Deep Release

TRAINING & COUNSELLING

REFLECTIVE PRACTICE JOURNAL FOR COUNSELLORS

Inspired by our
2026 CPD programme

deeprelease.org.uk

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WELCOME!

Whether you've joined us for one workshop or many over the past six months, we're grateful you've chosen to learn with us.

As a small thank you, we've created this reflective mini guide, inspired by the 12 live workshops we've shared so far this year (more to come later this year!).

Together, we've explored Gestalt, dream work, self-harm, creative approaches, spiritual wounds, the first 1000 days from conception, stress and burnout, and much more.

Rather than simply revisiting the content, we've gathered together some of the ideas, questions and themes that have stayed with us, along with space for your own reflections.

We hope you'll dip into it whenever you have a quiet moment. Perhaps it'll accompany a cup of tea, spark a conversation in supervision, or simply encourage you to pause and reflect on your own practice.

If there's a workshop you missed - or one you'd like to experience again - don't forget many recordings are available in our CPD Library, so you can revisit the learning whenever it suits you.

Thank you once again for being part of our community.

We hope this little guide is a reminder of just how much we've explored together, and perhaps inspires what's next.

With love
The Deep Release training team

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1. WORKING WITH GESTALT: AWARENESS IS OFTEN THE BEGINNING OF CHANGE

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts of Gestalt is permission not to rush. Rather than seeking certainty, it invites both therapist and client to become curious about what is unfolding in the present moment. Often it is within that shared curiosity that new understanding begins to emerge.

Rather than becoming preoccupied with why something happened, attention is given to what is being experienced now - emotionally, physically and relationally. This focus on awareness can help clients notice patterns, experiment with new ways of responding and develop a deeper understanding of themselves.

Reflection

Think about one recent client session.

- What did you notice before you understood?
- Were there moments where staying with the experience felt more helpful than analysing it?
- What might you become more aware of in your next session?

Space for notes:

Take this into your next week of practice...
Notice one moment where you find yourself wanting to move quickly to an explanation. What happens if you stay with the experience just a little longer?

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2. WORKING WITH TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS: HOW DO RELATIONAL PATTERNS SHAPE OUR WORK WITH CLIENTS?

At the heart of TA is the concept of three ego states- Parent, Adult and Child.

The Parent reflects the messages, values and beliefs we have internalised from significant people in our lives. The Adult helps us respond to the present moment with reason and awareness, while the Child represents the thoughts, feelings and experiences carried from childhood. We move between these ego states throughout our daily lives, and recognising them can help us better understand our relationships, communication and emotional responses.

Transactional Analysis also introduces the concept of life scripts - the unconscious beliefs and expectations we develop from our earliest experiences, influencing how we see ourselves, what we expect from others and the roles we find ourselves returning to throughout life. Although these patterns may once have helped us make sense of the world, they are not fixed. By bringing them into awareness, therapy creates space to reflect on their meaning, appreciate the purpose they once served and consider new possibilities for relating and responding.

Reflection

- Which ego state do you find yourself working with most often?
- Are there moments where your own responses are worth noticing?
- What helps you remain grounded in Adult?

Space for notes:

Take this into your next week of practice...

Notice one interaction that stays with you. What might it reveal about the patterns, expectations or ways of relating that were present - for you or the other person?

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3. UNDERSTANDING SELF-HARM: LOOKING BEYOND THE BEHAVIOUR

Self-harm can evoke many responses in us as practitioners—concern, uncertainty, a desire to protect, or questions about risk.

While every client's experience is unique, self-harm is often an attempt to cope with overwhelming emotional pain, regulate difficult feelings, or communicate distress that is hard to express in words.

As therapists, our role is not simply to focus on the behaviour itself, but to remain curious about its meaning within that person's life and relationships.

Developing confidence in working with self-harm means balancing empathy with good clinical judgement, while creating a space where clients feel safe enough to explore what lies beneath.

