

Helping Clients Develop  
Secure Attachment:

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.

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 **Welcome!**  
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Session 2: March 20, 2018

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Adult Attachment in Relationships



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Dr. Dan Siegel on Recreating Our Past

Avoidant Attachment




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## Attachment and Caregiving

Many studies have shown that attachment anxiety and avoidance are related to deficits in caring for relationship partners and engaging in altruistic behavior more generally (e.g., Kuncie & Shaver, 1994; Gillath et al., 2005).

Anxious people tend to be self-focused when engaged in supposedly caring/ altruistic actions, leading to intrusiveness, poor assessment of others' actual needs, and personal distress.

Avoidant people tend to be less interested in helping others and to derogate needy others. They are relatively deficient in the domain of compassion and love.



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

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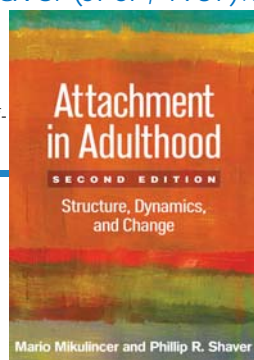
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## Since Hazan & Shaver (JPSP, 1987)...

Hundreds of studies using self-report attachment measures have been conducted




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## Overall Conclusions

- Attachment theory has proven to be a very fruitful framework for studying social and psychological processes
- Our priming studies show that security infusions, whether administered consciously or subliminally, have beneficial effects on mental health and interpersonal relations
- This suggests that insecurity lies at the heart of many psychological and social pathologies (as Bowlby suspected from the beginning)
- Similar mental and social processes occur in different contexts: romantic relationships, teacher-student relationships, leader-follower relationships, etc.; and many attachment-related mental processes occur in religious/spiritual contexts (prayer, meditation)
- Humans' social-relational nature shows up everywhere and perhaps can eventually be conceptualized in a general theory

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## Developing a Secure Attachment

- It is never too late to develop an Earned Secure Attachment. Models of attachment are changeable, but only if we come to understand them.
- Feel the full pain of your childhood and make sense of it.
- Grow toward security by developing integration from non-integrated brain functioning.
- Because our attachment ability is broken in a relationship, it can 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 in a relationship. Stick with it!

Sources: Siegel, D. J. (2015). *The developing mind: how relationships and the brain interact to shape who we are* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Guilford.  
 Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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## Why is it important to make sense of your life?

Research shows that with self-reflection and understanding, we can free ourselves from the limitations of our upbringing.

Making sense of our lives by writing a coherent narrative allows us to have a sense of who we've been, who we are now, and who we'd like to become.

“

*“Research reveals that the more coherent a narrative we have of our own attachment issues in childhood, the more we've made sense of how our early life experiences have shaped us, the more likely our children will have a secure attachment to us and the more rewarding in general our interpersonal relationships will be.”*

– Dr. Dan Siegel

*“When we create a narrative of who we are, we link past and present so we can become the active author of a possible future, too.”*

– Dr. Dan Siegel




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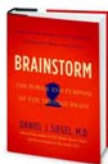
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## Questions for Self-Reflection

The following questions are designed for self-reflection, guiding think about your early life experiences. These questions from Dr. Dan Siegel's book *Brainstorm*. In your responses to each of the following questions. Your responses can be as long or as short as you like.



### Family Background

Who was in your family? Include significant adults, siblings, etc.  
What was it like growing up in your family?  
What was your parents' philosophy about raising children?

### Family Relationships and Attachment

Was there anyone in your life, other than your parents, who served as a parental figure or to whom you felt attached? Please state a few words to reflect your relationship with those individuals as well.  
What were the major conflicts in your family? Did you have conflict with anyone?  
Was there anyone you could turn to or any place you could go to help you feel comforted during difficult times?

### Childhood Experiences

Did you ever experience a long separation from your parents in childhood? What was that like for you?  
How were you disciplined as a child?  
Have you ever felt threatened by your parents?  
Have you ever felt rejected by your parents?

Source: Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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## Looking Back on Your Early Relationships

Choose five adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother or mother-like figure. Try to think back as far as you can remember to your early childhood.

