

# Missing Memory

Strategies for constructing  
childhood trauma narratives  
for adults with limited  
childhood memory

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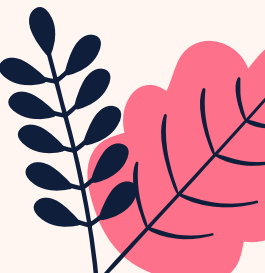
"Trauma comes back as a reaction, not a memory"

—**Bessel Van Der Kolk**



# Today's Presentation

01. **Basis: Attachment disruption and missing memory**
02. **Strategy 1: Using core memories**
03. **Strategy 2: Projective identification with media**
04. **Strategy 3: Role reversal in imagined scenario**
05. **Strategy 4: Somatic access with loose association**





# Goals of the strategies: Creating a more coherent narrative

01. Create broader map from fragmented memories
02. Reattach missing emotions to childhood memory map
03. Connect childhood and adult memory maps
03. Elicit and attach suppressed childhood memory

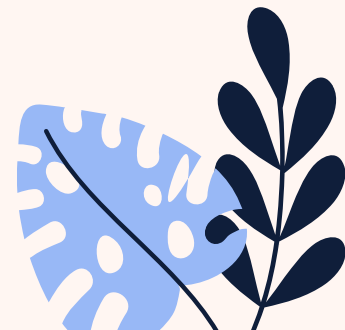





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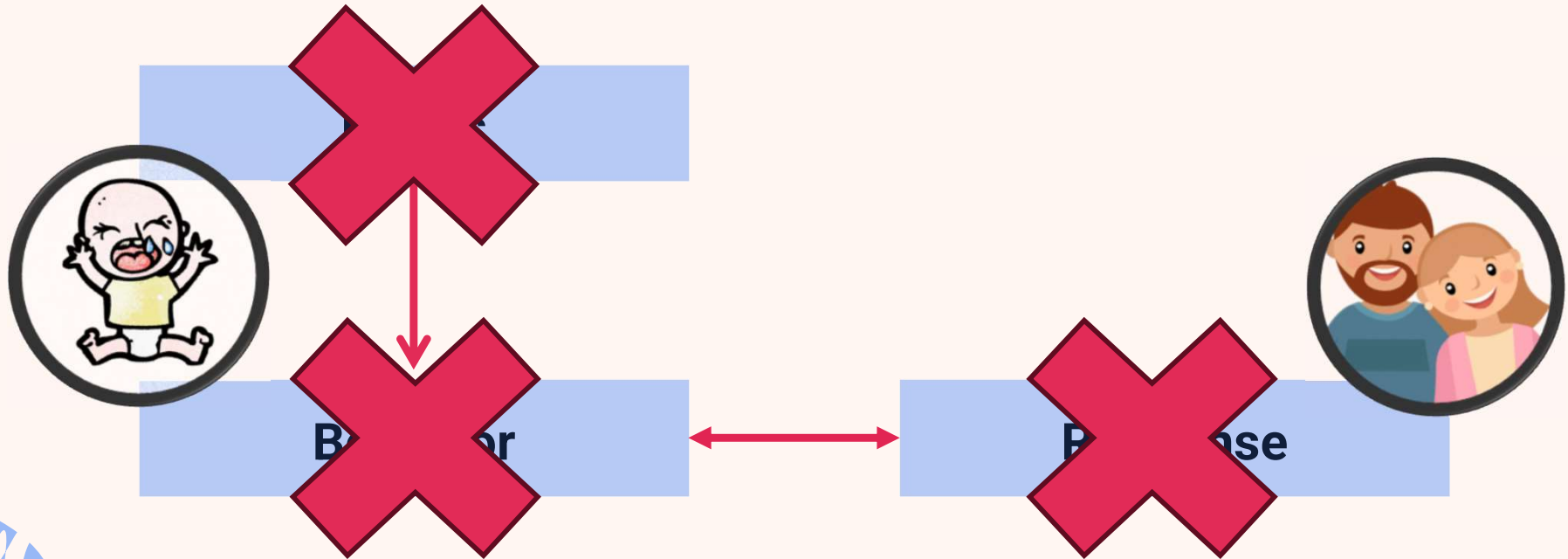
# Attachment and Memory

