

DIAGNOSING PAIN FROM A FAILURE TO THRIVE

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FREE RESOURCE

Diagnosing Pain From a Failure to Thrive

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There are five ingredients needed to thrive.

1. Belonging
2. Receiving and Giving Life
3. Recovery (Resynchronizing)
4. Maturing
5. Staying True to Our Identities

Taken in ascending order, like we just done, we live lives that thrive. Taken in reverse order we can diagnose a failure to thrive. We address problems starting with the top level and working down. Here is a description of these five levels in diagnostic order taken from *Thriving: Life Rhythms Learned, Life Rhythms Restored* by Chris Coursey and E. James Wilder. (©2003 by Coursey and Wilder. Used by permission.)

Synchronization and the Five Dimensions (Hierarchical Processes) of Thriving

Thriving is a five level hierarchical process and all five levels of our lives need synchronization for us to thrive.

5) Coherent identity: Thriving means synchronizing our autobiographical story with our experiences in progressively more intricate ways. When our *explanations and words* fit with our *experiences and feelings*, our minds become more complex and coherent. We become authentic, transparent, spontaneous and broadminded. It is difficult to exaggerate the painful, dismembering effects on our identities of an incoherent identity. When our experiences do not match our explanations we feel inadequate, become mentally rigid, inflexible, small-minded and our emotional wounds do not heal. Unhealed identity wounds stay painful and easily triggered for life leading to a painful existence or a rigid avoidance of new experiences.

Dismembered Identity – Level Five:

The best indication of a thriving brain is a steady increase in complexity across life. As our identities grow, more and more parts of our lives begin to fit together and work smoothly. We act and feel the same inside our homes as outside our doors.

When we were younger we were different at school, at play or at home. We changed when we are being watched. We feared standing before a large group or lost our composure if our clothes or hair were not right. Stress, anxiety, guilt, confusion and worry are indicators that our identities are not coherent. When our explanations of who we are and how life works must change based on circumstances, we are inconsistent. When powerful emotions come into play, they place enormous pressure on our faulty explanations. Our explanations no longer work for something we cannot ignore. Now the two halves of our brain will not synchronize. Our explanations (in our left brain) are not complex or consistent enough to match all our experiences (in our right brain) and the problem is too intense to ignore. We feel pain and confusion.

Faced with the need to correct the symptoms of a left and right brain that are not synchronized to each other, people will often try to believe harder. As a direct result they become rigid, narrow, inflexible or controlling. Others will try to synchronize their thoughts with their emotions and experience. Synchronizing does not mean we let our emotions and experience become our whole reality, it means we reach more inclusive explanations of reality. By synchronizing with our emotions we learn to suffer well and stay consistently the same person through increasingly complex and difficult situations. Paradoxically, those who synchronize with their emotions develop better structure than those who try to structure their thoughts.

You might not think that stress, guilt, anxiety, confusion and worry sound very painful and you would be right. At the far extreme of dismembered identities are even more painful conditions we will examine in Chapter Eight. These painful conditions are often disabling but respond to counseling techniques like Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR®) and TheoPhostic Ministry® both of which resolve traumas and intractable emotional pain with amazing speed. Both of these methods are believed to get results by resynchronizing the left and right brains. EMDR® does its work through rhythmic movement or sounds while the mind reprocesses unsynchronized experiences. TheoPhostic® allows God to resynchronize the mind by revealing truth to the left brain while the right brain revisits the original experience used by the left brain to draw its conclusion. Dr. Smith calls this process “removing the lie.” The wide range of severe emotional pain resolved by these two techniques is an indication of what kinds of severe suffering our souls endure when our experiences and explanations are not synchronized and our minds lose their internal rhythms.¹

4) Maturity: Thriving means the demands placed on us are synchronized to our development so we remain hopeful, intentional and in control as we learn new abilities. Each stage of our development is undertaken in the right order so the development of each new capacity is synchronized with the best age for that ability to grow. Instead of reacting to others or to our circumstances, we creatively act like ourselves. Our *control centers* are well trained.

Immaturity – Level Four

Hopelessness, disorganization and reactivity characterize immaturity. The immature control center does not know where or how to direct our attention thus squandering our mind’s most valuable commodity—our attention. Immaturity is built on bad timing—paying attention to the wrong things at the wrong time.

