

Toddler Ages 1 – 3

DEBRIEFING

In getting the facts about your toddler self's history, use the following questions as guidelines:

1. Who was around when you were 2 to 3? Where was your dad? Did he play with you often? Spend time with you? Did Dad and Mom stay married? Where was your mom? Was she patient? Did she spend time with you?
2. How did your mom and dad discipline you?
3. Did you have any older brothers or sisters? How did they treat you?
4. Who was there for you? Who held you when you were scared or crying? Set firm but kind and gentle limits when you were angry? Who played, laughed, and had fun with you?

Write out as much as you can about your toddler self's history. Pay attention to anything you now know about family secrets that you couldn't have known as a child. For example, Dad was having lots of affairs? Is either parent an untreated victim of physical, sexual, or emotional violence?

Write about any traumatic incidents you remember. Include every concrete detail you can. For example, if you write about the time you were punished for what your brother actually did, write, "My brother and I were playing with two Raggedy Ann dolls. One was tattered and the stuffing was coming out. They were painted red and blue, but the details were fading. My brother grabbed my doll and ripped the arm off of it. He immediately ran to Mom and told her that I had ripped his doll. He was her favourite! She immediately slapped me twice, one blow hit my back, and the other hit my bottom. It hurt and I ran to my room crying. My brother started laughing."

You may not remember all the details, but put down whatever you can remember. There is a therapeutic slogan that says, "You cannot fail with detail." Detail is closer to actual experience and therefore comes closer to touching your actual feelings.

FEELING YOUR FEELINGS

If you have a photograph of yourself as a toddler, get it out. See how small and innocent you were. Then, find a child in the toddler stage and spend some time with them. Focus on the normalcy of this developmental stage. It was normal for you to be full of energy, to be rambunctious. Toddlers get into things. You were curious and interested in things. You said no in order to begin a life of your own. You were shaky and immature, and your tantrums came from that. You were an innocent and beautiful little person. Focus on what you went through during toddlerhood. Feel whatever feelings come up for you.

LETTER WRITING

Just as you did for your infant self, write a letter to your toddler self. This letter is from the grown-up you—in my case, a gentle and wise old wizard. One of my letters to my toddler reads as follows:

Dear Little John:

I know you are very lonely. I know you never got to be yourself. You are scared to be angry cause you think there is a terrible fire called hell which will burn if you get angry. You can't be sad or afraid cause that's for sissies. No one really knows the wonderful little boy you are and what you really feel.

I'm from your future and I know better than anyone what you've been through! I love you and want you to be with me always. I'll let you be exactly the way you are. I'll teach you some balance and let you be mad, sad, afraid, or glad. Please consider letting me be with you always.

Love,

Big John

When I wrote this, I felt my inner child's loneliness and sadness.

Letter From Your Toddler

Next write a letter from your wounded inner toddler. Remember to write it with your non-dominant hand; left hand if you're right-handed and right hand if you're left-handed. Here is what one person wrote:

Dear Big Richard
Please come and get me
I've been in a closet for
forty years, I'm terrified, I
need you.
Little Richard