

Relationship (Re)Programming

© Five Pillars of (Re)Programming

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1. Create your timeline starting from birth to present day:

- Identify significant events (“significant events” only have to be significant to you in order to be considered significant).
- Explore relationships in various developmental stages: birth to five years old, elementary age, middle school, high school, early adulthood, remainder of adulthood.
- Keep in mind, significant events are not only the bad things that happened to you, but also the good things that did not happen (nurture, attention, affection, quality time, etc.).
- Try your best not to dismiss or minimize your experiences throughout your timeline.

2. Track “themes” and developed beliefs:

- Reflect on your timeline and work to identify the repeated themes of each developmental stage of your life (ex: abandonment, rejection, abuse, emotional neglect, parentification, lack of safety, lack of protection, needs not being met, boundaries violated, chaos, etc.).
- After identifying the themes, reflect on what beliefs about yourself, others, and relationships were formed and/or were reinforced due to themes (ex: I’m not good enough, I’m not loveable, I’m not safe, people can’t be trusted, people aren’t safe, people will always leave, relationships are scary, relationships are chaotic, relationships result in pain, etc.)
- Try to think about your past experiences and emotions through the lens of how you felt at the time of these events (through the lens of a child, teen, young adult, etc.). Otherwise, there is a chance you might downplay these experiences, if you look at them through the lens of your adult self.

3. Identify “survival behaviors” you’ve used to try to stay safe:

- “Survival behavior” is the term I use for the “skills” we developed in childhood that either helped us get our needs met (as much as possible), cope with the distress of not getting our needs met, and/or avoid danger as much as possible.
- Examples of survival behaviors include: people-pleasing, perfectionism, performing, caretaking, fawning, controlling, withdrawing, isolating, acting out, yelling, manipulation, lying, deflection, flying under the radar, etc. These are just a few examples, survival behaviors are unique for each individual, so dig deep to identify your specific go-to attempts to stay safe.
- Get really honest with yourself about how these survival behaviors continue to show up in your present-day relationships... and how they have become a possible barrier to obtaining and/or maintaining healthy, safe, and connected relationships.

4. Start tracking present-day triggers and reactions:

- Triggers are our emotional response to certain stimuli that often activates a behavioral response (i.e., our “survival behaviors”)... the purpose of these triggers is to keep us safe from something that our brain is perceiving as unsafe (i.e., our “themes”).
- When an experience is painful, scary, overwhelming, etc., the brain stores all of the sensory components of this experience and will alert us to anything present-day that is even similar to this previous experience, so that we can try to protect ourselves from this potential threat.
- These unchecked triggers can take a major toll on our relationships... Because, unfortunately, our behavioral responses to them can often be really hurtful and unsafe for our partners.
- Start to track (write them down!) the things that often cause you to become triggered and reactive, as well as what your reactions are to these triggers, as this will assist you with determining where healing and change is needed.

5. Find healthier ways to show up:

- Once you have an awareness of your “themes,” “survival behaviors,” and present-day triggers, you can then jump into where the real work begins.
- If therapy is accessible to you, find a therapist who specializes in trauma and attachment-theory, to start working through these previous experiences and present-day relational patterns.
- If therapy is not an option, you can still read, listen to podcasts, and find a lot of available content online, to help you learn how to become more aware, learn skills to regulate when you are feeling triggered, as well as resources on how to show up better in your relationships.
- Regardless of if you go to therapy or seek out all the resources, the only way that change is actually possible... is by making the decision to start choosing healthier relational behaviors. All of the information in the world will not make a difference if you are not IMPLEMENTING these changes.
- Remember, Relationship (Re)Programming does not happen overnight. It is crucial to give yourself patience, grace, and compassion throughout this process. Allow yourself time to adapt and get used to this new way of being.

Change is possible... But it requires self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-discipline.