

Creating a Path from

# I Hate My Life

to Resilience and Self-Realization

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.



THE GLENDON  
ASSOCIATION

& PSYCHALIVE

# Welcome!



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My  
relationship

Being  
single

Myself

Feeling  
pressure

My job

Having  
nothing  
that  
matters

What is it you hate  
about your life?

# We assume so much is circumstance:



But we actually have a lot of power.

# Experiences of trauma and tragedy

- Loss
- Traumatic events
- Illness
- Abuse

We don't have the power to control what happens to us, but we do have the power to change how we cope with what happens to us.

Everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of human freedoms - to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.



- Viktor Frankl

We have a lot of power  
but  
do we feel empowered?  
What gets in our way?

"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive; and to do so with some passion, some compassion, some humor, and some style. Surviving is important. Thriving is elegant."



- Maya Angelou



# Two Parts to This Webinar:

## Part 1:

### Why do we hate our lives?

- The Role of the Anti-Self and Critical Inner Voice

## Part 2:

### Psychological Tools to Live a Better Life

- Challenging the Critical Inner Voice
- Self-compassion
- Emotional Resilience
- Differentiation
- Mindfulness
- Building Hope

# Part 1

## Why do we hate our lives?

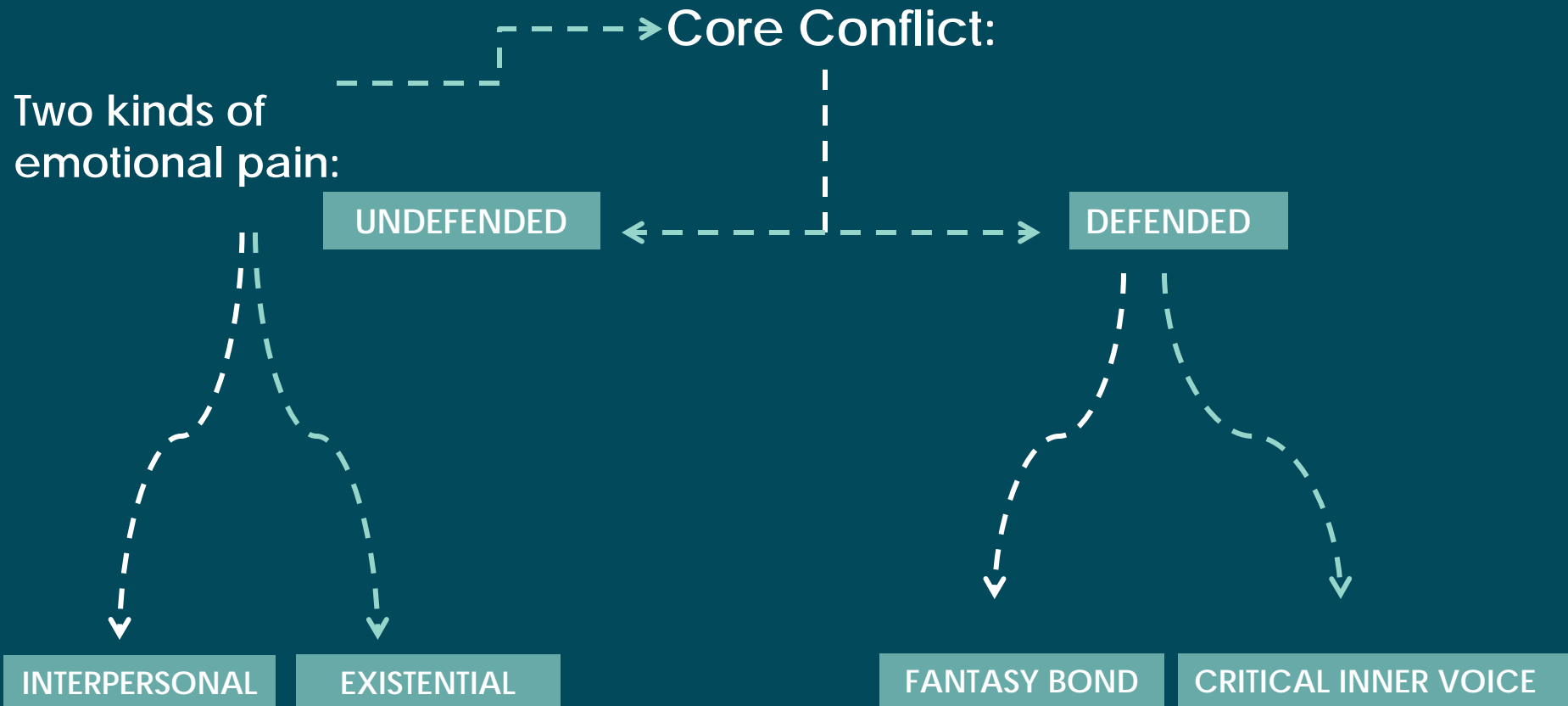
- The Role of the Anti-Self and Critical Inner Voice



# Separation Theory

Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

Integrates psychoanalytic and existential systems of thought



# Our Theory

## Each person is divided:

- One part wants to live and is goal-directed and life-affirming.
- One part is self-critical, self-hating and even self-destructive.
- The nature and degree of this division varies for each person.

**Real Self  
Positive**

**Anti-Self  
Critical**

# Our Theory

How a person is thinking is predictive of how he or she is likely to behave.



# What is the Critical Inner Voice?

- The critical inner voice is not an auditory hallucination; it is experienced as thoughts within your head.
- This stream of destructive thoughts is the language of the anti-self that discourages individuals from acting in their best interest.

# What is the Critical Inner Voice?

- The critical inner voice is a well-integrated pattern of destructive thoughts toward ourselves and others.
- The nagging “voices” that make up this internalized dialogue are at the root of much of our self-destructive and maladaptive behavior.

Our outlook on life is often shaped  
by our inner critic.





