

# Healing Your Inner Child

Each of us has the desire to be cared for, loved and nurtured. That little child inside of you, (even when you are an adult), is called your “inner child.”

- It is a free spirit that is emotional, sensitive, fun-loving, joyful, imaginative, and creative.
- Your childhood spirit may have been tamed, lost, or forgotten, but it is still somewhere inside you.
- It can influence our decisions, even when we are unaware, because **our inner child is part of our beliefs about ourselves.**
- That inner child may need healing and support if it was hurt, neglected, frustrated, or abused during childhood. **Even if you have masked, or hidden the inner child, it may be causing you to be worried and fearful of being treated badly.**
- People often ignore their inner child if they have felt guilty or “not good enough.”
- Our inner child may be hidden if we had to pretend our family was happy and healthy, even when it wasn’t.
- Sometimes when we dream or daydream, we can picture what the little child is like.

We know our inner child is active when we:

- Lose ourselves in fun
- Enjoy playing with games, toys, or pets
- Get emotional looking at old photo albums, scrapbooks or home movies about our childhood
- Still think as a child does, seeking to please parents or extended families

Many people hid their inner child and make him or her invisible by:

- **Wearing** one of these “**masks**”
  - “Fashion Show Plate” – Dressing up extremely fancy or carefully
  - “Make-up Artist” – Wearing too much make-up
  - “Body Perfect” – Too much work on body shape and exercise
  - “Miss Manners” – Too much politeness

## Healing Your Inner Child

- “The Blob” – Too much weight (obesity)
  - “The Glumstress” – Wearing drab colors
  - “The Overachiever” – Taking on all challenges
  - “The Daredevil”- Too much risk taking
  - “The Perfectionist” – Being obsessive or fixated on details
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- **People Pleasing** –Always giving people what they want to please them, gain approval, and avoid conflict
  - **Entertaining** – Being the “life of the party” by making jokes, being a clown, and making other people happy without being sensitive to your own needs or feelings
  - **Withdrawal, pulling in or nonfeeling** – Holding back any emotional responses to make sure no one gets to know how you feel
  - **Looking good** – Being sure to look good by overachieving, being perfect, and doing only what seems to be the right thing
  - **Enabling, or rescuing**– By always focusing your attention and energies on the needs of others, you keep the focus off of yourself to the point that you can’t identify anything you need to work on yourself – You are out of touch with who you are.
  - **Passive aggressive** – Agreeing to go along with requests or orders when you disagree and have no plan to follow through
  - **Jumping to negative assumptions** – Assuming the worst about what others think and plan to do, you give other people power over you. Many people who have negative thinking hide their true selves to avoid conflict
  - **Acting out, troubled person** – Being a person who draws attention to your negative behaviors, you try to hide your real self who is sensitive and needy

### Overcome “Invisibility”

- Believe that you and your inner child deserve respect.
- Give yourself the nurturing, caring, love, forgiveness, and respect needed to heal.
- Let go of self-pity over being neglected or abused as a child, and take charge of your life.

## Healing Your Inner Child

- Create a bond between the adult you, and your inner child (to give you a sense of security and self-confidence).
- Like your inner child, you may think, “All I want is to have someone hug me and tell me they are proud of me. Why can’t it happen?”
- Instead, give yourself a hug every day, know your strengths, and be kind to yourself.
- Say, “I am proud of me!”

## Healing Your Inner Child Imagery

**Picture yourself resting under a tree, welcoming a little child who walks toward you. Hold the child in your arms, and talk about what is troubling him or her.**

Your inner child is afraid of loneliness, and wants to be taken care of. Say to him or her, “You deserve to be loved. I want to give you unconditional love, even if I did not have a loving childhood.”

“Accepting, respecting, and forgiving both myself and others is easier when you are with me, expecting goodness. I need that feeling of acceptance and hope as I begin to heal.”

Reassure your inner child by saying, “Changes will help us grow. And I plan to change from within, based on what is healthy and real. You **won’t** be lost or forgotten, even when I am strong enough to stand alone.”

“I am relying on others for support, and to listen to me. I will tell them our story. Doctors, counselors, therapists, friends and family are important to me when we are healing. Sometimes we need their help.”

“You also help me believe that recovery is possible. To help us move forward, I will make healthier decisions, and quit feeling guilty about the past. ”

“Changing things may be uncomfortable, but it is worth the risk. I will quit making excuses. Please, help me to be brave - I know that things will end up better than they are now.”

## Healing Your Inner Child

“Making new goals and following our dreams can lead to a better life. I want to have some fun again. What I am doing now isn’t working very well. It has been a long time since we have felt happy and healthy.”

“You are there when I have relaxing, fun, and playful times in my life. I need to pay more attention to you, because you are a free spirit that adds creativity and joy to my life.”

“I will be responsible for us, having enough control so we will feel safe, secure and loved. We’ll take care of each other.”

Remind your inner child, “I want to give you a hug every day because I am proud of you and you deserve it. But even though we are close, I can’t touch you. Instead of hugging you, I will try to be kinder to myself and know that we deserve to be treated well.”

“I know that if I take better care of myself, it will make you happy, because you love me and are proud of me, too. You see strengths in me that I don’t see, and you help me believe that things can get better.”

“To take charge of my life, I have to let go of my self-pity and sadness over being treated badly as a child. That will be hard to do. It might help if I focus Instead on treating you, my inner child, as I would have liked to have been treated. We can grow stronger together in mind, body, and spirit.”

“Let’s celebrate the challenge of inner growth and healing that comes from our journey of faith and recovery.”

**Now I uncradle my inner child from my arms. We know he or she won't be forgotten, and we will always be close.**

Revised from Messina, J. J. & Messina, C. (2010). Growing down: Tools for healing the inner child, and Growing down with visualizations. Retrieved from <http://jamesjmessina.com/growingdowninnerchild/innerchild.html> and <http://jamesjmessina.com/growingdowninnerchild/childvisualizations.html>