¹ See more from the *Peace App* at peace.lifemodelworks.org.

Immaturity develops from presenting developmental tasks at the wrong time or sequence. In other words, training is not synchronized to development. Properly sequenced training with well-timed introduction of developmental tasks creates a hopeful and creative mind. Although each new task is too hard at first, because the mind is ready for the next step, success follows our creative persistence. This way our mind directs its attention to problem solving and mastery not problem avoidance and escape.

Badly timed developmental steps lead to hopelessness and disorganization. Instead of persistence, the brain prefers to escape problems without trying to solve them. Words become clubs or bait to get results and not the path to understanding. Immature people frequently get locked in a reactive interaction with others or with their circumstances. Some immature people give in too easily while others resist too much. As a result, circumstances determine what gets their attention rather what is really important to them. Goals, values, creativity, preference and personal style get lost reacting to circumstances.

In addition to a global lack of direction and a narrow or hopeless reactivity, there are many specific skills missing from the capacities of immature people. These skills are covered in great detail in other Life Model books² so we will not examine them here. We will take an extensive look at how to address immaturity problems in Chapter Nine.

3) Recovery: Thriving means recovering quickly when we fall into a distress state. From every desynchronized distress state we return rapidly to joy and from joy to peace.

Continuing Distress – Level Three

Not recovering from distress is what we typically think of with emotional pain. The big six distress feelings are anger, fear, sadness, disgust, shame and hopeless despair. Being stuck in one of these feelings is painful. We avoid even landing in one of these six feelings too frequently. While a normal brain rhythm would return our minds to joy in less than two minutes and restore our peace soon after, a badly trained brain does not know it's way home from one or more of these six states of distress.

Joy, at least as far as our brains are concerned, means we are glad to be together. Not returning to joy means our relationships are disrupted by distressing emotions. Practically speaking, this means that our relational rhythms become disrupted during one or more of the six distressing emotions. Not only are we in pain, our relationships are jeopardized at the same time thus making the path back to joy and peace even harder to find. Most of us know what it is like to be stuck in anger and alienated from the very person who should bring us joy. We know the lack of peace this tension brings. We will look at ways to repair these disruptions in Chapter Ten where we learn how to restart the non-verbal rhythms that link our minds internally and relationally.

² See *Growing a More Human Community Volume I Growing Me: Becoming a Child* Copyright© Jim Wilder 1993, 1997, 2004, 2024 All rights reserved.

2) Receive and give life: Thriving means synchronizing what we receive with our needs and what we give with our nature so our life is full of goodness and not dominated by fear.

Pervasive Fear – Level Two

Fears keep us off elevators, from asking for promotions, from voicing our ideas, from expressing our desires and from trusting others. Our lives become restricted when our fears begin to direct and govern our choices, when we spend increasing effort to avoid the situations that frighten us or when our own emotions and reactions make us afraid of others and even ourselves. A tight, cold fear-clamp keeps our lives from adapting and thriving. While there are a few fears “hard wired” into our brains like the fear of falling, angry faces and loud noises, most fears are learned. We learn to fear any experience that is too intense for us to handle. When an emotional experience becomes more intense than our capacity to stay synchronized we become afraid and just want it to stop. People get stuck on receiving or stuck on giving when they lack the capacity to handle the intense emotions of life. This fear usually derives from “too much too soon” experiences early in life.

The capacity to tolerate intense experiences grows out of practicing the basic life rhythm of receiving and giving joy. Trying to handle intense experiences, even happy ones, before the emotional rhythms are well developed overwhelms an infant’s brain. Infant’s brains have limited capacity to stay synchronized. Because repeated overwhelming events are frightening and disorganizing, early experiences can become patterns. If interactions with caregivers are not synchronized to the baby’s capacity to handle the interaction the infant will become frightened and avoid trying to synchronize minds with others. A fearful mind will get stuck receiving or giving rather than cycle back and forth in rhythm with the moment-by-moment needs of a relationship.

