



Deep Release  
training counselling

*Another*

**FIVE WAYS**

of working with  
the Inner Child

a mini e-guide for counsellors



[deeprelease.org.uk](http://deeprelease.org.uk)

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# WHY INNER CHILD WORK?

Many of the emotional struggles people experience in adulthood can often be traced back to early experiences and relationships. Inner child work is a gentle and compassionate therapeutic approach that helps clients reconnect with younger parts of themselves that may still carry hurt, fear, loneliness, shame, or unmet emotional needs from childhood.

The “inner child” is not about being childish or regressing. Instead, it refers to the emotional self that developed through early Attachment experiences, family relationships, and the messages we received about ourselves and the world around us.

As John Bowlby’s Attachment theory showed, our earliest relationships shape our sense of safety, connection, and self-worth (Bowlby, 1988). When children experience inconsistency, criticism, emotional neglect, trauma, or a lack of emotional attunement, they often develop protective ways of coping in order to feel safe or accepted.

These strategies may once have helped them survive emotionally, but can later create difficulties in adult life and relationships.



# WHY INNER CHILD WORK?

Clients may present with patterns such as:

- People-pleasing
- Fear of rejection or abandonment
- Perfectionism
- Difficulty setting boundaries
- Shame or harsh self-criticism
- Emotional overwhelm or dysregulation
- Anxiety or hypervigilance
- Difficulty trusting others
- Feeling “not good enough”

Time and time again, we see how powerful it can be for clients to finally have their emotional pain recognised and validated - sometimes for the very first time. Many clients have spent years minimising their experiences, feeling misunderstood, or believing their needs were “too much.” Inner child work creates space for those younger parts to be seen, heard, understood, and responded to with compassion rather than judgement.

Often, it is not only the original wound that causes pain, but the lifelong experience of having that pain dismissed, ignored, or unmet. When clients begin to gently connect with these younger parts of themselves, there can be a profound sense of relief, grief, safety, and self-understanding.



# WHY INNER CHILD WORK?

Inner child work helps clients explore these patterns with curiosity and kindness, encouraging clients to understand why certain emotional responses developed, and to begin meeting those younger emotional needs in healthier and more nurturing ways.

Inner child work can support clients to:

- Develop greater self-compassion
- Understand emotional triggers
- Improve emotional regulation
- Build healthier Attachment patterns
- Reconnect with authenticity, creativity, and play
- Process unresolved grief or trauma
- Create a more nurturing internal dialogue
- Strengthen self-worth and emotional safety

For counsellors, inner child work offers a warm, relational, and trauma-informed framework for understanding Attachment wounds, emotional survival strategies, and deeply held beliefs about self and others, while helping clients develop a kinder and more compassionate relationship with themselves - one where they can begin offering the care, emotional safety, validation, and understanding that may have been missing earlier in life.



# WHY INNER CHILD WORK?

## Connecting With Our Own Inner Child

As counsellors, taking time to reflect on our own inner child can help deepen empathy, self-awareness, and relational attunement.



Spend a few moments considering:

- What was I like as a child?
- What emotional needs were or weren't met?
- What messages did I learn about emotions or vulnerability?
- Which younger parts of me still show up today?

You may also wish to imagine yourself at a younger age and gently ask: what did this child most need to hear or feel?

Notice any emotions, memories, or body sensations that arise, approaching them with kindness rather than judgement.

Inner child work reminds us that many coping strategies began as ways of surviving emotionally.

# INTRODUCING INNER CHILD WORK SAFELY AND HELPFULLY

Often, clients themselves begin to give small clues that inner child work may be helpful. This can happen naturally within the therapeutic relationship, particularly when clients speak about feeling “stuck,” emotionally reactive, deeply self-critical, or as though part of them still feels very young, unseen, or unsafe.

Clients may describe patterns such as people-pleasing, fear of rejection, shame, abandonment fears, or difficulties regulating emotions. Sometimes they may speak about childhood experiences directly, while others may simply express a longing to feel cared for, accepted, or emotionally secure.

There is rarely a need to rush into introducing inner child work. Instead, it can be helpful to stay curious and notice whether themes around unmet needs, younger emotional parts, or early relational wounds begin to emerge naturally in the work.

Readiness is often less about a client being “prepared” to revisit childhood, and more about whether enough emotional safety, trust, and stability has been built within the therapeutic relationship. Clients benefit from feeling grounded, supported, and able to regulate difficult emotions before exploring deeper vulnerabilities.



# INTRODUCING INNER CHILD WORK SAFELY AND HELPFULLY

Sometimes, simply wondering gently alongside the client can open the door:

*“I wonder if part of you learned this much earlier in life?”*

*“Does this feeling feel familiar or younger in any way?”*

In the following pages, we will explore a number of gentle and supportive ways of working with the inner child, helping clients build greater self-awareness, emotional safety, self-compassion, and connection with the younger parts of themselves.

## Tips for Introducing Inner Child Work



- Follow the client’s language and pace.
- Stay curious about emotional reactions that feel “bigger” than the current situation.
- Notice when clients speak about feeling small, unseen, unsafe, or “too much.”
- Remember that protective behaviours often developed for good reasons and deserve compassion, not judgement.
- Inner child work can be woven into existing therapeutic approaches rather than becoming a separate “technique.”
- Small moments of validation and attunement within the therapeutic relationship can be deeply reparative in themselves.
- Clients do not need detailed childhood memories for this work to be meaningful.
- Be mindful of your own emotional responses and younger parts that may become activated in the work.
- Sometimes simply helping a client feel emotionally met in the present moment is inner child work.

