

Building the House Within

A Guide for Resilience in the 21st
Century



Everyone Needs a House

We all need a house – a structure to shelter us from the storm.

Extreme elements make us vulnerable, so we construct places to be safe and sound.

Every culture does this in its own way, but whether we live in condos or castles, igloos or cabins, we all recognize the many purposes they may serve:

- A place to nourish and restore
- A place to grow and evolve
- A place to gather with others
- A place to retreat for self-reflection
- A place to raise and shape our young
- A place to plan for the future

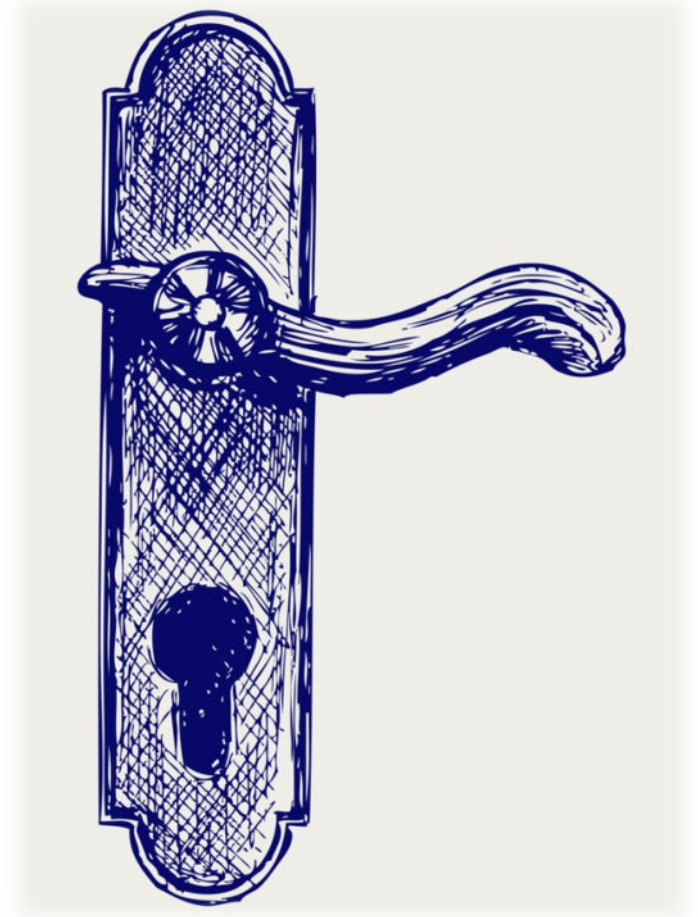


What is the House Within?

There is another house we inhabit, unseen from the street yet just as real.

It is an inner space, an internal psychological dwelling, that we begin constructing at birth and inhabit throughout our lives.

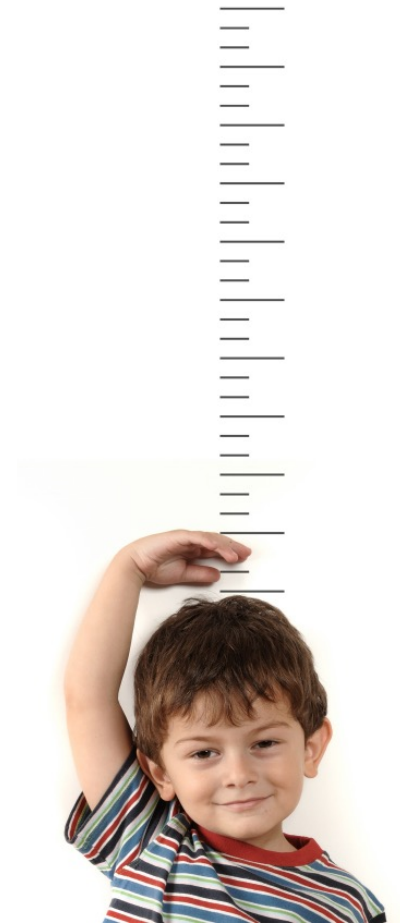
It is shaped by our interactions with our environment, and the kind of connection and emotional nurturing we receive from our parents or primary caregivers.



