

Healing Old Wounds



Healing yourself from your old injuries is a necessary step in self-growth and wholeness. Although you can often “survive” with your wounds still infected, you likely won’t thrive unless the roots of your pain are treated.

Healing old wounds does not mean dredging up the pain of the past or re-experiencing the emotions of the wounded parts of yourself. On the contrary, this process will help you learn to explore and engage your old wounds from a place of strength and wisdom. Healing old wounds is an invitation to comfort

and strengthen the wounded parts of yourself in order to live healthier and more whole.

There are some basic and essential steps in the process of healing old emotional wounds. The steps are sequential, one building on the other.

1. **Find a compassionate witness.** This is often a therapist who understands the healing process. The witness must not try to fix or solve the situation but rather guide you to your own inner resources to heal and resolve the pain.
2. **Tell a story of wounding.** Tell this story as a narrative of what happened. For example, tell about who was involved, what was the setting/context, and how things turned out. *Any* story of wounding will serve as an entrance point. It need not be your “most painful” story in order for this work to be effective.
3. **Tell about the feelings you felt during the injury.** Name the variety of feelings you experienced. Often this is quite a broad range. Feelings become the portals through which your current wise self will travel to make contact with your injured self for the purpose of healing. An empathic bond between the injured self and the wise self/healer is necessary in order for the wound to be fully examined, cleaned, and brought into wholeness.
4. **Make a connection with this wounded part.** Intentional and skillful dialogue provides the means for building a healthy healing relationship with the wounded parts of yourself. Imagine your wisest self, willing to engage in conversation with this injured part. Envision the wisest and most compassionate aspects of yourself reaching in to make contact with the wounded part. Pay attention to how this injured part prefers to be met. This ability to revisit the injury and offer the presence of comfort and wisdom is the key to healing.

A simple structure is to imagine your own wise man or woman knocking on the door of the bedroom of the hurt boy or girl the night the injury occurred. Maybe the injured self will allow the wise adult to come in the room, sit on the bed, possibly even hold the child in their arms. Maybe, instead, the wounded child doesn’t want to open the door to let the wise self enter. Whatever the child’s response, allow their needs/desires to lead. A good rule of thumb is: “Go only as fast as the slowest part of you is willing to go.”

If the wounded child is resistant, so be it. Show respect for the injured parts of self by not imposing your agenda, being patient instead, and trust that healing is desired and will eventually be welcomed. Make a gesture of goodwill if you want. You may want to slip a note under the door telling of your hope and intention. Come back again and again and wait patiently for the child to see you are trustworthy.

5. **Notice the experience and reaction of the wounded part** once a connection is made. Is this part open and receptive or cautious and closed? Use your imagination to see if eye contact is made. This is often a strong indication of the trust in the relationship. Remember to go slow. Trust that emotional wounds desire repair just as physical wounds naturally work towards a state of healing.
6. **Establish an empathic bond.** This bond is created when the wounded self feels seen and understood by the healer. By emotionally attuning, the wounded part begins to see that the healer “gets it”, trust is established, and the wounded heart can be fully exposed. Naming the feelings experienced in the injury, asking if they are accurate, and checking if there is more to share, are all important steps in establishing an empathic connection.
7. **Explore and expose the beliefs** that formed around the wounding, once the relationship bond is clearly in place. These beliefs are part of the coping strategies used by the wounded self to survive and protect from further injury. The problem with these beliefs is that they are often primitive, unchecked, and developed by a child. And because they provide a long-standing sense of protection, they are often carried forward and clung to without conscious regard for their usefulness in effective living. Identifying unhealthy and unhelpful beliefs is a vital step in healing the roots of the pain.
8. **Offer replacement beliefs** to the wounded self. Healing the wound involves clearing unhealthy belief structures and replacing them with life-affirming and self-supporting constructs. These replacement beliefs must be realistic, chosen, life-enhancing, and flexible in order to support and sustain growth. Up until this point the wounded part of the self may not have considered any alternative beliefs. This is an educational process only possible once the wounded self is engaged in a trusting relationship with the healer.

The wise healer may now tell the wounded part how it would have prevented the injury from occurring had they been the parent in charge at that time. The healer may also say what they would have done to soothe and comfort the injured child if the injury were not preventable. Essentially, the wise man or woman is modeling a new option; through imagination, a new experience of hope is offered to the injured self, full of possibility and potential. The injured aspects of the self begin to develop trust and hope that the adult in charge today (the wise man or woman) has the intentions and means to protect, prevent, and assuage pain. Presented with this alternative perspective, the wounded self is given a choice of internal drivers; they get to choose to be driven by the old belief structures set up in childhood or the new narrative of the wise healer.

9. **Translate this healing into day-to-day life.** You can begin to identify current self-defeating patterns, behaviors, and thoughts that may have developed around your woundings. You can examine the health of these patterns, the underlying assumptions and beliefs that sustain these patterns, and explore alternative perspectives, allowing for growth beyond survival.

