

What kind of “inner environment” do you wish to experience?

It is common for children to disconnect from feelings and needs when their parents aren't positioned to help them with the monumental developmental task of learning to understand and regulate their emotions. In many homes, children are strongly discouraged from expressing or even having emotions. In such cases, children learn by example that suppressing or punishing are the appropriate responses to emotions. If you notice that you are punishing yourself as a way to make yourself “behave,” it is a good time to notice that, and re-think your strategy. You do not deserve to be punished. Developing self-punishing behaviors in childhood is a normal and adaptive thing to do when one's parents are not able to help them deal with their emotions in healthier ways. Another way to look at this is that a child learns to do – in an environment in which emotions are wrong – whatever it takes to disconnect from their feelings.

So as you gradually learn that feelings are actually very important and functional AND that you can use them, express them and regulate them without hurting people, your need to disconnect will feel less and less urgent.

Over the course of the next week, pay special attention to what you think and say to yourself. If possible, jot down the actual words that come up in your head during the situation.

Later in the day or week, review what you observed of your thoughts and inner dialogues. Were there judgments of yourself, the situation, or other people? Did your thoughts embody other forms of life-alienating communication (complaining, comparing, criticizing, looping thoughts of any kind)? Was there revulsion or general dislike of something you were doing or someone you came into contact with? If so, these might be early signs of “anger,” signaling that you need to attend to boundary issues (which requires checking in to see what unmet needs you have at the moment, and then attending to them ASAP).

Remind yourself each day to be alert for external and internal messages that contribute to disconnection from feelings and needs. Notice the times you hear or say (to yourself) any of the following words: *should, must, can't, have to, supposed to, ought to*. Be aware of moments when you use shaming, contempt or punishment as a strategy for staying disconnected from your more vulnerable emotions. For many of us, these things were so commonplace in our homes growing up, that they now seem normal to us. They are actually warning signs:

- *Should*
- *Must*
- *Can't*
- *Have to*
- *Supposed to*
- *Ought to*
- *Shaming (the self)*
- *Contempt (toward yourself)*
- *Punishment (of the self)*
- *Judgments (of anyone, including the self)*
- *Comparing (self to others)*

Re-visit what you have written later on, when you have some time. See if you can begin to translate these expressions into feelings and needs.