



# The Key to Better Parenting

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.



## Welcome!

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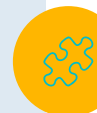


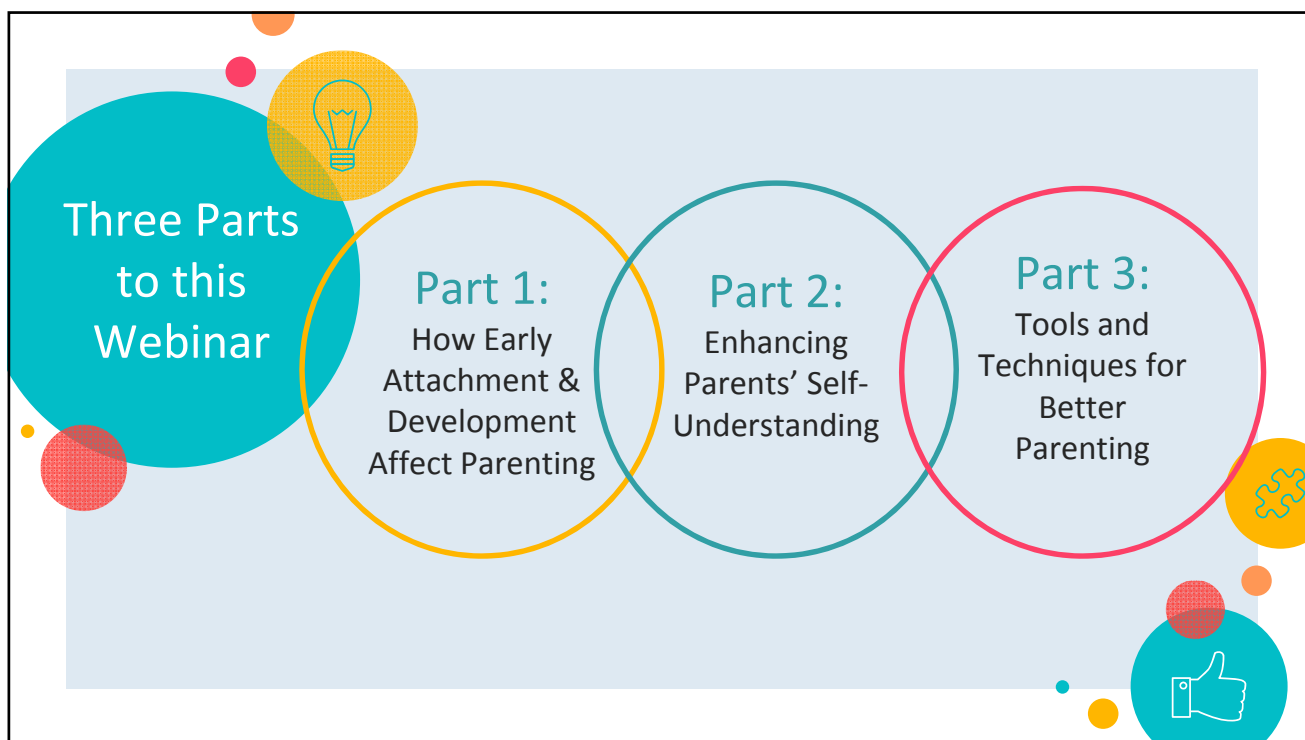
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The slide features a large teal circle on the left with the word 'POLL:' in red. To its right is a yellow circle with a lightbulb icon. The main text 'Are you:' is in black. Below it is a bulleted list with three items: 'A parent?', 'A professional who works with parents?', and 'Both?'. A red 'Note:' follows, stating that the webinar is for CE and designed for both parents and professionals. It asks for questions to be emailed to [Glendon@glendon.org](mailto:Glendon@glendon.org). Decorative elements include a puzzle piece icon in a yellow circle to the right, a thumbs up icon in a teal circle at the bottom right, and several small colored dots (orange, pink, yellow) scattered around.

POLL:

Are you:

- A parent?
- A professional who works with parents?
- Both?

**Note:** This is a CE Webinar. Many of the slides and exercises included are designed for parents and for professionals to use and teach to clients. If you have any questions, please email us following the Webinar.  
[Glendon@glendon.org](mailto:Glendon@glendon.org)



## Common Misconceptions About Parenting

***"I'm better off burying the past and just focusing on my own kids."***

Unresolved trauma and loss from parents' own childhoods strongly influence how they are as parents and creates problems for their kids.

***"I didn't have good parents, so I can't be a good parent."***

Attachment research shows that it's not how bad someone's childhood was but how much they've made sense of it that predicts the kind of parent they'll be.



## Common Misconceptions About Parenting

***"I'm gonna make up for how my parents were with me by treating my kids the opposite way my parents treated me."***

Parents often try to make up for their own past with their kids, however this is not necessarily an attuned way to meet their child's needs. Our children are not the same as us, and parents can hurt kids by overcompensating or rebelling against conditions from their own childhood.

***"How I feel doesn't matter. It's all about my kids now."***

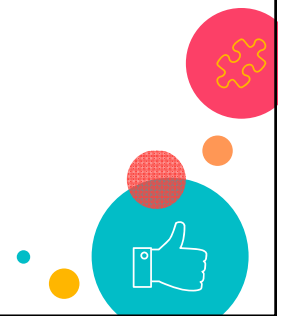
The best thing parents can do for their children is be happy, lively, and fulfilled people in themselves. Parents must seek to get their adult needs met by other adults.





## • The Compassionate Approach to Parenting

Being a good parent means focusing on you. It's an ongoing process that involves making sense of your past, understanding your behavior, differentiating from self-limiting influences, challenging self-critical thinking and seeking out your own, unique sense of happiness and fulfillment.



### Part 1.

### How Early Attachment and Development Affect Parenting





## What is Attachment Theory?



- At the very beginning of our lives, we form attachments to our primary caretakers as a survival mechanism.
- Our attachment style forms as a result of the adaptations we made in infancy to get our needs met. Children make the best adaptations they can to their family.