The relationship between attachment disruption  
and missing childhood memory



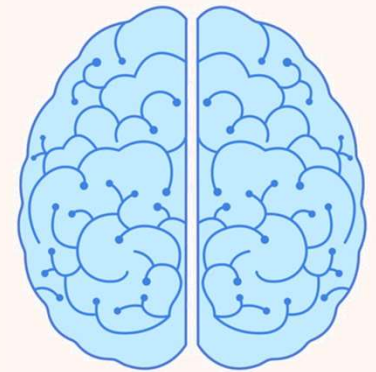


**Attachment:** An enduring connection between infant and caregiver for the purpose of survival



# Disruption in memory integration

- Suppression of needs and emotions due to attachment behavior deactivation
- Internalization of idea of self as unworthy leading to avoidance of self-reflection
- Attention shifted toward stabilization of caregivers, causing lack of reflection on self and own experiences





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# Strategy 1

**Using core memories:** Developing a broader childhood memory map

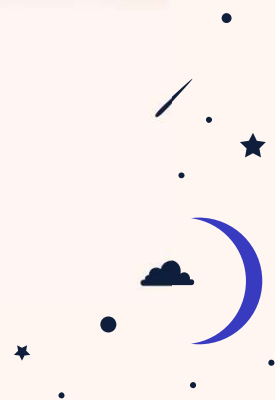
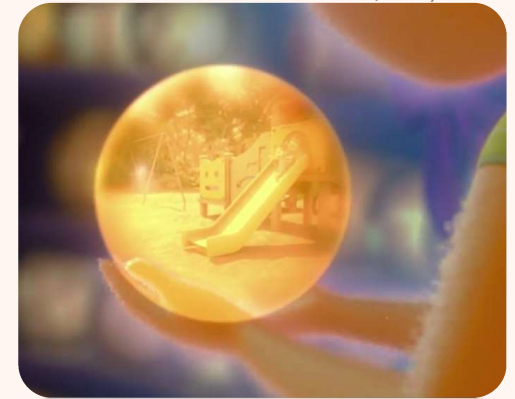




# Core Memories

- Involves intense experience
- Represent some kind of meaning the person applies to themselves, others and/or the world, and which continues to influence the client's responses
- Is the best representation to the client of a pattern of experience in childhood

"Inside Out" Pixar/Disney 2015



# Core memories: use

- Widen childhood narrative from fragmented single experiences into assumed patterns of experience based on core memories
- Ask client to consider the memory as representative of a pattern and what this means to them

"Inside Out" Pixar/Disney 2015



# How developing a map of child experiences using core memories is useful:

- Resolve inappropriate guilt
  - Would you do that to your child?
  - How would they feel if you did?
  - How would you approach the situation differently as a parent?
  - What does that mean about how your parent handled it?
  - What feelings does that generate in you toward them?



# How developing a map of child experiences using core memories is useful:

- Resolve inappropriate sense of responsibility
- Develop alternate narrative of childhood and the people and experiences within it
- Create hope for change





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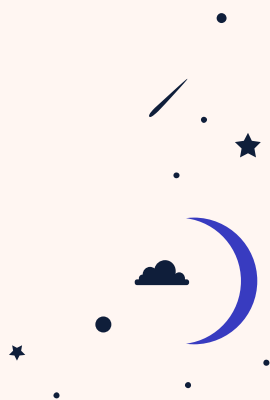
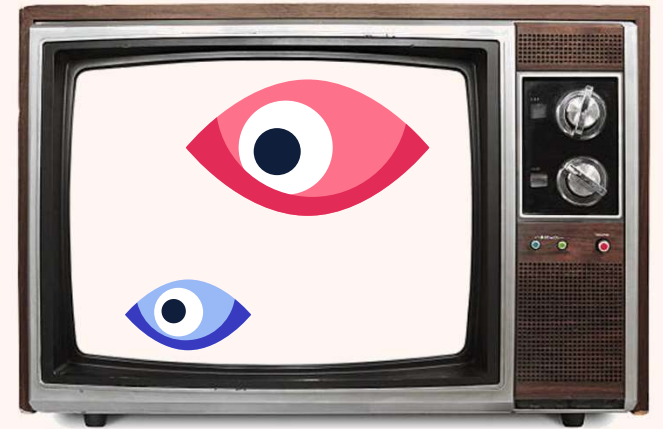
# Strategy 2

**Projective identification with media:** Reattaching missing emotions to childhood memory map



# Method

- Ask for when the client has recently had a strong (maybe confusing) emotional response to TV show, movie, song, book etc.
- Ask client to recount in detail
- Loose-associate to childhood memory or...
- ...Identify primary themes in the media and explore presence of those themes in childhood





