



A Teams-of-Two Vision

mending the world in a time of chaotic breakdowns

OneEarth.University Edition

1. Transformational Teams of Two and Circles of Six
Dennis Rivers and friends
2. Dialogue Notes on Anam Cara and Tikkun Olam
Dennis Rivers and friends
3. Overview of the Seven Challenges Workbook
on Cooperative Communication Skills
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4. Strengthening Resilience in a Risky World:
It's All About Relationships
Linda M. Hartling, Ph.D.

OneEarth.University and Interfaith Companions in Blessing

Eugene, Oregon

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TWELVE NEXT-STEP SUGGESTIONS FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL TEAMS-OF-TWO AND CIRCLES OF SIX

*Steps for creating working partnerships
to deepen your practice of embodying compassion
and nurturing the Web of Life*

*By Dennis Rivers, MA, and friends
March 2024 Edition*

Context: The current global epidemics of greed and violence (and their combination in chronic wars, climate chaos and ecological devastation) appear to have a powerful, self-perpetuating, momentum about them, like a whirlpool or an avalanche. Therefore, if we are going to live differently and change the societies in which we live, I have become convinced that we will probably need to be a lot more deliberate and systematic about that journey than might have previously been our preference.

The following suggested action steps and guiding principles are one possible systematic approach, drawn from the author's experience in, and study of, spiritual communities, anti-nuclear and social change movements. The steps and principles presented here implement and carry forward the vision of non-hierarchical "Three-part Learning Companions" introduced in this article.

Invitation: We invite you to explore / participate in / adopt / adapt / evolve, open-source approaches toward independent, self-organizing, peer

accompaniment and encouragement. We offer the following suggested steps and principles (and the linked support materials) as possible starting places and guidelines. You are also most welcome to use this material as a starting point to develop your own vision of peer accompaniment and team effectiveness.

1. Explore infinite interwoven-ness as a spiritual vision and way of life. You will find examples of this way of being among the mystics of every religious tradition and the poets of every culture. We offer Joanna Macy's *Work that Reconnects*, Vijali's World Wheel life of artistic pilgrimage, and Dennis Rivers' *Five Wings of the Heart* prayer mandalas, as starting places to begin exploring the life of infinite interwovenness.

Embracing our interwovenness with all life, and all of the Cosmos, will challenge us, at the very least, to live more consciously, more compassionately, more courageously and more creatively. We invite you to use the following as possible beginnings of your unique spiritual encouragement library. These resources can be as much a part of your survival gear as a jacket, tent and flashlight. We also deeply recommend that you draw from every source you can. As places to begin, we invite you to review the following web and print resources:

[Joanna Macy's Work That Reconnects \(web page\)](#)

[World Wheel Community website](#)

[BOOK: World Wheel – One Woman's Quest for Peace](#)

[Five Wings of the Heart Mandala Series](#)

[Spiral Journey Resilience Maps](#)

[Companions in the Storm, Companions in Blessing \(article\)](#)

[Scholars, artists and activists mending the world](#)

2. Follow your calling from the Heart of Life to mend/nurture/serve the living Earth in some specific way. Pick a specific study topic, create an action project, or select an existing public service organization, which strongly expresses your

reverence for life and your evolving compassion for all peoples and all creatures. Here are some suggestions and reflections about picking a topic or project:

- Faced with all the contending appeals for help in the world, we suggest that you commit yourself to the topic/issue that most inspires you to love more deeply and to live more fully. (Inspired by sayings of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Augustine) As Howard Thurman put it, *“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs; ask yourself what makes you come alive. And then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”* Frederick Buechner, novelist and minister, expressed this as *“Vocation is the place where our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.”*
- A person who follows their deepest calling with love is much more likely to awaken the love and sense of calling in others, thus increasing the total amount of love energy moving in and through the world.
- Only the causes that move us to love, will move us to master the details and disciplines of our area of concern, and give us the strength to persevere. Thus, the more we are moved to love, the better advocates we will become. As the writer Wendell Berry once wrote, “What we do not love, we will not save.”
- The Shamanism of Lovingkindness: What we care about deeply fills us with its power and cares/acts through us to mend the world. (Thanks to Joanna Macy and John Seed for this deep idea.)

3. Find one or more project partners who share your deep interest, and invite them to become Team-of-Two / Study Group partners with you, dedicated to the above topic or project. Together, dedicate your shared work to the mutual well-bring of all peoples and all creatures. To find possible partners, you can use the Internet to host a local “meet up” focused on your topic. Or you can use your Facebook page, or

local network, to announce that you are interested in that topic and would like to find study partners. (For safety reasons, we strongly recommend meeting your study partners online via Skype or Zoom, or in public places such as coffee shops.)

4. Explore and agree on project goals. Agree on what you would like to accomplish in a 3-to-6-month period of working together on behalf of the Web of Life as peer volunteers and mutual support partners.

5. Meet on a regular schedule to accomplish your goals, and keep a journal of your progress and challenges. Pass a “talking stick” back and forth to one another or invent other creative rituals to make sure that each person receives a roughly equal amount of listening attention. Make a space for expressing both joys and sorrows. Practice empathic listening. (Please see the [Seven Challenges Workbook](#) for suggestions about how to improve your team communication skills. Please see the [Spiral Journey Resilience Maps](#) for more suggestions about how to work on demanding issues while nurturing the people around you.)

6. Deepen your practice. We invite and encourage people everywhere to explore and develop a Web-of-Life-centered, daily, ongoing, spiritual practice that might include elements of prayer, meditation, blessing, gratitude, invocation, transformation, and opening to immanent and transcendent beauty (in the Navajo and Sufi senses). This could include communion with any and all the great souls who have inspired you on the path of compassion, communion with all your ancestors back to the birth of the Milky Way, and communion with all the future generations of Life on Planet Earth. (We offer the [Five Wings of the Heart](#) and the [prayer resources](#) page on the Earth Prayer Library web site as possible starting places for this kind of ecological spirituality. You are welcome to rewrite these prayers and blessings to meet your needs.)

7. Invite others to join with you in your project, if and when that feels appropriate. But also make it a goal to reach out to new participants. Explore how you might make participation easier. For example, how available are your study group gatherings to people with 9-to-5 jobs, or to parents with small

children? Encourage new participants to find and team up with new project partners. (We offer this guide as a resource for our new participants. You are welcome to both adopt it and adapt it to include additional resources.)

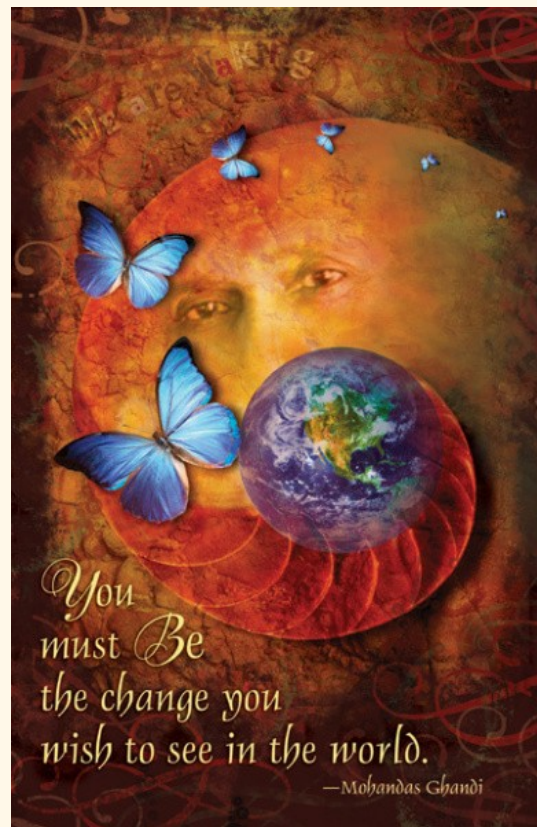
8. Create a gift from your work. With your Team of Two (or more) partner(s), create a memo, report, book report, PowerPoint presentation, video, painting, sculpture or music performance MP3 that documents/expresses what you have done and learned.

9. Celebrate and share the results of your project with your circle of friends and extended community, with other communities, and with the whole world through the Internet. We recommend that you place the results of your project or study in the Creative Commons as royalty-free resources so that others can learn from them and build on them.

10. Evaluate your experience together. Identify areas where you would like to function better and know more, both as advocates for the Web of Life and as Team-of-Two participants. Consider how you would like to deepen your spiritual practice. Record all the above in your personal journal, if you have one. (If you have not kept a personal journal up to now, this could be a good time to begin.)

11. Plan your next step. Renew your participation in a given project for another 3 to 6 months, turn your Team of Two into co-coordinators of a study/action group focused on your theme or project, or conclude your project and make a space for each Team-of-Two partner to bless the other to work on new projects and extend their circle of creative friendships.

12. Expand the circle. Meet other participants in your region and organize monthly or quarterly regional meetings/potlucks, where participants can share their ongoing work and evolve new forms of celebrating the Web of Life and our existence within Her. Deepen your knowledge and practice of the path of service that calls to you (see #2 above), then offer to co-mentor others in that path of service. Invite people to join your study/action circle, and encourage your *Team-of-Two* partners to develop other *Team-of-Two* partnerships.



Rationales, Resources & References for Teams of Two and Circles of Six Next-Step Suggestions

Introduction

We have been born into troubled times, and into a dynamically evolving universe, life circumstances that call upon us to mobilize our deepest inner resources of awareness, kindness, creativity and compassion.

The exploratory network: The World Wheel Community, One Earth University, and Interfaith Companions in Blessing, are small, loosely knit, communities of spiritually motivated artists, activists and scholars concerned with ecology, social justice and the climate crisis. We are linked both by the Internet and by small, local, pairs and groups. We are exploring *Teams-of-Two* and affinity-group *Circles-of-Six* as strategies for mutual support-and emotional resilience in the face of a wide range of deeply disturbing issues.

Our situation today is unprecedented in that any person with an Internet-connected computer or cellphone now has access to *tens of millions* of documents, audios and videos. Out of that information flood, how will we find the information that can help us build a saner world? How will we build real face-to-face relationships of mutual support when real people now have to compete with the digital flood for our attention?

Another challenging aspect of our current moment is that a lot of things on Planet Earth are falling apart at the same moment. It is not clear to me how anyone will survive in the face of nuclear weapons, the climate crisis, crushing social inequalities, and a long list of other similarly threatening problems evolving in the world today.

Pushed by these powerful developments, our cooperative team of researcher/activists is exploring *Teams-of-Two* and *Circles-of-Six* as patterns that could help mobilize the powerful creative energies of people everywhere on behalf of the integrity of life, and on behalf of the cause of kindness (for humans, a survival necessity). The way forward is unknown, but faith in life calls us to take up the cause of kindness and social transformation, nonetheless.

The Teams-of-Two and Circles-of-Six ideas belong to everyone.

Now that humans are impacting the entire Earth in such drastic ways, thoughtful people across the globe (including spiritual leaders such as Pope Francis and the Dalai Lama) have become convinced that we need to expand our vision of kindness to include kindness toward the whole planet. How will we do that?

Both Teams of Two and small circles are ancient survival patterns in human cultures, and even more ancient survival patterns in the biology of many species. These two patterns are already in almost universal use today *in at least some contexts*. Our goal is to practice and advocate them more widely and consciously in the contexts of the climate crisis, ending chronic wars, and transforming oppressive social arrangements. As part of our effort to support those goals, we have placed this

document in the Creative Commons. Whatever in the text of this document you find useful in your work to mend the world, you are welcome to use and adapt under a Creative Commons license. (The illustrations in this document, while used with permission, are not owned by us, so we cannot pass them on with such an open ended invitation to re-use them. However, you are welcome to reproduce this entire document, as is, for nonprofit educational purposes.) In this document, for the sake of brevity, we will use mostly climate crisis examples.

Exploring Decentralized Resilience

Catastrophic climate change is already here. The European heat wave of 2003 killed approximately 70,000 people, many elderly, poor, and isolated. Such events confront us with the knowledge that we need a deeply new civilization, one that is much more web-of-life-friendly and person-to-person friendly. May people everywhere take up the cause of inventing one.

