RAISING YOURSELF

REPARENTING THE YOUNGER YOU

BY SHELLY ROBINSON

Your Companion Workbook to the Connected Kids Card Deck

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HELLO, DEAR FRIEND:

I AM SO GRATEFUL AND EXCITED THAT YOU HAVE CHOSEN TO COMMIT TO THE COURAGEOUS WORK OF BETTER KNOWING, HEALING, AND UNDERSTANDING THE YOUNGER YOU, OTHERWISE KNOWN AS YOUR INNER CHILD.

Like you, when I had my first child almost 12 years ago (at the time of this writing), I was determined to parent him gently, consciously, and respectfully. I was committed to breaking generational cycles and overwriting institutional, familial, and societal narratives that didn't serve me as a child (or an adult). I was going to do things differently (enthusiastically shakes first in the air).

Naively, I thought just desiring those changes would be enough. I thought I could white-knuckle my way to gentle parenting, relying on grit and discipline. Little did I know back then how much I would have to re-till and soften my inner landscape in order to show up as the parent and person I truly wanted to be. After all, how could I be gentle with my children when I was being so hard on myself?

When I describe my journey to conscious parenting, people are sometimes surprised to learn that my anger was the gateway to this method of parenting, which seems a little backward, right?

Yet, my anger was what led me down the path of getting to know my inner child. Sure, just like any parent, I experienced surface-level anger about aggravating things most parents experience like the general overstimulation of parenthood, disrupted sleep, bedtime struggles, and mealtime tantrums. The surface irritations weren't what led me to my inner child, though.

It was that deep-seated, red hot anger that came from a deeper (younger) part of me that I knew I needed to investigate like a compassionate detective. I later learned that these unexpected explosions in anger were called my triggers (a term I had not heard of before parenthood).

"A TRIGGER IS ANYTHING YOU EXPERIENCE IN THE PRESENT MOMENT THAT ACTIVATES A FEELING FROM THE PAST."

During certain intense conflicts with my children, I could almost feel myself being catapulted back in time to when I was a child and felt powerless and unheard.

For example, early on in getting to know my inner child, I discovered that my kids "not listening to me" was a volatile trigger because it reminded me of the times I wasn't heard as a child (and this doesn't necessarily mean not being heard by our parents. This could show up as not being heard by other adults or institutions who played influential roles in our lives).

"MAY WE HEAL OUR OWN WOUNDS SO OUR CHILDREN HAVE A CLEANER CANVAS UPON WHICH TO PAINT THEIR OWN LIFE."

-SHELLY ROBINSON

For better or for worse, how we were raised as children directly (and often unconsciously) influences the way we show up as parents. I would also like to gently remind you that deciding to embark upon working with your inner child isn't about blaming and shaming our parents. No matter how amazing our parents were, none of us comes out of childhood unscathed and it is our moral obligation to the next generation to uncover and heal any wounds that we don't want to pass on to our children.

It is my most sincere hope that doing the work on the following pages unlocks a tenderness inside of you that you forgot existed, allowing you to relate to yourself and your children in a way that is rooted in grace, compassion, and unconditional love.

TO RAISING OURSELVES,

SHELLY

IMPORTANT: Please note that this workbook is not, in any way, a substitute for therapy. If, during this process, you feel you need additional support, please don't hesitate to reach out to your healthcare provider to discuss options and resources available in your area. I have included mental health resources at the end of this workbook.

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

You will notice that, like the Connected Kid card deck, I have divided this workbook into six different categories to help you gently access different parts of your childhood. Those categories include:

1. UNCONDITIONAL LOVE
2. BEING SEEN AND HEARD
3. MISTAKES AND APOLOGIES
4. CULTIVATING SELF-TRUST
5. MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLNESS
6. BODILY AUTONOMY + POSITIVITY

My intention for including this workbook with the cards is to give parents a soft landing place to process any intense, overwhelming or confusing feelings that may have arisen from using the Connected Kid cards with your children.

Sometimes our inner children become jealous or insecure when they see us giving our children the freedom and liberation that they weren't afforded growing up. This isn't "good" or "bad." This is simply something to notice with compassionate curiosity while affirming your inner child's feelings. This workbook is designed to support you as you process these emotions.

NOURISH AT YOUR OWN PACE

This is a self-paced journal that you can take at a pace that feels nourishing and sustainable for you. You don't need to go through these categories in a specific order, so if you feel led to begin with one category over another, feel free to start there.

Embedded within each section are various questions, exercises, letters, and activities you can incorporate into your life as you see fit. Remember that this is intended to be a self-judgment free zone and the more self-love and curiosity you can cultivate during this process, the more cared for Younger You will feel.

While connecting with Younger You is not always easy, I can assure you that it is worthwhile. And know this: if some of this work feels akin to untangling a knotted necklace that you can't figure out where it starts or where it ends... that's because it can very much feel like that - it doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. But, there are also moments of great clarity and healing, and my hope is that you experience more of that and fewer necklace knots along the way.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Within each section, you will see a consistent format. First, I will briefly discuss the topic at hand that you'll be connecting with (e.g., unconditional love). Next, you will see two types of journal prompts: one will be addressed to your inner child, and the next will be questions for adult you. They are designed to help you connect any missing dots between how certain childhood events may be showing up in your adult life.

Lastly, I invite you to "Rewire and Rewrite" various narratives that you've identified at the end of each section. You may choose to respond to the questions that you resonate most with. Don't feel pressure to answer them all if that feels too heavy. Take this at a gentle pace that makes the most sense for you.

Rituals: Lastly, at the beginning of each section of this workbook and prior to connecting with your younger self, I would invite you to establish a calming practice prior to putting pen to paper. Light a candle, burn some sage, or turn on some soft music in the background. Remind your nervous system that you are safe and that it's okay to proceed. You are surrounded by love.

EMOTIONAL SAFETY

As you dive into this workbook, the top priority is your emotional safety and wellness. At any time this work becomes too much or too intense, don't hesitate to walk away and reach out to a trusted friend and/or a licensed mental health professional to support you as needed.

In the nervous system section on page 20, I've also curated some of my favorite activities for returning to a calm baseline to help regulate your nervous system if you become too emotionally stimulated.

Finally, above all else, be gentle with yourself throughout this workbook. As you respond to the journal prompts that follow, remember that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Rather, consider addressing the prompts from a lens of compassionate curiosity for both your inner child and your adult self. Your main responsibility for the remainder of this workbook is to be a loving witness to that little you who yearns for unconditional love and acceptance.

WHO IS THE YOUNGER YOU?

I will be totally honest with you: when I was a new mom a dozen years ago, I rarely heard the term “inner child,” and when it did scuttle across my radar, I felt it was completely irrelevant to me and how I parented. After all, I hadn’t experienced any major traumas growing up, and at the time, that term felt too “out there” for me.

Boy, did I miss the mark thinking inner child work “wasn’t for me.” I had no idea how the needs and parts of me as a child that I suppressed would come roaring back to the surface as a parent when my child triggered me. And it took me years to connect those dots.

Before I dive into how inner child work changed my life, and how it influences the way I relate to my kids and myself, I first want to make sure we’re working from the same definition of what an inner child is, someone I will often refer to as the **Younger You** throughout this workbook.

Inner child work is defined as a way to meet the needs that went unmet throughout your childhood. Your inner child is the subconscious part of who you are today that has been receiving messages prior to being able to fully appreciate and process what was going on.

