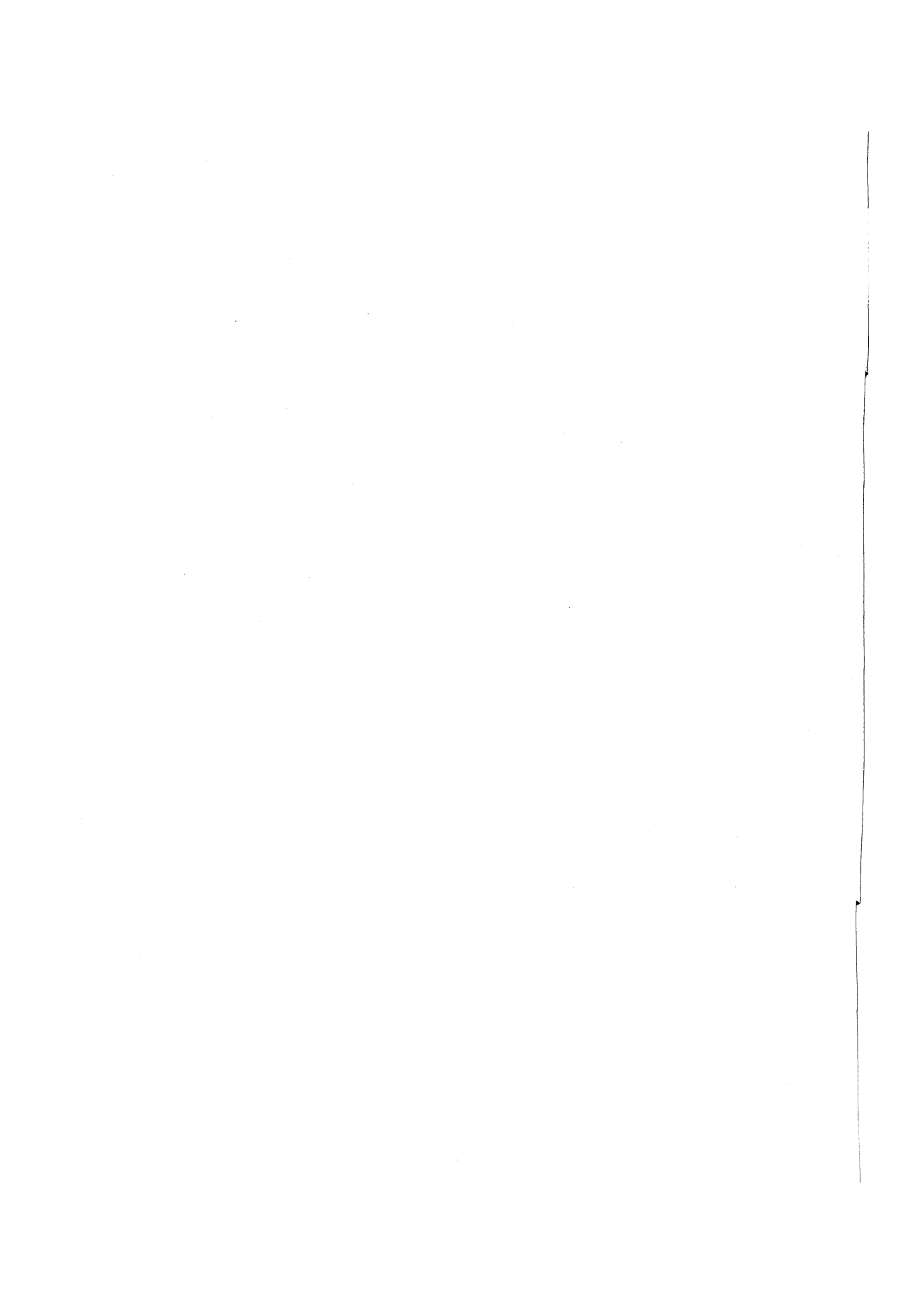


part four

gathering information

A person's consciousness awakens wrapped in another's consciousness.

M.M. Bakhtin *'Speech Genres' and Other Late Essays* (1986: 138)



9

Examining the impact of our beginnings

By now you should have a notebook of ideas about difficulties you are having, some of which may go back a long way. Perhaps you are ready to ask, 'Why do I get myself into traps and dilemmas?' 'Where do these conflicts come from?'

Remember the concept of the individual carrying the seed of their own nature with its potential for individual life. If our own core nature is a bit like an apple pip it will want to grow into an apple tree. Whilst we are naming and studying our 'no-go areas' it's important to understand that they are the result of our own 'appleness' meeting the early outside world. As you look back over your early life in this section, remember to look for signs of your own 'seed' nature, which may have been eclipsed by your environmental history. Try to keep hold of it, feeling your way in to what it was trying to accomplish. Remember also the concept of Maitri – unconditional friendliness to oneself.

Use this section of the book in the way that you would flick through a photograph album. Focus on what feels right for you. **Push where it moves!**

Before you start, sit quietly somewhere by yourself and ask: What has brought me through the dark times?

Opening boxes

In this section we are going to be opening a few boxes. We are going to use everything that you discover about yourself to write your own life story. In order to create an accurate description of what goes wrong we need to know exactly where difficulties are rooted so that we can build a picture of the reciprocal roles that influence your inner and outer relationships. Then we need to create appropriate aims for change that you will be monitoring each week.

Some memories will feel painful. It's the pain you have tried to manage all your life. Whether you are reading this section in co-counselling, or you are on your own and are concerned about dragging up old ghosts, imagine that I am sitting right alongside you. Imagine that my voice and face is smiling and encouraging you to be both courageous and also mindful of what you can manage. Use the diagram on page 17 (Figure 1.2) to keep yourself in the 'window of tolerance' by monitoring your body responses to all the material you

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are exploring. Our task is to find ways to accept the emotional pain you feel and to respond to it differently.

Psychotherapy is not easy, but it does bring relief if you stick with it. It can help to make us stronger.

Self states

You probably realise already that your experience of yourself varies throughout each day as if you were composed of many different parts. Some you may know well, others not at all. Some you may like, others not like so much!

The different self states that comprise our personality and fund our behaviour have been developed at different times of our lives. Many of them are rooted in early life. Some parts of us may feel very small, like a child who has a specific need – to be looked after, or helped to grow up. All of us tend to have a dominant ‘coper’ to control chaos inside; or an ‘insister’ to cope with feeling needy.

Understanding where our conflicts are rooted helps us to see how very powerful fears, often unconscious, act to keep us behaving ‘as if’ the circumstances that produced the original problem are still in full force. Although over the years we have grown to be competent adults, there is a part of us who has not yet learned that new outside circumstances are prevailing. We still behave as if, unless we please, avoid, cut off or act in a particular way, our emotional life is threatened.

Recognising how our everyday feelings and images may be rooted in our childhood, and thus can be reframed, is an important part of the change process. So we are now going actively to shine a light on the bits of ourselves that have been hidden, because they were too scared, too rejected, too damaged. The purpose is to bring a listening ear and a caring heart to the places that hurt. To relieve the small part of us from isolation and rejection, fear and limitation. This work is done in psychotherapy all the time. No book can hope to step into the place of a living person met each week in the privacy of the same room and time. But these pages may offer a beginning for the safe exploration of our misunderstood self, challenging old assumptions and messages, and facilitating the discovery of previously hidden parts of us that we will come to value.

