

# How is your little one?

**B**efore I get into this article, it may be helpful just to take a second and see what this title evokes in you. What do you think it is talking about? What is your response to that understanding within yourself?

I am going to be talking about our relationship with our inner child. Or, to make it less 'therapy-speak', to think about using our younger selves as a trusty source of feelings, needs and responses.

In my own journey of reconnecting with my authentic self and trying to pay closer attention to my deeper responses in the world, I have found my little one to be a surprisingly wise source of information, needs and truth in most situations.

I also found that this is a very important aspect of our continued self-care and integration, particularly as caregivers, to ultimately improve our psychological wellbeing and mental health, in a demanding world and workplace.

## Losing touch

There are many different things that will begin to disconnect us from our congruent and uninhibited way of being in the world. Messages that we have (inevitably) absorbed from our primary caregivers, or societal pressures and expectations we face through adulthood. The world is rife with many ways to pull us away from our true self. Most of the time, we aren't even aware that this is happening.

Within counselling, one of the most common journeys is that clients begin to see all the forces that have shaped them, and then start reclaiming who they really are.

At our core, we are social creatures who are desperately seeking love and acceptance from those around us. This often results in adapting our true nature to fit the conditions and demands that are put on us from a young age (e.g. stop crying, eat all your meal, work hard, be nice).

While living up to these 'rules' might result in the approval of those closest to us, it also begins a denial of our true experience and needs. If I have a desire to cry and make a fuss because I am hurting, and I am told that I need to be quiet and ask for what I need 'nicely', then I am already beginning to deny and distort my true expression and needs, in favour of another's preference.

Unfortunately, there is no escape from this as we are growing up. Of course, there are many rules that are helpful to absorb — look both ways when crossing the road, don't put your hand in the fire, treat others with respect — but alongside these well intentioned and important lessons, we also take on the less essential things that our parents transfer onto us.

In person-centred counselling, these are called 'Conditions of Worth' and 'Introjections'. Conditions of Worth being the conditions that are given to us by others, which we feel we must live up to in order to gain their love and approval; Introjections are the values that we absorb from those around us, and believe that they are actually our own.

And I'm sorry to say that these continue well into adult life. Not only will we be carrying these values from childhood (often without knowing it), but we also continue to gather new messages from others around us as we continue to grow up. These can be conditions that are set by our peers, workplace or society as a whole (and again, often discreetly — e.g. be ladylike, work hard, put others first, keep calm and carry on).

This, ultimately, results in us existing in societal and work structures that are full of implicit messages that we feel we must abide by to fit in and not be ostracised. What if we are struggling to work hard, keep calm, put a smile on our face, and do those extra hours that everyone else is doing?

This causes something called Psychological Tension — a divide between our true experience and how we believe we should be in the world. At its root, this is what the majority of people come to counselling for. It may show up as anxiety, depression or insomnia, but the belief in person-centred counselling is that, at the root of all of these things, is a denial of our true experience and a growing Psychological Tension.

And so, where better to start to try and reconnect with our authentic selves than through the unfiltered expression of our little ones? A time of life where we hopefully still had our full freedom of expression, creativity and playfulness — and ultimately, were likely a much more congruent and integrated being.

## Why reconnecting with our little ones is important

As we have already seen through the first half of this article, we come into this world with a

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very pure and uninhibited way of expression and relating. We know how we need to express hunger, pain, need for connection or comfort, before these things gradually get altered in response to how we are treated and taught to be in the world.

This is why making space and intention to re-connect with our younger selves can help us tune back into a more congruent and expressive way of being in the world. The process of reconnecting with this part of ourselves can be varied, and even reading about it in this article, it may seem a little out there and 'woo woo'. But however you relate to this, I really trust that even a mild curiosity of that inner child's needs and expression can be a rich and insightful source for more harmonious and authentic living.

I feel as though I have fairly recently experienced both sides of this relationship. Firstly, without realising, being quite out of touch with my little one's needs and relevance in my own navigating of the world. And more recently, through being able to reconnect with him, hear his voice and really build trust of what a wise little bean he actually is!

