

Make Peace with your Family of Origin

Through Guided Imagery Healing and Reparenting the Wounded Child

by Charles D. Leviton, Ed.d.

printed in ImagiNews August 1998

There is no way of minimizing the importance of the family of origin in each of our lives. Not only our self-concepts and personal identity but also our values and belief systems as well as images of the opposite sex are filtered and shaped through these childhood experiences.

Yet most of us have difficulty with confronting our parents or trying to improve our dysfunctional relationships. The risk is too great, the pain too intense, the parents physically or emotionally not available. There is fear of further loss and guilt over “blaming” them.

Guided Imagery provides a safe, protected area for dealing with any and every possible childhood trauma or deprivation. Parents and siblings can be confronted, traumas relived and healed. Perhaps most important of all, the client can learn to reparent the wounded, deprived child within and thereby provide the necessary love and support needed to “grow” to adulthood and take responsibility for one’s success as a person.

In my belief system, there are two things every child needs from his parents. The first is unconditional love: “I love you because you exist and need no other reason to love you”—the essence of Maslow’s basic need theory. The second is to ask your parents to reveal themselves to you.

Most of us demand that others (our parents, spouse, children and friends) *change* so we can be happy. “My father was an alcoholic. I told him if he loved me he would stop drinking. He still drinks therefore he doesn’t love me.” Great logic - lousy truth. Your father’s drinking is rarely if ever connected to whether or not he loves you. His drinking is *his* issue, not yours. We take it personally, and make it ours.

If the father can explain his addiction or problem to you then you understand “why” he does what he does and that it is not your fault. As good children our job description is to tell our parents what our needs are and give them the opportunity to respond. Their job is to respond the best they can.

Imagery provides a great method for this asking because there is no risk of loss. The parents might be defensive at first, even in the imagery, but with the help of the therapist they will often break down and cry, admit responsibility, ask forgiveness, provide the love and reveal truth. Because of this new information and emotional healing the client often changes his attitude and behavior toward the parents without actual confrontation. As a result of the client’s change, the parents will often change without knowing why.

Even if they don't change in the imagery or in reality, the client has met his own needs by asking and acknowledging the legitimacy of those needs. As some point out, we all must take over the parenting of that frightened, wounded or deprived child, providing the love and nourishment the child never properly received. Once again, imagery provides a safe and healing place for this to occur.