Now, try to think of a memory or an incident that would illustrate each of the words you chose to describe the relationship. Write these memories or incidents down.

Adjective 1:

Memory :

Adjective 2:

Memory :

Adjective 3:

Memory :

Adjective 4:

Memory :

Adjective 5:

Memory :




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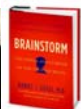
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## Reflect on Your Attachment Models

Look over your responses to the "Questions for Self-Reflection" and "Look Back on Your Early Relationships" exercises. As you read through your responses, think about the attachment model or models you have experienced in your life. Were they secure, avoidant, ambivalent, and/or disorganized? Remember, many of us have experienced more than one of these attachment models.



Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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## Reflect on Your Attachment Models

Keep in mind that, as Dr. Dan Siegel writes in *Brainstorm*, "Your attachment model is a summary of how you've adapted to the relationships you've had with the important people in your life. It's not however, a sign of some problems to have inside you – it's merely a reflection of a learned response to real-life events, to your actual relationship in your early days."



Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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## Reflect on Your Attachment Models

We invite you to reflect on your attachment models in your journal. Consider how your early relationships and the attachment models you developed in response shape how you connect with others today.



Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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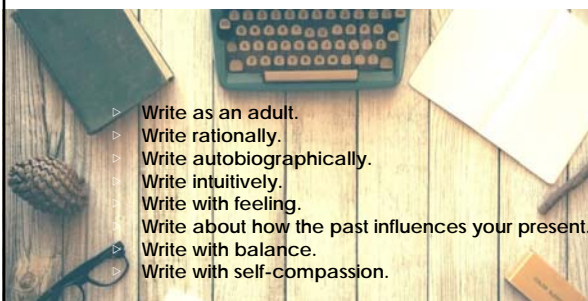
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## Tips for Writing a Coherent Narrative



Write as an adult.  
Write rationally.  
Write autobiographically.  
Write intuitively.  
Write with feeling.  
Write about how the past influences your present.  
Write with balance.  
Write with self-compassion.

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## Forming a Story: The Health Benefits of Narrative

~ James Pennebaker & Janel Seagal, *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1999



*"Writing about personal experiences in an emotional way for as little as 15 minutes over the course of three days brings about improvements in mental and physical health."*

*"...writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences."*

*"...the formation of a narrative is critical and is an indicator of good mental and physical health."*

*"Forming a story about one's experiences in life is associated with improved physical and mental health across a variety of populations."*




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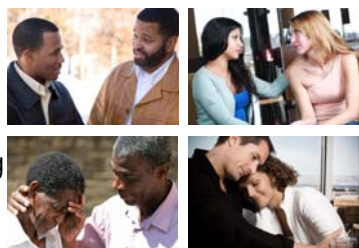
## Interpersonal Neurobiology

C urious

O pen

A ccepting

L oving




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## 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

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

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## Toolkit

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




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## The RAIN Approach

- **R**ecognize
- **A**ccept/Acknowledge/Allow
- **I**nvestigate
- **N**on-Identification




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## Wheel of Awareness



Access on: [http://www.drDansiegal.com/resources/wheel\\_of\\_awareness/](http://www.drDansiegal.com/resources/wheel_of_awareness/)

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## Video

*Dr. Dan Siegel Story*




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## Identifying Traumas

List some emotional or physical traumas or traumatic events that have happened in your life. These do not have to be "Big T" traumas. A trauma can be any significant, distressing event or incident that shaped you as a child – things that made you feel bad, scared, ashamed, etc.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

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## Understanding Your Triggers



How Elements from our Past Trigger Us in the Present

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### Think about a recent time that you got triggered...

How did you feel at the time?

What event or feeling in your childhood do you think led you to feel triggered in the recent situation?

Write a story that makes sense out of why you felt triggered.




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### Choose Your Words

Choose from the descriptive list given below and pick the word that best describes the deeper emotion that comes up when you get triggered emotionally. This is often some kind of fear about yourself or how others feel about you. It may be some kind of anguish or hurt.