One of the ways we seek to contribute to this resilience-building process is through imagining, exploring and building decentralized **Networks Of Overlapping Friendships** (NOOF! for short) both as individual instances of mutual support and also as an adaptable pattern of mutual support that other groups could make use of.

This sort of decentralized group structure means that you are invited to be always both at the center and at the growing edge of the innovation / exploration process. (This is also a deep and ancient vision of empowerment: “*Wherever two or more are gathered in my name, there will I be.*”)

Working from three of our evolving principles of decentralized organizing:

Inspire rather than require

Inform, engage and support rather than direct

And (from St. Teresa of Avila):

Take up the cause that stirs in you the deepest love

we support our far-flung participants with organizing suggestions and several large online libraries of inspirational and educational materials, including,

WorldWheel.org
EarthPrayer.net
EarthhouseCenter.org
RandomKindness.net
Communication-Skills.net
PersonPlanet.net
OneEarth.University
BreakthroughCommunities.info

How partners-for-the-journey can help us think much-needed new thoughts and acknowledge disturbing feelings.

I'm sure most of you are familiar with two of Einstein's most famous social commentaries: first, that insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results, and second, that we cannot solve our problems with the same kind of thinking we used when we created them. In spite of the fact that our current system of out-of-control industrialization appears to be killing the planet, there are still loud calls for even less regulation of industrial processes, even less planning for a world in which we and our brother and sister species could survive. In burning even more fossil fuels, we are clearly doing more of the same and hoping (against all logic and experience) for different results. I can't see how this will turn out well for us.



In order to think new thoughts, and also to perhaps express doubts about the current way of doing things, we will often need new partners for brainstorming and creative exploration. Although every now and then people can think wonderful new ideas all by themselves, thinking still has a deeply social element in it. Those wonderful ideas will probably not get developed unless there is someone to talk with. We learn to think, early in life, in the

company of those from whom we learn to speak. Then we spend ten to twenty years in classrooms and teams where our thinking power unfolds even more in the company of others. In this social view of language and thinking (for which there is a large body of evidence), whatever ideas we hold, we almost always hold in the context of a circle of conversation partners. The same holds true for what feelings are allowable to be expressed.

In our time, continuous war and profit-driven, out-of-control industrialization are pushing the web of life to the breaking point. Our desperate circumstances are challenging us to both grieve for what we have already lost and think big new thoughts about what sort of social arrangements will allow life to flourish rather than perish. We already know the kinds of social arrangements that have brought us to our current impasse. Inventing something new and actually better will be the great cooperative challenge of our lifetimes, even if it is a challenge we did not seek.

As one possible way of beginning to meet that challenge, I am proposing in this article that each of us begin by cooperating with at least one other person, each partner giving the other permission to "think outside the box," and also to care about life in widening circles, outside the box of the individual selfishness that is, unfortunately, the guiding ideal of capitalism everywhere. When you start thinking new thoughts about the society in which you live, or start to care with a wider caring that your society allows, you risk evoking intense hostility from people around you who may have given up all hope of a better world. Having a small circle of supportive friends, or even one, can make all the difference. You could think of that new conversation partner as a swim-buddy for the ocean of life, or perhaps a Mother Earth accountability partner..

Resilient Teams of Two / Circles-of-Six

The circle of colleagues exploring these organizing paradigms are searching for ways to nurture in one another the creative resilience and transformational kindness we need to face of the multiple breakdowns of our era.

By weaving friendship into social action, we hope to provide people with the resources and encouragement needed to stay involved with difficult issues for long periods of time. We live in a time in which many churches, government agencies, non-profits and businesses have betrayed the trust that people placed in them, perhaps contributing to a widespread distrust in all organizations, large and small. But in spite of all the many organizational betrayals we may have suffered, the Web of Life still needs our love and care. I am convinced that and everyone-can-do-it vision of *Teams-of-Two* and *Circles-of-Six* can be a way of starting over.

This approach is also a vision of how we might work on issues of ecological sustainability in ways that are *also* themselves emotionally sustainable for the participants. *Teams-of-Two* is an effort to carry forward and develop the practices that have appeared in recent decades under the headings of “affinity groups,” “accountability partnerships,” and “peer coaching.” And, the *Teams-of-Two* idea is also ancient, with a long history in Buddhism (kalyana mitra), Judaism (havruta), Christianity and Celtic spirituality, and, of course, in marriage and in the parenting processes of many living species. Among its many facets, the *Teams-of-Two* approach is an example of bio-mimicry: following the patterns (in this case, the two – birds – protecting – their – young pattern) that nature uses to succeed in nurturing life.

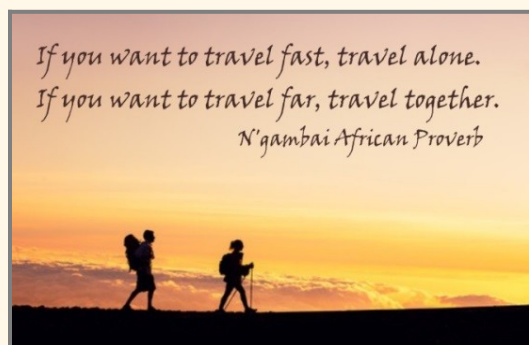


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In his recent book, *Powers of Two*, Joshua Wolf Shenk explores the highly productive dynamics of creative partnerships and alliances, such as that

between rock ‘n rollers Paul McCartney and John Lennon, scientists Marie and Pierre Curie, and the leading French Impressionist painters Claude Monet and Auguste Renoir. The power of these partnerships is often invisible to us, Shenk argues, because of the way our culture idealizes the heroic struggles of the lone genius. Inspired by all the examples noted above, we hope to renew, promote and extend this way of organizing co-operative effort in the context of serving the Web of Life in Her hour of great need.

Emotional support in our new context of enduring emergencies

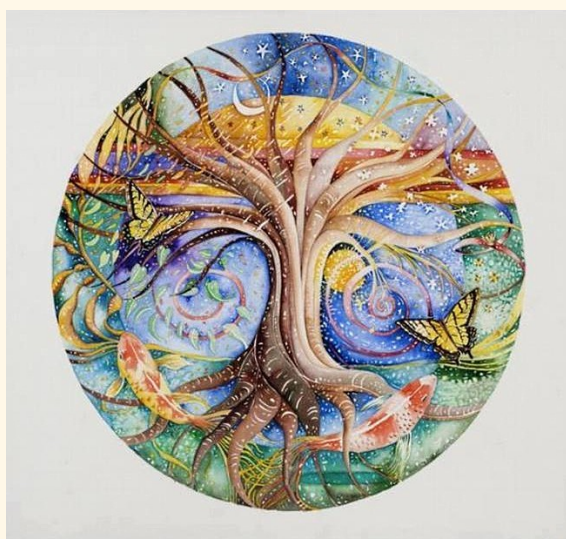
One of the fundamental principles at work in this approach is the idea that *the greater the task we ask a person to embrace, the deeper the support we need to offer them*. Although at first glance this might seem obvious, it clearly was not obvious to many of the groups I have worked in over the years.

Many of the topics encountered in today’s eco-activism and social change advocacy are profoundly disturbing of a person’s sense of physical and mental well-being. “*The water you are drinking will give you cancer.*” “*You and your family will die in the oncome calamity.*” As a result om my personal experience of this, I have become convinced that we need to weave emotional support practices, information and reflection into all our presentations of those difficult topics. For example, if I am going to appeal to you to make strong efforts over many years to keep the world from being poisoned by leaking nuclear power plants, then it seems quite compelling to me that I should also provide some opportunity for you to express the kinds of distresses you might feel as you master and live with the unhappy facts about radioactive contamination.

Many anti-nuclear and climate change groups have not yet begun to operate at this level, but it is greatly to be hoped that this level of support will emerge as ecological advocacy groups evolve and mature. (All our documents on this and related topics are in the Creative Commons, and you can find them as free PDFs online.) Eco-philosopher and anti-nuclear activist Joanna Macy is an inspiring

pioneer in this area, and her work has deeply influenced our thinking, and contributed to our online resources.

A good deal of ecological activism follows what I think of as the “house on fire” model. Which is to say, “drop whatever you’re doing right now and attend to *this*, over here” because *this* is the most important emergency. In the case of fighting a fire, you don’t give any thought while fighting the fire to the kind of person you hope to become in the course of your lifetime, nor the kinds of strengths that might have made you a better firefighter.



Tree Of Life image courtesy of [Meganne Forbes](#)

The ecological crises of our time, however, and the chronic wars and global economic inequalities that kill millions of people every decade, may well last longer than our entire lives. They are what you might call *enduring emergencies*. Prof. Rob Nixon has coined the expression, *slow violence*, to describe our predicaments. Global warming and Chernobyl and Fukushima include processes of injury that will unfold over thousands of years.

In relation to such life-long challenges, *I don't think we can or ought to give up on our quest to become more fully realized persons..* These crises are, for better or for worse, the contexts in which we will become persons. ***Responding to emergencies usually does not include learning new skills or cultivating new personal strengths.*** But from where I stand now, it seems self-defeating for us to assume

that we already have today all the personal strengths, all the personal skills, and all the personal webs of mutual support we will need to contribute effectively to the mending of the world over the rest of our lifetimes.

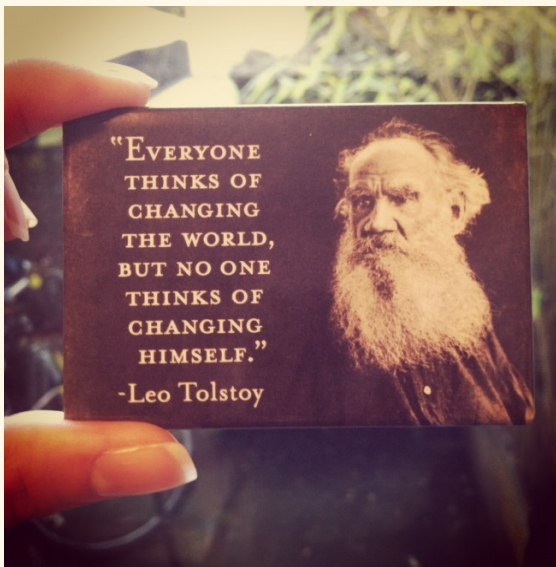
By way of personal example, most of my life has been overshadowed by issues involving nuclear weapons and nuclear waste. I grew up practicing weekly atom-bomb drills in school and later lived downwind from a nuclear power plant built on an earthquake fault. Since this is the only planet I've got, I am searching for ways to become a kinder and wiser person in the middle of my activities against nukes and on behalf of the web of life. In the course of my struggles, I have found many interesting and inspiring examples of how this might be done: Gandhi's Karma Yoga, the engaged Buddhism of Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa, the spiritual exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola, the Quaker Book of Faith & Practice, and the life and example of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador.

When I look at my life from the perspective of decades, the pattern of in-breath and out-breath suggests itself as a model. For every great challenge I face outside of myself, there appears to be a set of corresponding deep strengths that I am being challenged to develop in myself and encourage in my circle of co-workers. In a similar way, I have now become convinced that ***the deeper the ugliness we intend to confront and mend in the world, the deeper the beauty we will need to let into our lives and carry with us.*** (This conclusion reminds me of the Dine/Navajo blessing prayer: “Walk in Beauty.”)

Expanding our circles of emotional support

.One challenge that we face in organizing a peer support network is that in Western societies the psychotherapy profession has come to dominate the process of emotional support-giving. In recent decades psychologists in the United States even moved to classify all processes of emotional support and discussions of personal development as the unique province of licensed professionals

(themselves). (This effort failed because of freedom of speech and religious freedom issues.) For the most part, however, the gradual monopolization of emotional support conversations by psychotherapists has not been the result of a conscious plan on their part. It is much more an unfortunate byproduct of the process of professionalization itself. Whenever one group in society starts specializing in a particular activity (brain surgery, house wiring, shoe making, etc.), they generally do it better than everyone else, and most other people stop doing it, leaving it to the experts.



