



# The Psychological Effects of Emotional Hunger

Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.



# Welcome!

**Lisa Firestone**

Director of Research and Education – The Glendon Association  
Senior Editor - PsychAlive

[www. Glendon.org](http://www.Glendon.org) [www.PsychAlive.org](http://www.PsychAlive.org)





# 4 Parts:

1

What is emotional hunger?

2

Causes of emotional hunger

3

Effects of emotional hunger

4

Overcoming emotional hunger



A graphic consisting of four concentric circles in a light gray color, centered on the left side of the slide. The word "Poll" is written in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font, positioned over the inner circles.

# Poll

Are you a mental health professional?





# Part 1:

## What is emotional hunger?

# Robert Firestone, Ph.D.



**Emotional hunger** is a strong emotional need caused by deprivation in one's own childhood often felt as a deep longing.







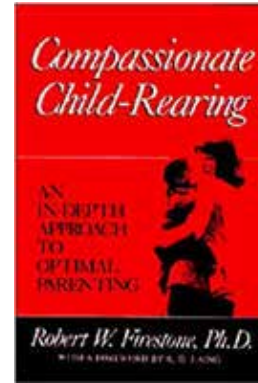
# VIDEO

*Dr. Robert Firestone on Emotional Hunger*



# Emotional hunger may be expressed in:

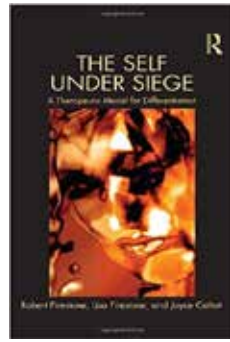
- Living vicariously through one's child
- Parentification (need the child to take care of them)
- Anxious over-concern
- Intense focus on the child's appearance
- Exclusion of one parent
- Over-protection (hovering)







# Emotionally Hungry Parent:



- Exerts a strong pull that drains the child of emotional resources
- Confuses own intense feelings of need and anxious attachment for genuine love
- Takes rather than gives by giving in a self-focused, mis-attuned manner

# Emotional Hunger as Addiction

Parent acts compulsively and doesn't want to be separate or separated.





# Signs of Emotional Hunger

- Child appears spaced out
- Child seems drained
- Child shows signs of anxious attachment
  - Clings to parent
  - Has trouble being soothed by the parent



# Overlaps with:

- Parentification
- Enmeshment







# VIDEO

## *Dr. Pat Love on Backwards Parenting*



190A

# 3 Factors to Distinguish Emotional Hunger from Love

1. The internal feeling state of the parent
2. Actual behavior of the parent relating to the child
3. Observable effect of the parent's emotional state and behavior on the child's demeanor and behavior







# VIDEO

## *Emotional Hunger in a Parent*



# Parent displaying real love:

1. Positive self-image
2. Maintains sense of compassion for the child and him or herself
3. Remains separate and aware of boundaries between them
4. Acts respectfully toward the child
5. Is neither abusive nor overprotective
6. Uses a natural, easy tone of communication that indicates an understanding of the child's individuality



# Child who feels loved:

1. Lively and displays independence appropriate to age level
2. Genuinely centered in himself
3. Feels secure and expects and elicits positive responses from others



# Child who experiences emotional hunger:

1. Desperate
2. Dependent
3. Emotionally volatile
4. Withholding (shut down)



A close-up, circular frame image of a baby crying. The baby's face is the central focus, with its mouth wide open in a cry. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent grey rectangular box containing the text. The text is centered and reads "Part 2:" in a bold, yellow font, followed by "Causes of emotional hunger" in a black font. The entire image is framed by a thin white circular border. In the bottom right corner, outside the circular frame, there is a solid black circle.

## Part 2:

### Causes of emotional hunger



# Separation Theory

Robert W. Firestone, Ph.D.

Integrates psychoanalytic and  
existential systems of thought

Core Conflict:

Two kinds of  
emotional pain

UNDEFENDED



DEFENDED



INTERPERSONAL



EXISTENTIAL



FANTASY BOND



CRITICAL INNER VOICE



# Each person is divided:

- One part wants to live and is goal directed and life-affirming.
- One part is self-critical, self-hating and at its ultimate end, self-destructive.  
The nature and degree of this division varies for each individual.