Am I odd?

Another reason for looking into the past is that we often take what we feel for granted. Many people say to me ‘Doesn’t everyone feel like this?’, as if they were trying to find what was ‘normal’. I think that this is a very basic concern when someone embarks on a path of self-discovery. Am I odd? Am I making a fuss? Freud tells a story of a young man who visited him early in his career. When Freud asked the man to describe what he did each day he said, ‘Same as everyone else... got up, threw up into the toilet...’

Claiming our uniqueness is part of allowing ourselves to be real and to put our experience into context. When I suggested to Freda that it sounded as if she had had to grow up quickly and become a 'little mother' when her brother was born and her mother became depressed, she responded with a good deal of feeling. Suddenly she had an explanation for why she felt responsible for everything. In making sense of her experience she felt relief. She could then choose of her own free will how to take up responsibility or not.

The rest of Part Four really forms one long questionnaire about your early life. As you reminisce, make notes or you can draw or paint any of the feelings or memories that come to you. Try not to underestimate the powers of your own imagination to create symbolic language, our very first language, which often has much information.

If you notice that you have blanked off, become stressed in your body, or desperately want to eat, just note this feeling. Write about it in detail as much as you can.

Early life review

Prebirth

There is an increasing awareness that interuterine conditions affect the growing infant. Just over a hundred years ago, Geog Groddeck was writing, in *The Meaning of Illness*, about the womb as our first container, our first contact with sound, space, warmth, movement.

In the mother's womb the child is made for nine months; it lives, grows, and develops in the womb. Never again in his life does the human being have relations as intimate as those he entertains with his mother during pregnancy. The extent to which we harbour the wish to be loved and to love is conditioned by this period of intimate togetherness. (1977: 65)

And one hundred years later neuroscience is corroborating Groddeck's findings through brain studies that show the effect of the mother's endocrine system on the growing infant in the womb, and on attachment behaviour after birth. If a mother is stressed by depression, anxiety or trauma her cortisol levels are raised and so also are her baby's. These high levels of cortisol may disperse with the post-birth mothering, or, if not regulated, can remain thus giving the growing person an anxious start which is difficult to regulate until this has been taught.

Birth stories and reciprocal roles

The late psychotherapist Angela Wilton made a study of birth stories – the actual birth as well as the earliest postnatal experience – and their link with the reciprocal role procedures. She asked people to tell the story of their birth and its impact on the family, using any anecdote, story or image from any

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source – parents, siblings, doctors, midwives – that added to the picture. She included jokes, myths or catch-phrases, as well as any actual memory of the birth itself.

As she worked with different birth stories she began to notice how the atmosphere around the birth story was often mirrored in the person's ways of relating to others. For example, a mother exhausted and angered by a long, arduous labour might be less able to bond with her baby than a mother who found giving birth exhilarating. This birth story would carry an atmosphere of pain and struggle, inducing possible hidden and 'magical guilt' in the child. These feelings might well be carried over into other relationships. Parents who hope for a child of a certain gender may have difficulty covering up their disappointment when their baby turns out to be the opposite. This disappointment may give rise to the person feeling worthless, especially when they get close to others, and to the belief that they have to strive to justify their presence.

Sometimes when a baby is born after a bereavement or loss, he or she becomes associated with this rather than being greeted in their own right. As a result, the person grows up believing that they were 'born under a shadow' or have become a 'replacement child'.

Over half of the people in Wilton's study felt they had damaged and hurt their mother during the birth, so burdening them with the reciprocal roles of either *hurt* one or *damaging* one (as if to be alive is to damage others), evoking guilt and a need to make compensation. Another theme was 'just we two', where an easy birth was followed by close and uninterrupted bonding between mother and child, with the father absent. The stories tended to emphasise an idealised central and perfect position in relationships, from which there could be, in reality, a long fall! Relationships in adult life with the 'just we two' emphasis could be over-close and dependent, mutually admiring, with a tendency to over-idealisation; or, if this was not met, a crash into feeling rubbished or, conversely, rubbishing anything too 'ordinary' (see Figure 4.1, p. 64).

The 'unwanted' theme was also prominent, leaving the person with a sense of ambivalence about commitment and an anticipation of rejection: the rejected/rejecting reciprocal role.

HELEN came into therapy because of difficulties in close relationships. She had a pattern of desperately trying to get close, getting close for a minute and then fleeing. The myth in her family was that she always had her 'knickers in a twist'. It turned out that she had been a breech birth, in spite of being turned before birth to come out head first. She had turned again to find her way out. Her mother always felt that she 'couldn't win' with Helen and thus was born the reciprocal role of stubborn/defeating to defeated/depressed with the resulting feelings of anger and resentment that made intimacy and acceptance hard.

Facts of our birth used to be shrouded in mystery. But today, as conditions for being born in the West have improved, I hear an increasing number of stories where a sense of *joy and celebration* is evident. Perhaps with the number of fathers now taking an active part in the birth process, increasing, as well as a

greater sense of control over the nature of the birth, these stories will be on the increase. My grandson Harry told me, aged three, with a serious look in his eye, that his mummy had to be cut open in order for him to be born, but that there were lots of people there and when they pulled him out they all shouted 'It's Harry!' and a huge smile came over his face.

The reason for examining your own birth story as part of gathering information about your life is to bring what has been hidden into the light. I have found that when people begin to ask friends and relatives about their birth or their early life, a few things start to make sense. It also offers an opportunity for corresponding or meeting relatives who may have been scattered over the world, as well as the family 'black sheep'.

These times of gathering can offer an opportunity to express rage and fury at what appears to be the unfairness of our lot. They also can lead to expressing forgiveness: of a mother or father who one learns was immature or ill, suffering from hardships we can only imagine, given little or no help, dominated by others, and living in poor and inadequate housing. While it's important to experience those feelings that have become blocked or split off by our need to survive earlier life events, part of moving on into maturity is to let go of our feelings about the past.

Sometimes the atmosphere of our birth seems to accompany us on other transitions and we can feel the flavour of a 'long difficult birth' in starting a new job or relationship, or in moving house. Or, feeling impatient always, as if we've always had to exit early, as in premature birth. Some people describe their lives as being like 'waiting in a passage'; others report a life-long sense of restriction around the throat which intensifies during change and subsequently discover they were born with the cord around their neck.

The atmosphere of our birth will not necessarily dominate our lives, for many people overcome difficult or protracted births naturally. But if you feel there is a link between the flavour of your birth and the kind of physical experiences you have while undergoing change or transition, it is worth reflecting on the nature of your birth, especially if there is still someone you can ask. Even if there isn't, your symptoms and intuition will be enough to let you know what to concentrate upon. Perhaps those of us who had slow and difficult births need to recognise that this may be the way we go into new things, and accept it for what it is. In knowing it consciously we can choose whether to get help to push ourselves on a bit, or whether to let the slow, difficult way take its own time.

The following questionnaire is designed to help you ponder on the nature of your own birth and the atmosphere into which you were born.

Questionnaire: Birth and prebirth

Our time in the womb is our first experience of unconditional being. How much time do you allow for *being* rather than *doing*? Weekends only, evenings, two hours per day, only holidays, never?

