



**OVERCOMING OUR  
RELATIONSHIP FEARS**  
WORKBOOK

Lawrence E. Hedges  
Ph.D., Psy. D., ABPP

# **Overcoming Our Relationship Fears Workbook**

**A Guide for Overcoming the Seven  
Deadly Fears**

**Lawrence E. Hedges**

## ***About the Author***



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### **Identifying and Managing Your Relationship Fears**

This workbook is a guide for overcoming the fears we each experience in our close relationships. This book expands on the body-mind-relationship fears that I have written about in *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears*. This guide not only elaborates in more detail what each of the seven relationship fears is about—but it provides specific exercises for individuals and couples to do in order to learn how each of these seven universal fears operates in their minds, their bodies, and their relationships.

In *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears* I begin by telling the story of how one evening I was swimming laps in my pool after a particularly trying day. I was doing my best not to think about some frustrations I was having in several of my relationships. But as I was breathing deeply and stretching energetically into my laps, I became painfully aware of muscle contractions in various parts of my body. Each knot seemed clearly related to some challenge I was currently facing in one of my relationships. In a flash I suddenly realized that my body is at all times enmeshed in my relationships. I have known for many years that our minds are at all times enmeshed in our relationships. And that if we want to know ourselves better we have to pay close attention to our relationships because our minds originally developed in and continue to live in our relationships.

But what I had not seen until swimming those laps was not only that the body-mind split is artificial, but that our bodies as well as our minds are at all times thoroughly enmeshed in our relationships. I had discovered in the exercise pool that evening the reality of the body-mind-relationship (BMR) connection while thinking about some upsetting relationship issues and simultaneously experiencing a variety of painful physical sensations in my body. For convenience I coined the term “BMR connection” (pronounced “beamer”) as shorthand for the body-mind-relationship connection—that place at our deepest center where our relationship fears reside in our bodies and minds.

This essential BMR connection should come as no surprise. After all, don't we live our entire lives in various kinds of emotionally-tinged relationships? And don't we know well the emotional daily ups and downs of our relationships? We are deeply connected to each other through all of our emotions. But in the pool when I connected frightening relationship concerns with painful physical sensations I realized that the most important body-mind-relationship connection is fear. I have since realized that relationship fears dominate our bodies and minds far more than we care to imagine!

Modern knowledge is clear—we are body-minds. But as we have come to value what is uniquely human we have gradually lost track of life in our bodies. For example, the way our food is prepared and marketed moves us away from healthy eating and drinking. Watching TV and surfing the web take us away from invigorating physical and aerobic activities. But there is much more we have lost track of—the ways our body-minds are continuously enmeshed in our emotionally significant relationships. Ask any massage therapist and she'll be quick to tell you, "It's true, people's relationships dominate their bodies and minds—I feel it with my hands every day as people moan and yell about whatever they're going through at the time."

Not wanting to think of ourselves as fearful, it seems that we have turned away from noticing on a moment-to-moment basis how deeply our emotional involvements with others affect us. We choose not to notice how much fear is stimulated by our relationships and what a toll our fears take upon us.

This workbook is about our human struggle to be more alive, more loving, and more healthy in our minds, our bodies, and our relationships. The exercises are not simply for frightened people who want to get rid of their fears. Nor is this workbook even primarily about fears—but about how to develop more meaningful and fulfilling intimate relationships by learning how to identify and release our relationship fears on a daily basis.

It is my belief that the seven deadly relationship fears silently stifle our lives in a myriad of untold ways. Frightening experiences in relationships we have encountered in the course of growing up have left constricting marks on the ways we think, the way we move, and the ways in which we conduct our intimate relationships. In order not to keep you guessing any longer, the seven universal relational fears are:

- (1) the fear of being alone
- (2) the fear of making connections with others
- (3) the fear of being abandoned by the ones we love
- (4) the fear of not being able to assert ourselves fully
- (5) the fear of not being seen, appreciated, and recognized
- (6) the fear of failure and success in competitive relationships, and
- (7) the fear of being fully alive

This workbook is designed not only to help you identify and understand your personal ways of fearing, but to show you ways of contacting and releasing the deadly stress tensions that affect your body, your mind, and your relationships. The exercises in this workbook are designed to show you how through anxiety, tension, and stress we daily produce in ourselves a variety of physical and mental symptoms that deaden our lives and eventually threaten our health and longevity. The exercises specify self-guided actions that promise an expanded awareness of the silent fears which operate deviously and destructively in our body-mind-relationship connections. Using these exercises will allow you to overcome inner obstacles to a more meaningful life and fulfilling relationships.

We live in a society that idealizes love, families, friendships, and relationships. But seldom do we acknowledge that good relationships by their very nature are troubling in many ways. Worse, we all know that good relationships are difficult to establish and even more difficult to maintain. Robust health, fulfilling self-experiences, and enlivening relationships develop as a result of people being courageous in reaching out toward one another and in mutually sharing their life experiences as sincerely and deeply as possible on a daily basis. In learning to be with each other, in learning to laugh and to play together, and in learning to talk seriously with one other about private experiences, two lifetimes of possibility can become entwined in enriching new ways.

On the list of things that people say they want in their intimate relationships, we seldom see at the top of the list the desire to find another person willing to struggle with the problems of relating, a person willing to stay involved and negotiate through life's difficulties in an honest, open, and non-defensive way, or a person committed to dealing simultaneously with both self-interests in the relationship. Nor do we generally think that our own first task in a relationship is considering at all times how the other person is experiencing

us and the relationship. One of the greatest experts on relationships, Harville Hendrix, reminds us that the most important thing in a relationship is not finding the best partner but learning how to be the best partner (Hendrix & Hunt, 2003).

We ignore the ongoing difficulties and hard work of fulfilling relationships because we so deeply fear investing ourselves and becoming hurt in the process of relating. Much as we hate to admit it, beneath all of the daily stresses and problems of modern life lies this problem of how deeply we fear being hurt by others. But even though we do our best to turn away from an awareness of our fears, every day we are seized by momentary flashes of tension accompanied by troubling thoughts and images. If we take ourselves seriously and are willing to stop and consider what is happening in our body-mind-relationship connection at the moment, then we can use these momentary flashes as opportunities for peering into our deeper inner life of relationship fears.

My growing awareness of how deeply we each fear being hurt in relationships has prompted me to write this workbook. For years I have studied my own fears as they operate daily in my significant relationships. As a therapist I have listened to the hidden fears of many people over a lifetime of professional work. Now I write to you about what I have learned.

I hope you use this book to take a journey into yourself—into that strangest of irrational places where body, mind, and relationship connect with fear. I hope you allow yourself an expanded awareness of how deeply hidden fears daily affect your body-mind-relationship connections. The more you allow yourself to know about your hidden frightened side, the better off you will be. Robust living comes from knowing as much as we possibly can about ourselves, not from pretending that we are not afraid or that fear is not a vitally important part of everyday human life.

I hope you enjoy this book and that you benefit greatly from it.

Write me and tell me what you discovered!

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## Chapter One

### How the Seven Deadly Fears Operate in Your Close Relationships

Fear controls our lives in numerous ways whether we are aware of it or not. From the beginning of childhood through our formative years we have developed reactions to many frightening situations. As the twig is bent, so grows the tree. We are creatures of habit and we carry the emotional bends and twists of childhood into later life. Our earliest reactions to fear persist into our present lives to impact how we function and how we relate to others. Very early in life we are taught, "Don't be afraid—you're over-reacting!" "Be brave. Act grown up—handle it!" We soon learn to suppress even the awareness of most of our fears. But when we are no longer conscious of our fears we are unable to distinguish between the real dangers of today and old automatic habits. I call these old habits "fear reflexes." These fear reflexes, which were set up in early childhood, work automatically in our body-mind-relationship connection outside of our awareness—usually to our detriment.

We may ask ourselves why we experience certain persistent tensions and pains in our bodies when there is no apparent physical reason. It seldom occurs to us that these discomforts are symptoms of fear reflexes that live on in our bodies. We may wonder why we keep having the same problems in different relationships. It may not occur to us that we are chronically or habitually afraid and that our fear is essentially a reflex from the past that needlessly thwarts us in our present relationships.

How often in a situation have we asked ourselves, "Why am I so nervous and worked up about this? This is really nothing. It shouldn't make me so stressed out!" If we had stopped for a moment, we might have had a flash of insight from previous painful and upsetting situations. Fear reflexes work to protect us by lumping together painful experiences from the past and alerting us to potential dangers in the present. But fear reflexes left over from the past often work against us by doing our thinking for us. Fear reflexes may signal danger when there is none. Fear reflexes may keep us from noticing some internal danger by focusing

us on something outside of ourselves that we dread.

I speak of Seven Deadly Fears because seven types of fear reflexes have established an ongoing and devastating hold over all of our lives! They severely limit full and passionate living and undermine our capacity for successful relationships. Further, in time these fears can prove fatal to us in many ways. Almost all disease processes—cancers; lung and circulatory diseases; kidney, liver, skin, and gastrointestinal problems; the addictions, eating disorders, and mental disorders; and infectious diseases as well as genetic and constitutional disorders—are dramatically affected by fear reflexes which give rise to chronic tensions and stress patterns. It is not unreasonable to think that many, if not most, people ultimately die from conditions that are either caused or aggravated by long-term stress and fear syndromes. Medical science in the past decade has shown a growing awareness of the interconnectedness of mind and body but has not yet generally recognized the profound impact our ongoing relationships have on our health and longevity.<sup>1</sup>

Usually we are not even aware of fear reflexes as they arise daily to sabotage our activities. We know that we experience tension, nervousness, and stress, but we often don't know the cause of them. Nor are we always conscious of the price we pay in our physical and emotional lives as well as in our relationships. We move on as though everything were okay when, if truth be known, it is not.

If we are to find ways of understanding the deadly impact our personal fears have upon us, we need a general map of the kinds of fears that are common to all people. The Seven Deadly Fears arise out of seven different kinds of relationship experiences, which we all encountered during seven different stages of childhood development. Each of the Seven Deadly Fears can be thought of as a beginning avenue for starting on your personal journey into what holds you back from being the kind of person you want to be, from doing the kinds of things you want to do, and from fully loving and being loved in the ways you desire. Each of the Seven Deadly Fears prevents you from enjoying the health, happiness, and success you deserve as a living, breathing, human being.

With courage, determination, and time, it will be possible for you to learn how your personal fear reflexes operate. You will then be in a position to limit their crippling power, eliminate the many stresses

they create, and transform them into creative energy for being more fully alive. In the chapters that follow we will explore in detail the Seven Deadly Fears in the order that children first encounter them in the process of growing up. In a nutshell here are the seven fears.

### Summary Chart: The Seven Deadly Fears

- |    |                             |  |
|----|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. | The Fear of Being Alone     | We dread reaching out and finding nobody there to respond to our needs. We fear being ignored, being left alone, and being seen as unimportant. We feel the world does not respond to our needs. So what's the use?  |
| 2. | The Fear of Connecting      | Because of frightening and painful experiences in the past, connecting emotionally and intimately with others feels dangerous. Our life experiences have left us feeling that the world is not a safe place. We fear injury so we withdraw from connections.   |
| 3. | The Fear of Being Abandoned | After having connected emotionally or bonded with someone, we fear being either abandoned with our own needs or being swallowed up by the other person's. In either case, we feel the world is not a dependable place; that we live in danger of emotional abandonment. We may become clingy and dependent or we may become super-independent—or both.                                 |
| 4. | The Fear of Self-Assertion  | We have all experienced rejection and perhaps even punishment for expressing ourselves in a way that others don't like. We thus may learn to fear asserting ourselves and letting our needs be known in relationships. We feel the world does not allow us to be truly ourselves. We may either cease putting ourselves out there altogether, we may assert ourselves with a demanding |

vengeance, or we may even relate in passive-aggressive ways.

5. The Fear of  
Lack of  
Recognition

When we do not get the acceptance and confirmation we need in relationships, we are left with a feeling of not being seen or recognized for who we really are. We may then fear we will not be affirmed or confirmed in our relationships. Or we may fear that others will only respect and love us if we are who they want us to be. We may work continuously to feel seen and recognized by others, or we may give up in rage, humiliation, or shame.

6. The Fear of  
Failure and  
Success

When we have loved and lost or tried and failed, we may fear opening ourselves up to painful competitive experience again. When we have succeeded or won—possibly at someone else's expense—we may experience guilt or fear retaliation. Thus we learn to hold back in love and life, thereby not risking either failure or success. We may feel the world does not allow us to be fulfilled. Or we may feel guilty and afraid for feeling fulfilled.

7. The Fear of  
Being Fully  
Alive

Our expansiveness, creative energy and joy in our aliveness inevitably come into conflict with demands from family, work, religion, culture, and society. We come to believe that we must curtail our aliveness in order to be able to conform to the demands and expectations of the world we live in. We feel the world does not permit us to be fully, joyfully, and passionately alive. Rather than putting our whole selves out there with full energy and aliveness, we may throw in the towel, succumb to mediocre conformity, or fall into a living deadness.

## Chapter Two

### Shrinking the Fear Monsters

Throughout the history of our civilization there have been stories of great quests from King Arthur, the Hobbit, and Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, to Indiana Jones, and Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*. The hero or heroine travels long and far through different terrains, encountering and slaying a variety of demons and monsters along the way. These heroic journeys are metaphors or allegories expressing the quest for self-discovery and the obstacles we encounter along our way.

In this book you will journey into the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection. The monsters you will encounter along the way are the Seven Deadly Fears that reside inside all of us. You are about to learn how the Seven Deadly Fears subtly and personally affect all aspects of your life. Your goal is to encounter, to subdue, and to transform your Fear Monsters into your personal allies for achieving your life's quest.

Each chapter that follows will discuss a different fear and conclude with a section entitled "Working With Your Fears." This section will provide you with specific ways for focusing on yourself and for clarifying the nature and source of your fears. It will give you tools for help in understanding and diminishing the power of these fears, for shrinking the monsters in your life. These exercises have been drawn from a variety of sources and have proven to be powerful tools for furthering self discovery and change.

Initially you may want to read this book from beginning to end. Then in order to work most meaningfully with your fears, I suggest you read each chapter one at a time, taking as long as you need to work with each fear. Set aside a time every day to experience the suggested exercises.

During your experiences, it is important to keep in mind that there are no right or wrong, good or bad feeling responses. Feelings are never good or bad, right or wrong—they just are. Only our actions can be

judged right or wrong, good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate. The experiences that come up for you during these exercises will contain your feelings and represent your personal responses. They may be feelings that have been out of your conscious awareness for years. They may be feelings that you are not especially proud of, or are even ashamed to admit. But try to acknowledge the feelings, whatever they are. When you can acknowledge or "own" the feelings, their power in your life will diminish because you are no longer working to avoid them. You are then on the way to undermining the power of your fears. Here is a brief synopsis of the four methods I will be suggesting for taming your fear monsters. First you will learn how to focus on the specific fear and how to experience it in the body-mind-relationship connection. Then you will learn to shrink the fear monster and, finally you will work on finding new methods for moving forward in your life.

### *Focus the Fear*

Each chapter contains a section designed to focus your reflections on yourself, your body, your feelings, sensations, and the area of your life that is relevant to that particular fear.

### *Breathe Deeply and Feel the Constrictions*

Focusing on breathing is an essential part of working with your fears. Fears exist not only in our minds, but they also are housed in our bodies. This is evidenced by sensations such as pain in the chest, a churning belly, a racing heart, a dry mouth, or clammy hands which accompany experiences of acute fear. We learn very early in life that by holding our breathing we can actually diminish feelings of fear and pain. But when we constrict our breathing we also diminish our energy level, and therefore our capacity for aliveness and wellbeing. Also, when we block our fear and pain we unfortunately block our good feelings as well. Breathing exercises will help you develop self-focus, connect to your body, and experience more fully both your fears and your good feelings. In the long run as we begin to experience more aliveness we can expect that the power of our fears will diminish.

## *Write in Your Aliveness Journal*

Each chapter suggests experiences which are designed to help you to explore your fears, to understand them, and to diminish their effects upon your life. These exercises for experiencing your fears include visualizations, affirmations, and simple body exercises.<sup>2</sup>

I recommend that as you focus upon each of the Seven Deadly Fears you keep an [Aliveness Journal](#). Recording your thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, and memories is an invaluable aid to diminishing your fears. Journaling not only helps you focus and clarify the thoughts, feelings, images, and sensations that come up on a given day, it also allows you to note changes through time. Rereading your journal notes at a later time often stirs up more related experiences that we can use in our journey toward greater aliveness. *(If your ereader software does not allow note taking, you may wish to print the journal for ease of use. A stand alone Aliveness Journal can be downloaded from [freepsychotherapybooks.org](http://freepsychotherapybooks.org))*

## *Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection*

It has long been recognized that to reduce fear and conflict in our lives we must work with our bodies as well as with our minds (Lowen A. , *The Language of the Body*, 1958, pp. 140-154). This is because, beginning at the earliest age, our feeling responses to frightening or painful experiences became locked inside our physical selves. When we were little it was often too dangerous, or not allowed, or not possible to cry, scream, kick, or rage. These many unexpressed feelings were suppressed by means of physical and mental constrictions and inhibitions. Over time those early ways of suppressing feelings, thoughts, images, and actions became automatic and habitual ways of limiting our expressiveness. I call these automatic mental and physical constrictions fear reflexes. As long as our feelings and impulses remain inhibited by physical and mental constrictions we cannot achieve deep or lasting release. *Insight and awareness alone do not produce relief from self-imposed pain and suffering.* We must reach into the constricted areas of our bodies and the body-mind-relationship connection in order to expand and to release the physical tension and muscular tightness we carry in our lives. In this book I offer exercises that introduce you to ways of working with your body. Many of these are adapted from Bioenergetic exercises originally developed by Alexander

Lowen and elaborated by the Bioenergetic community over time. For an explanation of Bioenergetic exercises see [Appendix C](#).

### *Handle Your Anxiety While Dealing With Fears*

As you read about the exercises designed to connect you to your fears, you may be asking yourself some questions: "If I begin to explore my fears, will I feel overwhelmed by feelings I don't understand? Will I be able to handle them? What will I do if I start to fall apart?" If a particular physical or mental exercise feels threatening or seems more than you can manage alone, then don't do it. Your experience of shakiness may point you toward seeking counseling or therapy around that specific issue. You may find that writing in your Aliveness Journal is less anxiety-provoking than the actual exercises and that it helps you to focus sufficiently. Should you need or desire to work with a therapist on issues that come up I have provided in Appendix A instructions, telephone numbers, and internet instructions for locating a therapist.

### *Find a Listening Partner*

Sharing your feelings is another vitally important aspect of coming to terms with fear. As your growing appreciation of your fears begins to develop, painful memories, experiences, and feelings will come up for you that you have done your best to suppress for a lifetime. Rather than stuff these unwanted feelings and images back into some dark corner of your mind, allow them to come into the full light of day so that you can face them head on.

Some people may feel that there is really nobody to talk to about such private and personal thoughts and feelings. Our biggest difficulty is often acknowledging to ourselves and to others that we do indeed have fears and that our fears are so irrational! Some people also feel that nobody wants to listen to their fears. But remember that all human beings have a host of fears left over from childhood experiences. Those who claim to be fearless are simply fooling themselves. Most people cannot deny to themselves that they have fears. But they may believe that they are not supposed to be afraid. Or they may discount their fears as silly or frivolous and therefore be hesitant to express them readily to someone else.

We have all experienced the great sense of personal satisfaction and instant bonding we feel when we discover another person who shares the same or similar difficult feelings. We all know the sense of relief that comes when after sharing a painful experience with someone, the response from the other person comes back as one of understanding and acceptance.

Many exercises in this book are designed to be done with a [Listening Partner](#). There is much we can do alone to understand and diminish the Seven Deadly Fears in our lives. But because our fears originated in our early relationships they can best be given free rein within the context of a current real relationship with another person whom we trust and care about. While your listener might be your therapist, group leader, or a member of your growth group, you may choose a trusted friend, close colleague, life-partner, or family member. Your Listening Partner's task is primarily to be present and to listen to what you have to say. Then the two of you change roles and it will be your turn to listen as carefully and deeply as you can to your partner's experiences of fear. In some exercises *specific instructions* will be given to the listener. You both may feel awkward at first. Soon however, when the "listening space" has been established as one of safety, trust, and comfort, the expressions and responses will come more easily.

### *The "Shrink the Monster" Exercise*

When you contact your personal version of one of the Seven Deadly Fears, remember that the fear originated in the distant past when you were small and everyone around you seemed enormous. You were not able to understand what was going on and you had no power to control your fear. The fear was imprinted on your mind like a giant monster. But now you are enormous in relation to that same fear which was once so monstrous! You are no longer a child but a grown person and you have the understanding and power of an adult. You have acquired many skills for dealing with people and events and for protecting yourself and others from harm. But the Fear Monster imprint is still living on as a fear reflex in your internal world, silently creating a myriad of pains, tensions, and stresses.

To try the "Shrink the Monster" exercise, think of a fear that haunts you today but that you know has its roots in the past. Close your eyes and try to tune into that fear and to feel where in your body the fear

reflex still lives on. Then in your mind's eye allow that fear to take the form of a very large monster. Visualize this monster in great detail. Visualize it as large and as powerful as it can be in your life. Let the monster form a huge and frightening image in your mind. Give your imagination a few minutes. Think of your fear in all of its many aspects, sense where and how this fear lives in your body. Watch the monster grow until it looms large and threateningly over you.

Now say aloud the words, "That was then."

The monster can be an image that allows you to feel sensations from that time in your life when the fear began and you were small and helpless.

Now imagine the monster as shrinking, shrinking, and shrinking until it is small enough to fit in the palm of your hand. Say the words, "This is now."

Repeat this exercise: Picture the giant Fear Monster. "That was then." Shrink it down to palm size: "This is now."

Repeat until you can easily and comfortably "shrink your monster."

As you look at the now figure, realize that instead of an overwhelming, overpowering, and dangerous monster, it is now a helper or an "ally" because it can alert you to real and present danger. Say to the fear-ally: "Thank you for protecting me when need it. I appreciate you. But I understand now that you have been overworking. From now on you can be off-duty when there is no real danger around!" As we go through this book reviewing the seven basic relationship experiences of childhood that produce fear, it will be important for you to try to feel in your body and visualize in your mind your personal monstrous versions of these Seven Deadly Fears.

Not everyone visualizes comfortably. Some people imagine sounds, smells, tastes, or other body sensations. In the chapters that follow use your own private methods of imagining the sensations you have encountered in the body-mind-relationship-relationship connection as monstrous. And then, using all of your

imagination and creativity, shrink the monstrosity of the fear sensations.

Do this exercise whenever you encounter one of your own deadly fears:

Visualize or imagine this fear as an enormous monster.

Shrink the monster, "That was then."

And thank your ally, "This is now."

As simple as this little exercise in imagination may sound at first, you can endow it with considerable power. Shrinking the fear monster into an ally will allow you:

- (1) To focus on your bodily constrictions,
- (2) to see how the physical tensions are tied to relationships, and
- (3) to establish a sense of conscious mental control over longstanding unconscious stresses and physical tensions.

The *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears Workbook* is a guidebook for your personal quest into your inner world of feelings and fears. You now have the basic tools required for apprehending, subduing, and transforming the fear monsters to be encountered along the way. You will be given additional guidance and specific suggestions as you read the pages ahead. This journey can be an exciting and stimulating personal adventure. The quest is to achieve greater aliveness in your body, your personality, and your relationships—every day! When you have mastered these ways of self-observation you may wish to utilize the two additional exercises for monitoring your aliveness and touching base with your body at various times during the day.

### *Find a New Way*

Each chapter that follows deals with one of the Seven Deadly Fears. At the end of each chapter we will conclude with suggestions for moving forward in your life journey without that fear. Bon voyage!

Say this Affirmation Aloud:

"I affirm that like all human beings I have many fears. These fears originated in relationships earlier in my life and live on in my mind and body to limit my relationships. I have the power to locate and to experience my fear reflexes. I want to be more vibrantly alive and healthy through releasing the chronic stress and tension which my fear reflexes cause. I want to be free of all unnecessary fear."

### *Two Additional Daily Exercises*

At the end of the Chapter Nine, there are two additional exercises to be performed daily or at times in the course of each day in order to locate how fears of the day, brought about through relationships, are manifesting themselves in your body-mind-relationship connection. The first is putting on your [aliveness monitor](#) and the second is [touching base with your body](#). You might at this point wish to turn to those exercises so that you can understand where this entire project of studying our relationship fears is leading us.

## Chapter Three

### The First Deadly Fear: The Fear of Being Alone

#### *What the Fear of Being Alone is About*

We all experience periods in which nothing seems right. Our senses are momentarily dull. We don't feel quite ourselves. We don't feel clear headed. Our minds tend to wander. We can't get anything done. It's hard to reach out to friends and loved ones in our usual ways. We find it difficult to get out of bed in the morning or to control our eating and drinking. Something definitely is bothering us but we cannot say exactly what. We are unable to enjoy ourselves or the people around us. We have little energy for life and nothing seems to perk us up.

Many people live most of their lives in continuous states of discontent, withdrawal, fatigue, lack of pleasure, discouragement, ill health, confusion, and unresponsiveness. It is the persistence of such states of mind and body that can point us toward studying the earliest of human fears—the Fear of Being Alone.

#### *How the Fear of Being Alone Began*

From the beginning of life the fetus expands and contracts—pulsating with its own rhythms in harmony with the life-rhythms which surround it, first with its mother and later with other caregivers. Without reciprocal rhythms the baby will die. Every mammal knows, "seek and cling to the warm, pulsating body or die." In delicate pulsations from its first heartbeat, the infant extends invisible tendrils to extract what it needs from the intrauterine environment to sustain life: bountiful nutrients, oxygen, warmth, and support. After birth the baby is on its own to suck for food, breathe for air, metabolize for heat, and build bones and muscles for support and mobility. It continues to reach to the environment for what it needs to survive. But,

as research clearly shows, the human infant needs more than food, oxygen, and physical warmth: its reach needs to be met with feelingful contact and positive emotional energy. This is what feeds and enhances the life force within.

When a mother is depressed, in shock, preoccupied with overwhelming problems, or when the spark of life in her is momentarily eclipsed or absent, then she cannot respond to her infant with optimal feeling, energy, emotional warmth and aliveness. Infant research now shows that this lack of responsiveness can even be experienced by the baby before birth in the womb and carried into later life as a body memory.<sup>3</sup>

As we study the Seven Deadly Fears during their first appearance in early life, we will follow Helen, who is a wanted and planned-for baby, born to parents who will do their best to envelop her in loving care and affection. After her birth Helen's needs for life-supporting contact intensify and expand. During the earliest weeks and months of life Helen's parents are able to meet her every need with timely and effective response. But her mother might well have experienced Helen's cries and needs to be demands that her level of energy could not fulfill. If mother or the principal caregiver cannot respond to Helen's reaching (for whatever reason) with positive feeling and energy, her body experience will be: "There's nobody there." The result is a generalized feeling that ranges from emptiness to despair. The body and its reaching energy retract. The organism sags or slumps. In very extreme cases the baby fails to thrive and literally dies.

It is impossible for a mother to be always present, lively, and totally responsive. It is also impossible for a mother to always have only positive feelings for her infant. For this reason all of us have some experiences contained in our body's memory that "there's nobody there." This body memory becomes the basis for the lifelong Fear of Being Alone. The image is being left out to die.

As infants we all depended on satisfying and stimulating responsiveness from our early caregivers to activate our aliveness. And there were times when, even under the best of child-rearing circumstances, the response was inadequate—times when we extended ourselves hoping to contact some essential movement or supply—times when the longed-for contact was not forthcoming. The result was some type of discouraged giving up. Not having contact when it was needed left us with the feeling that there was nobody there to meet

our needs. "So what's the use?" This then became the basis of a deep-seated fear of reaching out to people in our environment. We did not want to reach out again, only to find that there was "nobody there."

All of the Seven Deadly Fears must be understood from the infant's or child's point of view. The best parental intentions cannot avert the agonies of medical conditions (such as birth defects, allergies, or illness). Nor can good parenting prevent the damaging effects of environmental trauma (such as family deaths, concentration camps, kidnapping, adoption, or ravaging economic conditions). Any one of these conditions and many others can create situations wherein the most loving caregivers may be unable to respond completely or satisfactorily to the needs of the child. But regardless of the reality of external circumstances, when the baby experiences the environment as failing to meet its needs, he or she feels alone and comes to fear being alone.

### *How the Fear of Being Alone Works in Our Lives*

Since the Fear of Being Alone is the most basic or primitive of human fears it is often the most difficult to experience directly in adult life. And because it is the farthest back in our personal history it may be the hardest to identify. Rather than feeling actually frightened, we may instead tend to be aware of a lack of zest and energy for life or for our important relationships. When we experience discouragement (such as not getting particular needs met) we may feel dazed, confused, or collapsed. Most of the time we are able to exert a little energy and get things going again in relatively short order. But we all have known painful, empty moments of feeling, "What's the use?"

A person whose early history included a profound lack of needed responsiveness may later suffer from chronic (continuous) fatigue or frequently feel overwhelmed and stressed out. He or she may feel unnecessarily strained and anxious, or beset with physical symptoms having no clear-cut medical or psychological explanations. The person may not be actually depressed in the usual sense of the word, but may feel discouraged, depleted, and/or lacking vitality. These qualities are often clearly reflected in a slumping or slouching body posture and a general physical appearance of fatigue, depletion, and collapse.