- Events that happen to us are often not the primary cause of our distress.
- Instead, trouble arises when we interpret these incidents through our critical inner voice.

You can't  
do this.

You're a  
loser, and  
they know it.

She doesn't  
really love  
you.

You have  
nothing to  
look  
forward to.

The critical inner voice affects every aspect of our lives: our self-esteem and confidence, our personal and intimate relationships, and our performance and accomplishments at school and work.

The “voices” that make up this internal dialogue are at the root of much of our despair.

- “No one cares about you.”
- “Everyone lets you down.”
- “You’ll never be successful.”
- “They don’t understand you”
- “Have a drink. It doesn’t matter what you do anyway.”
- “You should just give up.”

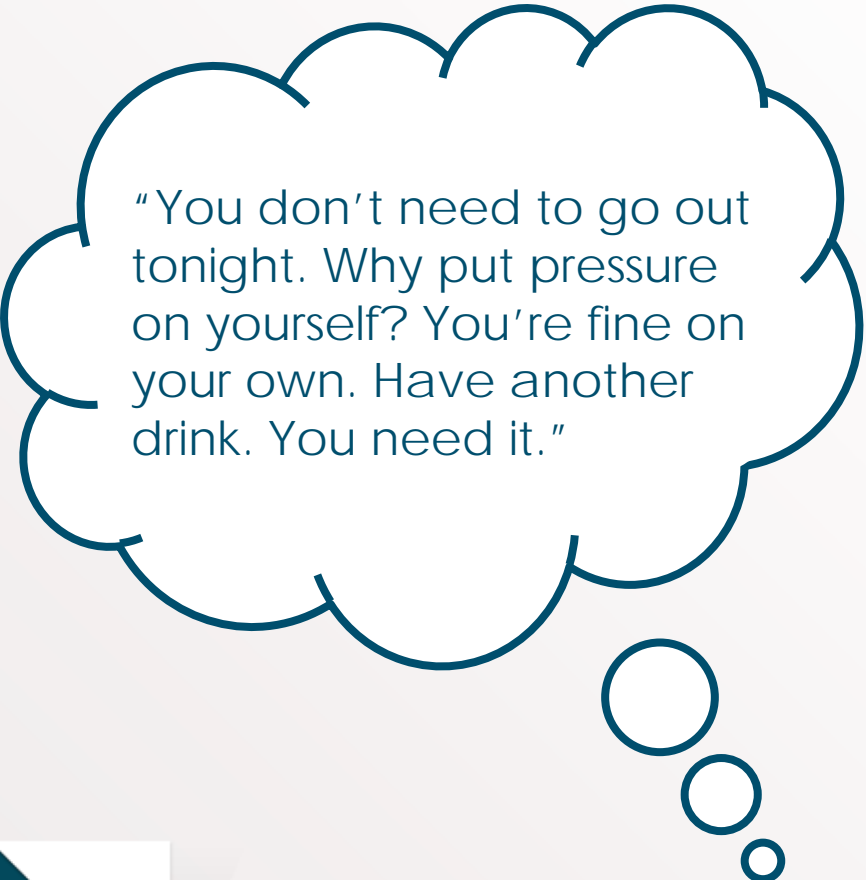
The “voices” that make up this internal dialogue are at the root of much of our despair.

## They foster:

- Inwardness
- Self-criticism
- Self-denial
- Distrust
- Addiction
- Retreat from goal-directed activities
- Self-destructive behavior

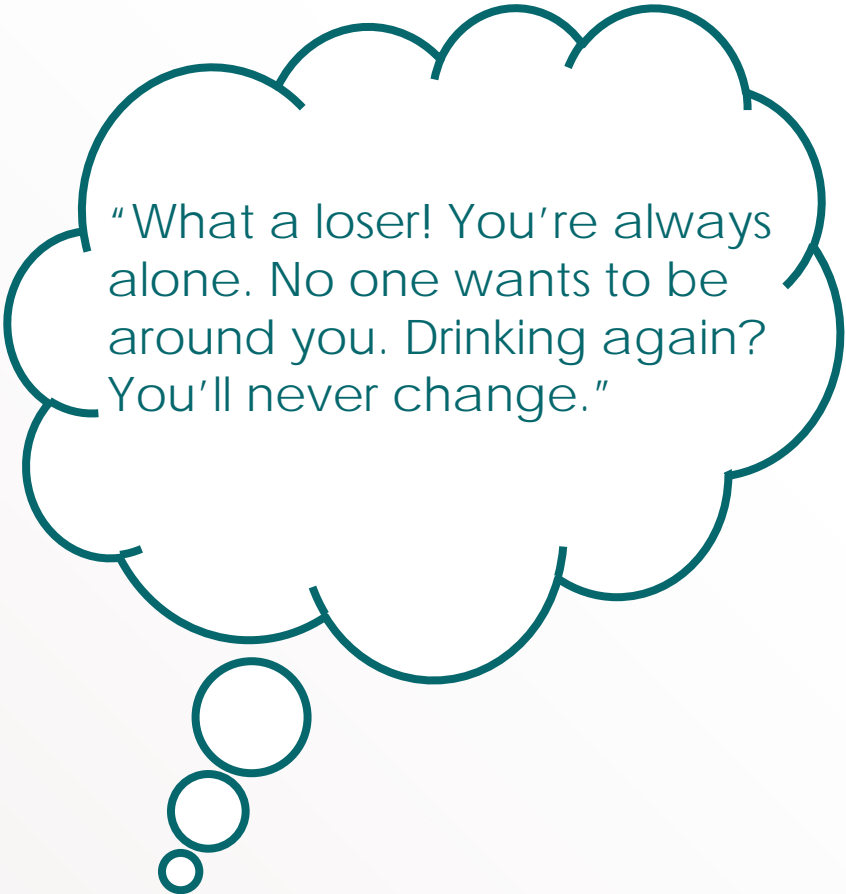
# Two Sides to the Critical Inner Voice

## Self-Soothing



"You don't need to go out tonight. Why put pressure on yourself? You're fine on your own. Have another drink. You need it."