Everyone Has This Internal House

Whether we are conscious of it or not, this “house within” is where we...

- Integrate and make sense of our experiences
- Develop coping strategies to comfort and protect ourselves from life’s stressors
- Establish a sense of identity
- Develop self-awareness and self-control
- Establish life goals
- Develop self-worth, self-love, and empathy for others
- Develop the capacity for growth and change which inevitably shapes the blueprint for the next generation



Building Resilience in My House Within

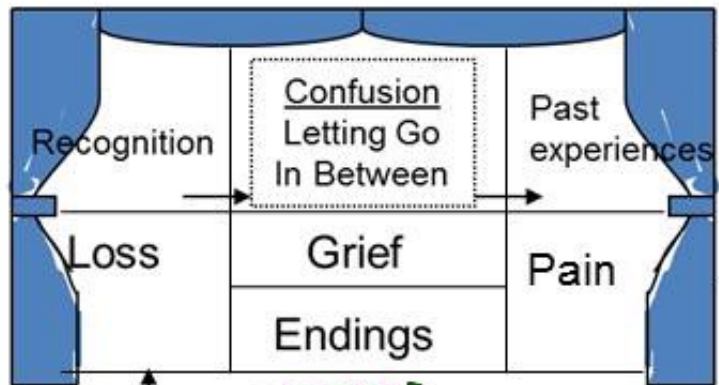
Development of values and character

Anxiety
Stress
Anger
Remorse
Excitement

A STRONG SENSE OF BELONGING TO SOMETHING OTHER THAN ONESELF



Reflect on Shadows of the Past



Risk

Integrate the past

Accept challenges of change
New Beginnings
Redefine
Reframe
Reinvent
Replace

Inability to tolerate discomfort - fear



Emerging
And Change
Capacity for
Growth



Personal Toolbox for Building Skills



Realistic Goals / Life's purpose

Passageway to one's internal life

Emotional Growth



Passage way to external world

Entrance/Exit

Joy of new adventure, discovery, and intimacy / development of empathy

A strong foundation is based on the continuity of memories and rituals that connect the present and the future to past generations' adaptive styles including courage, values, and ideals, which help to define us.

Walking Through The House

As we grow, we walk through our internal space, over and over again. It is where we go to...

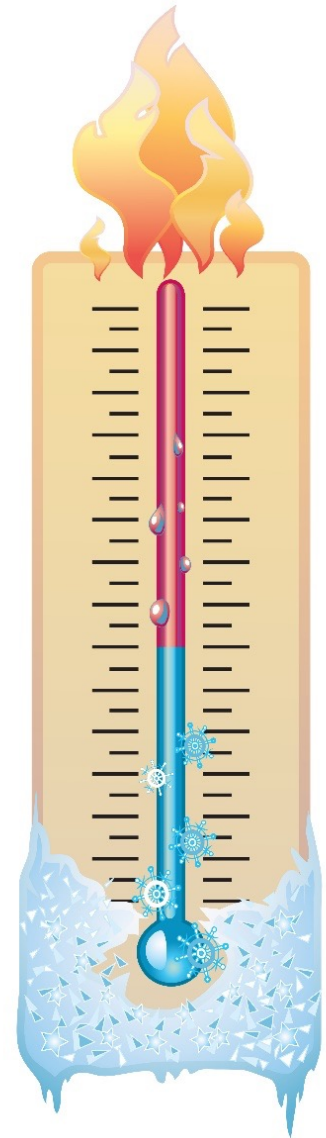
- fall apart and pull ourselves back together
 - think things over
 - solve problems
 - quiet our brains
 - take time out to reflect
 - to grow emotionally - redefine, reframe, and reinvent ourselves.
- The Inner House is the place from which we see and meet the world.
 - **In the tumultuous climate of the 21st century, this shelter is more important than ever.**



Climate Change on the Inner Landscape

Let's face it: these are challenging times.