As children, our core needs are to be protected (kept safe), loved, and seen for who we are. When one or more of those needs aren’t met, we exit childhood and enter adulthood with inner child wounds that unconsciously - and consistently - show up in countless ways in our lives. So many of the coping mechanisms we rely on as adults to blunt the pain of being human can be traced back to childhood wounds that have been left unchecked. Really, it’s just our inner child trying to keep us safe.

When you think about it, and as you dive deeper into this work, you will begin to see with wide open eyes that in many ways, most adults are children walking around in grown-up clothes, engaging in grown-up activities, but approaching so much of life with child-like experience. Meaning, in various areas of our lives, our emotional growth became stunted, keeping us stuck in cycles of pain and behavior that don't match our parental aspirations to be gentle and conscious.

Personally, I can recall many times in my own parenting journey, where upon entering a conflict with my child, I found myself engaging in immature, child-like behavior (shouting, being passive aggressive, pouting, etc.) because I was still operating from an unhealed childhood wound. I can also see how that shows up in my marriage. Wherever we (and our inner children) go, there we are, right?

Indeed, many of us act "like children" from time to time. It could be a temper tantrum we throw when our child refuses his bath, or it could be that sense of abandonment we feel when our spouse leaves for a week-long business trip. In so many of us, there is still an angry 8-year-old who doesn't trust a soul and is running the show in ways that cause more conflict and hurt in our lives than we know.

These lingering wounds are also what lead us to feelings of insecurity, worthlessness, anger, codependency, and self-betrayal, just to name a few. By identifying those wounds, you will be able to reparent those parts yourself that are waiting to be seen, nurtured and integrated into the whole of who you are.

And, remember: embarking on this work doesn't mean that anything is "wrong" or "broken" inside. Rather, consciously choosing to connect with the Younger You means you are courageously investing not only in yourself, but in lightening the load of future generations. You are doing priceless, transformational work that will ripple across generations to come.

PILLARS OF REPARENTING YOURSELF

As I mentioned in the previous section, when we begin to identify our childhood wounds that are calling out to be healed, we will have the opportunity to reparent those parts of ourselves.

That means our adult self, who now has the life experience, wisdom, and maturity our inner child didn't, will be able to step in as what I call the Inner Parent and guide this inner child back to safety and security. Your inner child doesn't know you are grown and capable of this and reparenting work facilities this process.

Reparenting work is also what I call Raising Yourself. There are six pillars of Raising Yourself to keep in mind as your inner parent begins to care for and communicate with your inner child.

- Compassion
- Curiosity
- Patience
- Courage
- Self-Awareness
- Persistence

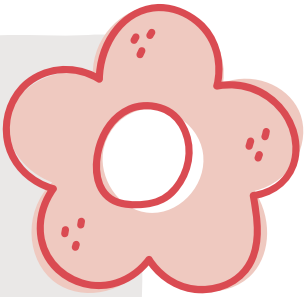
Reparenting yourself is akin to pulling weeds that don't allow your garden to flourish. It's not particularly fun, but it's necessary to grow beautiful things. On the hard days, honor your exhaustion and remember that the seeds you're planting today will bear more beautiful flowers tomorrow.

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR INNER CHILD

IN THIS SECTION, YOU ARE INVITED TO GET TO KNOW YOUR INNER CHILD A LITTLE BETTER.

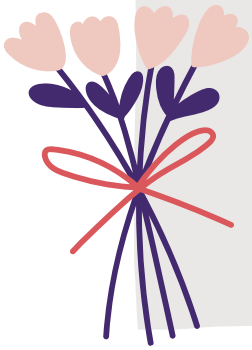
Close your eyes and travel back in time to your childhood. Based on what you see in your mind, what version of yourself as a child do you see? How old are you? What are you wearing? What were your surroundings like? If you have an old picture of yourself at this age, feel free to retrieve that and keep it close by for reference.

What do you think drew you toward looking at this time of your childhood?



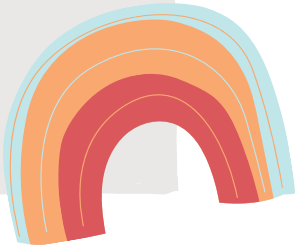
How did your parents respond (or not) to your physical and emotional needs during this time of your life?

What brought you joy during this time in your life?



Feel free to write down any life-changing events that occurred in your life during that time and how your inner child felt about those experiences.

What impact did those events have on your life today as an adult/parent?



Is there anything your inner child would like to say to you before we move on in the workbook?

If you're willing, feel free to use your non-dominant hand to answer the question. Research shows that non-dominant hand writing gives you greater access to the right hemisphere brain functions that include intuition, gut instinct and inner wisdom. This unschooled hand also brings us closer to our inner child.

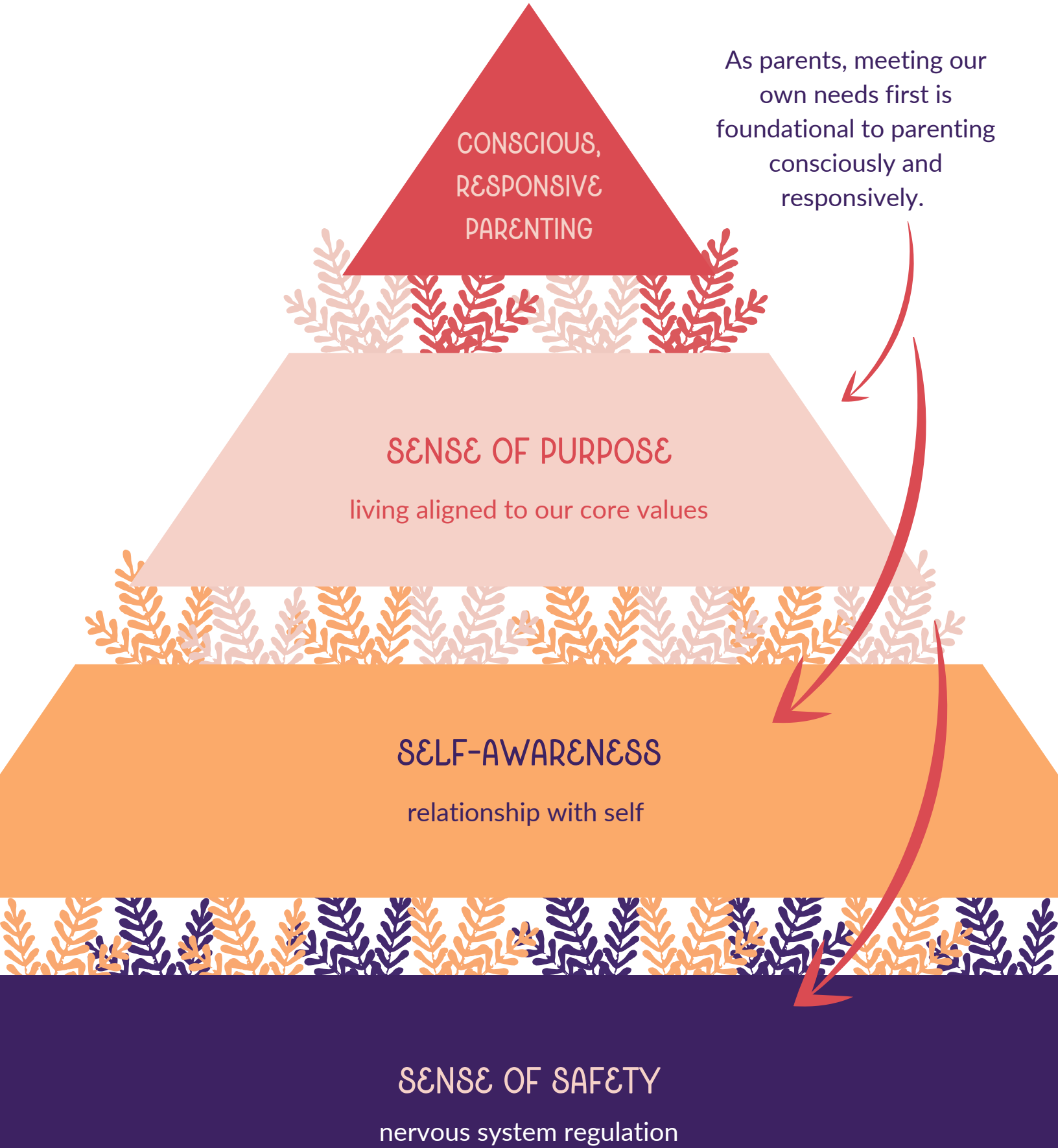
Lastly, I'd like to leave you with a visual for how I like to think of this work. I picture my inner child, or younger me, crouched in a dark corner, afraid to reveal certain parts of herself because those parts were "too much," shameful, or inconvenient for the adults in her life.