The Fear of Being Alone profoundly affects our adult relationships. When our earliest experience was “there's nobody there for me,” we developed an enduring expectation that we would not be responded to adequately by others. An internal fear reflex was silently put into play. This means that we now approach relationships hoping to get what was missing, yet expecting to remain unfulfilled. We are disappointed by and disappointing to our loved ones. They may complain about our lack of aliveness, our whining, our moodiness, our seeming indifference, our lack of attunement, or our lack of interest in sex or play. Because we are afraid and unable to reach for and to get what we need, we may have very little to give. True, a current life circumstance may have triggered the present reaction. But a long-standing fear reflex operates to keep us down for extended periods of time.

There are many ways in which the Fear of Being Alone is manifested in the lives of those around us. We note discouraged, weakened, and giving up kinds of responses in people who continue to eat, drink, or smoke in the face of medical information that these activities are endangering their lives. Many people with serious medical and psychological conditions fail to alter life-threatening habits, deny the seriousness of their condition, or simply give up when there are many options available for staying healthy and alive.

We may develop compensatory ways of assuring ourselves that we are not alone by manufacturing an exaggerated sense of liveliness. We may create a feeling of being fulfilled by filling our lives with stimulating activity. Or we may manufacture a feeling of being strong and together by developing an exaggerated sense of strength and wellbeing. But just underneath the surface of these ways of compensating lies a profound sense of emptiness, weakness, and aloneness. In order for vital change to take place, we must be willing to drop the compensatory behaviors long enough to face the fear that if we extend ourselves into the world—if we reach out—there will be nobody there. Through working with this fear, through facing it instead of avoiding it, and finally through taking the risk of reaching for what we need and desire, we can find ways to become more fulfilled and more truly alive.

## **Working With Your Fear of Being Alone**

## *Focus the Fear of Being Alone*

In a quiet environment sit with your feet on the floor and your back comfortably supported. See in your mind's eye a large wastebasket or trash container. Imagine clearly its size, shape, and color. Now drop into this trash container all thoughts and images that distract you or divert you from the task at hand.

## *Observe and Deepen Your Breathing*

Close your eyes and begin to notice your breathing. Don't change it. Just observe it. Take plenty of time to observe the natural rhythm of your breathing, the expansion and retraction of your diaphragm and rib cage. Is the movement limited to your upper chest or does your abdomen move as well?

Now consciously deepen your breathing. Notice how you feel when your body expands as you inhale and retracts as you exhale. Do you feel any tightness, heaviness, or constriction in your chest? As your breathing deepens you will begin to feel more connected to yourself and more capable of focusing on your own inner sensations. Over time you will find you have more energy in your body for life.

As you continue breathing deeply, focus on what you are sensing at this moment. You may become aware of beginning to feel anxious or afraid. Or you may find yourself avoiding anxiety or tension by becoming uninterested in your breathing and your body sensations. Perhaps you find your mind going blank, racing, becoming distracted, or wanting to do something else. Try to stay connected to the distracting and avoidant tendency for a few seconds. Ask yourself what the distraction or avoidance is about. Notice any images or thoughts that come to mind in connection with the tendency to want to avoid the sensations brought up by deep breathing. Then throw this distraction into your mental trashcan. Deepening your breathing also increases your capacity to feel good sensations. What pleasurable sensations does your breathing now stimulate? Write on your [Body Map](#) what sensations you feel and where in your body you feel them.

## *Elaborate in Your Aliveness Journal*

[\(click here to download a printable journal\)](#)

### React to Your Breathing

Record in your Aliveness Journal the sensations, images, and thoughts that occurred to you as you were doing this deep-breathing. Ask yourself in what ways you can identify the underlying or deep seated Fear of Being Alone in your body, mind, and relationships. How often do you experience the feelings, attitudes, and circumstances that are related to this fear? Put your thoughts about these things in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### Identify Your Personal Needs

The next Aliveness Journal box is divided into three columns. In the first column list all the needs you have that are not being met in your present life. In the second column opposite each need write down the reason you feel the need is not getting met. Leave the third column blank for now.

For example:

*not enough attention from my husband*                      *he's insensitive,*

*not enough nurturing contact,*                                      *he's not the type*

*I don't have many friends*    *I'm not likable*

*I feel alone in a crowd*

*nobody's interested*

Give yourself plenty of time to become aware of the needs you experience and the reasons you feel they are not being met. Feel free to return and add to this list later. Take your time.

Write in Your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### Consider Your Unmet Needs From Childhood

Reflect on which of your needs are unmet only in the present. Which feel like they have never been met? Write about your recollections of not being responded to as a child. As you write, pay attention to the sensations that accompany your thoughts. Do you see pictures and hear sounds? Or do you smell, taste, and feel sensations? Can you experience sadness, sorrow, or anger for those times when you were not responded to? How do you feel when you remember times when you did not receive what you needed or desired? Perhaps you have been resigned to not having certain of your needs and desires responded to. Why is that? Write down all of the sensations, feelings, and thoughts that come up for you when you feel, "there's nobody there for me."

Write in Your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### *Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection*

In order to diminish fears and the deadly physical effects they have on your life, it is necessary for you first to actually experience the sensations and feelings of fear in your body in order to be clear about what they actually are. *Intellectual awareness of fear is not enough*. The exercises below focus on the central issue involved in the Fear of Being Alone, of reaching out and finding no one there. They are designed to

help you to experience body sensations and feelings that may have long been outside of your awareness. The exercises will help you to identify certain physical sensations and to relate those body awarenesses to your mental understanding of your fears.

### Reach Out Into the World

If your reaching out as an infant was not reinforced by timely responsiveness, then you may have difficulty reaching out in your present-day life. Getting your needs and desires met depends upon being free to reach out to others. When physical reaching out is inhibited or limited in infancy, then the emotional capacity to reach out also begins to wither and atrophy very early in life. The result is that you will later feel deprived, unenthusiastic, and depleted. Much of your life may be controlled by the Fear of Being Alone and you have never been aware of it. Imagine reaching out into the world you know, trying to get your basic needs met. What is your experience?

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### Reach Out to Someone and Say, "I need you."

Slowly allow your arms and hands to move forward in a reaching motion. As you do so imagine yourself reaching out to someone. Say the words, "I need you." Repeat them several times. Notice how you feel about expressing your need. Do you find yourself tightening up and resisting? ("No way am I going to let myself reach for you!") Or do you feel sad, unenthusiastic, lethargic, and dejected? ("What's the use—there's nobody there.") Do you feel awkwardness or shame? ("I shouldn't have to need someone who isn't available for me.") Do you feel inadequate? (Why should anyone be interested in me?) Notice the sensations in all parts of your body. How do you inhibit your reaching out, your outward movement? Have your shoulders, arms, and jaw tightened? Are your hands hanging without energy or purpose in front of you? Have you stopped breathing? Why do you feel so disheartened and discouraged? Record your responses in your [Aliveness Journal](#) and [Body Map](#).

### Reach Out and Ask, "Where Are You?"

Now reach again and say the words, "Where are you?" Repeat the question several times. What sensations, feelings, or images do you experience when you ask this question? You may have positive expectations of joyful anticipation. But you may experience deep sorrow and sadness, with the sense that "there is nobody there." This exercise can give you the opportunity to get in touch with your aloneness and your sadness, to acknowledge it, and then to release it. Breathe into the sadness, feel the disappointment and the tears. Record your feelings in your [Aliveness Journal](#). Mark all physical sensations on your [Body Map](#).

### Reach Out and Ask, "Why Aren't You There For Me?"

Now ask the question as you reach again, "Why aren't you there for me?" What do you feel now? What happens in your body? Ask the question again. As you do, make your hands into fists. Shake your fists as you say the words using as much feeling as you can, "Why aren't you there for me?" Often these words and movements put people in contact with the deep anger and frustration they experienced at not having anyone "there" for them as young children. Let yourself feel and express your anger. Try to see what you can make contact with in your body and in your mind.

Make notes in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark any sensations you have on your [Body Map](#).

### Reach Out With A Listening Partner

The exercises above for working with your Fear of Being Alone can now be enhanced and deepened dramatically by experiencing them with your Listening Partner. The presence of another person can help you to activate and focus your feelings. Your listener can serve the important function of validating your experiences as well. Have your Listening Partner sit beside you or near you, but out of the line of direct vision. Then go through each part of the experience above, reaching out with your arms and hands, and saying the words, "I need you." "Where are you?" "Why aren't you there for me?" *In this exercise your*

*listener is only to be a validating witness to your reaching out.*

Record your experience in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

#### Share With Your Listening Partner

Share with your Listening Partner the body sensations, images, and thoughts that have just come up for you when you tried the reaching exercise in his or her presence—feelings of aloneness, sadness, shame, anger, inadequacy, or whatever. Talk about the images and associations which occurred to you during each part of these experiences. Explain to your Listening Partner what parts of your body are affected by the reaching and what feelings are stirred up. For example, "I felt light tension in my shoulders and arms," "I felt a deep sadness in my chest," or "I experienced anger in my belly." Write these experiences down in your [Aliveness Journal](#) and mark your [Body Map](#). What comes up for you that is simply related to telling your Listening Partner about your fears?

Make a note.

#### Observe How You Avoid Feeling Alone

See if you can notice in the reaching exercises how you characteristically avoid re-experiencing a lack of responsiveness to your needs.

- Do you tighten and assume that since there's nobody out there you must take care of your needs by yourself?
- Do you attempt to get your needs met indirectly by tirelessly attending to the needs of others?
- Do you minimize your needs and inhibit your aliveness so as not to be

disappointed?

—Do you pretend that it's okay not to have your needs and desires met so that you will not have to experience shame and inadequacy?

Your Listening Partner may be able to give you feedback based on what she or he has observed as to how you block getting your needs and desires responded to.

Write your observations in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Go back to [Defining What I Need From Others](#) in your Aliveness Journal and fill in the third blank column. Write in the heading, My Responsibility.

Now take responsibility for feeling aloneness. It may look something like this:

**My Unmet Needs**

**Why my needs  
are unmet**

**My Responsibility**

*not enough attention  
from my husband*

*he's insensitive,*

*I don't ask*

*not enough nurturing  
contact,*

*he's not the type*

*I don't let him know I  
feel needy*

*I don't have many  
friends*

*I'm not likable*

*they feel I don't have  
time for them*

*I feel alone in a crowd*

*nobody's  
interested*

*I'm shy and don't  
make contact,*

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#) what your experiences have been to the reaching out exercises in this chapter. What did you learn about yourself from reaching and feeling your aloneness when witnessed by your listener? How have you decided to take responsibility for your feelings of aloneness?

The Fear of Being Alone is established deep within us whenever our early needs are not responded to appropriately, sufficiently, and in a timely manner. Our early "needs deficit" sets up in us the expectation that we can never count on others to be there for us when we need them. We unconsciously come to feel that, it's no use to reach out. Then we gradually lose our willingness and capacity to do so. Consequently our needs continue to be unmet. Then we end up feeling deprived and alone. *We must learn to reach out to others in order to have our needs and desires responded to.* We can now acknowledge that, whatever our present circumstances may be, our negative expectation—our fear reflex of no response, is a Fear Monster that was established inside of us a long time ago. You have just made contact with the way this monstrous fear lives and works in your body-mind-relationship connection. Now you must find ways to subdue the power of that monster.

### *Shrink the Monster*

The Fear of Being Alone can indeed be a monster in our lives. Exploring our feelings of deprivation, shame, inadequacy, and helplessness can be frightening. Now, using the thoughts, sensations, and images you have just made contact with, envision or feel in any way you can your Fear of Being Alone in the form of a huge and threatening monster! As you feel in your body and mind this monstrous fear, remember that this "fear monster" came into being when you were an infant. It was large and overpowering and you were small and powerless. Now you are an adult. No matter how frightened, helpless, or inadequate you may *feel* from time to time, you have grown and acquired enormous knowledge, skill, and experience in life since the

days when you were a helpless child and this threatening monster first appeared.

Now imagine shrinking this once terrifying Fear Monster. "That was then."

Once you shrink your fears into perspective, the Fear Monster that lives inside your body-mind-relationship connection can become your helper to remind you of the risk you must take whenever you reach out to get your needs responded to so that you will not feel so alone. Now transform the fear monster into your ally, "This is now."

Write your reaction in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark physical reactions on your [Body Map](#).

There are times when we all feel that "there is no one there for me." But the truth is we are not alone. We can reach out again and again. Even if our reaching produces discouragement, hurt, and pain, *we are adults now and we have the capacity to reach out and to bear emotional disappointment and pain!* We must use our ability to reach out to others—despite the difficulty and the pain of rejection—until we find ways to be responded to. There is no reason to give up now and we know it.

When you reach out, not with a whiny or an angry demand, but as an acknowledgement of your need or desire for another person, you will find that there are those around you who can and will be able to respond.

### *Find A New Way*

It is important that you practice on a daily basis getting your needs and desires responded to. Begin by acknowledging your needs and desires to yourself. Then reach out and ask for a response from important others in your life. As you find yourself stopped or blocked in various ways, go back to the body-mind-relationship connection experiences in this chapter. Allow yourself to touch the old sadness and pain, the old

hurt, emptiness, and anger. Let out the feelings! Take responsibility for your feelings of aloneness and reach out again.

When you begin to have positive experiences of being responded to, of having your needs and desires met, take notice. Feel the joy of it. Feel the deep satisfaction! Tell your Listening Partner about your real and imaginary experiences of reaching out and being responded to in wonderful and rewarding ways. Since reaching out is reinforced by others responding positively toward you, you will find that the joy of reaching and finding comes more easily and more often. As you experience more responsiveness in your life you will feel more fulfilled and alive. Your increased aliveness and openness will evoke more responsiveness from those around you.

You are now started on your journey toward learning to master your Fear of Being Alone. As we explore further the body-mind-relationship connection in order to encounter the other Deadly Fears, you will find yourself often returning to experience your Fear of Being Alone. But in the process you will be developing many new ways to contact others and work with aloneness.

### **Say this Affirmation Aloud**

"I am a human being who has needs and desires that must be responded to. I can reach out to others. I can bear the pain of rejection. I can find people who will respond to me. I do not need to fear being alone."

### The Second Deadly Fear: The Fear of Connecting

#### *What the Fear of Connecting is About*

We all know what it feels like to be moving forward in some personal or intimate situation when we suddenly feel ourselves quietly backpedaling. We find ourselves trying to avoid further emotional involvement with someone or trying to escape a relationship for reasons that are not altogether clear to us. We may be able to find fault with something about the situation or about the person involved. But deep inside we know there is something, some unnamable dread, some silent fear reflex pulling us back from making or maintaining contact. We know that fear often prevents us from pursuing a relationship that could turn out to be rewarding and satisfying. But we miss the opportunity—or we spoil it! We hear from others, "Just when I begin to get close, you bail out." Or, "There's something about you that is afraid of relationships." Or, "Why do you avoid intimacy?"

By definition intimacy in relationships requires some degree of openness and vulnerability. We avoid certain kinds of intimate contact with others because, in our earliest history, we learned that human connections could be painful, and therefore dangerous and frightening. Like any frightened mammal we freeze, fight, or flee when danger threatens. Some people become rigid, immobilized, and frozen in face of intimate contact. Others characteristically pick fights or become irritable and critical. Still others simply run—either by literally leaving or by withdrawing their emotional availability. However we do it, we pull back because we do not dare risk the pain of connecting and being vulnerable and hurt again.

#### *How the Fear of Connecting Began*

In reaching out and making connections with people around them babies often encounter painful experiences. Pain then becomes associated with the person who, from the infant's point of view, was present and therefore in some way "responsible" for the pain. Or at least was responsible for not preventing it. Since babies are closely tied to caregivers, connection with people is almost always associated in one way or another with painful experiences in infancy.

A picture may clarify the early situation. Imagine an infant born with a thousand "invisible tendrils" reaching out in all directions into its human environment, actively seeking to latch onto sources of stimulation, pleasure, and safety. Many of these tendrils extend in pulsations, which need reciprocal responses to become enlivened. When they are not met, as we have already seen in the first *Deadly Fear of Being Alone*, the pulsating tendrils simply weaken or wither in a discouraged attitude of giving up.

But there are often times when the reaching tendril is not only unresponded to in a timely and satisfying manner, but is actively discouraged or hurt. It is met with coldness, indifference, or hostility. In such cases the infant experiences the environment not as a world of pleasure and safety but as one of pain, hurt, and danger.

When our little Helen reaches out to those in her environment and makes a satisfying connection, she is joyful and her reaching continues and expands. But if she makes a connection and then experiences hurt and pain, she actively and instantly withdraws from it. In response to pain Helen immediately constricts whatever muscles will help her withdraw from the pain-producing situation. Helen quickly learns that muscle constrictions not only work to remove her from painful situations, but also that ongoing muscle constrictions themselves serve to block the experience of painful sensations. In short order pain teaches Helen to fear making contact with whatever circumstances she believes may lead to pain. It is as if a sign were posted along the reaching path that says, "Never reach in that way again or you'll be hurt."

A simple example may help to illustrate this process. Imagine unwittingly touching a scorching hot stove. Your hand and arm tense and you pull back instantly! You may even gasp or yelp. When an infant encounters a painful or frightening experience her whole body reacts in the same way. She automatically

constricts her muscles in order to withdraw from the hurt. In extreme situations when the frightening or painful experience is powerful or continuous, and at the beginning of life when the infant is highly sensitive and undefended, the constriction caused by a painful encounter never fully relaxes. Thus in certain ways the child's body becomes frozen, unable either to fight or to flee. This quality of rigid frozenness can last a lifetime—unless the person learns how to identify and release it.

### *How the Fear of Connecting Works in Our Lives*

For the person whose earliest reaching for contact was a painful or even a traumatic experience, chronic anxiety, fearfulness, and even terror of connecting remain at the core of his or her being. These feelings may be accompanied by deeply repressed rage. Disconnecting from physical sensations, dissociating from external reality, and avoiding stimulating relationships may offer some relief and protection from re-traumatization. Numerous other bodily sensations, reactions, and symptoms may also result.

The tendency to avoid connections or to create disconnections can become known to us through deep and chronic tensions in our joints (arms, hands, shoulders, hips, legs, and feet) and in our neck, diaphragm, or any other muscles. It is as though the body's energy was once extended and then withdrawn from where it came into contact with frightening or painful stimulation. Tightly held muscles and joints serve to prevent us from reaching out and connecting to the feared pain ever again. The result is the inhibition of free-flowing movement, self expression, and deep breathing. But more tragically, "freezing" our movement disconnects us from experiencing our bodies fully and prevents us from knowing our sensations and feelings. As a result, we may be experienced at times by others as unresponsive, withdrawn, cold, unfeeling, and emotionally absent. We ourselves may feel chronically cold, withdrawn, or isolated from others.

The Fear of Connecting and its manifestations are not limited to people whose earliest relationship experiences included severe trauma and pain. For all of us there were moments of interpersonal contact in our early childhood which produced hurt, pain, and fear. As a result, certain kinds of connections with others have come to be unconsciously feared and avoided at all cost. This unconscious avoidance of human contact can only work to set up obstacles limiting our relationship possibilities and stifling our passion for life.

Chronic constrictions in our bodies, personalities, and relationships persist to tell a story about a time when our reaching out to connect with people whom we loved and trusted led to pain, fear, and withdrawal.

## Working With Your Fear of Connecting

### *Focus the Fear of Connecting*

[\(click here to download a printable journal\)](#)

#### Breathe Deeply into the Fear

Discard any distractions in your special trashcan. Give yourself time to become inwardly quiet. Then begin to focus on your breathing. Consciously deepen your inhalations and exhalations. Allow your breathing to bring your focus more and more into your body. Imagine that you are exhaling through the entire length of your body. Think about how many ways making connections with other people has proven dangerous for you. Breathe deeply and feel the physical and mental constrictions which come up for you.

Write in Your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

#### Elaborate in your Aliveness Journal: Freeze, Fight, and Flee

The next [Aliveness Journal](#) box is divided into three parts—Freeze, Fight, and Flee. These are our innate responses to experiences of pain and danger when we attempt to connect to others. Write under each heading the situations in your life that characteristically evoke that response. For example:

Freeze—when a person I don't like tries to make physical contact with me.

Fight—when my husband criticizes me in the presence of other people.

Flee—when my partner wants to make love and I'm not in the mood.

### Recall painful and Frightening Memories from Childhood

In the next box of your Aliveness Journal try to recall as many dangerous, frightening, and painful experiences from your childhood as you can, going back to your earliest memories. Write them down. Include all painful feelings and fears that emerge—even though there is no specific picture or experience you can attach them to. Once you start the reflecting and remembering process you will be surprised in the upcoming days and weeks at what will emerge in your thoughts, fantasies, dreams, feelings, and bodily sensations.

Write all of these in your [Aliveness Journal](#) now and add to these pages over the next few weeks.

Record your physical sensations on your [Body Map](#).

### *Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection*

The experiences below will help you contact the Fear of Connecting and how it lives on in the body-mind-relationship connection. Approach these experiences with a sense of adventure and curiosity. Remember that your mission on this journey is to discover and to subdue the monstrous fear of connecting that threatens and limits your aliveness.

### Imagine Touching a Scorching Hot Stove

With your eyes closed, reach out with your arms and hands. Imagine that you inadvertently touch a scorching hot stove! Notice the instantaneous body response. Your arms and hands recoil, your neck and jaw tighten, you suddenly hold your breath, and you give a startled yelp! Freeze these tensions in your body for a few seconds and focus on them. Then exaggerate them. This exaggerated state of constriction will help you become aware of what happens in your entire body in response to pain and fear.

Now slowly relax and clear your mind again. Breathe deeply. Repeat the hot stove encounter and locate exactly where in your body the tension and fear reside. What images, sensations, and thoughts of painful encounters now appear?

Remember them and put them into your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Record them on your [Body Map](#).

### Recall Frightening Experiences of Connecting

As you allow yourself to feel the pain-fear connections and constrictions, try to remember experiences in your early life when you reached out and were hurt, frightened, or even terrified—experiences you wanted to forget and never to feel again. Such negative interactions have helped shape your personality and how you view your world. Early fear impacts how we approach and interact with others in the present. It has a lasting impact on how we expect others to respond to us. Fear taught you that "freezing up" was the best policy.

Now, many years later, these painful experiences continue to impact not only your body constrictions, but also the decisions you make in your relationships. *In order to release the strong hold these fears have upon you, you must become aware of how you experience them in your body.* Begin to notice the subtle ways you tense up (freeze), withdraw emotionally (flee), and stir up conflict (fight) in your close relationships. Think of these contact-avoidance mechanisms now, feel them in your body, write about them in your [Aliveness Journal](#), and experience them in your life and relationships over the next few weeks. Mark your [Body Map](#).

### Touch Fingertips With Your Listening Partner

Sit facing your partner. Now without speaking reach out and lightly touch the fingertips of your partner. After a few seconds break the contact. Then try reaching and touching his or her fingertips again.

With your eyes closed, experience what you feel in your body. If the contact is uncomfortable or frightening, try not to block the sensations, but experience them. Verbalize your sensations, images, and feelings to your partner.

Now reach out and touch your partner's fingertips again. As you reach, imagine yourself as a child reaching for one of your parents. Go slowly and allow sensations to occur. What do you feel? Contact may feel good and comfortable. Or contact may bring uncomfortable and dangerous feelings. Do you sense fear and constriction in your body? Contact may not have been safe back then. You have chosen a safe partner now, yet you may still feel unsafe. Why? Try not to block your sensations or thoughts by becoming distracted or going blank. [Record your experiences.](#)

#### Connect and Disconnect With Your Partner

As the intensity of feeling, apprehension, and fear increases try pulling away. Take a deep breath, and allow the fear to go through you as you exhale. You are acknowledging the fear, not fighting against it, or blocking it out. Then reach again. Repeat reaching and touching like this until you feel safe. Verbalize your sensations, images, and thoughts to your partner as you become aware of them.

Write down your experience in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

#### Reach and Make Eye Contact With Your Partner

Finally, try reaching out to touch the fingertips of your partner while making eye contact. Sustain the eye contact as long as you can remain present. Now what fears arise? Hold steady and let your body respond with sensations. What do you experience? How do you want to avoid these feelings? Share these experiences with your partner.

Write your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### Feel Affirmed By Connecting With Your Partner

Ask your partner to reflect the fears you have expressed about connecting. Now ask your partner to affirm your right to seek rewarding connections and to have them. Do you believe it? *Your partner can say for example: "You do have the right to have safe and rewarding connections with others. You have a right to be safe!"* Allow yourself to feel affirmed by your partner in your desire for rewarding connections. *In subsequent repetitions your partner may—at key moments without interpreting or adding to the flow of your feelings—ask you where in your body you feel the fear, the constriction, the urge to freeze, fight, or flee. As your access to body sensations and images increases, your partner may be able to affirm for you how scary or frightening your experiences are now or must have been as a child. "Yes it was truly terrifying for you then!"*

Note your experiences in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### Shrink the Fear of Connecting Monster

As you are working with your fear of making and breaking connections do the "Shrink the Monster" exercise whenever you are aware of your fear.

Now in your imagination shrink your monstrous fear down to palm size: Say, "That Was Then." "This is Now."

Record your experience in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### Find a New Way

In order to have the courage to feel your fears, you need to remember that when you first experienced them you were small, vulnerable, and helpless. You had no better way of protecting yourself than to freeze, deaden, or cut off from your feelings. Now as an adult you have many options. In order to truly change your life—to have more interpersonal connectedness, increased closeness, and more rewarding warmth, intimacy, and sociability—it is necessary to take the risk of being hurt or frightened again! Without risking pain, you will not be able to grow in managing your fears.

Having been frightened when we reached out for connections as young children, every cell in our body now shouts, "Danger! Danger!" Our old fears of connecting crop up even when there is no objective danger. We must bring our adult awareness, insight, and knowledge to counteract these silent inner shouts when there is realistically nothing to fear. We know that there will inevitably be times when we are disappointed and hurt in relationships. But we also know that we are now adults with many capacities for recovering from setbacks. Even though it may not feel like it at the time, the hurts we now risk encountering are likely to be less costly than the deprivations we impose on ourselves by avoiding connections with people around us.

It is, of course, important that we retain our capacity to recognize and protect ourselves from real danger. But because our fear reflex causes us to withdraw automatically, it is difficult to know exactly how dangerous a given situation is unless we take some calculated risks. In order to grow we must be willing to push into our fears and inhibitions in situations that we realistically judge to be safe.

One man, referring to his defense against closeness and contact said, "It's like I have on a heavy coat to protect me against the cold. The problem is, the coat would be great in Alaska but I live in Hawaii—and I can't seem to take off the coat!" Our goal is to be able to take the coat off in Hawaii—and to be able to put it back on again in Alaska!

The more that you learn to identify your fear reflexes, to experience them in your body-mind-relationship connection, and to understand their historical sources and meanings; the more you will be able to risk making and sustaining intimate connections with people in your life. Allow yourself the pleasure of

being able to take off your protective coat in order to feel the warmth of intimate contact. Experience the satisfaction of knowing that you can put the coat on again when you genuinely need self protection. When you are able to do this you are on your way to finding new ways of dealing with your Fear of Connecting in your daily life.

[Say this Affirmation Aloud](#)

"I am a human being with a capacity to enjoy intimate human connections. I have been hurt in relationships. I can be hurt again. But I will no longer deprive myself of life and love by avoiding connections. I do not need to fear connecting to others."

### The Third Deadly Fear: The Fear of Being Abandoned

#### *What the Fear of Being Abandoned is About*

The First Deadly Fear of Being Alone results when we reach out in need and desire only to find that there is no one there. The Second Deadly Fear of Connecting arises when we make contact with someone important and then are badly hurt or frightened by our experience of that person. We experience The Third Deadly Fear of Being Abandoned after we have entered into an intimate or bonded personal relationship and then find that the other person cannot or will not be there for us in the ways we had hoped for or expected. We all know how devastating it can be to be abandoned by someone we were counting on. Early experiences of abandonment have left us with the (often unconscious) fear that important people in our lives will leave us, betray us, neglect us, turn away from us, or even turn against us. In fact, we are so afraid of being abandoned that we often remain in relationships that are unsatisfying or even abusive. We grudgingly do what others want, out of the fear that they will leave us if we don't conform to their wishes. We give in to sexual demands when that's not what we want at the time. We go out of our way to meet other people's needs at the expense of our own. We give care to others at times when we ourselves need to be cared for. But we end up feeling used, empty, unsatisfied, and resentful—sometimes even hating the person or persons we serve. Despite our best efforts, in the end we are no less afraid of being abandoned.

For some of us the Fear of Being Abandoned is expressed in the resistance to forming close relationships. Being abandoned seems inevitable, so therefore we don't even risk the pain by getting too close or caring too much. Or at the first sign of dissatisfaction from our partner we leave, rather than risk the pain of being left.

When the Fear of Being Abandoned grips our lives it affects us in many ways. We make relationship choices against our own best interests. We lose ourselves when we hold onto others too tightly so that they won't leave us. We lose relationships when we refuse to allow closeness or when we attempt to control the relationships so that we will not be hurt or left alone. But we still end up feeling abandoned, resentful, and depressed.

### *How the Fear of Being Abandoned Began*

Helen is born with the expectation that her needs will be met. She comes into the world expecting that when she reaches out, whatever she needs will be provided. After all, for nine months she has lived in her mother's womb in relative paradise. As her caregivers provide attentive, loving care Helen's expressions of reaching are rewarded promptly. And she is protected by her parents from having to withdraw from strong experiences of deprivation, pain, and intrusion. Helen slowly awakens to the world around her. She notices through her eyes, her nose, her mouth, her hands, her skin, and her entire being that she has entered into an interesting and exciting new world. Helen clearly knows that the most important aspects of her new world of sensations are people and the ways they relate to her. Is it any wonder that she organizes her mind, her body, and everything she experiences around those relationships? Perhaps Helen's mother has been able to take an extended maternity leave and has spent the first three or four months at home. Perhaps Helen's father has had the wisdom to arrange some paternity leave so that he too can be there to greet her when she awakens and to soothe her when she is uncomfortable. Father also wants to participate in nourishing and caring for her. Helen needs to know that Father is alive and available to her just as Mother is. This also goes for any and all others who are emotionally invested in relating to Helen.