# 1) LEFT/RIGHT HAND DIALOGUES

This exercise involves writing a dialogue between the adult self and the inner child using different hands.



Typically, the dominant hand is used for the adult voice, while the non-dominant hand is used for the inner child. The non-dominant hand often feels slower, less controlled, and more emotionally expressive, which can help clients connect with younger emotional parts in a softer and less defended way.

This exercise is not about neat handwriting or “getting it right.” Instead, it is about allowing space for curiosity, emotional expression, and compassionate connection.

You may wish to introduce the exercise gently by explaining that different parts of ourselves can hold different feelings, beliefs, or needs. Some clients may find this surprisingly emotional, while others experience it as playful, comforting, or insightful.

## Introducing the Exercise

Counsellors may wish to begin with grounding and emotional regulation before starting. Invite clients to notice their breathing, feet on the floor, or sense of safety in the room.

You might begin with prompts such as:

Adult Self (dominant hand):

How are you feeling today?

What would you like me to know?

What have you been carrying for a long time?

# 1) LEFT/RIGHT HAND DIALOGUES



Inner Child (non-dominant hand):

I feel...

I needed...

I was scared when...

I wish someone had...

Often, the responses that emerge are simpler, more emotional, and deeply honest.

## What This Work Can Offer

Clients frequently describe feeling surprised by the emotions, memories, or unmet needs that emerge through this exercise. For some, it may be the first time they have consciously offered kindness or attention to younger parts of themselves. Many clients find it healing simply to feel listened to internally.

## Working Safely

As with all inner child work, pacing and emotional safety are important. Some clients may access strong emotions, grief, or memories during the exercise, while others may initially struggle to connect with younger feelings at all. There is no “right way” to do the exercise. Short responses, uncertainty, or emotional numbness can all be meaningful and valid. It can also help to gently close the exercise by inviting the adult self to offer reassurance, support, or comfort to the inner child part.

For example:

“I’m here with you now.”

“You didn’t deserve to go through that alone.”

“Your feelings make sense.”

“You matter.”

# 1) LEFT/RIGHT HAND DIALOGUES



You could also offer these prompts to a client

## What brought you joy?

- What did you love doing?
- What made you feel alive?
- What did you find funny?
- What made you feel free?
- Where did you feel safest?

## Dreams & Expectations

- What did you think I would become?
- What did you imagine our grown-up life would be like?
- What did you hope for us?
- What worried you about our future?

## Reflect

What feelings arise in me when clients speak from younger, vulnerable parts of themselves?

Do I find myself wanting to rescue, reassure quickly, or move away from difficult emotions?

How comfortable am I sitting with grief, dependency, fear, or unmet Attachment needs in the room?



## Tip

Clients might worry they are “making it up” during dialogue exercises. Reassure them that the goal is not accuracy or perfect memory, but creating space for emotional expression, curiosity, and compassionate self-connection.



## 2) THE CORE NEEDS CARDS & QUESTIONNAIRE

The Core Needs Cards (available at [pact-resources.co.uk](http://pact-resources.co.uk) and as an online webapp at [pact-resources-online.co.uk](http://pact-resources-online.co.uk)) are a gentle and respectful way of helping clients explore the emotional and relational needs that are essential for healthy development, emotional wellbeing, and secure Attachment.

Using a mixture of original artwork by Pauline Andrew alongside photographic imagery, the cards are designed to feel accessible, reflective, and emotionally safe. They can help clients begin identifying which needs may have been met well in childhood, and which perhaps felt missing, inconsistent, or emotionally unavailable.



## 2) THE CORE NEEDS CARDS & QUESTIONNAIRE

Importantly, this approach allows clients to explore these experiences without immediately moving into blame, criticism, or “parent-bashing.” For many clients - particularly those from cultures, family systems, or backgrounds where loyalty, respect, or honouring parents is deeply important - this can make the work feel far safer and more manageable emotionally.

Often, clients can recognise that parents or caregivers may have met practical or physical needs very well, while emotional needs such as comfort, emotional attunement, reassurance, validation, affection, protection, or feeling emotionally seen may have been more difficult to access.

This can create a much more balanced and compassionate conversation:

“My parents worked incredibly hard for us...”

“...and I still didn’t always feel emotionally safe or understood.”