GETTING TO KNOW AND NURTURE THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUNGER ME HAS ENCOURAGED AND REMINDED MY INNER CHILD THAT IT IS SAFE TO COME OUT NOW.

As I write this, I can hear her sweet sigh of relief. As her Inner Parent, I remind her that all of her is safe and that the stories she made up about certain parts of herself aren't true. The people and institutions who allowed her to believe those false narratives were also coming from wounded places.

I picture her emerging from that dark corner, letting the sunlight of truth shine on her face, remembering who she is...remembering that she is Love.

KNOWING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM


CONSCIOUS, RESPONSIVE PARENTING
As parents, meeting our own needs first is foundational to parenting consciously and responsively.
SENSE OF PURPOSE
living aligned to our core values
SELF-AWARENESS
relationship with self
SENSE OF SAFETY
nervous system regulation

One of the most important things to better know and understand before connecting with your inner child is that your nervous system plays an important role in your ability to heal the wounds that continue to persist in your adult life.

After all, if your nervous system is on high alert at all times, your mind and body are unable to relax into a mode of healing and nurturing. Terror and healing cannot coexist.

THE NUTS & BOLTS OF YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

Your parasympathetic nervous system (PSNS) is part of the autonomic nervous system, along with the sympathetic nervous system. During stressful moments, your body's sympathetic nervous system immediately activates your fight or flight response. Conversely, the parasympathetic nervous system's job is to relax the body and calm those panicky responses once the stressor is gone.

While a normally regulated nervous system can go through a stressful experience and eventually return to normal once the threat has passed, for those who have experienced trauma their system has the potential to get stuck in the "on" position, and the person is overstimulated and unable to calm.

When your nervous system is on high alert and ready to flee or fight, then your ability to manifest breakthroughs and healing will be greatly minimized. That's because instead of investing its energy into healing, it's allocating its resources to keeping you safe.

Thankfully, there are a multitude of ways to support your nervous system in a healthy way that feels uniquely calming to you.

And, if doing this nervous system work on your own feels out of bounds with your comfort level, then seeking out a competent and trained therapist can help you learn how to activate the PSNS to control feelings of stress and anxiety.

The bonus to learning how to regulate your own nervous system is that it also allows you to better co-regulate with your child when they are feeling rattled or emotionally overstimulated.

"IF YOU WANT TO BE THE CALM IN YOUR CHILD'S STORM, YOU MUST LEARN TO BE CALM IN YOUR OWN STORM FIRST."

-SHELLY ROBINSON

CALMING NERVOUS SYSTEM ACTIVITIES

- Being in nature
- Meditation
- Singing
- Playing an instrument
- Exercising
- Picturing yourself in a peaceful place
- Deep breathing
- Playing with your pet
- Deep belly breathing

Take a moment to tune into what activities calms your nervous system and jot them down in the space below.

ALLOW THESE EXERCISES TO BECOME YOUR ANCHOR THROUGHOUT THIS WORKBOOK. COME BACK TO THEM AS OFTEN AS YOU NEED TO, ALLOWING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM TIME AND SPACE TO RECOVER WHENEVER NECESSARY.

SECTION ONE

UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

CULTIVATING UNCONDITIONAL LOVE

"How you love yourself is how you teach others to love you" - Rupi Kaur

When you were born into this world, you were - and still are - made of love. I believe that with all of my heart. Your default assumption as a tiny little baby was that you were born worthy of love with no strings attached. Though you couldn't articulate that at the time, energetically, you knew that unconditional love was your birthright.

That's why, as you grew and became older, it was so emotionally jarring when you began to experience what felt like love with conditions. Love with so many strings attached. Love served with a cold side dish of coercion.

When you misbehaved perhaps affection was withheld. When you made mistakes, maybe you were hit. When you acted out, you were isolated. Is this love, you wondered to yourself? After all, your love for your parents was boundless, even when they messed up. Why wasn't that being reciprocated?

So, Younger You learned to play that game. Did you have any other choice?

You knew that to receive love, affection, and acceptance you had to act a certain way. That's not what you were born believing, but you were willing to roll with a new script in order to remain attached to your caregivers.

And, I don't just mean your parents. Acceptance with conditions is so baked into our society for children that it probably also showed up for you in school, church or other institutions where the people in charge benefited from your compliance.

It's entirely possible (in fact, likely) that no one ever said to you "if you don't do xyz, I won't love you anymore." But they didn't have to say that explicitly, did they? The conditional love message was more subtle and implicit than that. That's what made it so hard to decode and understand.

So, our work in this section on Unconditional Love is to bring to light the truth you've always known: **that you are worthy of unconditional love.** And, the only person who needs to believe that is YOU. When the world knows that you love and accept yourself with unshakable conviction, the right people enter and fall away from your life. You become a magnet for love.

Our brains have spent most of our lives wiring in the lie that we have to hustle to be loved and accepted. And, if we didn't receive that message from our family of origin (hooray!), then we sure as hell picked it up somewhere along the way. After all, corporations profit off our shame and unworthiness.

So, let's roll up our sleeves and pluck those weeds from the garden that are preventing us from believing that we are, in fact, worthy of unconditional love.

As a child, did you believe that you were worthy of unconditional love?

If not, when in your childhood do you recall having to earn love? What was the scenario?

Did you only receive affection when you were being “useful?” (well-behaved, doing housework, finishing homework, etc.)

Did you feel valued unrelated to your achievements? (grades, sports, behavior, etc.)

What parts of yourself did you have to hide to feel accepted?

Ask Younger You what they were scared of when it came to their parent/s' love?

How/where does the belief that you have to “earn love/acceptance” show up in your adult life?

How does it feel in your body to believe you are worthy of unconditional love?