Helen gradually begins the dance of life with each of her parents—and with Dibbs too, who jumps up to see her, wildly wags his tail, licks her gently in the face whenever he can get away with it, and barks when strangers approach her crib. Each member of her family brings different enlivening possibilities to Helen. She soon learns who is coming to greet her, whom she needs to be held by, and the different ways each person responds to her. Helen also learns that when she expresses herself every person in the family has his or her own particular ways of responding. What fun it is making so many different things happen!

Each caregiver brings unique understanding and responsiveness to Helen which spontaneously arises from a personal endowment which is uniquely his or her own. Every baby brings into the world a rich set of personal possibilities which is also uniquely his or her own. Every baby-caregiver combination permits different kinds of emotional relationships.

Soon Helen develops different expectations for each of her relationships. These expectations inform her about what is happening now and what is likely to happen next. For example, she soon learns that when she cries and Mother's face appears she will be picked up, held, and nursed. But if Father's face appears he rocks her, gives her a bottle, and seems more comfortable when she stops crying. Since these interactions form the first patterns in Helen's mind, it is important that they go well so that she can develop a positive outlook on life. These first impressions of how her parents respond to her form the foundations of how Helen will relate to other people in intimate relationships with her for the rest of her life.

We could say that based on Helen's earliest relationship experiences, she stores body memories of her parents' responses and body memories of her reactions to them. These body memories are tied together in her mind by the emotions that accompany each remembered interaction.

The body-mind-relationship connections are thus forged, through her early relationships Helen rapidly learns how to bring pleasurable experiences to herself and how to push unpleasant or painful experiences away. These different patterns of relating which Helen learns we will call *scenarios*. Helen's theater of aliveness comes to contain many predictable scenarios. She comes to anticipate certain interactions with pleasure and joy. Other interactions she clearly wants to avoid. As Helen organizes her world of relationships, she seeks out "good" interactions or scenarios and avoids "bad" or unpleasant ones.

If we are to fully understand our Fear of Being Abandoned we must grasp what Helen learns so quickly about good and bad scenarios in relationships: After a certain point in the development of our early relationships we no longer simply seek pleasure and avoid pain. We are drawn toward the kinds of relationships that once offered us some form of reliable connection which we experienced as "good," if for no other reason than we did not feel abandoned. Likewise we came to identify as "bad" those interactions or

scenarios in which we felt the danger of abandonment, whether actual (physical) or emotional.

For example, if Helen senses that Father is displeased when she cries, she experiences his reaction to her as an emotional abandonment. She quickly learns to limit her crying rather than to lose her father's emotional presence. Though Father may be physically present, she experiences his lack of attunement as an emotional abandonment. Helen learns to seek Father's presence which is familiar. She simultaneously learns to tolerate the unpleasant experience of curtailing her tears and tightening her body (in order to control the fear associated with the emotional abandonment). *The fear of abandonment is so strong in childhood that infants and toddlers will learn to tolerate almost any situation, no matter how limiting or abusive, so as not to be abandoned.* In marriages and other close relationships we often see people engaged in and tolerating all manner of painful scenarios because they are terrified of abandonment. One woman in therapy had vivid memories of lying rigidly in her crib, quiet as a church mouse in hopes that her very shy and frightened mother would look in on her. If she moved or made sounds to reach out, her mother would be afraid of the child's emotional needs and quietly steal away. Only as an adult did she learn that her mother was afraid to touch or pick up her new baby for fear of hurting her or "breaking" her. In therapy this woman spent long periods of frozen silence on the couch until she was able to tell her therapist that she was afraid that even the slightest sound or motion would cause him to abandon her emotionally. *Our most fundamental belief about relationships is that we must seek out scenarios that are familiar and avoid those that are unfamiliar.* In familiar scenarios, no matter how unpleasant they may be, we do not so greatly fear abandonment as we do in the unfamiliar ones. But in new or unfamiliar interactions we are in alien territory and we fear that we may be abandoned. Because we seek the familiar and we avoid the unfamiliar, in time we find ourselves inevitably going after relationships and emotional interactions that are terrible for us—but familiar. We are compelled to seek out or to create longstanding and known relationship scenarios—no matter how self-abusive or self-depriving they may be—so that we will not feel the danger of abandonment! By the same token we pass up opportunities for new and exciting kinds of growth, enrichment, self-expansion, and love because in earliest childhood we became afraid of breathtaking and unfamiliar new experiences that raised for us the risk of emotional abandonment.

## *How the Fear of Being Abandoned Works in Our Lives*

The particular scenarios for relating to others which we each learned in the first two or three years of life are extremely limited, first, because we formed them with only the mental capacity of a toddler, and second, because our experience at that time was limited to our own home and family. Yet these patterns of relating continue to work automatically (and detrimentally) in all of our significant relationships for the rest of our lives—unless we find ways to dismantle them.

For example, how often do we find ourselves inexplicably attracted to someone who is clearly wrong for us? Because of some unconscious attitudes which we don't understand we find ourselves again and again drawn toward or clinging to relationships which are empty, non-satisfying, and self-destructive. Or conversely, we find ourselves fleeing from relationships that might realistically be wonderful for us. For what reason we ignore them we are not quite sure. We are often painfully aware that the relationship models which were set in motion early in life silently continue to govern our choices in ways that are clearly not in our best interests. We continue to project all-good or all-bad "split" expectations onto others. We develop either hopeful, optimistic idealizations; or negative, critical devaluations about others which are not realistic. Such opinions are the products of our automatic patterns. Our personal world view regarding good and bad relationships colors dramatically how we perceive and relate to others. We notice there are times when we simply cannot sustain sensible mixed feelings toward others. Instead we lapse into unthinking extremes of positive and negative feeling and continue relating in a naive or judgmental way.

The Fear of Abandonment appears in our idealized expectations that others will forever be available to us in loving and supportive ways. Our Abandonment Fear likewise appears in our negative expectations that the world is not a dependable place and that others are useless, self-centered, and ruthless.

In order to understand how scenarios become entrenched in our lives, let us consider a number of different kinds of common ones. There are many types of scenarios that all people experience to one degree or another. A frequent response to the Fear of Being Abandoned is to become clinging or demanding. Another is to pull back or to withdraw emotionally.<sup>4</sup> Still another is to become scheming and manipulative in

order to control the relationship. Starting with these, we will look briefly at eleven common kinds of scenarios.

### 1. Clinging/Demanding Scenarios

In response to the Fear of Being Abandoned, people cling with the feeling, "I can never get enough." When a parent, partner, or friend is unable to give what is wanted, then those who tend to cling can become very angry, rageful, or withdrawn. There is a sense of "rightness" about what is needed. The child inside knows exactly what she needs and how and when she wants it to be given. She often can't express it directly or go about getting what she needs from others. But she can express her displeasure when what she gets is all wrong. Her fear of not being responded to makes her desperate. Her desperation may make her demanding. Not so surprisingly, the desperation and demand that began with the early caregiving relationship gets directed toward other people in later life—her partner, her friends, her colleagues at work, and even her children. She feels frustrated and overwhelmed by her own needs and her inability to get them met. Her dreaded expectations of hurt and deprivation are in danger of being painfully repeated. Her relating attempts don't work. Her desperation and anger alienate those around her. Others think they are being adequately responsive. They know that they love her. But they don't seem to be able to "do it right," or to "do enough." Or even when they seem to be responding exactly as she wishes, the requirements of her clinging inner worldview still leave her feeling deprived and angry.

### 2. Withdrawing/Pulling Back Scenarios

Another common response pattern to the Fear of Being Abandoned is withdrawing. "I can't count on you being available to me so I have to take care of myself." Instead of being clinging and demanding the person suppresses and denies his own needs and withdraws. He may appear to be quite self-sufficient. His deep-seated need for contact and connection may get met indirectly by meeting the needs of other people. He may assume a caregiving role or enter a helping profession. He is compassionate and responsive to the needs of other people. But because of his denial he is outwardly indifferent to, or even negligent of, his own needs. Despite his giving and helping, at the center of his being he feels emptiness. And because his needs go

unmet, there is frequently a suppressed resentment and sometimes even an unconscious hatred and rage toward those whose needs he is meeting so well. His unconscious scenario is being repeated in relationships when his fear of being unresponded to makes him withdrawn and emotionally unavailable. The sad irony is that despite his good intentions and caregiving efforts, the way he lives his life assures that the care and affection he craves will be denied.

### 3. Scheming/Manipulative Scenarios

A third common way of responding to the childhood threat of being abandoned is to develop a scheming and/or manipulative character style. In extreme cases this may result in sociopathic behavior. Sociopathic tendencies arise out of an early parent-child situation in which the child's basic needs were at first well met. Then, before the child was ready, the need-fulfilling gratifications became limited or withdrawn (Winnicott, *Psychoneurosis in Childhood*, 1961). The child is left knowing what she needs. She knows what will make her feel safe or comforted. She comes to believe that what she needs will not be available unless she schemes and then manipulates the people around her. She knows that she is entitled to have her needs met—so she believes that whatever works is fair. We all learned a variety of ways of looking out for our self-interests as toddlers. But these deep-seated character manipulations often not only annoy and alienate others but also damage our integrity.

### 4. Inability to Give or to Receive Scenarios

The inability to give and/or to receive, which marks many of our relationship scenarios, also stems from the Fear of Abandonment. When we have difficulty reaching out we are also likely to have trouble taking in—receiving. We often experience difficulties letting ourselves really have or enjoy the gift, the compliment, or the pleasure. We minimize our right to have the gift with phrases like, "You shouldn't have...I really don't deserve this...you're doing this unnecessarily." We deflect the compliment with, "You're just saying nice things to make me feel good" or "I don't deserve such praise." We distract ourselves from truly experiencing the pleasure and joy of receiving. We may miss the opportunity of relishing a fine meal, enjoying a true friendship, drinking in a glorious sunset with someone, or surrendering to exquisite sexual

pleasure. We may outwardly accept or appear to take in what is given. But our inner thoughts and inhibitions block our truly receiving and enjoying richness. Our past relationships have taught us that intimacy may be over-stimulating in both positive and negative ways so that we shut down. We fail to be open to giving and receiving friendship and love. Thus we deprive ourselves and others of the love, respect, and nourishment that might otherwise come our way in many forms each day. This continued state of self-imposed deprivation reinforces our deep-seated fear that there is no one there to meet our needs, no one who can respond to us, no one who truly values us, and no one who can dependably be there for us. One woman discovered that the silent message to her mother was: "You had your chance and you didn't do it right. You don't get another one!" The problem was the same message was later unconsciously sent to everyone in her life. Behind the facade of "everything is wonderful," the message could be read in her body through a chronically tight mouth and pursed lips. Her tense hands figuratively—and sometimes literally—tightened into angry fists. By keeping everyone out, by not being able to take in the nurturing that was available to her, she remained empty, feeling that there was a "hole inside." The emptiness reinforced her feeling that she couldn't count on anyone for anything. Of course, her behavior and approach to people proved her "right," which in turn reinforced the tensions that maintained her defense. Another woman has memories of refusing a single scoop of ice cream because she hated her mother's trying to control her eating. "If I can't have what I want when I want it, how I want it, and as much of it as I want, I don't want any at all." Needless to say her relationships were unnecessarily impoverished. Paradoxically she held stubbornly to her bond with mother by refusing many loving overtures of others. With horror she realized that her way of maintaining her bond with mother was to choose people who would withhold from her. She began to see that she had even reared her children not to be as giving to her as they might otherwise have been.

## 5. Avoidance of Smothering Scenarios

Related to the problem of giving and receiving in relationship scenarios is a series of maneuvers people go through to avoid experiences that the past has taught them to see as invasive, intrusive, and traumatizing. Many caregivers smother their children with care and attentiveness that does more to satisfy the caregiver's needs to give, than they do to satisfy the baby's needs to receive. Depending on how the baby experienced untimely or unwanted care, he or she may avoid interactions that risk the emotional

abandonment implicit in the caregiver's engulfing lack of attunement.

One mother reported to a Child Guidance Clinic because her four-year-old boy was constantly destructive toward her. Only recently he had physically attacked her with a knife and set her house on fire! Her history revealed that her beloved father died only days before her son was born. She believed that her failure to love and care enough for her father was in some way responsible for his death. In her grief she clung attentively to her child, fearing that he too might die if she did not smother him with love and care. When she was agitated and in grief over her father's death she could not sleep nights. She would wake the baby. Then she would rock and feed him until she felt soothed enough to go back to sleep. An over-doting, smothering pattern of mothering subsequently developed which forced the child into a manipulative pattern of aggressive behavior designed to keep his mother at bay. He had come to experience her care as intrusive and destructive. He identified with and then reversed the emotional pattern of intrusiveness in order to gain control over the mothering process! Just as he experienced her love and care as sadistically intrusive and destructive, he learned to be similarly intrusive and destructive toward her.

## 6. Role-Reversal Scenarios

The previous example of a child reversing roles of an unpleasant interaction alerts us to another kind of emotional scenario learned early in life.<sup>5</sup> Because the mind of the child is so immature and unformed in earliest emotional relationships, the child masters the pattern of the relationship scenario by imitating or identifying with it. We see babies imitating their mothers in many ways—smiling, vocalizing, or moving. Later the imitation extends to complex interactions or scenarios. In the process of imitation babies learn both sides of the scenario—complete with the emotional involvement of each role! Parents are often startled to suddenly realize that they are witnessing a glimpse of themselves in some movement, gesture, word, or interaction of their child! The Golden Rule of Relationship Scenarios is: "We do unto others what was done unto us!" How many parents swear they will never do such-and-such to their kids because they hated it so much from their parents? Only later, much to their dismay, do they discover that they are unwittingly passing on the very same kind of treatment to their children that they most hated from their parents!

As you search to make contact with your Fear of Abandonment you will be attempting to define your own preferred and dreaded interaction patterns or scenarios. As you discover a longstanding interaction pattern be sure to try the pattern in a role reversal to see what you come up with. Study these role reversals and see how you repeat in your significant love relations the things you most hated in your parents!

## 7. "Holding On For Dear Life" Scenarios<sup>6</sup>

Despite the many different ways in which people experience the Fear of Abandonment in later life, these fears all have a common root—the painful loss of a loved one at a time when love and support were most needed. As children we did our best to manage our pain in whatever ways we could. We tightened our muscles, stiffened our joints, and held onto our breath for dear life. And we've been "holding on for dear life" ever since! This is why, if we are to truly experience and find relief from our lifelong terrors, it is essential that we have someone to recognize our pain, to hear us, to be with us, to hold onto.

Feeling our terror of abandonment requires warm human contact—a safe harbor in which the frightened child inside can become known and not be ashamed for feeling so weak, so crazy, so vulnerable, and so afraid. But when we are holding on to our selves for dear life we cannot reach out to others. We cannot surrender to our painful, frightened feelings for fear that "the bottom will drop out" and there will be "no ground under us to break our fall." So we tighten our bodies and our diaphragm closes so that we can barely breathe. Not until it is safe to reach out again and hold onto someone else can we release the tension in our muscles and joints. Only then can our diaphragm safely open so that we can relax and let ourselves breathe and feel alive and safely grounded once again.

*The resolution of longstanding and deep characterological fear, unfortunately, is not a do-it-yourself matter. Permitting ourselves to surrender to deep-seated feelings of fear requires a witness because there is so much weakness and shame attached to fear.*

One man reports the following experience. "For years I didn't know how afraid I was of my ex-wife—not until I saw how her cruel and neglectful alcoholism was hurting our children. When I wanted to confront

her, I discovered I was terrified of her murderous rage. Worse, I was in a real pickle over this with my current wife who was urging me to take some protective action on behalf of my children. She had idealized my goodness, my kindness, and my masculine nature. She had made great sacrifices to be with me and to marry me. How could I let her down? If I confessed to her how terrified I was of my ex-wife, it would be admitting a weakness to her which I couldn't tolerate having. She would see my weakness, hate me for it, and leave me, coward that I was—or so I believed. How could I let her see she had married a scared little boy? In my therapy group I confessed how afraid I was that my wife would discover my weakness, shame me, and then abandon me. I couldn't admit to myself or let her discover that I was so scared to face my ex-wife that I couldn't even protect my own children! I was screaming and shaking as it all came out. Of course, it was my damaging and destructive alcoholic mother of infancy whom I encountered in my therapy. I was still frightened but firm when I finally confronted my ex-wife. Sure enough, she puffed up in a monstrous rage, eyes bulging, fists clenched, jaw tightened. Then she started pacing the room. Then she started sobbing." There is simply no way we can deal with such gripping fear alone. We have done our best to manage fear in our own ways all of our lives and look where it has gotten us—uptight and still frightened. We need a Listening Partner, a witness—in this example a group of witnesses—to help us see that we are not crazy. We need someone to be with us to help us see that there is no need to be ashamed and embarrassed for what was done to us as children. When the Fear of Abandonment is this deep and strong we need help from someone who knows how to listen. We have tried all our lives to handle it on our own and it has not worked. We have had "to hang on for dear life."

## 8. "Remembering Mother" Scenarios

Complex interactions and scenarios are often difficult to untangle as they are woven into a larger family picture. The very young child learns a familiar pattern even though it may not be in his or her long-term best interest. It may even bring intense pain rather than pleasure, but it always remembers or commemorates an early form of love.

Darrin was in advanced stages of his therapy when he finally acknowledged that he had been forever addicted to prescription pills for sleeping. From time to time he had made attempts (with and without help of

various kinds) to relinquish his habit of nightly sleeping pills. During the six-week period of letting go of his addiction he made frequent contact with his therapist. Darrin even had to take time off work several days during this period because of extreme fatigue and intense painful agony in all parts of his body due to his withdrawal from the medication and consequent inability to sleep.

Darrin was determined to discover the inner relationship scenario that compelled him to resort to prescription drugs. For several weeks he allowed himself the luxury of wandering around the house in his pajamas to see what might come up for him. He added the humorous touch of carrying a teddy bear. He soon found himself able to catch "cat naps" under the dining room table with his teddy and "blankie"—though he was aware during these naps of being hyper-alert to sounds and movements in the house. Darrin even put warm milk in a bottle to see if that would bring out more early memories! Without the pills he couldn't sleep a wink at night. So for awhile he dragged around desperately tired and miserable during the day.

Darrin studied all of his physical and emotional reactions to being without his pills. He soon developed the odd conviction that his therapist wanted him to be miserable and to moan and drag around in desperate agony! "I feel like I'm supposed to die for you," he wailed—not quite realizing what he was saying.

At this point Darrin made the decision to tell his mother about his life-long plight in hopes she could help him recover memories of what must have happened in his early life. Several interesting stories emerged. Mother had desperately wanted a baby. She clung to Darrin from the moment he was born. Her physical and emotional needs for a cuddly baby quickly taught Darrin an intolerance of physical separation from her. When Father later forced him out of the parental bed and yet later out of the parental bedroom, Darrin cried bitterly and intractably. Father, with rage and occasional physical violence, forbade Mother to rescue Darrin in the nightly scenes. Darrin would cry, kick, scream, and finally convulse in his crib—relentless in his demand for Mother. The doctor supported Father in his belief that the boy should be allowed to "cry it out" until they "broke him." But every night, after seemingly interminable angry, desperate, agonizing protests from Darrin—just when the child was about to die from choking and exhaustion, Mother would defy Father and creep into Darrin's room. She found it necessary to spend the remainder of the night in the rocking chair by the crib holding the baby so he could sleep. Darrin thus learned to stay awake and to be miserable until at

last she came. That is, he learned to be miserable, to almost die" for her. But the story and the family web, which remembers or commemorates mothering, becomes even more entangled.

In talking with his parents Darrin came to fully realize what bad shape their marriage had always been in. A year before, he had urged his mother into therapy for listlessness, depression, and feelings of meaninglessness and uselessness. It seems Darrin's mother, thirty-five years later, was still sitting in the same rocker. She pleaded with her son to return to their hometown and set up his business near her.

In therapy Mother worked on the trauma of her life which she could now, for the first time, share with Darrin. When she was around two years of age she and her slightly older brother accompanied their mother to the chicken coop to gather eggs during a break in one of those frightening Midwest thunderstorms with fierce wind, dark clouds, and terrifying lightening. The children were clinging to Mother's skirt when she slipped in the mud, spilling the eggs and injuring herself. Father asked neighbors to rush him and his wife to the hospital fifty miles away. Father left the children in the care of his own mother for three weeks. He returned grief stricken—without Mother. No attempt was made to explain their mother's untimely death to the children or to include them in the funeral plans. Darrin's mother related with sobs and shaking how for years she had sat in her little rocking chair by the window waiting desperately for her mother to return. "Where is Mother? Why did she go away? Doesn't she love me? Doesn't she need me? When will she come back?"

Darrin's mother married a man as emotionally absent as her father. But when Darrin was born, the emotional void left by the abrupt and mysterious abandonment of her mother was at last filled. Her husband and the doctor colluded in replicating her internal childhood scenario by cruelly forbidding her the connection with her beloved baby which she so desperately needed in order to feel once again enlivened.

In therapy Darrin soon realized that his inability to go to sleep without pills was for her—a living memorial to his mother's love for him. The pill addiction substituted for her warm body and allowed him to sleep. The instructions built into his internal scenario were that he was not to drift off to sleep without her. So he could only risk hyper-vigilant catnaps that were not in his bed where he might accidentally fall asleep.

Darrin also discovered the strange fear that if he went to sleep he would surely die—a role reversal of a scenario that was an accurate reading of his mother's unconscious fear of losing her mother. Darrin's loud protests of need for his mother throughout the night allowed Mother in her internal scenario to at last feel needed and wanted. In his near death desperation as a child Darrin replaced her own lost mother—but now she could override her childhood helplessness trauma and this time be the rescuer.

With these body-mind-relationship connections having been made through therapy, Darrin took his blankie and teddy to bed and slept for three solid days and nights! His need to stay up for her at any cost and his pill addiction (to substitute for Mother's finally coming and allowing him to sleep) at last ended. The unconscious relationship pattern of the scenario was broken. Likewise, his fears that either he or his mother would die if he gave up his vigil—the emotional role reversal of the internal scenario—the parent part, was over.

#### 9. Being "Sold Down the River to Mother" Scenarios

In complex scenarios other family members are often found to be "shadow figures" in the primary love interaction with mother. In the following example Father has his own investment in keeping mother and son strongly bonded to each other. By keeping her emotionally tied to the boy, he can avoid mother's infantile dependency needs.

Brent suffered from an inability to leave relationships with women that were no longer satisfying and were abusively wrong for him. He dreamed of being "at the foot of Mother's bed waiting for her to peek over, see me, and smile." He couldn't tell exactly how she was preoccupied up on the bed. Was she with someone? Was she on the telephone? He didn't know. But what he did know was that if he was just a good boy, waited long enough, or approached her in just the right way—sooner or later she would smile, hold him, and perhaps give him a breast.

Brent had always believed that it was "some sick need" of his to hang around beautiful and voluptuous women, no matter how emotionally crippled they were. He lived in hope that if he approached

them in just the right way they would somehow come through with the love and recognition he needed and give him at least a brief "sip of milk." In his self study experiences he learned that his clinging was not for him but for her (that is, simultaneously for his mother and for his women). Mother had needed him waiting at the foot of the bed so when she needed soothing he would be there waiting for her! In therapy Brent spent days of intense physical agony and seemingly endless, sleepless nights waiting for his girlfriend to demonstrate somehow that she loved him. It seemed clear to his therapist that she could not see him or love him for who he was but needed him to be there for her.

Showing considerable ingenuity and integrity, Brent had developed a brilliant career in corporate business. He was a mastermind in wheeling and dealing because of his "sixth sense" about the strong and weak emotional points of every player in the game. He knew everyone's needs and what it took to get what he required of them. But with women he was a disaster. His internal Fear of Abandonment scenario blinded him to the emotional emptiness of the women he chose. He came to see that his father had "sold him down the river" to a damaging, incestually-tinged, exclusive relationship with his mother. This had been accomplished by teaching his son hope, loyalty, devotion, and honor. Father was loyal and devoted to the physical care of his wife, but farmed out her emotional life of immature dependency, emptiness, and depression to his son.

Brent struggled desperately against fully experiencing the painful body-mind- relationship connection involved in his compulsion to remain attached to depressed, empty, crippled women who could never be there for him. He realized that the unconscious instructions in his Fear of Abandonment scenario were: (1) to be loyal and loving to her like Father was, (2) to remain "at the foot of Mother's bed" always looking for ways to please and to entice her, (3) to be present for Mother when she needed comforting from him, and (4) to obliterate all other relationships that would take him away from his bedside vigil.

Brent named the family monster, "Hope," as he saw how devious and destructive this pattern of blind loyalty, devotion, and honor that he had learned from Father could be. Brent slowly found forgiveness for his father who was basically a good, loving man. Due to his upbringing Father had no idea how to respond to the emotional needs of a woman or to a son. Brent also tearfully found a way to forgive his mother, realizing that

she was so damaged and devastated by her own life's circumstances that there was no way she could ever love or be emotionally available for anyone, including her son.

Brent came to see that his inability to "forgive" his girlfriend for not being capable of loving him was, in fact, his refusal to acknowledge his internal mother's total inability to be present for him, to love him. "If she (the girlfriend) only smiled occasionally 'over the edge of the bed at me' I would then know she loved me." This hope slowly turned into the realization that when she (both mother and girlfriend) did smile at him it was for her, not for him. Brent had chosen all these years to believe that when mother, or any woman, came through occasionally it was because they loved him rather than because they needed soothing. Brent feared that if he finally accepted that these empty, crippled women could not love him or be there for him emotionally he would be forced "to lose all hope and drop into the bottomless pit of eternal abandonment." For weeks intense physical pain, sleeplessness, and compulsive, crazy, and endless manipulations with his girlfriend kept Brent frozen on the brink of self awareness, refusing to allow himself to be fully alive in the ongoing bizarre hope that he could somehow be loved by the mother/girlfriend. Father had "sold him down the river using the family monster, Hope."

## 10. Being "Framed by the Other" Scenarios

Early relationships with Father and other significant men are often present in bonding scenarios in surprising ways. One woman found herself nervous and threatened by "the kind of hysterical energy that some men give out." Tearfully she said she feared losing herself in the frame of her new boyfriend's perceptions of her. She feared losing her sense of self by becoming sucked into his picture of who she was. Her body-mind-relationship connection took her back to two years of age when she first had experienced "this kind of male energy" as love from her maternal uncle, who adored her and lived in her home during the time her father was dying. "I gave my heart to him, to his hysterical 'let me be there for you energy' that men often give out. But he betrayed me with numerous girlfriends and finally with a new wife who had a daughter my age, both of whom I hated. He had his own frame of reference for me and what my emotional makeup was— but it wasn't me. I fell for the seeming affection of it all, only later to realize that his picture of me that promised so much was not for me but for him. He couldn't understand me for who I really was. My new

boyfriend brings out that deep fear in me of being taken in and betrayed by the way he frames who I am. He's so outgoing, so really 'there for me,' so seductive and promising, that I'm terrified of getting near him."

#### 11. "Masochistic and Perverse" Scenarios

Examples of internal Fear of Abandonment scenarios are always highly unique, strange, and unusually seem somewhat shocking to our rational minds. One man declared, "I have a hard-on for women who can't be there for me." Another said, "I wish to be passive until I am finally abandoned altogether." Another declared, "My deepest longing is for an empty teat." A homosexual man was finally able to state with conviction, "My deepest passion is to be beaten, raped, robbed, and left for dead." One woman's deepest bonding fantasy was "to be tied up and humiliated by my lover in the middle of a circle of men who then each take me by turn until I have no more body or self to call my own."

Statements such as these reflect years of self study and therapy and are drastically condensed into an emotional bottom line that captures the full sense of Fear of Abandonment scenarios as being the deepest and worst of one's crazy relatedness desires and potentials. Sometimes these scenarios appear as masturbation or orgasm fantasies or as pornography preferences.

Perverse and/or masochistic scenarios often accompany our sexual life, reflecting the fact that our first sensual experience of love had a sadomasochistic flavor—that is, we may have experienced considerable excitement in giving up aspects of ourselves to conform to the pattern of interaction offered by our beloved caregivers. Stated conversely, our Fear of Being Abandoned by our first love has left us forever searching for love in old familiar ways—no matter how self negating or perverse. Such early love scenarios are often accompanied by unusual, caricature-like, addictive sexual fantasies and practices because the relatedness strivings of early childhood are so often skewed and distorted.

One man who had always been obsessed with women's breasts was distressed by his incessant search on the internet for breast and nipple images that served as fetishes in his masturbation sessions. One night he dreamed he was lost in sucking the small nipple-like clitoris of a woman who was passively lying back,

totally turned on by him. When he awoke features of the woman quickly identified her as a composite of his mother and several important past girlfriends. His therapist pointed out that Freud taught that our sexual fetishes represent the way we first came to believe that Mother could be turned on. The clitoris symbolizes the young child's knowledge that there is a hidden or elusive place, an attainable position or scenario, a way of relating to and stimulating Mother's desire that totally satisfies and captivates her (Freud, *Fetishism*, 1927/1961). People's compulsive and displaced search for all kinds of perverse, addictive, and fetishistic satisfactions stems from their deep-seated Fear of Abandonment and their desperate search for a way of controlling the source of satisfaction (mother) so that she will never leave.

Sadomasochistically tinged Fear of Abandonment scenarios are a testament to the truism that babies will warp themselves in almost any way not to be abandoned. Sadistically tinged scenarios often exist as role reversals of our original (masochistic) situation.