Reflection

How do you notice yourself responding when a client discloses self-harm?

What helps you remain curious rather than moving too quickly into problem-solving?

Where do you feel confident in your knowledge, and where might further learning support your practice?

Space for notes:

Pause and wonder: When someone presents with a behaviour you find difficult to understand, pause before asking "Why?" and instead wonder, "What might this be communicating?"

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4. DREAMS: WHAT CAN DREAMS BRING TO THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP?

Gestalt therapy invites us to approach dreams with curiosity rather than interpretation. Instead of asking "What does this dream mean?", we might ask "What happens if we allow the dream to come alive?"

In this approach, every part of the dream is considered meaningful. A person, an object, a landscape, or even the weather can be explored as though it has its own voice and perspective. By drawing the dream, adding dialogue or speech bubbles, or inviting different elements to 'speak', clients may discover new awareness and unexpected insights.

Rather than searching for the 'correct' interpretation, the emphasis is on the client's own experience and the meanings that emerge through exploration.

Reflection

- Think about a recent dream - your own or one a client has chosen to share.
- Which element of the dream stands out most strongly?
- If that element could speak, what might it say?
- What feelings arise as you imagine giving it a voice?

You don't need to arrive at an explanation. Simply notice what emerges when you stay curious.

Space for notes:

Take this into your next week of practice...

Pay attention to the images that capture your attention - not only in dreams, but in everyday life. What might they be inviting you to reflect on?

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5. SPIRITUAL WOUNDS: WORKING SENSITIVELY WITH FAITH, MEANING AND TRAUMA.

Faith and spirituality can be profound sources of comfort, meaning and resilience.

For some clients, however, spiritual or religious experiences have also been sources of fear, shame, coercion or abuse.

As counsellors, we may meet clients who are navigating the impact of controlling religious environments, spiritual abuse, or the complex process of questioning beliefs that have shaped their identity for many years. These experiences can affect attachment, relationships, self-worth and a person's sense of safety in the world.

Working therapeutically in this area requires sensitivity, cultural humility and an appreciation that healing often involves making space for clients to explore both loss and hope, without imposing our own beliefs or assumptions.

Reflection
Consider your own practice.

- How confident do you feel recognising the signs of spiritual abuse or coercive control?
- How might a client's faith, or loss of faith, influence the way they experience themselves and their relationships?

Space for notes:

Pause and wonder: How have faith, spirituality or belief systems shaped your life or the lives of your clients? Is there anything you feel inspired to learn more about?

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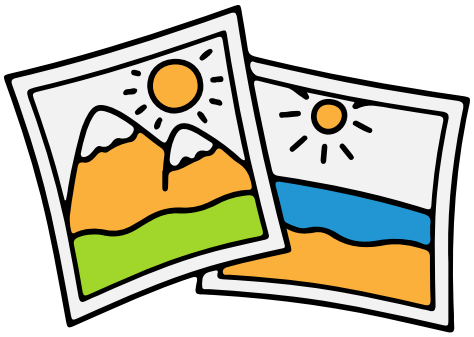
6. WORKING CREATIVELY WITH ARTWORK: OPENING UP NEW CONVERSATIONS

Creativity has long been part of therapeutic practice, not as an end in itself, but as another way of inviting reflection. Working with images, symbols, stories and drawing can open up new conversations and encourage clients to engage with their experiences in different ways.



The focus isn't on artistic ability or producing something 'good'. Instead, creative activities offer an opportunity to pause, notice and reflect. Whether exploring a symbol, responding to a picture card, or working with a fairy tale, the emphasis is on exploration rather than interpretation, trusting the client's own understanding to develop through the creative process.

Reflection
Think about your own therapeutic practice.

- When might a creative approach offer a fresh perspective for a client?
- How comfortable do you feel introducing creative methods into your work?
- What assumptions do you hold about using art, symbols or imagery in therapy?