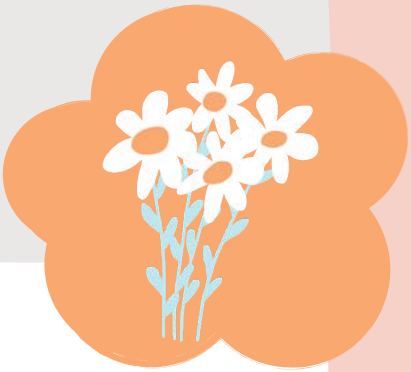
Where in your adult life do you *not* show yourself unconditional love?

If you are a parent, do you struggle to show your children unconditional love knowing that you didn't receive that as a child?

(REMEMBER: YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER/ENGAGE WITH ALL OF THESE - CHOOSE THE ONES THAT YOU CONNECT WITH THE MOST)

In the space below, write a letter to Younger You reminding them of how they have always been worthy of unconditional love and that you don't have to do anything to earn love, be valued, and know your worth.

What would your higher self/inner parent say to that younger part of you today?



AS YOU GO TO SLEEP TONIGHT, CLOSE YOUR EYES, PLACE ONE HAND ON YOUR TUMMY AND ONE HAND ON YOUR HEART. CONNECT WITH YOUNGER YOU AND REMIND THEM OF HOW LOVED THEY ARE, NO MATTER WHAT HAPPENED TODAY. ASSURE THEM THAT IT IS SAFE TO BE A MESSY HUMAN AND THAT THEY ARE LOVED REGARDLESS. GO TO SLEEP KNOWING THIS IS TRUE.

Below, capture your old, subconscious belief about your relationship to unconditional love. (it's okay if that subconscious belief is still hanging in there - it takes time to uproot these weeds). Then, take a moment to replace it with your new mindset when it comes to unconditional love for yourself. This isn't magic and writing it down won't make the old belief disappear overnight. Right now, you're planting seeds and I promise you they will grow as long as you continue to give them the sunlight and water they need.

OLD NARRATIVE

*Example: I've always felt like I had to earn people's love. I've never felt good enough. If I could just be "this" or have "that" *then* I would be worthy of love.*

NEW NARRATIVE

Example: I know deep in my bones that I am worthy of unconditional love. I don't have to chase it or hustle after it and I'm going to be the most enthusiastic advocate of giving myself the unconditional love I know I deserve.

SECTION TWO

BEING SEEN AND HEARD

EXCAVATING YOUR AUTHENTIC VOICE

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside of you."
-Maya Angelou

One common theme I've heard over and over again in the Raising Yourself community is that so many in our generation grew up regularly hearing: "Children should be seen and not heard."

And, because we trusted and depended on the adults in our lives (because we kind of had to), we took it as the gospel truth. At a young age, we knew our "role" was to show up and shut up. So, if that was implanted into our psyches as children, it makes sense that we would feel disconnected from our authentic voice as adults.

Being the perceptive, sensitive soul that you were growing up, you learned what to say, how to say it, and when to "keep the peace." After all, good kids "didn't rock the boat," right?

We know we have a voice in there somewhere, but it was silenced for so many years growing up, that part of our self-expression muscle began to atrophy over time. In this section of the workbook, we're going to dig deep to uncover the voice that has always been there. It never left you, it is just waiting to be reclaimed.

In addition to having lost your voice, you also may not have been seen the way you wanted to be seen by your parents. That doesn't mean they didn't love you. Many parents love their children but never see them. I think that's also a powerful reminder, though, that *being seen IS what being loved feels like*.

In the exercises and invitations below, you'll be invited to remember aspects of yourself that perhaps weren't witnessed by your parents growing up, but are things about yourself that you know deserve to be honored and seen.

As a child or adolescent, were you able to use your authentic voice growing up? Or did you have to quiet it so you could fit in and be accepted within your family of origin?

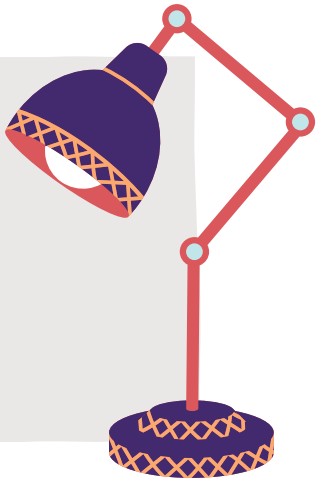
How did it feel in your body when you had to consistently silence yourself?

Were you allowed to (safely) disagree with the adults in your life?

Was your opinion valued as a child growing up?

Did your parents see you for who you were or did they just see the palatable version they wanted to see?

What parts of you did you feel never saw the light of day in your family growing up? What parts of you did you have to hide?

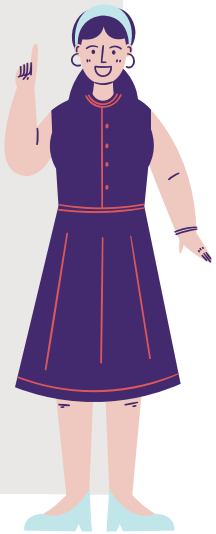


As a child, what would you daydream about? (this can be helpful in connecting to your core essence as a child)

Where in your adult life do you struggle to use your voice? Setting boundaries? Offering a different opinion?

What do you want your parents to know about you that you don't believe they ever heard or saw about you?

Where do you struggle to use your voice in your adult life?



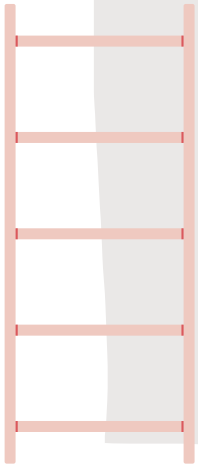
(REMEMBER: YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER/ENGAGE WITH ALL OF THESE - CHOOSE THE ONES THAT YOU CONNECT WITH THE MOST)

Close your eyes. Think about the things that brought you most joy as a child. Write them down. Now, think about the things that bring you joy as an adult? Are they similar? Different? Brainstorm ways to integrate more of what brings you joy into your adult life from your childhood to bridge that gap - let little you know it's safe to do those things now. Let your inner child know you see them.

What would you like to tell younger you about the parts of yourself you had to suppress as a child? Could you let them know it is safe to come out now? That you've got their back?

What part of yourself do you still hide as an adult?

What one small step could you take this week to validate and bring to life that part of yourself?



By stifling our voices as children, we often stifled our creativity. Allow any epiphanies you uncovered in this section to rekindle your creative spark. How would you like to express your voice creatively? Painting? Learning a new instrument? Writing poetry? Tune in to what feels true to you and try out that activity this week.

THINGS TO TRY:

SECTION THREE

MISTAKES & APOLOGIES

LEARNING TO EMBRACE IMPERFECTION

"I call perfectionism 'the 20-ton shield.' We carry it around thinking it's going to protect us from being hurt. But it protects us from being seen." - Brene Brown

Confession: If you would have asked me five years ago if I was a perfectionist, I would have scoffed and said no way. People always considered me cool as a cucumber. Unruffled. Chill. In my former professional life as a public relations consultant, I was trained to be this way.

Little did people know that most days, I was battling an undercurrent of fear and anxiety because I was always afraid of making mistakes. In hindsight, and after confronting a lot of demons I had been previously sweeping under the rug, I discovered that I was (am) more of a perfectionist than I ever realized.