## **Working With Your Fear of Abandonment**

### *Focus the Fear of Abandonment*

[\(click here to download a printable journal\)](#)

The deadly Fear of Being Abandoned is based upon our early childhood experience of not being responded to in the ways that we needed—of not having sufficiently consistent emotional contact or of losing whatever closeness we had. Think about what it was like for you as a young child. For some people this will be an easy task. Your 87 memories and feelings will be clear and accessible. For others it may be difficult. People often grow up telling themselves that they had a great childhood. Or they may believe that, "Of course I was loved, and everything was just fine." Only when they are confronted with serious difficulties in their present lives and relationships do they begin to look deeper. Such people come to recognize that denial is one way they coped with the painful realities of their childhoods. We must acknowledge or "own" our memories and feelings—sometimes buried for a long time—about what happened to us in those earliest of times. We can work with our Fear of Abandonment until we actually make contact in the body-mind-relationship

connection with our feelings and fears about not getting enough, our feelings of needing and desiring, our fears of losing, and our fears of being emotionally abandoned.

### [Breathe and Reflect on Past Abandonments](#)

Take time to focus on your breathing. Allow your awareness to expand to include your entire body. If you find yourself distracted by random thoughts, let them go by discarding them into your wastebasket.

Reflect on the ways that the Fear of Being Abandoned shows up in your life: Do you hold on inappropriately in relationships? Do you cling, withdraw, manipulate, or avoid good things? Do you repeat bad choices or do you stay in relationships too long in order to avoid being alone? Do you suffer slights, mistreatment, or abuse in order to keep a person from leaving you? Do you find yourself scheming and/or manipulating to make sure that you get what you need? Do you tend to see other people as "all good" until they disappoint you? Then do they seem "all bad?" What other manifestations of the Fear of Being Abandoned do you experience in your life? Consider ways that people often treat or mistreat you so that you somehow arrange to be deprived, disregarded, unnoticed, or otherwise mistreated. If so, what bond with which early caregiver(s) might you be reluctant to let go of? Write them all down—"owning" or acknowledging the fears as you go.

Then consider all possible role reversals. How do you "do unto others what was done unto you?" In what ways do you respond at times to your children, partner, or friends just as your parents responded to you?

Write in Your [Aliveness Journal](#)

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### **Elaborate in Your Aliveness Journal**

In Your [Aliveness Journal](#) record the anger, resentment, frustration, and hurt—and any other negative

feelings and emotions you have—toward someone who has abandoned you, rejected you, or failed to respond to your needs and desires. Then focus on your parents, and particularly on your mother—your first and primary caregiver. What negativity do you feel for not having gotten all that you needed in the ways that you needed it? The purpose of expressing the negativity is not to blame your mother or anyone else. She may have done the very best that she was capable of doing for you, given her understanding of you and her life circumstances at the time. She may have done quite a decent job, but you still felt the pain of being let down, of being abandoned at times. Expressing and releasing the negativity is an essential part of the process for undermining the deadly Fear of Being Abandoned and the effect it still has on your life. In what ways were you abandoned by your father and other significant people in your childhood?

In your [Aliveness Journal](#) write what you believe are the things that make for a good relationship. How should people be? How should they treat each other? Write about how you usually react when you are treated right.

Now [write](#) what you believe makes for a bad relationship. How should people not be and how should they not treat each other. Write about how you characteristically react when you are mistreated.

Later have an extended conversation about how you actually relate — with someone who lives with you or who is emotionally close to you. Ask that person to tell you frankly from his or her point of view what kinds of things in the relationship "set you off" — make you uneasy, angry, or upset. On the other hand, what kinds of interactions elicit from you a positive response of enthusiasm, contentment, or joy?

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#) and define for yourself as many of your scenarios as you can think of. For example, "When my husband says \_\_\_\_\_, I always \_\_\_\_\_." Or "When I am in a depressed mood I need my significant other to give me special attention, but instead he always withdraws and criticizes me.

Then try reversing the roles of the scenarios. You may quickly see how much like your parents you have become in relationships without realizing it!

Write the results in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### *Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection*

The Fear of Abandonment necessarily involves other people. The following exercises are designed to be done with a Listening Partner, or you may prefer to imagine the presence of another person, perhaps someone close to you.

#### **Reach To Someone You Need**

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed. As you did when working with the Fear of Being Alone, begin to reach into space with both hands, as if you are reaching for somebody you want or need. Who is that person? What are your needs? Move very slowly, becoming aware of what is happening in your body at each moment. Notice the images and associations that come into your mind. Express them to your partner as they occur. Later, note them in your Aliveness Journal and mark your Body Map.

Now open your eyes and slowly, very slowly, reach toward your Listening Partner while making eye contact. Pay attention to your responses. Some people will find it easy and pleasurable to reach. Others will want to reach like hungry babies to hold on and never let go. Many people will find in their bodies an unexpected resistance: the jaw tightens, the shoulders tense, the feeling inside is, “I can't,” “I won't,” “You can't make me,” “This exercise makes no sense,” “I don't want to reach,” “I can't count on you to respond to me so why should I?” [Record the results](#).

#### **Experience Your Listening Partner Reaching Back**

This time as you reach toward your Listening Partner, the partner will reach back toward you. Your listener reaches slowly toward the partner, holding out arms and hands, without making physical contact.

Observe carefully what you experience in your body. Make a conscious effort to keep your jaw loose and your shoulders and arms relaxed. What feelings emerge for you? How is your partner "supposed to be?" How is your partner "not supposed to be?"

Now what happens when you and your partner reach toward each other and make contact? Go slowly, monitor your bodily sensations and your mental images. Express yourself as you experience things happening.

For many of us, feelings of neediness and longing are experienced as painful or even shameful. For that reason we attempt to block such feelings by tightening and contracting various parts of our body. We can never get to the place of having our needs met, of having our longings fulfilled, or of not feeling abandoned until we have been able to move through the pain and the shame of acknowledging and owning that those feelings of not being fulfilled reside deep within us. Share with your Listening Partner all the things you experienced during this exercise—all of your sensations, images, and thoughts. The exercise and the sharing can bring about a deeper understanding and a clearer acknowledging of how you relate to the Fear of Being Abandoned.

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### Express Your Hurt and Anger

When we have recognized and acknowledged that we didn't get all we needed as children, then we can begin to contact our negative feelings about our sense of deprivation. Those feelings aren't new; anger and distress have been inside us since the first times Mother wasn't there when we needed her. But we learned to hold back such feelings—to suppress, to repress, to deny, and to dissociate them. The result may be that we live our adult lives with bitterness, resentment, depression, and depletion. Or we may be stuck with a ragefulness that is easily triggered and seemingly never resolved.

In order to experience and release your negativity more deeply, do the following exercise with your Listening Partner. Follow the reaching exercise above until you have contacted your inner feelings of need, loss, or aloneness. Stand before your partner with feet firmly planted. Make fists with your hands and hold them in front of you. As you make eye contact with your Listening Partner, begin to shake your fists and while speaking the following phrases.

“Why aren't you there for me?” or

“Why do you leave me? or

“Why don't you know what I need?”

“Why?”

Which of these or other similar phrases has significance for you? As you say these words, allow them to resonate fully in your body. Repeat the most meaningful phrases, until you can feel their full emotional meaning. Allow the anger to come through and express it with as much force and energy as you can. A full expression can leave you feeling relieved and renewed. And the anger—even very old anger—can be released and allowed to dissipate.

Repeat the exercise, this time using even more emphasis. Be conscious of all parts of your body. What about your face, your jaw, your neck and shoulders, your arms and fists, your eyes and voice, and your entire stance? Feel the energy of your self-expression. Speak your experiences and your reactions aloud. Say whatever needs to be said. Say it again with more force. *Then ask your Listening Partner to reflect what he or she sees and hears.* How convincing are you? What seems to be left unexpressed? Try again.

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your reactions on your [Body Map](#).

## *Shrink the Monster*

### Accept the Reality of the Past

After you have identified and acknowledged the shortcomings of the past, when you have experienced them and owned them, and when you have fully expressed the negativity surrounding them, you will then be ready to take the necessary step of accepting "the way things were." Acceptance is a key to shrinking the monstrous fear of being abandoned. Rather than continuing to live locked into feelings of despair, disappointment, resentment, and bitterness about not having been adequately responded to, you can now move on to accept the reality of your past life, however difficult or horrendous it might have been. Remaining stuck in the negativity of your past resentments simply perpetuates the effects of the negative conditions in your present life.

Accept that what happened did indeed happen and that it certainly has left its mark on you. But it is now time to let it go. Acceptance doesn't mean that it was okay that you were neglected or abandoned. It simply means that you are no longer fighting against your own inner reality. These things really happened. And they were bad. And you have been holding on to those negative reactions in your body, personality, and relationships ever since. Write about your acceptance of your past in your Aliveness Journal.

Sometimes when people begin to make contact with an inner sense of trauma, they are able to get mental images and pictures of what it was like for them as children. But then their rational mind worries if such atrocities could really have ever happened. Many bad things may have happened to us long before we developed ordinary ways of remembering them. The imprint of very early trauma lives on in our physical reactions and in our social interactions, not necessarily in mental pictures or images. That is, frightening and hurtful experiences continue to live on in our constricted muscles and in the ways we approach or shy away from certain people. Studies done with people in therapy show us that it doesn't truly matter if these images or "recovered memories" really literally happened in exactly the way our mental pictures say! What is important is that some things really terrible indeed happened to us as young children that we need to work for physical and mental release and relief from.<sup>7</sup> These exercises point the way toward accepting, grieving,

letting go, and finding new ways.

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### Grieve the Loss

Accepting the way things were for us brings up the sorrow and sadness that have inevitably lain beneath the anger and resentment that we've carried for so long. The sadness is about loss of the hope and the promise that was inherent in our earliest contact with our caregivers—the expectation that there would always be someone there to meet all our needs in the way we wanted them met. Essential to the working-through process is grieving that loss. The way we had hoped to be treated didn't happen. And there has been a great loss as a result. It is time to allow the long-held tears and the deep, disappointed crying to pour out. "I didn't get what I needed. It hurt me a lot. And I've been holding onto that pain, resentment, and sadness ever since."

Many people in our culture find it difficult or impossible to cry. Some can cry alone but cannot let others see their tears. Others find they need some kind of contact or support before tears will come. Many say, "I cry easily in the movies, but nowhere else." They can allow the tears when identifying with someone else but they cannot cry for themselves. Most of us learned as children to suppress tears, to avoid "feeling sorry for ourselves."

Not only do most of us carry around a repository of unexpressed sorrow and grief, but we are constantly confronted with situations that evoke sadness and anger that we still suppress. Life is full of sadness and hurt, but we seldom allow a full or appropriate emotional release of our feelings. Someone once remarked that if we were in touch with our feelings we would be unable to read even a newspaper through without crying! Our own world of relationships offers us daily disappointments that can range from simple hurts to emotional devastation. Tears not only express our natural emotions but also allow a physiological

release that is essential for healthy functioning of our bodies and our minds. Write about your grief in your [Aliveness Journal](#) and mark your [Body Map](#). Grieve for all the time and all the opportunities that have been lost, and for the time you have spent in unhappiness because you could not count on others in dependable ways.

### Let It Go!

Fully expressing the deep feelings of sadness and grief can bring you to the point of letting go. Letting go means dropping the illusion that "someday Mom will love me the way I always wanted and needed to be loved." Holding on to such a hope means that we then displace (transfer) that illusion onto other people in our current lives. In doing so we re-experience sorrow, bitterness, hurt, or rage when others inevitably disappoint us. But the larger problem is, because we're holding out to get it just the way we needed it then, we can never get what is available to us now! The holding on and holding out are visible in our bodies through chronic muscular tension patterns, such as the ones around our mouth, eyes, jaws, shoulders, joints, and hands. Or we may feel a tight holding on in our head or deep in our gut.

Our failure to let go of past disappointments is apparent in our relationship patterns by our not reaching out, by our not taking in, and by our meeting other's needs at the expense of our own. We therefore remain empty, lonely, frustrated, frightened, hurt, and angry.

When we have acknowledged and accepted the way things were, and have released the unexpressed emotions of negativity, hurt, and grief, then we can let go of the hope and the illusion that what was can be changed. Now we are in a better position to recognize, to accept, to take in the good that is realistically available to us in our lives.

[Record your reactions.](#)

Mark your [Body Map](#).

## *Find a New Way*

### Drink in The Good!

Assume a comfortable position. Take time to relax and breathe deeply. Discard any distractions in your special wastebasket. Concentrate on your breathing and feel the pleasurable sensations.

Recall a recent positive experience that was pleasurable and satisfying for you: taking a pleasant walk, observing a beautiful sunset, or playing an enjoyable game of golf. Bring into the present the good feelings. Let the wonderful and fulfilling sensations permeate your entire body and mind. Breathe in (inspire) deeply. Imagine that you are drinking in the good feelings that were there in the experience. Allow your whole body to bask in the goodness, the pleasure, the inspiration.

Think of an important person in your life. Consider what it is that person may have and want to give to you. Is it time, attention, appreciation, or some other sort of gift? Open up your heart and let that gift in. See if you can really let yourself have it. Let down the barriers to truly receiving what that person has to offer. You may have the thought, "But if I take it in, I'll feel bad when it's no longer there!" This is just such an attitude that keeps us empty and deprived. Take the risk of being nourished by the gift. Breathe it in. Don't worry; when that gift is no longer available you will be even better able to take in goodness and pleasure from other sources!

Record your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### Jump for Joy!

There is another secret which body therapists and physical trainers know: that moving and positioning our body in positive ways actually produces positive experiences and emotions to take with us into life's activities and relationships. Now let yourself begin producing positive and joyous sensations to take on

your journey! Slowly stand up straight. Plant your feet apart and slightly bend your knees. Raise your hands and arms to the sky. Stretch. Experience yourself reaching for the good! Reach for life and love! If you can, let yourself go to really experiencing free and spontaneous expression. Jump, jump again, jump for joy! Shout aloud! Shout louder to the heavens! Laugh and jump and shout for joy! "I am alive! I am alive and well and happy!" Skeptics have to actually get up and jump to know this truth about our bodies and our feelings! The more you allow yourself to really take in, to savor, to love and be loved, and to feel joy and happiness, the more the deadly Fear of Being Abandoned will diminish in your life.

What happens when you let your body be joyful?

Record your findings in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark Your [Body Map](#).

### **Say this Affirmation Aloud**

I am a human being who is alive! I can acknowledge and accept that my earliest needs were not responded to in ways I required. I can grieve the loss of what I did not have. I can let go of the illusion that I can re-do the past and make up for my pain. I can now be open and receive all the good that is available to me in my life. I can love! I can be loved! I do not need to fear abandonment. I can be joyful!

### The Fourth Deadly Fear: The Fear of Self-Assertion

#### *What the Fear of Self-Assertion is About*

There are times in our lives when we experience enormous anxiety over the seemingly simple matter of speaking up for ourselves. We may find ourselves unable to express disagreement with the boss or to ask for a much-needed and well-deserved raise. In our personal relationships we are apt to be compliant and agreeable, at least on the surface. We may cheerfully go along with our partner's agenda, even when it is at odds with our own. Yet after a while we begin to feel more than slightly ripped-off. We become uncomfortably aware that resentment and even hostility are building up inside us. Yet the prospect of a confrontation is so disturbing that we continue to stuff down our negative feelings. We may even find ways to blame ourselves. This suppressed burden of resentment, anger, and negativity is likely to cause us to feel sluggish, listless, weighed down, and generally unhappy. Or it may make us uptight, flighty, and anxious. Yet we tend to keep on a happy face. We may or may not be aware that the state we are in is profoundly connected to the Fear of Self-Assertion. We fear really putting ourselves "out there" in a full, alive, and independent manner.

#### *How the Fear of Self-Assertion Began*

During her stage of emotional dependency discussed in the last chapter, our little Helen had been busily occupied learning the complex scenarios which prevailed in her early relationships with significant others, especially her mother. Her emotions were divided. There were the "all-good" feelings that resulted when her desires and needs were being attended to or her scenario was being played out "properly." And she felt "all-bad" when her feelings were being poorly responded to or when the requirements of her scenario

were not being adequately met. Fearing emotional abandonment, Helen learned to seek out familiar interactions and to avoid new or strange ways of doing things.

But at some point it occurs to Helen that she doesn't always have to play exclusively by the rules which she and her significant others have jointly developed. Helen decides to declare independence by saying "no" whenever she can. (Mothers call this period the "terrible two's"—when opposition to the established family order prevails.) Helen, as a toddler, now insists on doing things according to her plan, her methods, and her wishes. She now announces vociferously and in bold actions that she must be in charge of matters that affect her life.

The best parenting strives to recognize Helen's need to be in charge of her life and to declare independence, while at the same time setting limits and offering her viable options. These negotiations around issues of control are delicate because what is entailed is Helen's daring to say "no" and daring to feel emotionally separate. In order to accomplish this developmental feat Helen must have gradually learned to tolerate previously intolerable feelings of frustration over separations. If she is not helped with these frustrations Helen may feel overwhelmed and experience a loss of control over her feelings of hurt, rage, and despair. Helen needs support in learning to assert herself.

Overbearing, rigid, or impatient parenting will bulldoze Helen's plans and feelings. Parental intolerance will frighten her initiative and crush her budding sense of self-assertiveness and creativity. Parental rejection of Helen's initiative and opposition, coupled with the message that she will receive love, acceptance, and approval only when she contains her negativity, will derail her from her quest for independence. She will then learn to hold in her "no," and to present instead the smiling, acquiescing face of the "good girl."

On the other hand, parenting without firm and mutually negotiated limits and options fails to help Helen deal effectively with the tensions that will always exist between her personal need to feel in charge of herself versus her interpersonal needs for negotiation, compromise, and cooperation with others in the world.

## *How the Fear of Self-Assertion Works in Our Lives*

Charting an efficient and fulfilling course between our needs for independence and our needs for interdependence is a lifelong project for all of us. The ways in which a toddler first learns to consider and to negotiate between competing sources of control has lifelong implications for all emotional issues involving self-assertion, opposition, compromise, negotiation, and loss of self-control. To the extent that Helen's early strivings for separateness and independence are stymied because her caregivers cannot tolerate her negativity and opposition, she will have difficulty asserting herself in certain situations throughout her life. The Fear of Self-Assertion appears in all relationships that require a balance of competing self-interests. The Fear of Self-Assertion shows up in many moments when we feel hurt, put down, or cast aside because our self interests are at odds with the interests of someone else. A slight threat of loss of control in a present relationship may trigger a long-standing fear of becoming lost in a power struggle in which we are likely to be painfully overruled or forced to face a humiliating defeat. The demand of a significant other may catapult us into fears of being completely lost or submerged by someone else's needs. We may automatically comply with or rebel against this perceived demand based on the history of our fear reflex.

Over time we have evolved many unconscious ways of managing our Fear of Self-Assertion. We may become passive or passive-aggressive. This means that while seeming to be positive and agreeable on the surface, we express our assertiveness and negativity indirectly. It may appear in subtle criticisms, barbs, hostile actions, delays, forgetting, or lateness. We may "act out" our anger by withholding affection from those whom we love. Not being "in the mood" can be a negative refusal to comply. Or we may establish blind prejudices rather than struggle with conflict, uncertainty, or insecurity.

Often, people who are afraid to assert their negativity have long lists of silent grievances toward those close to them. Beneath a smiling, agreeable countenance, their body is a repository of resentments and anger. Sometimes this adds up to enormous rage. Because the rage doesn't get directly expressed but is experienced passively or gets turned back upon one's self, it may become transformed into depression and/or many kinds of physical symptoms. Unexpressed anger contributes to such conditions as colitis, ulcers, headaches, arthritis, hypertension, depression and other muscular diseases. It's easy to see how the Fear of Self-Assertion

wreaks havoc in our relationships. A partner may think it's great to have a compliant mate who goes along with his agenda and rarely makes waves. But the person who does not assert her needs or wishes and who does not directly express her negativity is surely building up a storehouse of resentment, anger, and rage. When anger comes out indirectly or passive-aggressively there is never a real opportunity to clear the air in the relationship. Grievances may be carried silently for years. The weight of withheld negativity drags down and finally buries the positive feelings. The clearing, refreshing, and renewing of the atmosphere which follows the electrical storm of an angry exchange between two people never happens.

The Fear of Self-Assertion frequently shows up to cause damaging problems in sexual relationships. In this arena both men and women are often anxious about asserting their preferences, expressing their discomforts, and particularly, revealing any negative responses for fear they will be shamed, abandoned, shunned, or rejected. They may keep the hurt feelings to themselves. But they secretly harbor destructive resentment when they are unfulfilled, dissatisfied, or unhappy. The negative feelings are stockpiled and the person deludes herself that she feels safe. But the problem is that when negativity is withheld, the passion in the relationship dies. The result is often that, rather than facing and expressing the negativity, one or the other person leaves, the relationship is dissolved for lack of good feelings, or the relationship remains forever stagnant and unfulfilled. Those involved miss the opportunity to experience a certain reality about feelings: Withheld negativity acts as a block or barrier to experiencing good and positive feelings—including passion, joy, and sexual desire. When negativity can be fully expressed the barrier is removed and the good feelings and sexuality can flow once again. Workable and rewarding relationships require that each person involved be ready and able to assert her or his self-interests—often in opposition to the self-interests of others.

## **Working With Your Fear of Self-Assertion**

### *Focus the Fear of Self-Assertion*

[\(click here to download a printable journal\)](#)

### Reflect On Your Negativity

When you begin to work with your Fear of Self-Assertion you may experience great difficulty and resistance to exploring and expressing your separateness and your anger toward people you love. Often we hear comments such as, "I can't be angry or say negative things about someone like my mother. She was a good woman. She loved me. She did the best she could. After all, she was my mother!" These positive beliefs can be very real indeed. But they can also cover other negative feelings that are buried inside us from childhood. Unconscious negative feelings infect or inhibit positive ones in ways that are outside of our awareness. We may "act out" the negativity in some passive or unconscious way by withholding or indirectly expressing the anger. When we can fully express or discharge the negativity, then the positive feelings of self assertion can come through more freely and genuinely. Then we are no longer unconsciously compelled to "act out" the negativity. The natural drive toward self-assertion and independence will no longer be expressed in some disguised or inappropriate form. Write down your negative reactions to others who are important in your life and your fears of asserting yourself.

Write in Your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

#### Express Your Negativity to Your Listening Partner

You don't always have to express your anger and negativity directly to the person involved in order to discharge the long-held feelings. In fact it may be better not to! Instead, you can express it to an attentive listener who will be able to hear your expressions of distress. You can discharge some forms of anger when you are alone.

If you have lived long disconnected from your negativity, you no doubt have repressed it beyond simply being a "good girl" or "good boy." It then takes giving yourself permission and allowing yourself considerable practice to be able to express your anger and resentment, even when you are alone. You will have to confront your fear that something terrible will happen if you do release those long held feelings. What would that terrible something be? Would you be abandoned? Would you not be loved? Would you not

be acceptable? Would you be crushed? Would you feel shamed and humiliated? Might you severely injure or kill someone?

As children, expressing our negativity—saying "no"—was the gateway to achieving separateness from our parents. Consequently, withholding anger and negativity can be a way of staying emotionally connected to parental figures or to others with whom we have developed deep (dependent) attachments. But the cost to our bodies and relationships is high. Expressing opposition means separating and becoming emotionally independent. Thus your resistance to expressing negativity may indicate a reluctance to becoming truly separate from parental figures or from loved ones in your life now. Your reluctance may be your way of not allowing yourself a full measure of self-confidence, pride, and self-assertion.

You will find that when you connect to the angry feelings and express them with real energy and conviction, the negativity will begin to dissipate. You will feel freer and more alive. Much to your amazement, you will now begin to experience genuine positive feelings that before had seemed utterly impossible. If at the end of your angry expression you do not feel better, this may be an important clue that you have not yet reached the full extent of your rage and that more expressive work is needed.

Write your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

Elaborate in Your Aliveness Journal

As you reflect on these issues, write your thoughts and feelings in your [Aliveness Journal](#). Think of a person from whom you have withheld anger. Pour out your anger onto the pages. Blame, complain, criticize all you want. Don't hold back. If you feel uncomfortable writing down negative things about someone who is important to you, remember that you are expressing feelings, and that feelings are neither bad nor good, they just are. It is important to keep in mind the difference between feelings and actions.

## Write a Letter Expressing Your Differences

In your [Aliveness Journal](#) assert your independence, your differences, and your anger in the form of a letter (not to be mailed) expressing your feelings to a person you are dependent upon, angry with, or have been hurt by.

## *Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection*

In working with separateness, opposition, and negativity the goal is to feel and to express your self-assertiveness so that your negative feelings can be released. *Simply thinking or writing about intense feelings is rarely enough. In order to be able to release negativity you must first be able to feel it in your body.* When you feel and express yourself fully in some way, you are, so to speak, clearing out the pipeline. You will be surprised at the change that can take place when you devote some time and energy to clearing the air or getting things off your chest. Negative feelings which only a short time ago you believed would never leave you can quickly drain away and disappear. What flows in to replace the negativity is the love, respect, good will, or passion that has been previously denied or blocked by the Fear of Self-Assertion.

There may be people in your life who have been truly hateful to you. There may be relationships that have been deeply hurtful and destructive to you. Fully and appropriately releasing your anger and negativity toward these people will open up the flow of assertive and creative energy needed to take appropriate action so that you can go on with your life. Not asserting yourself keeps you in a prison-house of anger and despair.

Below are some exercises for helping you to experience and release your anger and negative feelings. They can be done alone, but are ideally experienced with a Listening Partner.

## Express Your Negativity by Hitting With Force

One way to harmlessly release angry feelings which are pent up in your body is to take a tennis racket, a bataca, or a rolled-up magazine or newspaper and strike a soft surface like a couch or bed. Hold the object with both hands and bring it straight up over your head. Stretch it high. Then bring it down on the bed

with all the force you can muster. Repeating this experience is particularly effective when you make loud sounds or yell words to accompany the hitting. As you hit, express words that come to you like, "Stop it!" "How could you?" "Leave me alone!" or "You hurt me!" Put more force and expression into the hitting and vocalization until you can really experience and own your feelings with your entire being. At first you may find yourself holding back in various ways. But when you are able to express the anger with full body involvement you will begin to feel many different things. You may be afraid that you have actually hurt someone. Or you may want to cry. But you have prepared the way to experience relief. It is the beginning of a process toward feeling more "open" and "cleansed." You will move toward experiencing new and positive feelings.

Record your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

#### Say "No!" and Mean It

Stand with your feet firmly planted apart about the width of your shoulders. Bend your knees slightly. Begin saying out loud the word "No!" Repeat it several times. How does it feel to you to say "No"? What is the sound of your "No"? Are you convincing? Is there a question mark at the end as though you are asking permission? Does it sound like you mean what you are saying? Perhaps your "No" sounds like you don't expect to be heard or paid attention to. Perhaps your "No" sounds as if you expect to be hit!

Repeat the word "No" several times loudly and forcefully. What feelings do you have in response to this strong "No"? Are you uncomfortable? Are you anxious? What associations or images occur to you? Where in your body do you feel tightness? Now, say "No" as loud as you can. Scream it if you have to in order to really mean it.

Record your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### Say "No!" While Making Eye Contact

Try the above "Saying No" exercises while making eye contact with your Listening Partner. Pay attention to your facial expression when you say "No!" Are you smiling or smirking? If so, the smile may be an indication of a habitual pattern of denying negativity. The smile sends the message, "I don't really mean it—I'm really a good little girl/boy." What other expressions of denial or inhibition can you detect as you work with your partner on saying "No!?" How do you hold back? What emotions come up for you?

Make a note on your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### Yell, "Get Off My Back!"

While standing and facing your Listening Partner try saying, "Get off my back!" Using first one elbow and then the other, push firmly backward—like you were literally trying to push someone off your back. Alternating elbows, push back harder while loudly and clearly insisting that the other person get off your back! Take your time, push hard and yell! Insist on your right to have your life your very own way and not to be saddled by the agendas of other people! Open your chest and breathe deeply. Yell, "get off my back!"

Record your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### Twist a Towel and Insist, "I Have a Right!"

Take a small towel or T-shirt. Twist it and hold it with as much strength as you can muster. Repeat

the words, "I have a right!" You are expressing your right to assert yourself, to be alive, to do it your way! Feel the strength of your energy and determination in your body—in the muscles of your fingers, hands, wrists, arms, and chest. Try growling aloud, "It's mine! Or, "I want to do it my way." Know that expressing yourself is your right. Do not limit your full expression of voice, hands, arms, chest, and shoulders. Really tell your Listening Partner that you have a right! Include all of the things you have a right to that have been so long denied. Let your partner really hear it—insist that you have a right to be fully and passionately alive!

Write these things in detail in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### *Shrink the Monster*

Unexpressed anger often looms like a very large monster. Yet we find that when we have expressed our anger in harmless and non-attacking ways the monster does indeed shrink! The energy and power behind the negativity dissipates. In the yelling and hitting exercises above you were likely to have begun by expressing your anger toward someone in the present. But experience shows that in the process of hitting, other feelings tend to come up. The focus may quickly shift to someone else, perhaps to a person in the past, like your mother, father, ex-partner, or sibling. In expressing the negativity you will find that you are often taken quickly back to the historical source of your anger. When these old feelings are touched, expressed, and released, then you are addressing long-standing fear reflexes and truly shrinking internal fear monsters. The anger that belongs in the present has inevitably diminished in the process of locating its source in the past.

Imagine your Fear of Self-Assertion as taking the form of a monster that has loomed over you, that has intimidated and controlled you. Now say the words: That was then. Take a deep breath and see yourself growing from a small and insignificant child to becoming the same size as your monster. Look the fear monster in the eye and assert the words: "I have a right!" Then shrink the monster to palm size. "This is now."

Record your response in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### *Find A New Way*

After you have expressed your negativity in writing, experienced it in your body, and released it through words and movement, you have begun taking responsibility for feelings that belong to you and for fear reflexes from your past. Then, and only then, you may wish to express yourself directly to the person you are angry with—your partner, friend, parent, or boss.

