

Living Through a Challenging Childhood

From the beginning, we were dependent on adults to care for us. We needed to feel secure and protected; to be held lovingly, to gaze into our parent's delighted eyes and snuggle into their reassuring warmth. We needed our parents to be in tune and responsive to our needs.

As we grew older we gained more independence, yet we still needed to know our special people were there to listen to our hopes and fears, speak kindly, encourage our interests and help us cope with the demands of life.

For many of us, that kind of sensitive care is a far cry from what we received. As children we may have learned harsh lessons about disappointment, shame, rejection, violation or intimidation as we looked to those closest for comfort and received repeated indifference, disapproval, abuse or anger.

Challenging though it can be to acknowledge the hurtful, inappropriate events you suffered as a vulnerable child, it is also a significant step in the healing process - for we can't heal what we won't allow ourselves to know.

When I was growing up...

Often Sometimes Never

_____	_____	_____	I was overlooked, ignored or neglected.
_____	_____	_____	There was no support for my interests or school work.
_____	_____	_____	My emotional or physical needs were not taken care of.
_____	_____	_____	I was expected to take care of myself from an early age.
_____	_____	_____	I was deprived of food.
_____	_____	_____	A parent acted as though they didn't like me.
_____	_____	_____	I was subjected to punishing silences.
_____	_____	_____	I was accused of doing things I didn't do.
_____	_____	_____	It was not safe to express my feelings.
_____	_____	_____	I was belittled, called names or put down.
_____	_____	_____	I was subjected to cutting criticism.
_____	_____	_____	If I cried, I was ridiculed, threatened or punished.
_____	_____	_____	I was the subject of cruel jokes.
_____	_____	_____	I was forbidden to express my point of view.
_____	_____	_____	I was forced to conform to an adult's harmful demands.
_____	_____	_____	I was smothered or controlled by an overprotective parent.
_____	_____	_____	The 'rules' at home kept changing without warning.
_____	_____	_____	I was confused by denial, mind-games or lies.
_____	_____	_____	I was frightened and confused by a parent's unpredictability.
_____	_____	_____	A parent was extremely self-centred and demanding.
_____	_____	_____	I was made to feel guilty for not supporting a parent.
_____	_____	_____	I was given too much responsibility for caring for siblings.
_____	_____	_____	I was made to do chores that were too advanced for my age.
_____	_____	_____	I had to cope with a parent who drank excessively or took drugs.
_____	_____	_____	A parent was unable to care for me because she or he was ill.
_____	_____	_____	I felt embarrassed by a family member's behaviour.
_____	_____	_____	Someone I was close to had a mental illness.
_____	_____	_____	I told lies to cover up family problems and behaviour.
_____	_____	_____	There were secrets in the family I had to keep.
_____	_____	_____	I was forced to cope with many changes.
_____	_____	_____	I experienced loss or grief that wasn't attended to well.
_____	_____	_____	I was abandoned by someone close.

Living Through a Challenging Childhood, Continued

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| _____ | _____ | _____ | My sibling(s) were favoured over me. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I had destructive power struggles with a sibling |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was bullied at school or at home |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I hated school because I found it hard to cope. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | Life was difficult because I had some form of disability. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was humiliated or abused by a teacher. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was frightened by someone's angry outbursts. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was often on edge waiting for the next 'blow-up'. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | There was sexual abuse in my family. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was personally subjected to some form of sexual abuse. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | My personal privacy was violated. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | One or both parents used me as a confidante. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was made to listen to one parent bad-mouthing the other. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I felt upset because I saw a family member suffering. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was afraid that someone in the family was going to get hurt. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I tried to protect one family member from another. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | Someone close was seriously ill or died. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I witnessed emotional or physical abuse. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I witnessed other distressing events without adequate comfort. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | Someone used frightening stand-over tactics to make me conform. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | Someone close treated me harmfully. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was subjected to harsh physical 'punishment' or physical abuse. |
| _____ | _____ | _____ | I was sexually abused. |

Having completed this checklist, you may be feeling somewhat overwhelmed. You may find it helpful to reflect on, or write about, the following questions or discuss them with a supportive person:

- What has this checklist highlighted for you?
- What new insights into your childhood do you have?
- How are you feeling about your discoveries?

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