As I look back on all the things in my life that I've hesitated to try for fear of not being "the best," the list is vast. I've also learned that this type of black/white, all/nothing thinking (either I'm the "best" or the "worst") was just my inner child's way of trying to protect me. I had always had this deep fear of being 'average' and now I know that was rooted in this story I made up so many years ago about what it meant to be worthy. I subconsciously thought that "perfection/being best = worthiness and that "imperfection/being average" = unworthiness.

In fact, as I embarked upon creating this workbook for you, I could hear my little inner child saying things like "I don't think this is a good idea. What if it's not the "best" workbook, Shelly?"

In response, I affirmed her feelings and said, “honey, I don’t know that it is the "best" workbook, and that’s okay. What this workbook is, however, is my personal best and truest effort. And to me, our best and truest efforts are all we can really ask of ourselves.

Remember that this work that you’re doing is courageous. You’re coming face to face with and uprooting what feel like very scary beliefs, bringing them into the light of day, and replacing them with beliefs rooted in grace, love, and compassion.

Whether in your personal, professional, or parenting life, if you find yourself walking on eggshells for fear of making a mistake, and, therefore, inhibiting your creativity and self-expression, it’s time to let your inner child know once and for all that it’s okay to mess up.

The questions and exercises to follow will gently help you trace back to the roots of where you may have learned the false narrative that mistakes equal shame and unworthiness and will offer you the chance to rewrite that story in a way that gives you the freedom to falter.

We’ll also dive into the power and impact of receiving and giving apologies and how that has the potential to transform our relationship with perfection. Let’s get ready to be our messy, human sevles!

Side note: To ensure we are working from the same definition of perfectionism, I loosely describe perfectionism as holding yourself (and possibly others) to unrealistically high standards – standards that you can never meet, so you always feel like you’re not measuring up. For me personally, it feels like living in a pressure cooker that I don’t know how to escape. Maybe you can relate.

As a child, what generally happened when you made a mistake? Were you punished or criticized?

What other childhood events may have led you to be afraid to make mistakes?

As a child, what were the benefits of you being a “perfectionist” or never messing up?

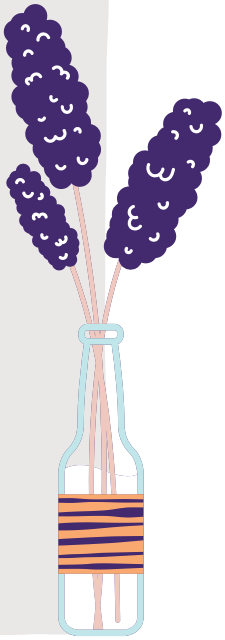
What did you want to do more of as a child but didn’t/couldn’t because you were afraid of messing up?

Did you struggle with all/nothing or black/white thinking as a child/teen? Either I'm the "best" or "worst" at something?

Were you consistently apologized to as a child by your caregivers? If not, how did that make you feel growing up? What stories did you create around that?

Were you forced to apologize as a child? If so, what (if anything) did that teach you about apologies?

What is your relationship to apologizing and being apologized to as an adult?



Do you struggle to give or receive apologies? If so, why do you think that might be?

How does perfectionism show up in your adult life? What are you afraid to do because you're terrified it won't be perfect?

What kinds of things does your inner critic say to you?

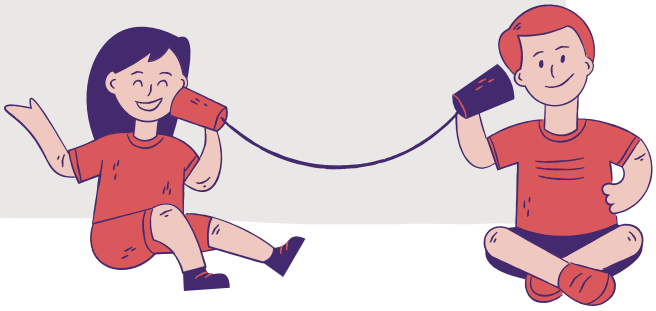
What do you think your inner critic is ultimately afraid of?

(REMEMBER: YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER/ENGAGE WITH ALL OF THESE - CHOOSE THE ONES THAT YOU CONNECT WITH THE MOST)

What is something you really want to do, but are hesitating because you're afraid of being vulnerable and making a mistake? What one baby step could you commit to making this week to move the needle in the direction of imperfect self-expression?

Where can you still feel the sting of shame for a mistake you made? How could you rewrite that experience to be rooted in compassion and love?

When and how did younger you deserve an apology but never got one? Could you write a letter to her telling her she was always worthy of an apology?



DEAR YOUNGER ME,

If you took down your perfectionism shield and let people know the real you, how might your life look different?

What is one thing you can take off your plate that you've only been doing because your perfectionism taunts you to "prove yourself." Write down that thing(s) and honor the fact that you are enough as is. **You have nothing to prove.**

Fun and joy are the antidote to perfectionism. What is something fun you could do this week to remind you that joy is your birthright and you don't have to earn it?

If you could go back in time and write a letter to Younger You, what would you say to her when she felt inadequate or insecure that she wasn't "enough?"

SECTION FOUR

CULTIVATING TRUST

LEARNING TO TRUST YOURSELF AGAIN

"A bird sitting on a tree is never afraid of the branch breaking because her trust is not in the branch, but her own wings."
- Charlie Wardle

The inability to trust yourself can show up in myriad ways from low self-esteem to imposter syndrome to constantly seeking external validation from others. It leaves us feeling unconfident, uneasy, and, honestly, quite tired. It's draining not to trust your instincts because instead of leaning into the peace of our intuition, we frantically search for outside sources to make us feel better about our choices. Believe me, it's exhausting.

And while the feeling of self-doubt in the moment is acutely painful, longer term, it hurts even more because when you don't trust yourself you miss out on so much life you might otherwise pursue.

But where did this lack of self-trust come from? Were we born this way? Did we learn it? And how do we get it back?

From the time we are born and across every institution we encounter as children, we are mostly taught - either implicitly or explicitly - that we cannot be trusted. Sadly, that is in direct conflict with our inner knowing that we were all born with and caused to abandon, deny, or betray ourselves in order to receive love and acceptance.

Because we were smaller, less powerful, and had fewer resources than the adults taking care of us, our divine intuition that we were born with was essentially considered null and void to our caretakers who, frankly, didn't have the time or patience to let us experiment with our instincts. So we learned to suppress them.

It's also important to note that the message "you can't be trusted" wasn't always maliciously delivered. In fact, it may have been laced in what felt like protection from our caregivers.

For example, instead of having had safe and reasonable chances to 'fail' (make developmentally appropriate mistakes that we can learn from), as children our parents may have been overly protective, having never given us the chance to climb that tree or try that new sport. Perhaps our parents unconsciously projected their own fear of failure right onto us.

Or, maybe when we did try those new things and didn't succeed we were shamed, humiliated, and made to feel like we shouldn't have trusted our instincts in the first place. You'll also notice how closely intertwined perfectionism and lack of self-trust are. When you begin uprooting weeds about one of these things, don't be surprised when you see a dozen more lies trailing close behind waiting to be excavated. They're all tangled up together in there. (remember that necklace metaphor?)

Our lack of self-trust can be traced back to a thousand different roots, yet no matter their origin, it's never too late to honor and embody that divine intuition you were born with. It's still there, I promise.

And, just like any muscle that weakens over time when it's not used, with practice and consistent use again, you can strengthen your self-trust and learn to view your instincts like a holy internal compass that is safe to trust.