## What is Attachment Theory?

- The attachment system is activated when we are distressed.
- The way our parents interact with us (particularly during times of distress) forms the basis of our attachment style.

**Attachment  
system  
activating!**





## Attachment Theory Distilled

● Humans rely on attachment figures for:

- Protection (*safe*)
- Support (*seen*)
- Emotion regulation (*soothed*)

*From: "Secure and Insecure Love: An Attachment Perspective" Phillip R. Shaver, Ph.D.*



## Patterns of Attachment in Children

### Attachment Style

- Secure
- Insecure – avoidant

### Parental Interactive Pattern

- Emotionally available, perceptive, responsive
- Emotionally unavailable, imperceptive, unresponsive and rejecting



## Patterns of Attachment in Children

### Attachment Style

- Insecure – anxious/ambivalent
- Insecure – disorganized

### Parental Interactive Pattern

- Inconsistently available, perceptive and responsive and intrusive
- Frightening, frightened, disorienting, alarming

## Attachment Statistics

### Attachment Styles:

- |                     |               |
|---------------------|---------------|
| • <b>Secure</b>     | <b>55-65%</b> |
| • <b>Ambivalent</b> | <b>5-15%</b>  |
| • <b>Avoidant</b>   | <b>20-30%</b> |

### Disorganized Attachment

- **Low Risk Populations = 20-40% Disorganized**
- **High Risk Populations = 80% Disorganized**

**Secure =  
Good Enough**

## What causes insecure attachment?

Unresolved trauma/loss in the life of the parents statistically predict attachment style far more than:

- Maternal Sensitivity
- Child Temperament
- Social Status
- Culture

## Implicit Versus Explicit Memory

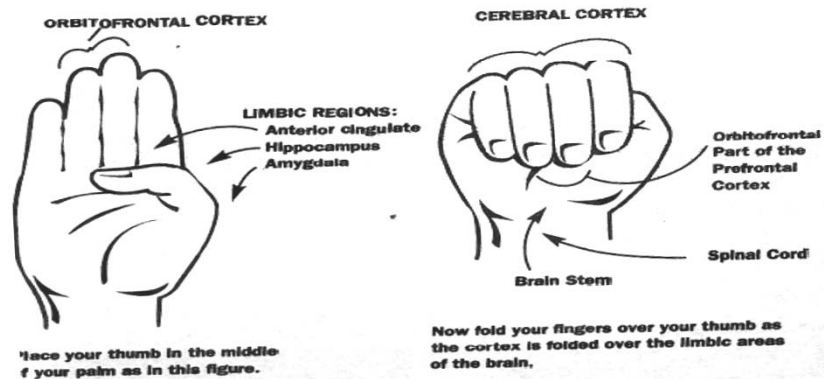
Implicit Memory

Explicit Memory



# The Brain in the Palm of Your Hand

Daniel Siegel, M.D. – Interpersonal Neurobiology



## Triggers

Current day situations can stir up pain from the past:

- Identify with ways our parents felt or acted
- Feel the way we felt as a kid



## 9 Important Functions of the Pre-Frontal Cortex

1. Body Regulation
2. Attunement
3. Emotional Balance
4. Response Flexibility
5. Empathy
6. Self-Knowing Awareness (Insight)
7. Fear Modulation
8. Intuition
9. Morality



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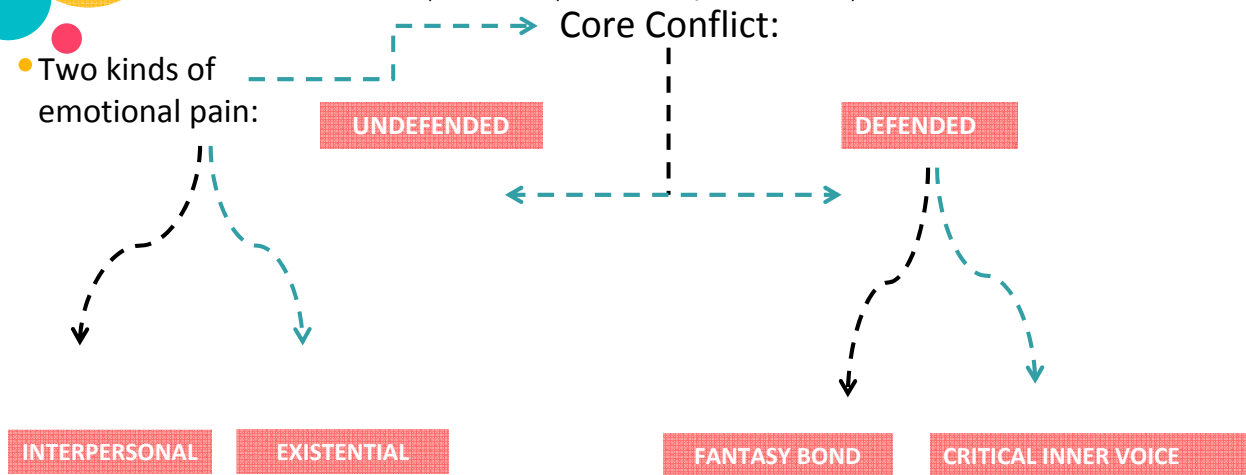


## • Separation Theory

Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

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- Two kinds of emotional pain:



## • The Fantasy Bond

### • For a child:

- The fantasy bond starts in infancy when a child fantasizes of being merged with the mother.
- The child creates a fantasy, identifying with the parent or internalizing them, becoming parent and child all in one.



# The Fantasy Bond

## For a child:

- In later years, the child learns to self-parent.
- Like an addiction, the fantasy bond may provide temporary relief, but ultimately creates more feelings of hunger, desperation and maladaptation.




# Emotional Hunger vs. Love

Emotional hunger describes a strong need created from deprivation in the parent's own childhood. Often a parent will seek physical contact with a child in an attempt to relieve this ache or longing. However, this type of physical affection drains rather than nourishes the child. It is a form of *taking from* rather than *giving to* a child.