## Self-Punishing



"What a loser! You're always alone. No one wants to be around you. Drinking again? You'll never change."

# Common Critical Inner Voices

## About Yourself:

- You're ugly.
- You're stupid.
- You're not like other people.
- You'll never succeed, so why even try?

## About Your Relationship:

- She doesn't care about you.
- You can't trust him.
- You're better off alone.
- Don't be vulnerable. You'll only get hurt.

## About Your Career:

- You'll never be successful.
- No one appreciates your work.
- You're under too much pressure; you can't handle it.

# Critical Inner Voice

## Colors the Way We See the World

- When we listen to our inner critic, we give it power over our lives. We project these critical thoughts onto others and perceive the world through its negative filter.

# Neuropathways:

## Recreating the Past in the Present

### Dr. Daniel Siegel

- Our brains are wired to recreate conditions from our past.
- Our early experiences help lay down neural networks that, on a synaptic level, lead us to later stimulate an environment that will give us feedback that's familiar.
- Even if our early attachments were strained and fraught with difficulty, we are primed to elicit these same patterns from future relationships.
- *"This happens automatically, generating a way of being in the world...You create your own nightmare. You recreate your past."* - Dr. Daniel Siegel



# The Power of Our Words

- Neurological studies show that just flashing the word “NO” for less than a second causes dozens of stress-producing hormones and neurotransmitters to release in our brains.
- These chemicals interrupt the normal functioning of our brain, impairing logic, reason, language processing and communication.
- Seeing a list of negative words will make a highly anxious or depressed person feel worse. Ruminating on these words can damage structures that regulate memory, feelings and emotions.
- This can disrupt sleep, appetite, and one’s ability to experience long-term happiness and satisfaction.

# The Power of Our Words

So what could the words of  
your “critical inner voice” be  
doing to you?

# The Critical Inner Voices that Make Us Feel Victimized

*She doesn't treat you the way you treat her. It's so unfair.*

*They should have taken care of this. You can't rely on anyone at this company.*

*How dare they tease you. Some friends they are.*

*No one sees how much you hurt. You need to make them see it.*

# Playing the Victim is Maladaptive

*"Victims" deal in judgments and "shoulds" in interactions with others. They operate on the basic assumption that the world should be fair: "I should have been loved by my parents." "My children should call me or write to me." "After all that I've done for her, the least she could do ..."* This type of preoccupation with "rights" and "shoulds" is irrelevant to the real problems that we are all faced with; it leads to inward brooding, righteous indignation and vengeful feelings. Worse yet, angry, victimized feelings are bottled up inside, contributing to depression and psychosomatic disorders.

- Robert Firestone

# Hating Your Life vs Loving Your Life

Ruminating on the negative, complaining, and seeing yourself as the victim is maladaptive and doesn't help us have a life we love.

Complaining vs Gratitude

Rumination vs Self-Compassion

Author of Your Life vs Victim of Your Life

# Gratitude vs Complaining

Optimists report a higher quality of life than pessimists  
(Mayo Clinic Study)

# Health Benefits of Gratitude

- Lower blood pressure
- Better immune function
- Improved heart health
- Better well-being
- Less depressed mood
- Less fatigue and better sleep
- Boosted immune system
- Lower fat intake
- Lower stress hormones
- Reduced effects of aging to the brain

# Part 2

## Psychological Tools to Live a Better Life

- Challenging the Critical Inner Voice
- Emotional Resilience
- Differentiation
- Self-compassion
- Mindfulness
- Building Hope



# Challenging the Critical Inner Voice

# Identifying the Critical Inner Voice

1. Recognize the events that trigger it
2. Recognize specific outside criticisms that support it
3. Become aware of times you may be projecting your self-attacks onto other people
4. Notice changes in your mood

# Identify Negative Thinking

## Are you...?

- **Filtering:** You magnify the negative aspects of a situation and filter out all of the positive ones.
- **Personalizing:** When something bad occurs, you automatically blame yourself.
- **Catastrophizing:** You automatically assume and anticipate the worst.
- **Polarizing:** You see things only as either good or bad. There is no middle ground.

Source: Mayo Clinic

# Assessment Instruments

- Firestone Assessment of Self-Destructive Thoughts (FAST)
- Firestone Assessment of Suicidal Intent (FASI)
- Firestone Assessment of Violent Thoughts (FAVT)
- Firestone Assessment of Violent Thoughts – Adolescents (FAVT-A)

# Uses for Our Measures

- Risk Assessment
- Treatment Planning
- Targeting Intervention
- Outcome Evaluation

# Voice Therapy

Cognitive/ Affective/  
Behavioral Approach

# Voice Therapy

A Psychotherapeutic  
Approach to Self-Destructive Behavior

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Robert W. Firestone Ph.D.

# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step I

The person articulates his or her self-attacks in the second person and expresses any feelings that arise.

# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step II

- The person discusses reactions to saying their voices.
- The person tries to understand the relationship between these attacks and early life experiences.



# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step III

- The person answers back to the voice attacks.
- The person makes a rational statement about how he or she really is.

# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step IV

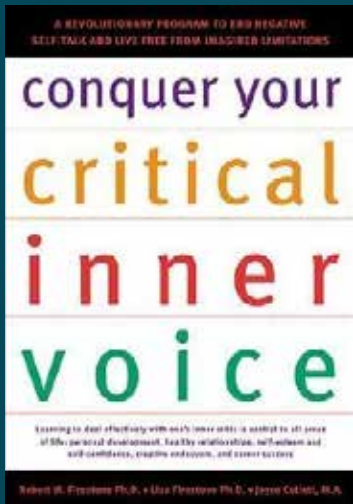
The person develops insight about how the voice attacks are influencing his or her present-day behaviors.