(Continued)

Gathering information

How does your need for containment – a house, room, building – reflect itself in your life? Does the place you live in suit you? What is it like? Describe it, and see how much of it is an extension of your original container, offering retreat, safety, protection. If you find it does not offer these properties, where can you go to get in touch with them? For all-round good health all of us need safe and appropriate containment, whether this is a caravan, tent or hut that is our very own.

How much sleep do you allow yourself – enough, too little, too much? Are there restrictions against sleep in your life (internal voices telling you to get up and not sleep)? Look back over your life and see how you have used sleep, whether it has been allowed or not in your life. Babies and teenagers require a lot of sleep, as if they needed to balance the enormous growth in consciousness and physical change with darkness and rest more than at other times.

How much care do you take of yourself – warmth, safety, protection?

Do you allow rhythm into your life – music, dance, sound? When was the last time you felt in touch with the rhythms of life and felt you were part of it – today, yesterday, last week/month/year? Where did you feel in touch most? By the sea? In the country watching the seasonal changes? How much do you allow this to affect you positively – all the time, partially, not enough, never?

How much do you know of your actual birth? Was it a natural birth, forceps delivery or Caesarean? Was it easy or difficult? Were you breast-fed or bottle-fed?

Multiple births

This means that several lives share the same space right from conception. Sometimes this creates rivalry and a keen competition for space and attention. Sometimes there is a complex mixture of strong feelings: those of intense love and bonding to the person with whom you have shared your whole life; and intense hatred and jealousy for when the other or others would seem to be favoured, and you feel your already slender share of the goodies is threatened. Multiple-birth children are actually deprived maternally, however hard the mother works: those moments of being alone and special to Mum are rare. But even short regular moments of being recognised as unique help to consolidate our sense of 'self'.

Many multiple births also include deaths, especially today with the new *in vitro* fertilisation techniques where several embryos may be implanted. When one child or more is born, and one or more has died, there can be a tendency for medical staff to be so pleased that there are any survivors at all that they can overlook the impact of the deaths of those who have perished. There is anecdotal evidence that if you have had a twin who has not survived you are subtly aware of it in some not yet understood way. If that person has died but not been accorded his or her due recognition, there may be uneasy feelings such as survivor guilt. Fearing we were greedy will not be conscious, but may be around unconsciously, subtly undermining our freedom to live

Adoption

In adoption we are carried by one woman and then nurtured by another, or many others, during our first years. We come to each one as a stranger with whom bonding has to be achieved and new signals learned. All of us are now much more aware of the importance of the early years to our psychological development. People who have had many fosterings, many different 'mothers' and many moves seem to suffer the most in terms of insecure or disorganised attachment and lack of self-esteem. But sometimes, if there has been one central kind of influence, even the most deprived early backgrounds can be compensated. During the process of self-exploration, people who have been mainly in touch with the negative side of their backgrounds do often unearth the memory of someone who was kind and helpful, someone who showed care and introduced the person to something of value in themselves.

JAMES, who had had several difficult fosterings before living in a reasonable children's home for several years, kept his life very ordered and unadventurous, not making many friends and not risking relationships. He had a fine sense of colour. He would wear coloured socks and have an attractive tie and handkerchief. When I commented on this he looked startled and embarrassed. Teased for his 'foppishness', he had tended to repress this side of himself, but on exploring it further he did acknowledge his love of colour and design, and his attraction to beautiful things. He had a knack for picking out small objects like glass and silver, at markets, but he felt it to be 'wrong' in some way. What we discovered was the influence of an old lady he used to visit as a community service 'punishment' during his early fostering days. He hated being associated with the 'cast-offs' of society – babies and old people who weren't wanted. But this old lady had a room that resembled an Aladdin's Cave, and when he showed an interest (which he had in him naturally) she encouraged it. It was the only concentrated attention and appreciation he received during his early years. The memory of it was buried underneath years of basic survival in a difficult competitive world that revolved around who was going to get the best parents or foster parents. It was a moving moment when he realised how much kindness he had received for himself and who he was, and it raised his self-esteem. He started to value his appreciation of colour and shape and took it seriously enough to begin an evening course in design.

Many people who are adopted carry the sense of rejection all through their lives. In an interview with Anne de Courcy in the *London Evening Standard*, the writer John Trenhaile explained that many adopted children are overachievers, struggling to compensate for some sin they are not even aware of having committed:

... the feeling that you have failed a test you didn't even know you'd been set ... In my case I felt I had done something so unspeakably wrong that my own mother gave me away. But it took a long, long time to realise this.

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Sometimes people who have been adopted carry an *abandoning/rejecting* in relation to *abandoned/rejected and worthless* reciprocal role. This may express itself as an obsessional interest in security, being attached to objects or rituals of checking, or fear of emotional commitment. Or, the *conditional* in relation to *striving* reciprocal role may include rebellion, testing out all attachments to see if they will last, to prove oneself 'lovable'.

Some people split their biological and adoptive parents into good/bad or ideal/second best. Biological parents may be idealised, and the split between the two sets of mothers or parents may be reflected in later relationships, or form a 'snag'. For example, a pattern of allowing a 'second-best' relationship while yearning for the unattainable idealised 'real'. Now that adopted children can search for their biological parents this split has a chance to be healed, both by the reality of finding actual parents less than ideal, as well as healing through self-exploration or therapy.

Do you recognise that any of the following underlie your feelings about yourself: I unconsciously behave as if I'm about to be: (a) given away; (b) abandoned; (c) teased by being given life but nothing else; (d) rejected?

Many people who have been successfully adopted, and who are tremendously grateful to their adoptive parents, also carry some of the intense feelings that less successful adoptees carry, but feel guilty about expressing them. They feel they should be grateful and give all their loyalty and self-expression to these parents, and that it would hurt or harm them if they were to search for the biological other. The cost of gratitude may feel as if it damages the 'real' parent or image, thus developing a pattern of spoiling hope or longing. It is often only in later life that people feel able to look at their past and their attitudes in a fresh way. It is possible to find ways to release this hold and to allow a full, accepted life that our biological mother felt unable to offer.

Questionnaire: Our first reception

Were you expected; wanted?

Did it matter if you were a boy or a girl?

How long had your parents been married when you were born?

Where did you come in the family: eldest, only, middle, youngest, etc.? (See Figure 9.1, p. 141.)

Were there any miscarriages, stillbirths, other children who died but were perhaps rarely referred to?

Were you welcomed with open arms and smiling faces?

Was much expected of your presence, for example as the first boy, girl, grandchild, mixed race child, child for generations; or as the heir to title, fortune, family business etc.?

Was your birth an attempt to redeem lost other lives or disappointment?

Was there an unwritten hope that you would carry on a tradition or break with tradition; that you would pioneer something new, such as being the child of a gay couple, or redeem parental restrictions?

Development of a sense of oneself in the world

Infancy

Reciprocal roles describe the internalisation of patterns of relating, to ourselves and to others. These roles begin during pregnancy, through birth and infancy into childhood, when we are at our most impressionable, before we have started to form thoughts about anything. Our infant world is experienced mainly through our bodies – hot, cold, wet, soiled and uncomfortable, hungry, empty, full; held gently, firmly, roughly, not held at all; stroked gently, soothingly, lovingly, roughly, angrily, harshly, or not at all. Because we are so dependent and vulnerable when we are infants we experience a great deal of anxiety if what we have known as keeping us safe is threatened in any way. Dr D.W. Winnicott (1979) uses the term ‘primitive agonies’ to describe the unbearable anxieties of the infant in fear of falling forever, in fear of being abandoned.