May be expressed in a number of behaviors, including:

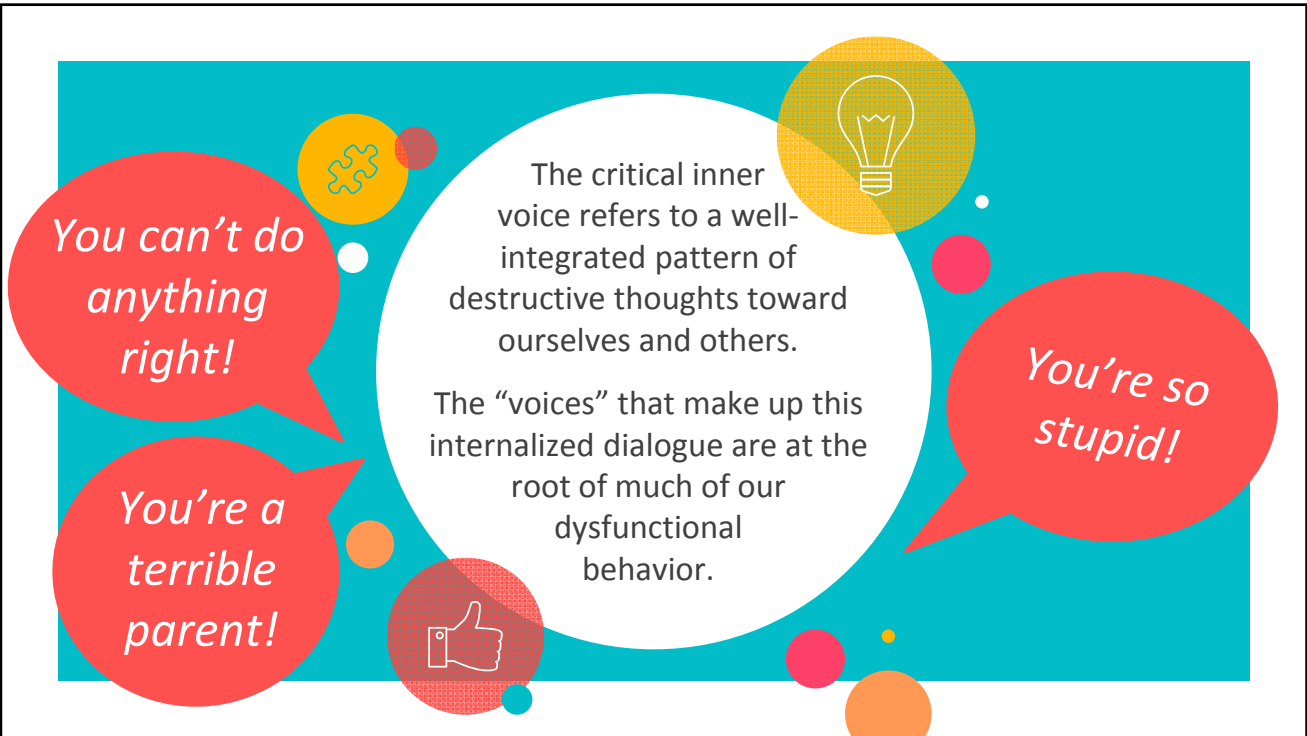
- Living vicariously through a child
- Being overly protective, excluding the other parent
- Exploiting the child as a confidant
- Expecting to be taken care of by the child – a form of role reversal
- A parent's love can be observed in behaviors that enhance the well-being of children, and that are nurturing and supportive of the unique personality of each child. They establish real emotional contact with their children, display spontaneous, non-clinging physical affection and take pleasure in their child's company.





A large teal circle contains the title text. It is surrounded by several smaller circles in yellow, orange, and red. Icons include a puzzle piece, a lightbulb, and a thumbs up.

## Definition of the Critical Inner Voice



A central white circle contains the definition text. It is surrounded by a teal background with various colored circles and icons (puzzle piece, lightbulb, thumbs up). Three red speech bubbles contain negative self-talk examples.

The critical inner voice refers to a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward ourselves and others.

The “voices” that make up this internalized dialogue are at the root of much of our dysfunctional behavior.

*You can't do anything right!*

*You're a terrible parent!*

*You're so stupid!*



## Where Critical Inner Voices Come From

- As a defense, people identify with and internalize destructive attitudes from their parents, particularly in times of stress.
- The times children are most scared are the times they most identify with their parents.



## Why We Idealize Our Parents

- Children may idealize their parents in order to feel safe.
- Instead, they turn on and feel bad about themselves.





## Projections onto Our Children

- Parents may project how they were or how they were seen as kids onto their own children
- They may see their children as their parents saw them (i.e. the “bad kid” or the “baby”)



## Parental Ambivalence

- All parents have mixed feelings toward themselves and toward their children.
- The more parents try to cover up or deny their negative feelings, the more these feelings may come out in their behavior.





## Division of the Mind

### Parental Ambivalence

Parents both love and hate themselves and extend both reactions to their productions, i.e., their children.

**Parental Nurturance**

**Parental Rejection, Neglect, Hostility**




## Parental Nurturance

### Self-System



- Unique make-up of the individual
- Identification with and incorporation of parent's positive attitudes and traits
- The effect of experience and education









- **Realistic, Positive Attitudes Toward Self**  
Realistic evaluation of talents, abilities, etc...with generally positive/ compassionate attitude toward self and others
- **Goals**  
Needs, wants, search for meaning in life
- **Moral Principles**
- **Behavior**  
Ethical behavior toward self and others
- **Goal-Directed Behavior**
- **Acting with Integrity**

- **Parental Rejection, Neglect, Hostility**  
Other Factors: accidents, illnesses, death anxiety
- **Anti-Self System**
  - **The Fantasy Bond** (core defense) is a self-parenting process made up of two elements: the helpless, needy child and the self-punishing, self-nurturing parent.
  - The degree of defense is proportional to the amount of damage sustained.







