

Spirit Rock Meditation Center

June 9-11, 2017

Shift Happens: Learning to Bounce Back from Disappointment, Difficulty, even Disaster

June 9, 2017 Saturday afternoon 1:30pm-4:30pm

Relational Intelligence

S-82 image of two women talking

Any check-ins, questions, reflections from lunch?

This afternoon applying what we're learning about creating shift to relational intelligence, both how we related to ourselves internally and how we relate to others externally; intra-personal relationships and inter-personal relationships.

Because those intra and inter personal relationships have a lot to do with how our resilience - capacities to cope with distressing events and bounce back from adverse events and even learn and grow from potentially traumatizing events develop in the first place. And how well our resilience and capacities for response flexibility mature and strengthen as we go along. And how we can use healthy resonant relationship - with ourselves and with

others - now to heal and rewire anything that didn't go so well the first time around.

Relationships really are both refuges - a safe place to pull in a re-group when we've been thrown by something, by too many somethings, and resources - the help and support and role models of skills and learning we need to find our way again. Other people provide refuge and resource; we can provide refuge and resource for ourselves, too. Relationships help strengthen our resilience.

I haven't talked very much on this retreat about the importance of our earliest attachment relationships on shaping our earliest inner secure base of resilience (or not) or how those earliest attachment relationships shape the development of our brains, especially the development of the pre-frontal cortex, our center of executive functioning and CEO of resilience. How all of our capacities to regulate the nervous system, manage feelings, related to ourselves and others well, respond to life events resiliently - are conditioned by those early relationships.

My book *Bouncing Back* explores that in a lot of detail. I mention that here because the imprint of those earliest relationships may still impact how we relate to ourselves today and how well we regulate our nervous system, manage emotions, respond to life events today. Certainly impact how much we trust ourselves and trust other people to be safe,

trustworthy, dependable, to be refuges and resources, and how much we can be refuges and resources for others, or not.

So, this afternoon, learn tools and exercises of relational intelligence to rewire that conditioning if necessary, so that we can have strong, healthy, resonant relationship with ourselves and with other people, social or intimate, families, friendship and work circles, in communities.

S-83 Q Fosha

I referred to this quote from Diana Fosha yesterday in terms of safety in relationships being one of five factors that help strengthen our resilience:

The roots of resilience are to be found in the felt sense of being held in the mind and heart of an empathic, attuned, and self-possessed other.

Now we are really going to apply that in terms of all the factors: safety, safety in relationships, positive emotions in relationships, the brain learning from experience, little and often.

Diana calls this a relationship of a true other to a person's true self. And it can be any true other to any true self. When we are the true other to the true self of any other person we can see and

reflect their true self back to them when they have forgotten, or perhaps have never known, who they truly are. We remember their best self when they are mired in their worst self and accept without judgment all of who they are. True others are not necessarily the people closest to us, though they may be: they are the people most attuned to the us, those most accepting of our innate goodness, our essential worth as human beings. For many people, a true other can be a spiritual figure or deity; for others it may be a teacher, or friend. When someone who is acting as a true other genuinely sees us at their best, we can see ourselves in that light, too. This mirroring helps us rediscover our resilient self.

The power of the true other can be seen in the example of the Irish playwright Oscar Wilde when he was imprisoned in England in 1895 for homosexuality. As Wilde was walking through the throngs of jeering hecklers on his way to prison, his publisher and friend, Robert Ross, quietly bowed and tipped his hat to him. Wilde later recounted in his autobiographical work *De Profundis* that his friend's gesture of respect was what enabled him to endure his two years of imprisonment with his courage and dignity intact. When Ross acknowledged Wilde's true self, Wilde's resilience came to the fore.

S-84 Q Dinah Craik

The felt-sense kind of empathy that creates the conditions for those roots of resilience moment-by-moment is expressed in the words of the 19th century British novelist Dinah Craik:

*Ah, the comfort,
The inexpressible comfort
Of feeling safe with a person.
Having neither to weigh out thoughts
Nor words,
But pouring them all right out, just as they are,
Chaff and grain together;
Certain that a faithful hand
Will take them and sift them;
Keeping what is worth keeping and,
With the breath of kindness,
Blow the rest away.*

- Dinah Craik

A Life for a Life, 1859

Among my favorite stories that also illustrated the attunement and empathy and reflecting from a true other to a true self is one I heard from the meditation teacher Jack Kornfield. A seven-year-old boy and his family went to a restaurant for dinner.

When the waitress asked the boy what he wanted for dinner, he replied without hesitation, “A hot dog and French fries!” His mother interrupted, telling the waitress, “He’ll have meatloaf with mashed potatoes and gravy.” After the waitress had taken the parents’ orders, she turned to the boy and asked, “Do you want ketchup and mustard on your hot dog, son?” As the waitress was leaving, the boy turned to his parents and said, “She thinks I’m real!”

The safety this moment-by-moment deep listening provides creates a neural safety net in the brain that primes the brain’s receptivity to new experiences, new learning, and activates the brain’s neuroplasticity for change.

When we can engage with people in interactions that are safe, resonant, not shaming-blaming-judgmental or critical, but supportive, validating, we strengthen our own inner sense of belonging and worth, and that becomes a powerful resource to strengthen our own capacities of resilience, to shift from contraction and reactivity to a more engaged and open-minded perspective in any situation.

S-85 Cultivating the Wiser Self

1. Find a comfortable position to sit quietly. Allow your eyes to gently close. Breathe deeply a few times into your belly and allow your awareness to come more deeply into your body.

Allow yourself to breathe comfortably. Become aware of relaxing into a gentle field of well-being.

2. When you are ready, imagine you are in our own safe place, somewhere where you feel comfortable, safe, relaxed and at ease. This could be a room in your home, a favorite cabin in the woods or a place by a pond or lake, or in a café with a friend.

3. Then let yourself know you are going to receive a visit from your Wiser Self, perhaps an older wise, stronger version of yourself. Someone who embodies the qualities you aspire to, and is mature and settled in them.