- The high-speed winds of globalization, technology, and economic volatility have created a perfect storm of *constant change, distraction, and overload* that exhausts and stresses. This environment threatens the healthy development of the individual, the family, and the community at large.
- Life circumstances change from moment to moment, taxing our ability to adapt and understand **what skills are necessary to push forward.**

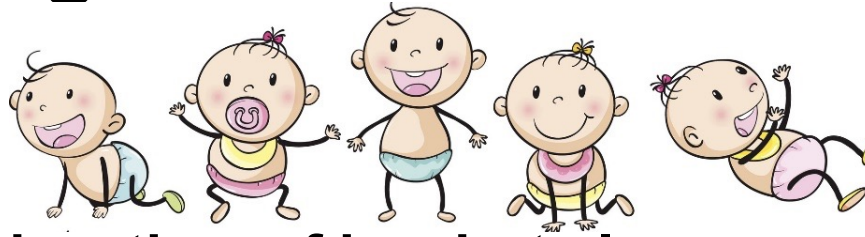


Circuit Overload



- Technological connectivity is slowly eroding intimate human connection, as people pay more attention to the face on the phone than the one across the dinner table. ¹
- We are, as author Sherry Turkle puts it, “alone together,” connecting in ways that don’t support a sense of being seen or felt by others. ¹
- With the proliferation of smart phones, e-readers, and digital billboards, even our youngest can find themselves experiencing information overload. ¹

Parenting is Not What it Used to Be



Having a new baby is a time of joy, but also one of vulnerability to distraction and exhaustion.

- Given the challenges facing modern society, **parents need community support to manage daily caretaking activities as well as** coaching, training, and practice in developing **parenting skills and strategies.**
- Raising children ages 0-3 requires constant adjusting and readjusting – children grow so rapidly that parents need to learn different strategies and routines for each new stage.
- Parents must prepare for these rapid changes and readjustments so that they can prioritize where they focus their time and attention.
- Parents' ability to shift mental energy toward their baby may be key to this reorganizational phase of life. This dynamic lays the foundation for future parent/child relationships.
- Both parents need time for themselves as well as time to maintain their relationship with each other – which can become neglected.

Surviving vs. Thriving Parenting is a Balancing Act

The American family structure now takes many new forms. They include; working mothers, stay at home dads, single parents, grandparents raising children, co-parenting, same-sex parenting, and two working parents.

- All families need to find their own unique parenting style.
- Conflicting schedules, splintered living situations, and mounting economic pressures add up to chaos and stress for the modern family.



- In 2017, in the United States, **58%** of mothers with children under the age of one are in the workforce. ²
- “Two out of three American children under 5 years old now receive some form of nonparent care; in most cases, this care begins during the first year of life.” ³
–Allan Schore, Pg. 363

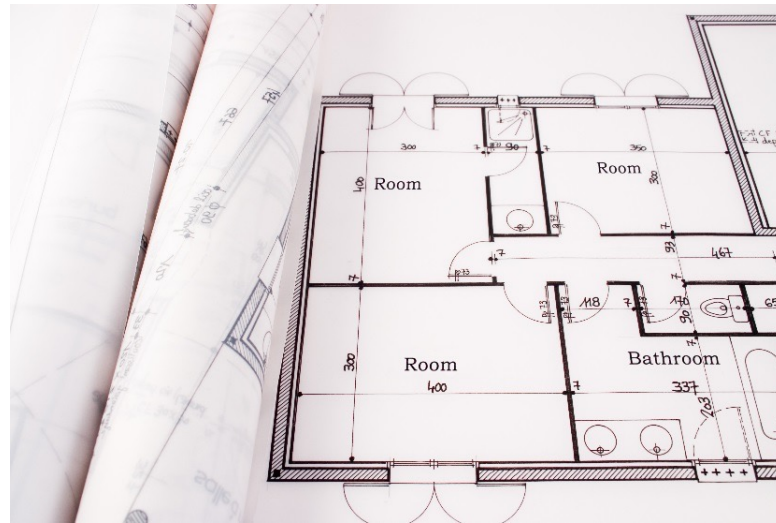
The Cult of Bigger, Faster, Better

- Media images of wealth, success, and instant fame promote a focus on counting and comparing. The pressure to succeed is so severe that no grade seems high enough, no performance “special” enough.
- Parents race to enroll their toddlers in the “best” nursery schools so their children don’t start out “behind.”
- The obsessive need to be current, connected, and exceptional overshadows our natural, healthy striving to grow for growth’s sake. It creates false expectations about what life should be like.