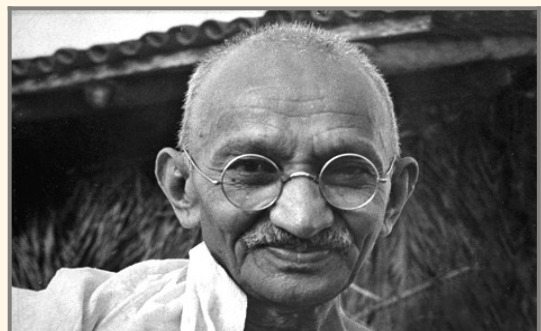
This professionalization brings good results in many areas of life but, I would suggest, terrible results in other areas. Many of the challenges facing us today, such as chronic war, climate change, nuclear waste, and global disease and early death related to tobacco use, can't be solved by experts alone. They involve society-wide consensus-shifting and the participation of as many people as possible. So we need to learn from examples of wide participation, such as 12-Step groups and the Civil Rights movement. We might also learn from other examples, such as how specific card games are played around the world with relatively little supervision, how popular songs spread across the world, and the structure of amateur sports, to understand more about how such movements and activities reach out to involve and empower new participants.

In contrast to the division-of-labor model, in which a few highly-trained individuals provide emotional care for many people who are feeling overwhelmed, the *Team-of-Two* paradigm envisions and encourages every human rights and ecology activist to be an ongoing giver and receiver of emotional support. This emphasis on everybody taking care of everybody expresses contemporary psychology's growing interest in what is now identified as "emotional literacy."

Three empowering ideas

We are searching for resources that could empower people newly concerned about the fate of the Earth. How could we live more courageously, compassionately and supportively?

We begin with three ideas from three inspiring "spiritual permission granters:" Mahatma Gandhi, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the eco-philosopher Joanna Macy.



Mahatma Gandhi

From **Mahatma Gandhi** we receive the idea that we have the power to be the change we want to see. I am convinced that this idea is partly rooted in Gandhi's Hinduism. Hinduism is based on the overarching idea that your individual soul (Atman) is a wave in the ocean of God's Being (Brahman). Therefore, you have infinite resources of love, awareness and understanding within you, although you may not have learned yet how to mobilize these resources for the good of everyone. *But having such resources means that we can stop waiting for someone else to do something wonderful! We can find a way to start doing that something wonderful in our own lives, in our own towns, in our own countries.*

It is possible to express this vision of empowerment as based in nature, as well, for those of us who are not members of a specific religious community. (This brings to mind the nature mysticism of John Muir and Hildegard of Bingen.) Starting in nature, one could say that every cell in your body contains the five- hundred-million-year history of life, therefore you have within you a well of living intelligence to draw on in overcoming whatever obstacles your society faces.

You have the power, in both of these visions, the spiritual and the spirit-in-nature, to begin the change you want to see. And you have the power to stand against the entire world in those times when the world sinks into the confusion of greed and violence. In terms of a mutual support network, Gandhi's vision allows us to see one another as partners in the mobilization of that profound compassionate intelligence, hidden, but yearning to be born, in every human being. (Please see the OneEarth.University page on [Mahatma Gandhi](#))



Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

From the **Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**, we receive the idea of the “Beloved Community,” a vision of inclusiveness that grows out of the belief in one supremely loving Creator, who has created us all as brothers and sisters. Because of that, our vision of the transformation of society must necessarily include all those people with whom we now disagree, all those people we see as creating society's problems.

In Dr. King's vision, the power of love reaches out to include everyone, to transform unjust social arrangements, and to lift us up to be the generous and noble human beings we were intended to be by our Creator. In terms of a mutual support network, Dr. King's vision allows us to see one another as partners in the mobilization of that deep love, hidden, but yearning to be born, in every human heart. (Please see the OneEarth.University page on [Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Study Resources](#))

From the eco-philosopher **Joanna Macy**, we receive a profound idea that changes our relationship to the crises of our time. Our pain for the world, she insists, is not a problem that we should try to be getting rid of. Our society, obsessed with success, views every discomfort is a sign of failure, which must be medicated or therapized out of existence.

To the contrary, Joanna Macy declares, with the deep strength of a grandmother determined to protect her family and the Family of Life as well, our pain for the world bears witness to our love for the world. Our pain for the world is not a failure, it is the best part of us yearning to be expressed. Even more, our pain for the Web of Life and the obliteration of countless species, *is the Web of Life itself speaking through us*, moving through us, and calling us to a life of heroic service.



The way forward, in Joanna Macy's vision, is not to avoid our pain but to enter into it fully and consciously, and to find the love that is hidden within it. Empowered by that love we can go forth and participate in the healing of the world. In terms of a mutual support network, Joanna Macy's vision allows us to see one another as partners and companions in the radical transformation of personal pain into courageous love. (Please see the OneEarth.University page on [Joanna Macy Study Resources](#))

Three visionaries of peer support

Another strong source of inspiration for the Teams-of-Two vision is the work of **Carl Rogers** (1902-1987), a 20th-century psychologist, university professor and scholar of human development. In the course of analyzing hundreds of psychotherapy transcripts, Rogers discovered that there were three underlying attitudes on the part of the therapist that seem to help the client take the next step in their developmental journey. These three attitudes were ***caring, sincerity, and an actively voiced empathy***, a nonjudgmental effort to see the world through the eyes of the client, and reflect that world back to the client.

Rogers built on his experience to propose that ***these three attitudes are the universal ingredients of developmental encouragement***, whether between therapist and client, teacher and student, parent and child, minister and parishioner, spouse and spouse, or friend and friend. Rogers' discovery, explored in his most famous book, *On Becoming a Person*, offered the possibility that we might grow toward becoming a more empathic civilization, because these attitudes could be adopted (with some conscious effort, of course) by everyone.

The need for developmental encouragement is more than merely the need of individuals. The developmental problems of individuals become the developmental problems of entire societies, and vice versa. A society permanently at war, such as the one I live in, becomes a society in which the cruelty and deceptions of war become the norms of everyday life. (Citizens of the United States are at war in three ways: at war with other countries, at war with the Earth through savage resource extraction, and at war with each other through in a society organized around relentless competition.) As we work to steer our lives toward kindness and truthfulness, following the path opened up by Carl Rogers' research, we work not only to improve our own lives, but also to steer our culture out of the self-perpetuating labyrinth of war.

Unfortunately, Rogers' inspiring discoveries about caring, sincerity and empathy collided with the needs of the emerging psychotherapy profession,

which needed, in order to justify its professional existence, to have access to specific tools and techniques that were by definition beyond the reach of "unlicensed" laypeople. Although Carl Rogers did not succeed in his efforts to universalize the three attitudes he had documented, it is not too late to develop the life-enhancing implications of his work. A small but steady stream of psychologists and psycho-therapists have been doing so over the past forty years. And such is the case with the following two writers, whose work has encouraged me with materials that could be used to deepen peer-to-peer mutual support communication and communities.

Gerald Goodman, now emeritus Professor of Psychology at UCLA, did research in the 1960s that led to his 1972 book, *Companionship Therapy*, which focused on the beneficial effects on troubled ten- and eleven-year-old boys of being in the regular presence of a "supportive other," in this case university students selected for their interpersonal skills. Goodman went on to write *The Talk Book*, a popular communication skills self-help book intended to empower us all to become "supportive others" in one another's lives. (Rogers and Goodman were major inspirations for the creation of the *Seven Challenges Workbook*, a 100-page, free, PDF introduction to cooperative communication skills and conflict management now in use around the world.)

Lawrence Brammer is an emeritus professor at the University of Washington, Seattle, and author of *The Helping Relationship: Processes and Skills*. Brammer points out that most people who are experiencing distress in life ***are not mentally ill***. They simply need the presence of a supportive other in order to help them mobilize their coping resources. We could all learn specific skills and attitudes that would allow us to be more supportive of one another in times of acute distress and disorientation. Brammer documents these skills in great detail. (What I would add to Brammer's analysis is that widespread knowledge of how to be a supportive presence does not fit well into the dominant script of professional success in our society, which requires that one master a rare specialty, and focus on people with spectacular distresses.)

The strength of these books is that they unfold the process of being a supportive companion in great detail. The limitation of these three books is that they mostly conceive of the helping relationship as being primarily between skilled helper and a less-skilled person in need. Our challenge is to translate these ideas into a vocabulary of mutual support rather than one-way helping in a fee-for-service context. (*In terms of eco-organizing and social change, I view the fee-for-service model as inherently fragile, because whenever the money runs out, the conversations have to stop. So the OneEarth.University extended community is searching for peer-sharing-based alternatives.*)

Three-Part Learning Companions – a vision of all human relationships

One important aspect of the universal Teams-of-Two theme is an emerging, *three-part vision* of what it means to be on an equal footing with another person, given that no two people ever have exactly the same experiences, temperaments or skill sets.

In my experience, with *every* person I meet, I have (and am invited by life to deepen) at least three parallel, different and complementary relationships, like a chord of three notes played on the piano.

- There are many areas and topics in life where you know more than I know, and you have lived more than I have lived. In relation to those areas I am, and will always be, your student.
- There are some areas and topics in life where we know roughly the same amount and/or we've had roughly the same amount of experience. In relation to those areas, I am your companion and co-explorer.
- And there will be some areas and topics in life where I know more than you do, or have had more experience than you. In relation to those areas, I am convinced that life calls me offer myself as your servant-mentor. My task is to support, accompany and encourage you in your exploration and learning. .

In a society based on competition and merit examinations, there is a powerful focus on knowing

more than other people, and on having specialized knowledge that other people do not possess. To the degree that I succumb to that influence, I would tend to focus almost entirely on the areas where I know more than you. But if I were to do that, not only will I become an unpleasant person to be around, I will also be seriously out of touch with you, missing what I could learn from you, and missing most of the creative possibilities in our conversations.

In relation to the complex journey of becoming a person, you already have much to share, much to teach me. You have had many life experiences that I have not had, and you may have struggled through many difficult situations that I have not yet encountered. Awakening to this, I strive to look at each person I meet and know through this new three-dimensional lens. I invite you to do the same, so that new creative partnerships might unfold in your life and in our world.

Co-mentoring: A Different Way of Teaching

Within our various informal communities and peer support networks, *we are all teachers-by-example*. (We are convinced that this is also true for every person on Planet Earth.) In our view, we may as well accept the responsibility of being teachers, because we are all already teaching-by-example all the time. I may not be teaching algebra all the time, but every waking moment that I am in the presence of other people I am teaching by example how to be a person, how to love, how to live, how to tell the truth, how to express reverence for life, how to forgive, etc.

So, in relation to these basic qualities of being a person, the division of any human group into teachers and learners covers up something really important. We may not be teaching particularly inspiring lessons, but *we are all teaching each other and all learning from each other all the time!* I conclude from this that since we are already fully on the stage of the world, we may as well learn to sing better. This for me is one of the most important messages implicit in the discovery of the “mirror neurons” in the brain that predispose us to imitate one another whether we want to or not. (I invite you

to read up on mirror neurons at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_neuron)

(2022 note: There is no doubt that we are neurologically predisposed to imitate one another. There are ongoing debates about which particular neurons in the human brain are responsible for this tendency.)

Of course, in relation to the really important human strengths, I can only encourage others as much as I myself have really learned and lived. And the further you go along the path of human unfolding, the more you realize that at any given moment a challenge could come along that would be so large that it would be beyond your reach. So at a deeper level, all the beginners and all the experts in this world are really in the same human boat. We are all perpetual beginners, each of us facing our own multiple horizons of the unknown. That is why I enjoy the chambered nautilus as one of my guiding images. We are never finished evolving. All the great human virtues call us toward open horizons.

All of this has deep implications for teaching resilience in the face of ecological catastrophes. It suggests that however inspired one person's discoveries about resilience might be, there are severe limits as to how much of those discoveries can be transferred with words directly into the minds of others. (Songs and pictures can increase that transferability a bit, but not nearly as much as one would hope, in my experience.) What we can do is walk along beside one another in a journey of exploration and discovery. And that walking-along-beside can be a powerful, life-giving, form of encouragement, even though it tends to unfold in quiet ways, and focuses on living with ongoing questions rather than providing dramatic answers. An analogy from sports would be to say, I can't run for you, no matter how good a runner I am, nor can you run for me, but running together we can encourage each other to run further than either of us would have run alone. We are co-mentors on the road of life.