# The Therapeutic Process in Voice Therapy

## Step V

- The person collaborates with the therapist to plan changes in these behaviors.
- The person is encouraged to not engage in self-destructive behaviors and to increase the positive behaviors these negative thoughts discourage.

If you are interested in attending a voice therapy training or in getting training materials please contact [jina@glendon.org](mailto:jina@glendon.org) or visit [www.glendon.org](http://www.glendon.org).



# Critical Inner Voice Attacks

Change “I” statements to “you” statements.

**Self-critical attacks  
as “I” statements**

**Self-critical attacks  
as “you” statements**

## **Examples:**

*I’m so unattractive.* —————→ *You’re not attractive.*

*I’m a failure.* —————→ *You’re a failure.*

*No one loves me.* —————→ *No one loves you.*

# Inner Voice as an External Enemy

Why you should put your “voices” in the second person:

- Become clearer and more easily recognizable
- See them more like an enemy than your real point of view
- Increases your awareness of these thoughts
- Brings up clues about your feelings and your past
- Feel more compassion for yourself and take your own side
- Unearth negative core beliefs about yourself

# Two Sides of the Critical Inner Voice

Leads to two kinds of actions:

**Actions that seem self-destructive:**

**Example:**

*You're so fat. You should just starve yourself.*

**Actions that seem self-protective:**

*You've been stressed all week. Just have a drink or two. You deserve it.*

# The Critical Inner Voice Vs. the Real You

Respond with a more compassionate and realistic view of yourself.

**My critical inner voice  
as “you” statements:**

**The real me as “I”  
statements:**

## **Examples:**

*You’re so incompetent.  
You must be stupid.*

*You’re making a fool of  
yourself. You should just hide.*

*Sometimes I struggle at work, but I  
catch on fast and do a good job.*

*No one is laughing at me.  
People enjoy my company.*

# A Plan for Action

What are some actions dictated by your critical inner voice?

## Examples:

- "Have another piece of cake."
- "You should just be on your own."
- "You can't trust anyone, so don't get too close."
- "Don't go after that promotion."



# A Plan for Action

What are some actions that reflect the real me?

## Examples:

- "I want to eat healthy and take care of myself."
- "I don't want to be isolated. I'll seek out friends"
- "I want to stay vulnerable in my relationships."
- "I'm gonna take actions toward my career goals."

Self

Anti-Self

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# Self-Compassion

# Self-Compassion

*“Being touched by and not avoiding your suffering”*

**From Kristin Neff:**

*Self-compassion is not based on self-evaluation. It is not a way of judging ourselves positively; it is a way of relating to ourselves kindly.*

## Three Elements:

1. **Self-kindness** Vs. Self-judgment
2. **Mindfulness** Vs. Over-identification with thoughts
3. **Common humanity** Vs. Isolation

# Benefits of Self-Compassion

- Mechanism for change
- Lowers stress
- Buffers against negative social comparisons

Source: <http://www.self-compassion.org/>

# Emotional Resilience

# Emotional Resilience

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress — such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means "bouncing back" from difficult experiences.



# Emotional Resilience

- Being resilient does not mean that a person doesn't experience difficulty or distress. In fact, the road to resilience is likely to involve considerable emotional distress.
- Resilience is not a trait that people either have or do not have. It involves behaviors, thoughts and actions that can be learned and developed in anyone.

# Staying Flexible

- Resilience involves maintaining flexibility and balance in your life as you deal with stressful circumstances and traumatic events. This happens in several ways, including:
- Letting yourself experience strong emotions, and also realizing when you may need to avoid experiencing them at times in order to continue functioning.
- Stepping forward and taking action to deal with your problems and meet the demands of daily living, and also stepping back to rest and reenergize yourself.
- Spending time with loved ones to gain support and encouragement, and also nurturing yourself.
- Relying on others, and also relying on yourself.

# Learning from Your Past

- What kinds of events have been most stressful for me?
- How have those events typically affected me?
- Have I found it helpful to think of important people in my life when I am distressed?
- To whom have I reached out for support in working through a traumatic or stressful experience?
- What have I learned about myself and my interactions with others during difficult times?
- Has it been helpful for me to assist someone else going through a similar experience?
- Have I been able to overcome obstacles, and if so, how?
- What has helped make me feel more hopeful about the future?

# 10 Ways to Build Resilience

- Make and maintain connections
- Try to shift perspective from seeing crises as insurmountable problems to challenges
- Accept that change is a part of living
- Set goals and take baby steps
- Be open to new experiences and to making new discoveries about yourself
- Increase self-compassion
- Try to keep a balanced perspective
- Allow yourself to be hopeful
- Take care of yourself

# Differentiation

# Becoming Differentiated

“To lead a free life, a person must separate him/herself from negative imprinting and remain open and vulnerable... As children, people not only identify with the defenses of their parents but also tend to incorporate into themselves the critical or hostile attitudes that were directed toward them. These destructive personal attacks become part of the child’s developing personality, forming an alien system, the anti-self, distinguishable from the self system, which interferes with and opposes the ongoing manifestation of the true personality of the individual.”

Robert Firestone, Ph.D.

# Differentiation

- As a kid, turning against ourselves can make us feel safe, because it feels threatening to face the flaws in our parents.
- As adults, it can feel scary to give up these negative views toward ourselves, because we then feel separate from our parents.

# How to Break Free of the Past to Become Your Real Self

- Differentiation
- Coherent Narrative



Child Self

Real Self

Parent Self



# Steps of Differentiation

**Step 1:** Break with internalized thought processes, i.e., critical, hostile attitudes toward self and others

**Step 2:** Separate from negative personality traits assimilated from one's parents

**Step 3:** Relinquish patterns of defense formed as an adaptation to painful events in one's childhood

**Step 4:** Develop one's own values, ideals, and beliefs rather than automatically accepting those one has grown up with

# Step 1:

“We have to separate from the destructive attitudes that were directed toward us.”