Lonely	Panicked	Sad
Dismissed and	Rejected	Forlorn
Unimportant	Like I Don't Matter	Disappointed
Frustrated and Helpless	Ignored	Isolated
On Guard and	Inadequate	Let Down
Uncomfortable	Shut Out and Alone	Numb
Scared	Confused and Lost	Humiliated
Hurt	Embarrassed	Overwhelmed
Hopeless	Ashamed	Small or Insignificant
Helpless	Blank	Unwanted
Intimidated	Afraid	Vulnerable
Threatened	Shocked	Worried

Sources: Johnson, Sue. *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love*. Little Brown & Co., 2011.

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### Strategies for Developing More Secure Attachments



Strategies for Success in Developing More Secure Attachments

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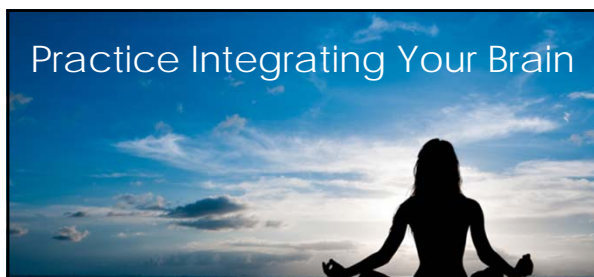
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## Practice Integrating Your Brain



Mindfulness helps integrate the brain for all attachment patterns.



Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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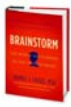
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## Practice Integrating Your Brain

**Avoidant Attachment:**

- ▷ Become aware of non-verbal signals. Try watching TV without the sound on.
- ▷ Build autobiographical memories. Write down the details of what you did today.
- ▷ Pay attention to any desires you have to be closer to people in your life. Reach out to another person to express your feelings of wanting to connect.



Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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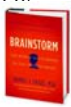
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## Practice Integrating Your Brain

**Anxious/Ambivalent Attachment:**

- ▷ Cultivate the ability to name your internal emotional states ("name it to tame it"). Simply describe what you feel, you don't need to explain it.
- ▷ Write in a journal. Use your left hemispheres drive to tell a logical, linear, language-based story.
- ▷ Pay attention to when your attachments system goes into overdrive. Focus on keeping an internal state of calm at these times.



Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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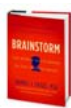
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## Practice Integrating Your Brain

### Disorganized Attachment:

- ▷ Keep a journal and be sure to write about times when you feel triggered or your internal world may feel fragmented.
- ▷ When investigating your past, try to use the RAIN approach: recognize the trauma or loss, accept that it has occurred and may be in a state of being unresolved, investigate the nature of the experience in our past and present lives, and have non-identification with the experiences (meaning the events don't define you).
- ▷ SIFT. Pay attention to your sensations, feelings, thoughts and images, as they arise.



Siegel, D. J. (2017). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. Vancouver, B.C.: Langara College.

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## Develop Security in Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is an excellent vehicle to develop an earned secure attachment.

Find a therapist that resonates with you. Stay in therapy for two to five years.




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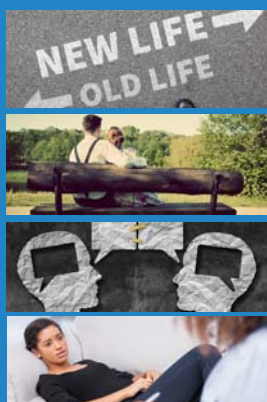
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## Treatment




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## Attachment Theory-Based Interventions

Most existing therapies use techniques and principles that are in line with attachment theory.

For example, healthy therapeutic relationships, exploration of significant relationships in past.



From "Attachment Theory and Research: Implications for Psychodynamic Psychotherapy"  
[http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-60761-792-1\\_24#page-1](http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-60761-792-1_24#page-1)

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## Implication of Attachment Theory for Treatment

- Behavioral and family systems therapies focus on making procedural memories conscious and available for inspection.
- Cognitive therapies focus on changing family semantic generalizations.
- Psychodynamic therapies focus on retrieval of forgotten episodic memories in order to process them through to resolution.
- Meditative therapies emphasize the need to attain distance from distressing life events in order to achieve integration.