You can now better express your negativity without the additional negative charge that actually belongs to your childhood past. You can accept your present responsibility: "These feelings belong to me and to my past. There are many real feelings toward the other person I can express now without excess baggage left over from the past." You can now acknowledge the negative feelings which have gotten stirred up in the relationship without blaming or attacking the other person. You can now own your feelings by saying, "I have been feeling neglected, criticized and belittled"—instead of, "You are neglecting me, criticizing me, or belittling me."

If you blame and attack others you will inevitably produce defensiveness, counterattack, and/or withdrawal in them. You will succeed in bringing about the very reactions that you most fear! But if you can learn to assert yourself without blaming and attacking you will not invite such a crushing counterattack or a hurtful rejection.

Most of us need practice asserting ourselves in effective ways. Think of your capacity for self-assertion as a muscle. If you haven't exercised it lately your self-assertion muscle will be weak and flabby. Each time you overcome your fear and express your needs, your wants, your opinions, your desires, and your negative feelings the muscle will get stronger. Asserting ourselves effectively becomes easier with time and practice. It is best not to attempt direct, realistic expressions of your negative feelings toward people until you are truly ready. Go over your feelings first with your Listening Partner until you gain enough perspective to make your expressions effective rather than damaging.

How important it is to notice and to enjoy the good body feelings you have when you assert yourself! Instead of receiving a lightning bolt or a devastating punishment, you can have a satisfying sense of increased strength and independence. Through experiencing, owning, acknowledging, expressing, releasing, and taking responsibility for your negative feelings you will have begun to confront and to diminish your Fear of Self-Assertion. Let yourself enjoy your new-found sense of freedom and aliveness!

**Say this Affirmation Aloud**

I am a human being who enjoys doing things my own way. I have been attacked, shamed, and hurt for wanting to be different from how others wanted me to be. I can bear the pain of forceful, negative, and angry opposition. I have the courage, determination, and capacity to enjoy my own uniqueness and to assert my right to be separate and independent. I have no need to fear self-assertion.

## Chapter Seven

### The Fifth Deadly Fear: The Fear of Not Being Recognized

#### *What The Fear of Not Being Recognized is About*

How many times do we find ourselves looking for the right thing to wear for a special event, certain that we will feel out of place or not comfortable if we don't find it? Or we worry if our hair isn't quite right or if a blemish appears. Or if we don't have the right shoes. We can't seem to feel okay about ourselves if our appearance doesn't suit us.

Certain social situations make us feel very insecure and we worry that we won't say or do the right things or that we won't be interesting enough. Being in the presence of some people—particularly ones we consider important or prestigious—can make us absolutely tongue-tied. Or at times we find ourselves "name-dropping" or slipping in references to our accomplishments in order to feel worthwhile. In our work we put up a self-assured front, but inside we wonder when the axe will fall. Sometimes we have an underlying, nightmarish feeling that someday someone will expose us for the inept, inadequate persons we really at some level believe ourselves to be. We feel like impostors.

We find ourselves needing reassurance from our partners and friends that we are okay. Yet when we're given compliments about how we look, how we perform, or who we are, it doesn't seem to make a difference. We never quite believe it anyway. Or at least their positive feedback rarely takes away our discomfort completely. Why don't we feel better about ourselves?

#### *How The Fear of Not Being Recognized Began*

In order to develop self-respect, self-esteem, and self-love it is essential that who we are and how we

are is seen, appreciated, affirmed, and mirrored back to us in various ways by significant people around us. When we did not receive adequate acknowledgment of our developing personhood in our early years, we grew up with feelings of being insignificant or even valueless. We later live out our lives with an underlying Fear of Not Being Recognized.

Let us return to Helen in order to gain an understanding of how this Fear of Not Being Recognized began. By the end of the third year of life our little heroine is becoming a real person. She has won her right to oppose what others want from her and to negotiate mutually satisfying relationships. She is now relatively free from the threat that, on the one hand, others will unduly control her, and on the other hand, that she may lose control over herself or her feelings. She is now in a position to carve out a new kind of relationship with others around her. But what exactly does Helen need at this point? She needs a firm sense of being an independent self—her “own self,” a sense of being a fully functioning person, a feeling of being an autonomous center of initiative. But how will she establish and strengthen her sense of having a strong, cohesive sense of “I,” a self all of her own? She must be seen and acknowledged for her developing talents and skills. All that she is and is becoming must be found to be worthwhile and acceptable by the important others in her world. The process of defining and strengthening a healthy sense of self is primarily accomplished through affirming reflections or “mirroring” responses from Helen's parents and significant others. The smile, the nod, the enthusiastic gesture from Mother or Father must match her own feelings. When Helen comes proudly marching into the room to show us how well she can do somersaults, or what she has just unearthed in the garden, or how pretty she looks in her new dress, she is seeking a proud, admiring reflection in her parents' eyes, voice, and smile. She wants to be told how strong she is, how clever she is getting to be, and how pretty she looks.

At times Helen's sense of self is strengthened through identifying with another significant person in a twin-like fashion. She needs to feel, “We are just alike, so I am strong and good just like you!” At other times self consolidation may come through feeling inspired by the connection to an idealized parent: “My Mommy is the best cook in the whole world;” or “my Daddy has the nicest car of anyone on the block;” or “my Grandpa knows everything!” The purpose of all of these reflections, identifications, and idealizations is the strengthening of her sense of self through being seen and being found acceptable. Helen learns self-

affirmation from the ways she experiences others affirming her.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately many problems can and do arise when three year olds strive to have their psychological selves mirrored and strengthened. For example, a child comes excitedly running into the house, "Mommy, Mommy, see what I found!" But instead of prizing the treasure or the treasure seeker, Mother may show more concern for mud on the carpet, for mussed up hair, or for a shirttail hanging out. Cleanliness, order, and decorum are valued more than an excited self-expression.

Frequently, significant others fail to reflect how wonderful the growing talents and skills of the young child really are. When the child proudly exhibits to her parents some new creation or performs a new trick on her tricycle, an insensitive parent may be indifferent to her efforts, or tell her how she could have done it better. Or when the child verbally expresses pride and pleasure in herself she may be met with words like: "Don't toot your own horn so loud." Or, "You're getting too big for your own britches." Or, "Don't be so self centered." Or, "Don't break your arm patting yourself on the back!"

Often parents' acknowledging or mirroring failures can be traced to their own rigid ideas and absolute images of what their children ought to be like and who they should become. Frequently these images are derived from the attitudes and values of the particular culture or sub-culture in which they live. Or the images may simply be reflections or extensions of the parents themselves. But the parents' ideas about who their child is or could become exert a powerful and life-long influence on the developing self of the child. Self-expressions that don't fit the parents' images are often ignored, discouraged, or even ridiculed or punished. The child learns to adapt to and to incorporate the parents' expectations as best she can. The child remains forever alert to what brings about positive acknowledgment from those whom she loves. She never forgets what brings about disapproval, shame, ridicule, or unresponsiveness.

### *How The Fear of Not Being Recognized Works in Our Lives.*

We all need acknowledging others from birth to death—important people in our lives who see us and affirm us for who we really are. We need people who are pleased with our accomplishments, who are proud

to be connected to us. The need for personal acknowledgment through being affirmed, confirmed, and inspired is universal and lifelong. If our earliest strivings are met with sufficient acknowledgment, we will then tend to feel comfortable being ourselves throughout our lives. We will feel safe turning to others for acknowledgment. But if our developing self was not adequately acknowledged in that early and crucial era, we may have learned immature or incomplete ways of gaining acceptance and compensating for feeling unacceptable. Our old patterns tend to cause distress and pain in our adult lives. And we find, much to our chagrin, that we are stuck in childish or simplistic ways of seeking acceptance.

If, when we turn to others in search of confirmation of ourselves, we feel shamed or humiliated for our selfishness or self-centeredness, then we lose our sense of self-esteem and self-cohesion. We may become frantic or driven in an attempt to regain our self-esteem. Essentially stuck in a three year old mold we clamor in one way or another, "See me, see me!" Instead of receiving acknowledgment, we may feel or actually be met with painful shaming and humiliation for needing reassurance.

Failure to feel acknowledged may, on the one hand, leave us with a perennial readiness to fly into narcissistic rage, to puff up with righteous indignation, or to seek revenge for feeling wronged. Our sense of entitlement says, "Nobody's going to rain on my parade!"

Or, on the other hand, we may become afraid of being humiliated for what is actually a perfectly normal and healthy need to be seen as strong and acceptable. We may come to feel that it is somehow wrong to take pride in self-achievement. Or that we are likely to be seen as self-centered or selfish if we express pride or seek confirming responses from others. In these ways faulty acknowledgment in childhood results in either an inflated or a deflated sense of self, creating in us a world view in which our self-esteem feels constantly threatened. In feeling chronically deflated or over-inflated we may find ourselves as adults spinning our wheels in an attempt to correct problems of self-esteem developed in early childhood.

In relationships, our need for reassurance and affirmation may seem like incessant demands for attention. Or our self-preoccupations may cause us to be insensitive to or unaware of our partner's or our children's needs. They may feel neglected, devalued, rejected, or disregarded. Here again we may realize our

Fear of Not Being Recognized by actually stimulating shaming and blaming responses or by forcing others to abandon us!

Faulty acknowledgment that plays into our Fear of Not Being Recognized may lead us to abandon our own true selves in order to become the person we feel we ought to be to please others. We look around for an image to model ourselves after. What is considered to be acceptable, likable, desirable, or admirable? The media offer constant reflections of our image-driven culture and provide us with stereotypes of how we "should" think, act, play, feel, and relate. Media information tells us exactly what to wear, eat, drink, drive, and how to comb our hair.

It may be that our ultimate cultural image is none other than Barbie or her counterpart, Ken. Barbie is perfect. But Barbie has no feelings, no personality, no faults, no problems—except what we project onto her. But she has lots of clothes. And she has all kinds of accouterments that fit many occasions and allow her to play a myriad of roles. When our Fear of Not Being Recognized drives our lives into complying with the images our culture surrounds us with, we may find ourselves becoming more like a Barbie or a Ken doll, lifeless imitations of the real person we were meant to be—the real person we could yet become.

## **Working With Your Fear of Not Being Recognized**

### *Focus The Fear of Not Being Recognized*

[\(click here to download a printable journal\)](#)

#### **Breathe, Relax, and Turn Inward**

Take time to relax and breathe deeply. As you draw each breath allow your focus to shift from outside considerations to your inner self. Put any distractions into your imaginary wastebasket. Reflect on what you have just read about The Fear of Not Being Recognized. Consider how you are impacted by it.

Think about how you imagine you are regarded by others. On a scale of one to ten, how much do you

think others value you? On a scale of one to ten, how much do you value yourself? As you think about these things notice what has happened to your breathing. What sensations, images, and thoughts come up for you?

Write in Your [Aliveness Journal](#)

Mark your [Body Map](#).

Elaborate in Your Aliveness Journal: Image Self and Real Self

In the next [Aliveness Journal](#) box there are two columns. In the left column you will write in all of the things you feel you must be in order to really be worthwhile and acceptable to others and therefore to yourself. Then farther down the left column you will write in all the things you must have in order to be worthwhile and acceptable.

### EXAMPLES OF YOUR ALIVENESS JOURNAL PAGE

#### **Image Demands**

I must be...

*Thin...*  
*Smart...*  
*Beautiful/Handsome...*  
*Perfect Body...*  
*Successful...*  
*Wealthy...Etc...What else?*

#### **Image Self**

How I Stack Up.../I am in Fact...

*Fat...*  
*Stupid...*  
*Ugly, Etc....*

I must have and do...

What I actually have and do...

*The right clothes...*  
*The latest hair style...*  
*A certain automobile...*  
*A special house...*  
*A certain kind of neighborhood...*  
*Etc....What else?*

*Ugly clothes....*  
*The wrong hair, Etc....*

As you consider your self-image be as soul-searching and honest as you can. Our whole culture is so permeated with image consciousness that it is impossible not to be caught up in it to some degree or another. Your hesitation here no doubt reflects your uneasiness or shame for wanting things that you think might make you feel better about yourself or be more attractive to others. Note any shame and how it comes up for you in your Aliveness Journal.

Your list in the left column is the representation of the Image Demands of parents, friends, family, and the culture that you have internalized—all the ways you must be and all the things you must do to be absolutely wonderful! Don't let socially conditioned shame get in your way here—let yourself go imagining what you must have and how you must be in order to be a wonderful person. On the right side of the page write how you feel you are in relation to each image demand. Notice how you feel in your body as you write these things down. You may find yourself becoming quite deflated and depressed. Or you may tend to rise up and counter these shortcomings with "Yes, but..." and search for examples of your worthiness. Observe your responses. As you look at your list, remember that both sides of the page are about your Self Image. Note your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

The next [Aliveness Journal](#) page is for writing about your Real Self. Write about your beliefs about how you really are and the shame and pride that come up when you acknowledge yourself. Write your reactions on the Real-Self page. Think about those aspects of you that are your Real Self, not about what you are supposed to be according to external standards or demands. Make a list of your qualities or characteristics

that you feel are really you, qualities that you value—even secret ones. Beware of allowing either false modesty or shame about self-pride to deflect you from defining the worthwhile and valuable aspects of yourself.

### *Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection*

The following experiences will be most valuable to you if they are done with your Listening Partner. If this is not possible, then do the exercises alone, experiencing your feelings as deeply as possible. Write about your responses in your Aliveness Journal and record your physical experiences on your Body Map.

#### Recall Experiences of Being Devalued

Recall times when, instead of being acknowledged and accepted, you felt devalued or humiliated. As you remember, try to actually feel the impact of these experiences in your body. You may experience deep pain, humiliation, or shame. Or you may feel intense anger or resentment. You may be afraid of getting all shaken up or of losing control. Share these reactions with your Listening Partner and write them in your Aliveness Journal. This is an opportunity to air longstanding pain, shame, and resentment. Now is the time to talk about things you may never have shared before. Perhaps you were taught that such feelings are insignificant, that your feelings of wanting acknowledgment and recognition are selfish. Experience your body as you share. Where do these sensations and feelings affect your body? Write on the Body Map. Can you express and release the tensions? Is there someone you want to scream at or get back at? Perhaps you need to simply scream—to get it out, or to cry your tears of self-pity or hopelessness. Write your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#) and on your [Body Map](#).

#### Recall Experiences of Being Acknowledged

Share with your Listening Partner the times when you felt acknowledged and esteemed by others for your Real Self. This is not a time for false modesty—really let it out with your Listening Partner. How does shame work to inhibit what you say, to spoil potentially good feelings? How do fears of being

unacknowledged tarnish genuine feelings of self-pleasure and pride? Indicate how you are affected on the [Body Map](#) and record your experiences in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

#### Experience Having Your Real Self-Acknowledged

Share with your Listening Partner all those parts of your Real Self that you value. *Ask your Listening Partner to acknowledge and reflect your Real Self-qualities back to you, one at a time after you have named them. For example, "I see your aliveness, your sense of humor, your integrity, I like these qualities and I value them."*

*Your Listening Partner can also acknowledge the feelings you are experiencing as you name your Real Self-qualities: "I hear your reluctance to tell me the good things. I hear your fear that I will not find you acceptable for who you really are. I understand your fear that being seen by me may make you feel humiliated or ashamed. I can really value the you who has been hiding in shame all these years! I know your need to feel acknowledged and share your fear of being found unacceptable." Recall that your Listening Partner is only to mirror you, to reflect what qualities you feel are real and how you feel about them. Your Listening Partner does not add, qualify, or interpret.*

Record your [experiences](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### *Shrink the Monster*

#### Enjoy Real Self-Esteem

Begin a Real Self-esteem exercise which you will practice daily over the next few weeks. Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor. Relax and take several deep breaths. Quiet your mind by imagining that you are depositing all distractions and tensions into your imaginary wastebasket.

Then bring to your awareness a vivid image that is pleasing and engaging—a lovely landscape, an ocean view, or a beautiful arrangement of flowers. The image should evoke the senses of sight, sound, smell, touch, and perhaps even taste. When the scene is very real to you, breathe it in so that you can feel it in your body. Now recall a time when you were acknowledged or found worthy for some aspect of your Real Self. Take time to feel the acknowledgment in your body. How good it feels to have aspects of ourselves esteemed! Enjoy the inspiration!

Think of another time when you were acknowledged and esteemed. You may at first find it difficult to recall such times. Keep reflecting until you do. Allow some moments for taking it in. Repeat this exercise later today and several times a day for a week. In the beginning it will require a little time to become quiet and receptive. But soon you will be able to see the scene and recall the good feelings of the acknowledging moments in a few seconds. Then you can do the exercise often and enjoy the real sense of worthiness and self-esteem it allows. This exercise will help you to establish an internal basis upon which you can build increased Real Self-esteem.

Soon you will find that you are able to identify other times when either you have been or are presently being acknowledged for your Real Self. But more importantly, you will begin to notice and to "take in," to accept, and to internalize self-esteem on a daily basis when others acknowledge you for your Real Self. You will no longer need to deflect or discount their responses. Sometimes we reveal our difficulties in enjoying Real Self esteem when we make such comments as, "I have trouble accepting compliments," or "I feel uneasy when people praise me." Such phrases signal our tendency to deflect or to discount acknowledging responses from other people. We need affirmations of ourselves every day of our lives. But our conditioned shame often prevents our enjoying healthy self-pride and allowing the good feelings of being worthwhile and acceptable to fill our lives. Think of the many kinds of self-affirmation you have received from association with other people—children, friends, family members, and mentors—and how much they have meant to you. We can take pride and joy in the associations we have with respected others who help us build and maintain healthy self-esteem.

Write your Experiences in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your reactions on your [Body Map](#).

### Shrink the Monster

Imagine a monster figure that symbolizes your Fear of Not Being Recognized and its impact on your life. That was then. Recall the list of times you felt acknowledged and valued. As you breathe deeply, experience each separate occasion of feeling affirmed throughout your entire being. As our Real Self-esteem grows, The Fear of Not Being Recognized diminishes. We shrink the disabling fear monster by truly valuing our real selves. Imagine your monster diminishing to palm-size. This is now. What comes up for you?

Record your experience in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### *Find a New Way*

By acknowledging the damage that has been done in the past to our Real Self, by risking letting go of our Image Self, by feeling the pain of not having been seen, and by letting in current acknowledgments from those around us, we can begin to heal the wounds in our self esteem. We can recognize the old reflexes when they occur—the self-negations, the blocking of self-affirmations, and the grandiose but unrealistic compensations. We can replace faulty thoughts and attitudes left over from an old fear reflex with a deeply felt affirmation of who we really are and pride in who we are becoming!

#### **Say this Affirmation Aloud:**

I am a human being with a Real Self that needs to feel affirmed, loved, and respected by others. I am able to accept self-affirmation joyously, and without inhibition. I have been shamed, humiliated, devalued, and hurt by others not finding me acceptable. I can bear the pain of not always being acceptable to everyone. I do not need to fear lack of recognition or being unacceptable.

## Chapter Eight

### The Sixth Deadly Fear: The Fear of Failure and Success

#### *What the Fear of Failure and Success is About*

The Deadly Fear of Failure and Success affects most people to one degree or another. It manifests in feelings of not measuring up, of not being as good as some other person, or in feelings of anxiety about not being able to function as well as needed or expected. We may experience the fear as deeply devastating and paralyzing. Or it may simply cause us troublesome anxiety that inhibits our effectiveness. The Fear of Failure may create such intense internal constrictions that we completely blow a job interview or fail a crucial exam. Or it may undermine our composure and confidence so that we are unable to put our best foot forward. It may result in mild to severe performance anxiety when we are about to introduce ourselves to a group, to give a speech, to participate in a competitive sports event, or to perform before others in any capacity whatsoever. The Fear of Failure may hold us back from pursuing a particular relationship. Or it may inhibit us in our social interactions in a variety of ways. There are endless situations which bring up this fear, and there are very few people who live completely without it.

We tend to judge success and failure in terms of other people—how our efforts, skills, products, or creative efforts measure up or compete with standards set by those around us. To the extent that success and failure are about winning and losing they also involve competition. In one way or another we compete with others in order to be successful, or, one could say, to be chosen or acknowledged as successful or as a winner. Even when we explicitly compete with ourselves, comparisons to others<sup>37</sup> are inevitable. Telling ourselves it doesn't matter if we win or lose may be a great idea but it simply doesn't touch our deep-seated fear reflexes.

There are also many ways in which we are afraid to win. The Fear of Success may manifest in the feeling that "something dreadful will happen if I really do win." "I may be drastically punished in some way if I do make it to the top." Or, "if I succeed I will have to keep on succeeding." When competing for a special position, or in a sporting event, or even for a personal relationship, we may inexplicably undermine ourselves at some decisive moment, therefore assuring our loss. To reverse a well-known phrase, sometimes we may have a penchant for "snatching failure out of the jaws of success!" There's also fear that success will lead to a need to keep on succeeding—and that can be scary.

Competition always occurs in the context of "triangular" relationships whether that fact is obvious to us or not in a given situation. For example, the triangle may be comprised of me, the person I desire, and my real or imagined rival. Or the triangle may be me, the job I want, and the other applicants. Or the triangle may be my product, the consumer, and other competing products. The third party may be silently operating in the background of my mind as a moral value, a cultural proscription, or a judgmental attitude. Or the third party may be a belief about what I "ought" to do, or what I think is the "right" way.

It is in the nature of competition and triangular situations that someone wins and someone loses in relation to the desired person, criterion, recognition, or goal. Thus our attitudes about winning and losing are connected to the ways we relate to all forms of competition. Our Fear of Failure and Success thus has its roots in our earliest experiences of triangular relationships: Myself, my mother, and my father—or whatever threesomes were available when we were four or five years old when competitive attitudes first developed.

### *How the Fear of Failure and the Fear of Success Began*

Freud's classic formulations of the "Oedipus Complex" are as rich and provocative today as when he wrote about them in 1924 (Freud, *The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex*, 1924/1961). Each well developed child during this four to six year old period is likely to experience both intensely loving and intensely hating feelings at the same time toward each parent or emotionally significant other. This is in contrast to the earlier developmental tendency to alternate in our love between "all-good" and "all-bad" feelings. The four or five year old can experience ambivalence (mixed and contradictory feelings) towards

others who are emotionally significant. Conflicts over the universally intense and contradictory feelings of love and hate in family relationships were first celebrated in the ancient Greek myth of Oedipus and were later immortalized in Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex* and in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

The emotional problems faced by Helen—our little Oedipus, Hamlet, Electra, or Ophelia—can be stated simply. She has one reliable relationship with her mother when the two of them are alone. Within this relationship the emotional dimensions are well known, reasonably predictable, and therefore somewhat safe and under her control. She experiences knowledge and power within the context of her two-person relationship with Mother. But let Father (or anyone else emotionally close to both of them) enter the room and she experiences an immediate sense of loss of control and power. That is, she comes to fear the loss of her personal power and influence when the person she loves is involved in a three-way relationship with her and another loved person.

The same is true for her two-person relationship with her father. When they are alone she knows clearly who she is and how to be with him. She has a sense of reliability and confidence in their relationship. But when mother (or another significant third person) enters the room she feels robbed of her power. Her confidence and prowess are diminished. She experiences her influence in the relationship diminishing as she finds herself involved in various kinds of disturbing three-way competitions.

The worst part of emotional triangles, as we all know only too well, is when the other two somehow get together and leave us out. We are not only powerless now, but we are in a position of competitive failure as the other two (Mother and Father) go into the bedroom and lock the door. Nothing feels worse than losing our sense of exclusivity to a competitor. In all subsequent three-party relationships we fear the pain and injury of being left out, of losing our exclusive position, of not being preferred. Not being chosen over our competition gave us our first broken heart.

There is one potentially worse outcome than failure in the triangular competition—namely complete success. Winning the "oedipal dilemma"—that is, becoming the exclusive or primary love object of a parent—forms the basic model for incest. Among the many things which actual (overt) or emotional (covert) incest

produces is a significant lack of knowledge and skill in terms of how to deal successfully with three-person relationships which we encounter for the rest of our lives.

Strong incestuous or incest-tinged relationships are destructive to the child in that he or she fails to develop the ego skills necessary to bear the conflict, insecurity, fear, jealousy and pain inevitably involved in three-person relationships. The child who has failed or succeeded completely in the first triangular emotional competition remains subtly disabled in a world of complex and ever-shifting triangular relationships that demand continuous negotiation. The model for learning about the difficulties involved in three-way emotional relationships is mother-father-me. But the lesson can be equally learned in any three-person relationship in which ambivalence, competition, conflict, and negotiation are present.

### *How the Fear of Success and Failure Work In Our Lives*

The fear of emotional injury and personal failure in the face of being left out of an emotional triangle, or, conversely, the fear of being the unchallenged victor in a competitive triangular conflict, becomes structured into our inner world view of relationship attitudes in a variety of ways. In Oedipus Rex the guilty hero punishes himself with blindness when he has to look honestly at the ways he has ruthlessly lived out his sexual and aggressive impulses in relation to his parents. Many people similarly choose to live with diminished awareness of their sexuality and aggression. Hamlet sacrifices his life in the process of living out his instincts—"To be or not to be, that is the question." His Ophelia chooses madness and death over the loss of her self when feeling caught in social demands. Many people choose illness or emotional deadness over the possibility of being fully and vibrantly alive to the internal conflicts and insecurities necessarily involved in experiencing their full energetic potentials in socially competitive relationships.

Our competitive strivings for dominance in love and our murderous rage over competitive defeat and failure (or over incestuous success) are all likely to produce intense guilt and repression of feelings in a young child. Repression of loving and hating feelings means that we have cultivated a blindness to our very nature and produced a deadening of all of our passionate quests in life. Far from being simply a dusty old myth, the problem of guilt and the Oedipus triangle lives on as the problem which every well developed five

year old faces and somehow solves with various forms of repression—blinding him-or herself to the power of the life forces within and deadening the outward expression of the instincts with fear-avoidance habits. The blinding and deadening constrictions we each developed during this period of oedipal or triangular striving have left their mark on our bodies, on our personalities, and on our relationships.

Our anxieties over failure may further cause us to become workaholics or to develop a drive for perfectionism in our activities and relationships. Or conversely, we may thwart ourselves and our successes with a tendency to be a flake, a slob, or a deadbeat in various circumstances. At the root of compulsions to be a perfectionist or a slob lies the Deadly Fear of Failure and Success.

## Working With Your Fear of Failure And Success

### *Focus Your Fear of Failure and Success*

[\(click here to download a printable journal\)](#)

#### Reflect on Work, Social Relationships, Intimacy, and Sexuality

Consider carefully how you relate in four areas of your life: Your work, your social relationships, your intimacy, and your sexuality.

As you reflect on the questions below write your thoughts in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

As you feel constrictions mark them on Your [Body Map](#).

**Work:** Whether you run a company or run a household, whether you take care of patients, students, or your own children, focus on how you feel about what you do on the job every day. In what ways do you feel a failure? Do you fear being—or being found out—a failure, a phony, or a fraud? Are you afraid of not being as good as others in your workplace? Are you afraid to be too good? Do you fear standing out as special or accomplished in your work? Are you a perfectionist or a slob? Do you undermine yourself just as

you are about to attain success?

Write in Your [Aliveness Journal](#)

Mark your [Body Map](#).

**Social Relationships:** Do you find yourself competing with others? Are you competing with a true competitor? With all other men or women? With an internalized image of what you should do and be? Or are you competing with something your parents wanted for you? Or a way your family wants you to be? How do your fears of failure show up differently in different social relationships? What are the ways that you feel powerless or out of control? Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

**Intimacy:** What are your fears of failing or losing out in your intimate relationships? Do you undermine yourself? How do you cut off or emotionally distance yourself from the other person when things get too close? Do your methods of minimizing yourself indicate a fear of losing? Or a fear of succeeding? Do you use affairs or multiple lovers as a protection against the vulnerability and potential pain of intimacy? Do you emotionally pull out just when you are about to get what you thought you wanted?

Write your thoughts in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark reactions on your [Body Map](#).

**Sexuality:** What are your fears in regard to failure and success in sexuality? How do you see yourself as a sexual being? Do you fear being sexually inadequate, unattractive, or unwanted? In what ways do you minimize or avoid sexual feelings and involvements? Who are your sexual competitors? When you are aware of diminished sexual interest, arousal, or activity how do you relate to yourself and to your partner(s) (past and present)? Do you use third parties or outside involvements as excuses for maintaining blindness or deadness to your sexual impulses—such as competitors, preoccupations, work, social obligations, children, moral authorities, or parents? Are your perfectionist or slob tendencies also reflected in your attitudes toward sexuality?

Write your thoughts in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

#### Elaborate In Your Aliveness Journal About Triangles

Consider all the triangles in your job, your social relationships, and your intimate and sexual life.

With whom do you compete?

- For a position or recognition in your job?
- For the closeness of an intimate friend (such as other friends with whom they may prefer to spend time?)
- For the attention and affection of your partner or mate (such as another adult, a child, a job?)
- For approval by others (such as your boss?)
- Over some inner standards you hold (such what is "right" or "best"?)

Remember when considering triangles to include as third parties all values, social standards, customs, judgments, and morals, as well as people we relate to, real and imaginary; present, past, and future. It may be useful and interesting for to you to [diagram the triangles](#).

Examples:



Based upon your reflections write down your Fears of Failure and Success related to each triangle. As you consider each triangle your Fear of Failure or Success may immediately be apparent. But it might also be quite hidden. Take time to consider carefully before concluding that you have no fears in any three-way relationship!

