

MY EARLY RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGE

Our early experiences with our caretakers influence whom we choose as a partner in our adult life – and the quality of the relationship we will have with them.

This exercise will help you discover the childhood challenge that determines the frustrations and desires you experience as you interact with significant others in the present.

Study the ten items in the two boxes below. **Select and CIRCLE () the ONE (and only ONE)** that most represents your greatest early challenge.



If none of them describe your early challenge, write one that does in the box marked "other."

When the major caretaker was...	
INTRUSIVE	NEGLECTFUL
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To get free from feeling controlled by others.• To express my own thoughts rather than what I should think.• To express what I felt rather than what I should feel.• To experience my thoughts and feelings as important.• To do what I wanted to do rather than what I ought to.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To experience feeling seen and valued rather than invisible.• To be approached by others rather than feel alone/ abandoned.• To feel wanted and significant as a person.• To get support for what I think or feel.• To get someone interested in what I want and like.
OTHER	
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MY EARLY RELATIONSHIP NEED

The early relational challenge you identified on the previous page resulted in a relational need that you brought into your adult relationships. It is especially active in your adult intimate relationships and it also shows up in all your significant relationships.

Study the ten items in the two boxes below. **Select and CIRCLE () the ONE (and only ONE)** that best describes what you needed most from significant people in your early life.



If none of them describe your early challenge, write one that does in the box marked "other."

When the major caretaker was...	
INTRUSIVE	NEGLECTFUL
I Needed:	I Needed:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To have space and time to myself on a regular basis.• To experience trust from others in my thinking and my decisions.• To be asked what I feel and what I want.• To experience genuine and reliable warmth when I need it.• To experience what I do and want is valued by others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To experience a show of interest in me when I am talking• To be responded to when I ask for it.• To ask me what I want, feel and think and respond.• To show curiosity about my experiences in life.• To get love and gentle touch frequently and without having to ask.
OTHER	
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PRACTICE:

SHARING EARLY RELATIONSHIP CHALLENGE AND NEED

MAKING AN APPOINTMENT



I would like to talk about my early challenges and the needs I brought to our relationship. Is now a good time?

Yes. I'm available now.



RECEIVER

CONNECTING NON-VERBALLY

Make eye contact and take three deep breaths in sync.

SHARING THE APPRECIATION



Before I start, I would like to share something I appreciate about you which is...

You want to express an appreciation of me which is...



RECEIVER

SHARING YOUR EARLY CHALLENGE



When I was a child, I lived with caretakers who were generally _____
(pick Neglectful or Intrusive)
and my relational challenge with them was to _____.

MIRRORING THE EARLY CHALLENGE

Let me see if I've got it. You said when you were a child, you lived with caretakers who were _____ and your challenge with them was to _____.
Did I get it?



RECEIVER



SENDER

Yes, you got it
-or-
You got most of it. I also said...

Continue mirroring and checking for accuracy until the Sender says, "You got it."



RECEIVER

Is there more about that?
Check for accuracy and continue asking, "Is there more about that?" until the Sender says, "There is no more."



RECEIVER



SENDER

And when I remember that, I feel...

Mirror the feelings:
And when you remember that you feel...

Check for accuracy: Did I get it?



RECEIVER



A NOTE TO THE RECEIVER:

If you get on overload, raise your hand and say: "I'm on overload, let me try to mirror you back so far."

Continue mirroring, checking for accuracy, and inviting "more" until Sender says: "There is no more about that," or "That's all for now."



RECEIVER

SHARING THE EARLY RELATIONSHIP NEED



SENDER

What I needed most from them was _____. Not getting that from them, I brought it to our relationship.

MIRRORING THE EARLY RELATIONSHIP NEED

Let me see if I've got it. What you needed most from your caretakers was _____. Not getting that from them, you brought _____ to our relationship.



RECEIVER

Check for accuracy:
Did I get it?



RECEIVER



SENDER

Yes, you got it
-or-
Yes, and I also said....

Continue mirroring and checking for accuracy until the Sender says,
"You got it."



RECEIVER

Show curiosity and ask:
Is there more about that?
Mirror and check for accuracy until the Sender says,
"There is no more about that."



RECEIVER

SUMMARIZING

Let me see if I got all of that.
In summary, your caretakers
were generally _____ and
the relational challenge you had
with them was to _____.



RECEIVER

When you remember that
you feel _____.



RECEIVER

What you needed from them
was _____, and not getting it from
them, you brought _____
to our relationship.



RECEIVER

Check for accuracy:
Did I get it?



RECEIVER



SENDER

*Listen to the summary and
verify if accurate. Yes, you got me.*

-or-

The part you got was... and I also said...

VALIDATING

You make sense, and what makes sense
is that if your caretakers were _____,
that your challenge would have been
_____ and that your relationship need
would be _____.

It also makes sense that not getting
that in your early years, that you would
bring it to our relationship.

Is that an accurate validation?



RECEIVER



SENDER

*Receive the validation
and verify if accurate.*

EMPATHIZING

And given that, I can imagine that if your relationship need to _____ was met, you would feel _____ (*glad, relieved, happy, connected, heard, etc.*)

Is that your feeling?
Are there other feelings?



RECEIVER



SENDER

Yes (*or, I also feel ...*)

CLOSING DECLARATIONS

Thank you for sharing with me your unmet need caused by your childhood challenges. I want very much for you to have your needs met in our relationship.



RECEIVER



SENDER

Thank you for listening and for wanting to understand this about me – and for helping me with it.

Couples: Give each other a one-minute, full-body hug

Non-romantic partners: Make a simple touch gesture to seal the connection, like a handshake or high-five.

SWITCHING ROLES

When all the steps are completed, switch roles and repeat the process.

SUMMARY OF EARLY CHALLENGES AND RELATIONSHIP NEEDS

Instructions: Now that you are familiar with the relational challenges you and your partner had with your caretakers, summarize them below.

My early challenge was to _____

_____ (challenge circled on page 19) and the relational need I brought to our relationship is _____

_____ (need circled on page 20).

My partner's early challenge was to (challenge s/he circled on page 19) _____

_____ and the relational need my partner brought to our relationship is _____

_____ (need circled on page 20).

I commit to co-creating a relationship in which both our childhood relational needs will be met.

Signed _____