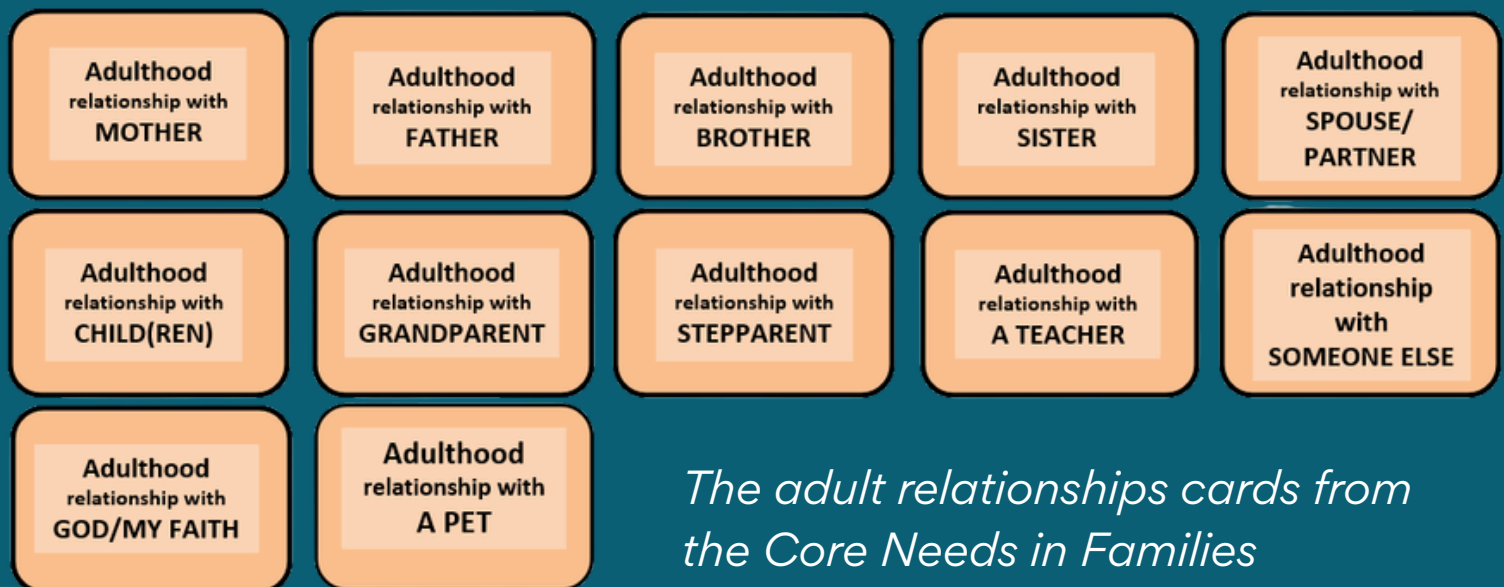
Holding both experiences at once can help reduce shame, defensiveness, or guilt, while allowing space for honest emotional reflection.



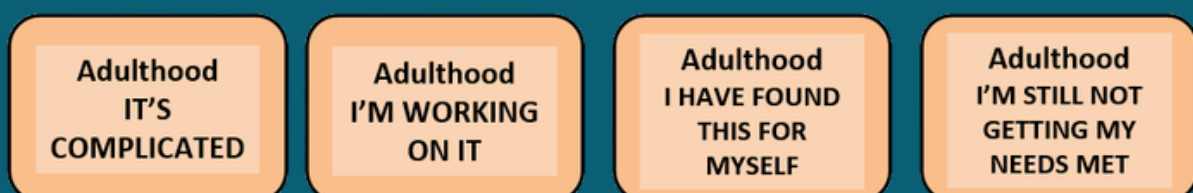
## 2) THE CORE NEEDS CARDS & QUESTIONNAIRE

The cards can be used in many different ways. You might invite clients to:

- Sort needs into categories such as “met,” “partly met,” or “unmet”
- Match label cards with the people who met those needs most consistently
- Reflect on which needs feel most important currently
- Explore which needs feel easiest or hardest to acknowledge
- Compare childhood needs with present-day emotional needs
- Notice emotional reactions, memories, or body sensations that arise
- Explore how unmet needs may still influence relationships or coping strategies today



*The adult relationships cards from the Core Needs in Families*



## 2) THE CORE NEEDS CARDS & QUESTIONNAIRE

Clients may notice that different people met different needs at different times. For example, a parent may have provided safety and practical care, while another family member, teacher, sibling, grandparent, or friend may have offered emotional warmth, encouragement, comfort, or understanding.

This can help clients develop a more balanced and nuanced understanding of their experiences. Rather than viewing caregivers as entirely “good” or “bad,” clients are able to gently explore where certain needs were met, where some may have been missing, and how this may still affect them emotionally today.

The exercise can also help identify relational strengths and protective experiences alongside wounds or unmet needs, supporting a more compassionate and grounded exploration of Attachment and emotional development.

Clients are often surprised by how emotional or validating this exercise can feel. Simply naming a need - perhaps for comfort, reassurance, consistency, affection, or protection - can bring awareness to experiences that may never previously have been recognised. The visual and tactile nature of the cards can also help clients who struggle to verbalise emotions directly. Sometimes selecting an image or phrase feels safer than talking openly at first.

### TIP

We might gently and curiously enquire:

- What hurt you most?
- When did you feel most alone?
- What were you afraid of?
- What did you learn to hide?



## 2) THE CORE NEEDS CARDS & QUESTIONNAIRE

As with all inner child and Attachment-based work, pacing and emotional safety are important. Counsellors should remain aware of shame responses, emotional overwhelm, or protective defences that may emerge when discussing unmet needs.

### Using the Core Needs Questionnaire

If you do not have access to the Core Needs Cards, similar themes can still be explored using the free Core Needs Questionnaire included within this booklet (full page printable version on following page). The questionnaire can provide a gentle starting point for conversations around Attachment, unmet needs, emotional development, self-worth, and relational patterns - particularly for clients who may initially find direct inner child work overwhelming or unfamiliar.