**Real Self - Positive**



**Anti-Self - Critical**



# Attachment Theory



How do I get these  
people to take care of  
me?



# Understanding Attachment

- Attachment patterns are formed in infancy during the first two years
- Affects us throughout our lives, particularly in how we relate in intimate relationships and with our children





# Attachment Theory

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

## Category of Attachment

- Secure
- Insecure – avoidant
- Insecure- anxious/ambivalent
- Insecure - disorganized

## Parental Interactive Pattern

- Emotionally available, perceptive, responsive
- Emotionally unavailable, imperceptive, unresponsive and rejecting
- Inconsistently available, perceptive and responsive and intrusive
- Frightening, frightened, disorienting, alarming





Emotional hunger can contribute to ambivalent attachment in children and manifest as preoccupied attachment in adulthood.





# Ambivalent/Anxious Attachment in Childhood



# Adult Attachment Interview

Mary B. Main

- “Now I'd like to ask you to choose five adjectives or words that reflect your relationship with your mother starting from as far back as you can remember in early childhood--as early as you can go, but say, age 5 to 12 is fine. I know this may take a bit of time, so go ahead and think for a minute...then I'd like to ask you why you chose them. I'll write each one down as you give them to me.”
- “Okay, now let me go through some more questions about your description of your childhood relationship with your mother. You say your relationships with her was (you used the phrase) Are there any memories or incidents that come to mind with respect to (word)”





# VIDEO

*Ambivalent/ Anxious Attachment*





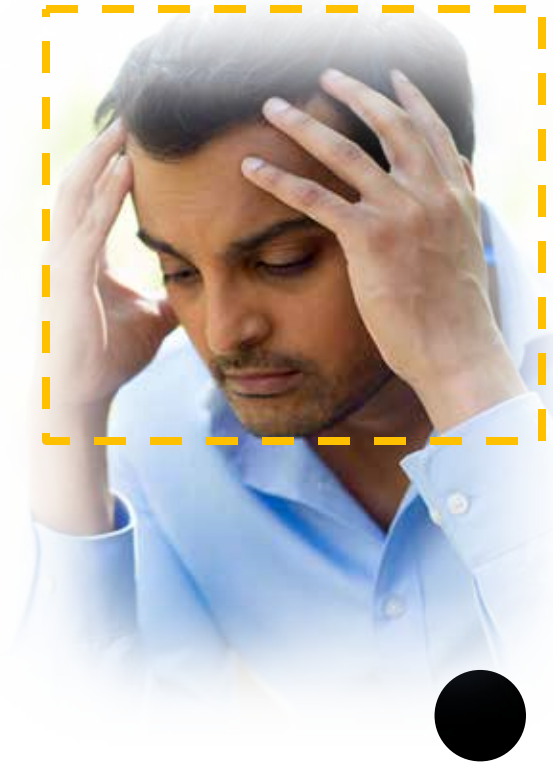
# Part 3:

## Effects of emotional hunger



# Preoccupied Attachment

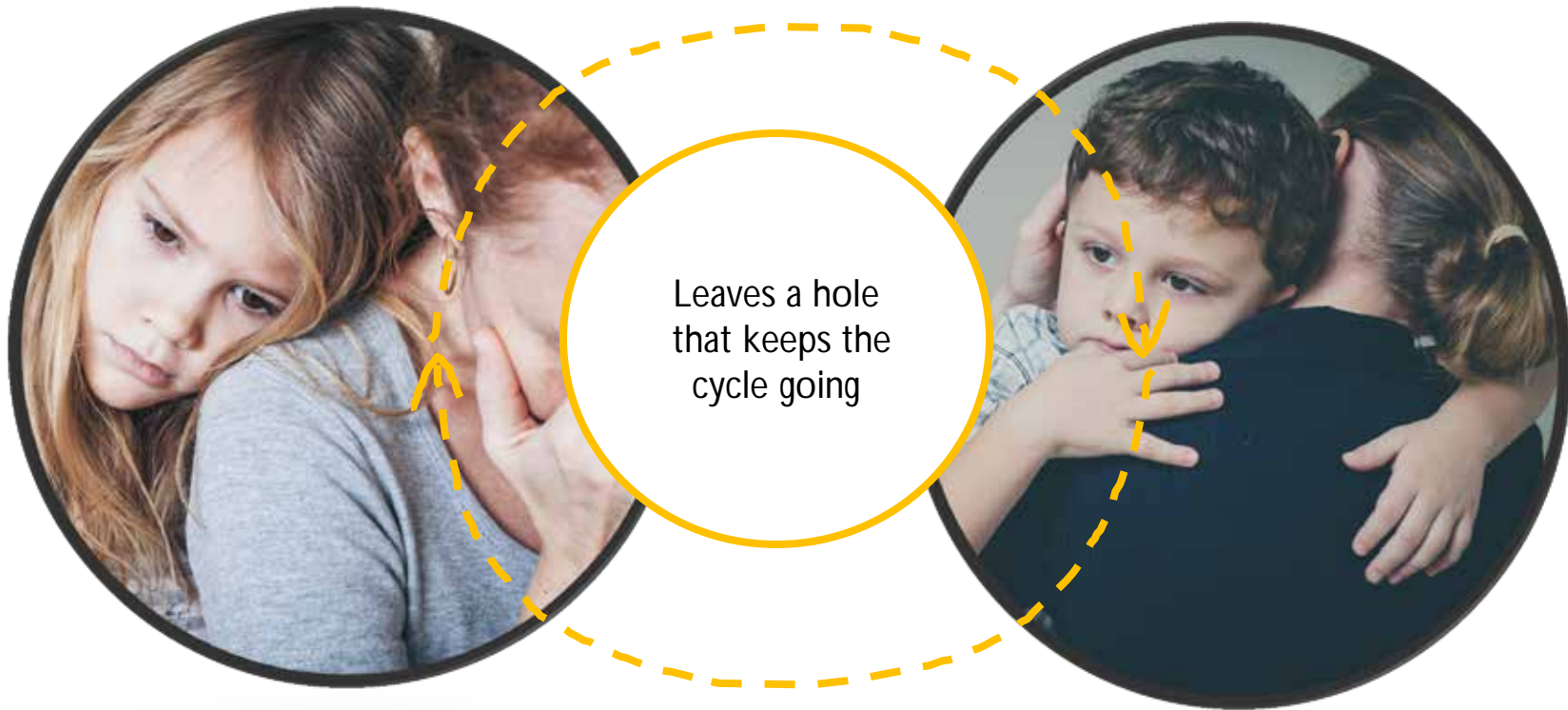
- Self-critical and insecure
- Seek approval and reassurance from others
- Anticipate rejection, loss of interest, and abandonment
- Worried and not trusting
- Clingy and overly dependent
- Feel resentful and angry when partner doesn't provide attention and reassurance





# Cycles

Experienced emotional hunger from a parent



Experience emotional toward your child





# VIDEO

## *Effects of Emotional Hunger*



# Emotional Hunger

## Can lead to:

- Distrust
- Confusion
- Emotional longing based on unmet needs
- Need for reassurance
- Addiction to people
- Choosing partners you need to take care of
- Withholding




# Real Love

Can lead to:

- Inner security
- Attuned sensitive caregiving
- Expectation and eliciting of good treatment from others



A woman with long, wavy brown hair is shown from the chest up, looking upwards and to the left with a hopeful expression. She is wearing an orange blazer over a white collared shirt. The background is dark with faint, white, chalk-like scribbles. Overlaid on the image is a large, dark blue circle containing several concentric white circles. A semi-transparent grey rectangular box is positioned horizontally across the middle of the image, containing the title text.

