, the more difficult it becomes to face the truth.

Sooner or later we stop running, out of sheer exhaustion and desperation, and turn around to face our image.

The pain that we go through during this revelation is negligible compared to the State of Grace that we enter into when we have finally moved on.”

– Christiane Northrup

I'd like to begin this article by emphasizing that not all people who are in therapy, or who are working to maintain long-term weight loss must revisit their childhood in order to move forward. However, if a person chooses to explore his past, the intention behind the exploration should be solution-focused and approached with a sense of self-compassion and curiosity. The purpose is not to re-victimize, place blame, or get stuck in retelling old stories, but rather to help him understand how his reaction to past experiences may be contributing to his present-day struggle with food, weight, and negative self-regard. Once armed with this knowledge he can then respond to his world differently.

I have clients who absolutely know when they are eating in response to feelings other than physical hunger. They know when they are eating, because they are stressed, or bored, or lonely, or as a way to celebrate with friends. They are very conscious of how different kinds of foods affect them physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. They know which foods give them good healthy energy and which ones deplete them of that very energy. They understand the concept that every food they eat has a consequence that will bring them closer to living the life of their dreams—or not! Yet, they consciously continue to overeat and often choose to eat foods that, in time, will rob them of good health and vitality, the very thing they desperately desire. This often leads to feelings of self-hatred, shame, anger, and frustration. And yet it is at this time that they need more self-love, compassion, and understanding; not self-denigration.

It is apparent that while they have come to know the role that compulsive eating has played in their lives, they do not yet understand the source of their uncomfortable feelings, nor do they know how to effectively manage, tolerate, or process those feelings. On some level, they are fearful of being their Truth. It is at this point when their journey to recovery often leads to exploring the past and discovering clues for creating a joy-filled future—one that is free of negative self-chatter and struggle with food and weight issues.

As part of this journey, many clients discover that they learned to ignore the voice of their inner wisdom at a very young age. They sometimes find it helpful, then, to investigate the concept of healing their inner child. In this context, I am using the term Inner Child to describe that part of you which is alive, energetic, intuitive, passionate, creative, and playful. It is the part of you that feels and expresses your deepest need for security and nurturing. It is also the part that carries the pain of unresolved past emotional traumas. It is the place where guilt, anxiety, shame, and fear reside. Your inner child is the part of you that knows your Truth.

If you find it unsafe to be your Authentic Self, to be your Truth, chances are you disconnected from your Inner Child. You may have even learned to deny her existence. This makes for a very conflicted, frustrated, and fearful Inner Child, who can make you—the adult—feel unsettled, anxious, depressed, sad, frustrated, or nervous. In an effort to ignore her cries to be heard, it would make sense that you find ways like overeating, drinking, gossiping, keeping your life in a state of chaos, chronic caretaking, overworking, or other destructive habits to distract you from the uncomfortable feelings associated with denying her existence.

There are several ways to reacquaint yourself with your Inner Child if you feel so inclined. *Please be advised: if you have a history of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, it is important that you only do the following exercise with the guidance and support of a well-seasoned therapist, as it can trigger flashbacks and painful memories.*

One way is to gather pictures from each phase of your life, starting with infancy. Set aside a few hours to go through these pictures. Choose a time when you are most likely to be present and relaxed and not feel pressured or hurried. Take a few deep cleansing breaths as you begin this journey down memory lane. Consciously set an intention to view your pictures through the eyes of love, kindness, curiosity, and compassion.

Be mindful of your initial gut feelings as you look at each picture. Do you seem happy or sad, posed or free-spirited?

What kind of child were you: obedient, wild, silly, sad, serious, responsible? How was life at home at the time the picture was taken? Did everyone get along? Did you have lots of friends? Were you in school? Did you have any hobbies?

Notice any fluctuations in your weight as you review your life through the pictures. Are there correlations between your weight fluctuations and significant events in your life? If there are other behaviors you would like to change—like over working, difficulty setting boundaries, people pleasing, avoidance of conflict at all costs—can you discern from the pictures when you adopted that behavior? Can you understand how that behavior may have served to protect you as you were growing up? What are some other observations you can make?

Take some time to write about your observations. How did it feel to revisit your childhood? Were there things as a young child that you needed but never received? How did you learn to silence your inner knowing? How were you taught to express feelings?

Choose a picture of you as a child. It should be a picture that speaks to you. Look into that child's eyes. Feel what she needs. Tell her what she needs to hear to feel loved, to feel safe, to feel wanted, to feel validated, to feel heard, to feel like she matters, to feel important. Let her know that she no longer has any reason to be frightened, or sad, or lonely because you, the adult, are there to love and protect her and will never again leave her side. Keep her picture in a place where you can easily see it.

Now, from this moment on, know that every word you say to and about yourself is a word that you are saying to and about that child. And every action you take will either honor and protect that child or not! Please think about keeping your word to that little child. She really deserves it!

I recently asked one of my clients what she would have thought if someone had told her a year ago that she'd be doing Inner Child work. She was quite passionate in her response:

"No way, there was absolutely no reason why I would want to relive my childhood; unless I could be reborn a different child. I was very happy to keep that little Inner Child tucked away in a box, far away in the back of a closet. I didn't want

to see that little girl and I did everything I could to forget she even existed. She was hurt, traumatized, afraid, alone, and I don't want to remember her, know her, and definitely not embrace her. The past is over and done. No, you have to be out of your mind to think I would want to bring her down and embrace her. Inner Child work, not on your life! You must be out of your mind!"

Needless to say, my client is in the throes of "healing the child within." Read about her journey in the summer issue of *WLS Lifestyles* ●



about louisa...

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