4. As your Wiser Self arrives in your safe place, imagine your Wiser Self in quite some detail. Notice how old your wiser self is, how they are dressed, how they move. Notice how you greet your Wiser Self. Do you go out to meet them? Do you invite them in? Do you shake hands, bow, or hug?

5. Imagine yourself sitting and talking with your wiser self, or going for a walk together. Notice their presence, their energy, and how it affects you.

6. Then, in your imagination, you can ask your wiser self how they came to be who they are.... Ask what helped them most along the way.... What did they have to let go of to become who they are?... Can they share examples of when and how they

triumphed over adversity?... You may choose to ask them about a particular problem or challenge facing you now. Notice what advice your wiser self offers that you can take with you. Listen carefully to all they have to tell you.

7. Imagine what it would be like to embody your wiser self. Invite them to become part of you. Notice how it feels to inhabit your wiser self from the inside out and to experience your wiser self within you. When you are ready, imagine your wiser self becoming separate from you again.

8. Imagine that your wiser self offers you a gift—an object, a symbol, a word or phrase—to remind you of this meeting. Receive this object into your hand and place it somewhere in your clothing for safekeeping. Your wiser self will let you know their name; remember it well.

7. As you prepare to leave, take a few gentle breaths to anchor this connection with your wiser self. Know that you can evoke this experience of encountering your wiser self anytime you choose. Imagine thanking your wiser self for the time you have spent together; imagine saying goodbye. Take a moment to reflect on the entire meeting and conversation. Notice any insights or shifts from the experience.

You may ask your client to write down their experience with their wiser self to help integrate it into their conscious memory

and to use it any time they need guidance from within about how to be more resilient. As with any use of imagination to access our deep intuitive knowing, the more they practice encountering their wiser self, the more reliably they will be able to embody his or her wisdom as they respond to the challenges and difficulties of their lives.

S-86 Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us

Rewiring Negative Views of Yourself through Seeing the Goodness That Others See in You

And one more...

1. Sit or lie comfortably. Allow your eyes to gently close. Focus your attention on your breathing. Rest comfortably in the simple presence of awareness. When you're ready, let yourself become aware of how you are holding yourself in this moment. Are you feeling kind toward yourself? Are you uneasy with yourself? Are you feeling critical of yourself? Just notice, just be aware and accepting of what is, without judgment—or if there is judgment, noticing that.

2. Then, when you're ready, bring to mind someone in your life whom you know loves you unconditionally, someone in whose presence you feel safe. This could be a teacher or dear friend; a partner, parent, or child; or a beloved dog or cat. It could be a

spiritual figure—Jesus or the Dalai Lama, or your own wiser self. Or it could simply be a memory from any time in your life when someone accepted you as you are and loved you.

3. Imagine yourself sitting with this person face to face. Visualize the person looking at you with acceptance and tenderness, love, joy. Feel yourself taking in their love and acceptance of you.

4. Now imagine yourself being the other person, looking at yourself through their eyes. Feel that person's love and openness being directed toward yourself. See in yourself the goodness, the sacred humanness that the other person sees in you. Let yourself savor this awareness of your own goodness.

5. Now come back to being yourself. You are in your own body again, experiencing the other person looking at you again, with so much love and acceptance. Feel yourself taking in that love and acceptance. Take the love deeply into your own being. Feel it in your body. Notice how and where you feel that love and acceptance in your body—as a smile, as a warmth in your heart—and savor it.

6. Take a moment to reflect on your experience. You are learning to recondition past negative views of yourself. Set the intention to remember this feeling any time you choose to.

S-87 Cultivating Self-Acceptance

You can also try this exercise of reconditioning:

1. You can begin to accept aspects of yourself that you have previously found unacceptable by pairing a negative message or belief with the embracing stance of self-acceptance. For example:

“Even though I feel lost and confused right now, I deeply and completely love and accept myself.”

“Even though my finances are a mess and I’m in real trouble, I deeply and completely love and accept myself.”

“Even though I feel like it’s all my fault that my wife left, I deeply and completely love and accept myself.”

2. If both the awareness and acceptance seem like too much of a stretch, head yourself in the right direction with a modified phrase like “I’m willing to consider trying to deeply and completely love and accept myself.” Let yourself notice that even if you deeply believe the negative statement about yourself to be true, the deep love and acceptance of yourself can simultaneously be true as well.

S-88 Guest House - Rumi

This being human is a guest-house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
Some momentary awareness come
As an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.

S-89 Rumi....

He may be clearing you
out for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,

because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

- Rumi

S-90 Befriending Yourself by Accepting the Many Parts of Yourself

This exercise of **de-conditioning for relational intelligence** is adapted from the pioneering family therapist Virginia Satir's Parts Party. It's about befriending yourself by accepting the many parts of yourself, including the part you may not like so very much.

This exercise does require that client has developed the Wiser Self or Compassionate Friend to "hold" the inquiry of the exercise. Again, I'll be leading this as you would lead a client.

1. Settle comfortably in your seat. Allow your eyes to gently close. Focus your attention on your breathing. Rest comfortably in the awareness of simply being.
2. When you're ready, imagine you are outside a theater. Imagine the building, the doors, the posters outside. Walk up to one of the doors, open it, and walk into the lobby. Open another door and walk into the empty theater. Walk all the way down to the first or second row and take a seat in the center of the row. An empty stage lies in front of you. All is quiet.

3. Now imagine that the first figure to come out on the stage is your wiser self, standing in the center. This figure that represents all the qualities you aspire to: wisdom, strength, courage, compassion, competence, acceptance.

4. Now imagine other characters coming on to the stage one by one. Each of these imaginary characters embodies a particular quality in yourself. These characters could be people you know, yourself at a different age, people you know from the movies or history or literature, animals, or cartoon characters.

The first character embodies a quality in yourself that you really, really like. Take a moment to let that character take the stage and remember it (perhaps make a note).

A second character comes on stage embodying another positive quality in yourself. Again let that character materialize on the stage and remember it.

