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Working Therapeutically Between Sessions: Journaling Exercise

Four Ss

In the last 50 years researchers such as British psychologist John Bowlby have been able to scientifically document what mothers worldwide have known for millennia: That *the emotional bond between caregiver and child is crucial* for the child's healthy psychological development. The clinical term for these emotional bonds is "attachment," and it can be described in various types. Various types of attachments have been shown to predict various types of adult emotional adjustment.

Interpersonal neurobiologist Dan Siegel has described **Secure** attachment using 4 words: **Seen, Safe, Soothed,** and **Secure**. In this exercise I invite you to consider each. Take a few deep breaths to slow and quiet yourself, then write a couple of sentences on the following questions:

1. **SEEN:** "Seen" would imply "recognized" or "responded to," while "unseen" could imply "overlooked" or even "ignored."

As you think back to your earliest memories as a child, do you remember being **seen** or **unseen** by your primary caregivers? What specific memories come to mind to support this feeling?

2. **SAFE:** We could think of words including “free from danger,” or “protected.” Of course the idea of “safe” can extend to the domains of the physical or emotional, including even our survival.

Let your mind drift back as far as it would like to go, and with several deep breaths, consider: On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 representing “felt danger all day every day” and 10 representing “feeling complete protected most moments,” how do you rate your childhood sense of safety? What caused it to be that way?

3. **SOOTHED:** Exiting the womb is upsetting for all humans: Things get too bright, too loud, and too cold too quickly. And from that moment on life brings many other upsets in many forms and in many degrees from unsettling to catastrophic.

As you think back to your earliest upsetting experiences, do you remember being soothed by someone? Who? How did he/she sooth you? When and how did you learn to sooth yourself?

4. **SECURE:** Broader than the idea of safe, “secure” implies protection from danger but can extend also to ideas of trustworthiness, stability, and confidence in others and in yourself.

If “secure” and “insecure” feel on opposite sides of a spectrum, on which side would you place your child self? Were there specific experiences that you now feel placed you there?

5. In this meditation and journaling exercise, what have you discovered that has been most surprising to you?