## The Core Needs Questionnaire

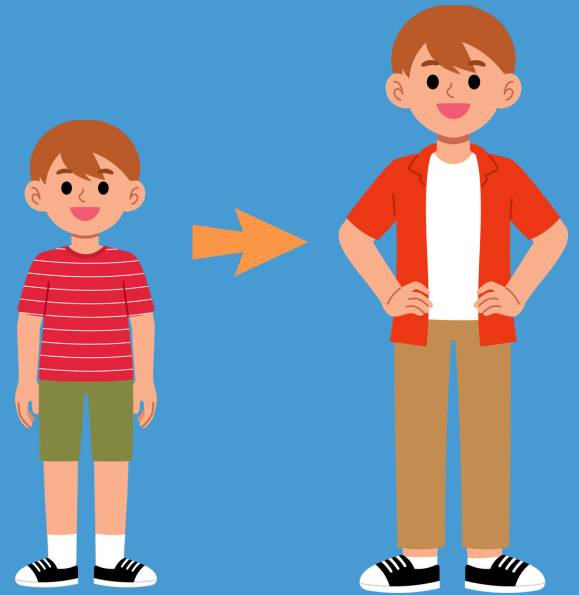
NEED FOR  Give percentage values for each one	I got this from my MOTHER			I got this from my FATHER			I got this from SOMEONE ELSE			I got this from my FAITH/OTHER			How I feel about myself now
	As a child	As a teen	As an adult	As a child	As a teen	As an adult	As a child	As a teen	As an adult	As a child	As a teen	As an adult	
<b>Acceptance: I am ok!</b> <i>I'm able to be my true self</i>													
<b>Praise: I did well!</b> <i>I can accept compliments</i>													
<b>Appreciation: I am valued</b> <i>I have self-worth</i>													
<b>Encouragement: I can do it!</b> <i>I have self-belief/can take risks</i>													
<b>Emotional Security</b> <i>My feelings are validated</i>													
<b>Financial Security</b> <i>I have financial support /backup</i>													
<b>Physical Security</b> <i>I am protected from harm; my boundaries are respected</i>													
<b>Comfort - emotional</b> <i>My feelings are empathically respected and understood</i>													
<b>Comfort - physical</b> <i>I am safely held and soothed</i>													
<b>Other</b>													

# The Core Needs Questionnaire

NEED FOR  Give percentage values for each one	I got this from my MOTHER			I got this from my FATHER			I got this from SOMEONE ELSE			I got this from my FAITH/OTHER			How I feel about myself now	
	As a child	As a teen	As an adult	As a child	As a teen	As an adult	As a child	As a teen	As an adult	As a child	As a teen	As an adult		
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### 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF

Many clients carry a deep sense of rejection that did not begin in adulthood, but much earlier in life. Often, the rejected child becomes the rejected teenager, and eventually the rejected adult - creating a snowball effect where early emotional wounds continue to grow and shape identity, relationships, and self-worth over time (George, 2025)



Rejection in childhood does not always come from obvious abuse or bullying. It can develop through emotional neglect, criticism, inconsistent caregiving, feeling unwanted, not being emotionally understood, being compared to siblings, feeling “too much,” or having emotions repeatedly dismissed or minimised. Over time, children often begin to internalise these experiences, forming beliefs such as:

- I’m not important
- I’m too much
- I’m not lovable
- Something must be wrong with me

Bowlby’s Attachment theory highlights how early relational experiences shape a child’s internal working model of self and others (Bowlby, 1988).

When children repeatedly feel emotionally rejected or unseen, they may begin to expect rejection within future relationships and social interactions.

### 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF

As children move into adolescence, these wounds often deepen. The teenage years naturally bring greater sensitivity around identity, belonging, peer relationships, and self-esteem. If rejection wounds are already present, teenagers may become especially vulnerable to shame, isolation, bullying, emotional withdrawal, or intense fears of not fitting in.

For some young people, this may lead to people-pleasing, perfectionism, masking, or constantly seeking approval. Others may cope through anger, withdrawal, risk-taking, self-harm, emotional shutdown, or pushing others away before they themselves can be rejected.

Over time, these experiences can become deeply embedded within adult life and relationships. Clients may present with:

- Fear of abandonment or rejection
- Difficulty trusting others
- Low self-worth
- Sensitivity to criticism
- Social anxiety or hypervigilance
- Relationship difficulties
- Emotional dependency or avoidance
- Perfectionism
- Chronic shame or self-criticism
- Feeling fundamentally “unlovable”



### 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF

Allan Schore's work highlights how repeated experiences of relational stress or emotional misattunement can affect emotional regulation and the developing sense of self (Schore, 2003). Similarly, Gilbert's compassion-focused work explores how shame and threat systems become activated through experiences of rejection and criticism (Gilbert, 2009).

One of the most painful aspects of rejection wounds is that clients often continue rejecting themselves internally long after the original experiences occurred. The inner dialogue may become critical, dismissive, or emotionally abandoning in ways that mirror earlier relationships. Inner child work can help clients begin to recognise and gently reconnect with the rejected child or teenager within them. Often, healing begins not through "fixing" these parts, but through finally offering them understanding, compassion, emotional safety, and validation.

#### **Shame, Rejection, and Nathanson's Compass of Shame**

For many clients, experiences of rejection, criticism, emotional neglect, or not feeling "good enough" can lead to deeply rooted shame. Unlike guilt, which relates to something we have done, shame often relates to who we believe we are. Clients carrying shame may quietly hold beliefs such as:

There's something wrong with me.

I'm not lovable.

I don't belong.

If people really knew me, they would reject me.

