

About Inner Bonding by Emily Agnew

Inner Bonding® is a simple but powerful six-step process for healing anxiety, depression, addictions, and painful relationships by facilitating dialogue between your Loving Adult and your Inner Child. Margaret Paul, PhD, and Erika Chopich, PhD, developed the process together and published their first book about it, *Healing Your Aloneness*, in 1990.

Inner Bonding defines your Loving Adult as the “bigger you” that wants to take responsibility for being more loving towards yourself and other people. And it defines your Inner Child as your innate talents and essence qualities, as well as your wounded coping patterns that you developed in an attempt to cope with childhood challenges.

The Six Steps of Inner Bonding

- Step One:** Be willing to feel your feelings
- Step Two:** Move into the intent to learn
- Step Three:** Dialogue with your inner child and wounded selves
- Step Four:** Dialogue with your higher guidance (your spiritual intuition)
- Step Five:** Take loving action
- Step Six:** Evaluate the action

As you can see, the first three steps of Inner Bonding help you begin a conversation with your Inner Child. But that is only half of the process. Step Four, “Dialogue with your higher guidance”, sets Inner Bonding apart from other inner child practices and from most psychotherapy by recognizing that only by connecting to something higher than yourself can you heal addictive patterns.

If you are not religious, don't worry: the term “higher guidance” is openly defined and does not require you to hold any particular religious belief. Some people connect to God, Allah, Mohammed, or Buddha. Others connect to nature, or simply experience a deeper sense of knowing.

Whatever form your guidance takes, however, connecting to it is key to the other five steps. On the material level, the steps of Inner Bonding are linear and sequential. But on the spiritual level, Inner Bonding looks more like a daisy. Spiritual connection is at the center, with all the other steps radiating out from that center like petals.



Understanding the intent to control

As human beings, we go through our days trying our best to get our needs met. Why is it that this goes so well some times, and so very badly at other times? The Inner Bonding concept of *intent* gives you a powerful conceptual framework to answer these questions so you can make sense of and improve your relationships with yourself and with others.

In reality, as you go through your day, you are either in *the intent to learn* or in *the intent to control*. This is true of your relationship with yourself, and also of your interactions with other people. Seen through this lens of intent, patterns and reactions that have perplexed you suddenly make perfect sense. To put it simply, when you act from the intent to learn, you end up feeling better. When you try to control people, situations, or your own feelings, you end up feeling worse.

Why do we try to control, then, if it makes us feel worse? Because *not* to control can mean feeling something even tougher: specifically, one or all of the three core emotions that are an unavoidable part of being a human being in a body. These core emotions are—

1. **Powerlessness:** The reality that we are helpless to control other people, events, and our own emotions (we can choose not to *act* on our emotions, but we can't control them from arising in the first place)
2. **Loneliness:** The reality that there are times we can't connect to others—may not—because our heart is closed, or their heart is closed, or the person we want to connect with is busy, or away, or has died
3. **Aloneness:** The reality that when we are in the intent to control, we cut ourselves off from our spiritual guidance ...then we feel the existential fear, emptiness, and un-groundedness that accompany that disconnection

These three feelings are so hard to feel that as children we learn to protect ourselves from them in order not to be completely overwhelmed. This is how our addictive behaviors get established. Inner Bonding defines an addictive behavior as *anything* you do to try not to feel your feelings. Watching TV, for example, could be a harmless way to wind down. Or it can be an addictive response. It all depends on your intent.

Unfortunately, our addictive responses keep us locked in a circular negative pattern. When we try to control with addictive behaviors, we cut ourselves off from our feelings, our needs, and our higher guidance. This leaves us more and more tense, angry, anxious, or depressed. Then we try to numb that pain with more addictive behaviors. It's a vicious cycle.

What a difference your intent can make

Imagine it's 5 PM, and my partner has just come home from a long day of physical therapy work. He's exhausted, ready to vegetate on the couch and watch Netflix. I, on the other hand, worked at home all day. Now I'm climbing the walls, wanting to get out of the house.

How would I react if I were in the intent to control? I might—

- **Get angry** and say, "You're no fun, you never want to go out."
- **Blame him:** "It's easy for you to say you want to stay in. You've been out at work, but I've been stuck inside here all day!"
- **Try to make him feel guilty:** Just heaving a sigh can convey volumes.
- **Try to persuade and cajole him** into going out.
- **Turn on myself**, trying to control my own disappointment and helplessness: "I shouldn't go out when my partner doesn't want to. A good partner wants to be with their partner, no matter what."

You can see the problems my controlling energy could create. None of the above options will set us up to enjoy each other this evening. If this kind of interaction continues over time, it will seriously erode our relationship. Fortunately, there is a way out of this pattern. I can choose to move into the intent to learn instead of to control.

How would I react if I were in the intent to learn? I might check in with myself and—

- **Hold my disappointment and stir-craziness** with compassion and curiosity
- **Dialogue with my child and my guidance:** "Am I willing to stay home to be with him? Or will I end up feeling resentful if I stay home? Would that be the most loving choice?"
- **Acknowledge any beliefs that are coming up:** Perhaps I have a belief that it would be wrong for me to go out without him. I can ask my inner guidance for the truth of this belief, then ask what action might be loving in this situation.
- **Take responsibility to look at the bigger picture:** "Do I need to take responsibility for getting myself out of the house more often so I can take care of my need for variety but still be available to hang out with my partner? Do I need to check in with other friends who could go out with me sometimes when he is too tired?"

And I might check in with my partner and—

- **Empathize with him:** Give him a hug and acknowledge how he is feeling
- **Find out what he is and isn't willing to do**

- **Explore with him, if he's willing:** "Sweetie, can we find a time when you are not so tired to look at what is going on that work that is leaving you so exhausted? Is some kind of loving action needed there?"

Notice how differently I respond when I'm in my Loving Adult. I *honor the reality of my partner's choice* in the matter at hand. And I accept my ultimate helplessness over his choices. I can influence him, but I can't control him. Being loving to myself and to him doesn't mean I give up on getting my needs met. It means I give up trying to control *him* to meet my needs.

The center of the daisy: spiritual connection

Whatever action you choose to take in a situation like this, the first key choice is your intent. When you choose the intent to learn, you take responsibility for your feelings, needs, and choices. You connect to your higher guidance for truth and loving action. And you move from feeling powerless, lonely, and alone, to feeling empowered, joyful, energized, calm, happy, and strong.

Distilled to its essence, Inner Bonding is about leading a spirit-led life. Whenever you put your spiritual connection front and center, you re-focus on the priority of becoming more loving. This helps you move into the intent to learn. The other steps will flow from there.

While the six steps of Inner Bonding are simple, they can be challenging to practice by yourself. In fact, your most challenging issues are nearly impossible to process alone, because they are the issues around which you struggle to have any Loving Adult presence. If you need additional help, please [contact me](#) and we'll talk about how I might be able to support you.

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Emily Agnew completed her Inner Bonding certification in 2009. Her 1:1 sessions, programs, and classes use Inner Bonding and Focusing to help you build a healthy inner relationship, a sturdy, flexible personal infrastructure, and a strong connection to your spiritual intuition. To learn more, visit www.sustainablysensitive.com/services.