## Anti-Self System

### Self-Punishing Voice Process


<u>Voice Process</u>	<u>Behaviors</u>	<u>Source</u>
Self-critical thoughts	Verbal self-attacks – a generally negative attitude toward yourself and others	Critical parental attitudes, projections and unreasonable expectations
Self-destructive thoughts	Addictive patterns and self-punishing thoughts after indulging	Identification with parents' defenses
Suicidal thoughts	Jeopardizing actions like carelessness with one's body, physical self-harm and suicide	Parents' covert and overt aggression (identification with the aggressor)

## Anti-Self System

### Self-Soothing Voice Process


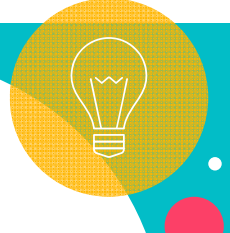

<u>Voice Process</u>	<u>Behaviors</u>	<u>Source</u>
Self-soothing attitudes	Inwardness, self-limiting or self-protective actions	Overprotection by parents, imitation of their defenses
Self-aggrandizing thoughts	Building up yourself verbally	Build up from your parents
Suspicious or paranoid thoughts toward others	Feeling alienated from others, acting destructive toward others	Parental attitudes, child abuse, feelings of being a victim
Self-sabotaging thoughts	Addictive patterns, thoughts that lure you to indulge	Imitation of parents' defenses
Violent thoughts	Aggressive actions and actual violence	Parental neglect, parents' overt aggression (identification with the aggressor)






## Psychological Defenses


There are many traits people developed as children that served a purpose in their childhood but actually hinder them as adults. These characteristics served as “defenses” that shielded them from fully experiencing the pain, and even terror, of recognizing the faults of those responsible for their well-being. Although they were adaptive in the past, these defenses can limit individuals in their adult lives and in their relationships with their children.



### Part 2. Enhancing Parents' Self- Understanding




People can change their present by feeling the full pain of their past and making sense of what happened to them.



## Questions for Parental Self-Reflection


Adapted from the Adult Attachment Interview

- What was it like growing up? Who was in your family?
  - Think about your relationship with each of your parents when you were young. What were your interactions with them like?
  - Did you ever feel rejected or threatened by your parents? Were there other experiences you had that felt overwhelming or traumatizing in your life, during childhood or beyond? Do any of these experiences still feel very much **alive**?
- 




## Questions for Parental Self-Reflection

### Adapted from the Adult Attachment Interview

- How did your parents act with you when you were happy and excited? Did they join with you in your enthusiasm?
  - How did they act when you were unhappy or distressed? Were they sensitive to you?
  - Was there anyone else besides your parents that you could depend on? Did they offer you comfort during difficult times?
- 



## How to Develop a Secure Attachment

- It is possible to develop an Earned Secure Attachment.
  - Because a our attachment ability is broken in a relationship, it needs to be fixed in a relationship. This can be with a romantic partner, a close friend, or a good therapist.
  - It takes time to develop an Earned Secure Attachment, often five years.
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## How to Promote Secure Attachment in Children\*

### Parents should strive to be:

#### Emotionally Available

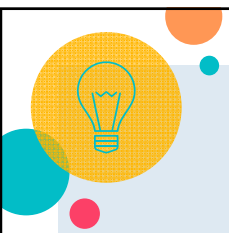

Slow down and be present. Make sure to be 100% emotionally present *some* of the time (emphasizing quality over quantity).

#### Perceptive

Try to observe and *understand* how a child feels. Rather than projecting onto the child, *learn* them.

#### Responsive

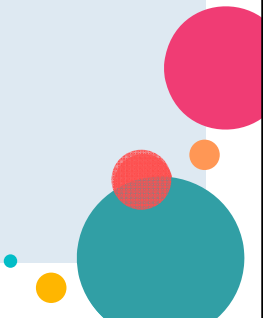
Offer children a contingent response.




## Identifying the Moments When Parents “Lose It” With Their Kids


### What triggers you?

#### Examples:


- Running late
  - Public displays
  - Tantrums
  - Our own stress
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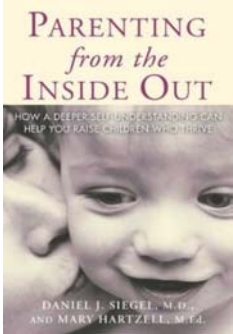