Record your findings in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### *Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection*

#### Feel Your Fear of Failure and Success in Your Body

As you think and write about your fears related to failure and success in your job, your social life, and your intimate and sexual relationships, pay careful attention to how you feel in your body. Where in your body do you feel the fear when you think about competition? Or about adequacy or perfectionism in relationships? What happens when you consider your relationship to sexuality and intimacy? Or your relationship to morals, ethics, and values? Where in your body does each fear reside? Can you identify the constrictions and tensions?

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Identify these sensations and feelings on your [Body Map](#).

### Experience Your Original Triangle

Reflect on your experience with your "original triangle:" the relationship between you, your mother, and your father. Your history may not have provided both parents. But even an absent father formed one part of a triangle. Perhaps there is a step-parent, or grandparent, a sibling, or someone else who formed part of an important triangle. Let your mind consider your original triangle(s).

As you reflect on each aspect of the triangle, what emotions emerge? Do you feel warmth, longing, and admiration? Or do you experience dread, contempt, disgust, or repulsion? What fears, feelings, and sensations do you experience in your body? Where are there tensions and constrictions? Can you recognize how these same feelings and constrictions show up in your current relationships? If there were stepparents and/or foster families in your past, consider all possible triangular relationships. What happens in your body as you do?

Note your experiences in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Write on your [Body Map](#).

### Consider How the Original Feelings Persist Today

Given what you have just noticed about your original triangle(s), how do you notice similar feelings affecting current relationships? Record your findings in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Our capacity to engage in deep and lasting intimate relationships and to possess a healthy, satisfying sexuality has been profoundly impacted by the makeup of our original triangles. The interactions of intimacy with our parents and their responses and attitudes toward our childhood tenderness and sexuality shaped our feelings about ourselves and how we came to function in relationships as adolescents and adults.

Some of us have been severely wounded by abuse or molestation. Others of us have been damaged by neglect or by unclear sexual boundaries, by "covert" or emotional incest, or by hidden competitiveness. And since a negative view of sexuality is pervasive in our culture we all have received negative and inhibiting messages regarding our sexuality. We all carry into our adult lives sexual wounds left over from our relationships with our parents.

#### Address Your Same-Sexed Parent

The difficulties we experience around sexuality often seem to have their source in our relationship with the opposite-sexed parent. But experience shows that in order to heal the wounds inflicted in the triangle we need to work first with the same-sexed parent. Your goal in this exercise is to have the same-sexed parent become your ally when you confront the opposite-sexed parent. Begin by asking your Listening Partner to be a stand-in for your same-sexed parent. *For this part of the exercise the Listening Partner simply listens, and need not speak.*

#### ***Express Your Negativity Toward Your Same-Sexed Parent***

"Why didn't you protect me? Why did you see me as a competitor? Why couldn't you affirm me as a sexual being? Why did you make me feel ashamed?" Allow yourself to feel all the anger, rage, disappointment, bitterness, and fear that have lived in you since you were a little child. In order to experience them fully in your body you may want to take a tennis racket or a rolled up magazine (as you did in working with your fear of self assertion) and hit on a bed or sofa as you express your negativity. This will enable you to release the old feelings of hurt and anger. Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#) and mark your [Body Map](#).

#### **Ask Your Listening "Parent" for Support**

What does it take from you to make contact and ask for support? Notice all of the sensations, images, and thoughts that appear and record them in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

#### Address Your Opposite-Sexed Parent

Have your "same-sexed parent" stand beside you in support as you now face your listener who stands-in as your "opposite-sexed parent." Give yourself time to experience and to feel in your body all of the old feelings of hurt, disappointment, and rage around issues of sexuality and relationship—whatever comes to mind.

Record your [experiences](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

### **Express Your Negativity with Strength and Energy**

As you stand before your "opposite-sexed parent," allow any negative feelings to be experienced and expressed as fully as possible. As above, use a tennis racket or rolled up magazine to maximize the release. Involve your entire body by hitting with as much force as you can muster. Turn to your "supportive parent" any time you need to. It is important that the "supportive parent" simply receive your feelings in a supportive way. He/she need not speak or interact. When you feel you have exhausted your expression of your negative feelings, see if you want to make contact. Stand before your "parent" to be seen as you are.

Write your experience in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### ***Ask Your Listening "Parent" for Support***

What does it take from you to make contact and ask for support? Notice all of the sensations, images, and thoughts that appear and record them in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### ***Shrink the Fear Monster<sup>9</sup>***

There may be many ways that the Fear of Failure and/or Success is monstrous to you, so you may have many monsters here to identify and shrink! But the Fear Monster of Failure and Success is nowhere more impactful in our lives than in intimacy and sexuality. Not only is this aspect of our lives of immense

importance to us, but it is also problematic in some way for most of us. For that reason our exercises focus on intimacy and sexuality. But you should try to shrink any monster that has come up so far in your consideration of Failure and Success.

Whenever you experience your Fear of Failure or Success and how it inhibits you, causes you to be cautious, makes you hold back, or blocks you from opening your heart, remind yourself: "That was then." Recall what it is like to be affirmed and supported. When you have taken inside you these affirmations and supports you can become the good parents to yourself. Your internal triangle—rather than inhibiting and blocking you—can support you to move toward the full realization of achievement in love and life. "This is now."

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### *Find a New Way*

Our caregivers failed us in many important ways—even if they did their best. And even if the job they did was "good-enough." But failure creates wounds. Old wounds fester and continue to grow worse until the pains spill over to affect all of our relationship expectations. To be fully released from the destructive effects of old resentments and hatreds, we must call upon the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean that we forget. Nor does it mean that we do not still feel the pain of old wounds at times. Forgiveness does mean that we actively strive to release the effects of damage, fears and hatreds left over from the past.

Say aloud to your Listening Partner: "Mother, I forgive you." And then, "Father, I forgive you." Also say aloud:

"I ask for forgiveness and I forgive myself for harboring so many ill feelings for so long. I want forgiveness and release from past damage, fear and hatred."

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

Say this Affirmation Aloud:

"I am a human being who must cooperate and compete in many kinds of relationships in order to feel fulfilled in my life. I have a right to feel strong and capable, alive and fulfilled, in cooperation and in competition. I deserve fulfilling intimate and sexual relationships. I do not need to feel shame or loss of self-worth when I lose. When I play fair and with full consideration of others, I need feel no guilt when I win. I do not need to fear either failure or success in competition or in relationships. I will not allow damage, fears, and hatreds from the past to diminish my life and relationships in the present."

## Chapter Nine

### The Seventh Deadly Fear: The Fear of Being Fully Alive

#### *What the Fear of Being Fully Alive is About*

Imagine that your Thanksgiving table is set. The candles are lit. Platters heaped with steaming food pour from the kitchen as the family and guests assemble for the Thanksgiving prayer and the carving of the bird. Shrieks are heard from the children eating in the kitchen, pets silently settle into their corners, and the conversation begins. It hardly strikes us at this moment that beneath the weeks of careful preparation, the anxieties of coordinating family plans, and the private anticipations about the day lie a thousand silent fears. And similar pageants await in the weeks beyond Thanksgiving as with eager anticipation and silent dread we prepare ourselves for the upcoming holiday events.

Yes, there is thankfulness. And yes, there is joy. But in the background lies the darkness, fear, dread, and depression that have always accompanied Winter solstice celebrations. How each of us experiences the emotional pressures of these social events differs from occasion to occasion and from year to year. But none can deny that the bustle of the holidays, the pressures of large family gatherings, and the obligations of seasonal get-togethers are something of an ordeal. "But why, if we are so glad to be reunited with family and friends, is it all such a strain? And aren't these stressful holiday occasions simply exaggerated versions of the many social events we find ourselves participating in all the time? What is it that we so object to about being with people in groups? Why do we pacify or anesthetize ourselves with customs and rituals, with spending and giving, and with massive amounts of food and drink? What are we struggling with? What are we fleeing from? What exactly do we dread so much? What keeps us from being fully alive to ourselves and to those around us that we care about so much?"

There must be many ways we could address these questions about our social life. But what occupies our attention here is how our fears operate silently in social situations to rob us of full and rich enjoyment of ourselves and of the important people around us.

The Fear of Being Fully Alive is a fear associated with group life. As a result of a lifetime of living in groups we have come to feel stifled and stymied by the expectations and demands of the social world around us. The minute we come under the influence of any particular group, we are immediately aware of how people in this group walk, talk, dress, think, move, and behave. Each group we encounter is identifiable by characteristic codes, behaviors, and beliefs—the standards of the group. But no matter how much we may identify with the beliefs and standards of a group, we know that we are, in our own way, different. We learn to suppress our differences, to pull in our opinions and beliefs when they are at odds with the prevailing group climate. We dread the clashes, which are an inevitable part of group life. We fear the influence that powerful group pressures exert on us. And we learn that it is often best to hold ourselves back, to keep our feelings under control, to inhibit our expressiveness, and to keep our opinions to ourselves.

The results of this mass social inhibition that we all participate in are truly appalling. Every day we watch people go about their lives like zombies—hardly noticing that the sun is shining, that flowers are blooming, and that all of nature is singing! We forget that we are living, breathing beings with a capacity for love and happiness, joy and sorrow, anger and fear.

Too often we pass through the day feeling stultified by the many demands upon us. Too often we forget about ourselves and our need for vibrant health and success in living. Too often we ignore the ones we love and deprive ourselves of the sense of life and aliveness we truly deserve. Too often we fail to allow ourselves the sense of fulfillment that comes from feeling truly connected with nature and with others whom we love and care about. And too often our bodies are wooden, our smiles strained, our eyes dull, and our hearts heavy.

It is as if we have somehow chosen to die before it is our time! We have become infected by forms of living deadness that we feel in people all around us. Whether it's eating, drinking, working, shopping, or

watching television, we are devoted to a life of escape—from what? Where did all of this numbness, this inhibition, this deadness, this need to escape life come from? How can we focus on the ways we unwittingly allow lifelessness to take us in? How can we release the habitual restrictions that limit our personalities? How can we release the chronic contractions that bind our bodies? And how can we overcome the needless inhibitions that exist in our relationships? How can we unburden ourselves of the terrible deadening sense of obligation we have toward everything and everyone? How can we prevent social influences from threatening our peace of mind and our general well being? How can we keep from being pushed into rigid postures and life-restricting habits and practices?

Unfortunately, it is not easy to learn to greet the day with full aliveness. Our chronic rigidity, numbness, and deadness are the result of the accumulated fear reflexes of a lifetime. The Fear of Being Fully Alive, which manifests itself in our lackluster days, is a combination of all of the previous six Deadly Fears as they operate to stifle us in our social life.

### *How the Fear of Being Fully Alive Began.*

As human beings we are currently in the midst of a major crisis in terms of how we are to think about and manage ourselves in an anxiety-producing social environment. We are bombarded virtually every moment of our waking day with potentially frightening and overwhelming stimulation which has powerful effects on us. It is easy for us to blame our fears on the media, Hollywood, corporate life, urban living, technological advances, environmental toxins, and modern life in general. But the fear of intrusive and controlling social influences has always been a daily part of human life. Certainly the frequency, intensity, and invasive qualities of fear-producing social stimulation have increased in recent years. And our vulnerability to tension and stress-related diseases has also increased, no doubt in part due to the stimulus bombardment we continuously experience.

Contractions in the body serve to pull living organisms back from strong and overwhelming forces in the environment which are perceived as dangerous or life threatening. For humans those over stimulating and threatening forces tend to be associated with relationships with important people. We are not simply

creatures living in a jungle waking up each day and responding to the world on the basis of instincts and behavioral conditioning. We carry with us an evolving inner world view with a set of beliefs and expectations that color our everyday experiences in complex ways. Our world views based upon early learned responses to fear in relationships determine to a great extent how we perceive and respond in later situations. All of the seven levels of relationship fear and the reflexive contractions we develop early in life leave lasting imprints on our personalities, on our bodies, and on our ways of responding in later relationships.

How perplexing this all must be to a growing child. By age three or four Helen proudly manages to establish her own sense of self. From four to six she learns the joys and perils of artfully relating in ambivalent triangles, of cooperating and competing with other independent selves in her family and immediate social environment. But not until she is ten or eleven is Helen likely to feel the full impact of the group on her behaviors, feelings, thoughts, and fears. And in adolescence there is a new task—that of consolidating a sense of personal identity in a society of intense, complex, and contradictory demands. How does Helen as a teenager achieve social confirmation for her self-development and identity amidst such compelling and competing group pressures?

Consider the many powerful demands we experience from family, work, religion, politics, economics, and culture. Is it any wonder that we walk through many of our days like zombies, not knowing exactly what we want to do or how we want to be? Is it any wonder that we dread group encounters of almost any kind because of the networks of conflict they place us in? "How am I to retain my personal identity—my sense of who I am—amidst such overpowering and contradictory social demands?"

### *How the Fear of Being Fully Alive Works in Our Daily Lives*

As we walk through life we don't consciously think of the influence of the numerous emotional triangles, which are silently embedded, in all of our relationships. Nor do we usually think about the symbols of success, failure, passion, injury, inhibition and death that characterized our coming to grips with our early "family romance." Instead of being conscious of fears as such, we are more aware of the demands we

experience from loved ones, the pressures we feel from peers, and the anxiety, strain, and fatigue our social life generates in us. We are aware of how hard it often is to fulfill our obligations to family, marriage, work, and the various groups we belong to. We are also aware of how difficult it is to maintain our moral, ethical, and spiritual commitments in a world of shifting values and conflicting pressures. How are we to feel whole and fully alive as individuals when our sense of who we are is so beleaguered at every moment?

One night when I was writing about this fear I struggled for an image that would capture the all-pervasive influence of social triangulations on our psyche. Lost in reverie I fell asleep and had the following dream that oddly enough even came with a title!

### **The Invasion of the Chili Pepper Monsters**

I was at home with someone who seemed like another part of myself, like an alter ego. There were other shadowy figures in the background like the ghosts of my family and friends. I was vaguely afraid and alert to some impending danger. Suddenly I saw what looked like long tentacles creeping through the crack under my door. They were long—maybe three or four feet—and there was a sense of many more tentacled creatures pushing to get in. Some were trying to poke their way in through a crevice in the ceiling. Others wiggled in through the air vents. I couldn't actually see the monsters trying to force their way in. Only their reaching, probing, invading tentacles were

visible. But I had a sense that they came in all sizes up to 5 or 6 feet long.

I knew somehow that these tentacles belonged to 'chili pepper monsters'—they were long, thin, pointed, dark red, and somewhat flat and pliable. Only the long pointed end actually entered my space. The top part (the other two points of the triangular form of the tentacles) remained outside under control of the monsters. I knew that these chili pepper monsters killed people—not by violence, but by taking them in—by forcing others to become like them, to become one of them! I was surrounded by these chili pepper monsters with tentacles reaching in through every possible crack and crevice.

I somehow managed to shoo them out temporarily—to keep them at bay for a while. But I was becoming increasingly frantic, feeling I was losing the battle. They were coming in from everywhere; I was surrounded and vastly outnumbered, and there was nothing I could do to stop them. I called to the other who was with me, 'get the insecticide!' It turned out to be a yellowish-

white powder (the color of whitewash) that I could sprinkle on the tentacles.

The repressing powder caused the tentacles to withdraw and to disappear temporarily from view, though it didn't actually kill or get rid of them—it only kept them at bay.

I called out to the other with me, 'where was it we were going? We have to clear a path out of here! We have to hurry!' The line sounded like an ironic, hopeless-comic line from Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.<sup>10</sup> The comic element came in the vague realization that I was planning an escape from the clearly inescapable. We were surrounded, outnumbered, and ultimately in danger of being overpowered by them—we didn't have a chance. There was no way out and I knew it! I thought, 'how silly of me to think I can escape them, they're everywhere—creeping, crawling, wriggling tentacles trying to pry their way into my space, trying to take me over and make me into one of themselves!' I braced myself in terror when I realized there was no

escape.

I awoke from the dream with a start—sweating from tossing and turning. I was curled up in a tight fetal position. My body was shaking, totally tense and constricted, and my heart was racing.

I thought immediately that these 'chili pepper monsters,' were mildly addictive (seductive, I love them) and edible (oedipal) in nature! The shape of the red tentacles with their threatening points intruding was basically triangular. The other two points were outside of my abode and under control of monstrous intruders that were threatening my safe personal existence from all directions. Triangular tentacles were everywhere—there was no escape!

I thought of the 'shrink the monster' exercise in the *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears Workbook* that I had reviewed the night before. I had fallen asleep wondering what the Fear of Being Fully Alive might actually look like if I experienced it in my body. In my dream I visualized my Fear of Being Fully Alive as a horde of triangle shaped, intrusive tentacles belonging to the addictive chili pepper monsters outside me. My dream pictured my inner world threatened by an endless and inescapable invasion of outside (social, triangular) threats.

I had written the night before in the *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears Workbook* that all relationships are influenced by external social forces of a triangular nature that are not completely under our own control. The extent to which we surrender ourselves to others in love is the extent to which our individual selves, our own needs and desires, our carefully carved out self-integrity feels the danger of an invasive threat. Others inevitably want us to be like themselves.

As a child I was continuously invaded by intense needs and demands of my parents to be certain ways and not to be other ways. I learned my own secret ways of holing up in the safe seclusion of my private self with my own inner dialogue (the alter-ego in the dream). I had to isolate myself emotionally from my family in order to protect myself from succumbing to the powerful (and to a child, monstrous) forces that I felt

surrounded me. I have always tried to repress, to whitewash, the extent of my fear of the invasive influence of others on my private self. Before the body-constricting, nightmarish, dream, I had no idea of how intense and all pervasive this fear of losing oneself to the hoard could be.

In our journey toward greater aliveness, social constrictions come at us every day that are frightening, that we brace ourselves against. But we have for so long conditioned ourselves not to actually experience fear that we fail to notice how profoundly we are affected by powerful and intrusive social forces. Cultivating full aliveness implies developing a heightened sensitivity to all of the intrusive and disturbing group influences that impinge on us in the course of a day.

We do not give our best to others when we pull back short of what we could give—short of where we could reach if we made the effort. We tend to stop short of what we could be—dominated by a plague of irrational and unconscious fears masquerading as anxiety, tension, fatigue, stress, anger, illness, and depression. How many of us can name a single relationship in which we have been willing and able to give our all to its fulfillment, no matter how frightened we are of the intimacy and commitment involved? We are painfully aware of how we shortchange the ones we love—our partners, our children, our friends, and our work colleagues. Now we can also become aware of how our fear of Being Fully Alive shortchanges us!

## **Working With Your Fear of Being Fully Alive**

### *Focus the Fear*

[\(click here to download a printable journal\)](#)

Since the Deadly Fear of Being Fully Alive affects every cell in our bodies and affects each of us differently according to our accumulated histories of social fear, it is difficult to prescribe how each of us will learn to get into contact with our fear of experiencing the fullness of our strength, joy, energy, and vitality when confronted by demands and pressures.

### Consider Pressures From All Your Groups

You have already begun constructing your personal history and profile of your own fear reflexes as you have read the previous chapters and worked the exercises with your Listening Partner. As you now turn your attention to the ways in which you experience daily group living, you will be aware of how social pressures stimulate each of your personal fears in various ways. You will become aware of how invisible social pressures—invasive demands experienced long ago and consciously forgotten or repressed—still affect your personality, your body, and your every relationship. Relax, breathe deeply, and feel what comes up for you in relation to all of the groups in your life.

Write in your [Aliveness Journal](#)

Mark your [Body Map](#).

#### Elaborate On Group Pressures In Your Aliveness Journal

In your Aliveness Journal list a series of groups you belong to—such as your family, your work, your church, and your school. After each, mention an event or two you have attended with each group in the past year. Now give each event some time to be recalled. How did you feel about going? What was it like arriving there? Whom did you talk with? What pressures did you feel? Think of the Seven Fears—did you feel (1) alone, (2) disconnected, (3) abandoned, (4) unaccepted, (5) not seen or acknowledged, (6) a competitive failure or success, or (7) pressured by group expectations? Remember and write down the physical and emotional feelings you had during and after each group experience. Knowing what you know now, in what ways did the group setting bring out and intensify all of your other fears? Take your time to remember and write. Each experience brings out our fear reflexes differently.

Record your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

Mark your [Body Map](#).

#### *Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection*

## Put on Your Aliveness Monitor

Cardiologists ask people to wear heart monitors for days at a time to study irregularities in their heart functioning so that proper remedies can be applied. The person is instructed to push a button any time an unusual sensation occurs so that the activity of the heart can be electronically recorded. The heart monitor is then taken to a laboratory for analysis.

Imagine that you have a featherweight “Aliveness Monitor” which you put on in the morning. It is like a close-fitting body glove that you slip into right after your morning shower. It fits almost invisibly and leaves your body in a quite free and comfortable state. Your Aliveness Monitor has a fine network of microscopic electronic probes and sensors that monitor all parts of your body—both separately and in total relationship to each other throughout the day. The moment your breathing slows or quickens, that activity is relayed to the monitor. This data is cataloged alongside the accompanying reactions of increased adrenalin in your blood, an acceleration in your heart rate, a dilation of your eyes, and a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach. The tightening of your diaphragm muscle is monitored along with the crimping in your toes, the tension in your jaw, and the slight tremor in your nostrils.

Further, this twenty-first century technological wonder is capable of creating a detailed computerized video picture of you and all of the activities you are engaging in during the day. When you want to study your patterns of stress and fear you now have a comprehensive collection of physiological data and a complete accompanying video record of the situations you were in at the time of the stress and exactly how the sequences of fear reaction progressed. You can now tell what set off your fear reflex and how it accelerated and spread into different parts of your body. You can now monitor exactly (1) how your fear reflex appeared, (2) how long each fear reaction was maintained, and (3) how the fear constriction was slowly released or how long it was tenaciously held onto.

Our days are filled with cycles of heightened physiological arousal followed by depressed, depleted functioning. With your imaginary Aliveness Monitor you can quickly tune into the total nature and patterns of your personal fear reflexes. At the end of the day you can review your findings and write them in your

Aliveness Journal. With your technologically sophisticated biofeedback system you can now get to know the totality of your interacting fears and how they operate to limit your personality, constrict your body, and interfere in your relationships.

The good news is that we don't have to wait for twenty-first century technology to provide us with our Aliveness Monitors. We already possess in our bodies an extraordinarily complex network of built-in micro-electronic probes and sensors, which we can train to do an incredibly effective job of informing us of the exact nature and pattern of our fear responses. After all, it was our body's own creativity and ingenuity that established our habitual protective system in the first place when we were very young children. But once programmed, our biofeedback system continues to operate in the same blind and automatic way that any computer program does—until and unless it is reprogrammed. We are still using fear-avoidance programs we set up to respond to the demands of early childhood. Gaining power over our conditioned fear reflexes means learning how to monitor ourselves carefully and then finding ways of reprogramming our fear reflexes. What are your ideas about reprogramming some of your fear reflexes?

Biofeedback and neurofeedback machines are now in operation in medical and psychological clinics all over the world and their results demonstrate beyond the shadow of a doubt that we have the power at our disposal to notice and to alter life-threatening constrictions in every part of our bodies. Healers from all cultures throughout the ages have been telling us this, but we have not been willing or able to listen until now. Our defensiveness and denial have kept us at a childish level of self awareness. Perhaps we have never needed as badly as we do now ways of meeting head-on the strong and invasive demands of an incredibly complex social and technological environment.

To keep our minds and bodies healthy it is essential that we cultivate a heightened consciousness of our relationship fears and how they affect us throughout the day on a daily basis. Controlled experimental biofeedback and neurofeedback studies demonstrate that external electronic monitors are not only very costly, but they are clumsy and inefficient compared with the finely tuned monitoring we can learn to establish on our own through systematic self focus and self study!

We carry in our bodies many accurate and sophisticated feedback systems—the same systems that set up our characteristic stress responses and fear reflexes in the first place. But most of us have not yet learned how to consciously tune into the flow of this information and to make creative use of it.

To imagine every morning slipping into “Aliveness Monitors” which give us pictures of ourselves is where we are headed when we work on our breathing, stretching, imagining, shrinking, and releasing exercises.

What results does your aliveness monitor yield when you consider all of the invasive social influences in your life? Record your experience in your [Aliveness Journal](#).

### Touching Base with Your Body<sup>11</sup>

The following exercise provides a way to “touch base” with all parts of your body within several minutes. You can do this exercise when you first get up in the morning. Whatever else you may do in the way of physical activity during the day, this beginning will connect you to your body and your breathing, and help to alert you to where current tensions are. You can also “touch base” with your body at other times—like before and after stressful meetings and events, and at the close of a trying day. Touching base allows contact with your body-mind-relationship connection whenever you feel you need it. Many people prefer this kind of self-contact and revitalization to habitual use of caffeine, sugar, salt, soda, and other snacks.

**1. Breathe and Reach:** Plant your feet apart about shoulder width and bend your knees slightly. As you deeply inhale, bring your arms out and up overhead, stretching upward as far as possible without straining until you are almost up on your toes. On the exhale open your arms out and bring them down to your side. Continue these movements three more times, deeply inhaling, slowly exhaling, and stretching your arms to the maximum before relaxing them at your sides. Take several deep breaths between each repetition. Be mindful of all parts of your body as it stretches and relaxes.

**2. Open Your Chest and Release Your Shoulders:** To further open your chest and deepen your

breathing, bend your elbows next to your side. Then thrust your elbows backward, one at a time, as though you were pushing something away. It will help if you open your throat and your chest and say or yell out loud as you thrust, “Get off my back!” Repeat three times on each side, or as much as you want to in order to release your chest and shoulders.

Now thrust your arms out in front of you, the palms of your hands facing outward, as if you were pushing someone or something away. Say or shout a phrase such as “Go away!” or “No!” Repeat three times, or as many times as you want to.

Take a moment to relax. Take a deep breath, let your arms dangle, slightly bend your knees. Shake yourself a bit to loosen up. Now swing your arms from side to side, parallel, in an easy, soothing motion. As you move from side to side, shift your weight from one foot to the other. Feel your body's freedom!

**3. Release Your Lower Back and Pelvis:** Move your hips in an easy, wide circle. Move slowly. Allow your upper body to move in the opposite direction in a counter-balance. Circle three times in one direction. Then reverse and make three circles moving them in the opposite direction. Be mindful of every muscle.

Now stand with your knees slightly bent. On the inhale, retract your pelvis as far back as you can comfortably go. Then on the exhale, thrust your pelvis forward. Do this three more times. Make a strong sound as you thrust your pelvis forward, “Huh!, Huh!” Our pelvis bone is designed to swing or swirl forward and backward easily, but life's tensions cause a freezing of natural vitality at the base of our spines. Retracting and thrusting often restores our natural energy by reliving tensions in our back and pelvic areas.

**4. Ground Your Legs and Feet:** Shift your weight onto one leg so that your entire torso is aligned directly over that leg. Turn your knee slightly outward. On the exhale, slowly bend your knee, pressing your foot into the floor as you do so. Then straighten your leg on the inhale. Repeat this movement five or six more times. Shift your weight to the other leg and repeat. Be mindful of every muscle in your legs and feet, feel the tension release as you breathe and stretch. Also be mindful of the total body realignment this exercise

promotes and the rich possibilities here for further release as you focus and breathe. Don't be afraid to vocalize—our voice muscles need release too!

Now bend over forward as far as you comfortably can. Ideally you will come to touch all ten fingers lightly to the floor. (You can bend your knees as much as you need to.) Inhale and exhale deeply three times or more. Be mindful of the stretch and the release. You may wish to shake your whole upper body, head, and arms like a gunnysack to loosen up.

When you come back to a standing position uncurl slowly, allowing your head to remain forward and down and your neck to stay entirely relaxed. When you are in an upright position, bring your head up last. Go very slowly and be mindful of every slight movement.

Finally, repeat the Breathing and Reaching exercise with which you began. When you have finished, say the following affirmation: “I want to live this day Fully Alive!” Say it again with joy and determination.

As you journey toward greater aliveness you are now sporting your new invisible Aliveness Monitor. You are frequently “Touching Base With Your Body.” You are learning how to spot fear indicators in all parts of your body. You are learning how to tune in to fear in your personality functioning, and you are developing increased consciousness of how fear operates in all of your relationships. In your quest for greater aliveness you are now directing your energies toward releasing your chronic fear constrictions by reprogramming your Seven Deadly Fear reflexes.

Record your reactions in your [Aliveness Journal](#) and mark your [Body Map](#).

### *Shrink the Monster*

In all types of group experiences from Thanksgiving dinner to office Christmas parties, church socials, business groups, and support groups we become aware of the operation of pressures which keep us from being Fully Alive. In your body and imagination allow yourself to feel the tensions which group life

sets off in you—they can be monstrous! Now shrink the monster: "That Was Then." "This Is Now." Record your [experiences](#).

### *Find a New Way*

The purpose of our book has been to sensitize you to the ways in which programmed patterns of fear response established in childhood continue blindly operating in our lives—successfully maintaining chronic, unhealthy, and unnecessary constrictions and tensions.

Further, it has been my purpose to provide simple experiences designed to help you educate yourself about your personal patterns of fear and fear-avoidance reflexes. These experiences encourage you to create imaginary mental pictures of your particular fears, and to begin learning ways of shrinking the fear monsters and releasing the grip they have over you.

### *Say Aloud This Affirmation*

“I am a human being who is unavoidably affected by the many pressures of group life. I have allowed the standards and expectations of groups to limit my full sense of life. I have suffered many times when my integrity, health, and sense of well being have been threatened by social demands. I have the power to monitor all parts of my mind and body daily for signs of undue pressure. I am learning ways to identify and to release every day any and all body-mind-relationship constrictions produced by the pressures of living. I do not need to be afraid of being Fully Alive!”

## Chapter Ten

### The Underlying Fear of Death

“All fear can be traced to the fear of our own mortality.”