Remember: self-trust isn't about always getting it right. It's not about striving for perfection. Rather, it's about committing to the practice of trusting and acting on behalf of your values and treating yourself with kindness and respect when it doesn't turn out the way you'd hoped.

Did your parents trust you as a child?

Can you remember a time when you freely pursued what you wanted to pursue without worrying what others thought?

When in your childhood did you feel the most confident?

Can you think of a time as a child/adolescent when you correctly trusted your instincts about something? How did you feel about that?

Can you think of a time when you shared your intuition about something with the adults in your life but you were invalidated?

Where in your adult life do you hesitate to fully trust yourself?

Describe a time you honored your intuition/instincts.

What regrets do you have in life as a result of not trusting yourself?

Do you find yourself looking to others for validation and feedback more than trusting yourself?

Do you trust your children?

Do you struggle with trusting others in general?

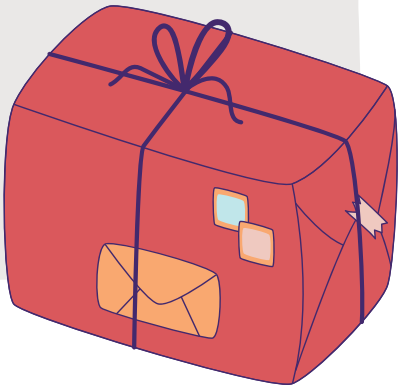
How do you feel in your body when you trust yourself?

(REMEMBER: YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER/ENGAGE WITH ALL OF THESE - CHOOSE THE ONES THAT YOU CONNECT WITH THE MOST)

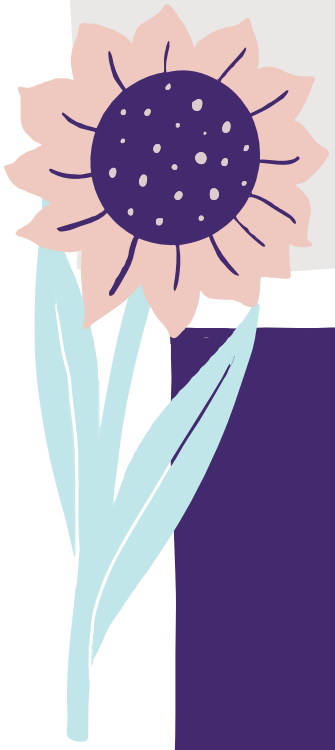
Can you point to a time in the past where you didn't trust yourself and offer yourself compassion and forgiveness? Feel free to write a letter to yourself about that here.

SOMETIMES OUR LACK OF SELF-TRUST CAN BE TRACED TO REPLAYING PAST EVENTS THAT DIDN'T TURN OUT THE WAY WE'D HOPE.

By ruminating on those events obsessively, we affirm the lie that we can't be trusted and continue to recycle through the same mistakes. In this exercise, I invite you to visualize releasing the weight of that past mistake and describe how it feels in your body to let that go. What opens up for you in place of that criticism?



What's something you've always wanted to do but haven't trusted yourself to do? What is one baby step you can take to make that a reality?



ONE OF THE BEST WAYS TO CULTIVATE SELF-TRUST IS TO LEARN HOW TO TUNE INTO OUR INNER CRITIC (WHO IS OFTEN JUST A SCARED INNER CHILD).

Instead of reacting to her on auto-pilot, tell her you are here for her and acknowledge her feelings. Then, remind her that you (your wise Inner Parent) are in charge now and that you're no longer interested in listening to these lies.

SECTION FIVE

MENTAL & EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

LEARNING TO FEEL YOUR FEELINGS

What mental health needs is more sunshine, more candor, and more unashamed conversation." -Glenn Close

If you're like me, one of the life skills you want to impart to your children is emotional literacy. You may feel particularly passionate about this if you grew up in a household where feeling "happy" and "good" reigned supreme and feeling "sad" or "angry" was considered inconvenient and annoying. So many of us grew up emotionally illiterate, unable to name and identity how we were feeling inside.

And while normalizing and welcoming feelings in children today has come a long way - in part, due to the conscious parenting movement you are helping to grow - we still have a long way to go.

At the time of this writing (February 2022), the CDC reported that nearly one in 10 children aged 3-17 experienced anxiety; for adolescents aged 12–17 years, 1 in 5 (20.9%) had experienced a major depressive episode; and among high school students in 2019, more than 1 in 3 (36.7%) reported feeling sad or hopeless, and nearly 1 in 5 (18.8%) seriously considered attempting suicide. About 7 in 100,000 children aged 10–19 years died by suicide in 2018 and 2019.

I know these numbers are grim and hard to read, but we need to confront these facts in order to change the conversation and prioritize children's mental health. And we do that by learning how to feel our own feelings first.

In her book, *Atlas of the Heart*, Brene Brown drives this point home by explaining how, over the course of five years, her team collected surveys from more than seven thousand people where they were asked to recognize and name all the emotions they were experiencing during that time. The average number of emotions named across the survey was three: happy, sad, and angry. That is a small fraction of the number of emotions (more than 80!) that Brown discovered in her research that humans have the potential to experience over a lifetime.

While our struggle to name our feelings in a nuanced way is not necessarily our fault, I do believe as parents and advocates for children, it is our responsibility to break that cycle so we can better equip our kids to process their feelings in a healthier way.

It is my hope that the generation of children we are raising knows that seeking support for their mental health is just as important (if not more) as going to the doctor for a tummy ache or sore throat. I want to normalize for them (and us) that needing and receiving mental health support is just as important as drinking enough water, getting enough sleep, and eating foods that help you grow healthy and strong. It's all connected and when we cut one of those things out, it ripples across our body's ecosystem.

While most of us likely grew up unaware of how intertwined our physical and psychological lives were, I believe it is our duty as parents and global citizens to bring this conversation to the forefront for our children when we talk about whole body health.

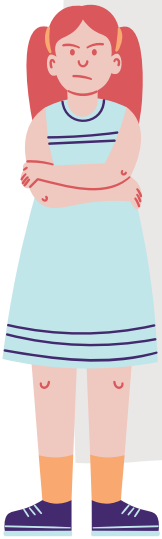
Lastly, before we dive into the following questions in this section, I want to celebrate and honor the parents and children who are considered highly sensitive people.

Highly Sensitive Person, or HSP, is a term coined by psychologist Elaine Aron. According to Aron's theory, HSPs are a subset of the population (15-20 percent) who are high in a personality trait known as sensory-processing sensitivity, or SPS.

Those with high levels of SPS display increased emotional sensitivity, stronger reactivity to both external and internal stimuli—pain, hunger, light, and noise—and a complex inner life. I definitely identify with this description and have learned to celebrate that part of myself instead of cursing my sensitivity like I did growing up. Our sensitivity is our superpower, my friend. (Side note: I highly recommend "Sensitive The Movie" featuring Alanis Morissette if you want to take a deeper dive into this topic).

Were (all) feelings welcome in your home growing up? If not, how did your parents react/respond to your more “unpleasant” feelings?

What was your relationship with anger as a child? Were you “allowed” to be angry?



What made you most angry as a child?

Which feelings did you most have to suppress as a child?

Describe a time where you felt misunderstood as a child?

What is your current relationship with feeling your feelings as an adult?

What emotions do you typically avoid the most as an adult? What do you do to avoid them? Where in your body does your emotional pain land?