There are two frequent expressions of a fearful mind. The first is the fear of giving. This first group fearfully consumes, unaware that having, buying, eating, drinking, getting higher and having more makes their problem worse. The second fear is a fear of receiving. Perhaps you could say this later fear is a fear of not giving. This second group gives, cares and loves hoping to receive love and care in return, all the time unaware that giving only makes their situation worse. Both groups have their receiving and giving rhythms stuck—one is stuck in give and the other in receive. We call both of those fearful reactions “low self esteem.” Neither group is likely to admit or even know that they are afraid unless a crisis hits. Addictions, codependence, procrastination and many fearful ways of life develop in this underworld that we will visit in Chapter Eleven.

1) Belonging: Thriving means synchronizing with the right people in our lives so that our personal reality is meaningful rather than painful.

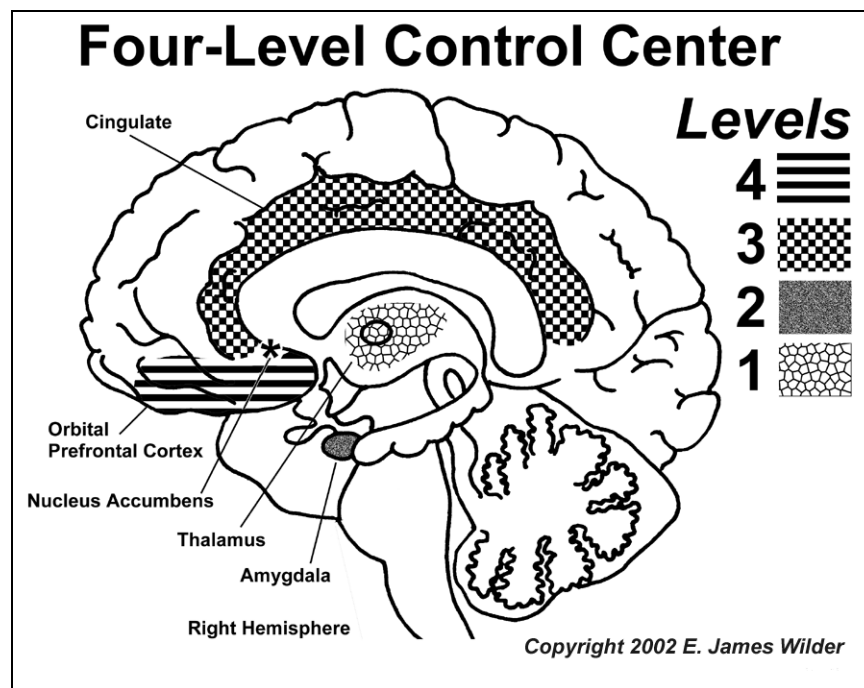
Painful Existence – Level One

Lonely, unloved, unwanted, uncaring, impersonal, untouched and unreachable feelings all grow out of damage to our personal reality. My personal universe takes shape around the faces and bodies that are personally meaningful to *me*. When these faces do not sense my needs and respond to my rhythms, my personal reality begins to feel dangerous, painful or cold. My distorted personal reality can either be overrun by emotions and pain or become cold and meaningless. Those whose personal reality is compromised because they lack a synchronized, predictable and good interaction with a “joy face,” find their very existence is disconnected from others. Some find their disconnection makes life and

people cold and meaningless. Others find their aloneness painful and lonely. They feel left out and unloved. We will look at these miserable levels of existence and how to restore these rhythms in Chapter Twelve. First we must examine the brain structure responsible for synchronizing our emotional, relational and mental rhythms.

Synchronization of the Well-trained Control Center

The right hemisphere of each brain holds an emotional regulation structure called the control center. This four-level control center tops the command hierarchy of every brain. Identity, *who I am*, resides at the top (level four) of the control center in an area called the prefrontal cortex. Below *who I am*, the third level, or cingulate cortex, synchronizes our life rhythms. The lower two levels control our *basic evaluations* (level two) and our *personal reality* (level one.) While it is not important to remember locations at this point, level two is in the amygdala and level one in the deep limbic structures of the thalamus and basal ganglion.



Summary – Each human brain contains a *control center* that develops across our lifetime and provides our resilience and capacity to grow, thrive and recover. Synchronized to and by our relationships, this essentially non-verbal control center provides our peace, joy and strength of character.

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