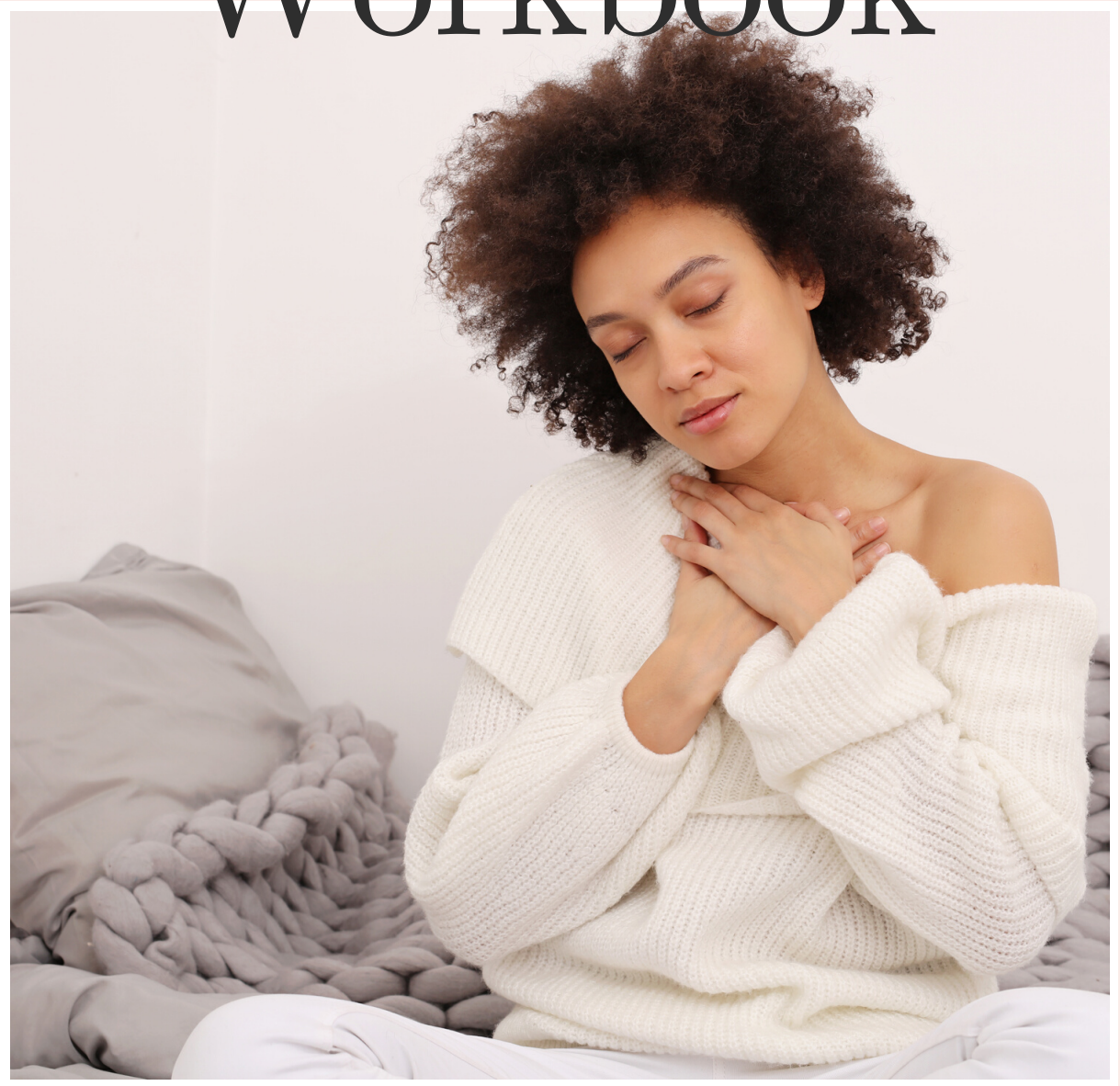


Adaptive Child Workbook



Stacey Herrera



I was inspired to create this workbook, which was adapted from the work of Terry Real, MSW, LICSW, while undergoing my dark night of the soul.

After understanding the power of expressing gratitude and appreciation for all my adaptive child has done for me, I wanted to provide a resource to help others do the same. This workbook focuses on creating an empathetic relationship between the parts of you that tend to show up when you're highly triggered.