# Separate From Destructive Attitudes

- Self-critical
- Self-soothing
- Hostile and suspicious
- Self-aggrandizing

## Step 2:

“We have to separate or differentiate ourselves from the negative traits of our parents, and their defensive posture toward life.”

# For Example:

The way you are in your relationship...

The way you are as a parent...

# Step 3:

“We want to separate from the defenses we use to cope with elements of our childhood—we want to break with these defenses as well. And being ourselves, we have to move away from the defensive posture that we adopted realistically as children, but that are no longer necessary or functional.”

## Step 4:

“We have to develop our own values, our adult value system, and approach to life, to really fulfill our destiny as a human being, our potential as a unique individual.”



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// The fantastic news is that if you can make sense of your childhood experiences—especially your relationships with your parents—you can transform your attachment models toward security. The reason this is important is that relationships— with friends, with romantic partners, with present or possible future offspring—will be profoundly enhanced.  
And you'll feel better with yourself, too!

//  
~ Dr. Dan Siegel

# Writing a Coherent Narrative

- “It’s never too late to bring both hemispheres [of your brain] into development and activity.” ~Dr. Dan Siegel
- Writing a coherent narrative integrates your brain by drawing upon the right side of your brain for autobiographical memories and deep emotions, as well as the left side of your brain for language, logic and linear storytelling.
- Make sense of the nonsense.

# eCourse

## MAKING SENSE OF YOUR LIFE

Understanding Your Past  
— to Liberate Your Present —  
and Empower Your Future



An eCourse with  
Drs. Dan Siegel  
& Lisa Firestone

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today!

# Mindfulness

# Practice Integrating Your Brain

*“Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.”*

- Jon Kabat-Zinn

# Mindfulness

## **Present-moment attention:**

- Ability to focus on what is happening in the present (beyond your own activities)
- Strongest predictor for increased positive emotions

## **Nonjudgmental acceptance:**

- Withholding judgment on your experiences, sensations, thoughts, behaviors, and emotional states
- Strongest predictor for decreased negative emotions

## **Acting with awareness:**

- Ability to focus your attention on your own activities rather than doing things mindlessly or automatically

# Benefits of Mindfulness

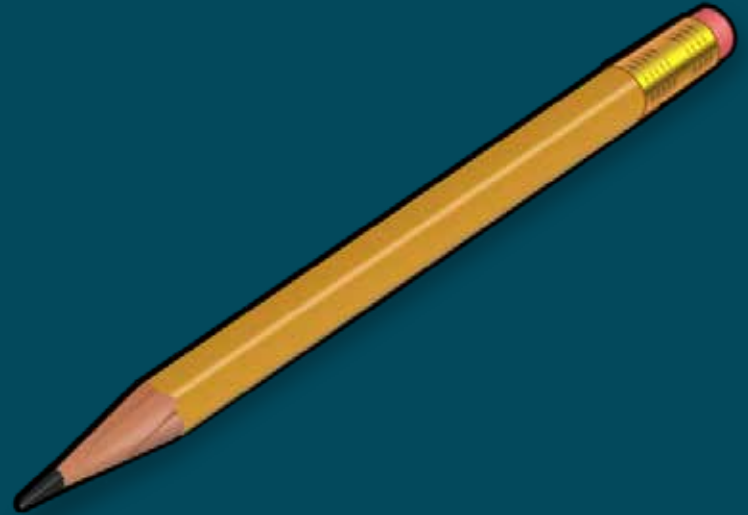
- Boosts our immune system's ability to fight off illness
- May improve sleep quality
- Increases positive emotions, reduces negative emotions and stress
- Fights depression and helps prevent relapse
- Increases density of gray matter in brain regions linked to learning, memory, emotion regulation, and empathy
- Helps us focus
- Helps us tune out distractions
- Improves memory, attention skills, and decision-making
- Fosters compassion and altruism
- Boosts self-compassion as well
- Enhances relationships
- Helps couples recover more quickly from conflict
- Gives a stronger sense of self, healthier body image, more secure self-esteem, and more resilience to negative feedback

Source: <https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>



# Toolkit

- Name It to Tame It
- Wheel of Awareness
- RAIN Approach
- Balancing the Mind
- Strengthen Your Internal Observer
- 4-7-8 Breathing



# The RAIN Approach

Recognize

Accept/Acknowledge/Allow

Investigate

Non-Identification

# Building Hope When You Feel Hopeless

# Building Hope

"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved."



- Helen Keller



# Building Hope

"People care, they love you, and they want to support you. There's somebody and something in this world that is better because you're around. I know it might be hard to see, but it's there. Explore and look for that. You're important and you matter. If you could stick around for that, you'd be helping tremendously. Just because you've been in one place at one point doesn't mean you can't make an incredible life for yourself and help other people. Everybody's important and everybody matters. Just because you don't see it right now doesn't mean it's not true."

- Story from [suicidepreventionlifeline.org](https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Find more hope stories at [livethroughthis.org](https://livethroughthis.org)