## Part 4:

# Overcoming emotional hunger

# Dealing with Emotional Hunger Directed Toward You

- ▷ Set boundaries
- ▷ Notice your triggers
- ▷ Seek strategies to calm down
- ▷ Notice your critical inner voice
- ▷ Acknowledge your half of the dynamic
- ▷ See a therapist
- ▷ Let go of hope of getting what you didn't





# Dealing with Emotional Hunger Toward Your Child

- ▷ Get your adult needs met by other adults
- ▷ Respect boundaries
- ▷ Expand the child's world
- ▷ Foster independence
- ▷ Don't make comparisons
- ▷ Avoid co-parenting (decision-making)
- ▷ Learn to sit with your emotions
- ▷ See a therapist





# Dealing with Emotional Hunger Toward Your Partner

- ▷ Respect boundaries
- ▷ See your partner as separate
- ▷ Support what lights them up
- ▷ Don't expect them to meet all your needs
- ▷ Learn to sit with your emotions
- ▷ See a therapist



# Differentiation

refers to the struggle that all people face in striving to develop a sense of themselves as independent individuals.



# Therapeutic Strategies



# Steps of Differentiation

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

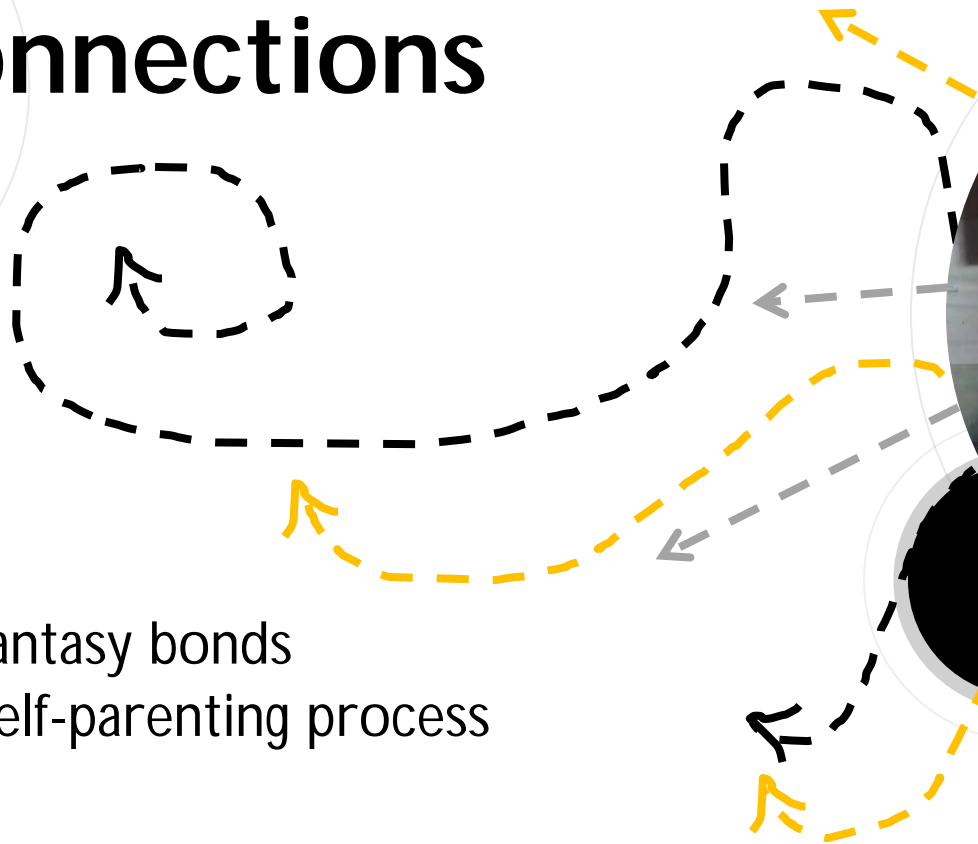
**Step 2:** Separate from negative personality traits assimilated from parents

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

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



# Letting Go of Fantasy Connections



- Breaking fantasy bonds
- Stopping self-parenting process



# 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 parent.”
- “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.





# 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.



# eCourse

## Become Your True Self



# 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 1

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).



# Interpersonal Neurobiology

**C**urious

**O**pen

**A**ccepting

**L**oving



# Strengthening Your Real Self

- Times when you notice you feel the most yourself.
- Times when you notice yourself following in the footsteps of others (i.e. of parents or other influential figures).
- What are the things that light you up?
- What are the things you do to please or conform to the standards of others?
- Are there areas of your life in which you act either childish or parental?
- At what times do you lose your own point of view?