And the reason I think we all have so much wisdom already in us, thanks to our little ones, is that this represents the parts of us that know truth and expression so purely. There is still a part of us that lies unaffected by the conditions and rules that we have been given throughout life. That can still feel and act congruently, on a deep level. Our mission, if we choose to accept it, is to reconnect and begin to listen and tend to what these parts of ourselves are showing us.

To give a less abstract example of what I am talking about, we only need to look as far as the next child we see. The pure expression and the unfiltered communication. All the ways they move, express and feel, so purely and without censorship. And this is what we all were at some point. Able to be, feel and express in full force, without filtering or censoring, before we became the anxious, unsure and restricted adults that we may currently embody today.

#### **How to reconnect with our little ones**

So, how do we begin to reconnect with this little one? Ask how they are and really hear what they have to say to us? I think the first step begins with intention. To even bring into awareness that these parts of ourselves exist and may have some value. To entertain the idea, make space for it and be open to being curious and inquisitive about what our little one might have to say to us. After a lifetime of maybe being out of touch with this, it is no small thing and may take concerted effort and intention to hear the echoes of that lost little voice.

For myself, there were a couple of things that

really proved helpful in reconnecting with my little one. The first one, was to give it a name or think of something I associate with it. Now this may just be 'little one' — 'how are you doing, little one? What do you need right now?' Equally, it may be a name that we associate with being younger, or a pet name we had or wish to give it. I sometimes refer to myself as 'little bean' or 'little Chris' to help connect with this part of me. This also tends to bring affection or endearment in the very way I refer and speak to him.

Secondly, the mere act of checking in can bring instant and surprising answers. Even at the times when I feel most disconnected from myself and it's hard to get in touch with what I am truly feeling, simply asking 'what do you need right now, little one?' has often brought instant emotion and answers to the surface. Despite having experienced this numerous times, I am still surprised by what an instant and rich source this can be. And, equally, this also instantly reconnects me with myself and gives me clear reason or direction of what I need in that moment.

The final thing to offer is to make space for the more childlike needs and parts of yourself. This might just be dancing freely, playing a game with frivolity and freedom, maybe even picking things back up that you once used to like at a younger age. For me, this has been music, dancing, expression and other ways that I may have inhibited myself during my adult journey.

As always, these don't have to be drastic changes or actions, but merely making space for enquiry, being open to something new, relating to and expressing yourself in a new way that might not come naturally at first. It can often be a lifetime of being disconnected or out of touch with our deeper needs or desires, so give it some time and care as you tune back in. What did your younger self used to like? When did you feel most free and expressive in yourself? What areas have you lost touch with, because others have negatively judged their suitability and appropriateness in you, as an adult?

Curiosity can be such a potent attitude and feels so fitting with these younger parts of ourselves and the children we see around us. Allow yourself to be playful, curious, expressive and carefree, even if it is in the privacy of your own home. Because this is a relationship that deserves being tended to, has so many answers and insights and can be the ultimate homecoming or thing we have been missing for so long.

Because that is often what it can feel like when we reconnect with our little ones — a homecoming. That we finally reconnect with one



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of the most important parts of our experience and selves. Not only that we can notice and actually take care of our younger selves, but that there is a kind of wholeness in the team of the younger and older self together. Both with important perspectives to offer. Both with value and wisdom. Neither better than the other, but together, making a whole that leads to us being more integrated and psychologically healthy. And, ultimately, a more authentic self. To finish this article, I include a poem that I recently wrote through my own process of reclaiming my relationship with my little one. I hope it makes some sense of the words that I have written throughout this article and speaks to you on some level.

### The Homecoming

Hey little one,  
You didn't get it wrong — you just learned what  
you were shown:  
That love meant caretaking,  
That safety meant compliance,  
That value meant being needed.  
And I followed you, in my adult ways, because  
that's what we thought loving and surviving  
meant.

But now I see you fully.  
I lost touch with your innocence —  
your wild wonder,  
your clarity that cuts through the noise, and  
your big HUGE curious eyes.  
The part of you that still knows how to feel  
deeply, love openly, and see beauty.

I'm sorry I left you alone in that.  
But I'm here now —  
with wholeness,  
with clarity,  
with care for the both of us.

We're a team, you and me.  
And you don't have to keep proving anything.

We're allowed to live.  
To rest.  
To feel.  
To be.  
Together. ●