My hope is that this workbook will help you better understand yourself and your relationships. I wish for you to come out of this experience with more resilience and self-compassion so that you can stop performing for love and start experiencing it.

Stacey Herrera



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Every human develops relational wounds that typically arise in childhood. These wounds, whether the result of a traumatic event or chronic distress, can manifest in our adulthood as symptoms that are deeply entrenched and difficult to resolve. To heal these wounds, it is essential to understand how they impact us and adopt strategies for recovery.

The inner world of an individual infected with relational wounds is often full of chaos, pain, and confusion. These wounds can lead to distorted perceptions of reality, causing us to doubt our self-worth. They compel us to adopt defense mechanisms that are damaging and counterproductive, such as avoidance, people-pleasing, or aggression when we feel threatened.

The healing process begins with identifying our relational wounds and understanding the context in which they were created. By recognizing and exploring our trauma, we can start to understand our behavior patterns and how they may influence our relationships.

We can also learn to identify situations that trigger us and use healthy coping skills such as self-care, mindfulness, and relaxation techniques to bring ourselves back into balance.

Terry Real, MSW, LICSW, renowned Family Therapist, Speaker, and Author, recommends practicing self-compassion as part of our healing journey. He encourages us to meet our woundedness with gentleness and self-empathy to recognize and accept what has happened and make changes for the better.

Recovery from relational wounds can be a long and challenging process, but it is possible. And we can begin by exploring the three parts of the psyche: the **Wounded** child, the **Adaptive** child, and the **Functional** (Wise) adult.

Three Parts of the Psyche



The Wounded Child

Is young, scared, and vulnerable. It may feel overwhelmed, possibly abandoned, and longs for deep connection.

The Wounded Child is often the focus of trauma work. But the wounded child does not cause dysfunction in relationships. Like Terry says, "you don't see the trauma. You see the scar tissue."

The Adaptive Child

Is developed by the psyche to protect the Wounded child. The Adaptive Child is the one who was able to adjust and cope with whatever trauma was experienced. It is conditioned to self-protect.

The Adaptive Child sees the world in black and white. It tends to be harsh, unforgiving and driven by perfectionism. The Adaptive Child typically overcompensates to protect the Wounded Child and control the external environment.

The Adaptive Child is threatened by intimacy and resists connection. It reacts as the aggressor and often models or imitates the dysfunctional behaviors of its parent(s).

The Adaptive Child tends to be highly reactive when it doesn't get its way. It's defiant, belligerent, and sometimes even manipulative.



The Functional (Wise) Adult

Is the part of us that has grown from our wisdom, experience, and insight. It's mature, self-reflective, and forgiving.

The Functional Adult exists in the present. It understands imperfection and can be compassionate in the face of failure.

The Functional Adult can set boundaries, make thoughtful decisions, and communicate with clarity and love. It's flexible and willing to compromise. It's the part of us that can make sense of uncertainty.

The Functional Adult knows when to pause and when to act. It's capable of learning new skills and shifting behavioral patterns. And it understands that relationships are not about winning or losing.

The Functional Adult is the part of us that embraces our vulnerability and transforms it into strength. It can heal our wounds and help us make sense of a confusing world.

The Functional Adult enables us to be effective and successful in our relationships.



Navigating the Inner Landscape

The Wounded Child carries our deepest hurts and traumas from childhood; it is in a constant state of fear, shame, and pain.

The Adaptive Child is the learned behavior we employ to avoid or cope with situations associated with these deep wounds.

Finally, the Functional (Wise) Adult offers perspective, compassion, and objectivity.

Terry Real suggests that when our Wounded child is triggered (i.e., we become overwhelmed with fear), our Adaptive Child takes over and reacts in an unhealthy way to the perceived threat.

We may react with anger, withdrawal, passivity, manipulation, or other behaviors that can be damaging to ourselves and our relationships.

In response, the Functional (Wise) Adult can provide comfort and calm to the Adaptive Child by recognizing its fears and validating them without judging or attacking. This acknowledgment helps us re-center and calm down to make more rational decisions and create more constructive solutions to our problems.



The Functional Adult can also help us to identify our core needs and develop healthy strategies for meeting them. This allows us to move away from unhealthy behaviors and destructive coping mechanisms and towards more compassionate self-care practices.

When we understand the underlying causes of our pain and adopt strategies for self-care, we are better able to heal our relational wounds and create more meaningful connections with those we love.