When our early infant life is adequately provided for, our fears are allayed and our anxieties do not get out of proportion. We learn to trust that what or whoever goes away will come back; that it is safe to know love and be loved, and to know and love oneself; and that there are parts of us we can trust to be safe and to where we can retreat. We form appropriate boundaries between ourselves and others as we grow from infancy into childhood, a process that takes from the time of birth to between two and three years.

When the early environment is experienced as non-nurturing, but neglectful, hostile or inadequate, our development is thwarted by anxiety. We learn to adapt in order to accommodate, and, before thought process, and before we have separated what belongs to ourselves and what belongs to others, our only defence against what is experienced as a hostile outside is to compartmentalise our experiences. This might involve states where we withdraw, become zombie-like; states of helplessness and states where we are overwhelmed by unmanageable feeling and can only writhe and scream. We may also split off the things that are unpleasant and experienced as ‘bad’ from the good experiences, setting a pattern for later on of things appearing as either totally good or totally bad, with nothing in between.

Projection

For example, it could become difficult, if not impossible, to be angry and love someone at the same time, or to receive someone’s anger without feeling hated. When we are split off in this way we may project any negative aspects onto others, thus experiencing the other as bad or against us, as chaotic or hateful. These feelings can be projected onto our employers, friends or relatives, who we

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then invite to live out for us the unresolved difficulties or rejected parts from our early life.

From birth to about the age of seven the ego is developed against the background we have just described. In order for the ego to grow healthily and be of use to us as a lens through which we see and operate in the world, we need a 'good enough' background. We need to feel that we are loved and therefore lovable; liked and therefore likeable; accepted and therefore acceptable. We need to know that however 'bad' we are, we will not be rejected.

If our early years are accompanied by a 'too tight' environment, where a parent or guardian is too attentive and protective, we get little experience of the outside world and therefore lack the tools to cope with adult life. We tend to grow up to be afraid of life and our instincts, unwilling to take any risks, avoiding challenge and thus isolating ourselves. Our reciprocal roles tend to involve *restricting/controlling* in relation to *restricted/crushed* and we may recognise the dilemma 'if I must, then I won't'. We may be drawn to want to merge with another.

If there has been too little interest, too loose a soil, we feel ungrounded and 'dropped', which can emerge later in depression and a lack of ego strength or self-esteem, a sense that we inhabit a 'nowhere world'.

Recollecting early life and influences

The following section offers exercises and questions for gathering together and reflecting upon your early life.

exercise

Figure 9.1 is an example of how to lay out your own family map. Make your own family map or tree in your own way. Use different colours for different people and different shapes. Alongside each person put their date of birth, occupation, style, personality traits and any other description you feel is significant. See if you can find words to describe the reciprocal roles of the family members in your map.

Spend a few moments with your eyes closed, and feel into the type of early childhood you had and the type of early environment. Did it feel (a) too tight and enclosed, or (b) too loose? See if you can get an image of your mother, or whoever was mother for you, the feel of that person. Where are they in relation to you? What does the image tell you about your early life and the child you once were?

exercise

Many people have few or no early memories, although sometimes early memories start to come back during therapy or self-questioning. What is your earliest memory? Picture it, in all its colours and shades. What is happening, with whom, who is there? Set the scene for yourself down to the tiniest detail – what everyone is wearing, the texture of the cloth, smells around you, sounds. Again, closing your eyes, feel into your own place in the recollection. What are you wearing? Feel your feet on the ground, feel how small you were, actually become yourself as a small person in that picture. Write down what is happening, and what the feelings are. When you look at it now, what do you sense are the reciprocal roles being invited?

When you have got this memory, anchor it by writing or drawing. Make another picture inside yourself, of the early life you would like to have had, painting in all the feelings, objects, ideas, atmosphere you would have liked as a small person to have had. See if you can, from this exercise, begin to understand the world you inhabited as a child, and the kind of choices you had to make in terms of survival. Make a note of the parts of you that went underground or unnoticed and undeveloped.

Ponder on where you fit in the family network and on how this position has influenced you. Eldest children are said to have similar beginnings as only children: they are 'King or Queen' until a sibling comes along. As the eldest you had 'new' parents, inexperienced at the art of parenting. Sometimes the eldest or only children are expected to be more 'grown up' than is appropriate for their age, and are given responsibilities way beyond their years.

Second children are often treated more leniently, because parents are by now experienced and more relaxed. If the elder sibling is making a success of things and fitting in with the family network, a second child may feel they have to keep up. Or, if the eldest has in some way disappointed parents and family expectations, the second (and this can apply to any children who come afterwards) can take on the position of the eldest, making the eldest feel redundant and a failure.

If you are a middle child then there is a sense of having to 'jockey for position' in a family, often feeling in between or in a 'no place'. Sometimes the youngest child is the 'sunshine child' who has it easy, with few expectations or demands. Siblings often divide into pairs, as families with two parents and two children can become two pairs. Pairs are comfortable, but threes make complicated triangles. Youngest children may have a lot of freedom, but can also be neglected or taken for granted. Sometimes they are babied longer than is appropriate because they are the last to leave the nest. If spoiled and cosseted, they may find it difficult to grow up and lead their own independent lives.

