

How Your Mirror Can Help You Get What You Want Out of Life



When people are unable to achieve success, love or happiness, it is often because different parts of their personality are at war with each other.

We can resolve our inner conflicts by learning to recognize these warring parts and by integrating them into the rest of our personality. During my years as a psychotherapist, I developed a way to do this—using an ordinary mirror. I use this exercise myself a few minutes each day.

SECRETS IN OUR REFLECTION

We often think of our personality as if it were a single unit. But personalities are much more complicated than that.

Each person has many different “subpersonalities.” They grow out of our experiences and the roles we have played throughout our lives...and they affect our thoughts and actions. *Your subpersonalities include...*

• **The child-self**, which reflects the feelings and attitudes of the child you once were.

• **The teenager-self**, the subpersonality that reflects the values and attitudes of the teenager you once were. You will often see a couple in conflict revert to the mind states of their teenage selves and project attitudes of “I don’t care—who needs you, anyway?”

• **The opposite gender-self**—the male-self in women...and the female-self in men. Each of us carries an opposite gender side in our personality. How a man reacts to the internal feminine has a good deal to do with how he treats the woman in his life...just as how a woman relates to the internal masculine will be reflected in how she relates to the man in her life.

• **The mother-self...the father-self**—the internal representation of the

voice of mother or father within your psyche...the attitudes, values and feelings you unconsciously acquired from your parents.

• **The outer-self**—or the image you present to the world.

• **The inner-self**—the “real you,” your deepest dreams and desires.

ACHIEVING BALANCE

We function at our best when these various parts of ourselves are working together in harmony.

Many of us still use obsolete survival skills that were developed at a particular time in life when they may have been effective but are no longer.

Or we may be unconsciously trying to meet the needs of a subself whose very existence we’ve been denying—for example, a child-self who constantly hungers for approval.

By identifying which subselves are prominent in different areas in our lives, we can choose more effective and satisfying responses to life’s challenges.

USING THE MIRROR

A simple yet powerful way to identify and resolve “subself conflicts” is through mirror work.

To get started, set aside 10 to 20 minutes in private. Place a chair in front of a full-length mirror, sit down facing your reflection and speak out loud to yourself. Begin with sentence stems—incomplete sentences that you repeat,

Bottom Line/Personal interviewed Devers Branden, a psychotherapist and business consultant in private practice in Beverly Hills, California, who specializes in working with subpersonalities to build self-esteem and develop high performance. She works with her husband, Nathaniel Branden, PhD, in leading self-esteem workshops, training mental-health professionals and developing innovative psychotherapeutic techniques.

She is coauthor, with her husband, of *What Love Asks of Us* (available at most libraries).



adding a new ending each time—never fewer than six endings. *Examples...*

One way that I survived growing up was...

One of the ways I survive today is...

Being male to me means...

Being female to me means...

You can choose an issue that's bothering you, and create sentence stems directed to each subself. *Examples...*

As a child, success to me meant...

As a teenager, success to me meant...

My mother taught me that success was...

My father taught me that success was...

Success to my inner-self means...

Success to my outer-self means...

Instead of *success*, you can substitute any of many words, such as *love...marriage...money...work...etc.*

Make up sentence stems as they suggest themselves. Completing these sentences in front of a mirror forces us to be honest with ourselves. Our faces and bodies show sadness, fatigue, enthusiasm and other reactions of which we were not previously aware.

IF YOU FEEL AWKWARD

Don't worry if this exercise feels awkward. Most people find it hard to look at themselves honestly at first. If you're uncomfortable, use sentence stems based on that feeling. *Examples...*

The awkward thing about looking at myself is...

The scary thing about this exercise is...

One difficult thing about looking in a mirror is...

Another common reaction is to see only your negative features. Halt this negative temptation by turning these feelings into positive sentence stems. *Examples...*

If the fatigue behind my eyes could speak, it would say...

If my frown could speak...

If my fat could speak...

Believe it or not, most people find that after they've done this for a few minutes, they notice a softening and a growing sense of self-acceptance, as well as a tremendous feeling of relief.

I recommend doing mirror work each day. Even one session can make a big difference. You begin to become aware of unmet needs and how they are getting in the way of your happiness and fulfillment. ■