There are no right or wrong answers - simply an invitation to reflect on what creativity might bring to your practice.

Space for notes:

Over a cup of tea...
Choose a symbol, picture card or piece of artwork and spend a few minutes reflecting on it. You might journal your response, or, if you have the opportunity, explore it with a colleague and notice what emerges through conversation.

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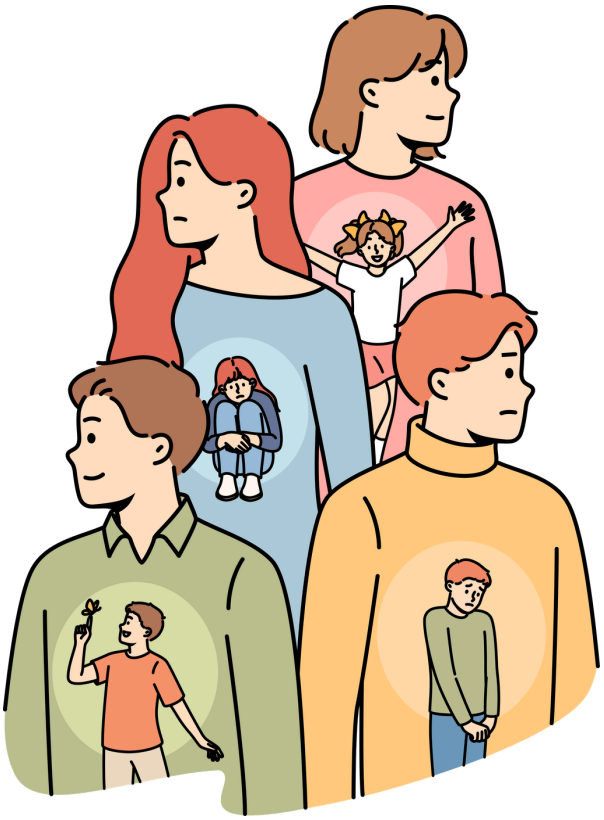
7. INNER CHILD: COMPASSION FOR YOUNGER PARTS OF THE SELF.

Many therapeutic approaches recognise that our early experiences continue to influence how we see ourselves, relate to others and respond to life's challenges. Exploring our younger selves with curiosity and compassion can deepen our understanding of present-day thoughts, feelings and patterns.



There are many ways to approach this work. Reflective exercises, photographs, dialogue, imagery and creative resources can all help clients reconnect with earlier experiences, acknowledge unmet needs and consider how those experiences continue to shape them today.

Rather than trying to change the past, this work invites us to listen with kindness to parts of ourselves that may still be seeking understanding, acceptance or care.

Reflection

Take a moment to think about your own journey.

- What activities brought you joy as a child?
- What younger part of yourself might still benefit from your compassion today?
- How might these reflections influence the way you work with your clients?

Space for notes:

Pause and wonder: Notice a moment this week when an older emotional pattern seems to surface. Pause for a moment and ask yourself, "What might this younger part of me need right now?"

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8. BEYOND THE LABEL: SEEING THE PERSON BEHIND THE DIAGNOSIS

Psychological diagnoses can provide a valuable framework for understanding a client's experiences. They can guide treatment, improve communication between professionals and help clients make sense of what they are going through.

At the same time, no diagnosis tells the whole story. Every client brings their own history, relationships, strengths and way of making sense of the world. As counsellors, we are challenged to hold both perspectives: recognising the value of diagnostic knowledge while remaining curious about the unique person sitting in front of us.

Developing confidence in this area means understanding common psychological disorders, appreciating the role of medication where appropriate, and resisting the temptation to let a label define the individual.

Reflection

Think about a client you've worked with recently.

- How has a diagnosis helped you understand their experiences?
- In what ways have they shown you that they are more than their diagnosis?
- How do you balance psychological knowledge with genuine curiosity about the individual?

Space for notes:

Take this into your practice...

