

# ***Please Try This at Home***

## ***Monthly Tips for Increasing the Joy in Your Life***

### **Who's Your Mommy?**

In the popular documentary *Winged Migration*, some extremely dedicated scientists filmed the migratory flight patterns of birds by pretending to be the birds' "mothers." The scientists knew that some species of birds identify the first caring being that they see as their "mother," regardless of whether that being is a bird or not—a phenomena called imprinting. So the scientists made sure that they were the first "mother object" the young birds saw. They then raised the birds and gained their trust until the birds eventually learned to fly next to their "mother" scientists in ultralight aircraft carrying filming equipment.

Human beings can be "imprinted" as well. Certainly, few of us send Mother's Day cards to a pelican. But the ways in which we interact with our caregivers early in life created many of the patterns in our brains that feel "normal" to us now. This is true no matter how excellent or strange our caregivers happened to be.

As we grew up, some of us may have observed the ways that other caregivers interacted with children and come to realize that things that we thought were normal about our early years, in retrospect, ranged from bizarre to downright traumatic. What once felt normal turned out to be strange, as if we were Ugly Ducklings who suddenly discovered that the environment in which we were raised was filled with people from a different species altogether!

### **Brain Structure: Why Ugly Ducklings Miss Becoming Swans**

Many of us have spent a great deal of energy trying to escape our Ugly Duckling early patterns and transform into the "swans" we were meant to be. We've read self help books, attended seminars, tried the latest fads, collected degrees, or simply kept ourselves busy with new adventures or substances to keep us away from the "normal" things we were taught early on that turned out to be strange. But many of our efforts have been unsuccessful for two key reasons: isolation and time.

While we may be able to learn how to use a barbeque or program a cell phone by reading a manual alone, the brain processes relational learning differently. Most of the views and patterns that we learned by relating to people early on can only be un-learned by relating to people in different ways now. With few exceptions, what's hurt in relationship needs to be fixed in relationship. That's just the way the brain works!\* If we want to learn to relate to the world and other people in different ways, we can't do it alone. We need to train the people in our lives to help us practice different ways of relating or find new people who can relate to us differently until these new, healthy ways of relating replace the old patterns.

Secondly, we may have missed the results we desire because we were hoping for a quick fix. In early life, the brain imprints very quickly. But after adolescence, the brain solidifies a bit and un-learning lessons that we learned in early relationships takes years, rather than weeks or months. So if we want to learn new ways of relating to others and the world, we need to prepare ourselves for some long-term practice.

## How to Change Your “Mommy”

If there is a relational or world view pattern that you would like to change, start by clearly identifying both the pattern and the way you'd like it to be different. Then decide which people might be willing to work with you to change it. Let them know how you are trying to change and provide them specific ways in which you would like them to help you.

For example, if being punished for making a mistake when you were young has made you afraid of trying new or exciting things currently, you might ask a trusted co-worker to give you whatever kind of “thumbs up” feels meaningful to you each time you try something new—whether you succeed or fail! If you were told to be “seen and not heard” as a child and now you find yourself listening to others, while they don't seem to care about what you have to say, you might ask a friend to start your conversations by asking how you are really doing and then refusing to tell you anything about her life until you answer at length.

If you are having trouble thinking of someone you might ask for help in this process, or it just seems to scary to try in the relationships you have right now, see if you can find a mature, trustworthy counselor or someone else in a helping role who would be willing to try this with you until you are comfortable doing it with the other people in your life. A professional helping relationship is certainly not the only way that people can heal in relationship, but it can be a great way to get the process started.

And remember, no matter how you approach relational growth, good relational healing takes time. Keep at it! Don't give up!

If you or someone you know would like some help with breaking past patterns, *call me at 303-931-4284 for a free 20-minute consultation or email [info@jenniferdiebel.com](mailto:info@jenniferdiebel.com).*

Thanks for reading!

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\*For more about relational learning and brain structure, see *A General Theory of Love* by Lewis, T., Amini, F., & Lannon, R. (2000). New York: Vintage Books.

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