Now bring a third character to the stage that embodies a quality in yourself that you really don't like all that much. In fact, you wish it weren't part of you, but you know it is. Let this character materialize and take a moment to remember it.

Bring on a fourth character that embodies another negative quality in you.

5. Now you have on stage your wiser self, two characters embodying positive qualities, and two characters embodying negative qualities. Ask each character in turn what special gift they bring to you by being part of you: ask the positive ones first, then the negative ones. As you listen to their responses, notice what lessons you learn from their being a part of you. Each one has some wisdom or learning to offer.

6. Next, ask your wiser self what gifts and lessons these parts have to offer you. Listen carefully for the answers.

7. Briefly thank each character for coming to be with you. Watch as they leave the stage one by one, the wiser self last.

8. Take a moment to notice and reflect on your experience from doing this exercise. Notice any insights, any shifts. Take a moment to remember and embrace the lessons of each of these four characters, especially the negative ones: each is an integral part of you, essential to your wholeness.

9. Then imagine yourself getting up out of your seat and walking back up the aisle, through the lobby and back outside the theater. Turn around to look at the theater where all this happened. Then

slowly come to awareness again of sitting quietly, and when you're ready, open your eyes.

When I lead clients or workshop participants in these exercises, I always allow time at the end to pause, notice, and reflect on the experience, especially any shifts or insights gained from the experience. That's how the brain can consciously, intentionally integrate the benefit of the exercise.

S-91 Using Self-Compassion to Answer the Inner Critic

Now, without a doubt the most difficult inner part to integrate into our sense of self is the inner critic, the voice that constantly runs a negative commentary about everything we do and think and feel. “How come you're still trying to get approval from your dad (or wife, or son)? Don't you know you're a lost cause? You don't even like yourself half the time!”

Very often clients would rather get rid of the inner critic, to never ever hear from it again, and that desire is understandable. They want to be free of the misery that the inner client causes them. And...the deeper healing is to come into a different relationship to the inner critic, to understand the job it is trying to do to keep us safe from harm; it's always jumping in to make sure we don't do something stupid that would cause us to be disapproved of...and exiled...by others.

This is a **de-conditioning** exercise to come into a different relationship with the inner critic. It is a written reflection exercise. We learn more about the power of written reflection to help us get a little distance from whatever emotional turmoil might be disturbing us in session on healing trauma and moving into post-traumatic growth. For now we'll just practice this exercise.

1. Ask the client to identify a typical comment or running commentary from their inner critic that causes them to feel badly about themselves: a habitual pattern of self-criticism or self-contempt that derails their resilience or at least tries to drag their efforts to be resilient through the mud. "You're so lazy!" or "You sure are out of shape these day." Have them write down the comment as you typically hear it. Have them notice the tone of voice the inner critic uses. Notice their own response to hearing that tone of voice inside their head.
2. Ask the client to write a letter to a trusted friend (or to you) about this comment and their struggles with it. (They won't actually mail the letter.) Have them describe what usually triggers this self-criticism; their typical reactions—body sensations, feelings, and thoughts—to hearing this inner voice; any fears of a germ of truth in the criticism; their wishes and desires for understanding and support in dealing with this repetitive pattern.

3. Putting yourselves in the place of the friend they wrote to, ask them write a letter back to themselves. Writing in their friend's voice, (or your voice) convey empathy for the pain of being pummeled by these repetitive criticisms. Acknowledge how hard it is to be vulnerable to this particular form of suffering. Include an appreciation of the client's own wholeness and goodness, all the client's strengths, all their weaknesses, including the ones the inner critic is currently harping on. Include the friend's love and acceptance of the client, exactly as they are, with all of the client's human imperfections, and the friend's understanding of all the events that created the client's way of being and their particular flavor of the universally human inner critic. The client can include any suggestions they imagine their friend might add in the letter; be sure they include the friend's care for the client's well-being and the friend's wish that the client find their way to wise action and relief from this suffering.

4. After writing this second letter, the client puts it aside for awhile. When the client reads it again, ask them to receive and take in the compassion they have conveyed for themselves to themselves.

5. After the client has taken in the self-compassion from the second letter they wrote, ask them to write a third simple letter, this time back to the friend, (or you) thanking the friend for their support and reflecting on what the client has learned from the friend's letter. Ask the client to make a

note of any new behaviors of self-care they can now follow up with, based on the encouragement they have received through these letters.

Small groups of three; share process of writing letters

S-92 Listening to the Intuitive Wisdom of the Wiser Self

1. Find a time and place to sit quietly without interruption. Settle into a comfortable position, take a few deep breaths, and relax into a state of mindful presence. Let any thoughts or concerns fade into the background. Then bring to your awareness a sense of your wiser self, the part of you that embodies your essential wisdom and goodness.
2. Bring to mind someone you are currently having difficulties with: a neighbor who turns up the television too late at night; a coworker who misses important deadlines; a sister-in-law who dominates every discussion at the dinner table. Imagine that you can introduce this person to your wiser self and then stand to the side as you overhear the conversation between them.
3. Listen to how your wiser self handles the conversation with the difficult person: what they say, how they handle the energy of your difficult person. You are overhearing your own inner wisdom being patient and skillful with your difficult person.

4. When the conversation between your wiser self and the difficult person is complete, notice how the difficulty is resolved. Notice what you overheard, what you learned, what advice you are taking in from your wiser self.

5. Let the difficult person fade from the scene. Imagine that your wiser self turns to you, offers you a word or phrase of advice, and offers you one symbolic gift you can hold in your hand to remember this conversation by. You may chose to write down your reflections for future reference.

S-93 Wished For Outcome

The exercise I use to **re-condition negative relational memories** is one of the most powerful I use with clients and workshop participants. I'll walk us through the exercise; if you find yourself doing the exercise, and people do, please do practice good self-care and stay within your comfort zone. The exercise is called Wished for Outcome and again, starting small. One moment of one memory, so the brain has a chance to reprocess the memory and you have a chance to develop a sense of competence in using the tool. You're welcome to listen and observe if that feels more comfortable to you.

