

Emotional Neighborhood

An introduction to navigating the emotions that live inside us. *by Ronit Herzfeld*

We all have **hundreds of emotions** locked in our bodies' memories from childhood. They are generally rather painful and extremely uncomfortable. The reason they are there is because when we felt hurt, fearful or misunderstood in some way, we usually didn't have a constructive way to express or release them. Our parents were either unaware that we had those feelings or didn't have the tools with which to soothe us. Having no place to go, the emotions got stored in different parts of our minds and bodies.

From a *psychological perspective*, it left us basically walking about with thousands of suppressed emotions from childhood screaming to come out at any opportunity; hence the triggers. Because they feel so uncomfortable to us, we avoid dealing with them. If we want to free ourselves from their hold we need to get in touch with them and give them an opportunity to release. As long as we continue to avoid them, they will continue to trigger us in various ways and render us reactive and ineffectual.

From a *brain science perspective*, these painful and uncomfortable emotions are encoded in neural pathway systems that will continue to fire together until something intercepts them and replaces the system with new neural pathways that encode feelings of acceptance and peace.

What can you do to free yourself from these triggers?

It begins by embracing them. This requires a willingness to get to know what lives inside of you. I know that is the last place you want to go, but think about it: if you don't, these stored emotions will continue to haunt you.

Think of your emotional world as a new neighborhood that you want to get to know.

When you first enter a new neighborhood, you feel out of sorts; a little guarded and maybe even fearful if it is late at night. However, if you continue to visit this neighborhood, over time, it becomes more familiar and less daunting, until you learn to feel very comfortable and secure in the area. The same thing happens with your emotional neighborhood; at first it is uncomfortable and downright scary. If you continue to visit with your feelings and hang out with them, they become more familiar and less daunting, until you become very comfortable with them.

You can begin by taking 5 minutes every morning and night to quietly sit with your feelings.

See if you can stay put without getting distracted. With practice you will be able to increase the amount of time you can spend in your emotional neighborhood and feel more comfortable and free in your own skin.

Parents: you can start with your children early by helping them identify their feelings and teaching them how to release them constructively. Children need to be heard.