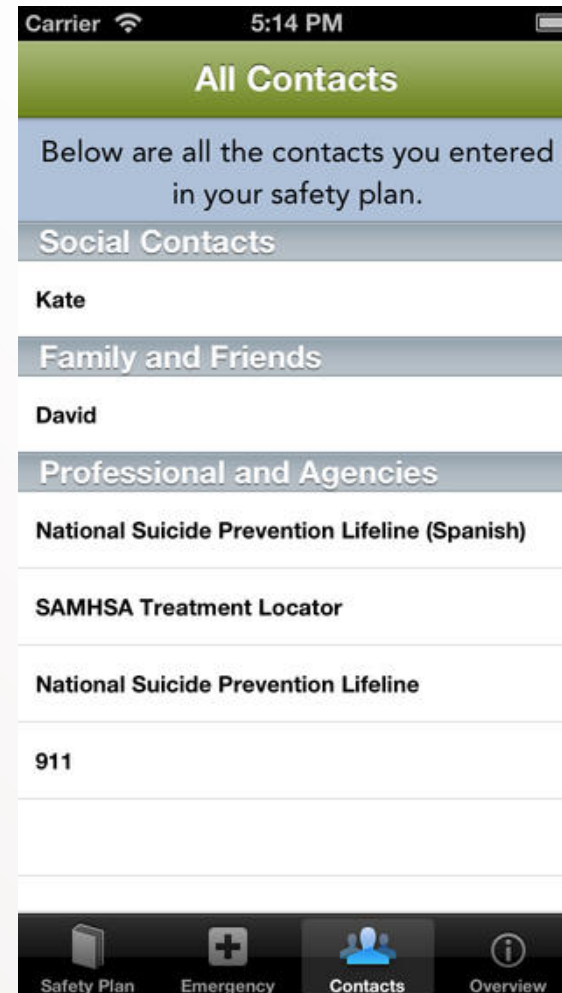
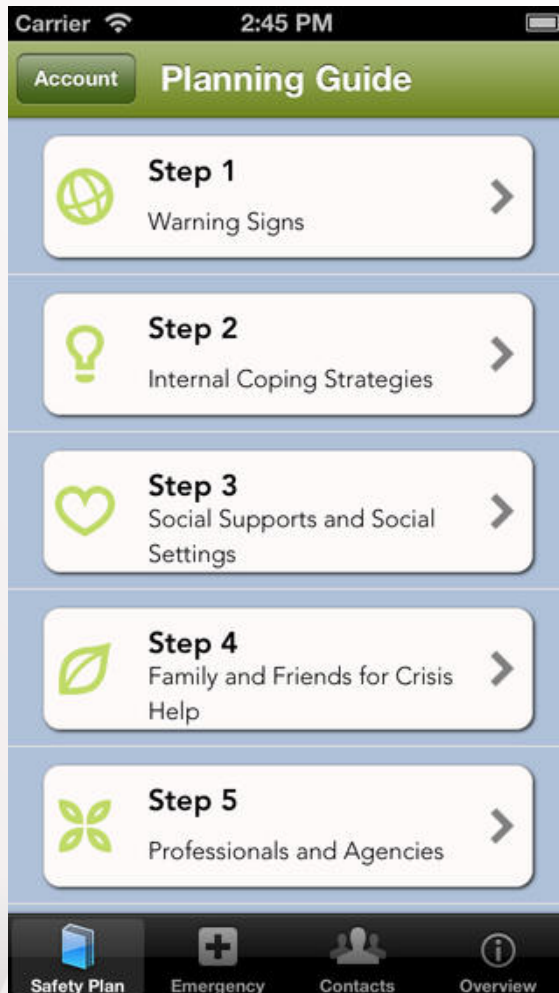
# Building Hope

The suicidal state is almost  
always  
transient and temporary.

# Coping Suggestions for the Suicidal Person: A Safety Plan

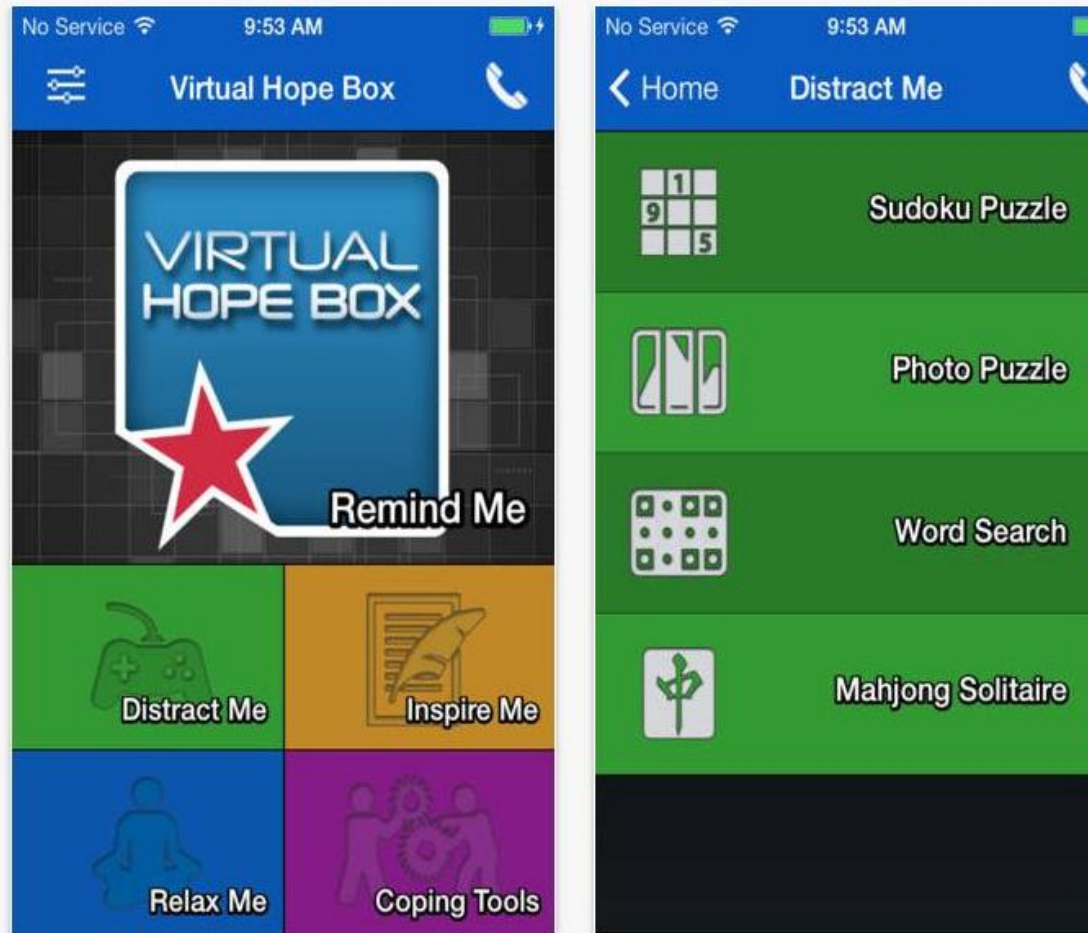
- Recognize specific actions that you will take when you start to feel bad. These will help interfere with two behaviors that fuel a suicidal state: passivity and isolation.
- What activity are you going to do to make yourself feel better? (ie: take a walk, play with your dog, bake brownies, meditate, watch a funny movie)
- Where are you going to go to be with people and take your mind off your negative thoughts? (ie: to the mall, to the park, to an athletic event)
- Who are you going call to talk to? (ie: a specific friend, relative, minister) Make sure that you have that person's phone number
- Reduce the potential use of lethal means
- And finally, make sure that you have the Suicide Hotline Number – **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** – in your phone