Creative Partnering -- Recommended Reading List

For PDF of this entire *Teams-of-Two* document with active hyperlinks please visit:

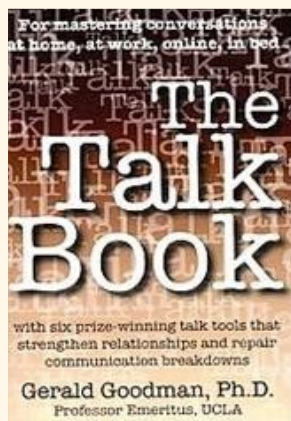
<https://OneEarth.University/library/teams-of-two.pdf>

[The Seven Challenges Workbook: Communication Skills for Success at Home and at Work](#)

Dennis Rivers, MA, communication skills trainer and anti-nuclear activist. (See Summary and Introduction as separate documents below in this Resources collection.) Available free of charge in PDF format at Communication-Skills.net

[The Talk Book](#) By Gerald Goodman

Publisher's description: This handbook, full of tools for better talking, has served families, romantic couples, counselors, consultants, talk-show hosts, screen-writers, sales-people, lovers, news anchors, therapists, teachers -- just about anyone who has important conversations. This book's success has created a demand for re-publication.



The success comes from the method's proven ability to sharpen talk skills and untangle messy communication. Its technique won the Innovations Award from The University of California, and covers the six primary tools everyone uses for connecting- in personal and work conversations: questions, self-disclosures, advice-giving, explanations, expressed empathy, and attention-managers. These familiar tools are natural to most people, so there's little to memorize. New skills simply come from knowing how and when to use them. The technique brings strong understanding to a wide spectrum of interpersonal joys and sorrows over a lifespan.

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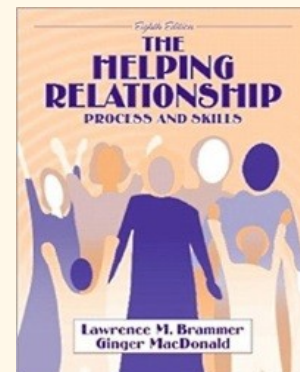
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[The Helping Relationship: Processes and Skills](#). By Lawrence M. Brammer and Ginger MacDonald

From the publisher:

Counseling is not just a specialized profession reserved for a few trained individuals. All people are called upon at certain points in their lives to serve as counselors, listeners, or helpers in some way. Basic counseling skills are a necessity



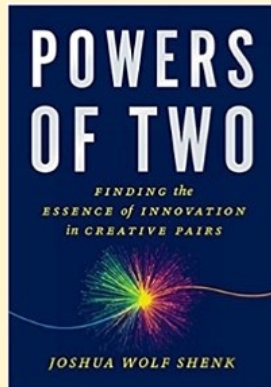
for every single individual, whether one is a parent listening to his teenager, a family member helping another cope with the loss of a loved one, a doctor counseling a patient about a terminal illness, a friend providing support for another friend, or even a business professional engaging in active listening at a meeting or interview. Counseling requires leadership and compassion, and it is a skill that all must possess in order to live with others in the world. This book describes in non-technical language the human helping process and provides training for anyone interested in becoming a helper. Filled with examples and step-by-step outlines on how to develop basic counseling skills, this book focuses on helping people learn to help themselves and each other. Providing a systematic approach to acquiring helping skills, this book cuts through psychological jargon and reaches across various professions and settings. Readers are asked to consider important personal issues of being a helper as they enter professional or para-professional roles as helpers. Social workers, counselors, human service professionals, business professionals, law professionals, medical professionals, and anyone interested in becoming a helper.

ISBN: 978-0205355204 [Find this book in libraries](#)

[Find this book in bookstores \(including used copies\)](#)

[Powers of Two: Finding the Essence of Innovation in Creative Pairs](#) By Joshua Wolf Shenk

Publisher's description: All of us have experienced creative connection, and glimpsed its power. Yet, for centuries, the myth of the lone genius has obscured the critical story of the power of collaboration. In *Powers of Two*, Joshua Wolf Shenk argues that creative pairs are the exemplars for innovation. Drawing on years



of research on great partnerships in history - from Lennon and McCartney to Marie and Pierre Curie, plus hundreds more in fields including literature, popular culture, art and business - Shenk identifies the common journey pairs take from the spark of initial connection, through the passage to a cognitive 'joint identity' to competition and the struggle for power. Using scientific and psychological insights, he uncovers new truths about epic duos - and sheds new light on the genesis of some of the greatest creative work in history. He reveals hidden partnerships among people known only for their individual work (like C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien), and even 'adversarial collaborations' among those who are out to beat each other. This revelatory and lyrical book will make us see creative exchange as the central terrain of our psyches.

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[Power of 2: How to Make the Most of Your Partnerships at Work and in Life.](#)

By Rodd Wagner and Gale Muller

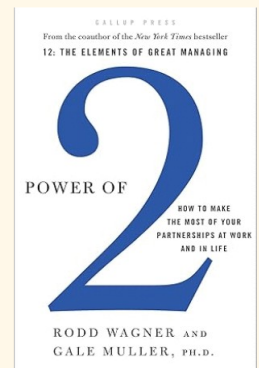
Publisher's description: Many of the greatest accomplishments can only be reached by two people working together. Tenzing and Hillary were first to scale Everest. Malone and Stockton were the key to

each other's success on the basketball court. Eisner was never as effective at Disney without Wells.

But while some partnerships reach great heights, others fall short. Why do some people click while others clash? What do great pairs have in common? And what can you learn from the most powerful partnerships to strengthen collaboration in your work and personal life?

Based on Gallup's groundbreaking research, *Power of 2* details the eight elements that prepare partners to succeed in their most important endeavors. Gallup shares the science and the secrets of successful collaboration.

Mixing key insights about human nature, field-tested discoveries and inspiring stories of partnerships that reached the pinnacle, *Power of 2* will change the way you think about working with someone else.



ISBN: 9781595620293 [Find this book in libraries](#)
[Find this book in bookstores \(including used copies\)](#)

[Becoming Naturally Therapeutic: A Return To The True Essence Of Helping.](#) Jacqueline Small. A universal guide to being a helpful companion on the road of life.

From the publisher: Based on studies that pinpoint the characteristics of the most effective therapists, *Becoming Naturally Therapeutic* shows you how to help those you care about by opening your heart and releasing the healer within. A nationally known pioneer in the area of addiction and transpersonal psychology, Jacquelyn Small shows you how to emphasize without enabling, how to care without controlling, and how by helping others in a genuine spirit of giving you invariably help yourself. She teaches how the true art of therapy lives within us all.

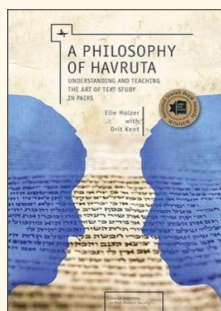
ISBN: 9781595620293 [Find this book in libraries](#)
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[A Philosophy of Havruta: Understanding and Teaching the Art of Text Studies in Pairs.](#)

Elie Holzer with Orit Kent. Academic Studies Press, 2013.

From the publisher: No longer confined to traditional institutions devoted to Talmudic studies, *havruta* work, or the practice of students studying materials in pairs, has become a relatively widespread phenomenon across denominational and educational settings of Jewish learning. However, until now there has been little discussion of what *havruta* text study entails and how it might be conceptualized and taught.

This book breaks new ground from two perspectives: by offering a model of *havruta* text study situated in broader theories of interpretation and learning, and by treating *havruta* text study as composed of textual, interpersonal and intra-personal practices which can be taught and learned. We lay out the conceptual foundations of our approach and provide examples of their pedagogical implementation for the teaching of *havruta* text study. Included are illustrative lesson plans, teachers' notes and students' reflections, exercises for students, and other instructional materials for teaching core concepts and practices.



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Articles on co-mentoring

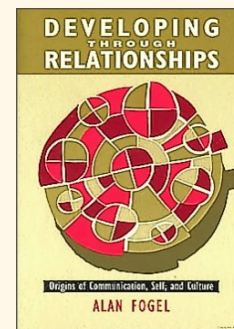
<https://www.fastcompany.com/3045170/hit-the-ground-running/the-case-for-co-mentoring>

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/how-do-life/201411/co-mentoring>

[Developing Through Relationships: Origins of Communication, Self, and Culture.](#)

Alan Fogel

From the publisher: This accessible book explains how individuals develop through their relationships with others. Alan Fogel demonstrates that human development is driven by a social dynamic process called co-regulation—the creative interaction of individuals to achieve a common goal. He focuses on communication—between adults, between parents and children, among non-human animals, and even among cells and genes—to create an original model of human development.



Fogel explores the origins of communication, personal identity, and cultural participation and argues that from birth communication, self, and culture are inseparable. He shows that the ability to participate as a human being in the world does not come about only with the acquisition of language, as many scholars have thought, but begins during an infant's earliest nonverbal period. According to Fogel, the human mind and sense of self start to develop at birth through communication and relationships between individuals.

Fogel weaves together theory and research from a variety of disciplines, including psychology, biology, linguistics, philosophy, anthropology, and cognitive science. He rejects the objectivist perspective on development in favor of a relational perspective: to treat the mind as an objective, mechanical thing, Fogel contends, is to ignore the interactive character of thinking. He argues that the life of the mind is a dialogue between imagined points of view, like a dialogue between two different people, and he uses this view to explain his relational theory of human development.

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[The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development](#) Robert Kegan

Editor's note: I found the book to be very demanding, and also a very rewarding, next step in my understanding of human (and my own) development.

Publisher's description: *The Evolving Self* focuses upon the most basic and universal of psychological problems—the individual's effort to make sense of experience, to make meaning of life. According to Robert Kegan, meaning-making is a lifelong activity that begins in earliest infancy and continues to evolve through a series of stages encompassing childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. *The Evolving Self* describes this process of evolution in rich and human detail, concentrating especially on the internal experience of growth and transition, its costs and disruptions as well as its triumphs.

At the heart of our meaning-making activity, the book suggests, is the drawing and redrawing of the distinction between self and other. Using Piagetian theory in a creative new way to make sense of how we make sense of ourselves, Kegan shows that each meaning-making stage is a new solution to the lifelong tension between the universal human yearning to be connected, attached, and included, on the one hand, and to be distinct, independent, and autonomous on the other. *The Evolving Self* is the story of our continuing negotiation of this tension. It is a book that is theoretically daring enough to propose a reinterpretation of the Oedipus complex and clinically concerned enough to suggest a variety of fresh new ways to treat those psychological complaints that commonly arise in the course of development.

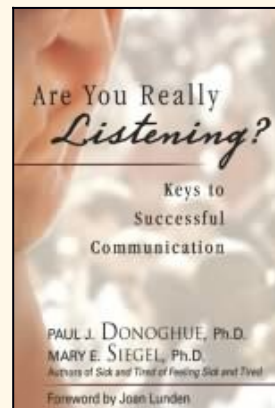
Kegan is an irrepressible storyteller, an impassioned opponent of the health-and-illness approach to psychological distress, and a sturdy builder of psychological theory. His is an original and distinctive new voice in the growing discussion of human development across the life span.

ISBN: 978-1618113856 [Find this book in libraries](#)
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[Are You Really Listening?: Keys to Successful Communication](#) By Paul J. Donoghue, PhD, and Mary E. Siegel, PhD.

Listening is an essential skill worth every effort to learn and to master. Listening takes us out of our tendency toward self-absorption and self-protection. It opens us to the world around us and to the persons who matter most to us. When we listen, we learn, we grow, and we are nourished.

Why do we often feel cut off when speaking to the people closest to us? What is it that keeps so many of us from really listening? Practicing psycho-therapists, Donoghue and Siegel answer these questions and more in this thoughtful, witty, and helpful look at the reasons why people don't listen. Filled with vivid examples that clearly demonstrate easy-to-learn listening techniques, *Are You Really Listening?* is a guide to the secrets and joys of listening and being listened to.



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Suggestions welcome!

More information about co-mentoring and accountability partnering to be added to later editions of this document. Please send suggestions of informative/inspiring books and articles to dennis.rivers@gmail.com.