Building A Strong Foundation

In building a house, the architectural drawings begin with the construction of a strong foundation, solid enough that the house can withstand all kinds of weather.



So, too, the *House Within* needs a strong foundation so that our psychological structure can be flexible and adapt to the obstacles, struggles, and misfortunes that are an inevitable part of our internal landscape.

Standing on the Shoulders of Past Generations

While physical houses are built on everything from packed dirt to poured concrete, *our* inner foundation is built on the beliefs, values, and history of our parents and the generations before them.



What's Under the Floorboards?

- The foundation of the house that we stand on can be shaky or solid.
- Family history and intergenerational narratives that connect us to the past – the foundation of our inner house – can also be shaky or solid.
- Our ancestor's inner lives, their stories and rituals, alter as they pass down through generations.
- Consciously or not, this history becomes a part of what defines who we are and how we see ourselves in the world.
- As we grow, we integrate these stories with childhood memories and present experiences to add another layer to our understanding of ourselves.



Floors and Windows: Structures Made of Stories



- Beginning at birth, we start to internalize the stories that others tell about us: that we are clever, needy, dumb, beautiful, plain, difficult, and so on.
- These narratives contribute to our sense of self and shape the stories we eventually tell about ourselves.
- Like layers of paint, stories and experiences fill the walls of our inner house with personal narrative.
- Like using low or high grade materials in building a house, our experiences – both good and bad – can have a profound effect on our development.

View From The Window

We process new experiences through family and personal narratives.

These narratives become the ***windows*** through which we view the world and how we respond to struggle and change.



Personal History is not Destiny

Of course, not all houses are well-constructed, and the same is true for the *House Within*.

Some adults developed unstable or negative connections as children, and many family narratives include shameful family secrets. Thus, a negative personal history can leave a person feeling vulnerable, disconnected, and alone.

Like rotten floorboards, these stories can undermine the strength and resilience of a person's psychological space.



Connecting with the Subtext of our Lives

Gaining new, personal understandings is done through the process of making connections between the present and the history of those who came before. This allows us to revise our own autobiographies and become the architects of our inner structures. It gives us the freedom to take risks, make mistakes, and consider new possibilities.



You Can Remodel

The good news is that even a “fixer upper” can become a sturdy, wholesome home.

Your *House Within*, whatever state it is in, can be reorganized, redesigned, and remodeled into a space that better supports you.



Tools for Remodeling

As we continually walk through the house, revisiting the past memories, we develop a realistic understanding of who we are in the world.

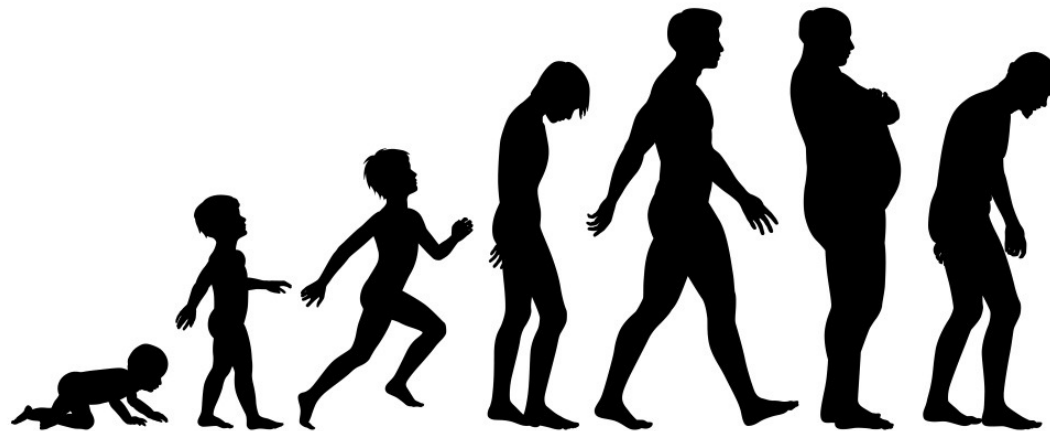


We can then remodel and strengthen our inner space when we...