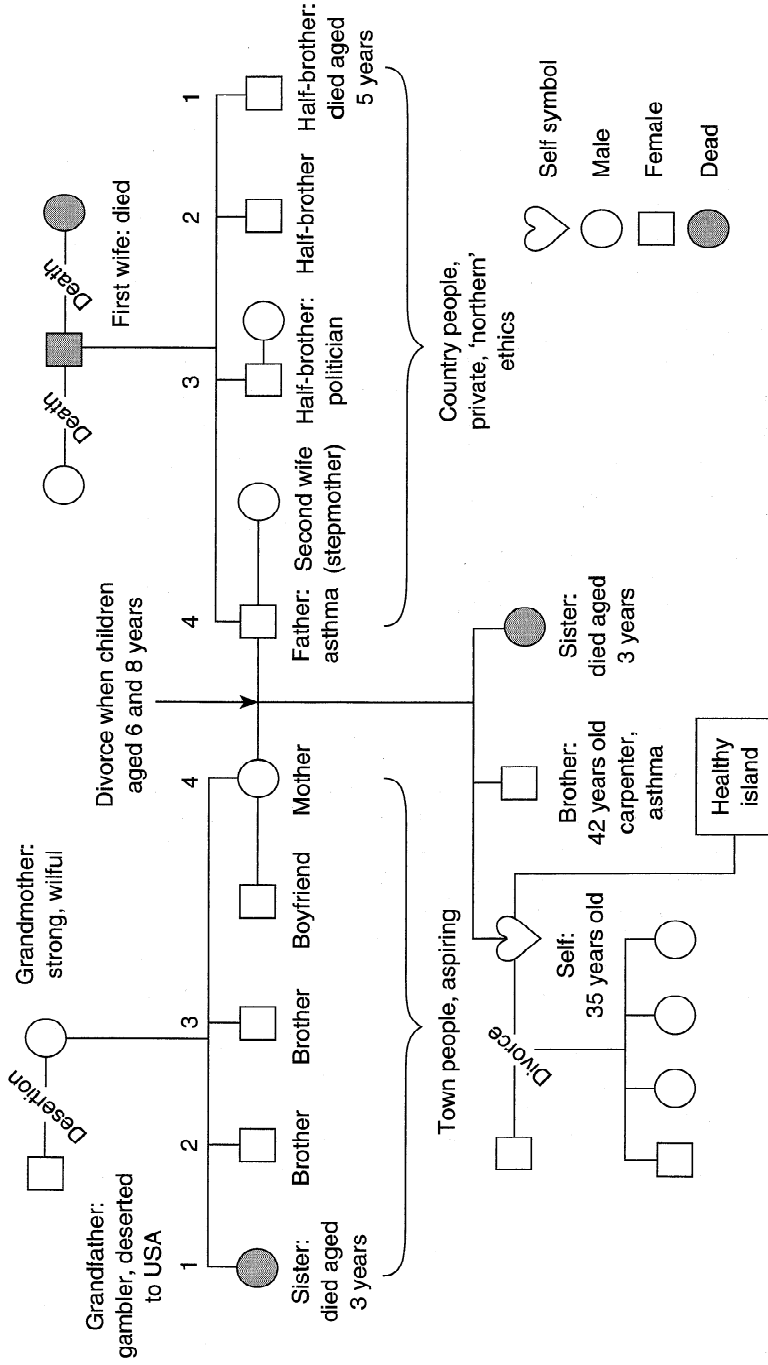


Figure 9.1 A family map

*researching signs of our 'healthy island'
in early life*

1. Play

Were you allowed to play as a child? What kind of play was it? See if you can remember games, toys or stories. Notice the quality of this remembered play and how it made you feel. See if you can find a word to describe what you were naturally drawn to. There may be both negative and positive aspects that emerge from exploring the games we had as children. Play can often be creative and nourish our imagination, our sense of colour, shape and image-making capacity. It may also have been a way in which we safely expressed difficult feeling. Telling dolls or teddies off or mending them with bandages sometimes tells us something of our internal world at a particular time. Burying things in the garden, learning to punch, throw darts may help us see our natural defences emerging.

How do you play now?

2. Longing

How have you experienced longing? For what have you longed? See if you can follow where your own natural longing, or your own heart, has been trying to lead you.

3. Happiness

Write down the times in your life when you:

felt happy
experienced joy
were respected
realised you were being taken seriously
felt you mattered

Note how you experienced these feelings:

in your body
in feeling words

How might you write about these good feelings now and about what you received?

(Continued)

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4. Connection

Write down the number of times in your life when you have felt connected to someone – person, animal, situation or group, part of nature, belief. Note the feelings around this sense of connection.

5. Spiritual awareness

Write down what for you gives a sense of spirituality. How important is this capacity to you? Do you give space for this in your everyday life? What are your spiritual practices and how do you nourish them?

Whatever you discover about your healthy island, make a space for it in all your writings, diagrams and in your own self-monitoring. When, later on in the book, you make a diagram of the problematic reciprocal roles, remember to put your healthy island on to your diagram.

exercise: using objects to create our family map

Have some fun by gathering a number of objects – for example, shells, stones, plates, glass – that might depict your family members. Choose a favourite object for yourself and place this on the floor first. Then gather objects that represent other family members, including steps, fosters, halves, aunts, grandparents and any animals and neighbours if they were part of family life. Move the objects around to indicate times of change. For example, if one parent left, became ill or died, when you went to school, when siblings were born or other people joined the family. We can often remember something happening in a certain house, but not how old we may have been.

Allow the objects to show you something of your early family atmosphere.

Qualities of early caregivers

Describe the one or two main people in your early life and list underneath in columns the main qualities of each: their likes and dislikes; their sayings and ambitions.

Mealtimes

Mealtimes can be highly charged family gatherings that can tell us a lot about what is going on in a family.

The impact of our beginnings

What were mealtimes like? Did you eat: together as a family, or separately?

What kind of atmosphere was there:

- silent
- formal
- informal
- tense
- happy
- chatty

Were there rituals about food, such as preparation, washing up, washing hands, saying grace, 'I always sit here'?

Were mealtimes in front of the TV?

Recall your favourite and least favourite foods. What was the difference?

What habits, fears, difficulties, pleasures, have come out of your experience of family meals?

Celebrations

Name and remember one good and one not so good celebration, a birthday perhaps, or Christmas.

Recall your memories of any of the following:

- being dressed up
- poverty
- worry
- rows
- feeling spoilt
- feeling neglected

Which visitors were allowed?

Relatives

Who were they? (Go back to your family tree)

Who spoke to whom?

Family feuds: what was their nature? What was the history, story, mythology? How did it live on? Who perpetuated it?

Were those who were a bit slow treated equally and well, or secretly laughed at, ridiculed and ignored?

In cases of great social or financial change, how were relatives who had not 'made it' treated:

- slighted
- with shame
- ostracised

(Continued)

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- looked down upon
- kindly
- generously
- willingly

Religion

What was the family religion or belief system?

How did it manifest itself? Did you go to church every Sunday? Was there fierce rejection of anything 'funny' or irrational? Any other memories?

Was religion talked about in a free way?

Were you allowed to have your own view as you were growing up?

Was religion important to you – the idea of God, Jesus, Allah, Siva? Was it:

- frightening
- reassuring
- wonderful

What lives on today from your early experience with religion and religious ideas? The concept of:

- sin
- guilt
- love
- discipline
- wonder
- awe
- belief

School

Take either primary or secondary school or both.

What was your first day at school like?

Were you prepared or not prepared?

Who took you?

How did you react to:

- teachers
- other children
- the classroom
- tasks

What lives on in you today that comes from early schooldays?

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How did you cope with:

- lessons
- the playground
- other children
- teachers

Did you ever run away or want to come home?

How did your parents cope with talking to teachers about anything to do with school and school meetings?

Did you have school dinners or take your own lunch?

Did you feel different from other children? If so, why? Was it:

- clothes
- hair
- hygiene
- parents
- where you lived
- colour of skin
- religion
- being clever
- being not so clever
- speaking in a different language
- not understanding others

Were you bigger or smaller than others? Did this matter?

Did you follow in a brother or sister's footsteps?

Did Mum help with school or was it Dad?

Did you get rewarded for achievements, or did no one notice or seem to care what you did? What were the rewards?

Did you travel on your own or with others?

Did you have to care for a younger sibling? Did you mind?

If things went wrong at school – bullying, fights, teasing, taunting, unfair treatment by staff – who did you talk to?

If things went wrong at home, was there someone at school to whom you could turn?

How did it feel to come home after school?

Friendships

Were you allowed to bring friends home?

How were they treated?

(Continued)

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Did your parents' morals and ethics become judgements on your friends?
What was this like for you? Did you:

- remain divided in loyalty
- continue the friendship anyway, but secretly
- give in to your parents and drop the friends

Were you allowed out in gangs or groups? How early?

Money

Did you know how much money your parents earned?

Were you given pocket money?

Were you encouraged to, or did you have to earn your own money?

Was money important for:

- saving
- buying things
- having power

What were the myths about money in your family? Was money never talked about, worshipped, or was everything priced or referred to in relation to its cost?

Were you hard up or poor? Was this:

- like everyone else
- sad
- a disgrace
- humiliating
- painful

exercise

Write something in your notebook about what you learned about value systems from the family's attitude to and handling of money.

Spend some time looking at your own attitude to money and how you may have used money over the years:

- Do you feel you have to hold on to it if you have it?
- Are you afraid of it?