So, as I always like to do when reconditioning, we begin by coming into a sense of presence, aware of being in our own

body in this moment, in this place. And bringing a sense of kindness and openness to one's experience, evoking a sense of one's own true and deep inner goodness. Then, beginning the exercise by remembering one moment, one small moment, when an interaction between you and another person went awry, and you wound up feeling not very good about yourself, you wound up feeling badly. Stay anchored in your own awareness and your own self-compassion as you evoke this memory, and you light up all the neural networks constellating this memory by remembering where you were, who you were with, remembering what you said, and what they said. Remembering what you did, and what they did. And remembering how all of that made you feel, at the time, or even now as you remember the event. Notice how you feel, or felt, and see if you can locate where you feel, or felt, that in your body. The visceral sense of the experience. Notice any negative thoughts you may have about yourself now because of what you experienced then. Let the evoking of this negative experience be as vivid as you can, lighting up the memory so it can be rewired.

Then, you create the positive resource that you will juxtapose with this negative memory to do the rewiring, by beginning to imagine a different outcome to this scenario. A different more satisfactory resolution of the event. Remembering, whatever you can imagine is real to the brain, even if this new ending never could have happened in real life.

So you begin to imagine something different you might have said. You imagine something different the other person could

have said, even if that never could have happened in real life. Let your brain do its own imagining and its own rewiring. Imagine something different you might have done. Imagine the other person doing something differently, even if that never could have happened in real life. Let your imagination create a more satisfactory resolution of the entire event. You can even imagine someone who wasn't there at the time coming in and doing something helpful.

As this new scenario unfolds, let it come to a new more wished for outcome. And light up all the neural networks of this new resolution. Let yourself feel how you feel with this new ending, and where you feel those feelings in your body. Let yourself notice any new more positive thoughts you have about yourself, given this new outcome. Let the experience of this resolution be vivid in its details and vital in your imagination. Strengthen your experience of the thoughts and feelings of this new ending.

Then, gently touch back in to the original negative experience. Touch it lightly. And then let it go and return to resting in the experience of the new ending. Then touch into the negative experience again, just briefly; notice any shifts. Then return to the resource of the new positive ending. Touch into the negative again one more time, let it go, and rest in the feelings and thoughts of the new positive ending.

Then you take a moment to pause and reflect on your experience of the entire exercise, noticing any shifts.

This technique of reconditioning does not change what happened, but it does change our relationship to what happened. And it doesn't re-write history, but it does rewire the brain.

When we can pause and notice any shift, usually we notice that the negative experience feels less charged. This is what happens in trauma therapy. You might be encouraged to try this technique again on another memory or part of a memory. And again. Eventually the brain learns how to generalize this technique. We don't have to do all 4,957 interactions that ever went awry in our life. Our sense of self in relationship to these memories changes, our sense of self in terms of competence to recover from trauma is changed. People no longer have to identify themselves as a victim of trauma or even as a survivor of trauma. They can identify themselves as a whole human being who has learned to grow from the ups and downs of their life.

BREAK

Take care of yourself after intense afternoon of practice. Notice your own relationship to yourself. Kind? Accepting? Harsh? Judgmental? Ambivalent? See if you can bring the positive emotions of these exercises to any negativity you become aware of.

S-94 photo of two women talking

Skills of Relational Intelligence

When we feel more comfortable in our own skin and with our own inner landscape, we are then more likely to be able to reach out to other people, to receive support, to give support, to call on people as resources.

There are still some common impediments to the smooth flow of healthy relating. And I often end up teaching these specific skills of relational intelligence to my clients.

S-95 Skills of Relational Intelligence

Deep listening is more than half of a skillful conversation and allows trust and connection to deepen.

Reaching out for help keeps us connected to the resources we need to find a new job or a good doctor or the right tutor for our kid.

Setting limits and boundaries actually helps us stay calm in relationships, knowing we won't be intruded upon or have to do something that goes against the grain or could be harmful to do.

Negotiating change builds our competence in getting our needs met.

Resolving conflicts smooths the way to be more resilient, more successful in our daily living.

Knowing how to repair a rupture in a relationship helps us find the courage to take risks, confident that we can repair and even strengthen the bond with another person if need be.

Forgiveness requires the mindful empathy that allows us to see the larger picture clearly, holding our own behaviors and those of others, resilient or not, in a larger compassion that supports resilience.

S-96 Deep listening

We want to recover our capacities to listen to other people well and to assert our own needs to be listened to.

The most basic and powerful way to connect to another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention....A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words.

- Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D.

When we shift our attention toward listening, our whole world changes. Learning to listen is equal to learning to love.

- Ruth Cox

S-97 Deep Listening exercise

- What brings you joy in your life?
- What has brought you sorrow?
- What worries you now?
- What are you grateful for?
- What are you proud of?

S-98 Photo - Reaching Out for Help

Resources can be people, and frequently are. People who serve as role models offer wisdom from their own experience, giving us keys to crack the code of how to live resiliently, whether we are observing them, talking with them, or evoking their presence in our imagination. From them we learn competencies and values to guide our actions, sometimes through direct instruction and practical suggestions, sometimes by the “contagion” of coping: the resonance from spending time with a resilient role model can call forth the same capacities for resilience in us. And

because our brains can encode new patterns of coping directly from interacting with other resilient brains, identifying people as resources greatly accelerates our own brain change.

Researchers at the University of Michigan conducted a simple experiment to measure the effect of receiving help on a person's estimate of a difficulty. Participants standing at the bottom of a steep hill were asked to estimate its height; their estimates were recorded. Next the same participants were given heavy backpacks and asked to estimate the height of the hill again. The estimates were considerably higher. The backpacks were then removed, and the participants were paired up to climb the hill together. This time their reported estimates of the height of the hill were considerably lower than the original estimates. Help... helps.