# Safety Plan App





# Virtual Hope Box App



# Webinars on Understanding & Preventing Suicide

- FREE or CE Webinars
- Dr. John Draper – Director of the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
- Kevin Hines – Author *Cracked Not Broken*

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(800) 273-8255

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline**

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## Get Help For Someone Online

It can be scary when someone in your social media network mentions suicide. Bookmark these links so you can help a friend find hope.

Call 24/7  
1-800-273-8255

**NATIONAL  
SUICIDE  
PREVENTION  
LIFELINE**  
1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
[suicidepreventionlifeline.org](http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Are you in crisis?  
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No matter what problems you are dealing with, we want to help you find a reason to keep living. By calling **1-800-273-TALK** (8255) you'll be connected to a

# Conclusion

“When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”



- Viktor Frankl

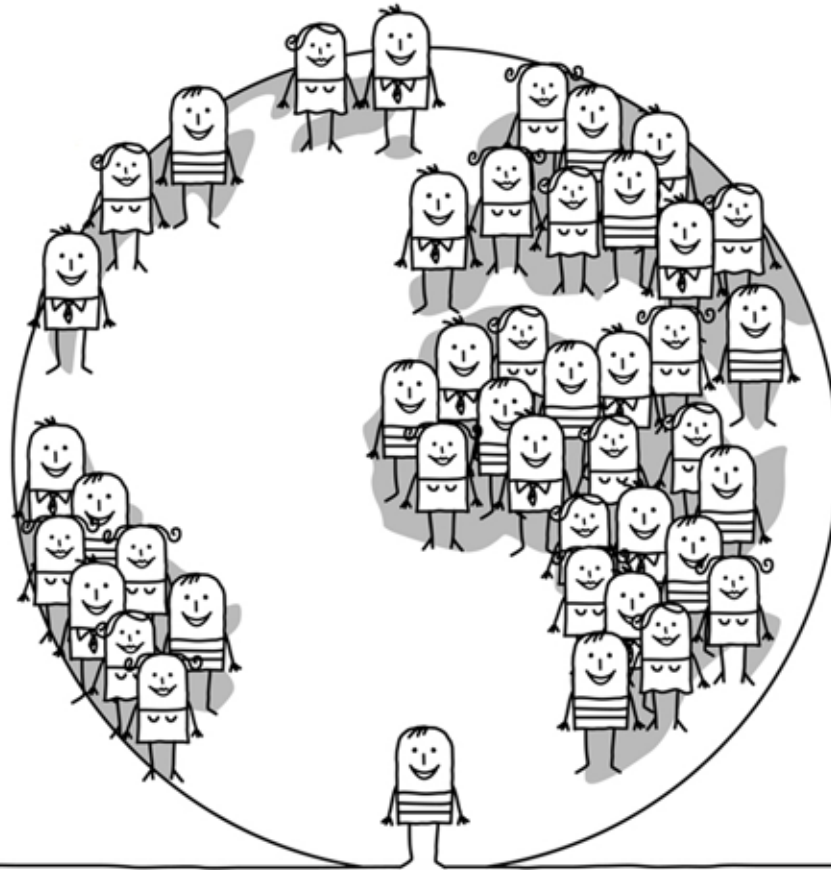
# Align actions with intentions



GOAL!







