

# LEARNING TO **LOVE**

**YOUR GUIDE TO PERSONAL  
EMPOWERMENT!**

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## 23. CONTROL, CONTROL, CONTROL

Children apply every adaptive strategy conceivable to thwart disconnection and to secure connection.

They need to **control to survive**.

From a very young age, children attempt to repress behaviours and personality traits that:

- *appear to antagonise their caregivers,*
- *appear to frighten their caregivers.*

Children register a parent's involuntarily withdrawal in response to personality traits that either they or a sibling is expressing (these traits represent a 'toxic' or a 'radioactive' threat to the parent's psyche – we discuss this later in the book). This means that children often need to **suppress** their tears and to **ignore** 'inconvenient' feelings. If, for example, neediness, clumsiness, irritability, or indepen-

dence, triggers a parent, then **that personality traits need to be submerged**, or the parent will involuntarily withdraw from the child, emotionally.

On the other hand, children **repeat and exaggerate attitudes and behaviours that appear to captivate and to impress their caregivers**. These are generally attitudes and behaviours that make the adults feel good (and look good in the eyes of other people). Babies, for example, are able to smile and to coo from birth. Many children reinforce their connection with parents by walking or talking impressively early, by achieving high grades at school, excelling at sport, selecting a 'desirable' partner, working in a 'respectable' profession and 'succeeding' at things that cause their parents and their community to express pride in them, and in their achievements. Every

child has attributes that they emphasise and things that they think, do, and believe because these contribute to a more secure connection.

The child's distinct **personality** (who they become) develops in direct **response to the specific strategies that the child is able to use to secure connection**. (If, for example, a sibling employs melodramatic behaviour to secure their parents attention, then the child will usually opt for a **different strategy** – one that has not yet been adopted by a competing child.)

## EXERCISE

1. If a friend or close relative were to describe you as 'controlling', how would you respond and how do you imagine feeling?
2. Describe the six events that caused you the most pain because you weren't able to control what was happening to you, or around you.
3. Describe in detail what happened on four or more memorable occasions when you were unable to control yourself.
4. What strategies did your parents and your siblings employ to feel connected?
5. How successful were these strategies?
6. Did their use of these strategies cause you to feel any resentment toward them? Please elaborate.