### 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF

Nathanson's Compass of Shame (1992) offers a helpful framework for understanding the different ways we learn to cope with painful feelings of shame and rejection.

According to Nathanson, when shame feels overwhelming or unsafe to experience directly, people often move into protective coping responses. These are commonly grouped into four patterns:

#### **Withdrawal**

The person pulls away emotionally or socially in order to protect themselves from further hurt or rejection.

This may present as:

- Isolation
- Emotional shutdown
- Avoiding intimacy
- Staying quiet or “invisible”
- Anxiety in relationships or groups

#### **Attack Self**

The shame becomes internalised and directed inward.

Clients may experience:

- Harsh self-criticism
- Low self-worth
- Self-blame
- Perfectionism
- Self-harm or self-punishment
- Feeling fundamentally flawed

### 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF

This pattern is often seen in clients who learned early in life that their emotions, needs, or mistakes were unacceptable.

#### **Avoidance**

The person attempts to escape or numb feelings of shame altogether.

This can include:

- Overworking
- Addictions
- Busyness
- Humour or deflection
- Emotional detachment
- People-pleasing or masking

Often, clients may appear highly functioning while feeling deeply disconnected internally.

#### **Attack Other**

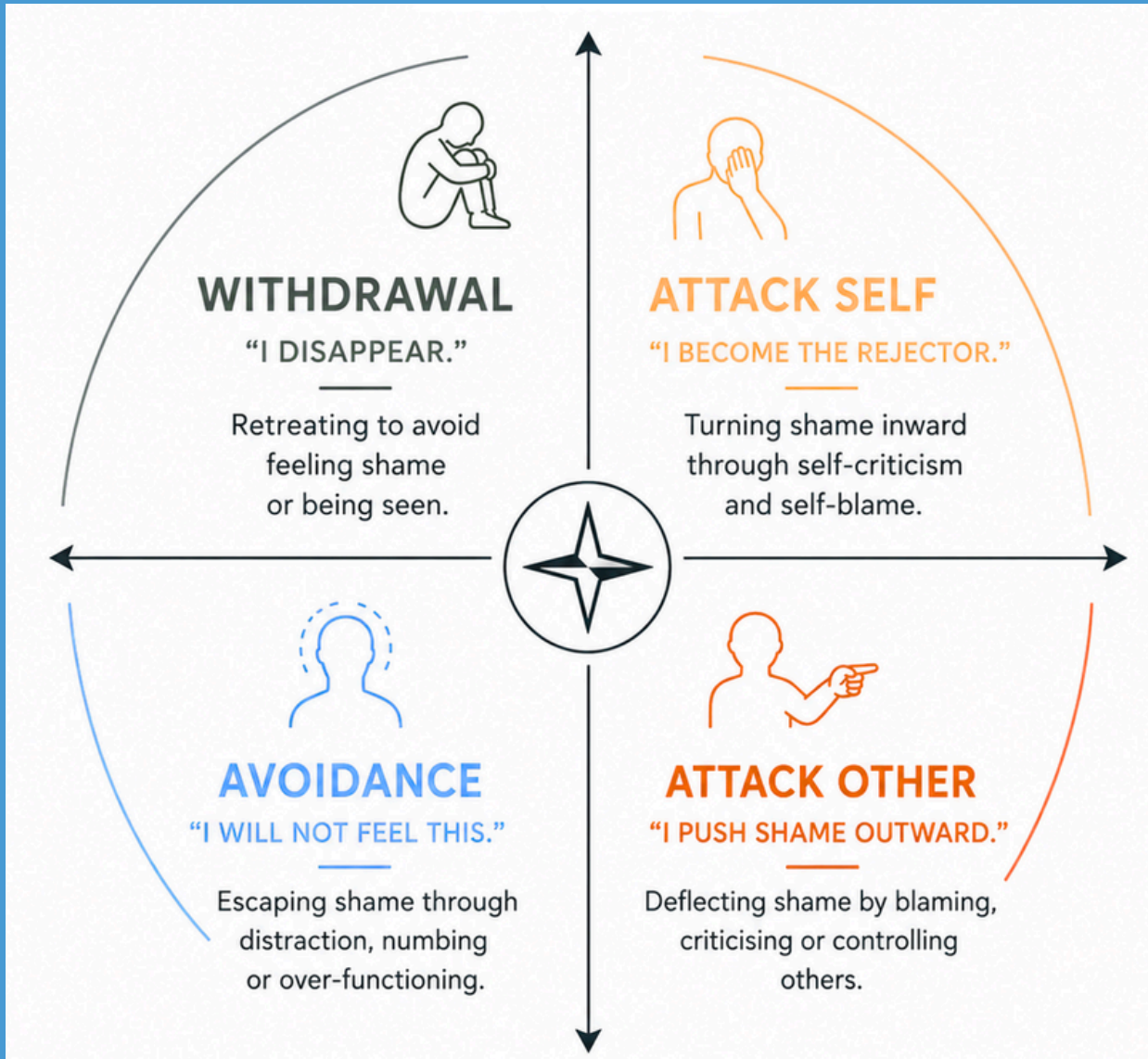
The shame is projected outward onto others.

This may present through:

- Anger or blame
- Criticism
- Defensiveness
- Controlling behaviours
- Aggression
- Pushing others away before feeling rejected themselves

Underneath these responses there is often significant vulnerability, fear, or hurt.