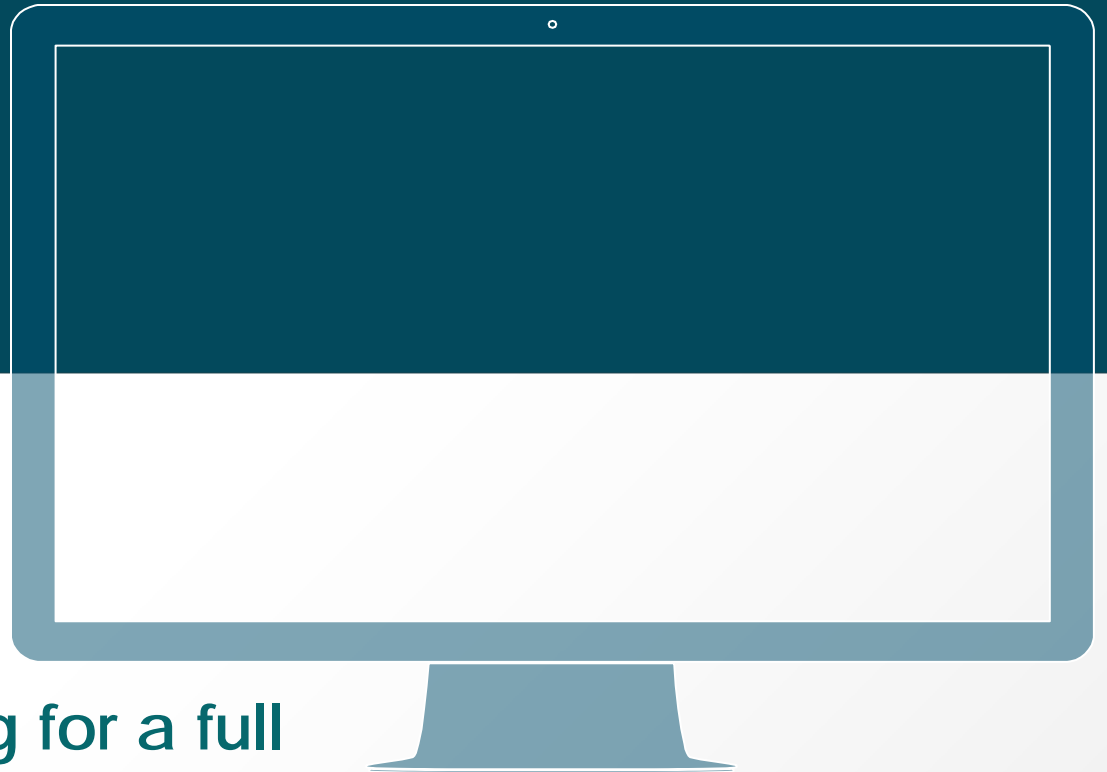
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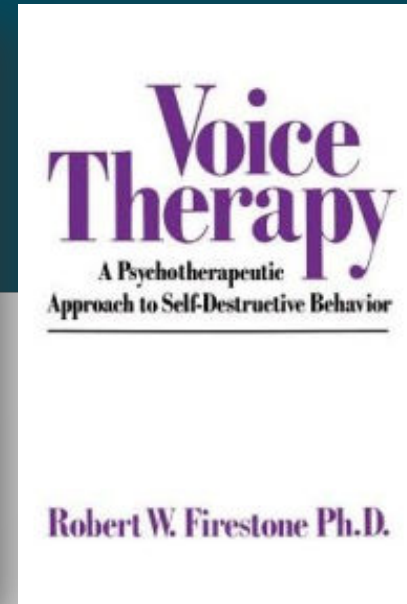
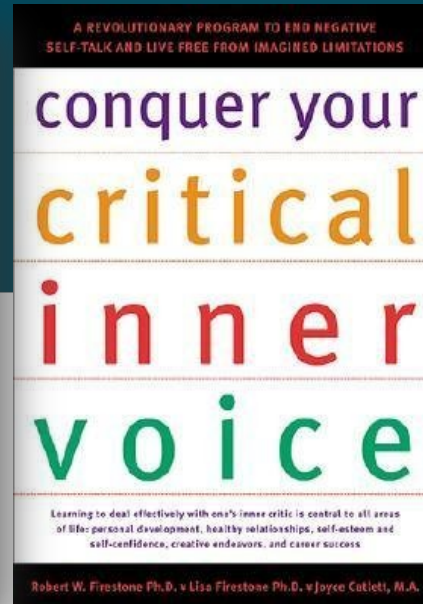
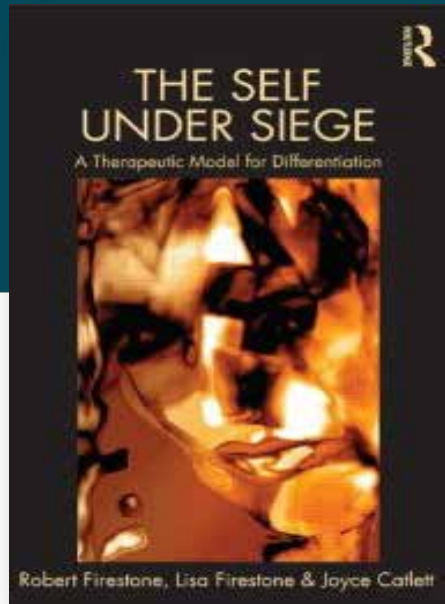
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# Thanks!

Any questions?

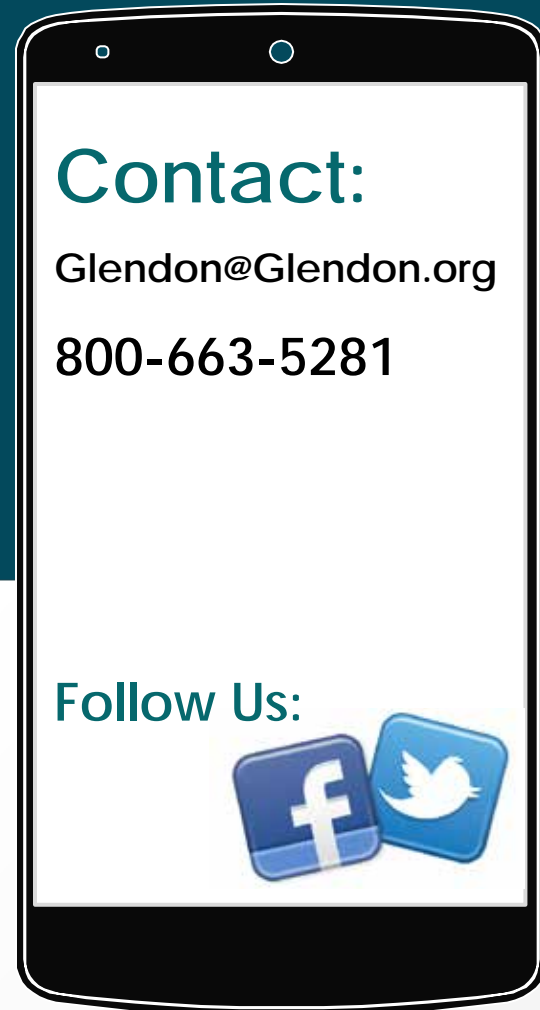


**Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.**  
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