—Deepak Chopra

In this workbook I have explored the seven basic fear reflexes that have their sources in seven stages of the early development of our relationships. We have seen how these old fear reflexes persist into the present to thwart our adult lives and relationships even when the original causes of the fears have long since disappeared. How can it be that the Fear of Connecting, or the Fear of Self-assertion, or the Fear of Failure and Success hold such a profound, unremitting—and irrational—sway over our lives?

#### *The Underlying Fear of Death*

Our conscious fear of death is expressed in many obvious ways. We get preoccupied with terminal illness or we want to avoid all thoughts of it. We become afraid to drive on freeways or to venture into dangerous neighborhoods. We experience anxiety around situations that are even remotely life threatening. And in response to our anxiety the deep, innate survival mechanisms inside us begin to operate silently.

But the struggle to survive and the fear of death is far deeper than our conscious concern with dying or being killed. From the moment of conception onward the human organism experiences constant threats to its survival. As the organism develops it acquires many ways of protecting itself. But initially it is entirely dependent upon the environment in which it grows to keep it alive. Inherent in the organism is the genetic "knowledge" that dangers to survival abound and that the environment is not completely safe. Anything disturbing the sense of equilibrium is likely to be experienced as a threat to survival. Thus the human

organism fears death from the beginning of its life.

The Underlying Fear of Death is a biological fear that lives on in us at an unconscious instinctual level. And it is the fear of death that underlies and gives power to each of the Seven Deadly Fears we experience during our early relationships. Let's look back at the Seven Deadly Fears in order to understand how each one is ultimately related to the fear of our own mortality.

**1. The Fear of Being Alone:** When we extended ourselves into our environment as infants or reached toward our caregivers and got an inadequate response we had little or no motivation for reaching again. This is because we felt that there was nobody there. Reaching is expanding, and expanding is moving toward greater aliveness. To feel alive is frightening because the programming in our body says that the more we expand the more we will experience how alone we are. The fear is that we cannot survive being alive and alone. Better to just barely exist than not to exist at all. Better to have few or no needs than to risk facing the possibility that there's nobody there. Being alone is to die. In our infancy that was true. That was reality then.

**2. The Fear of Connecting:** Connecting to others has been dangerous. We have all been hurt or frightened by others in infancy. The experience stored in our bodies and minds at that early stage of life was that our life was somehow threatened by connection to people. We had no capacity to think objectively or to reason out the actual reality of the threat. At the core of our being was a fear of being annihilated, of not existing any more. So we came to fear making connections in many ways lest we be killed or just cease to exist. Making contact felt like risking our lives. Better to stay frozen and to protect ourselves by cutting off the frightening feelings than to risk death. Our biological instinct told us, "if you get hurt like that again, you may not survive!"

**3. The Fear of Being Abandoned:** When as infants we bonded with our caregiver and experienced that person as unreliable or unavailable in the ways we needed, the bodily feeling was that we had been abandoned. "I'm on my own; I'm going to have to handle things all by myself," was the inner response. In order to avoid the accompanying feelings of depression and hopelessness we became self-sufficient, taking care of everyone's needs but our own. Or on the other end of the spectrum we may have become clingy,

demanding, and possessive. Or we learned to manipulate and control those around us—all to make certain that we didn't have to feel our dreaded abandonment fears again. At this early stage of life as with the first fear, we could not survive alone. If mother had left us alone and didn't come back, we would have died. So ultimately the fear of abandonment is about the fear of death.

**4. The Fear of Self-assertion:** We become frightened when we speak out, express negativity, affirm our differentness, or attempt to separate from others, and our efforts are punished. We may be shamed or crushed. Or we get the message that we won't be loved if we behave that way. If we are not "good" in the expected manner we won't have the needed connection with our caregivers anymore. Without love and emotional connections we could not survive. We would die. Not actually, of course, but the threat of abandonment left us frightened to assert ourselves. We became compliant and agreeable. We gave up our quest for independence. We couldn't express our negativity or our aggression directly. All of these ways of relating developed on behalf of survival; they became our ways of avoiding the underlying fear of death.

**5. The Fear of Not Being Recognized:** When we have low self-esteem caused by not being seen, affirmed, and reflected in a positive way, we fear we can't measure up. If we don't live up to our parents' expectations or to an image projected by society and personalized by our particular views, then we feel worthless. We may compensate with perfectionism or with grandiose fantasies of who we are, but that grandiosity is like a balloon that can be deflated in an instant by the pin prick of any real or imagined criticism or slight. Then we're back to feeling worthless, a ham, a phony, a slob, or no good. On the deepest level, we may feel ashamed and fear we don't deserve to live. We fear we can't live without the response and approval that we need. Again, not being able to survive in an environment that doesn't accept us is the underlying fear.

**6. The Fear of Failure and Success:** When our major fear is failing—whether in love, in a career, or in life in general—the deep fear is that we will be devastated if we fail. Failing is mentally equated with an emotional death. If we fail we will not survive—our hearts will break. Failure in love means heartbreak. But failure in work or in goals we set for ourselves also feels devastating. It represents not measuring up, not making it, or not being able to sustain success. Failure feels life threatening. In order to protect ourselves

from the pangs of failure we don't open our hearts fully to others and we don't go all out in work or play. Fear of success is connected to the fear of being killed. The unconscious fear is that if I succeed the third party in the triangle will wipe me out! On a rational level, of course, we know this isn't quite true. But on an unconscious or non-rational level, this primitive fear resides in each of us. So we undermine our efforts—we "blow the deal," or spoil the relationship—to assure that we won't be "killed." Underlying the fear of success and the fear of failure is the deep, unconscious fear of our own demise.

**7. The Fear of Being Fully Alive:** Being fully alive means being our full selves. Yet being fully who we are brings us into conflict with the pressures, demands, and expectations of the groups to which we belong. Throughout the stages of our early development we learned to control our impulses, diminish our needs, suppress our demands, inhibit our self-expression, curtail our ambitions, and stifle our desires. We took our cues from the expectations of our parents and those closest to us. As we grew we went to school, we went to church, we went to work. We were in and out of social groups and circles of friends. Each had a set of rules and expectations, spoken and unspoken, for the way we were to be. Our "survival" in each of those groups depended upon a high degree of conformity to their particular expectations.

In order to conform to our various groups we cannot express opposing opinions or beliefs, or raise doubts or objections. Often we must hold back our expressiveness and our creativity. And most of all, we must hide our differentness. We numb ourselves through a variety of distractions to be able to withstand the conflicting demands upon us. And we have had to deaden parts of ourselves in order to tolerate the conflicts within us. Our belief is, if we were simply to be fully and truly who we are we would not be acceptable to the groups that are so essential to our lives. So, in essence, we fear we cannot survive while being fully alive! At each stage of development the fears that resulted from not getting our needs fully met were imprinted on our bodies and personalities by the ultimate fear, the Underlying Fear of Death. For it could only be the deep-seated fear of not surviving that could hold in place with such fierce tenacity the fear, say, of abandonment, long after there is any realistic threat of death. As adults we have the capacity to survive more or less alone—not happily, to be sure. But we are no longer required to be dependent on specific others for survival. Yet the deep-seated fear remains inside, out of consciousness, and continues to eliminate options and to limit our lives. It is the underlying threat of dying that maintains in us the fear of abandonment just as it maintain

reflex reactions to each of the Seven Deadly Fears.

What we experienced in relationships during those early stages of our development told us that our very survival was threatened in many ways. Since that time the danger signal lives on in our bodies and minds as though it were imprinted on our very cells. Forever after when we encounter similar circumstances the signal is activated and something inside cries out "Danger!" and triggers self-protective constrictions even when no real danger exists.

How can we work with this Underlying Fear of Death? And how, if this instinctual fear is the underlying basis for all of the Seven Deadly Fears, can we possibly overcome them? We must begin by recognizing and acknowledging the basic fact that there is a Fear of Death inside us. And that it is powerful. Then we can recognize another truth: that when, on behalf of becoming more fully alive, we are reaching out, making contact, taking in, asserting ourselves, allowing ourselves to succeed, and challenging social expectations—we are creating change on a deep level. Change of this type always feels as though we are risking our lives. No matter how stupid that may seem to our rational minds—on an emotional level and on a body level, the risk will seem as real as stepping in front of a moving train. Our emotions and body responses resist change, no matter what our rational minds may tell us. So we can recognize, for example, that when we ask a partner with a deep fear of connection for more intimacy, we may as well ask that person to risk his or her very life. That would be the way it is likely to feel to that person.

Overcoming the Seven Deadly Fears means becoming sufficiently aware that our fears are unrealistic so that we can take the risk of some new—and more alive—behaviors. *Only then will we find that we did not die!* We may become anxious, frightened, confused or hurt, but we won't die. For example, if we have been afraid to assert ourselves and we come to the point of risking that thing that feels so scary—such as asking the boss for a raise, standing up for ourselves, or making a demand on a spouse who takes us for granted—we may find that we get what we want. Or we may get the hurtful response that we feared. But we know that as adults we can tolerate the pain, disappointment, and grief involved.

On a social level it may take time for those around us to adjust to changes in our behavior. They may

not want to adjust to our new aliveness. They may even strenuously object to it or reject us. Then we may feel hurt and humiliated all over again. Something inside may say, "See? Just like I always thought. It's too dangerous to put myself out there. Back to being quiet—and safe." But you have a choice! Take notice. Death hasn't happened. You may be bruised, but you did survive. There is much to be learned from the situation. You may have to be wiser about when and how to assert yourself in the future. You may need to reeducate those around you whose expectations don't fit you anymore. You may need some new people in your life! You may need more practice or tolerance. But like strengthening any muscle, you have to exercise and strengthen your capacity to assert your growing sense of being Fully Alive! Your efforts will be reinforced as you experience the rewards of getting more of what you need in life, of feeling a stronger sense of self, and of being more alive. In the long run, the rewards will be greater than the pain of self-expansion.

Daring to be more Fully Alive is always worth the risk! Finding ways to create the necessary changes is what this book is about. Recognizing the existence of the Underlying Fear of Death is the beginning of overcoming each of the Seven Deadly Fears. Risking new behavior is the key. Risking and going forward is scary. It can be painful and even costly at times. But without risking in this way there is no expansion, no increased connection, no getting our relationship needs met in better ways. Unfortunately, "no pain, no gain."

Our choice is clearly to experience the feeling that we are risking our lives—or to accept deadness as a way of life. We either risk the feeling of dying or continue to live with real deadness. The feeling of fear that we will die is not realistic. Our deadness is a reality. When you can grasp the fact of the Underlying Fear of Death, then you can confront your other Deadly Fears with the expectation of releasing the power they have over your life.

## *Chapter Eleven*

### **Daring to be Fully Alive**

The central theme of this workbook is that the Seven Deadly Fears keep us from being truly and Fully Alive. As infants and children, we chose or learned our defenses in order to survive and adapt to our early relationship environment. Our fears served a purpose. But as we grew to biological maturity, and as we developed emotionally and relationally, those fears no longer serve us so well. Our old fear reflexes no longer reflect our current realities. They have become limiting and constricting. So we can say that the fear reflexes that once served our survival now threaten our survival. This is why at this stage of our lives, our fears themselves are deadly, not the things we fear—aliveness, contact, abandonment, assertion, unacceptability, failure and success, and social pressures. Our fears are deadly because they limit and constrict us. The impact of such constrictions on our physical bodies literally can be life threatening in some situations— such as producing, allowing, or exacerbating physical illnesses. But in all cases, it is true to say that our fears are aliveness threatening.

Beyond surviving is thriving. Those who thrive, regardless of life's difficulties, have learned to monitor on a daily basis their habits and attitudes toward life. Every day they practice seven types of mindfulness.

1. They are mindful of their physical being and its pulsations and movements toward health.
2. They are aware of their world views, their psychological being which sustains their sense of being alive.
3. They consider carefully nutrition and other substances which they allow to enter their bodies.

4. They know the importance of deep breathing, daily stretching, and movement—physical activity which is enlivening and allows a full measure of feeling.
5. They are spiritual—ever mindful of the broader connections which they as individuals share with other people and with the spirit of the universe.
6. Those who practice passionate living spend time each day thinking positively, aligning themselves with the natural spiritual laws of the universe (Chopra, 1994).
7. Thriving entails being constantly alert each day for the ways that fear reflexes left over from childhood operate to rob us of the passionate life we truly deserve.

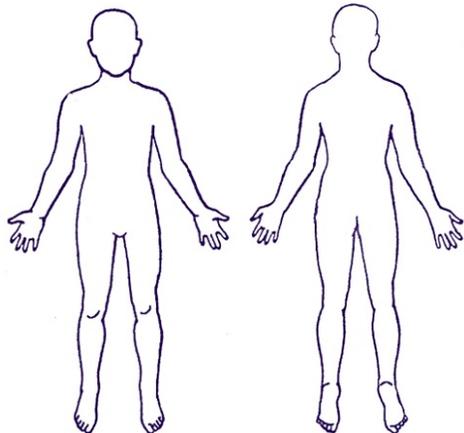
Dare to Be Fully Alive!

## **How to Use Your Aliveness Journal**

Each time there is a "Working With the Fear" section in this book, a link to your Aliveness Journal will follow. Use your Journal to record your experiences, feelings, and thoughts that the exercise stimulates. If your ereader allows, write directly in your Aliveness Journal in this book so that your self discoveries will not get lost, disorganized, or displaced. You can use the headings on the Aliveness Journal pages to return to the workbook text. Should you need a separate printable journal, simply print the PDF file available at [www.freepsychotherapybooks.org](http://www.freepsychotherapybooks.org)

## **How to Use Your Body Maps**

Fears affect different places in our bodies. As you go through the exercises and write in Your Aliveness Journal you will become aware that distinctly different tensions are associated for you with each of the Seven Deadly Fears. Using lines, circles, or arrows indicate in any manner that you like exactly where the tension or sensation is being felt in your body. Describe the constriction or specific pain by writing directly on the Body Map. A different Body Map is provided for each of the Seven Deadly Fears so that you can discover



how each different fear affects different parts of your body. As you work back and forth through the book

locating the exercises that are important for you, add your findings to the Body Maps.

## **How to Enjoy Your Listening Partner**

Full benefit from this book can be obtained by choosing someone who can be your "Listening Partner." This may be a person who simply listens as you do these exercises or it may be someone who is reading the book with you and who participates in all the exercises. Meet on a regular basis to read the book together. Work the exercises with your listener and then when appropriate, change roles and you be the listener. Begin by exchanging a "secrecy pact," assuring each other absolute privacy and confidentiality for all of the feelings, thoughts, and experiences that come up in the course of your very special time together. A secrecy pact increases the safety of your "listening space."

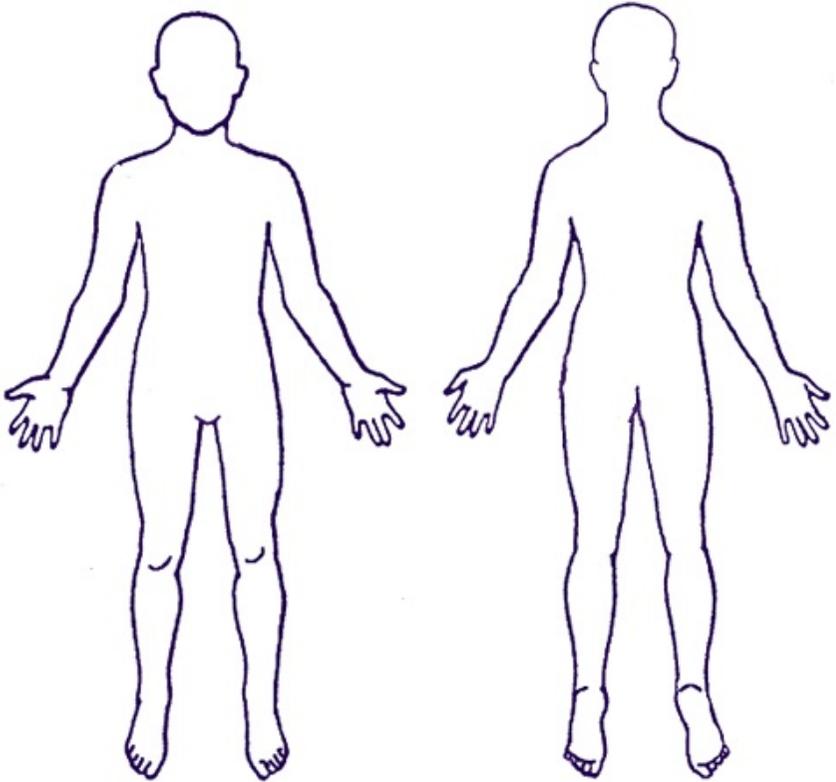
## 1. The Fear of Being Alone

### **SUMMARY: WORKING WITH THE FEAR OF BEING ALONE**

Focus the Fear of Being Alone  
Observe and Deepen Your Breathing  
Elaborate in Your Aliveness Journal  
React to Your Breathing  
Identify Your Personal Needs  
Consider Your Unmet Needs From Childhood  
Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection  
Reach Out into the World  
Reach Out to Someone and Say, "I Need You."  
Reach Out and Ask, "Where Are You?"  
Reach Out and Ask, "Why Aren't You There?"  
Reach Out With A Listening Partner  
Share With Your Listening Partner  
Observe How You Avoid Feeling Alone  
Take Responsibility For Feeling Aloneness  
Shrink the Monster  
Find A New Way

Affirm: "I am a human being with needs and desires that must be responded to. I can reach out to others. I can bear the pain of rejection. I can find loving people who will respond to me. I do not need to fear being alone."

Body Map – Fear of Being Alone



ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*React to Your Breathing*

*Defining What I Need From Others*

<b>My Unmet Needs</b>	<b>Why My Needs are Unmet</b>	

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Consider Your Unmet Needs From Childhood*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reach Out Into the World*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reach Out to Someone and Say, "I need you."*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reach Out and Ask, "Where are You?"*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reach Out and Ask, "Why aren't You There for Me?"*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reach Out with a Listening Partner*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Share with Your Listening Partner*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Observe How You Avoid Feeling Alone*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Take Responsibility For Feeling Aloneness*

*Shrink the Monster*

*Say this Affirmation Aloud*

"I am a human being who has needs and desires that must be responded to. I can reach out to others. I can bear the pain of rejection. I can find people who will respond to me. I do not need to fear being alone."

## 2. The Fear of Connecting

### **SUMMARY: WORKING WITH THE FEAR OF CONNECTING**

Focus the Fear of Making Connections

Breathe Deeply Into the Fear

Write in Your Aliveness Journal: Freeze, Fight, and Flee

Recall Painful Memories from Childhood

Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection

Imagine Touching A Scorching Hot Stove

Recall Frightening Experiences

Touch Fingertips With Your Listening Partner

Connect and Disconnect With Your Partner

Reach and Make Eye Contact With Your Partner

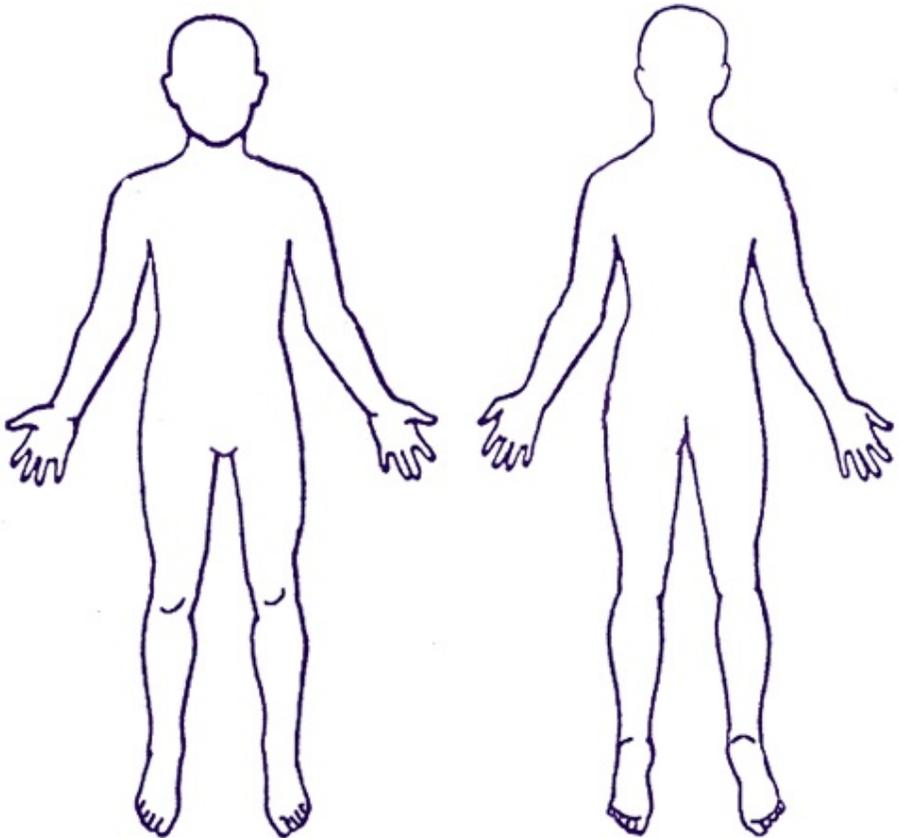
Feel Affirmed By Connecting With Your Partner

Shrink the Monster

Find A New Way

Affirm: "I am a human being with a capacity to enjoy intimate human connections. I have been hurt in relationships. I can be hurt again. But I will no longer deprive myself of life and love by avoiding connections. I do not need to fear connecting to others."

Body Map – Fear of Connecting



ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Breathe Deeply Into the Fear*

*My Freeze, Fight, and Flee Reactions*

Freeze

Fight

Flee

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Recall Painful and Frightening Memories From Childhood*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Imagine Touching a Scorching Hot Stove*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Recall Frightening Experiences of Connecting*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Touch Fingertips With Your Listening Partner*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Connect and Disconnect With Your Partner*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reach and Make Eye Contact With Your Partner*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Feel Affirmed By Connecting With Your Partner*

*Shrink the Fear of Connecting Monster*

*Say this Affirmation Aloud*

"I am a human being with a capacity to enjoy intimate human connections. I have been hurt in relationships. I can be hurt again. But I will no longer deprive myself of life and love by avoiding connections. I do not need to fear connecting to others."

### 3. The Fear of Abandonment

#### **SUMMARY: WORKING WITH THE FEAR OF ABANDONMENT**

Focus the Fear of Being Abandoned

Breathe and Reflect on Past Abandonments

Elaborate in Your Aliveness Journal

Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection

Reach to Someone You Need

Experience Your Listening Partner Reaching Back

Express Your Hurt and Anger Over Being Abandoned

Shrink the Monster

Accept the Reality of the Past

Grieve the Loss

Let It Go!

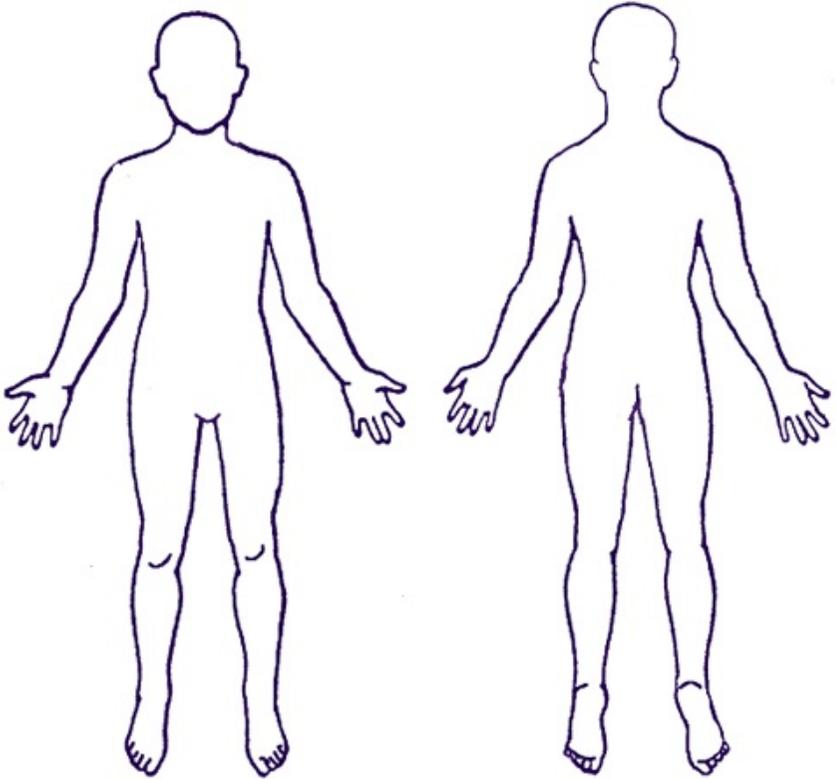
Find a New Way

Drink In the Good!

## Jump for Joy!

Affirm: I am a human being who is alive! I can acknowledge and accept that my earliest needs were not responded to in ways I required. I can grieve the loss of what I did not have. I can let go of the illusion that I can re-do the past and make up for my pain. I can now be open and receive all the good that is available to me in my life. I can love! I can be loved! I do not need to fear abandonment. I can be joyful!

Body Map – Fear of Abandonment



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*Breathe and Reflect on Past Abandonments*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Negative Feelings I Have Toward People Who Have Abandoned Me*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Things That Make for a Good Relationship*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Things That Make for a Bad Relationship*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Common Scenarios in my Significant Relationships*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Role Reversal Scenarios*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reach to Someone You Need*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Experience Your Listening Partner Reaching Back*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Express Your Hurt and Anger Over Being Abandoned*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Accept the Reality of the Past*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Grieve the Loss*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Let it Go!*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Drink in the Good!*

*Jump for Joy!*

*Say this Affirmation Aloud*

I am a human being who is alive! I can acknowledge and accept that my earliest needs were not responded to in ways I required. I can grieve the loss of what I did not have. I can let go of the illusion that I can re-do the past and make up for my pain. I can now be open and receive all the good that is available to me in my life. I can love! I can be loved! I do not need to fear abandonment. I can be joyful!

## 4. The Fear of Self-Assertion

### **SUMMARY: WORKING WITH THE FEAR OF SELF-ASSERTION**

Focus the Fear of Self-Assertion

Reflect on Your Negativity

Express Your Negativity to Your Partner

Write in Your Aliveness Journal

Write a Letter Expressing Your Differences

Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection

Express Your Negativity By Hitting With Force

Say "No" and Mean It

Say "No" While Making Eye Contact Yell, "Get off My Back!"

Twist a Towel and Insist, "I Have A Right!"

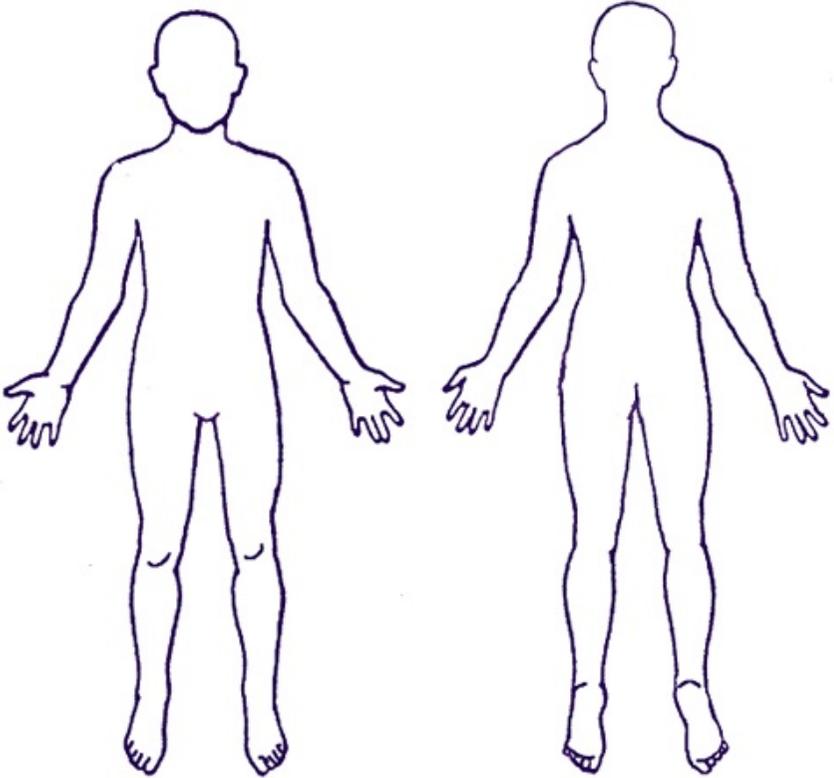
Shrink the Monster

Find a New Way

Affirm: I am a human being who enjoys doing things my own way. I have been attacked, shamed, and hurt for wanting to be different from how others wanted

me to be. I can bear the pain of forceful, negative, and angry, opposition. I have the courage, determination, and capacity to enjoy my own uniqueness and to assert my right to be separate and independent. I have no need to fear self-assertion.

Body Map – Fear of Self-Assertion



ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reflect on Your Negativity*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Express Your Negativity to Your Listening Partner*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Think of a Person from Whom You Have Withheld Anger*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Write a Letter Expressing Your Differences*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Express Your Negativity by Hitting with Force*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Say "No!" and Mean It*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Say "No!" While Making Eye Contact*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Yell, "Get Off My Back!"*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Twist a Towel and Insist, "I Have a Right!"*

*Shrink the Monster*

*Say this Affirmation Aloud*

I am a human being who enjoys doing things my own way. I have been attacked, shamed, and hurt for wanting to be different from how others wanted me to be. I can bear the pain of forceful, negative, and angry opposition. I have the courage, determination, and capacity to enjoy my own uniqueness and to assert my right to be separate and independent. I have no need to fear self-assertion.

