

Self as child Script

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INTRO

In this exercise, caregivers experience a guided visualization in which they imagine asking for what they need from caregivers then also from their adult self and noticing how each adult responds to what they ask for. The self as child exercise can be used to increase openness and acceptance. This exercise can highlight how the adult was cared for by others, how they care for themselves, and parallels that may exist in their current caretaking of self and others.

SCRIPT

Now we're going to do an exercise that focuses on acceptance. This exercise will take us back a little to some memories of being a child. So this exercise will take a little bit longer than some of our others. So let's begin by moving our bodies around, maybe just rolling our shoulders and then settling back into your seat. Inhaling deeply through your nose and then exhaling through your mouth. And as you feel comfortable closing your eyes or resting your gaze in front of you.

Now go back to a time when you were five or six and felt a little bit lonely or a little bit sad. Maybe you were a little younger, maybe a little older, no problem. And if you can't remember a very specific memory, no problem.

Just remember yourself, try and visualize yourself around that age. Imagine your favorite outfit, What your hair looked like at that time. And imagine that you are in that child's body. Now you are the child. You take a moment to look down at yourself, noticing the smallness of your hands, maybe the colors of your favorite outfit. And imagine you are outside the place that you used to call home. Take a minute to look at it with those child's eyes. And then when you're ready, begin approaching the place you enter.

Watch your small hand as it reaches up towards the door. And then when you enter your home...begin by looking for your main caregiver. For some people, it will be their mother or their mother-like figure. Look for whomever was your most important person. And when you find them, pause for just a second, looking at them...what are they doing? And then as you're ready, do what you need to do to get their attention...and then when you have their attention, ask for what you need from them...notice how they respond. Notice any emotions that come up.

And then as you're ready, if there's another important person, an important adult in your life, go find that person. Take a moment to watch what they are doing when you find them....And then try to get their attention. When you have their attention, ask them for what you need...Noticing how they respond...noticing any emotions that come up.

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LIVING ACT
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And then as you're ready, making your way back out of the house...Imagine that you begin to walk away from the home.

And in the distance, you see a figure approaching. You walk away from the home and walk towards the figure. And as the figure comes closer, You see that it is the adult you. Take a moment to look at the adult you...As the child you, ask for what you need from your adult self. Notice how adult you responds.

And as you are ready...slowly, imagine that the child you is dissolving into the adult you...Stepping together again, being the same body.

Now taking a moment to settle back into now. Creating a treasured place for these memories and images. Pressing your feet against the ground. Pressing your hands, just gently into your legs. Inhaling deeply through your nose and exhaling through your mouth...welcoming yourself back to this room.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What did you make of what you observed?
- Was there anything that you observed that made sense or felt familiar?
- What did each of your caregivers offer you?
- What could you offer yourself?
- What surprised you?
- What did you notice?
- What did you need?
- How did loved ones respond?
- How did adult you respond?

TAKE HOME

Depending on the insights and reflections developed, this exercise can be the springboard for many suggestions or further steps such as:

- reflecting on what the caregiver learned about responding to suffering,
- ways they would like to parent the same or differently when their own child is in need,
- practicing listening to their child's requests this week with both their ears and their heart
- trying out new ways of responding or nurturing themselves when they need something this week

With special thanks to Drs. Walser and Westrup. This exercise is loosely adapted from the following source: Walser, Robyn; Westrup, Darrah. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy for the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and Trauma-Related Problems: A Practitioner's Guide to Using Mindfulness and Acceptance Strategies . New Harbinger Publications. Kindle Edition.

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