## Low Road






## High Road







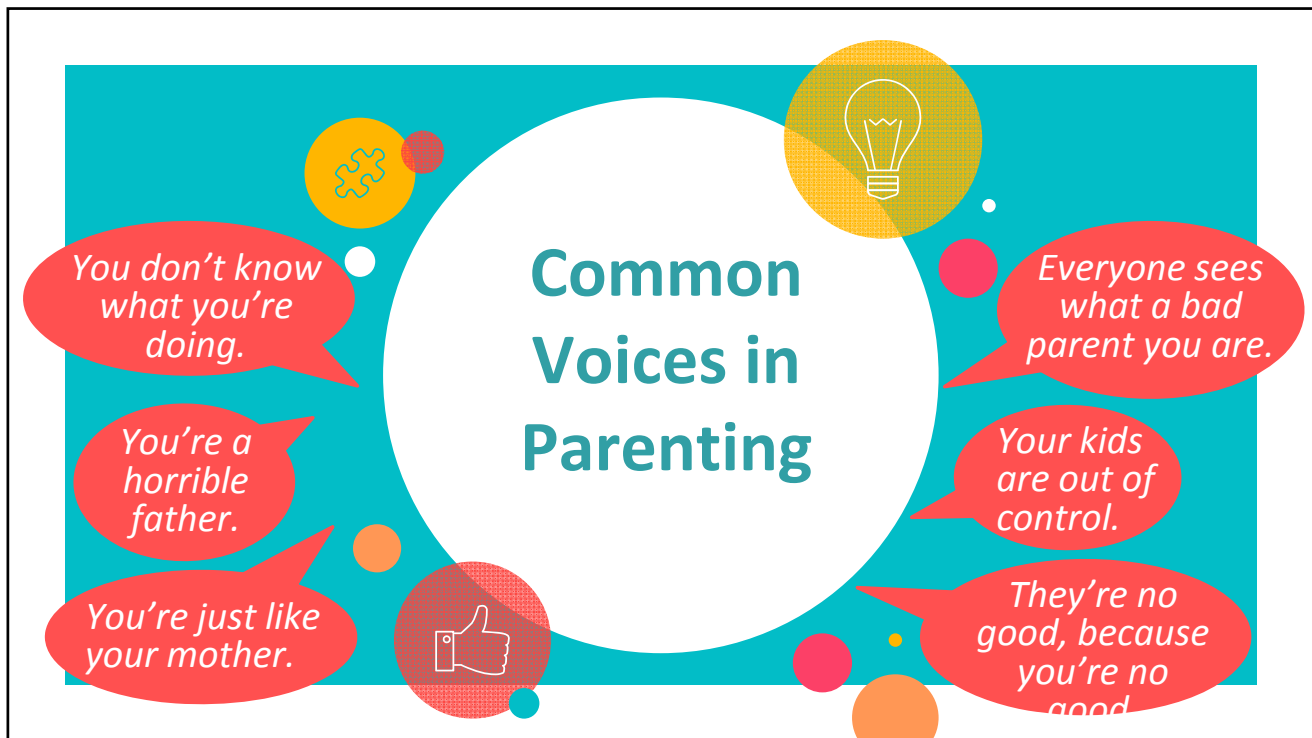
- Think about times when you have entered a low road state with your child. Knowing your triggers and recognizing when you are starting to take the low road are the first steps toward changing.
- Are there particular interactions with your child that frequently bring you into a low-road state? What themes act as a trigger and brings you to the edge?
- Think about what your critical inner voice is telling you at these times.

It is helpful to ask what one's critical inner voice may be saying about the situation.

When people recognize their critical inner voices, they are much less likely to act them out.



## The “Should” Voices

(The Negative Coaching)

- You should make them listen to you.
- You should be nice to them.
- Be different from your mother.
- Let them do what they want.
- You should point out everything they do wrong.
- You shouldn't let them get away with that.
- You should make them eat healthy.
- You should make them behave.



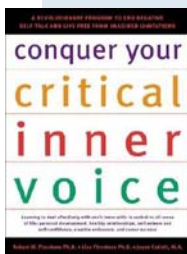
## Children also experience these voices.

*I never know  
what to say.  
I'm such a loser.*

*No one wants to  
be my friend.*

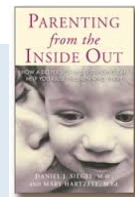
## Challenge Your Critical Inner Voice

1. Notice what triggers these thoughts.
2. Verbalize them in the second person.
3. Think about the source.
4. Respond from a compassionate, realistic point of view.
5. Take actions that go against your voices.





## From *Parenting from the Inside Out*



*If you have already entered the low road, self-reflection may be very difficult. If possible, remove yourself from interaction with your children. **Move your body, stretch, walk.** watch your breathing. As soon as you begin to calm, observe your internal sensations. You may find certain “self-talk” techniques useful in helping to decrease the intensity of your feelings and behaviors. “I need to calm down.” I am on the low road and these feelings and impulses are not dependable.” Even if these strategies don’t lead to immediate recovery, they can often help to reduce the destructive impact of low roads on your children, and your sense of self.*

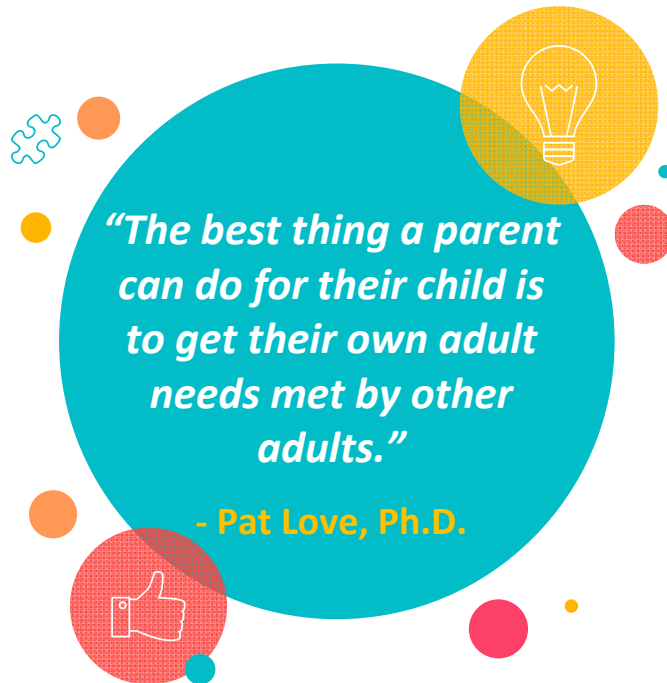


## Identifying Emotional Hunger

### Exercises from The Compassionate Child Rearing Parent Education Program

- Can you recall your parents being overprotective or intrusive? Did their treatment of you make you feel that you were more helpless or incompetent than you really were at that age? Describe your reactions?
- Did your parents try to get comfort from you when you were a child? Did one of them seek you out as a confidant or special companion and leave the other parent out? How did you feel?
- Did your parent or parents insist that you perform for friends and relatives? How did you feel at those times?
- Did your parent or parents brag excessively to their friends and relatives about your accomplishments (as though your achievements or talent were theirs)? How did you respond?