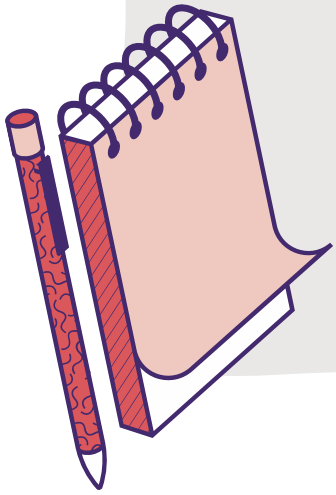
What unpleasant/painful physical symptoms do you experience that you suspect could be linked to emotional pain?

What makes those emotions so scary or unpleasant for you?

What are you most sensitive about? What blessings does your sensitivity bring to your life and the world?

(REMEMBER: YOU DON'T HAVE TO ANSWER/ENGAGE WITH ALL OF THESE - CHOOSE THE ONES THAT YOU CONNECT WITH THE MOST)

Find a calming, quiet space. Close your eyes and tune into your Inner Parent. From that Higher Self, write a letter to Younger You, assuring your inner child that all their feelings were welcome growing up and that any discomfort they caused your caregivers was not a burden for you to carry. Remind Younger You that all feelings are safe.



Think about the top three emotions you've been experiencing this week. Write them below.

1

2

3

What do you think those emotions need from you right now? Write your answers below. Then, name three (or more) ways you will honor those needs this week and give yourself what you need at this moment.

Set a timer for 10 minutes and practice being with - not running away from - your feelings. Practice being a compassionate and loving witness to any feelings that come up for you during this time. What would your Inner Parent like to say to your scared, unsure self about any feelings that came to the surface during this time? Write your answer below.

In the table below, in the column on the left, circle (without any self-judgment) all the ways you numb the feelings you don't want to feel. On the right, circle all the ways you could honor your feelings, allowing them to pass, in a way that feels nourishing and safe. Feel free to add things that you don't see on the table.

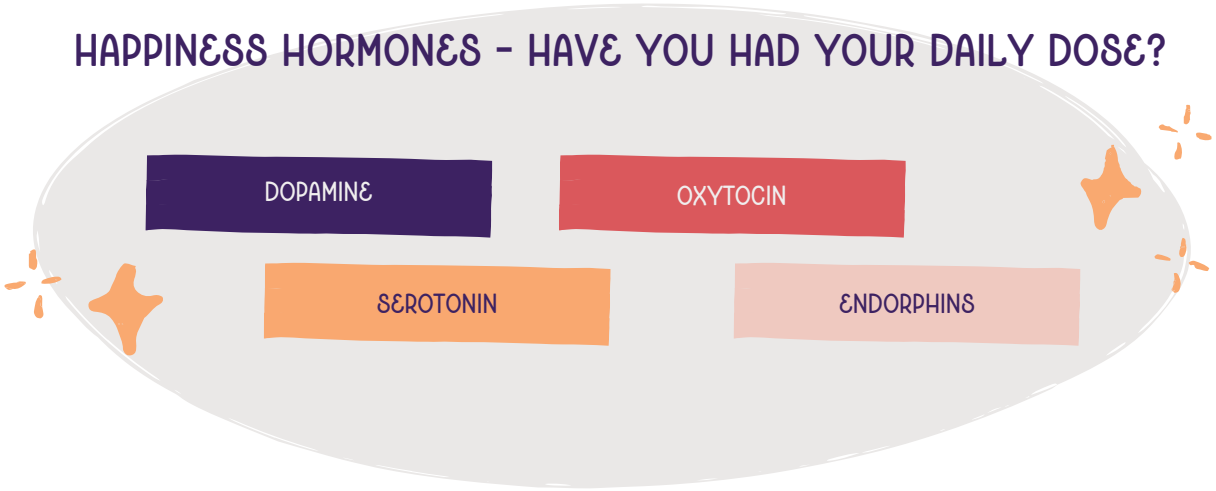
HOW I NUMB MY FEELINGS

- Be busy/productive
- Drink alcohol
- Gossip
- Scroll social media
- Watch TV
- Emotionally eat/binge
- Compare yourself to others
- Shop/spend money

HOW I HONOR & SUPPORT MY FEELINGS

- Journal
- Be in nature
- Cry
- Schedule a therapy session
- Move my body in a nourishing way
- Take a warm bath
- Listen to music that connects to my current emotions

HAPPINESS HORMONES - HAVE YOU HAD YOUR DAILY DOSE?



One thing that was transformational for me as I continually learned to be a safe space for my feelings, was that relying on those coping mechanisms to numb my feelings didn't make me "bad." All it made me was an emotionally overwhelmed human being who was trying to trigger what are often referred to as our body's "happy hormones" to make myself feel better. There is nothing morally wrong or bad about that, right? That is a response that makes sense! Why wouldn't we want to feel better?

This was a huge lightbulb moment for me because part of the reason I would keep coming back to my maladaptive coping mechanisms was a result of the shame stew I would marinade in for making what I considered "bad" choices (see, these binary childhood behavior labels we learn growing up follow us into adulthood!). I particularly struggled with this at the beginning of motherhood where I battled emotional eating to deal with all the overwhelm of being a new mom.

Where we run into issues is when we seek out short-term "feel better" solutions that end up harming our mental and physical health in the long-run.

The key to learning how to process our feelings is to feel them - YES - but not to wallow in them so long (and only you know what amount of time/space feels right to you) that we can't step back into our own light. So, I wanted to offer you some happy hormone activators that you can try out when you're tempted to fall back into old coping mechanisms that you know don't serve you in the long-term. It's all about learning how to tap into our bodies' own naturally occurring boosters in order to get our happy mood "highs."

First, let's do a quick crash course of what these happy hormones are and why they matter when it comes to our feelings.

Dopamine: Also known as the "feel-good" hormone, dopamine is a neurotransmitter that's an important part of your brain's reward system. Dopamine is associated with pleasurable sensations, along with learning, memory, motor system function, and more. Yet, dopamine can be tricky because it wants us to persist to the point of unhealthy behavior (hello doom scrolling and online shopping) in order to reward our pleasure response. Consequently, it's often linked with addiction, social media and instant gratification.

Oxytocin: Often called the "love hormone," oxytocin is responsible for our social connections and empathy. It's also.essential for childbirth, breastfeeding, and strong parent-child bonding. This hormone can also help promote trust and bonding in relationships, and oxytocin levels generally increase with physical affection like kissing, cuddling, hugs, and sex.

Serotonin: This hormone (and neurotransmitter) is linked to your mood, how well you sleep, your appetite, digestion, learning ability, and memory. A requirement to produce melatonin, our sleep hormone, having too little or too much of this neurotransmitter can affect the pattern and quality of our sleep cycles.

Endorphins: The word endorphin comes from putting together the words "endogenous," meaning from within the body, and "morphine," which is an opiate pain reliever. Ever heard of runner's high? Endorphins are usually associated with exercise because of the feeling of euphoria we get after completing a particularly tough workout. These hormones are our bodies' natural response to stress, acting as an incentive to help us to keep going

WAYS TO BOOST YOUR HAPPINESS HORMONES

DOPAMINE

the reward chemical

- Setting and meeting a goal
- Eating food
- Celebrating small victories

OXYTOCIN

the love hormone

- Hugging, cuddling
- Playing with your pet
- Holding a baby
- Offering a compliment

SEROTONIN

the mood stabilizer

- Soaking up the sun
- Being in nature
- Swimming
- Meditating

ENDORPHINS

the painkiller

- Exercise
- Listen to your favorite music
- Laughter
- Deep breathing

TIP: If you're running low on time and need a one-stop-shop for activating all these hormones at once, chocolate is the solution! No, I'm not kidding. Eating chocolate (the darker, the better) triggers this quartet of happiness hormones, which is responsible for that warm and fuzzy feeling it gives us.