My client Doug grew up in a family that was both dysfunctionally disconnected within itself and isolated from other families. He had never even attended a birthday party until his first year of community college, and no one had ever thrown a birthday party for him. As he approached his twenty-first birthday, he decided to throw a party for himself. For Doug, this event was as significant a marker of becoming a competent adult as knowing how to buy a car or rent his own apartment.

He approached a guy he had met through pick-up basketball games who seemed to know how to get people together for social occasions. Doug's request for advice turned into a three-

week mentoring project: Neil helped Doug identify whom to invite, what sort of event to host, and when to hold it, and coached him on the details—obtaining the food and drinks and planning activities and rituals that Doug had only glimpsed from afar. Doug had a great time celebrating his twenty-first birthday, resourced by people who could help him figure out how to make his way in the world in this particular way. And he learned the value of finding a role model to help him crack the code and rewire his own brain.

For many of us, asking for and accepting help is much harder than giving it. We may not know how to ask for help, we may believe that asking for help is a sign of weakness, or we may have come to believe, from experience, that there's no point. At the other extreme, if we have not developed enough self-sufficiency, we may be constantly asking for help and driving people crazy. Reaching out for help in relationally intelligent ways is a sign of resilience. We don't need to wait for something bordering on catastrophe—a teenage son arrested for drunk driving, a muscle spasm in your lower back that keeps you in bed for three days, a storm that blows a huge tree down onto the roof of the house—to practice asking for help.

S-99 Reaching Out for Help

Identify need

(MSC helpful here to even acknowledge that we have needs and that it's okay to have them)

Identify people receptive to need

I'm applying the wisdom of shame resilience researcher Brene Brown here: how important it is for us to tell their story to someone, not to stay in withdrawal and hiding with it, and that it's essential to tell the story to someone who deserves to hear it.

Ask for help

(don't rely on mind-reading) "If you loved me, you would know." Not helpful or effective

Take in the good of receiving help.

If help not available, find other resources.

Practicing asking for help actually strengthens the PFC, the brain's center of executive functioning, so that it's available when we need it in times of emergency.

S-100 Theory of Mind

For the next skill of relational intelligence - setting limits and boundaries - we need to strengthen a capacity known as theory of mind.

Developmental psychologists have found that the human brain is capable of distinguishing between self and others by six months of age. The capacity of theory of mind takes that development further as we mature. More important for taking our place in the world as independent, resilient human beings, by four years of age our brains are capable of recognizing and accepting that other people may be having thoughts and feelings different from our own. Your thought, belief, impulse, feeling, or reaction to a topic, event, or reality may be completely different from mine at the same moment—and vice versa. And that's okay.

Theory of mind allows us to develop and maintain an inner subjective reality—a sense of self—that is separate from other people's opinions and expectations of us. It allows us to be ourselves and other people to be who they are, regardless of our needs or projections. We each have our own inner subjective reality, whether we're fully or only fuzzily in touch with it.

This capacity to differentiate our own thoughts, feelings, reactivity, and responses from another person's helps us step back from assumptions, rules, and expectations about how we and others *should* feel or behave. Stepping back from "should" is essential for responding flexibly—reminding us that different

options are available and that they are valid, a sine qua non of resilience.

Secure, resonant relationships enhance this capacity of theory of mind; less secure or un-empathic relationships typically don't. So not everyone has fully developed this capacity by age four.

Mindfulness can be an essential tool to help us observe any assumptions or projections we are making rather than accepting a full differentiation between ourselves and other human beings.

S-101 Setting Limits and Boundaries

Setting limits—trusting that we can set boundaries, regardless of another person's reactions—also allows us to initiate communication and take risks in relationships that otherwise we might not perceive as safe. We learn to avoid either responding aggressively to protect ourselves or acquiescing completely to another person's needs when they do not reflect our own needs. This experience supports the brain's capacity to stay open to learning and change.

1. Identify what's "wrong," any intrusion into personal space, any disrespect of personal beliefs, any disregard for personal welfare.

2. Identify what limit or boundary would actually address that.
3. Identify what the consequences would be for violating that limit or boundary.
4. Identify how they would enforce the consequences

[This is unilateral decision making. The next skill, negotiating change, includes the other person in making the decision.]

My client Nancy was becoming more and more frustrated with her husband going out drinking with his buddies. That part was okay, but he would repeatedly promise to come home by a certain time and then invariably would come home two hours after that agreed upon time, often without calling to let her know what was going on.

Nancy was clear, Jim's staying out with his buddies wasn't the issue. She was fine having a quiet time at home with the dog and a good book. Her frustration was more about feeling disrespected and not cared about, not important when Jim didn't call to tell her about his change of plans. Not for permission but for communication of information.

Nancy asked me to help when she began to resent how powerless she felt. She did try talking to Jim about it. She was

worried that someday something might happen and she would be getting a call from the police or the local hospital.

She needed a consequence for Jim's habit of forgetting to call, and rather than threatening to call the police or check with the local hospital, she told Jim the next time he was more than 30 minutes late without calling, she would call Jim's sister who lived in the same town. Jim was very fond of this sister, revered her almost, and truly did not want to look bad in her eyes. Nancy never ever had to call the sister; she had created a limit with an enforceable consequence and Jim's ne habit of calling when he would be late started the very next weekend.

S-102 Negotiating Change, part 1 (reciprocal)

I teach this exercise on negotiating change to couples and individuals all the time. Because it's effective and the principles underlying it eliminate shame-blame-hostility and attack within the relationship and create conditions for empathy, understanding, and change.

This exercise is adapted from a method originally known around the world as Non-Violent Communication (NVC) developed by Marshall Rosenberg and now called Compassionate Communication. To some, the method can feel structured and mechanical, but when a conflict needs to be expressed and dealt with, it can be worth its weight in gold.

When both people become adept at the protocol, they can identify the emotional needs that need to be addressed and choose appropriate actions to address them.