Notes on Anam Cara and Tikkun Olam *Spiritual Friendship and the Mending of the World*

Dennis Rivers, MA, in dialogue with friends, colleagues, mentors and ChatGPT4 – 4/20/2023

Introduction

The spiritual and ethical dimensions of human life are often explored and articulated through the themes and metaphors that emerge from different religious and cultural traditions. This brief article explores the creative synergy between two such themes: *Anam Cara*, the Irish concept of spiritual friendship, and *Tikkun Olam*, the Jewish notion of mending the world. By examining these themes, we hope to uncover their interconnectedness and the potential they hold for helping us to make a more compassionate, just and ecologically sane society.

Anam Cara - Spiritual Friendship

Anam Cara, which translates to "soul friend" in the Irish language, is a concept deeply rooted in the Celtic spiritual tradition. It refers to a special kind of friendship that transcends the superficialities of everyday social interactions and is grounded in a profound spiritual connection between two individuals (O'Donohue, 1997). This concept is also echoed in the Buddhist term *Kalyana Mitra*, which similarly denotes a spiritual companion who supports one's journey towards enlightenment (Subuti and Subhamati, 2008).

In both traditions, the relationship between spiritual friends is characterized by deep trust, mutual support, and shared values. Such friendships foster growth, self-awareness, and ethical development. Importantly, in today's world the spiritual bond between the partners in an *Anam Cara* or *Kalyana Mitra* relationship transcends conventional social hierarchies and divisions, uniting people across differences in age, gender, ethnicity, and social status. All that matters is the compassion that moves you.

Tikkun Olam - Mending the World

Tikkun Olam is a Hebrew term that means "repairing the world." It is an essential concept in Jewish theology and ethics, which calls upon individuals to actively participate in improving the world through acts of kindness, justice, and compassion. Rooted in the Talmud and extended in the mystical teachings of Kabbalah, the idea of *Tikkun Olam* evolved to include the spiritual dimension of rectifying the divine sparks scattered throughout creation (Lerner, 2006).



The spirituality of kindness, as embodied in *Tikkun Olam*, has far-reaching implications for social and environmental justice. By engaging in acts of generosity, fairness, and empathy, individuals can break the hypnotic spell that violence and domination often cast over everyday life, which itself is a giant step toward starting to make a more harmonious and equitable world. In doing the above in seemingly small ways, we also create the momentum and pattern for even larger changes, because in a deep sense, *love never rests*. As the early 20th-century labor activist Eugene V. Debs said, "...while there is a soul in prison, I am not free."

Anam Cara as the Seedbed and Greenhouse of Tikkun Olam

The metaphor of *Anam Cara* as the "seedbed" of *Tikkun Olam* highlights the idea that spiritual friendship provides fertile ground for nurturing the ethical and compassionate qualities necessary for world mending. This metaphorical seedbed encompasses the values and practices that cultivate kindness, solidarity, and mutual support among individuals, which can reach out in widening circles to heal the world. As was the case during the Rwandan Genocide, when Muslim Rwandans sheltered their Christian Tutsi neighbors against the wrath of the murderous mob, the practice of simple kindness can represent a deep faithfulness to what is best in people, and, at times, a steadfast resistance to what is worst.

In this context, Gandhi's concept of "constructive program" can be seen in the light of the seedbed metaphor. Gandhi emphasized the importance of building alternative social structures and institutions grounded in nonviolence, cooperation, and self-reliance (Gandhi, 1945). All of this was **directly in the face of** the monumental economic and political oppression of the citizens of India by the occupying British colonial administration. Through such constructive efforts, individuals develop the strengths and virtues needed to imagine (!) and contribute to transformative change. (I am convinced that the transformative changes we need today, to address such issues as systemic injustice and climate madness, will demand heroic levels of patience, kindness, honesty, and **imagination**. *How do we plan to develop these strengths?* A Gandhian answer would be: *starting with the person sitting next to you.*)

Similarly, the idea of "prefigurationism" in Western social thought reflects the notion that one must embody the values and practices one seeks to promote in the world (Graeber, 2009). By fostering spiritual friendships rooted in *Anam Cara* or *Kalyana Mitra*, individuals can embody and prefigure the values of *Tikkun Olam*, thus contributing to the unfolding of what might be understood today as a

kind of fractal propagation, the personal-relationship roots of the social change tree. The scholar Adrian Kreutz summarizes prefigurationism as "a way of engaging in social change activism that seeks to bring about this other world by means of planting the seeds of the society of the future in the soil of today's."

Conclusion

The creative synergy between *Anam Cara* and *Tikkun Olam* offers a rich and inspiring framework for understanding the spiritual and ethical dimensions of social change. By cultivating spiritual friendships and engaging in acts of kindness, compassion, and justice, in widening circles, we can sow the seeds of *Tikkun Olam* in our own lives and simultaneously *prepare for* and *contribute to* the mending of our fractured world.

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creating the life that lives between us in working, partnering, parenting and negotiating

seven lifetime challenges in the process of communicating more cooperatively and successfully, as explored in The SEVEN CHALLENGES Workbook and Reader, available free of charge in PDF format at communication-skills.net

	<p>challenge one</p>	<p>Start by listening more carefully and more responsively - acknowledging the feelings and wants that people express in word and mood. Actively acknowledging another person's experience does not have to mean that you agree or approve. Compassionately allow people to feel whatever they feel. People are much more likely to listen if they have been <i>listened to</i> with actively expressed acknowledgments.</p>
<p>"I would like to..." A. Advise you... B. Give instructions... C. Make plans... ✓ D. Negotiate about... E. Explore possibilities F. Make a request... G. Ask for support, etc. OK?</p>	<p>challenge two</p>	<p>Explain your conversational intent and invite consent. Use one of 30 basic conversational invitations such as, "Right now I would like to take a few minutes and ask you about... [subject]." The more involvement a conversation is going to require, the more you will benefit by sharing your conversational goal and inviting the conscious cooperation of your conversation partner.</p>
	<p>challenge three</p>	<p>Express yourself more clearly and completely - giving your listeners the information they need to understand (mentally reconstruct) your experiences more fully. One good way is to use "the five I-messages": What/how I (1)<u>observe</u>, (2)<u>am feeling</u>, (3) <u>because I interpret/evaluate/need</u>, and now I (4)<u>want to request</u>, and (5)<u>envision/hope for</u> from request. Good for self-understanding, too.</p>
<p>challenge four</p>		<p>Translate criticisms and complaints into requests and explain the positive results of having your request granted. Do this for both your own complaints <u>and</u> the complaints that others bring to you. Focusing on the positive outcome shows respect to the recipient of a request as having a positive contribution to make, and shifts focus from past mistakes to present and future successes.</p>
	<p>challenge five</p>	<p>Ask questions more "open-endedly" and more creatively. "How did you like that movie?" is an open-ended question that invites a wide range of answers. "Did you like it?" suggests only "yes" or "no" as answers and does not encourage discussion. Sincerely asked open-ended questions can open up our conversation partners. (<i>How comfortable are you with this suggestion?</i>)</p>
	<p>challenge six</p>	<p>Thanking... Explore and express more appreciation, gratitude, encouragement and delight. In a world full of problems and criticisms, make a special effort to look for opportunities to express satisfaction & thanks. Whether partnering, parenting or working, it is the memory of many appreciations that makes a relationship strong enough to allow for the stresses of problem-solving & differing needs.</p>
	<p>challenge seven</p>	<p>Adopt the continuous learning perspective... Make the practices described in challenges 1 through 6 important parts of your everyday living. Pay attention to <u>each conversation</u> as an opportunity to grow in skill, awareness and compassion. Work to redefine each of your "opponents" in life as a learning and problem-solving partner. Jump-start the process of change in your life by personally embodying the changes, virtues and styles of behavior you want to see in others.</p>

Adapted from the Overview and Introduction:

The Seven Challenges
Communication Skills Workbook

My lifetime of working against nuclear weapons and nuclear waste has taught me this: **Working to mend a troubled world will challenge us to go to a whole new level of skill and awareness.** But the world is in fact a changeable place. It is changing all the time. And because conversations are a bringing together of both persons' contributions, when you initiate a positive change in your way of talking and listening, you can single-handedly begin to influence the quality of all your conversations., sending out eddies of change in many direction. The actions described in the Seven Challenges Workbook are seven examples of "being the change you want to see" (a saying of Mahatma Gandhi, the great teacher of nonviolence).

While this may sound very idealistic and self-sacrificing, you can also understand it as a practical principle: **model the behavior you want to evoke from other people.** The Seven Challenges are also examples of another saying of Gandhi's: "the means are the ends."



Communicating more awarely and compassionately can be satisfying ends in themselves, both emotionally and spiritually. They also build happier families and more successful businesses.

A brief summary of each challenge is given in the paragraphs that follow, along with some of the lifelong issues of personal development that are woven through each one. In Chapters One through Seven you will find expanded descriptions of each one, with discussions, examples, exercises and readings to help you explore each suggestion in action.

Challenge 1. Listening more carefully and responsively. Listen first and acknowledge what you hear, even if you don't agree with it, before

expressing your experience or point of view. In order to get more of your conversation partner's attention in tense situations, pay attention first: listen and give a brief restatement of what you have heard (especially feelings) before you express your own needs or position. The kind of listening recommended here separates acknowledging from approving or agreeing. Acknowledging another person's thoughts and feelings **does not have to mean** that you **approve of** or **agree with** that person's actions or way of experiencing, or that you will do whatever someone asks.

✦ Some of the deeper levels of this first step include learning to listen to your own heart, and learning to encounter identities and integrities quite different from your own, while still remaining centered in your own sense of self.

Challenge 2. Explaining your conversational intent and inviting consent. In order to help your conversation partner cooperate with you and to reduce possible misunderstandings, start important conversations by inviting your conversation partner to join you in the specific kind of conversation you want to have. The more the conversation is going to mean to you, the more important it is for your conversation partner to understand the big picture. Many successful communicators begin special conversations with a preface that goes something like: "I would like to talk with you for a few minutes about [subject matter]. When would be a good time?" The exercise for this step will encourage you to expand your list of possible conversations and to practice starting a wide variety of them.

✦ Some deeper levels of this second step include learning to be more aware of and honest about your intentions, gradually giving up intentions to injure, demean or punish, and learning to treat other people as consenting equals whose participation in conversation with us is a gift and not an obligation

Challenge 3. Expressing yourself more clearly and completely. Slow down and give your listeners more information about what you are experiencing by using a wide range of "I-statements." One way to help get more of your listener's empathy is to express more of the five basic dimensions of your

experience: Here is an example using the five main “I-messages” identified by various researchers over the past half century: (Please read down the columns.)

The Five I-Messages = Five dimensions of experience	Example of a "Five I-Message" communication
1. What are you seeing, hearing or otherwise sensing?.	<i>"When I saw the dishes in the sink..."</i>
2. What emotions are you feeling?	<i>...I felt irritated and impatient...</i>
3. What interpretations or wants <u>of yours</u> that support those feelings?	<i>...because I want to start cooking dinner right away...</i>
4. What action, information or commitment you want to request now?	<i>...and I want to ask you to help me do the dishes right now...</i>
5. What positive results will receiving that action, information or commitment lead to in the future?	<i>...so that dinner will be ready by the time Mike and Joe get here."</i>

Anytime one person sincerely listens to another, a very creative process is going on in which the listener mentally reconstructs the speaker’s experience. The more facets or dimensions of your experience you share with easy-to-grasp “I statements,” the easier it will be for your conversation partner to reconstruct your experience accurately and understand what you are feeling. This is equally worthwhile whether you are trying to solve a problem with someone or trying to express appreciation for them. Expressing yourself this

carefully might appear to take longer than your usual quick style of communication. But if you include all the time it takes to unscramble everyday misunderstandings, and to work through the feelings that usually accompany not being understood, expressing yourself more completely can actually take a lot less time.

✦ Some deeper levels of this third step include developing the courage to tell the truth, growing beyond blame in understanding painful experiences, and learning to make friends with feelings, your own and other people’s, too.

Challenge 4. Translating your (and other people’s) complaints and criticisms into specific requests, and explaining your requests. In order to get more cooperation from others, whenever possible ask for what you want by using specific, action-oriented, positive language rather than by using generalizations, “why’s,” “don’ts” or “somebody should’s.” Help your listeners comply by explaining your requests with a “so that...”, “it would help me to... if you would...” or “in order to... .” Also, when you are receiving criticism and complaints from others, translate and restate the complaints as action requests.”).