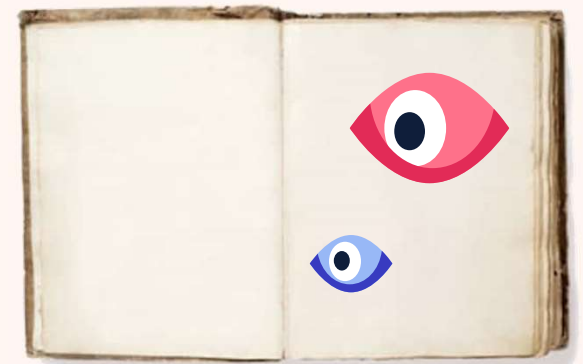
# How to loose-associate

- Move client back into experience of when they had an emotional response to media and ask for felt age
- Ask client for first memory that comes to mind
- Right-brain link between emotion state and childhood experience will usually result in an extracted memory
- Ask client to talk about the memory without leading while listening for connected themes between media and memory
- Bring connected themes to client's awareness and process



# Purpose

- To attach missing emotions to childhood experiences
- Helps begin to create an emotional thematic map of childhood
- Helps begin to explore that “something happened to me” or “my childhood was not as okay as I thought”







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# Strategy 3

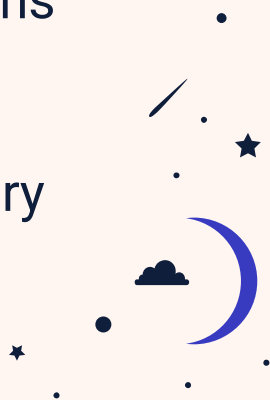
**Role reversal in imagined scenario:** Reattaching missing emotions to childhood memory map





# Method and use

- Have client imagine a child they know in the situation they experienced in their childhood where client appears to be missing an emotional response
- Have client describe how that child would react in that situation
- This gets around defenses that inhibit client from attaching emotions to their childhood experience by moving them into protector role
- Allows client to layer emotional content over their childhood memory

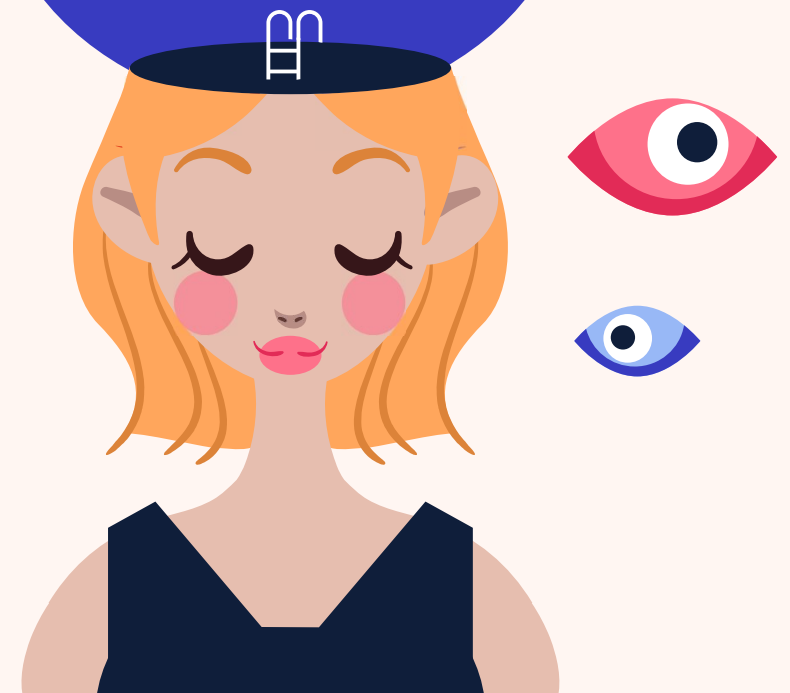




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# Strategy 4

**Somatic access with loose association:** Elicit suppressed childhood memory, attach emotional content, connect childhood and adult memory maps



# Method

- Clinician takes note of when the client is appearing to have an affective response to something being discussed
- Ask client to shift to awareness of emotional and physical state and describe those states and ask for the age of that experience
- Ask client to identify first memory that comes to mind
- Ask client to talk about the memory
- Can then use role reversal or projection techniques to attach emotion





# How and why this works

- Often there has been no left-brain processing of early experiences so following the client response to the childhood memory has to take a right-brain path
- Defenses tend not to activate due to lack of rational awareness of the cause of the emotional / somatic state





# Use

- Elicits suppressed memory
- Processing the elicited memories begins to develop left-brain connections between child and adult experiences that accompany the right-brain ones
- Helps client make sense of their adult experiences (moves from sense of being irrational or broken to “my responses are normal given my experiences”)
- Provides access to unprocessed experiences in order to facilitate narrative and emotional processing





# Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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