The next time you think about a client's diagnosis, ask yourself one additional question: "What else do I know about this person that the diagnosis cannot tell me?"

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9. HOLDING THE HIDDEN SELF: ENCOUNTERING DIFFERENT PARTS

The nesting dolls provide a powerful metaphor for understanding the many layers of human experience. We often meet clients through the outermost layer - the one that has learned to cope, protect or adapt to life's challenges.

Yet beneath this may be parts that carry earlier experiences, unmet needs, hopes and vulnerabilities. The dolls remind us that each layer has developed for a reason and deserves to be approached with respect rather than judgement.

For therapists, the nesting dolls encourage patience and sensitivity. Rather than rushing to uncover what lies beneath, we are invited to move at the client's pace, allowing trust to develop as each layer is explored. In doing so, therapy becomes a collaborative journey of discovery, where every part of the client's story is valued. This compassionate exploration can help clients move towards greater self-understanding, acceptance and a deeper connection with who they truly are.

Reflection

Take a moment to imagine yourself as a set of nesting dolls.

- Which parts of yourself are most visible to others?
- Which parts remain carefully protected?
- What experiences have shaped these different layers?
- How might recognising these layers influence the way you work with your clients?

There is no need to uncover everything at once. Sometimes the greatest value lies simply in recognising that every person carries more than is immediately visible.

Space for notes:

Take this into your practice...

Try using a plain set of nesting dolls or a simple nesting doll paper template with a client. Explore together what each layer represents and how these different parts contribute to their sense of self.

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10. THE FIRST 1000 DAYS: HOW EARLY RELATIONSHIPS SHAPE LATER LIFE.

Our earliest experiences begin long before we have words to describe them. From life in the womb through infancy, development is shaped by a complex interplay of biology, relationships and environment.

Many therapeutic approaches recognise that these early experiences can influence how we regulate emotions, form attachments and respond to the world around us. Exploring these foundations can help us understand present-day patterns with greater compassion and curiosity.

While every person's story is unique, considering the earliest chapters of life can offer another perspective on the experiences clients bring into the therapy room.

Reflection

Take a moment to consider your own practice.

- How does considering a client's early experiences help you understand who they are today?
- In what ways do attachment patterns continue to emerge in therapeutic relationships?
- How do you balance an understanding of early influences with a recognition of each person's resilience, growth and capacity for change?

Space for notes:

Take this into your practice... Think about one client you are currently supporting. How might viewing their story through a developmental lens help you respond with greater empathy and curiosity?

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11. LISTENING TO STRESS AND BURNOUT: RESPONDING WITH COMPASSION

Stress is part of being human. At times it can motivate us, helping us respond to the demands of everyday life. But when stress becomes prolonged or overwhelming, it can affect our bodies, our emotions, our relationships and the way we experience the world.

As counsellors, we see the impact of stress and burnout in many different ways. Clients may arrive feeling exhausted, disconnected or unable to cope, while we too can experience the cumulative effects of holding emotional space for others. Although our experiences may differ, we all share the same human capacity to become overwhelmed.

Rather than viewing stress and burnout simply as problems to overcome, they can be understood as signals that something needs our attention. They invite us to pause, to listen and to consider what changes might help us move towards greater balance and wellbeing.

Reflection

Think about stress from both perspectives - your clients' and your own.

- How might stress be showing itself in the lives of the people you work with?
- What messages might lie beneath feelings of exhaustion, frustration or overwhelm?
- How do you recognise the early signs of stress in yourself?
- What helps you reconnect with a sense of balance and purpose?

As therapists, we cannot separate our professional selves from our human selves. The more compassion we bring to our own experiences, the better equipped we are to understand the experiences of others.

Space for notes:

Take this into your next week...

Choose one small habit that supports your wellbeing, whether it's taking a proper lunch break, stepping outside, or pausing between sessions, and make space for it this week.