SECTION SIX

BODILY AUTONOMY + POSITIVITY

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR BODY

One of the fundamental pillars of conscious parenting is a child's right to bodily autonomy, and sadly, many of us did not receive that growing up.

If you were forced to hug, show affection, or otherwise offer your body in ways that you didn't consent to as a child, you were likely not alone. The bodies of children growing up in our generation were not viewed as our own, and, instead were perceived as things that grown-ups had complete sovereignty over. This showed up by coercing us to kiss uncles we instinctively didn't like, manipulating us into eating foods we despised, and hitting and smacking us when we misbehaved.

To be sure we're working from the same definition of what constitutes body autonomy, here is a brief description below:

Bodily autonomy is the right for a person to govern what happens to their body without external influence or coercion. This is an imperative concept for all children to understand.

To be honest, bodily autonomy wasn't something I had ever thought much about until I began my own conscious parenting journey. At the beginning of my commitment to ensure my child had bodily autonomy, it was confusing because it seemed to contradict what so many parents were doing.

But, I trusted my instincts and later confirmed by reading many evidence-based books and articles on this topic that communicating to my children that they are in charge of their bodies MATTERS.

In fact, research tells us that a child who knows that they are in control of their body is less likely to fall victim to sexual abuse, sexual assault and later in life, violence with their future partners. They are also more likely to share with a trusted adult any abusive events that happen to them.

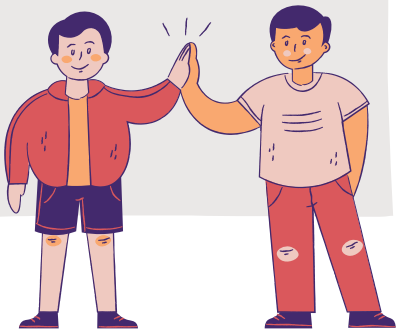
In order to instill this concept of body autonomy into our children, we must first untangle any false or unconscious narratives we may have picked up about our own bodies in childhood.

JOURNALING PROMPTS TO YOUNGER YOU

Were you encouraged to offer hugs/affection to adults in your lives that you did not consent to?

How did that make you feel in the moment? What message did you receive about your body in those instances?

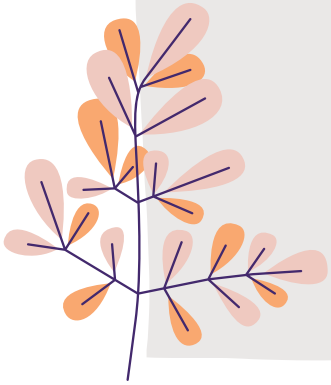
Did you have a trusted adult you could turn to if something happened that you didn't like or consent to?



When did your body feel most afraid as a child? What activities were you engaged in, what was the environment around you like? What were the physical sensations you experienced?

When did your body most feel alive and joyful as a child? What activities were you engaged in, what was the environment around you like? What were the physical sensations you experienced?

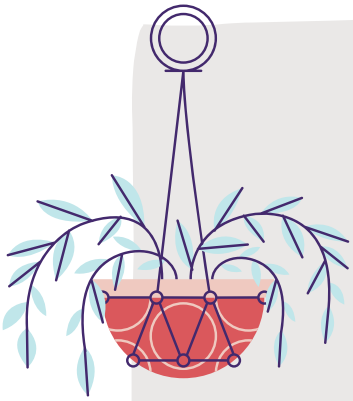
How do you think your childhood influenced the relationship you have with your body as an adult?



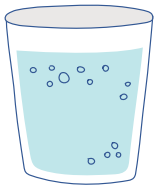
How does your body like to play? (look back on the last question above for clues to this question)

As an adult, in what ways do you numb out or escape being in your body?

What consistent unpleasant physical symptoms do you regularly experience that won't seem to go away?



Are my basic physical needs being met today? (sleep, water, movement, nature, etc.)



When does your body feel most alive and joyful as an adult? What activities are you engaged in, what is the environment around you like? What are the physical sensations you experience?

What would you like to say to Younger You about those times you had to offer affection to adults when you didn't want to? What does Younger You need to hear from you?

Review the response that invited you to think about the times in your childhood and adulthood that brought your body the most joy. Pick one to two of those activities and write down below what they are when you incorporate them into your life. Choose a time and day to hold yourself accountable.

Set a timer for five minutes. Tune into all the sensations of your body. What does you need right now? What are you lacking? Write down what your body is revealing to you and make a commitment to yourself to honor those unmet needs your body is revealing to you.

What are 10 things you love and appreciate about your body? List them below.

IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOUNGER YOU?

Tune into your Inner Parent and use the space below to share anything else that is on your heart with your inner child. What do they need to hear? What has been left unsaid?

ABOUT SHELLY

"Parenthood is the hardest and holiest work because our kids are reflecting back to us what we haven't yet resolved or healed within ourselves."

-Shelly Robinson

Shelly Robinson is a certified holistic family wellness coach, reparenting advocate, cycle-breaker, conscious parenting educator, and founder of Raising Yourself. She is also the creator of the Rebirth Journal and the Connected Kids cards and online activities.

Her passion in life is to equip parents with the tools and support they need to offer themselves and their children more compassion and unconditional love. Through her work, she hopes to normalize and build awareness about inner child work, reparenting ourselves, breaking generational cycles, and what it looks like to take radically good care of our needs.

When she's not connecting with her Raising Yourself community or geeking out on the latest neuroscience of cycle-breaking, she's likely making a mess in the kitchen with her two kids, trying to find her way out from under a pile of laundry, or curling up to a good mystery on the couch with her hubs.

Join her on Instagram or Facebook to discover her latest tips & talks on how to live your truest life, empower the next generation, and to do it all with plenty of grit, grace, and humor along the way.

LET'S HANG OUT!

@raising_yourself

@raisingyourself

shellyrobinson.com

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

Refer to the websites below to find therapists in your local area if you desire additional support.

PSYCHOLOGY TODAY (FIND THERAPISTS BY SPECIALITY):

https://www.psychologytoday.com/us

CRISIS TEXT LINE:

https://www.crisistextline.org/

INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS THERAPISTS:

https://ifs-institute.com/

PSYCHOLOGIST LOCATOR:

https://locator.apa.org/

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HEALTH SERVICES PSYCHOLOGISTS

https://www.findapsychologist.org/

INNER CHILD HEALING & REPARENTING BOOKS

- Childhood Disrupted: How Your Biography Becomes Your Biology, and How You Can Heal, *Donna Jackson Nakazawa*
- Homecoming, *John Bradshaw*
- Adults of Emotionally Immature Parents, *Lindsay C. Gibson*
- Inner Bonding, *Margaret Paul*
- Healing Your Lost Inner Child, *Robert Jackman*
- The Body Keeps the Score, *Bessel Van Der Kolk*
- What Happened to You? *Bruce Perry*, *Oprah Winfrey*