

Use Social Relationships To Heal

People who have been mistreated by others may have a very hard time healing, because they may feel triggered by the main thing that can help their trauma—relationships.

What is relational healing, in layman's terms? It's consciously using your bond with a chosen, healthy person, to build both a safe space and a healthier template for future relationships. Relational healing allows you to reclaim the feel-good power of social connection, which often feels inaccessible to those who have been socially injured.

Find a relational healing partner, and in your conversations, channel the following four qualities "essential to the development of trust and subsequent relational healing"*:

1 Empathy: careful listening, engaging with the other person's experience, mirroring body language, and paraphrasing.

2 Authentic Vulnerability: both partners should share their parallel history

- I really reverberate with...
- I dislike x too. When I went through it the hardest part was...

"I needed to experience that all the less than shiny bits of me were acceptable to another human being. Seeing that she was comfortable with and accepting of her own unhappy feelings eventually convinced me that she really was not disgusted by mine." – Pete Walker

3 Dialogicality: this can be thought of as reciprocity. When conversations flow freely from one person to the other, with both sides sharing relatively equally, both sides get a boost. (if you and your relational healing partner have both had trouble taking charge in conversation, start by taking turns monologue-venting. It may take a while to get fully into your own thought process at first)

4 Collaborative Relationship Repair: every relationship has moments where you've miscommunicated, not understood each other, or made an assumption. Healthy relationships involve "owning one's part in a conflict" which "validates the normality of relational disappointment and the art of amiable disagreement."*

Relational healing goals by Four-F stress response (fight, flight, freeze, fawn)

FIGHT:

cultivate reciprocal sharing and listening,
avoid compulsion to stay in-control of the conversation

FLIGHT:

recognize when you're focusing on smaller or
inconsequential issues in order to avoid more meaningful
and potentially triggering topics

FREEZE:

look for more opportunities to engage in conversation
or express your opinions

FAWN:

learn that healthy relationships involve both
people having and expressing needs

*This worksheet inspired by "Relational Healing in Complex PTSD" by Pete Walker, MA.