### 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF



Understanding the Compass of Shame can help counsellors recognise that many difficult or protective behaviours are rooted not in “badness,” but in attempts to manage painful feelings of shame, rejection, and emotional disconnection.

### 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF

Clients may move between different points of the compass depending on the situation, relationships, or perceived threat. For example, someone may withdraw in intimate relationships, attack themselves internally, and avoid vulnerability through busyness or perfectionism.

Inner child work can help clients begin to recognise the younger rejected or shamed parts beneath these coping responses. Rather than viewing behaviours through judgement, clients can begin to understand them as protective adaptations developed in response to emotional pain.

#### **Reflect**

How might protective shame responses be misunderstood as resistance, avoidance, anger, or “difficult behaviour”?

What shame responses do I notice within myself when I feel criticised, rejected, or emotionally exposed?

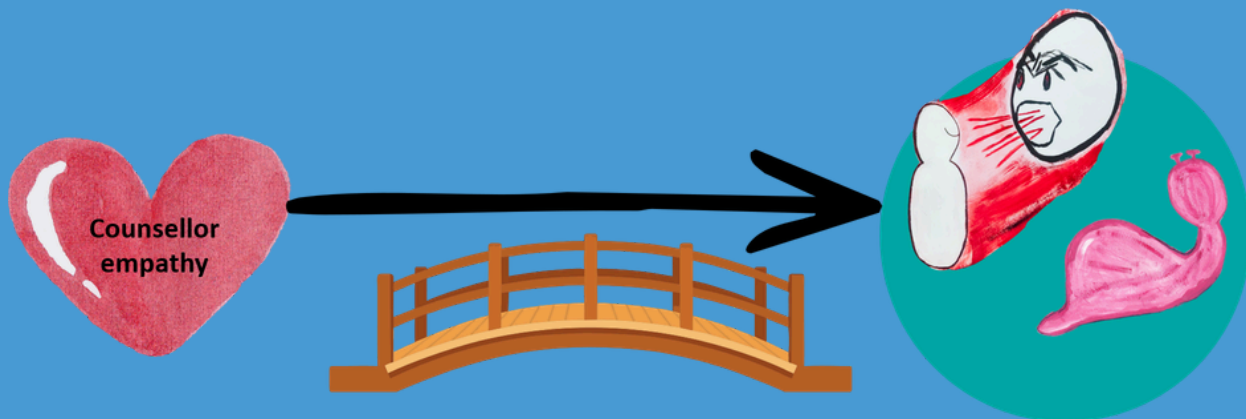


#### **Gentle Reminder**

Behind many shame-based coping strategies is a younger part that learned it was unsafe to feel vulnerable, emotionally needy, or imperfect. Meeting these parts with compassion rather than judgement can be deeply reparative.



### 3. THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF: BUILDING A BRIDGE



Rather than trying to “fix” these parts, inner child work invites us to begin building a bridge towards them through empathic understanding, compassion, and emotional safety. This bridge can help clients move from: “What’s wrong with me?” towards “What happened to me, and what did I need at the time?”

You may like to use the four points below with Nathanson’s Compass of Shame (image and table on the following pages) to help clients gently explore how shame, rejection, and protective coping responses may show up within their own lives, relationships, emotions, and self-talk.

- 1. Think of a moment (not necessarily a major one) where you felt rejected, misunderstood, criticised, dismissed, emotionally exposed, or somehow not fully received.**
- 2. Which of these protections (compass points) feels most familiar?**
- 3. Can you sense when this response may first have become important?**
- 4. What happened when this part of you wasn’t protected?**

# 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN: BUILDING A BRIDGE

## NATHANSON'S COMPASS OF SHAME



# 3) THE REJECTED CHILD/TEEN SELF: BUILDING A BRIDGE

When shame or rejection is triggered, I tend to...

Based on Donald L. Nathanson's Compass of Shame



## Avoid

- distract myself
- overwork
- numb
- over-function
- intellectualise or minimise

*“I will not feel this”*



## Attack Other

- become defensive
- criticise
- blame
- become angry
- try to regain control

*“I push shame outward”*



## Withdraw

- pull away
- go quiet
- isolate
- shut down
- avoid being seen

*“I disappear”*



## Attack Self

- criticise myself
- feel defective
- blame myself
- become perfectionistic
- turn anger inward

*“I reject myself”*



## 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

Working creatively with cards and images can offer clients a gentle and accessible way into emotional exploration. Many people find it difficult to talk directly about childhood experiences, Attachment wounds, shame, or unmet emotional needs, particularly when these experiences have been minimised, dismissed, or difficult to put into words.

Images can help bypass some of these barriers.

Often, clients respond emotionally to an image before they fully understand why. A picture may evoke memories, feelings, body sensations, younger parts, or relational experiences that sit beyond immediate verbal awareness. This can help clients connect with emotions and experiences in a less pressured and more emotionally contained way.

For some clients, it might be easier to say:

“This image feels like me...”

rather than

“This is how I feel.”



## 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

The World of the Inner Child cards (available to pre-order from [pact-resources.co.uk](http://pact-resources.co.uk)) were created as a gentle and creative way of helping clients explore childhood experiences, emotional wounds, Attachment patterns, coping strategies, and unmet needs through imagery, reflection, and compassionate understanding.

### Exploring the Feeling Child

Many of the cards focus on emotional experiences commonly carried by the inner child.