✦ Some of the deeper levels of this fourth step include developing a strong enough sense of self-esteem that you can accept being turned down, and learning how to imagine creative solutions to problems, solutions in which everyone gets at least some of their needs met.

Challenge 5. Asking questions more “open-endedly” and more creatively. **“Open-endedly...”:** In order to coordinate our life and work with the lives and work of other people, we all need to know more of what other people are feeling and thinking, wanting and planning. But our usual “yes/no” questions actually tend to shut people up rather than opening them up. In order to encourage your conversation partners to share more of their thoughts and feelings, ask “open-ended” rather than “yes/no” questions. Open-ended questions allow for a wide range of responses. For example, asking “How did you like that food/movie /speech/doctor/etc.?” will evoke a more detailed

response than “Did you like it?” (which could be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”). In the first part of Challenge Five we explore asking a wide range of open-ended questions.

“and more creatively...” When we ask questions we are using a powerful language tool to *focus conversational attention* and *guide our interaction with others*. But many of the questions we have learned to ask are totally fruitless and self-defeating (such as, parents to a pregnant teen, “Why????!! Why have you done this to us????!!”). In general it will be more fruitful to ask “how” questions about the future rather than “why” questions about the past, but there are many more creative possibilities as well. Of the billions of questions we might ask, not all are equally fruitful or illuminating; not all are equally helpful in solving problems together. In the second part of Challenge Five we explore asking powerfully creative questions from many areas of life.

✦ Deeper levels of this fifth step include developing the courage to hear the answers to our questions, to face the truth of what other people are actually feeling. Also, learning to be comfortable with the process of looking at a situation from different perspectives, and learning to accept that people often have needs, views and tastes different from your own (I am not a bad person if you love eggplant and I can’t stand it).

Challenge 6. Expressing more appreciation. To build more satisfying relationships with the people around you, express more appreciation, delight, affirmation, encouragement and gratitude. Because life continually requires us to attend to problems and breakdowns, it gets very easy to see in life only what is broken and needs fixing. But satisfying relationships (and a happy life) require us to notice and respond to what is delightful, excellent, enjoyable, to work well done, to food well cooked, etc. It is appreciation that makes a relationship strong enough to accommodate differences and disagreements. Thinkers and researchers in several different fields have reached similar conclusions about this: healthy relationships need a core of mutual appreciation.

✦ One deeper level of this sixth step is in how you might shift your overall level of appreciation and gratitude, toward other people, toward nature, and toward life and/or a “Higher Power.”

Challenge 7. Adopting the “continuous learning” approach to living, making better communication an important part of your everyday life. In order to have your new communication skills available in a wide variety of situations, you will need to practice them in as wide a variety of situations as possible, until, like driving or bicycling, they become “second nature.” The Seventh Challenge is to practice your evolving communication skills in everyday life, solving problems together, giving emotional support to the important people in your life, and enjoying how you are becoming a positive influence in your world. This challenge includes learning to see each conversation as an opportunity to grow in skill and awareness, each encounter as an opportunity to express more appreciation, each argument as an opportunity to translate your complaints into requests, and so on.

✦ One deeper level of this seventh step concerns learning to separate yourself from the current culture of violence, insult and injury, and learning how to create little islands of cooperation and mutuality, islands that you can gradually expand to include more and more of the people you encounter on your life journey.

Conclusion. The creative wave. I hope the information and exercises in this workbook will help you discover that listening and talking more consciously and cooperatively can be fun and rewarding. Just as guitar playing and basketball take great effort and bring great satisfaction, so does communicating more skillfully. As you begin to brighten up your worlds of family and work interaction with the new skills described here, you will be carrying forward the creative explorations of the many psychotherapists, teachers, scholars and peace activists whose inspiration and assistance have made the Seven Challenges Workbook possible.

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Strengthening Resilience in a Risky World: It's All About Relationships

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About the Author

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Abstract

Building on Judith Jordan's earlier work (WP #57), this paper challenges the commonly held view that resilience is a unique form of individual "toughness" endowed to a lucky few and suggests that resilience can be strengthened in all people through participation in growth-fostering relationships. The author reviews the research describing individual, internal characteristics associated with resilience and explores the relational aspects of these characteristics. A case example illustrates that efforts promoting relational development help people grow through and beyond experiences of hardship and adversity. In addition, the author proposes specific ways resilience can be strengthened through engagement in relationships that enhance one's intellectual development, sense of worth, sense of competence, sense of empowerment, and, most importantly, sense of connection.

Introduction

In 1992 when Judith Jordan wrote about relational resilience as a "life-giving empathic bridge," she offered a profound reframing of the source of human ability to overcome adversities, hardships, and trauma. She challenged us to move beyond a highly circumscribed focus on individual, internal traits to a broader and deeper examination of the relational dynamics that promote growth in the face of hardship. According to Jordan:

...we can no longer look only at factors within the individual which facilitate adjustment; we must examine the relational dynamics that encourage the capacity for connection. (p. 1)

Few studies have delineated the complex factors involved in those relationships which not only protect us from stress but promote positive and creative growth. (p. 3)

Rather than perpetuating the common notion of resilience as some form of intrinsic toughness endowed to a few unique or heroic individuals, Jordan opened the way to understanding resilience as a human capacity that can be developed and strengthened in *all* people through relationships, specifically through growth-fostering relationships.

Today, Jordan's reconceptualization of resilience leads us to a profoundly valuable source of hope and courage as we face accumulating evidence that we are living in a riskier world (e.g., terrorist threats, global economic instability and injustice, civil unrest, extreme global climate changes, violent international conflict, widespread destruction of natural resources, corporate corruption, and world-wide epidemics, as well as intractable hunger and poverty). Just as more researchers are becoming more keenly aware of how trauma, hardships, and adversities can derail the lives of children and adults (Banks, 2000; Bremner, 2002),

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more individuals, families, and communities are facing forms of threat that were once unthinkable. Today, growing numbers of people have palpable fears about a repeat of the 9/11 tragedy; random rampage shootings; possible nuclear/biological/chemical weapons attacks; suicide bombings around the world; outbreaks of intractable, incurable diseases; etc. Given these developments, people cannot afford to wager that they are blessed with superior fortitude (individual resilience). Rather, all of us can find ways to strengthen our resilience *now* by developing our capacity to build healthy connections with others, our families, and our communities, that is, by developing our relational resilience (Jordan, 1992).

Based on a review of the research, this paper will explore the popular construction of resilience as an individual commodity and propose an alternate view: resilience as a relational activity. It will describe and examine the individual characteristics that are commonly associated with resilience and offer a relational understanding of these characteristics. Furthermore, it will begin to identify specific ways to strengthen resilience through relationships. Although this discussion is framed within the context of therapy, readers are encouraged to extend their thinking beyond confines of clinical practice. Because, as this paper proposes, in or out of therapy, *resilience is all about relationships*.

You are invited to begin this discussion with a brief activity to tap into your own experience of resilience. Please take a moment to respond to the following questions:

1. Reflect on a time when you felt someone contributed to your ability to be resilient after experiencing a loss, hardship, disappointment, or difficulty. What types of things did that person do that made the difference?
2. Reflect on a time when you felt like you contributed to someone else's ability to be resilient after experiencing a loss, hardship, disappointment, or difficulty. What types of things did you do that you think made the difference?

Please keep your reflection in mind as we continue our discussion by examining the research on resilience.

From Individual Strengths to Strengthening Relationships

The literature primarily defines resilience in two different ways. First, resilience is described as the

ability to achieve good outcomes in one's life after experiencing significant hardships or adversities, such as poverty, family discord, divorce, lack of access to educational opportunities, racism, etc. Within this definition, a "good outcome" for some individuals would be the absence of deviant and anti-social behavior. Another common definition suggests that resilience is the ability to recover from traumatic experiences, such as physical or sexual abuse, assault, severe neglect, and many other forms of trauma. These definitions tend to generate the notion of resilience as something located within the individual, some type of special individual competence or strength. From this perspective, the interest in individual characteristics and strengths move to the foreground.

The tendency to focus on individual strengths in the study of resilience is reinforced by traditional Western-European theories of psychological development that have historically emphasized individual development and experience. Most of these theories hold the underlying assumption that the goal of healthy development is to separate from relationships in order to become an independent, self-sufficient, i.e., strong adult (Jordan, 1992; Cushman, 1995). Consequently, these theories of development tend to lead researchers and clinicians to spotlight the experience of the *self*, the individual, while relational experience is relegated to the background and is all too often ignored. Within a scientific tradition that places relational experience on the periphery, researchers become absorbed in efforts to identify and describe characteristics located within the individual. With regard to resilience, much research focuses on identifying "special strengths," such as intelligence, good-natured temperament, higher self-esteem, internal locus of control, mastery, etc. This approach to the study of resilience promotes the belief that the lucky few, *those endowed with these special strengths*, will succeed, will be resilient, and will become independent and self-sufficient despite encounters with significant obstacles. The rest of us may be out of luck. But something is missing from this picture. How do people develop the strengths associated with resilience? Certainly, these strengths are not entirely inherent. Certainly, these strengths are not developed in isolation.

The Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) of psychological development offers a new foundation for understanding the research on resilience. RCT proposes that healthy development involves the formation and elaboration of growth-fostering relationships throughout one's life. RCT moves us

beyond a myopic emphasis on individual development and individual strengths and encourages the study of *relational development* and *relational strengths*. RCT would propose that relationships are a primary source of one's ability to be resilient in the face of personal and social hardships or trauma. Furthermore, relationships are a primary source of experiences that strengthen the individual characteristics commonly associated with resilience. In many ways, process of effective psychotherapy is an example of how resilience is strengthened through relationship.

An RCT approach to understanding resilience includes understanding the complexities of how people establish, engage in, and sustain growth-fostering (or resilience-strengthening) relationships throughout their lives. In particular, RCT suggests that all relationships are constructed within, and are highly defined by, the social and cultural contexts in which they exist. A cultural context can facilitate or obstruct one's opportunities to participate in relationships necessary for strengthening one's ability to be resilient. For example, as Maureen Walker (2000) explains, cultural contexts in which stratification of difference is enforced by dominant-subordinate systems of power undermine opportunities to engage in growth-fostering relationships. Being a member of a subordinate or marginalized group increases the risk that one's relationships will be chronically or acutely disrupted by adversities, such as poverty, lack of educational opportunities, institutionalized discrimination, insufficient health care, etc. Furthermore, (so-called) objective observers, such as researchers, are not immune to the influences of dominant-subordinate power arrangements in a society. Jean Baker Miller (1976) observed that, "...the close study of an oppressed group reveals that a dominant group inevitably describes the subordinate group falsely in terms derived from its own systems of thought" (p. xix). Thus, researchers may conduct studies that implicitly privilege the individual characteristics of dominant group as the norm or ideal, while missing other important factors. For instance, in a cultural context in which the dominant group values individual achievement and independence, relational factors may be disregarded or dismissed (Fletcher, 1999). The following example illustrates this point.

In the 1970s, Kobasa (1979; Kobasa & Puccetti, 1983) identified an individual, internal characteristic associated with resilience to stress called "hardiness." A "hardy" individual, according to Kobasa (1979), exhibits three characteristics:

- 1) Commitment: being able to easily commit to what one is doing;
- 2) Control: a general belief that events are within one's control; and
- 3) Challenge: perceiving change as a challenge rather than a threat.

The concept of hardiness was well received in academic and clinical communities, and over the years hardiness has been used as a standard of stress resilience applied across diverse populations of men, women, and children. Yet, today we are aware of the limitations of this initial research. Kobasa's work was based on the study of a narrowly defined group, specifically white male middle- to upper-level business executives. While the individual characteristics of commitment, control, and challenge (i.e., hardiness) appeared to be useful for describing stress resilience of the subjects in the initial research, unfortunately the conclusions derived from this research triggered "faulty generalizations" imposed on other populations (Minnich, 1990). The individual characteristic of hardiness may not be an accurate measure of the experience of women and others not represented in the study. Furthermore, today we are conscious of the social/cultural context in which this research was conducted. In the 1970s business executives were the beneficiaries of invisible systems of relational support comprised of secretaries, wives, mothers, and undervalued service providers (experts in providing relational support) who likely made it possible for these privileged professionals to be "hardy."

