

It's True I'm Really Just a Big Kid

When I met my husband I fell in love with his child-like spontaneity, his child like openness with his own kids and with me. I think I fell in love with his inner child before I fully appreciated the man that he is.

No matter how old we are; we remain kids inside. Do you remember the '80's book: "Healing the Child Within" by John Bradshaw? In it, he talks about how in our hearts we are still kids. We may not all be wounded kids, at least in an extreme way, but we are all kids. It's probably more apparent to me now as a parent of grown children, because while their bodies have grown, I still see the kid they were.

This helps us understand our partners and ourselves in a whole new light. I remember one vacation with my husband when he was acting like a real jerk. He was short with me, with the kids, and downright unhappy with himself. One night about half way into the vacation I realized that he had been hurt by something that had happened as we were leaving home. He had not been able to talk about it because it had triggered something from his childhood, and felt too little and powerless to address it. Once I was able to respond empathetically to what he was feeling and apologize for having unwittingly hurt him, he was his playful self again.

Our partners' upsets are not about us. What is really going on is inside of them. And more often than not, it's because they are reacting from their inner child. If we can stay aware of the child within our partner then our responses will change. We will be more empathetic and compassionate with their seemingly irrational behavior. The more

we know about our partners childhood wounds, the more awareness we will then have of how we trigger them, too.

Knowing what will trigger them doesn't mean we have to alter ourselves to avoid triggering them. We have to be who we are, but it does mean we can be sensitive to their wounds. One day after a trip to the mall with my daughters I came excitedly into my husbands home office and tried to show him my find. His response was basically, "Not now, I'm busy." I didn't know why but I felt really hurt by his reaction. A few minutes later he came in and asked to see what I had bought. I began to cry and he put his arms around me, and apologized for his blunt reaction earlier. He had been caught up in trying to solve a programming problem and hadn't realized that my little girl self was trying to share something with him. You see, he knew that I have a childhood wound around being ignored.

As a result of being aware of our own and our partners wounding we can become more intimately connected and develop a sense of safety and trust that goes far beyond "being in love".

The next time you are in what feels like an irrational argument with your partner, I want you to notice the little girl or little boy wound that is being triggered in your partner. Did something you said or did trigger a feeling that you don't care about them? Did something make them feel like they didn't matter, the way their mother made them feel? Is your anger making them feel that they are in danger because they were always hit when someone was angry with them?

You can turn this around and help yourself realize that your own upset is not really about your partner, too. Stop and think back, is what you are feeling really about this moment, or is it about an old wound? Once you have identified what is really going, you can help your partner understand your upset by owning what is going on. Tell them what they have triggered in you, without blaming them for your upset.

It's also important to note that our inner child is not just represented in our wounding. Our inner child is also represented in those things that bring us joy and a sense of play. Once our inner child feels safe and important to our partner, we become more open and trusting in our play as well. By developing a bond with our child selves we find ourselves more open to play together as well.