

## FROM ATTACHMENT TO AUTONOMY

The journey of being human is one that starts from a place of dependency and with appropriate support, supervision and love moves to interdependency and on to independence. Dependency is the starting point for us all and at any point in our lives when we begin something new or venture into the unknown, we are almost certainly going to begin from a place of dependency. Dependency isn't to be feared. It needs to be understood. It is only when dependency takes on an unhealthy form that it becomes a destructive force that needs to be avoided at all costs. We all start from a place of needing love, nurture, care, understanding and empathy. If these core needs are adequately met, we move from dependency to interdependency, a place where one still needs to be anchored to something other than oneself in order to complete the journey, yet there is in equal measure a growing self-reliance. If we are appropriately supported through interdependence, in time, independence becomes the foundation on which we can build the rest of our lives. This is the healthy progression we are meant to undertake in childhood and adolescence. Sadly, this journey is rarely completed without difficulty, which is why so many of us carry negative inheritances we would rather not own.

Moving from attachment to autonomy is the story for us all. Dependency is the point of attachment. It's where we need to feel connected to something bigger, greater, stronger than ourselves. When we apply this understanding to childhood the attachments we had to those people in our environment and the messages that came through were, in fact, the single most influential force in our lives. Our journey towards autonomy and independence is influenced more by the nature of our attachment at the start of our lives than any other factor. The whole point of counselling and psychotherapy, or indeed any other form of self-help, is to repair the damage incurred en route from attachment to autonomy. Because so few of us understand this journey we contribute to our own demise and the demise of others. There's no doubt that for some there has been conscious damage inflicted, but most of what spoils our beauty, and our innocence is inadvertent, which is why it is pointless to play the game of blame (see handouts Blame Game and Personal Responsibility). Refusing to play the blame game actually sets you free from the habits, patterns and the dysfunctions that limit you. Once we understand that the purpose of our lives is to become truly self-reliant and to enable and empower others to do the same, then we crave those solutions which enable us to take the journey in a profitable manner, causing no harm to anyone along the way.

Why we fall short in the journey towards autonomy is quite simple. We did not become appropriately attached to the key individuals in our lives (generally our parents and guardians) in a way that was reassuring, reaffirming, made us feel safe and deeply secure which would have ensured that the feelings of belonging, being loved and wanted, would flow through every fibre of our being (see The Three 'A's). It is attention, affection and affirmation that convince us that we are approved of, valued, deeply loved and precious. When we are attached to significant others and our environment by these very powerful strings, we are then able to move from being puppets to puppet masters. Once the three 'A's are present as real forces in our lives, then we can move to a place where we are mature, insightful and wise enough to be masters of our own puppet (the self). The baton of responsibility has now been passed from those who were initially responsible for your development to you. So, it is time to take the road from unhealthy attachment to true autonomy. Personal therapy is one way of completing this most important of life's missions.