

Anchoring

There is also a technique called ‘anchoring’. Think of a time when you experienced being welcomed—perhaps when you met a dear old friend. Remember the joyous look on their face when they first saw you. Or you might remember a surprise party that was given for you. You were the centre of attention. For example, I close my eyes and go back to 1963, when I was voted “man of the year” at the end of my first year in the seminary. I can feel myself standing there. I can hear the applause and see the brightness of fifty smiling faces as they called out my name. I see Father Mally’s face and the face of John Farrell, my best friend. As I feel the feelings, I touch my thumb to a finger on my right hand and hold it for thirty seconds. After thirty seconds I let go and relax my right hand. I have now made an anchor of the welcoming experience.

Touching your right thumb and finger together is a kinaesthetic anchor or trigger. Our lives are filled with old anchors, the result of neurologically imprinted experience. All of our sensory experience is encoded. We have visual anchors, for example, someone might look at you in a way that reminds you of the way your violent father used to look just before he hit you. This could trigger a powerful emotional response—even if you didn’t consciously make the connection. A tone of voice, a certain smell, or a particular food can trigger old memories with their accompanying emotions. Songs are perhaps the most powerful auditory anchors. I’ll bet you’ve experienced riding in your car listening to the radio and suddenly you remembered a person or scene from long ago. Our whole lives are an accumulation of such anchored imprints—pleasant as well as painful.

Future pacing

The N.L.P. folks call this step future pacing. It consists of imagining a time in the future when you will confront a new situation that triggers something from your past: for example, going to a party where you don’t know anyone, or starting a new job. You future pace it by firing your positive anchor and imagining yourself in the new situation. See, hear, and feel yourself handling it well. After you’ve done that, run through the imaginary scene again without the positive anchor. What future pacing actually amounts to is a positive dress rehearsal. Those of us with a wounded inner child tend to do negative dress rehearsals. We create catastrophic images of danger and rejection. Future pacing gives us a way to reshape our inner expectations.

Here are some things you might anchor:

I think of a time during adulthood when:

- I respectfully said I would not do something.
- I wanted something and went after it.
- I expressed anger respectfully.
- I expressed anger in a straightforward and valuing way.
- I left a painful situation.

- I was speaking to an authority figure in a coherent and articulate manner.

Making a Security Anchor

Another way you can use your adult's potency is to make a security anchor. This involves thinking of the two or three experiences in your life where you felt the most secure. If you have trouble thinking of these, you can simply imagine a scene of absolute security. The three experiences I used to make my security anchor were:

- A. A time in the monastery when I felt completely one with God
- B. A memory of being held in a love embrace by someone who loved me unconditionally at that moment
- C. A memory of being wrapped in my soft comforter, waking up after ten hours of sleep and having no obligations or responsibilities

Make a stacked anchor of your security experiences - a stacked anchor is where you do (A) above for 30 seconds (bring your mind to back to the here and now), then anchor B for 30 seconds etc. Whenever my inner child gets scared, I fire the anchor. It's wonderful! It takes me out of any fearful state. The fearful feelings try to come back, but the anchor interrupts an "awfulizing spiral." It gives me some moments of safety and relief. Sometimes it relieves my inner child's fears completely.