*Psychotherapy promotes self-understanding by illuminating how clients' internal working models as opposed to external forces are what shape the present quality of their interpersonal relationships.*

From "The Role of Adult Attachment Styles in Psychopathology and Psychotherapy Outcomes"  
<http://cmapspublib2.nlm.nih.gov/ids-1LQRM4n6-FYV87-1L42/pdf.pdf>

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## A Few of Many Clinically-Oriented Books Based Partly on Shaver's Research

- Johnson, S. (2008). Hold me tight: Seven conversations for a lifetime of love. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Johnson, S. (2013). Love sense: The revolutionary new science of romantic relationships. New York, NY: Little, Brown.
- Levine, A., & Heller, R. (2010). Attached: The new science of adult attachment and how it can help you find – and keep – love. New York, NY: Tarcher/Penguin.
- Marmarosh, C. L., Markin, R. D., & Spiegel, E. B. (2013). Attachment in group psychotherapy. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Obegi, J. H., & Berant, E. (Eds.) (2008). Attachment theory and research in clinical work with adults. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

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

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 Video

*Dr. Dan Siegel on Making Sense of Your Past*




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Child Self



Real Self



Parent Self



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## 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.

## 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



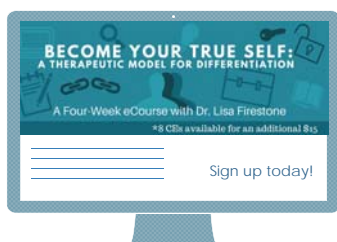
**Step 3:** Relinquish patterns of defense formed as an adaptation to painful events in one's childhood



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



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## Overcoming Negative Thoughts Exercise

Write down the negative thoughts you have about yourself on the first half of the page. As you write your thoughts, use the second person or "you" statements.

After you have written your negative thoughts down, come back to each of the thoughts and try to answer them positively. Practice self-compassion in your answers, as you respond to your self-attacks rationally and realistically.

### Negative Thoughts

Example: "You're so stupid."

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### Compassionate Responses

Example: "Sometimes I struggle with work, but I catch on quickly and do a good job."

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## Differentiation Exercise

What negative behaviors or undesirable traits of your parent or parents are you re-enacting in your own life? How are you re-enacting your parent's negative behaviors and traits in your current relationship, for instance?

In your journal, quickly list the ways you re-enact a parent's negative behavior or traits in your life today.




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## Saying Goodbye to Your Parents

Write a letter saying goodbye to one of your parents. The purpose of the letter is to say goodbye to them as your parent, not as a person. You might express the following:

- "I don't need you anymore as a mother/father."
- "I'm an adult."
- "I'm a separate person from you."

You might describe elements of your relationship, how you felt as a child, and how you will no longer engage in certain dynamics.

You will not send this letter.




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## Saying Goodbye to Your Childhood Self

Write a letter saying goodbye to your childhood self.

Imagine looking at yourself as a child. What would you like to convey to that child?

Describe yourself in a balanced way; as you write about yourself as a child, use both compassion and objectivity.

The purpose of the letter is to let go of any identification you still have with being that child. Even though your childhood shaped you in many ways, that is not who you are anymore. The goal is to live life fully in your adult self and in the present moment.




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## Video

*Dr. Robert Firestone on Mentally Healthy Person*




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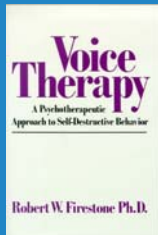
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## Voice Therapy



Cognitive/Affective/Behavioral Approach

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Video

Steps of Voice Therapy



Steps in Voice Therapy - Step 1  
Verbalizing the Voice in the 2nd person

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Self

Anti-Self



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Albert Einstein



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*“A human being is a part of a whole, called by us 'universe', a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest... a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security.”*

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## Resources: Books



visit [www.psychalive.org](http://www.psychalive.org) for resource links

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## Resources: Films

Intimate Relationships Series

Sexuality Series



visit [www.psychalive.org](http://www.psychalive.org) for resource links

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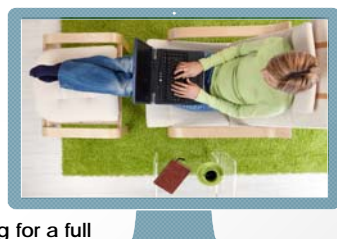
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