If the hardiness researchers had investigated a diverse population, they might have identified many other characteristics associated with stress resilience. For example, Elizabeth Sparks (1999) explored the resilience of African American mothers on welfare and described the relational practices these women used to survive tremendous hardships. These mothers engaged in connection, collaboration, and community action to overcome the destructive impact of poverty, racism, and social stigmatization. While traditional theories of development have led many researchers – although not all researchers – to emphasize the study of individual traits associated with resilience, RCT suggests that researchers can enlarge, deepen, and enrich their understanding of resilience by examining the relational-cultural factors that contribute to one's ability to be resilient. Taking an RCT perspective might ultimately lead to defining resilience as *the ability to connect, reconnect, and resist disconnection in*

response to hardships, adversities, trauma, and alienating social/cultural practices. This definition opens the way to new possibilities for strengthening resilience in the lives of individuals, families, and communities. It moves us beyond hoping that people will have the “right stuff,” that is, the individual strengths to be resilient in a risky world – to identifying practices that strengthen the relationships that foster resilience in our risky world.

Relationally Rethinking Individual Resilience

Taking a relational-cultural view of resilience offers us the opportunity to reexamine and rethink the meaning of the existing research on resilience. In the following section, we will briefly review a sample of the research describing individual characteristics commonly associated with resilience, including temperament, intellectual development, self-esteem, internal locus of control, mastery, and social support, and explore the relational aspects of these characteristics. Our discussion will conclude with a case example and recommendations for strengthening resilience.

A Relationally Tempered Temperament

For many years researchers have explored the internal, relatively stable, individual trait of temperament and its association with a child’s ability to be resilient (Rutter, 1978; Werner & Smith, 1982). In their groundbreaking, 40-year study of 698 multi- and mixed-racial children living in adverse conditions on the Hawaiian Island of Kauai, Emma Werner and her colleagues (1982) found that boys described as “good-natured” and girls described as “cuddly” were more resilient than other children. While some researchers might focus their investigations on describing the temperament of resilient children, an RCT perspective would suggest that researchers should examine the relational implications of temperament. Michael Rutter (1989) did just that. He found that children with difficult temperaments were twice as likely to be the targets of parental criticism. His research suggests that a child’s temperament either protects or puts a child at risk because of its positive or negative impact on the *parent-child relationship*. In other words, a child’s temperament affects the child’s and the parent’s ability to engage in relationships, i.e., temperament tempers relationships.

Based on Rutter and Werner’s observations, one might conclude that good-natured boys and perhaps cuddly girls would be the most resilient children and

children with difficult temperaments would be the least resilient. However, RCT encourages us to take a broader view and examine how the social/cultural context interacts with a child’s temperament and his or her relational opportunities. One study of East African Masai children living in severe drought conditions found that the children with more difficult temperaments were more likely to survive (de Vries, 1984). Noting that Masai culture values assertiveness, the researchers theorized that the difficult (assertive) children were more able to access the relational resources they needed to survive severe hardships. This one example illustrates how differences in temperament influence one’s relational opportunities within a specific social/cultural context. Moving beyond efforts to precisely describe the temperaments of resilient and nonresilient children, an RCT perspective would suggest that researchers could do more to describe *in depth and in detail* the optimal relational practices and cultural conditions that promote resilience in children with disparate temperaments. This would help clinicians identify the most helpful relational skills needed in the parent-child relationship to strengthen the resilience of the child *and the parent*.

Connecting Intellectual and Relational Development

The literature and research on resilience clearly indicate that individuals with greater intelligence are more resilient, yet the reason for this advantage is not clear. Ann Masten and her colleagues (Masten, 1994, 2001; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990) propose a number of explanations. It could be that individuals with greater intelligence are more able to discern danger and find escape routes, may have educational advantages when compared to others, or may have more capable parents. Exploring a relational view of intellectual development, Daniel Siegle (1999) emphasizes that interpersonal relationships are the central source of experience that influence the brain’s development. Neural pathways in the brain are activated by experiential opportunities provided to children through relational engagement, which results in “strengthening existing connections or creating new connections” (Ibid., p. 13). Siegle observes that “Interpersonal experience thus plays a special organizing role in determining the development of brain structure early in life and the ongoing emergence of brain function throughout the life-span” (Ibid., p. 24). Hence, “human connections create neuronal connections” (Ibid., p. 85).

Siegle emphasizes that relationships play a key

role in optimizing an individual's intelligence and consequently their ability to be resilient. For therapists, efforts to strengthen a client's resilience could involve proactively encouraging the client's participation in relationships that provide experiences that increase intellectual opportunities and stimulation. While this may be an obvious endeavor for therapists working with children or adolescents, therapists working with adults and seniors may find this way of strengthening resilience highly beneficial for reducing the diminished cognitive functions often associated with aging (Croze, 1997).

From Self-Esteem to Sense of Worth

Self-esteem is probably the most commonly known and widely accepted internal personality trait associated with resilience (Dumont & Provost, 1999). Nevertheless, scholars of RCT draw into question the conceptualization of this characteristic. Judith Jordan (1994) observed that Western-European society has tended to describe self-esteem based on the cultural values of individual achievement and self-sufficiency, as opposed to collaboration and connection. Consequently, a person's self-esteem may depend upon hierarchical comparisons in which one perpetually strives to feel superior to others in one way or another. Developing "healthy" self-esteem within this context becomes a competitive exercise to demonstrate that one's achievements are better than someone else's. Furthermore, those who do not participate in this method of building self-esteem, or those who do not subscribe to the dominant cultural values of self-sufficiency, may be perceived as having lower self-esteem.

Bernadette Gray-Little's (2000) research illustrates this point. For many years black children were thought to have lower self-esteem than white children do. This presumption followed a 1947 study in which black children were asked to choose between two dolls that were identical except one was black and the other white. When the black children chose the white doll, the researchers interpreted this result as a sign of black children's low self-esteem. Gray-Little refuted this conclusion generalized from this study and from similar research by examining over 261 studies of over half-a-million children. Her careful review of the research indicated that black children had at least as high levels of self-esteem as white children, and in some cases their self-esteem was even higher. According to Gray-Little, research like the 1947 study may be indicative of how a racial group is valued in society, but it is not indicative of the level of black children's self-esteem. Additionally, Gray-Little

challenges the view that self-esteem is built on a ladder of individual achievement, noting that, "Self-esteem is determined by our interactions with people significant to us personally" (Fletcher, 2000). Her relational view is supported by other research showing that self-esteem correlates with a child's closeness to his or her mother, and increased closeness is associated with higher self-esteem (Burnett & Demnar, 1996). Others have shown that adolescent self-esteem is positively correlated with involvement with family, community, and one's neighborhood (Dumont & Provost, 1999).

Taking a broader cultural perspective, Yvonne Jenkins (1993) proposes that individualistic conceptualizations of self-esteem may have limited relevance to people of color. Jenkins suggests that a group-centered, relational understanding of esteem is more useful for understanding the esteem of some people of color. She calls this *social esteem*. A person's social esteem is formed through association with a group-related identity that values "interdependence, affiliation, and collaterality" (p. 55). Jenkins observes that, "for collective societies, group esteem is practically synonymous with the Anglo-centric conceptualizations of self-esteem" (p. 55). For populations in which the unit of operation is the family, the group, or the collective society, social esteem may be an essential part of healthy psychosocial development and part of one's ability to cope with adversity.

Jean Baker Miller (1986) offers another alternative to what is known as self-esteem. She suggests that it may be more useful to think of this concept in terms of "sense of worth." Sense of worth grows through engagement in relationships in which people feel known and valued – relationships in which the other person "conveys attention to, and recognition of, our experience" (p. 6). Miller (1991) believes that the concept of a "self" as it has been formulated in Western culture reinforces a sense of psychological separation from others (p. 25). Perhaps the separate-self connotation embedded in the popular notion of self-esteem inspires efforts to build esteem by elevating oneself over or by diminishing others, which can become an insatiable pursuit. Rather than something one earns at the expense of others, Jean Baker Miller's notion of sense of worth is an outcome of participating in growth-fostering relationships, which benefits all who participate in the relationship. Furthermore, a relationally-based sense of worth, knowing that one matters to someone else, as opposed to an achievement-based sense of self-esteem, may be another essential reservoir of energy strengthening one's ability to be resilient. Clearly this is

demonstrated in effective and healing therapy relationships.

From Internal Control to Mutual Empowerment

A number of researchers have identified internal locus of control (ILOC) as another individual characteristic associated with resilience (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Werner & Smith, 1982). According to a textbook definition by Roediger and his colleagues (1991).

Children who take responsibility for their own successes and failures are said to have an internal locus of control. (p. 352)

This definition focuses on one's individual responsibility in response to individual experience, but it does not account for the impact of racism, sexism, heterosexism, or other forms of discrimination that can influence one's ability to take responsibility for successes or failures. For instance, it may be easier to establish an internal sense of control when one is a member of a social group in society that is viewed as the norm or ideal, i.e., the dominant group (Miller, 1976). Members of dominant groups are recipients of unearned advantages that facilitate their successes and mitigate their failures (McIntosh, 1989). As a result, it may be easier for these individuals to develop an internal sense of control, easier for them to take responsibility, because they are living in a society that encourages their success and cushions their failures. Furthermore, persuading subordinate groups that they should have a greater internal locus of control—i.e., they *should* feel responsible for their lack of success as well as their failures—may work to the advantage of the dominant group. Encouraging subordinates to attribute their lack of success and failures to some form of internal deficiency, e.g., lack of ILOC, distracts them from questioning external practices that impede their success and encourage their failure.

A recent study exploring the stress resilience of white and black children helps us rethink our understanding of ILOC (Magnus, Cowen, Wyman, Fagen, & Work, 1999). This study compared stress resilient (SR) white and black children with stress affected (SA) white and black children. As expected, the study showed that SR white children had a greater sense of internal locus of control than the SA white children, however, no significant difference in ILOC was found between the SR and the SA black children. These results led the researchers to theorize that black families may de-emphasize ILOC because it encourages a false belief that one can or should be able to control pervasive, socially constructed adversities

such as racism and other forms of discrimination.

Rather than using the language of internal or external control, RCT describes the relational phenomenon of mutual empowerment, which is a two-way dynamic process that grows out of participation in responsive, mutually empathic relationships (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Mutual empowerment is a sense that both (or all) people in the relationship have the ability to influence their experience and the relationship, and are able to take action on behalf of themselves and others. Using the construct of mutual empowerment rather than internal, individual control, researchers could explore whether or not people are more resilient when they are engaged in responsive relationships where they feel they have the capacity to influence their experience. RCT would suggest, and clinical practice supports, that mutual empowerment is an essential healing ingredient in the therapy relationship, which makes it possible for clients to overcome hardships, turmoil, and adversities (Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Miller, 1988; Miller 2002).

From Mastery to Competence Through Connection

The literature on resilience often uses the term "mastery" to refer to the instrumental behavior one develops to conquer a challenging situation or task (Masten, Best, Garmezy, 1991). RCT scholar Judith Jordan (1999) questions the use of this term because of the tacit connotation associated with the word "master." Jordan explains that "'to master' is to reduce to subjection, to get the better of, to break, to tame" (p. 1-2). Consequently:

...mastery implicit in most models of competence creates enormous conflict for many people, especially women and other marginalized groups, people who have not traditionally been "the masters." (Ibid., p. 2)

Jordan goes on to propose that "competence" may be a more useful, less contaminated term for describing the development of skills that contribute to one's ability to be resilient. Moreover, Jordan notes that competence is not developed in isolation; competence grows through connection. It evolves through engagement in relationships that support, encourage, and inspire our efforts to overcome challenges and hardships.

Many relationships can contribute to the development of competence, e.g., relationships with parents, family members, teachers, mentors, peers, supervisors, employers, etc. For example, according to

Ann Masten and her colleagues (1990), parents can strengthen their children's sense of competence by:

1. Being a model of effective action for their children.
2. Providing their children with opportunities to experience competence, and
3. Verbally affirming the competence of their children, by affirming their children's ability to develop new skills and utilize these skills effectively.

Therapists play a key role in encouraging and affirming the competence of their clients. Often those who enter therapy have lost their sense of efficacy as well as their confidence in themselves and their relationships. Within a mutually empathic, growth-fostering relational environment, clients can rebuild and reclaim their sense of competence to address the challenges they must face in their lives.