1. Stating the Intention

One person begins the conversation with: “There is something happening that’s impacting our relationship. I would like to talk about it. Are you available?” Mechanical! But it does close the exits. The listener agrees to listen respectfully until the speaker is done. If the listener is not available at that moment because he’s out the door on the way to work, or needs to be on an important conference call in five minutes, or is simply frazzled for the day, he can say no, but he must agree to be available within 24 hours. The speaker never has to nag or pursue once the mutual agreement to meet has been made.

2. Creating the Conditions to be Heard

Choose a time and place where there will be no distractions or interruptions. With the two sitting face to face, the speaker then states the topic in one sentence, and the listener repeats the topic back word for word so the speaker feels heard. The listener then asks, “Is there more?” That’s it. No commentary, no rebuttal, no resistance, no incredulity. This method completely prohibits any shame-blame-name calling. Safety and mutual respect are the priorities.

3) Speaking and Listening

The speaker then begins sharing her experience along the following lines: “I felt really hurt when I perceived (or thought or believed) you were flirting with Sandy at the block party last night.” She acknowledges any of her own subjective impressions or thoughts that may have contributed to the experience. The listener listens, repeats the statement word for word, so the speaker feels heard. “You felt hurt when you thought I was flirting at the block party last night.” The listener expresses no defensiveness, no editorializing, no retaliating, no sharing of his experience. It can be much harder to be the listener than the speaker!

The speaker continues until she is done, focusing on the feelings and needs underneath the facts of the events. Rather than express the problem as a thought – “I feel as if you’re not interested in me anymore” – she tries to get down to the feeling underneath – “I’m worried, and I’m scared.” Getting to the heart of the matter usually takes far less time than one would expect, once the focus is placed on the feelings driving the speaker’s own behaviors.

4) Summary of concern

The listener gives a brief summary of the entire concern, and the speaker clarifies until both can agree on a clear statement of it. In this case, it might be: “When you experience me paying attention to other people and not paying enough attention to you or to us, you’re worried that I don’t love you as much as I did; that I’m not really there for you.”

S-103 Negotiating Change, part 2

5) The request for change

The speaker articulates the request that would address the emotional need underneath: “I need to hear from you that you still love me; that you’re in this 100 percent.” She then identifies three things she is willing to do herself to address her emotional needs, for example: “I will check in with you at least once in the coming week to hear how you feel we’re doing as a couple.” “I will remind myself that I am loved by you before we to the football game with Sandy and Jim two weeks from now.” “I will pull you aside and speak to you right away the next time I experience any worry about your behavior.”

The speaker identifies three things the listener could do that would help address her emotional needs, such as: “I ask that you spend five minutes with me every night this week telling me three things you appreciate about me.” “I ask that you include me in at least one conversation you have with Sandy in the

coming month.” “I ask that you spontaneously give me a big hug and tell me you’re glad to see me at least once in the coming week.”

The speaker and listener each choose *one* of the three behaviors to do in the specified time period. The requests must be for changes in behaviors (not changing personality or character, but behavior) that are *positive* (specifying what is wanted rather than what is not wanted), *specific, measurable, and set in a specific time frame* so that both speaker and listener know when they have been accomplished.

4. Following through

As the pair implements the change requests, the speaker is responsible for acknowledging and showing appreciation when a request for change has been met. If the change didn’t address her emotional need after all, she can use the method again to get clearer and more on target. The listener then takes his turn using the same formula that lets him create the conditions to be heard, communicate his feelings and needs, and present his six requests for change. If each person does one new behavior every week for a year, they will have instituted more than 100 positive changes in their relationship in that year. Pretty resilient!

Sometimes, even with secure attachment and theory of mind, but especially when not, people can fall into conflicts with spouse,

family members, co-workers, neighbors, and not know how to resolve them.

At times our habitual lenses of perception and reactivity can make responsible speaking and empathic listening almost impossible. Both people in a conversation can be caught in a mind-set of “me. vs. you,” “us vs. them,” or “always-never.” The differences feel intolerable and frustrations run high. Learning to communicate your fears and wishes to other people, and receiving their communication about their fears and wishes in return, is a practice of relational intelligence that will sustain resilience for a lifetime.

S-104 Resolving conflict

- Acknowledge conflict
- Identify possible misunderstandings, mis-perceptions
- Take responsibility for your part in conflict
- Convey your responsibility to other; ask them to reflect on their responsibility for their part
- Brainstorm possible solutions; come to agreement

It actually takes a pretty strong pre-frontal cortex to be able to resolve conflict skillfully. Because you have to be able to regulate and even shift the reactivity that you’re likely to feel in your body and your nervous system when there is a conflict,

especially with someone important to you or where there's a power differential and a potential sense of threat or danger. Creating safety in your own nervous system that allows you to stay in your own window of tolerance, your own range of resilience, your own equanimity as you engage with the person you are in disagreement or conflict with.

And then to have enough mindfulness to see the misunderstandings and mis-perceptions on either side, and enough empathy to understand the mis-understandings and mis-perceptions on either side.

And then to take responsibility for your part. Takes trust in yourself and courage to do this, because it's a risk. You'll find out whether the other person has the capacity to do the same.

You try that. You convey your understanding of your part in the conflict and ask them to do the same. They may or may not be able to do that. That is part of what is observed and reflected on.

If yes, then the conversation may lead to brainstorming possible resolutions and coming to agreement.

If not, then the conversation might have to reiterate the differentiation, the respectful "agree to disagree" and wait for another day.

S-105 **Repairing a Rupture**

Researchers have discovered that even in “good enough” close relationships we spend about one third of the time in actual relating (attuned connection) about one third in rupture (mis-attuned or disrupted connection) and one third in repair (recovering the attuned connection.) Repair is the most important phase of this rhythm, especially in terms of re-wiring our patterns of behavior.