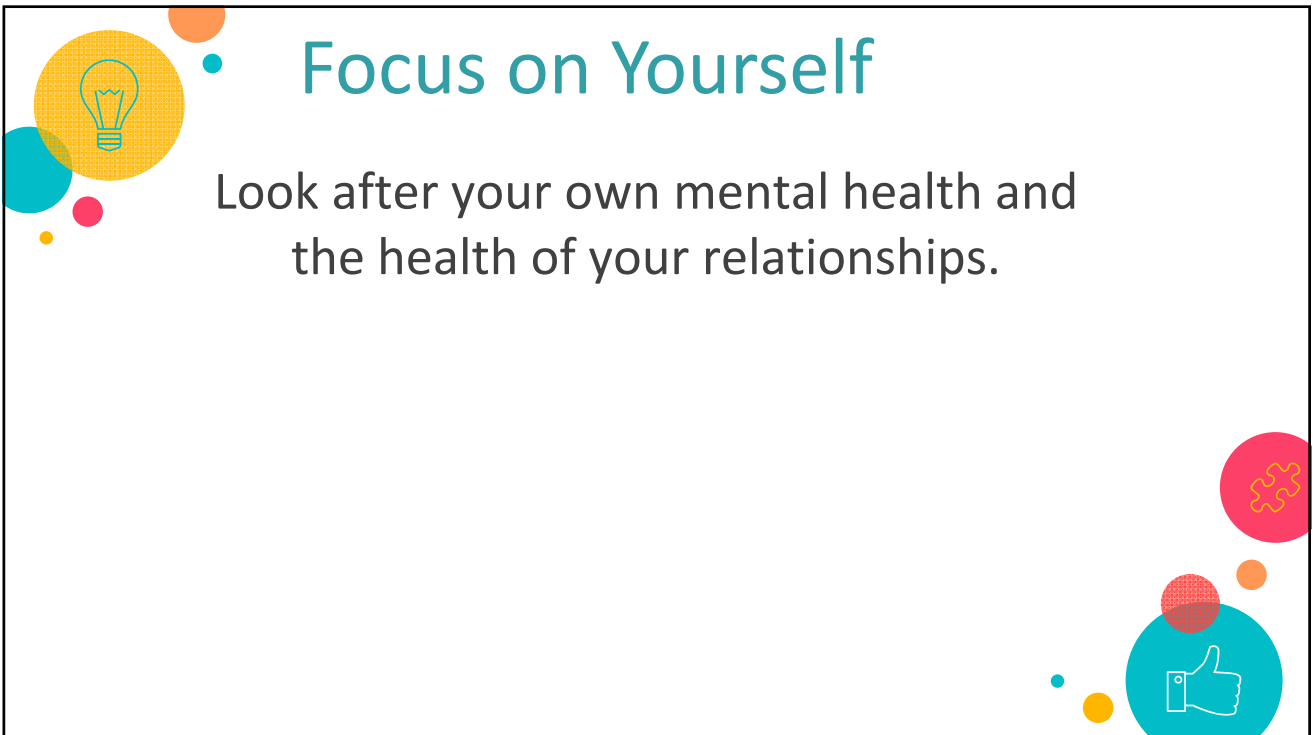


*"The best thing a parent  
can do for their child is  
to get their own adult  
needs met by other  
adults."*

**- Pat Love, Ph.D.**

## Focus on Yourself


Look after your own mental health and  
the health of your relationships.





## Practice Self-Compassion

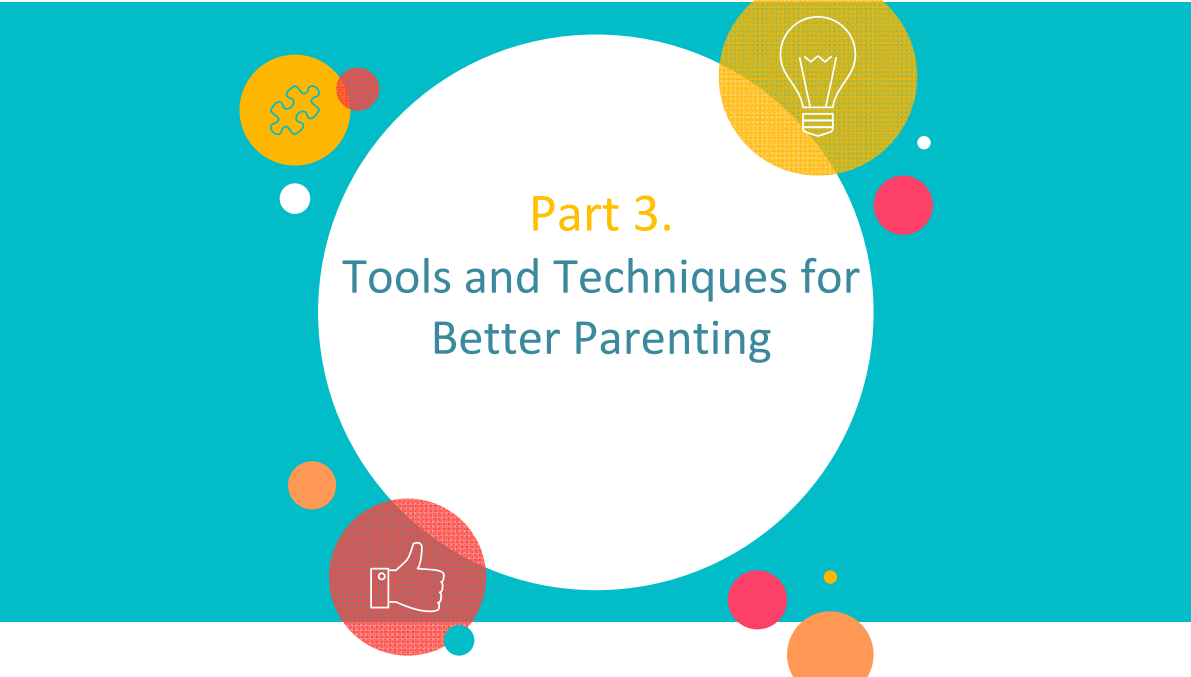
Dr. Kristin Neff:

1. Self-kindness vs. self-judgment
  2. Common humanity vs. isolation
  3. Mindfulness vs. Over-identification with thoughts
- 



## Parenting's Biggest Challenge?





## Part 3. Tools and Techniques for Better Parenting



## Hierarchy of Power

- Treat children with respect, while creating an environment in which the parent has power.
- Be coherent and consistent.



# Lead by Example


Be someone a child can love and respect.