- accept our own vulnerability.
- explore and understand the influence of the past on our present behavior.
- demystify painful family secrets.
- develop the courage to change our intergenerational patterns.
- develop empathy for ourselves and others.
- set goals that are realistic.

A House is Never Finished

- Growth is a continual process, requiring us to walk through the *House Within* again and again, as we transition through life's stages and surprises.
- We must constantly redefine, reframe, and reinvent ourselves. This requires revising our personal narratives so that they are realistic, meaningful, coherent, and current.
- So, take a moment to reflect and ask yourself: What kind of house do you have now? What do you want it to be? And, if you are a parent, what blueprints will your children inherit?



Little Houses Everywhere



The ability to build healthy connections and develop resilience begins at birth. ⁴

That means that our wee ones – children ages 0-3 – are actually tiny architects, already laying down the foundations of their own inner houses.

And they are looking to us for instructions.

New Construction

We live in a culture in which we must adapt to constant change.

The loss of traditional job security, as well as social and economic shifts, has created a new reality. These days, many fields require workers to modify and renew their skills, creating enormous fear about job stability and stress on the family.

Children today must learn to cope with mild to moderate stress and develop the skills necessary to deal with instability and adversity.

This economic stress affects the parents ability to be available, calm, and nurturing towards their children.



Shelter From The Storm

We can't control the external changes and complex transitions that life throws at us, but we can learn to manage how we respond to them. In this way, we can recover and adapt more quickly, bouncing back from whatever instability modern life throws our way.

We can also model these behaviors for our children. We can help them to establish healthy emotional connections and build the kind of strong, psychological structures that will support them throughout life's inevitable storms.



It Takes a Community...

In order to thrive, children today need a supportive environment of relationships and caretakers that are invested in their healthy development. 4

This starts with their family and extends to adults who are not family members, including early care providers, teachers, neighbors, and other community members.



Resiliency in a child is fostered by the presence of a trusted adult who is available and supportive in facilitating the child's ability to cope with environmental stressors. This adult can be anyone in the community who has a lasting caring connection with the child. **Even the development of the child's brain architecture depends on the establishment of these relationships.** 4

The Importance of a Tour



If you can't walk through your house and develop a realistic understanding of your history, you will project a lot of your childhood issues onto your children. You won't be able to help it.

But when you consciously explore your inner home, revisiting and revising as needed, you free your children to write their own stories and build new structures unhindered by the past.

Walking Through the Rooms Ahead

How do you build resilience, connections, and community in the 21st century? Each of the following sections addresses one key process and identifies concepts and insights that best support its development. Use these sections as blueprints for understanding both your own development and that of your child.



- **Tune into Attunement:** The importance of attunement, attachment and nonverbal communication
- **Tune into Communication:** The development of language and personal narrative
- **Tune into Temperament:** Frustration tolerance and the importance of rupture and repair
- **Tune into Temperature:** Learning self-regulation, separation and individuation
- **Tune into Executive Function:** Self-organization, prioritizing and multi-tasking
- **Tune into Others:** Empathy, character and gratitude

Building the House Within Videos

- Seg 2.1 - Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Brain Research and Early Learning, Part 1
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=db-KU5HGRWY>
- Seg 2.2 - Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Brain Research and Early Learning, Part 2
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pk1pC3ALZY>
- Seg 2-3 - Dr. Jack Shonkoff, Brain Research and Early Learning, Part 3
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAZnCageoDI>
- InBrief: The Foundations of Lifelong Health http://youtu.be/o_mCNW4kb6M
- Harvard Shonkoff: Building Adult Capabilities to Improve Child Outcomes: A Theory of Change
http://youtu.be/urU-a_FsS5Y

Building the House Within Citations

1. Turkle, S. (2012). *Alone together: why we expect more from technology and less from each other*. Seúl, Corea: Chungrim.
2. National Women's Law Center. (2017, April). A Snapshot of Working Mothers: Fact Sheet. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/A-Snapshot-of-Working-Mothers.pdf>
3. Schore, A. N. (2012). *The science of the art of psychotherapy*. New York: W. W. Norton.
4. Center for the Developing Child at Harvard University. (2013, May, 14). Building Adult capacities to improve child outcomes: a theory of change. [video file]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urU-a_FsS5Y