Years ago, I was visiting relatives in northern Minnesota on their summer vacation and witnessed a brilliant example of repair. My seven-year-old cousin Marty was fishing off the dock one morning. His mom, my Aunt Gen, came out to check on him, noticed his mouth was covered in jelly and crumbs from his morning donut, and scolded him for being so messy as she wiped his face clean. Marty’s body visibly slumped in a sulk. As Gen started to walk back to the house, Marty’s dad, my Uncle Ted, who had watched the whole scene, walked over to Marty, put his hand gently on his shoulder, and reassured him, “That’s okay, son. Fish bite better with a dirty face anyway.” Marty gave his dad a smile and a high five and joyfully went back to fishing.

Gen, who had watched Ted’s skillful repair to Marty’s self-esteem, decided to try to make amends with Marty, taking responsibility for causing a rupture in Marty’s self-esteem as well as between the two of them. She went into the house for more donuts. Back on the dock, she handed one to Ted to eat and

ate one herself. Gen intentionally left crumbs on her face, then asked Marty, “How’s the fishing?” Marty looked at her, understood her attempt at repair, laughed, and gave her a big hug.

What’s important here:

Focus on repairing the relationship, not on right v. wrong

- Value of relationship, motivation to repair
- Mindful empathy for each other
- Share experiences, not opinions
- Convey understanding of experience, care for person
- Re-engage from more resonant space

S-106 Forgiveness

The last skill in this section on skills of relational intelligence is perhaps graduate level work in interpersonal relation.

Forgiveness is an art, it is a practice, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would say:

Forgiveness is not an occasional act;

It is a permanent attitude.

Whether the causes of a potentially or previously traumatizing experience lie outside of us in other people or circumstances or within ourselves, whether we bear no responsibility or some, or a lot, practicing forgiveness allows us to bring the brain out of the contraction of anger, resentment, grudge, hostility, shut down and withdrawal. Forgiveness is not an emotion; it's a behavior of an attitude of the heart and mind that brings the functioning of the brain out of the lower brain's survival responses and back into the larger perspective of the higher brain - utterly necessary for resilience.

Most clients will experience injury, injustice, disappointment, or betrayal at some point in their lives. Staying caught in those experiences can block their resilience and their relational intelligence from developing. Continuing to feel judgment, blame, resentment, bitterness, and hostility against those who have caused us harm can cause us pain and suffering themselves.

The same can be true if the client hasn't been able to forgive themselves for harm they have caused others or themselves. We want to help them rewire the behaviors of complaining, criticism, disgruntlement, and contentiousness they can so easily get stuck in, and re-open themselves to the genuine understanding, compassion, grieving, and forgiveness that are needed to move into resilient coping and relational intelligence.

It's important to say here: forgiveness does not mean condoning, pardoning, forgetting, false reconciliation, appeasement, or

sentimentality. It is a practice, daily and lifelong, of cultivating an inner peace and wisdom that allows our clients to see that their pain is part of the pain of all human beings universally, to reset their moral compass, and to remain compassionate even in the face of injustice, betrayal, and harm.

They may even need to practice forgiveness of life itself, that they've been dealt the hand they've been dealt by life.

This forgiveness practice I will share with you comes from Jack Kornfield, a practicing psychologist as well as beloved spiritual teacher from his book *The Art of Loving Kindness Forgiveness and Peace*. It's not the only skill needed for healing from hurt and betrayal into post traumatic growth, but it is an important one.

S-107 Forgiveness I

1. Let yourself sit comfortably, allowing your eyes to close and your breath to be natural and easy. Let your body and mind relax. Breathe gently into the area of your heart, letting yourself feel all the barriers you have erected and the emotions you have carried because you have not forgiven yourself or others. Let yourself feel the pain of keeping your heart closed.

2. Breathing softly, moving through each of the following possibilities for forgiveness. Begin reciting the suggested words,

letting the healing images and feelings that come up grow deeper as you repeat the phrases of forgiveness.

3. Seek forgiveness from others with the following words:

There are many ways that I have hurt and harmed others, have betrayed or abandoned them, caused them suffering, knowingly or unknowingly, out of my pain, fear, anger, and confusion.

Let yourself remember and visualize the ways you have hurt others. See the pain you have caused out of your own fear and confusion. Feel your own sorrow and regret. Sense that finally you can release this burden and ask for forgiveness. Take as much time as you need to picture each memory that still burdens your heart. And then as each person comes to mind, gently say: *I ask for your forgiveness, I ask for your forgiveness.*

S-128 Forgiveness II

4. Seek forgiveness for yourself with the following words: *Just as I have caused suffering to others, there are many ways that I have hurt and harmed myself. I have betrayed or abandoned myself many times in thought, word, or deed, knowingly or unknowingly.*

Feel your own precious body and life. Let yourself see the ways you have hurt or harmed yourself. Picture them, remember them. Feel the sorrow you have carried from this and sense that

you can release these burdens. Extend forgiveness for each act of harm, one by one. Repeat to yourself: *For the ways I have hurt myself through action or inaction, out of fear, pain, and confusion, I now extend a full and heartfelt forgiveness. I forgive myself, I forgive myself.*

S-129 Forgiveness III

5. Find forgiveness for those who have hurt or harmed you with the following words:

There are many ways I have been harmed by others, abused or abandoned, knowingly or unknowingly, in thought, word or deed.

You have been betrayed. Let yourself picture and remember the many ways this is true. Feel the sorrow you have carried from this past. Now sense that you can release this burden of pain by gradually extending forgiveness as your heart is ready. Recite to yourself: *I remember the many ways others have hurt, wounded, or harmed me, out of fear, pain, confusion, and anger. I have carried this pain in my heart long enough. To the extent that I am ready, I offer you forgiveness. To those who have caused me harm, I offer my forgiveness, I forgive you.*

Gently repeat these three directions for forgiveness until you feel a release in your heart. For some great pains you may not feel a release; instead, you may experience again the burden and

the anguish or anger you have held. Touch this softly. Be forgiving of yourself for not being ready to let go and move on. Forgiveness cannot be forced; it cannot be artificial. Simply continue the practice and let the words and the images work gradually in their own way. In time you can make the forgiveness meditation a regular part of your life, letting go of the past and opening your heart to each new moment with a wise loving kindness.