- Does it burn a hole in your pocket?
- Do you never have enough, however much you earn or are given?
- Do you hate and despise it?
- Are you embarrassed about talking about it and cannot discuss money matters?
- Are you comfortable with money matters?

Talents and gifts

Many people grow up not knowing that they are really good at something because this is never appreciated and mirrored back. In Chapter 7, 'Snags and self-sabotage' we looked at the effect of envy upon someone whose skills or gifts were more developed or extended than those of a parent or other family member. We can be made to feel guilty for our talent and hide it or leave it undeveloped. Only later, when perhaps we are able to succeed, can we begin fully to claim this part of ourselves. But sadly some people do feel very crippled by their guilt about having gifts that they never develop, and remain thwarted in some way, envious of others' successes, frustrated and living out only half of their capacity.

What gifts do you feel you have? Make a list. If appropriate include things like communication, good listening, good with people, patience, kindness, ability to analyse or put things together, intuition, as well as being good at sport, writing, science, selling, making things, reading, storytelling. Add this to your healthy island.

How did the family remark on your gifts:

- kindly
- proudly
- encouragingly
- took no notice at all
- denied them
- called you names when you did something well – 'Don't let it go to your head', 'Show off'
- compared you with others, themselves or their ancestors

The things we are good at may also not be properly understood by our parents. They may appear to discourage our talent or interest because they don't understand it and they can't see where it will lead. A report by a schoolmaster about Barry Sheene, the champion motorcycle racer, read, 'Barry has got to learn that fiddling with motor cycles won't get him through life!' We may have been good at butterfly and insect collecting when our parents were mechanically minded. We may have loved the ballet and music, when our parents were only interested in the house and garden. My mother found it odd that I liked to walk on my own through the fields where we lived, dreaming. For a while I felt ashamed for my 'oddness' and tried hard not to be a dreamer. I can see now that this was the

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time I naturally reflected alone and collected dreams and thoughts. This is now an important nourishment for writing and therapy.

Go back to the time of your early growing-up period – age four to twelve – and think about what your own interests were then. Write them down. Include the ones you might be tempted to dismiss.

List the things you were drawn towards then that are still part of your life today.

If they have been driven underground how can you resurrect them?

Was the opposite true in your family – that talent was overemphasised and looked for even when it wasn't there? Did you feel you had to oblige and come up with something to please and gratify your parents' desire?

Sometimes parents who have a particularly strong talent hope it will come out in their children. Parents hope that their children will do the things they were unable to do, living out their own unfulfilled life through them. I know a young man who is naturally quite introverted and shy, and whose mother is the same. She dislikes her shyness but has never done anything about changing it, and she projects the extrovert person she would like to be onto her poor son. As a result, he is bullied into joining things that do not suit him and wearing clothes that are loud and fashionable. She tells false stories of his daring deeds, which make him curl up with embarrassment. He tries to oblige her by having a go at the more extrovert tasks, overcoming quite a lot of fear on the way and aligning himself with friends who expect him to be always full of bravado and loud jokes. It is killing his spirit.

Did you feel that you had to work hard to be what you are, not in order to please your parents' fantasy of what they wanted from a son or daughter?

Are you still having to live up to that today?

Does it suit you?

Do you want to change it?

Sexuality and gender

Have a look at how your sexuality was formed against the background of your family.

What was physical touching like in your family? Was it:

- encouraged
- not allowed
- allowed too much so you weren't sure of the boundaries between what

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Were you helped to feel good about your body or were you ashamed of it?

At what age did you first become sexually aware?

Could you talk freely about sex in your family? Did you want to? If not, what did you feel?

Were you told about sex:

- at school
- at home
- via a brother or sister
- other relative

What did you make of it when you heard about it?

In the family's attitude, did sex mean one thing if you were female and another if you were male?

Write down some of the myths you received about sex as you were growing up.

Was homosexuality talked about and, if so, in what way? What feelings did you have about it for yourself; for others?

If you discovered you were more attracted to people of your own sex, when did you become aware of this and how?

Were you able to talk about it and find a partner or has it remained hidden still?

A lot of people say, 'I feel very screwed up about sex.' Can you identify with this? If so, make a list of things that bother you about yourself and sexuality:

- always ends in an emotional row
- makes me feel great/other person feel great/both feel great, feel closer
- embarrassing
- humiliating
- gets in the way
- causes anger and disappointment
- it makes me scared

Spend some time looking at the mixed messages you have received about your body, your gender and your sexuality.

If you were sexually abused as a child, how does this affect you now:

- by feeling guilty and contaminated
- by being unable to feel safe enough to get close
- by self-abusive behaviour such as promiscuity, drinking
- by allowing others to abuse you by taking you for granted, hurting or depriving you

There are now many special agencies to help survivors of incest and sexual abuse. You may wish to contact one of these. You may prefer to find a counsellor or

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therapist who will help you with your journey of healing this most difficult and painful of wounds, a person who will treat your story with care, confidence and compassion. A guide to choosing a therapist appears in Part Seven.

Illness

Did illness or ill health affect your family much? Was one family member, yourself perhaps, ill more than the others?

Make a list of all the ill health within your family, with dates and the length of the illnesses and any periods of hospitalisation.

Make a list of all your own periods of ill health, with dates and kinds of experience.

How was illness referred to: was it with fear and reverence for operations, pills and doctors; or with a more cavalier approach, where it was left to nannies, grandparents or neighbours to look in or visit?

If you were ill, who looked after you? How was your illness handled, how much did you know about what was happening to you?

When small children are admitted to hospital they sometimes 'forget' who their real parents are and attach themselves to nurses or other staff members as a way of protecting themselves from the pain of grief. Look carefully at the number of separations caused by illness, and try to get in touch with the feelings of this time.

Who, if anyone, did you play with during those separations?

What fantasies did you have about your parents?

Sometimes parents do not believe us when we say we have a pain or problem, and this can be very hurtful.

In many one-parent families where the parent is the sole breadwinner, and going to work means the difference between eating or not, the onset of a child's illness can be a frightening prospect, and may be treated with fear and denial, before time and energy sees the situation accommodated.

Were you believed about your illness?

Were you treated crossly as if your illness was a nuisance, an inconvenience that upset the routine?

Parent's illness

Children often come to fear 'Dad's heart' or 'Mum's wheezes', and can be made to feel that they will make the problem worse by their behaviour. They mustn't laugh too loud, be rowdy, indulge in rough and tumble, play tricks, roll about in bed with parents first thing in the morning, in case they cause deterioration. or worse. death.

The impact of our beginnings

What did you know of any illnesses your parents had? Or were they mysterious, not referred to, hushed up?

Did their illnesses become barriers to your being with your parents and having fun with them?

So often what we retain of childhood impressions – smells, bandages, potions, creams, prostheses, coughs, wheezes, noises, dark clothing – remains like a pastiche. Myths about health and sickness spring from these times when things were not explained properly.

What was the nature of parents' or grandparents' or other family members' illnesses?

How much has your experience of other people's illness affected your own attitude to health, sickness, to control or feeling out of control, to life and death?