## 5. The Fear of Not Being Recognized

### **SUMMARY: WORKING WITH THE FEAR OF NOT BEING RECOGNIZED**

Focus the Fear of Not Being Recognized

Breathe, Relax, and Turn Inward

Elaborate in Your Aliveness Journal

Image-Self and Real-Self

Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection

Recall Experiences of Being Devalued

Recall Experiences of Being Acknowledged

Experience Having Your Real Self Mirrored

Shrink the Monster

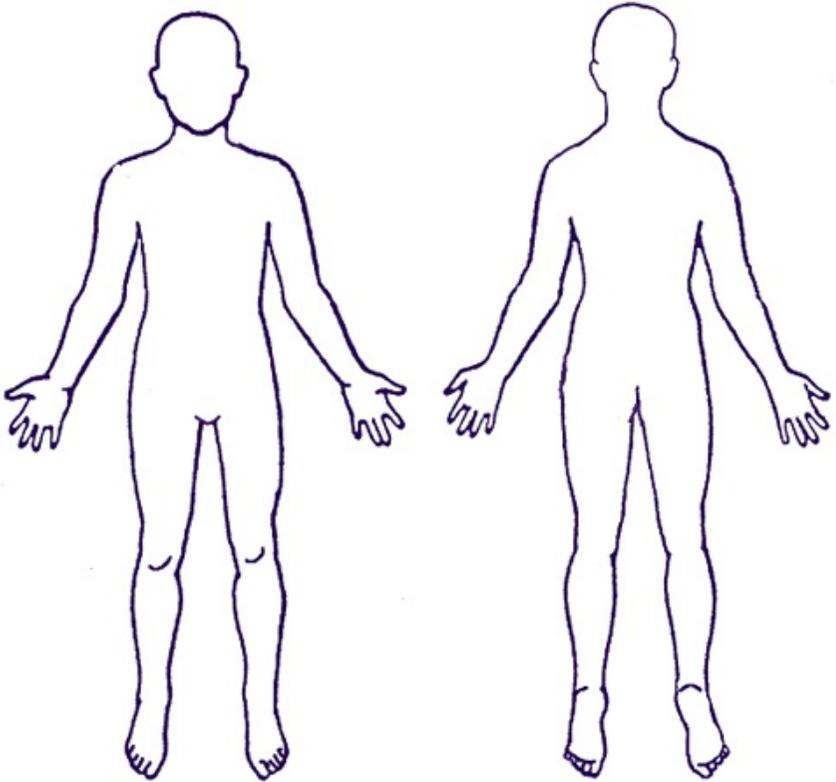
Enjoy Real Self Esteem

Find a New Way

Affirm: I am a human being with a Real Self that needs to feel affirmed, loved, and respected by others. I am able to accept self-affirmation joyously, and without inhibition. I have been shamed, humiliated, devalued, and hurt by others not finding me acceptable. I can bear the pain of not always being

acceptable to everyone. I do not need to fear lack of recognition or being unacceptable.

Body Map – Fear of Not Being Recognized



ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Breathe, Relax, and Turn Inward*

*Image Demands and Image Self*

Image Demands

Image Self

Here are the things that I  
must be or do:

Here is how I actually am in relation to each  
image demand on the left:

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Real Self*

Who I Really Am and Have a Right to be Proud of:

How Shame and Pride Come Up for Me:

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Recall Experiences of Being Devalued*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Recall Experiences of Being Acknowledged*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Experience Having Your Real Self Acknowledged*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Enjoy Real Self Esteem*

*Shrink the Monster*

***Say this Affirmation Aloud:***

I am a human being with a Real Self that needs to feel affirmed, loved, and respected by others. I am able to accept self-affirmation joyously, and without inhibition. I have been shamed, humiliated, devalued, and hurt by others not finding me acceptable. I can bear the pain of not always being acceptable to everyone. I do not need to fear lack of recognition or being unacceptable.

## 6. The Fear of Failure and Success

### **SUMMARY: WORKING WITH THE FEAR OF FAILURE AND SUCCESS**

Focus the Fear of Failure and Success

Reflect on Work, Social Relationships, Intimacy, and Sexuality

Write in Your Journal about Triangles

Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection

Feel Your Fear of Failure and Success

Experience Your Original Triangle

Consider How the Original Feelings Persist Today

Address Your Same-Sexed Parent

*Express Your Negativity*

*Ask Your Listening Parent for Support*

Address Your Opposite-Sexed Parent

*Express Your Negativity*

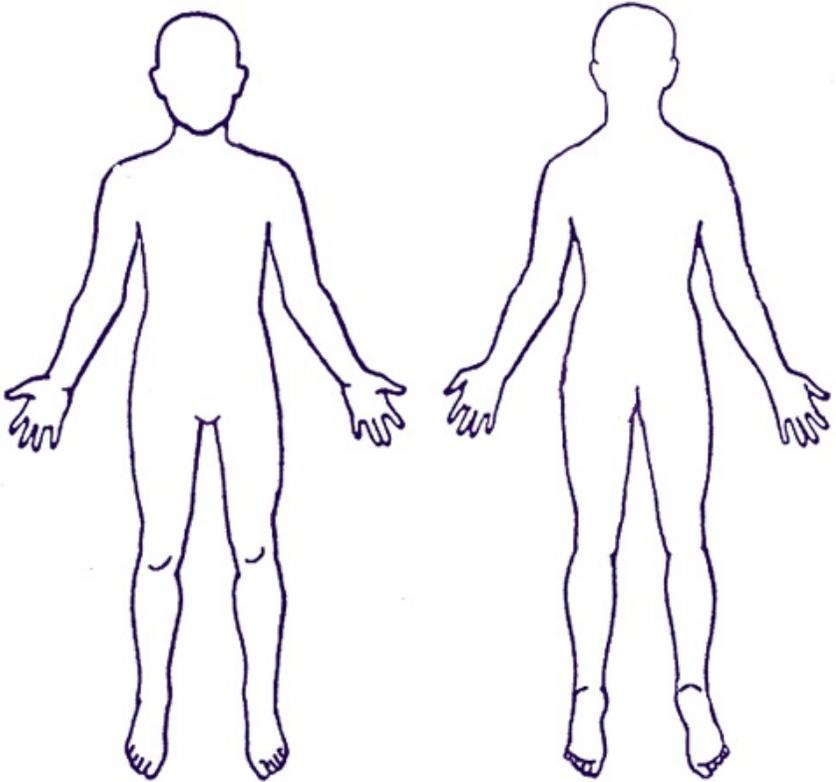
*Ask your Listening Parent for Support*

Shrink the Monster

Find a New Way

Affirm: "I am a human being who must cooperate and compete in many kinds of relationships in order to feel fulfilled in my life. I have a right to feel strong and capable, alive and fulfilled, in cooperation and in competition. I deserve fulfilling intimate and sexual relationships. I do not need to feel shame or loss of self-worth when I lose. When I play fair and with full consideration of others, I need feel no guilt when I win. I do not need to fear either failure or success in competition or in relationships. I will not allow damage, fears, and hatreds from the past to diminish my life and relationships in the present."

*Body Map – Fear of Failure and Success*



ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reflect on Work*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reflect on Social Relationships*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reflect on Your Intimacy*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Reflect on Your Sexuality*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*My Triangles*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Fears of Failure and Success in my Triangles*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Feel Your Fear of Failure and Success in Your Body*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Experience Your Original Triangle*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Consider How the Original Feelings Persist Today*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Express Your Negativity Toward Your Same-Sexed Parent*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Ask Your Listening “Parent” for Support*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Address Your Opposite-Sexed Parent*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Express Your Negativity Toward Your Opposite-Sexed Parent*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Ask Your Listening “Parent” for Support*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Shrink the Monster*

*Give and Receive Forgiveness*

***Say this Affirmation Aloud:***

"I am a human being who must cooperate and compete in many kinds of relationships in order to feel fulfilled in my life. I have a right to feel strong and capable, alive and fulfilled, in cooperation and in competition. I deserve fulfilling intimate and sexual relationships. I do not need to feel shame or loss of self-worth when I lose. When I play fair and with full consideration of others, I need feel no guilt when I win. I do not need to fear either failure or success in competition or in relationships. I will not allow damage, fears, and hatreds from the past to diminish my life and relationships in the present."

## 7. The Fear of Being Fully Alive

### **SUMMARY: WORKING WITH THE FEAR OF BEING FULLY ALIVE**

Focus the Fear of Being Fully Alive

Consider Pressures from All Groups

Elaborate on Group Pressures in Your Aliveness

Experience the Body-Mind-Relationship Connection

Put on Your Aliveness Monitor

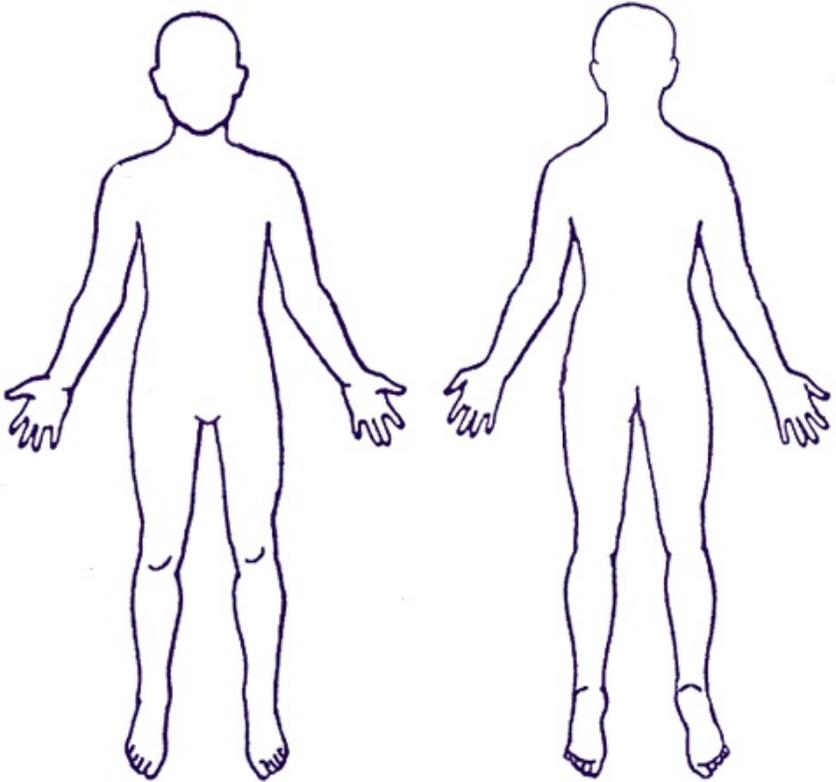
Touching Base with Your Body

Shrink the Monster

Find a New Way

Affirm: “I am a human being who is unavoidably affected by the many pressures of group life. I have allowed the standards and expectations of groups to limit my full sense of life. I have suffered many times when my integrity, health, and sense of well-being have been threatened by social demands. I have the power to monitor all parts of my mind and body daily for signs of undue pressure. I am learning ways to identify and to release every day any and all constrictions produced by the pressures of living. I do not need to be afraid of being Fully Alive!”

*Body Map – Fear of Being Fully Alive*



ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Consider Pressures From All Your Groups*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Elaborate On Group Pressures*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Put On Your Aliveness Monitor*

ALIVENESS JOURNAL

*Touching Base With My Body*

*Shrink the Monster*

*Say Aloud This Affirmation*

“I am a human being who is unavoidably affected by the many pressures of group life. I have allowed the standards and expectations of groups to limit my full sense of life. I have suffered many times when my integrity, health, and sense of well being have been threatened by social demands. I have the power to monitor all parts of my mind and body daily for signs of undue pressure. I am learning ways to identify and to release every day any and all body-mind-relationship constrictions produced by the pressures of living. I do not need to be afraid of being Fully Alive!”

## *Appendix A*

### **How to Locate a Counselor or Therapist**

Occasionally people have mental or physical reactions to self-help exercises and feel upset or confused. Or they experience anxiety or associations from the past that are frightening. Should this happen to you I recommend that you contact someone who can be of help to you. You can contact your physician, pastor, or rabbi, or you may wish to seek out a professional therapist or counselor near you who is listed in the yellow pages or online.

### A Note for Psychotherapists:

#### *Character Types, Relationships, and The Seven Deadly Fears*

Psychological classifications serve many purposes. The Seven Deadly Fears are conceptualized as arising from seven kinds of relationship situations which all people experience to a greater or lesser extent in the course of growing up. When listening to another person talk about him/or herself, it can be extremely helpful to organize one's thoughts and therapeutic inquiry around these seven nodal points of relationship development. This is because each distinct type of relationship fear can be thought to resist therapeutic analysis in characteristic ways, to function differently in the ongoing structuring of each person's body-self, and to manifest differently in each person's significant relationships—including the psychotherapeutic relationship. Additionally, since all people everywhere have experienced these generic relationship challenges in one way or another, this way of forming overall listening perspectives is essentially culture-, race- and class-free. Of course, the specific ways each person experiences each fear is specifically constructed by their cultural, familial and personal backgrounds.

The schema suggested in the *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears Workbook* for considering and contacting one's fears might well serve as a psychoanalytic-bioenergetic classification of character dynamics of the kind first called for by Otto Fenichel (Fenichel, 1945). Karl Abraham developed three character types: The oral, the anal, and the genital.<sup>12</sup> Sigmund Freud classified character types as erotic, narcissistic, and obsessional (Freud, *Libidinal Types*, 1931/1961). Wilhelm Reich's study of character was less theoretical and more based on practical problems encountered in developing psychoanalytic technique (Reich, *Character Analysis*, 1949). Rather than focusing on types of libidinal organization or on specific traits, Reich formulated character in terms of (1) its role in resisting analytic interpretation and (2) its relation to function

in the libido economy of the organism. Reich's types are based on "characteristic behavior of the patient in defending himself against analytic insight and unconscious material (Wolfe, 1949).

Alexander Lowen, on the basis of Bioenergetic considerations, in 1958 wrote, "In the growth and development of the ego structure the child is subject to three major kinds of disturbance, each of which will leave its characteristic mark on his personality. Deprivation leads to orality, suppression to masochism, and frustration to rigidity." (Lowen A. , *The Language of the Body*, 1958). Lowen's three original character types correspond roughly to Abraham's oral, anal, and genital types, but more closely to Freud's erotic, narcissistic, and obsessional types. Lowen later added the schizoid and psychopathic character types. Lowen subsequently elaborated a series of variations on Bioenergetic character types, specifying that these types need not be thought of as existing in pure form in any particular individual, but rather in varying combinations depending on the person's childhood experiences. He asks, "Is it possible to arrange the different character types schematically so that we have a broad picture of the essential neurotic disturbances? Such an arrangement presupposes a relationship between the character types and some developmental patterns. Is it possible then to formulate a genetic-dynamic theory of character formation which would serve as such a pattern?" (Lowen A. , *Betrayal of the Body*, 1967).

The Seven Deadly Fears delineated in this book expand the Lowenian understanding that relationship disturbances in early childhood leave characteristic marks on each body and personality. The basic schema for the *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears* is derived from psychoanalytic object relations theory as spelled out by many writers including Margaret Mahler (1968), Otto Kernberg (1976), and self psychology as formulated by Heinz Kohut (1971) and others.

In a comprehensive review of contemporary psychoanalytic approaches I have elaborated four ways of attending to others in my book *Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy* 1983, 2003) and subsequent paper, "Listening Perspectives for Emotional Memories" (2005). The four perspectives are the backbone of the present schema of Seven Deadly Fears. The fears of (1) being fully alive and of (2) connecting are addressed my (I) Organizing Listening Perspective. The fears of (3) abandonment and (4) self-assertion are covered in (II) The Symbiosis/separation-individuation Listening Perspective. The fear of (4) not being

recognized corresponds to (III) The Selfobject Listening Perspective. The fear of (5) failure and success and the fear of (7) being fully alive are included in (IV) The Oedipal Listening Perspective.

The Seven Deadly Fears can be thought of as disturbances of childhood in the Lowenian sense in that they set up characteristic blocks to spontaneous, creative, and vibrant living and loving. Each of these character blocks can be thought of as intimately linked with body function and structure at various developmental levels in the same manner that Lowen has demonstrated in his extensive work on character types. Each set of character blocks generated by childhood fear can also be expected to manifest in relationships—especially the psychotherapeutic one—as resistance to relating in a fully alive manner in the "here-and-now" of the present moment.

*Overcoming Our Relationship Fears* thus outlines not only seven distinctly different kinds of fears produced by different kinds of childhood relationship situations. This book also provides a broad dynamically based schema for understanding and classifying character. It parallels the penetrating and comprehensive work on character styles done by Steven Johnson (Johnson, 1994). Each general fear is assumed to be specifically tied to certain kinds of misattuned environmental responsiveness to the child's changing developmental capacities and needs at different stages of development.

The crucial technical implication in conceptualizing seven developmental levels of fear-based character formations is that optimal listening in psychotherapy then requires that we respond to each developmental level with different ways of understanding the transference, the resistance, and the countertransference. See my *Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy* for an extended summary of the listening perspective approach, its philosophical and epistemological underpinnings, its technical applications and an updated introduction including the contemporary relational perspective that is included in the twentieth anniversary edition (2003). See my *In Search of the Lost Mother of Infancy* for an overview of the Listening Perspectives approach and specific applications to the earliest developmental issues and fears.

### A Word on Body-Mind-Relationship Exercises

The exercises suggested in this book are derived from the work of a number of body psychotherapists, but chiefly from Alexander Lowen, a pioneer in body-mind-relationship therapy who recognizes that to reduce fear and conflict a person must work with the body as well as the mind (Lowen A. , *Bioenergetics*, 1975). This is because beginning at the earliest age, our feeling responses to frightening or painful experiences became locked inside our physical selves. Then it was too dangerous, not allowed, or not otherwise possible to cry, scream, or rage. So these unexpressed feelings remain held in the body by chronic muscular tension patterns. As long as our feelings are trapped in our bodies we are stuck in self-protective behavior—our fear reflexes. We cannot experience deep psychological change even though we may have insight and awareness regarding what our patterns of chronic contraction are about without also experiencing changes in our bodies.

Bioenergetic Analysis, a psychodynamic psychotherapy founded by Lowen, works with these chronic contractions in the body as well as with the issues and experiences which have created them. For body psychotherapists of any orientation the tension patterns in the body provide an essential key to understanding the client's problems. In the Bioenergetic therapy process the Bioenergetic exercises are utilized to help the person experience feelings, to express them, and to release them while understanding and integrating their meaning within the therapeutic relationship. This allows for change to take place on deep psychological as well as biological levels. The Bioenergetic-styled exercises suggested in this book can help you begin the process of connecting to your body and to your feelings. They provide a way to begin to release the long-held tension patterns which operate destructively in your life. Most of the exercises in this workbook have been generously adapted from Bioenergetic practice by Virginia Wink Hilton. The triangular exercises are adapted from a workshop given in Anaheim, California by Al Pizzo.

Bioenergetics is one of nearly forty different schools of body psychotherapy practiced worldwide but the one with which I have the greatest familiarity. For more information contact [The United States Body Psychotherapy Association](#).

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Three examples of the growing literature on stress and health are: *The Lost Art of Healing* by the cardiologist Bernard Lown (1996 NY: Houghton Mifflin Company); *Mending the Broken Heart* by Herbert Strein (1996 Northvale, NJ: Aronson); and *Psychoneuroimmunology: The Interface Between Behavior, Brain, and Immunity*, by Steven F. Maier, Linda R. Watkins, and Monica Fleshner in *The American Psychologist* 49: No. 12, 1004-1014, December, 1994. Other articles which underline the mind-body connection are: "Which comes first: Depression or heart disease?" *The New York Times*, January 14, 1991; "The Interface of Mental and Physical Health," *Health Psychology*, September, 1995; "Current research articles on psychological-physical health links abound," by Mary Low Bernardo, Ph.D. In *The National Psychologist* March/April 1997.
- <sup>2</sup> [See Appendix C.](#)
- <sup>3</sup> Much infant research into early states is summarized in Daniel Stern's. *The Interpersonal World of the Infant* (1985 New York: Basic Books). Intrauterine examples as they have become elucidated in later psychotherapy are given in Lawrence Hedges: *Working the Organizing Experience*, especially chapter 8. (1994 Northvale, NJ: Aronson). The body memory of early maternal unresponsiveness becomes the basis for the feeling, "there's nobody there."
- <sup>4</sup> Kaufman, Robert. "Southern California Institute of Bioenergetic Analysis." *Training Materials* (1994).
- <sup>5</sup> Anna Freud first formulated this idea as "identification with the aggressor" in *The Ego and the Mechanisms of Defense*. NY: International Universities Press, 1936.
- <sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Robert Hilton for his contribution to this section. For example, suppose in your exercises you encounter a fear that someone (like your father) is likely to criticize and humiliate you in a certain way or with certain words. Feel what that fear or humiliation is really like. Then in your imagination reverse the roles and imagine yourself as the one who criticizes or humiliates, say, your children, your subordinates, or other friends and associates. Often enough you will discover that those dreadful ways of criticizing and humiliating that you so hated as a child have somehow been incorporated into your personality in subtle ways.

Another way to study this role reversal tendency is to notice that what you most hate in others is a devious and hidden part of yourself!

7 The process of remembering trauma and finding relief is further elaborated in Hedges, L.E., *Remembering, Repeating and Working Through Childhood Trauma*. (1994 Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson).

8 These ideas on self development stem from the work of Heinz Kohut, especially *The Analysis of the Self*. (1971 New York: International Universities Press).

9 These exercises were first developed in a different form by Al Pizzo.

10 Beckett, Samuel. *Waiting for Godot*. New York: Grove Press, 1954.

11 Thanks to Virginia Hilton for this exercise.

12 Abraham, Karl. (1921) "Contributions to the Theory of the Anal Character;" (1924) "The Influence of Oral Eroticism on Character Formation;" and (1925) "Character Formation on the Genital Level of the Libido." In *Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis I*. New York: Basic Books, 1953.

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## ***Other Books by Lawrence E. Hedges***

### *Terrifying Transferences: Aftershocks of Childhood Trauma*

There is a level of stark terror known to one degree or another by all human beings. It silently haunts our lives and occasionally surfaces in therapy. It is this deep-seated fear—often—manifested in dreams or fantasies of dismemberment, mutilation, torture, abuse, insanity, rape, or death—that grips us with the terror of being lost forever in time and space or controlled by hostile forces stronger than ourselves. Whether the terror is felt by the client or by the therapist, it has a disorienting, fragmenting, crippling power. How we can look directly into the face of such terror, hold steady, and safely work it through is the subject of *Terrifying Transferences*. Contributing therapists: Linda Barnhurst, John Carter, Shirley Cox, Jolyn Davidson, Virginia Hunter, Michael Reyes, Audrey Seaton-Bacon, Sean Stewart, Gayle Trenberth, and Cynthia Wygal.

### *Listening Perspectives in Psychotherapy*

In a fresh and innovative format Hedges organizes an exhaustive overview of contemporary psychoanalytic and object relations theory and clinical practice. “In studying the *Listening Perspectives of therapists*, the author has identified himself with the idea that one must sometimes change the Listening Perspective and also the interpreting, responding perspective.”—Rudolf Ekstein, Ph.D. Contributing therapists: Mary Cook, Susan Courtney, Charles Coverdale, Arlene Dorius, David Garland, Charles Margach, Jenna Riley, and Mary E. Walker. Now available in a Twentieth Anniversary edition, the book has become a classic in the field.

### *Working the Organizing Experience*

Hedges defines in a clear and impelling manner the most fundamental and treacherous transference phenomena, the emotional experiences retained from the first few months of life. Hedges describes the

infant's attempts to reach out and form organizing connections to the interpersonal environment and how those attempts may have been ignored, thwarted, and/or rejected. He demonstrates how people live out these primitive transferences in everyday significant relationships and in the psychotherapy relationship. James Grotstein contributes a critical history of psychotherapy with primitive transferences and a case study is contributed by Frances Tustin.

### *Interpreting the Countertransference*

Hedges boldly studies countertransference as a critical tool for therapeutic understanding. “Hedges clearly and beautifully delineates the components and forms of countertransference and explicates the technique of carefully proffered countertransference informed interventions...[He takes the view] that all countertransferences, no matter how much they belong to the analyst, are unconsciously evoked by the patient.”—James Grotstein, M.D. Contributing therapists: Anthony Brailow, Karen K. Redding, and Howard Rogers.

### *In Search of the Lost Mother of Infancy*

“Organizing transferences” in psychotherapy constitute a living memory of a person's earliest relatedness experiences and failures. Infant research and psychotherapeutic studies from the past two decades makes it now possible to define for therapeutic analysis the manifestations of early contact traumas. A history and summary of the Listening Perspective approach to psychotherapy introduces the book. Contributing therapists: Bill Cone, Cecile Dillon, Francie Marais, Sandra Russell, Sabrina Salayz, Jacki Singer, Sean Stewart, Ruth Wimsatt, and Marina Young.

### *Strategic Emotional Involvement*

Following an overview of contemporary approaches to studying countertransference responsiveness, therapists tell moving stories of how their work came to involve them deeply, emotionally, and not always safely with clients. These comprehensive, intense, and honest reports are the first of their kind ever to be

collected and published. Contributing therapists: Anthony Brailow, Suzanne Buchanan, Charles Coverdale, Carolyn Crawford, Jolyn Davidson, Jacqueline Gillespie, Ronald Hirz, Virginia Hunter, Gayle Trenberth, and Sally Turner-Miller.

*Therapists At Risk: Perils of the Intimacy of the Therapeutic Relationship*

Lawrence E. Hedges, Robert Hilton, and Virginia Wink Hilton, long-time trainers of psychotherapists, join hands with attorney O. Brandt Caudill in this tour de force, which explores the multitude of personal, ethical, and legal risks involved in achieving rewarding transformative connections in psychotherapy today. Relational intimacy is explored through such issues as touching, dualities in relationship, interfacing boundaries, sexuality, countertransference, recovered memories, primitive transferences, false accusations against therapists, and the critical importance of peer support and consultation. The authors clarify the many dynamic issues involved, suggest useful ways of managing the inherent dangers, and work to restore our confidence in and natural enjoyment of the psychotherapeutic process.

*Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through Childhood Trauma: The Psychodynamics of Recovered Memories, Multiple Personality, Ritual Abuse, Incest, Molest, and Abduction*

Infantile focal as well as strain trauma leave deep psychological scars that show up as symptoms and memories later in life. In psychotherapy people seek to process early experiences that lack ordinary pictorial and narrational representations through a variety of forms of transference and dissociative remembering such as multiple personality, dual relating, archetypal adventures, and false accusations against therapists or other emotionally significant people. “Lawrence Hedges makes a powerful and compelling argument for why traumatic memories recovered during psychotherapy need to be taken seriously. He shows us how and why these memories must be dealt with in thoughtful and responsible ways and not simply uncritically believed and used as tools for destruction.”—Elizabeth F. Loftus, Ph.D.

*Facing the Challenge of Liability in Psychotherapy: Practicing Defensively*

In this litigious age, all psychotherapists must protect themselves against the possibility of legal action; malpractice insurance is insufficient and does not begin to address the complexity and the enormity of this critical problem. In this book, Lawrence E. Hedges urges clinicians to practice defensively and provides a course of action that equips them to do so. After working with over a hundred psychotherapists and attorneys who have fought unwarranted legal and ethical complaints from clients, he has made the fruits of his work available to all therapists. In addition to identifying those patients prone to presenting legal problems, Dr. Hedges provides a series of consent forms (on the accompanying disk), a compelling rationale for using them, and a means of easily introducing them into clinical practice. This book is a wake-up call, a practical, clinically sound response to a frightening reality, and an absolute necessity for all therapists in practice today. Now available in a revised and updated edition.

*Sex in Psychotherapy: Sexuality, Passion, Love, and Desire in the Therapeutic Encounter*

This book takes a psychodynamic approach to understanding recent technological and theoretical shifts in the field of psychotherapy. Hedges provides an expert overview and analysis of a wide variety of new perspectives on sex, sexuality, gender, and identity; new theories about sex's role in therapy; and new discoveries about the human brain and how it works. Therapists will value Hedges' unique insights into the role of sexuality in therapy, which are grounded in the author's studies of neurology, the history of sexuality, transference, resistance, and countertransference. Clinicians will also appreciate his provocative analyses of influential perspectives on sex, gender, and identity, and his lucid, concrete advice on the practice of therapeutic listening. This is an explosive work of tremendous imagination and scholarship. Hedges speaks the uncomfortable truth that psychotherapy today often reinforces the very paradigms that keep patients stuck in self-defeating, frustrating behavior. He sees sexuality as a vehicle for both therapists and patients to challenge what they think they know about the nature of self and intimacy. This book is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding 21st century human beings—or in better understanding themselves and their sexuality.

*Overcoming Our Relationship Fears*

We are all aware that chronic tension saps our energy and contributes to such modern maladies as high blood pressure and tension headaches, but few of us realize that this is caused by muscle constrictions that started as relationship fears in early childhood and live on in our minds and bodies. *Overcoming Our Relationship Fears* is a user-friendly roadmap for healing our relationships by dealing with our childhood fear reflexes. It is replete with relationship stories to illustrate each fear and how we individually express them. Dr. Hedges shows how to use our own built-in "Aliveness Monitor" to gauge our body's reaction to daily interactions and how they trigger our fears. Exercises in the book will help us release these life-threatening constrictions and reclaim our aliveness with ourselves and others.

*Cross-Cultural Encounters: Bridging Worlds of Difference*

This book is addressed to everyone who regularly encounters people from other cultural, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, and ability groups. Its special focus, however, is aimed at counselors, therapists, and educators since their daily work so often involves highly personal cross-cultural interactive encounters. The running theme throughout the book is the importance of cultivating an attitude of tentative and curious humility and openness in the face of other cultural orientations. I owe a great debt to the many students, clients, and friends with diverse backgrounds who over the years have taught me how embedded I am in my own cultural biases. And who have helped me find ways of momentarily transcending those biases in order to bridge to an inspiring and illuminating intimate personal connection.

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