

Using the Internet for Inner Dialogue

by a survivor of childhood trauma

I read about selfhelp therapy from childhood trauma or abuse using "inner child" dialogue on a survivors website whose forum I used. Following techniques taught by John Bradshaw, it proposed one should engage with one's childhood self using messages written by your right hand; "replies" from one's "inner child" could be allowed to come through from one's left. Elsewhere I read of techniques using of a mirror. I thought these processes were not for me, I would feel too self-conscious trying them. But a sense of desperation can make you inclined to try anything, and an approach to inner child dialogue using the internet web gradually came to me, developing over months.

I began by setting up a web email address as the holding place and address for email messages to my inner child; Yahoo rather than Hotmail was chosen as at that time free Yahoo addresses were less inclined to be erased if one did not use them for a month, as was the policy for free accounts at Hotmail. Nowadays I have a Yahoo Plus account which means I pay £12 a year and the account remains securely online supposing one doesn't touch it all year round. Also no adverts.

I decided to call the email account after the place where bad things had happened to me as a child, adding to the name the number of the year. For my password I chose my initials followed by a number that had private resonance, my family's local shop bonus-scheme number that I had had to give when sent shopping to the local grocery by my mother. There was nothing significant about the number itself, it just felt appropriate as an exclusive private detail from childhood.

Within the email address I set up three receiving subfolders: 'S3', for letters to my inner child in infancy; 'S12' to the child at the age of most particular trauma; and 'S15' to the postpubertal adolescent. An email sent with 'S3' in the subject matter would be filtered to the S3 folder - likewise S12 and S15. I used a scanner to

copy photographs of myself aged three, twelve and fifteen, and isolated my face in these photos using the scanner selector tool. The face aged twelve was taken and enlarged from a class photograph. To each of the folders I emailed these photographs of 'S3', 'S12', and 'S15' respectively. They could be used for face-to-face reflection or meditation when on the screen. It mattered to me that this email address I could access from anywhere in the world.

Sending emails to the address seemed to parallel the 'right hand' aspect of Bradshaw's technique, emails from "the child within" corresponded to the left. From the beginning I felt that what was appropriate in addressing my inner child was complete and unambiguous total love and understanding and a sense of preferred safety. The website, in a sense, was a place of safety, transferring this place of safety, ultimately, within. There had to be no embarrassment or hesitation in this. It had to be total.

Another fundamental aspect was that any email to or from the website once typed and sent, MUST NOT be opened again or looked at until the following day. That was an absolute, core rule of the procedure. Once sent, that email was gone from the day, to be forgotten about. Only from the following day could it be opened and read. For receipt of emails from the website an appropriately titled subfolder was made in my ordinary daily email application. If highlight indicated an email waiting there to be read, it could only be opened and read if it had been sent the day before.

In my exploration and dialogue with these childhood selves, I conducted a significant amount of psychological research on the web and elsewhere; reading about different approaches in child psychology, the Oedipal conflict, for instance, when trying to understand further and contextualise some unhappy memories recalled in the life of the infant S3. This research was done as a completely separate process from dialogue with my inner child; and memories and exploration could be a happy and comforting process, not at all negative. I bought a toy bus which I thought of as "my inner child's favourite toy". This just seemed to develop naturally, it was not planned in advance.

Eventually I found that I began to send emails from the Yahoo address to myself without notifying they were from S3, S12, or S15. When struggling with feelings

triggered by people or events, feelings of sometimes almost unspecified anger or other surges, I found it beneficial, sometimes as a "last resort", to go to the Yahoo address and from there write myself an email. The writing usually attempted a kind of rational wisdom, a mixture of conscience, reasoning, reassurance, advice. These would be my bases in making the emails, to rise to that. Never panaceas, but when I came to read the emails the next day, I always found them grounding and helpful. One factor was that the use of the system over time had taught me things about my own feelings it was helpful to be reminded of because I tended to forget them. A repeatedly hidden feature in my emotional turbulence was an undetected sense of powerlessness. Receiving a reminder in crisis that a sense of powerlessness was core to much of my difficult emotions and was rooted in childhood trauma could alleviate distress in an array of situations; not necessarily solving a problem, but at least helping the emotions cope with it and address it the better.

In presenting this here I hope some others might think my take on the "inner child" system could be usefully tailored to their own needs. For me when I reached a stage of healing it seemed appropriate to "move on". But I retain my Yahoo email web address, paying the annual £12, as an inner place that is a practical tool for whenever and if ever I feel the need to use it.