## The Culture of the Family

*From Parenting from the Inside Out*

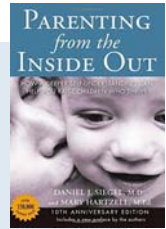
**Create a culture of compassion within the family by placing value on:**

- Reflective dialogues
  - Sharing of emotions/ mindsight
  - Compassionate interactions
  - Appreciation of differences
  - Mutual respect
  - Empathic understanding
- 

## Talking About Feelings

*Emotional relating requires a mindful awareness of our own internal state as well as being open to understanding and respecting our child's state of mind.*

*- Parenting from the Inside Out*




## Attunement

- Availability/ Being there
- Presence
- Quality of time versus quantity
- Empathy




## Brain Development

- Repeated activation creates, strengthens and maintains connections.
  - “Human connections shape neural connections.”  
~ Dr. Daniel Siegel
  - Physical and emotional abuse can disrupt brain development.\*
- \* Spanking children has a negative effect on brain development!
- 



## Seeing Our Kids Clearly

Our goal, as parents, should be to see our kids clearly.

- Acknowledge that your child is their own unique person, and they are separate from you.
  - Recognize your child's strengths and weaknesses without being critical of them or building them up.
- 





## Building Resilience



- Praise effort rather than outcome.
- Avoid overpraising.
- Don't do too much for a child.

## What Works and What Doesn't



### Do:

- Make direct statements.
- Encourage them to do as much as they can.
- Give them responsibility.
- Acknowledge their effort.
- Allow them to find what they enjoy and are good at and support that.

### Don't:

- Ask a lot of questions.
- Do everything for them.
- Treat them as incapable.
- Offer false praise.
- Pressure them to excel in a specific area.

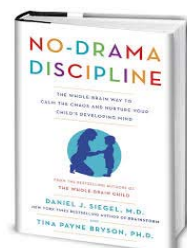


## Attunement

The best parents are  
only attuned to their  
child **30%** of the time.

Edward Tronick, Ph.D.

## Rupture and Repair





## Initiating Repair

*From Parenting from the Inside Out*

**The goal is to make a coherent story:**

- Be open and non-defensive, encourage your child to express their point of view.
- Get on the same physical level as your child and make eye contact.
- Make a non-intrusive, empathetic attempt at the repair process.
- Be neutral, not blaming or judging.



## Initiating Repair

*From Parenting from the Inside Out*

**The goal is to make a coherent story:**

- Do not interrogate.
- Do not invalidate your child's experience.
- Listen to your child's experience before you share your own.
- Be open with your child about your experience, what you felt, etc.
- Reflect back the child's experience.
- Explain melt downs to your child – people temporarily “lose their minds.”





## Raising Self-Disclosing Children

*You can increase the likelihood you'll have a self-disclosing adolescent by establishing in childhood the message, 'There's nothing you could do, there's nothing you could feel, there's nothing that could happen to you, that if you told me about it, I would stop loving you.'*

**- James Garbarino, Ph.D.**





## Coherent Narrative

● **Encourage your child to:**

- ✓ Talk about traumatic events or loss
- ✓ Ask questions

**Talking to your child helps develop:**

- ✓ Emotional vocabulary
  - ✓ Shared understanding
  - ✓ Resolved versus unresolved trauma
- 

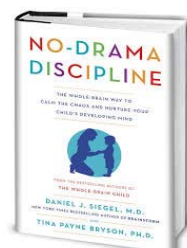


“Parents can develop a spirit of investigation as they try to uncover the causes of their child’s distress or undesirable behavior. Discipline is best practiced with firmness, not cruelty; with understanding, not condemnation; and from an underlying motive of helping the child become not only the kind of person who likes himself, but also the kind of person whom other people like, respect, and enjoy being with.”

*~ Dr. Robert Firestone*

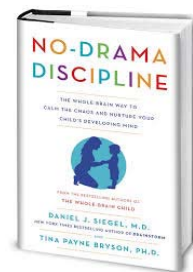


## Connect and Redirect



## 3 Questions from “No-Drama Discipline”

1. Why did the child act this way?
2. What lesson do I want to teach?
3. How can I best teach that lesson?



Thanks!  
Any questions?

Contact:

Glendon@Glendon.org

800-663-5281

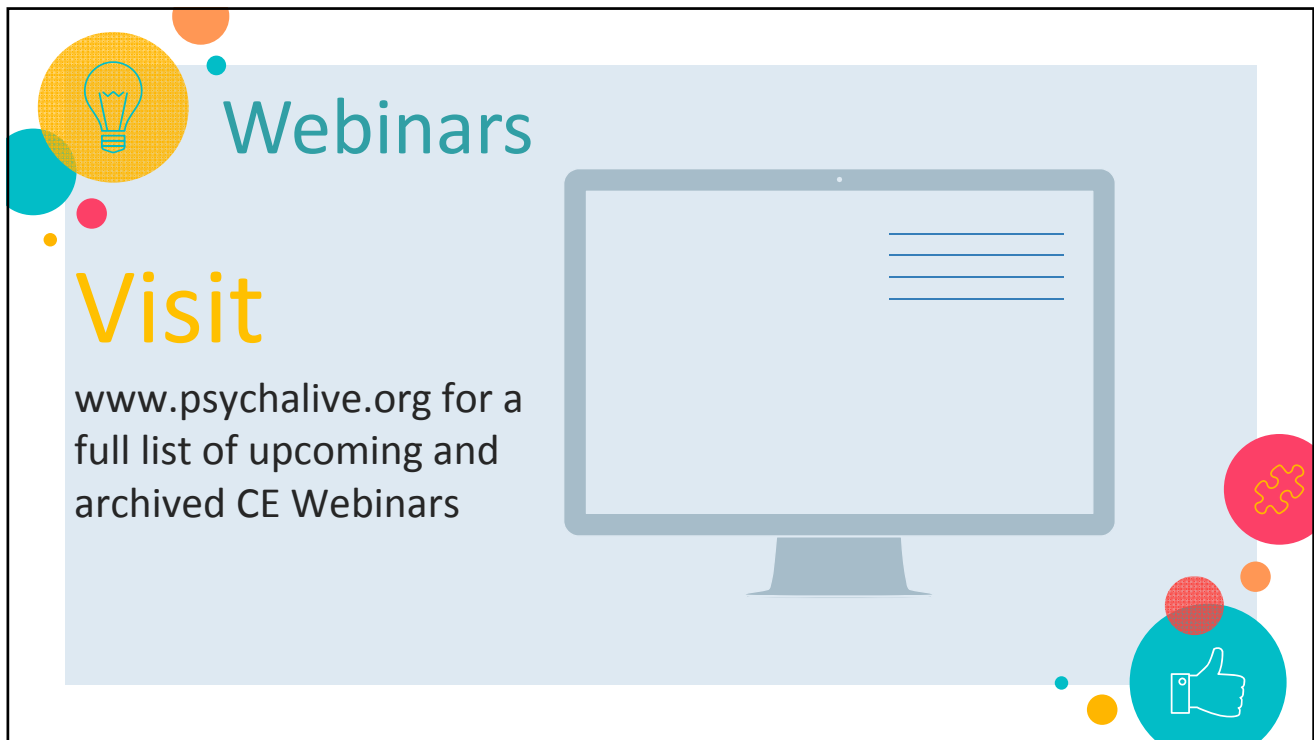


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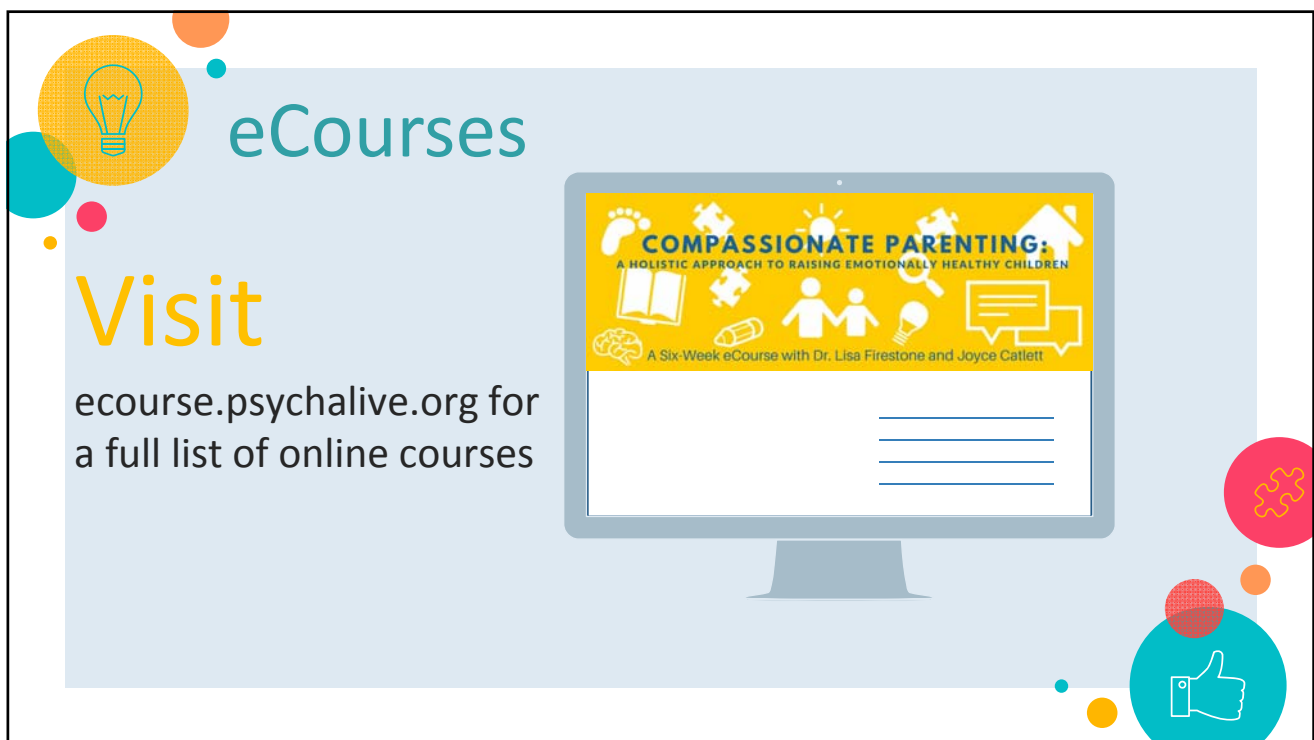


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# Webinars

## Visit

www.psychalive.org for a full list of upcoming and archived CE Webinars



The graphic features a light blue background with a large, stylized computer monitor in the center. To the left of the monitor, the word "eCourses" is written in a teal, sans-serif font. Below it, the word "Visit" is written in a large, bold, orange font. Underneath "Visit", the text "ecourse.psychalive.org for a full list of online courses" is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The graphic is decorated with several colorful circles (orange, teal, pink, yellow) and icons: a lightbulb in a yellow circle, a thumbs-up in a teal circle, and a puzzle piece in a pink circle. The monitor screen displays a yellow banner for "COMPASSIONATE PARENTING: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO RAISING EMOTIONALLY HEALTHY CHILDREN" with various icons (footprints, puzzle pieces, sun, house, book, people, brain, bandage, lightbulb, speech bubbles) and the text "A Six-Week eCourse with Dr. Lisa Firestone and Joyce Catlett". Below the banner, the screen shows a simple interface with four horizontal lines.

# eCourses

## Visit

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## Continuing Education Information

CE's for this Webinar are optional and sold separately through R. Cassidy Seminars. A link to purchase 1.5 CE's will be e-mailed to registrants following the live Webinar. For those purchasing or watching this Webinar as an archived recording, a link to purchase home study CE's was provided with your purchase confirmation. Registrants can earn 2 home study CE's by watching the Webinar and completing a reading assignment.