How can you tell the difference between the Wounded child, and Adaptive child, and Functional adult?

- *What do you **feel** when you're triggered?* (this is the wounded child)
- *How do you **react** when you're wounded or triggered?* (this is the adaptive child)
- **Stops. Thinks. Reflects.** *What's best for "us" right now?* (this is the functional adult)

Healing is a continual journey that can be transformative if we take the time and effort to do the work. We can learn how to connect with ourselves, listen to our bodies, develop healthy coping skills for difficult situations, and create the relationships we truly desire.

Healing relational wounds requires self-awareness, patience, and a commitment to care for ourselves and our relationships. We must be kind to ourselves, accept what has happened, and acknowledge that we are worthy of healing and growth.

Connecting with Your Adaptive Child



The Adaptive Child is basically a child in adult clothing. It needs to be nurtured, comforted and understood. It must be shown that it is safe and accepted as is.



You want to speak FOR your inner child, not FROM your inner child. — Terry Real

You want to be empathetic and loving, but you also want to contain it.

We don't have to act on all of our Adaptive Child's impulses. We can be mindful and make conscious decisions that align with our values and goals.

To engage with the Functional Adult regularly, it is essential to concentrate on collaborating with the Adaptive Child instead of the Wounded Child.

When we manage our nervous systems, inner peace, clarity, and connection are possible. By simply learning to soothe ourselves, we can achieve this balance with ease.



When the body is in a state of reaction, it inhibits our ability to effectively use communication and conflict management skills because the thinking part of the brain gets hijacked. And the Adaptive Child takes a firm stance, "it's me against you."

When our Adaptive Child is activated, it feels like a life-or-death situation. As a result of this fear and desperation, the Adaptive Child reacts impulsively, as an immature child would.

In relationships, each partner has different triggers and distinct "relational stances." But for the relationship to thrive, each partner must be capable of adjusting and adapting.

To restore balance in relationships, we must:

1. Confront our trauma triggers
2. Unpack the triggers and move past them
3. Practice "relational" strategies when the triggers arise

But first, we must understand our Adaptive Child and establish a connection with it. When we can do this, we start to heal the wounds of our past, release unhealthy communication patterns and create a safe space for healthy relationships.



A Letter to Your Adaptive Child

As the Wise Adult, it's your job to ensure that your Adaptive child feels seen and heard. And we're going to begin this process by writing a letter from you to your Adaptive Child.

Terry Real suggests touching on these four points in the letter:

1. **Gratitude** (all the ways it helped you)
2. **Gifts** (all the things it has given you)
3. **Cost** (all the things it has cost you)
4. **Moving forward** (how it's going to be from now on)

The letter should be full of love and appreciation for everything your Adaptive Child has done to protect you. You want it to feel seen and validated.

It's time to repair the relationship with your Adaptive Child by helping it move from a place of fear to a place of connection, trust, and acceptance.

The key to healing is understanding the Adaptive Child's point of view.

Sample Letter:



Dear (childhood nickname),

I want to thank you for saving me. You got angry when I was scared. You stood up for me when I was too small and intimidated. You always had my back when I felt overwhelmed.

You gave me the strength to survive and endure. You made sure I was protected and safe. You taught me how to be independent and self-sufficient.

Unfortunately, you also cost me. You caused me to be reactive and defensive. You made it hard for me to trust, and that made me feel isolated and disconnected. And sometimes, I struggle to take responsibility and own my mistakes.

But I understand now that you did the best you could with the resources you had. You were brave and strong, and for that, I am forever grateful.

Starting today, I will make sure to give you the acknowledgment and validation that you deserve. I won't ignore or reject the parts of me you've been protecting. I will be mindful of my triggers and use the skills I have to better cope with emotions.

You don't need to take over and do it all anymore. I'm going to take care of both of us.

Thank you for everything. I love you.

Always & Forever,

Me



Wrapping up...

This is just the beginning of the healing process. You may need to do this exercise more than once to become intimate with your Adaptive Child. Be patient with the process and give yourself the grace to take your time.

With a little effort and understanding, you can learn to view your Adaptive Child as an essential part of yourself, with its own needs and feelings. With practice, you can learn to redirect your energies to embody the Functional (Wise) Adult, even in the most challenging times.

You're on the path to making informed decisions, creating healthy boundaries, and cultivating fulfilling relationships.

Take a deep breath and be proud of yourself. You are one step closer to becoming your most empowered self.

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