Accidents

Accidents often stand out in the memory during childhood. Accidents such as burning, scalding, falling, bumping heads or knees, grazes, stings, swallowing foreign bodies, being bitten, often stand out in memory for us and can influence the way in which we subsequently take care of ourselves. We may become overcautious or, in defiance, reckless. Childhood accidents are often accompanied by parental anger and blame – 'I told you not to take your bike on that road/play with the neighbour's dog' – and the association of fear, danger, pain and panic with blame, disapproval or rejection can actually convince us that we are bad or foolish and that we mustn't try anything unusual or difficult or exciting, or we may put acceptance at risk.

Some children are punished for getting dirty or tearing their clothes, long before they are mature enough to look after themselves and take responsibility for such adult ways. One girl I knew, who had had a number of hospital admissions for various illnesses and accidents, subsequently became very depressed and was unable to communicate properly. After some months we did come across the memory of her experience of being twice scalded badly enough to go into hospital for several weeks when she was under ten years old. The most powerful memory for her in her revisitation of the image of these events was her mother's fear and worry, and her overwhelming sense of being burdened by a large number of children and now a child suffering from burns. The daughter vowed inside herself that she would never complain about anything, that whatever happened to her would be her own fault, and she must not burden anyone with her feelings. When she did become unwell later in life she returned to these feelings, and was so overwhelmed by them that she turned inwards into depression.

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exercise

Write down any accidents that occurred and the attitudes that accompanied them within your own family. Put them in date order. If necessary, ask about hospital admissions and treatments you received.

Death

Were there any deaths in your family during your childhood or adolescence, which made a big impact upon you? If the person who died was your mother or father, please go to pp. 158–9.

Write something about the person or people you lost, what you lost most at the time, what you most missed. Write something about what you learned from them about the world and about yourself. There might be negative things as well as positive.

How was the event of death handled in your family? Was it talked about?

How soon after the death did you know that the person had died?

Were you told how they died and where?

Were you allowed to go to the funeral, hold flowers, take part?

Could you talk about the death, did you feel free to express what you felt, ask questions, or were you told to be quiet or made to feel you had upset someone too much?

As you flick back the memory album, see yourself as a small person in whose family someone has just died. Imagine yourself, dressed and standing or sitting in a room in your house. Get as strong a picture as you can of that small person and then sit beside them in adult form. Can you feel into your child of that time? Did you:

- withdraw
- go silent
- go off your food
- throw things around
- scream and yell
- have nightmares
- find it difficult to sleep
- find yourself clinging to another adult or a soft toy
- find yourself being drawn to one particular place
- become ill in any way yourself
- have fantasies or dreams about the dead person, hear their voice, see them as if they'd come back to life

In the years following the death, how was the person spoken of:

- never again
- never without tears and upset
- you were told off for talking about them

Were anniversaries remembered, did you take part in them?

Today, how much do these deaths live on in your memory, or have they been blanked out?

Sometimes when a family death occurs early in our life, and we are not allowed to discuss it or mourn, it can produce 'magical guilt' which may unconsciously undermine our later life. It's as if, when very small, we take responsibility for the death (and also for things like the serious illness or miserable life of, for example, a parent or sibling). There are two ways in which this can work. We may have had some negative thoughts about the person who dies, and because we are small and our thinking is not sophisticated we presume that these negative thoughts had something to do with their death, that they contributed to it in some way. We may carry this magical guilt (magical because we couldn't possibly be guilty) unconsciously for years, until we reconsider it and decide to free ourselves from it.

We may also develop a sense of magical guilt because of our own survival: someone close to us died and we did not. Why should we survive and they not? Do we deserve it? Sometimes we think not. This undermining idea may also develop if there is a damaged or very ill parent or sibling in the family. We feel as if our health and wellbeing, or success and happiness, is at their expense, that if we grow up and claim our lives fully it will mean a rejection of the other's life, and that somehow instead we should be limited, damaged and as ill as they were. It's a very uncomfortable idea that our happiness has only been achieved at the expense of someone else's unhappy life. And so it lives on unconsciously inside us, coming out as self-jeopardy, self-sabotage, arranging things so that we do not fulfil our potential or really embrace fully what we can do. In the process of change we have to face those feelings of terror and guilt when we want to carry something through fully for ourselves, but the rewards in terms of self-acceptance and a wider sense of personal horizons are vast.

Sometimes, if a parent dies when we are very small (under eight), we feel guilty about it – especially if we have favoured the living parent and thus feel disturbed about 'gaining' anything from the death). We may then cover our 'magical guilt' by idealisation or hero worship of the dead parent. Sometimes loss of a parent can affect the way we relate to people of that parent's sex.

Loss of a father

Men who have lost a father early in life do sometimes have difficulty relating to other men, particularly older men, and this is more so if there were no other good male figures after the father's death. Sometimes men can grow

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into adulthood feeling that their masculinity is 'on hold', not yet formed. One man said to me, 'It's as if I'm waiting to grow into a man ... still I feel like this and I'm forty-five.' Some men feel they have to overcompensate for not having had a father, by being more in charge, powerful, strong and successful to make up for the loss. This is often encouraged by the widowed mother, who may view her son as a replacement husband. This means inevitably that the sons grow up way before their time, trying to fit into dead men's shoes that they cannot possibly ever fill. Left behind is the 'fatherless boy' inside them. Unless he is claimed properly, later in life he will still be there – lonely, sad, cut off from a possible mentor, champion, friend, example and mate – possibly dominating the inner life of the man, and preventing him from fully claiming his manliness. Getting in touch with this fatherless boy is an important part of mourning for the loss, which may never have been accomplished. When the father is mourned for by the boy who has become a man outside, but wants to feel one more fully inside, something important happens to the growth process.

A girl who loses her father early in life may later on have difficulty relating to men freely, because of fear of losing them. Sometimes people who have died are made into heroes irrespective of what they were like in life. It may then be difficult for a woman to find a man who lives up to the hero her father has become. In her idealism, no man may match up to him. She may find herself searching for the 'perfect' man only to feel more and more disappointed, but without realising why.

A parent's death may also cut a child off from that side of the family, their values and lifestyle. I have known many people who knew nothing of their father or mother's family because they had died early on. The remaining spouse either could not bear to be reminded of their deceased partner in any form and did not keep up with the family, or remarried and they lost touch. Sometimes in rediscovering what a dead parent was really like, by using old photographs or writing to anyone who knew them, people reclaim the character and flavour of their lost parent and can also claim that part of themselves. The individuality of the dead parent may have been forgotten, or hidden, and the child left may be quite like their lost parent but not realise it and feel odd or different.

At forty-eight, ALICE discovered a host of relations in Russia whom she had never met because her mother had lost contact after her father's death. She found they shared her love of music and dancing, of colour and of melancholy verse, qualities her mother had criticised in her and which she had come to feel were undesirable, extrovert and pretentious. Finding that she did indeed carry some of the essence of her father was a real gift to her.

During therapy, ANNE brought many old photographs of herself as a child with her parents. Her father had killed himself when she was three, and the subject was never referred to. He was made out to be a 'bad lot', unstable and generally no good. She was convinced that not only was there a poor quality running in her blood, but that her father hadn't cared enough about her to stick around.

By writing to one of his friends, whom she had discovered quite by accident, she was able to piece together her father's last few days, when he was hospitalised and suffering from shell-shock during the war. He had believed he was responsible for killings in Germany and France which his conscience could not tolerate, and in a frenzy of self-hate and acute misery he had leaped out of an eighth-floor window. This friend went on to describe to Anne some of the horrors of war and the lack of help available to people, such as her father, who were sensitive and conscious of what they were being asked to do.

