

Workbook Chapter Thirty-Two Live An Authentic Life

Self-Assessment Tools:

Re-membering Your Authentic Self: 12 Steps

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A major goal of this book is to teach you how to re-member your authentic self. I will outline this process briefly and then discuss each step more completely. I have witnessed clients recapitulate much of this whole process in one therapy session, even though I recognize that the process itself can take a lifetime to complete.

The process is described as a map and not as the territory, which each must experience in our unique way. The following are the “new 12 steps” to re-membering of your authentic self. They are:

1. Admitting that you are powerless to change your compulsive and addictive behaviors (co-dependency, counter-dependency, alcoholism, drug or substance abuse, dysfunctional behavior patterns) without some help. Removing your denial and admitting that you need help is the biggest step in this whole process.
2. Committing yourself to learning to identify the unresolved issues you learned from your family of origin.
3. Learning to recognize your family patterns as they occur in your present relationships.
4. Learning to feel and express completely the repressed and/or denied feelings from your childhood.
5. Developing a new understanding of what really happened to you as a child.
6. Developing new feelings connected to what really happened to you as a child.
7. Learning to take responsibility for your new thoughts and feelings. This means taking charge of your life and no longer expecting someone else to do it for you.
8. Developing a new picture of your family of origin and your role in that family without feelings of hurt or condemnation.
9. Feeling compassion for your parents and for yourself as imperfect human beings.
10. Accepting your parents and yourself just the way that you and they are.
11. Forgiving your parents and yourself. This means to “give back” to them what is rightfully theirs and give back to you what is rightfully yours.
12. Restoring the wholeness of your mind, body and spirit through the connection with your authentic self.

Case Example

Bob’s mother had postpartum depression just after his birth. His older siblings and the mother’s sisters helped care for him during her convalescence. Bob’s mother was never able to meet many of his emotional needs, and he described his most common feeling as feeling “lost.” He developed anxious behaviors when his older siblings began to leave home to attend college, and he suffered a major episode of post-traumatic stress at the age of 12 when his dog died.

At some point, Bob decided that his birth trauma was the cause of his mother's inability to connect with him and began to expect to be abandoned by someone close to him. He developed a strong sense of self-blaming related to his abandonment experiences that left him with lowered self-esteem. As an adult, Bob found himself drawn to women who symbolically represented mother figures and who suddenly left him.

When his wife decided to enroll in graduate school, it created an intense conflict inside Bob and he fell into a depression that he could not shake. It created a serious conflict that threatened to end the relationship. He finally sought therapy with the hope of getting support to convince his wife to reverse her decision about beginning graduate school.

Through his therapy, Bob came to see that his over-reaction to his wife's decision to go to graduate school was connected to an early abandonment he experienced with his mother in the first year of his life (you are never upset for the reason you think you are). Bob was finally able to resolve his conflict, and was able to accept his wife's decision and to support her emotionally and financially in this decision.