From Social Support to Authentic Connection

Social support has been well documented as a factor that contributes to one's ability to be resilient (Atkins, Kaplan, & Toshima, 1991; Belle, 1987; Ganellen & Blaney, 1984; Ornish, 1997). Of all the constructs discussed thus far, social support is obviously the most relational. However, from the perspective of RCT, social support has significant limitations. Social support is most often described in the research as a *one-way, unidirectional* form of relating, or something that one gets from others (Fiore, Becker, & Coppel, 1983). In addition, researchers know that some experiences of social support can have negative consequences (Belle, 1982).

In contrast to the one-way notion of social support, RCT emphasizes the *two-way, bi-directional* nature of relationships, that is, the two-way, growth-promoting quality of relating known as *connection* (Jordan, 1992). Connection is cultivated in relationships through the practice of mutual empathy, relational responsiveness, mutual empowerment, authenticity, and movement toward mutuality. (Jordan, 1986). The two-way nature of growth-promoting connection has been a central premise of RCT throughout its 25-year development, and recently more researchers have begun to note the importance of understanding connection and the bi-directional nature of relationships that foster resilience (Blum, McNeely, & Rinehart 2002; Masten, 2001; Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garnezy, & Ramirez, 1999; Resnick et al., 1997).

Renée Spencer's review of the research describes the evidence indicating that children who have at least

one supportive relationship (connection) with an adult can achieve good outcomes despite severe hardships. These hardships include parental mental illness (Rutter, 1979), separation from a parent (Rutter, 1971), marital discord (Rutter, 1971), divorcing parents (Wallerstein & Kelly, 1980), poverty (Garnezy, 1991), maltreatment (Cicchetti, 1989), and multifaceted or a combination of risk factors (Seifer et al., 1996). Michael Resnick's (1997) large-scale study of 12,000 adolescents found that *a sense of connection* (e.g., to parents, family members, or other adults) reduces the risk that a child will experience substance abuse, violence, depression, suicidal behavior, and early sexual activity regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or family structure. This challenges the traditional view that healthy adolescents need to separate from the important relationships in their lives. In fact, severing "apron strings" may be putting children at greater risk for developing psychological or behavioral problems. The turmoil often associated with adolescence may not be a signal for separation, (a.k.a. independence), but a signal to parents and adults to find better ways to stay connected to their children as they grow and change.

Connection appears to be particularly important for children in school. Robert Blum and his colleagues (2002) surveyed over 90,000 adolescents from 80 different communities during one academic year and found that students who felt connected in school were less likely to use cigarettes, alcohol, or drugs; less likely to engage in early sexual activity, violence, or become pregnant; and less likely to experience emotional distress. The researchers observed that, "when students feel they are a part of school, say they are treated fairly by teachers, and feel close to people at school, they are healthier and are more likely to succeed" (p. 2). Sadly, the data also showed that 31 percent of students do not feel connected at school.

A sense of connection is also essential for adults. In his national analysis of social connectedness, Harvard Professor Robert Putnam (2000) concluded that studies "...have established beyond reasonable doubt that social connectedness is one of the most powerful determinants of our well being" (p. 326). In fact, according to Putnam, "...happiness is best predicted by the breadth and depth of one's social connections" (p. 332). In another example of research, Berkman and Syme (1979) found that men and women who were married, who had contact with close friends and relatives, or who had informal or formal group associations had "lower mortality rates than respondents lacking such connections" (p. 188).

Connection may be especially important for

promoting women's resilience. Research by Taylor and her colleagues (2000) proposes that women utilize a *tend-and-befriend* response to stress rather than a flight-or-fight response. These researchers believe the fight/flight response is inhibited in women by neurobiological processes that mitigate their feelings of fear, diminish their sympathetic nervous system activity, and stimulate their care-taking and affiliative behavior. In response to threat, women may engage in care-giving activities or affiliative activities to protect themselves and the important people in their lives (e.g., children). This analysis is supported by other research showing that women are more likely to draw upon social support in times of stress, maintain close relationships with female friends, and engage in social groups more often than men (Belle, 1987). The *tend-and-befriend* theory is an interesting reformulation of responses to threat. However, on a note of caution, more research needs to be completed to explore larger applications of this model. For instance, Taylor and her colleagues (2000) state that the model may also apply to some aspects of men's behavior, but this research has yet to be conducted.

Therapists have known for a long time that social support can be helpful, but RCT helps us understand that it is the *quality* of the connection that makes social support beneficial. Social support that fosters mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and authentic connection can strengthen a client's ability to respond effectively to difficult and devastating situations.

The Case of Jennifer and Julie: Strengthening Resilience Through Relationships

Sisters Jennifer and Julie were recently placed in a pre-adoptive home after many months in foster care. Two years before, they were removed from their birth home because of the abuse and neglect they experienced at the hands of drug-addicted parents whose parental rights were eventually terminated. With the help of therapy, Jennifer and Julie had made great strides to deal with the trauma they had experienced in their biological home and they were looking forward to being adopted into a permanent home that was recently identified for them. To facilitate this process, Jennifer, Julie, and their pre-adoptive parents were referred to an adoption support program offered at a community mental health agency where I became their therapist.

From the start, I noted that Julie and Jennifer were very different from each other. Eight-year-old Jennifer was described by previous social workers as a bright,

attractive, affable, attentive child with a pleasant temperament, a positive self-esteem, and few obvious signs of her history of trauma and neglect. She excelled at school and had many friends. On the other hand, 11-year-old Julie was considered the "troubled child" with a difficult, emotionally liable temperament and borderline intellectual abilities. She was highly distractible, impulsive, and hyperactive with a chronically disheveled appearance (e.g., torn or dirty clothes, uncombed, unkempt hair, and poor personal hygiene.) She had few friends and did poorly in school. Using an individual strength perspective, one would say that Jennifer had the most resilience for adapting to an adoptive home while Julie faced daunting obstacles. These disparate sisters were placed in the home of "Janice" and "Jim," two mature, first-time parents who hoped to offer the girls a permanent home.

Clinicians who work in field know that the majority of adoptions of older children fail, so I felt I had realistic concerns about the success of this adoption. In the week before the family came to see me, the parents had become highly exasperated by Julie's behavior. They were concerned that they would "never be able to manage all of her problems and antics." They confessed that they would be tempted to adopt Jennifer without Julie, but recognized that this would be a crushing blow to the girls. Fortunately, these parents were very eager and open to working with me and continued to hope that they could find a way to provide these girls with a loving home.

My goal working with these parents was to help them foster the relational development of their new family, utilizing the principles and practices of RCT. This meant working with the family to build their relational strengths and skills to be resilient throughout the process of forming a new family unit. This process began with encouraging the parents to take a relational-contextual view of Jennifer and Julie's behavior rather than an individualistic view. In other words, encouraging the parents to examine Jennifer and Julie's behavior in the context of their relational history and experience.

For example, a relational perspective eventually allowed the parents to consider the possibility that Julie may have developed her difficult behaviors to ensure her survival in response to living in a severely abusive and neglectful birth home. This relational analysis and awareness of Julie's experience and difficult behaviors permitted the parents to overcome their temptation to target Julie for excessive criticism for being internally deficient or damaged, and

inspired the parents to find loving, creative, and effective ways to help Julie manage her behavior. Greater relational awareness also helped the parents notice and avoid negatively comparing Julie's intellectual abilities with her younger sister's. Instead, they became proactive in their efforts to get Julie the special resources and support to be more successful in school. The parents also found ways to help Julie develop a circle of friends beyond her relationship with her sister.

Interestingly, as the parents gained greater confidence in their ability to be responsive to Julie's challenging behavior, Julie gained greater confidence in herself and in her new family. These are symptoms of the relational resilience growing among the family members. In particular, there were many changes in Julie's behavior. Most notably Julie's hyperactive, distractible, impulsive behavior began to recede significantly at home and at school. In addition, Julie's increased sense of worth, derived from the love of her new parents went hand-in-hand with her attentiveness to maintaining her personal appearance and hygiene. Julie's transformation was so pronounced that her former therapist did not recognize Julie as the same client she worked with two years earlier.

As Julie's behaviors began to change, it became clear to me and the parents that Jennifer's "ideal" behavior was largely part of her special strategy of survival (Stiver, 1992), adopted in response to her history of living in an abusive environment. Once again, a relational analysis helped us see that Jennifer took on the role of the "responsible child" in order to take care of her difficult sister. She was a parentified child, a role that came at the price of being authentic, carefree, spontaneous, and playful. Eventually, Jennifer began to see that her adoptive parents were able to take care of Julie and constructively respond to her behavior. Based on this, Jennifer gained confidence in her relationship with her adoptive parents, trusting that they could be responsible and loving parents. This allowed Jennifer to relinquish much of her adult-like behavior and become the lively, spontaneous, sometimes mischievous child you would expect.

In this situation, all members of this family developed greater resilience through relationships. The sisters became more resilient through their relationships with the parents, which allowed both Julie and Jennifer to relinquish old strategies of survival. The parents become more resilient through their relationship with the therapist and others who supported their efforts to create a loving family. The parents' successful efforts to strengthen their new

family's development and resilience were obvious to all who knew this family. Eventually, Janice and Jim were honored with a special award from a statewide organization for being models of outstanding parenting.

Relational Ways to Strengthen Resilience

This paper proposes that resilience is strengthened through relationships, specifically, mutually empathic, mutually empowering, growth-fostering relationships. This view is supported by a review of the research examining individual characteristics commonly associated with resilience and describing the relational aspects of these characteristics. Taking a relational view moves the concept of resilience beyond the intrinsic toughness model, in which resilience is available to a few inherently lucky individuals, to understanding that greater resilience is available to us all through relationships. This opens the way to new sources of hope and courage as we individually and collectively face unpredictable threats while living in a risky world.

The practice of effective therapy is often about strengthening a client's ability to be resilient through relationship. In particular, a relational therapist is attuned to the connections and disconnections within the therapeutic process and in the client's life that promote or impede the client's ability to overcome adversities. Working together, the client and therapist can develop a "tool kit" of relational ways to enhance and strengthen the resilience of the client as well as the resilience of the therapeutic relationship. The following is a beginning list of relational ways a therapist may to enhance the resilience of her or his clients:

1. Explore the client's access to relationships that support his/her ability to be resilient, particularly relationships that are responsive to his/her unique individual characteristics (e.g., temperament, intelligence, etc.).
2. Help clients identify, establish, and expand relationships that contribute to their ability to be resilient, relationships characterized by mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, and responsiveness (i.e., growth-fostering relationships).
3. Encourage clients to identify and seek relationships that stimulate and support their intellectual development as well as contribute to their learning opportunities (e.g., mentors,

teachers, supervisors, etc.).

4. Help clients to enhance their sense of worth through engagement in meaningful relationships (e.g., with family, friends, community groups, etc.) rather than through competitive achievements or personal comparisons.
5. Show clients that they have an impact on the therapy relationship as well as on other relationships, which will strengthen their ability to take positive action on behalf of themselves, others, and their relationships. (Miller, 2002). Encourage clients to find opportunities to enhance their sense of competence and verbally convince them of their competence by providing praise, guidance, and/or constructive feedback (Masten, 1999).
6. Use moments of conflict in therapy to show the client that disagreements can be opportunities to enhance relational authenticity and strengthen confidence in connection, thus increasing the client's relational resilience in therapy and in other relationships.
7. Explore the client's opportunities to create more connections through peer groups, community groups, *mutual-help* groups, or formal or informal mutual support groups.
8. Examine ways the client can make meaningful contributions to others through community action, community service, social action, mentoring, teaching, etc.

These suggestions can be summarized as finding more and more ways to expand our clients' experiences of growth-fostering relationships, relationships characterized by mutual empathy, mutual empowerment, mutuality, zest, clarity, increasing sense of worth, and a desire for more connection (Miller & Stiver, 1997). But, these are not only good recommendations for clients in therapy, these are good recommendations for *all* of us. In this risky world, all of us can benefit from proactively identifying relationships that promote our resilience, our intellectual development, our sense of worth, our sense of competence, our sense of empowerment, and, most importantly, our sense of connection. Because *strengthening resilience is all about relationships*.

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