S-110 Integrating the Take Aways

What tools/exercises could you commit to practicing every day?

What obstacles might get in the way?

What resources could you draw on to overcome the obstacles?

Individual reflection, journaling, share in groups of three; large group Q&A

Exercise in the Brahma Viharas: Taking in the Innate Goodness of Others

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that

each one is in the eyes of the Divine. If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. There would be no more war, nor more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed. ...I suppose the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other. – Thomas Merton

The Brahma Viharas – loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity – are considered to be “the divine abodes” in the Buddhist wisdom tradition: states of consciousness we embody as we move toward enlightenment. These four Brahma Viharas are also states of being we cultivate to further us on the path toward enlightenment.

1. This exercise is done with a partner, entirely in noble silence. Invite a friend to do this guided meditation with you. Sit across from each other so that you can easily maintain eye contact. Decide who will be partner A and who will be partner B.

2. Begin by simply gazing into each other’s eyes, allowing yourself to see in your partner the nobility of their true nature. Their innate goodness and radiance of their being; their sincere wishes for peace, happiness, and well-being.

3. Partner A closes her eyes. Partner B begins to silently wish her well, sending her sincere expressions of loving kindness: may you know the deepest happiness, may you have ease of

mind and heart. Partner A, let yourself know that your partner is sending you expressions of loving kindness; let yourself receive and take in the kindness being offered you.

4. Partner B closes his eyes; both partners sit in silence, reflecting on the experience and giving and receiving wishes for loving kindness, happiness, peace and ease.

5. Partner A opens her eyes; partner B keeps his eyes closed. Partner A begins to silently Partner B well, sending him sincere expressions of loving kindness: may you know the deepest happiness, may you have ease of mind and heart. Partner B, let yourself know that your partner is sending you expressions of loving kindness; let yourself receive and take in the kindness being offered you.

4. Partner A closes her eyes; both partners sit in silence, reflecting on the experience and giving and receiving wishes for kindness and happiness, peace and ease.

5. Partner B opens his eyes; Partner A's eyes remain closed. Partner B begins to imagine what human sorrows Partner A might have experienced in her journey, what losses, what griefs, what pain of the human condition. Partner B silently begins to send Partner A expressions of compassion: May your sorrows be held in loving awareness, may your sorrows ease; may your sorrows cease. May you be free of suffering, and all causes of

suffering, and from causing any suffering. Partner A: let yourself take in the care and compassion being offered to you.

7. Partner B closes his eyes; both partners sit in silence, reflecting on the experience of giving and receiving compassion and care for sorrows and suffering.

8. Partner A opens her eyes; Partner B's eyes remain closed. Partner A begins to imagine what human sorrows Partner B might have experienced in his journey, what losses, what griefs, what pain of the human condition. Partner A silently begins to send Partner B expressions of compassion: May your sorrows be held in loving awareness, may your sorrows ease; may yours sorrows cease. May you be free of suffering, and all causes of suffering, and from causing any suffering. Partner B: let yourself take in the care and compassion being offered to you.

9. Partner A closes her eyes; both partners sit in silence, reflecting on the experience of giving and receiving compassion and care for sorrows and suffering.

10. Partner B opens his eyes; Partner A's eyes remain closed. Partner B begins to imagine what human joys Partner A may have experienced in her journey. What accomplishments and competencies she might have achieved. What blessings of abundance and love she might have experienced. And silently begin to send her expressions of sympathetic joy, happiness for

her happiness. May you fully delight in your delight; may you feel your joy deeply. Partner A; let yourself receive these sincere wishes from your partner for your own deepening joy.

11. Partner B closes his eyes; both partners sit in silence, reflecting on the experience of giving and receiving joy and delight.

12. Partner A opens her eyes; Partner B's eyes remain closed. Partner A begins to imagine what human joys Partner B may have experienced in his journey. What accomplishments and competencies he might have achieved. What blessings of abundance and love he might have experienced. And silently begin to send her expressions of sympathetic joy, happiness for his happiness. May you fully delight in your delight; may you feel your joy deeply. Partner B; let yourself receive these sincere wishes from your partner for your own deepening joy.

13. Partner A closes her eyes; both partners sit in silence, reflecting on the experience of giving and receiving joy and delight.

14. Partner B opens his eyes; Partner A's eyes remain closed. Partner B begins to imagine what ups and downs Partner A might have experienced in her life; what twists and turns. And begin to send her wishes for equanimity, for a calm abiding in centeredness and groundedness as she rides the waves of life.

Partner A, let yourself receive these wishes for equanimity, balance and deep inner peace.

15. Partner B closes his eyes; both partners sit in silence, reflecting on the experience of giving and receiving wishes for calm, for equanimity, for deep inner peace.

16. Partner A opens her eyes; Partner B's eyes remain closed. Partner A begins to imagine what ups and downs Partner B might have experienced in his life; what twists and turns. And begins to send him wishes for equanimity, for a calm abiding in centeredness and groundedness as he rides the waves of life. Partner B, let yourself receive these wishes for equanimity, balance and deep inner peace.

17. Partner A closes her eyes; both partners sit in silence, reflecting on the experience of giving and receiving wishes for calm, for equanimity, for deep inner peace.

18. With eyes remaining closed, both partners simply bring awareness to this entire experience, reflecting on the giving and receiving of kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Notice any changes in your sense of yourself or of your partner.

19. Both partners open their eyes; simply gaze into the eyes of the person you have shared this experience with. Give a bow of thanks and gratitude for creating this experience together.

Inquiry: which resonated more: giving or receiving? Which practice of the four resonated the most?

Homework

Notice your experiences in relationships. This could be getting complicated. Have compassion for all of it.

Dalai Lama: if you want to be happy, practice compassion. If you want others to be happy, practice compassion.

Slow down and take the time to mindfully unpack what is happening and how you're reacting to what's happening. And think through, even rehearse, how the tools learned today might create some shift.