# What Gives Your Life Meaning?

- What did your parents think gave life meaning?
- Name three areas that you feel give your life meaning.
- What about these things matter to you/ light you up?
- How could you do these things more justice in your life?





A woman with dark, curly hair is smiling broadly, showing her teeth. She is wearing a light blue top. The image is framed by a large dark blue circle with two white concentric circles. A semi-transparent grey horizontal bar is overlaid across the middle of the image, containing the text.

# Developing More Inner Security



# Earned Secure Attachment

- ▷ Coherent Narrative
- ▷ Therapy
- ▷ Long-term relationship with someone with a secure attachment pattern





# Coherent Narrative

as a Method to Resolve Trauma

# 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.”
- Ongoing studies suggest that writing serves the function of organizing complex emotional experiences.

Source: Pennebaker, J. W., & Seagal, J. D. (1999). Forming a story: The health benefits of narrative. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 55(10), 1243-1254.  
doi:10.1002/(sici)1097-4679(199910)55:103.0.co;2-n



Memories of traumatic events can be themselves traumatic: uncontrollable, intrusive, and frequently somatic. They are experienced by the survivor as inflicted, not chosen – as flashbacks to the events themselves.

**In contrast, narrating memories to others (who are strong enough and empathic enough to be able to listen) empowers survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma.**

Narrative memory is not passively endured; rather , it is an act on the part of the narrator, a speech act that defuses traumatic memory, giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self.

# 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.



# eCourse

## Making Sense of Your Life





# The RAIN Approach

**R**ecognize

**A**ccept/Acknowledge/Allow

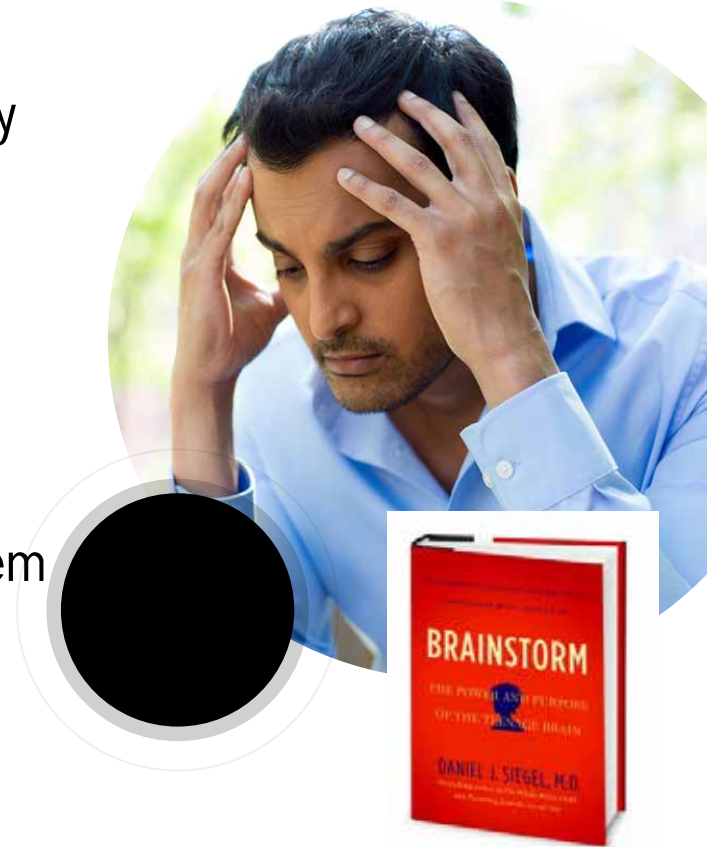
**I**nvestigate

**N**on-Identification



# Exercises for Anxious 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.



# 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



# Thanks!



*Any questions?*

**Lisa Firestone, Ph.D.**

lfirestone@glendon.org

**Contact:**

Glendon@Glendon.org

800-663-5281



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