Clients may identify with:

- A Free, creative child part
- Fearful parts that learned the world felt unsafe or unpredictable
- Anxious parts that became overly responsible for others
- Angry parts that never felt heard or emotionally understood
- Sad or lonely parts carrying grief, loss, or unmet emotional needs
- Frozen or dissociated parts that shut down emotionally to survive overwhelming experiences
- Secret-keeping parts carrying shame, fear, or silence



## 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

The imagery can help clients externalise and safely observe these parts rather than becoming overwhelmed by them.

Gentle questions may include:

What stands out to you in this image?

How does this younger part seem to feel?

What might this child need emotionally?

Does this image connect with any part of your own experience?

### Exploring Family Dynamics and Identity

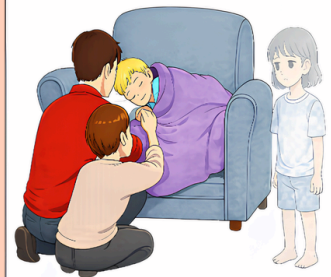
Some cards explore the roles children adopt within families and relationships.

Clients may recognise experiences such as:

- Becoming emotionally responsible for others
- Feeling overlooked or invisible
- Changing themselves to gain acceptance or belonging
- Losing a sense of identity within enmeshed family dynamics
- Carrying pressure, expectations, or adult responsibilities too early

The cards can help clients gently reflect on how these early roles may still influence adult relationships, emotional responses, boundaries, self-worth, or coping strategies today.

THE GLASS CHILD



*My sibling's needs are bigger than mine; they don't see me.*

THE MIDDLE CHILD



*I'm not really seen.*

## 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

### Working With Internal Messages

The “Messages in my Head” cards can help clients identify internal scripts, beliefs, or injunctions that may have developed during childhood.

Clients may begin recognising messages such as:

- Don't feel
- Don't be needy
- Don't belong
- Don't make mistakes
- Don't trust



Exploring these messages can help clients understand how shame, self-criticism, perfectionism, people-pleasing, emotional shutdown, or fear of vulnerability may have developed as protective adaptations.

Counsellors can gently help clients move from:

“What’s wrong with me?”

towards

“What happened to me, and what did I learn about myself?”

## 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

### Introducing Nurture and Compassion

The nurturing cards offer opportunities for clients to experience compassionate, emotionally supportive messages that may have been missing earlier in life.

For some clients, this may feel comforting. For others, receiving kindness, reassurance, or emotional attunement may initially feel unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or even unsafe. Working slowly is important.

The cards can help clients begin developing:

- Self-compassion
- Emotional reassurance
- Validation
- Internal safety
- Gentler self-talk
- Connection with younger emotional parts

Sometimes simply hearing or reading a nurturing message can evoke strong emotional responses, grief, or longing.



# 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

## Working With the Cards

There is no single “correct” way to use the cards. They work best when used flexibly, creatively, and at the client’s pace. Some clients may engage very emotionally and intuitively with the images, while others may prefer a slower, more reflective approach.

Often, simply spreading the cards out and allowing clients time to look through them quietly can begin the process naturally.

Counsellors might invite clients to:

- Choose cards they feel emotionally drawn towards
- Pick images that reflect how they felt as a child or teenager
- Select cards that represent how they feel currently
- Explore which cards feel comforting, upsetting, familiar, or difficult to look at
- Notice which images they avoid or feel disconnected from
- Use the cards to describe relationships, family roles, or emotional experiences



## 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

Clients may also find it helpful to physically sort the cards into piles, for example:

### Possible Sorting Themes

- “This feels like me” / “This doesn’t feel like me”
- Past / Present
- Safe / Unsafe
- Needs met / Needs unmet
- Feelings I could show / Feelings I had to hide
- Parts I accept / Parts I reject
- Protective coping responses
- Cards I relate to strongly / Cards I’m unsure about

Sorting tasks can help clients organise thoughts and feelings in a more contained and manageable way. They can also reveal patterns, themes, contradictions, or emotional conflicts that may otherwise remain unspoken.

Some counsellors may invite clients to:

- Choose one card that represents their wounded child
- Choose another representing the protective adult self
- Explore what the two parts might say to each other
- Select nurturing cards that the younger part most needs to hear
- Build a “story” of childhood experiences through chosen images

# 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

## Gentle Questions You Might Ask:

- What is it about this image that stands out to you?
- Does this card remind you of a feeling, experience, or relationship?
- What might this younger part of you need emotionally?
- Which cards feel easiest to connect with - and which feel more difficult?
- What do you notice happening emotionally or physically as you look at these images?
- If this child could speak, what might they want you to know?

If you don't have access to the cards, you also explore where the inner child might be showing up in the present, using this list below:



## How is my Inner Child showing up now?

- **Relationships**
- **Anxiety**
- **Anger**
- **People pleasing**
- **Perfectionism**
- **Emotional withdrawal**
- **Fear of abandonment**
- **Hyper-vigilance**
- **Overworking**
- **Needing validation**

*do I really belong?  
the world is unsafe  
?*

*fear of rejection  
I must get it right  
?*

*checking...  
performance driven  
am I really (doing) ok?*



## 4) THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

### Helpful Things to Remember

- Allow silence and reflection - clients often need time to emotionally process imagery
- Stay curious rather than overly interpretive
- Follow the client's emotional pace
- Be mindful that some images may evoke grief, shame, fear, or trauma responses
- Grounding and emotional regulation may be needed after deeper exploration
- Clients may initially minimise emotional reactions to cards that feel especially significant
- Gentle humour, warmth, and creativity can help clients feel safer within the work



### Working Safely

As with all inner child work, emotional safety and pacing are essential. Some images may evoke strong emotions, memories, body sensations, shame, grief, or younger wounded parts. Remain aware of signs of overwhelm, dissociation, emotional flooding, or withdrawal, helping clients stay grounded and emotionally supported throughout the process.