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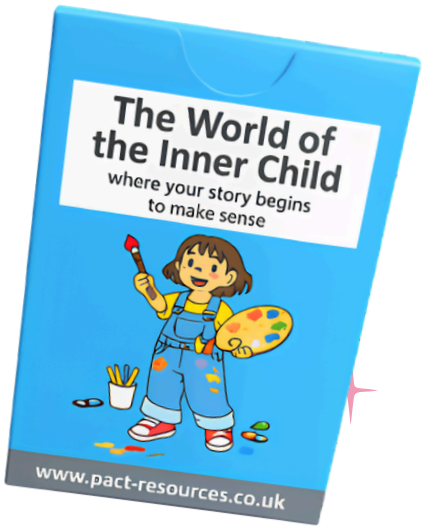
12. MEETING THE YOUNGER SELF: THE WORLD OF THE INNER CHILD CARDS

Our workshop introduced a new set of World of the Inner Child cards, created to help therapists and clients explore childhood experiences through images, emotions and compassionate reflection.

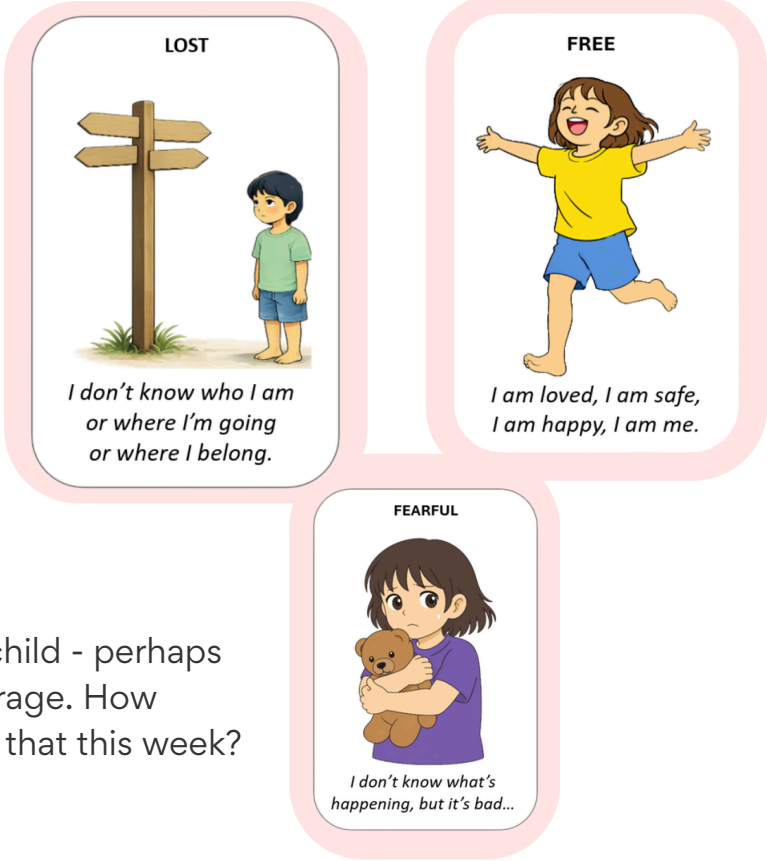


Together, we explored how visual prompts can open conversations that might otherwise be difficult to begin. The images invite us to recognise different feelings, relationships and experiences from childhood, while the accompanying injunction (e.g '*don't be a child*') and nurturing messages cards encourage us to reflect on the messages we received growing up - and the kinder messages we might need today.

Reflect:

- When a client shares a harsh inner message, how do you respond with empathy before exploring whether it still serves them?
- What does it mean to honour the protective role these beliefs may once have played?
- How do you create space for clients to discover their own kinder voice?

Space for notes:



Take this into your next week...

Think about one quality you valued as a child - perhaps curiosity, playfulness, imagination or courage. How might you make space for a little more of that this week?

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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

For resources visit: pact-resources.co.uk

we look forward to staying in touch!

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