Anne was herself a pacifist, and this realisation changed her given view of her father's character. One day she brought to the session some old photographs (discovered in the drawer of her aunt's desk) of her father holding her as a small child. Her arm was firmly round his neck and she was smiling radiantly. He was the image of a proud Dad, holding her as if she were the most precious thing on earth. Suddenly tears welled up in her eyes: 'I feel as if I was loved by him,' she said, 'even though I didn't have very long with him!' This realisation made a profound difference to her, and although she had to work through her ever-present fears of rejection from men, and her habit of reading rejection into everything that happened, she had begun the process of building a more solid core to herself, upon which could be built other profound experiences.

Loss of a mother

When a small child loses their mother it is an extremely sad day. Mother, or whoever is mother for us, is the earth into which we were planted. We share her unconscious for the first two years, and she represents our link with care and nourishment in the nursery years. She is the person who makes our emotional and physical world safe. When we lose a mother our most basic world is shattered and we feel frightened, alone and very vulnerable. Although others may take her place and give us mothering, we have lost our link with someone who, whether liked or disliked, was the centre of our world. As she is often the actual centre, family life is seriously disrupted when a mother dies and children may be fostered or farmed out to other families while help is found.

The loss of a mother may live on throughout the following years like a yawning gap. Part of us may stay 'on hold' internally from the time of our mother's death. Our instinctual, emotional and intuitional life may remain undeveloped as we struggle to survive in what to us is an alien world. Later we may look for 'mothering' influences to allow us to complete the unfinished work of our development. We may seek quickly to become mothers ourselves, or conversely, avoid mothering, because we know the excruciating pain of loss.

A man who loses his mother early on may be deprived of a feminine influence, thus not developing the feminine side of himself and finding it awkward to make relationships with women. Whatever the way of compensation, the wound inside will be deep and the need for appropriate mourning and release of sadness is important, as well as looking at ways in which we have overcompensated for the loss in our personality.

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Questionnaire: Loss of mother/loss of father

How old were you when your mother/father died?

Describe your world until that point if you can – where you lived, your own room, toys, playtime, school, atmosphere.

What is your most lasting memory of your mother/father? Paint this picture if you can, with all the details you can manage.

Do you feel you have properly mourned the death of your mother/father? Is the mourning process held up in some way:

- by the lack of knowledge of facts of the death – time, date, place of burial, nature of death
- by not talking enough about her/him, about how you felt for her/him, what you miss about her/him
- because part of you has not let her/him go, not accepted that she/he is dead

How does she/he live on in you? By the nature of:

- how you live
- your work
- family
- ideas
- religion
- ambition

Are you still carrying a candle for her/him in an appropriate way, having accepted her/his death and now remembering her/him lovingly; or inappropriately by trying to live as she/he would have, or wanted you to?

Does she/he have an unconscious presence in your life:

- through dreams
- through ideas of how to 'be'
- through 'magical guilt'
- as a force that drives you which is not your own

Do you feel you have to compensate for her/his death?

If you feel you have lost out on mothering/fathering, how does this manifest itself in your life?

If someone else took on the mothering/fathering, what is your relationship with that person or people now:

- grateful
- happy
- satisfied
- resentful
- angry

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Take a fresh page in your notebook and write down the positive and negative aspects of the mothering/fathering you received after your parent's death.

How much have you been able to take on 'mothering'/'fathering' or looking after yourself? Are you:

- kind
- gentle
- encouraging to yourself
- harsh
- neglectful
- demanding

Can you change this if needs be?

Parents' relationship

Were your parents happy together? If not, do you know why?

What was the atmosphere like: when they were together; when father or mother came home and one of them was already there?

How long were they married before you were born?

How did they meet?

What were their fantasies about each other – Marilyn Monroe or Clark Gable ...?

Did they agree how you should be brought up, or did you go to one parent for some things and the other for others?

Did they have a good physical relationship? Did they touch and hug each other? Did you reckon they were active sexually? Does this idea seem repellent; could you never imagine your parents making love?

Have you wanted to keep them as 'Mum and Dad' and not as ordinary human beings?

Did you prefer one to the other? How did this affect family life?

Did you feel your parents stayed together 'because of the children'?

Did you feel you had to intervene on behalf of one of them, to protect each from the other?

Many of these acts, although not conscious, may have been automatically taken on board. In defining ourselves alongside one parent we may be unconsciously rejecting what it is the other parent stands for. Many children of an alcoholic parent try to take on a role that will protect the non-alcoholic parent or the whole family from stigma, only to find later on in life that they partner an addictive-type person or become at risk themselves from addiction. Again, it is as if the psyche is trying to restore balance and to ask us to claim what it is we have rejected.

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Divorce and separation

Children always suffer when there is a marriage or partnership failure. Parents are the small person's rock and security. To have this threatened is devastating. The after-effects can be softened by the way in which parents act afterwards, and how much they each help the children not to feel guilty, or to feel that they have taken sides. Although a parent may say, 'It's your mother I'm leaving, not you', the rejection is no less absolute.

For a girl whose father leaves the family in her early adolescence, there is the additional blow of feeling rejected as a growing woman at the beginning of her maturity. A son whose father leaves the family may feel pulled between mother and father – wanting to see his father, and aware of a new role as surrogate father with his mother. Younger children may feel pulled from one place to another as they have to adapt to new places and faces, and to weekend fathers or mothers. There may be no memory of the actual event, but what will be absorbed is the atmosphere and emotions of those undergoing the separation.

When a mother leaves a relationship, children experience the same feeling of rejection, or a sense that she left because they weren't good enough. If the mother has been the centre of family life it may feel as if the heart has gone out of it, that their world is a very cold, unforgiving place.

If your parents divorced or separated:

How old were you at the time?

Who told you what was going to happen?

How did you feel?

What were your first thoughts, fears? Did you voice them? Did you get heard?

How much did your life change at this point – at home, at school, with friends?

Did you carry on seeing both parents?

Was there a difficult atmosphere or competition between parents for your attention?

Did you feel you had to take sides? Did other family members approach you?

Did you miss the parent you saw least? What was it you missed most?

Did you feel angry inside? Perhaps you did not express it, but do you think now that it came out in some other form – angry outbursts, tantrums, breaking things, banging your head, shouting, spitting, etc.? Do you still feel angry now?

Do you feel it was anyone's fault?

Did you blame yourself?

Could you talk to anyone about it – brothers, sisters or family members?

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If you grew up with only one parent, what were your fantasies about the absent parent? What kind of relationship, if any, did you have with them? How was the absent parent referred to:

- lovingly
- adoringly
- disparagingly
- with a curse
- critically
- as a hero/heroine

What effect has this had upon your attitude to, and relationship with, members of the opposite sex, and with members of the sex of the parent you grew up with?

What do you feel about being the child of a single parent:

- different
- deprived
- hostile
- ashamed
- embarrassed
- odd
- it was good fun
- it was an adventure
- it was special

Note what it was that your feelings were specifically attached to.

If either parent remarried, how did this affect you? Did it change your relationship with your parent? If so, how? What did you lose or gain? Were there new family members, step- or half-siblings? How did you feel your place in the family changed?

What effect has the experience of separation and divorce had on you? Has it made you nervous of relationships or a commitment? Has it not made any difference at all?