## 5) MY CHILD SELF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE



Inner child work is not simply about revisiting painful childhood experiences. Over time, the deeper aim is integration - helping clients build a safer, kinder, and more connected relationship with the younger parts of themselves.

Integration gently helps clients move from:

“I need to get rid of these parts of me...”

towards

“These parts belong with me, and they deserve understanding and care.”

This process often unfolds gradually through three interconnected areas:

### **Past - Encounter**

The first stage often involves encountering the inner child or teenager with greater awareness and honesty.

Clients may begin recognising:

- childhood wounds
- unmet emotional needs
- shame and rejection experiences
- protective coping strategies
- emotional pain that has been minimised or hidden



## 5) MY CHILD SELF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

For many people, this can be the first time they have truly acknowledged what the younger self experienced emotionally.

This stage is not about blaming caregivers or becoming stuck in the past. Instead, it is about creating compassionate understanding around experiences that helped shape emotional patterns, beliefs, relationships, and coping responses.

Clients may begin to recognise:

“No wonder I learned to protect myself.”

“No wonder this part of me feels frightened.”

Often, shame begins to soften when experiences are finally recognised and emotionally validated.

### **Present - Discovery**

As awareness grows, clients can begin discovering how these younger parts continue to influence present-day life.

The inner child may appear through:

- people-pleasing
- perfectionism
- fear of rejection
- emotional shutdown
- harsh self-criticism
- anxiety or hypervigilance
- difficulties with trust or boundaries
- longing to feel safe, chosen, or emotionally seen



## 5) MY CHILD SELF

### PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

Clients may also begin noticing moments when younger parts feel activated in relationships, conflict, vulnerability, criticism, or emotional disconnection.

This stage is often about building curiosity and connection rather than judgement.

Over time, we hope clients begin developing a gentler and more compassionate internal relationship with themselves, slowly taking in messages such as:

- You don't have to earn love
- You were always enough
- Your needs matter too
- You don't have to carry those bags anymore
- You are loved exactly as you are
- None of this was your fault
- You can rest now
- I've got you now
- We belong together

For some clients, these messages may initially feel unfamiliar, uncomfortable, or emotionally overwhelming. This is understandable, particularly where shame, neglect, criticism, or rejection have been deeply internalised. Integration takes time.

## 5) MY CHILD SELF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

### **Future - Connection**

The final stage is not about becoming a “perfectly healed” person. Rather, it involves building a more connected, compassionate, and emotionally secure relationship between the adult self and the younger self moving forward.

The inner child no longer needs to remain hidden, silenced, or rejected.

Instead, clients may begin asking:

- How can I care for myself differently now?
- How can I protect vulnerable parts of myself?
- What kind of future feels emotionally safe and meaningful?

It may be also helpful to explore the following using the Left Handed - Right Handed dialogue using the questions below.

Clients may also like to create a small collection of nurturing objects, images, quotes, songs, scents, or comforting activities that help the inner child feel safe, soothed, and emotionally connected.

This can become a practical reminder that comfort and care are allowed now.

### **Integration**

- What future would make you happy?
- What should we never forget again?
- What do you want us to protect?
- What would help you feel seen?



## FINAL THOUGHTS

Inner child work invites us to look beyond behaviours and coping strategies, asking what experiences, emotions, or unmet needs may sit underneath them. At its heart, this work is about compassion, connection, and understanding.

Through gentle exploration, emotional safety, creativity, reflection, and compassionate attunement, clients can begin reconnecting with these younger parts in new ways. Over time, shame may soften, self-understanding may grow, and clients may slowly begin to believe that their feelings, needs, and experiences truly matter.

Inner child work is rarely about “fixing” the child within. More often, it is about no longer rejecting or abandoning the parts of ourselves that needed care all along. This can be long-term work, particularly where Attachment wounds, shame, trauma, or emotional neglect have been present for many years.

As counsellors, we offer presence, curiosity, emotional safety, and compassionate witnessing. Sometimes, the most healing moments occur not through interpretation or advice, but through helping clients feel emotionally seen and understood - perhaps for the very first time.



Ultimately, inner child work reminds us that healing often begins when compassion replaces shame, and connection replaces emotional isolation.

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# CONTINUE YOUR JOURNEY WITH US

We hope you've enjoyed engaging with this resource and that it has offered something useful to take into your practice.

You might choose to revisit these interventions over time, bring them into supervision, or begin to integrate them into your work with clients in ways that feel natural to you.

If you're interested in exploring this approach more deeply, we offer:  
We offer a range of CPD opportunities, including:

- In-depth online and in person training courses exploring many different areas of counselling - theory made easy to understand and apply
- Therapeutic card sets to support creative and relational work
- Books on working creatively
- Training videos
- Tools for working online

For courses visit: [deeprelease.org.uk](https://deeprelease.org.uk)

For resources visit: [pact-resources.co.uk](https://pact-resources.co.uk)

*we look forward to staying in touch!*

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