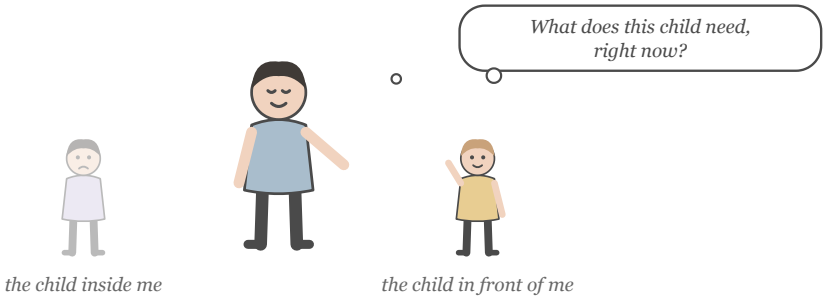
–LENSS–

Parenting the Child in Front of You

Telling apart your own childhood needs from the needs of your child.

Physician and author Dr Gabor Maté describes two core needs that every child has: **attachment** (closeness to the people who care for them) and **authenticity** (being able to be fully themselves). When the two clash, children usually give up authenticity to keep attachment. They learn to hide feelings, please others or become who they think they should be.

As parents, our own childhood can quietly shape how we respond. Sometimes we end up parenting the child we were, giving what we needed or reacting to old hurts, rather than the child in front of us, with all their own needs. This worksheet helps you notice the difference.



Attachment and authenticity in my childhood

- As a child, did you have to hide parts of yourself to stay close to the adults around you? Which parts?
- Which feelings were welcome in your family, and which were not?
- What did you most need from your parents that you did not get?

Attachment and authenticity for my child

- Does my child feel they can be fully themselves, including angry, sad or different from me, and still be loved?
- Which of my child's feelings or behaviours are hardest for me to accept? Why might that be?
- What does my child need from me to feel both close and free to be who they are?



Whose needs am I meeting?

When I am parenting, am I parenting the child inside me and what I needed growing up, or my child in front of me with all their needs?

The moment (e.g. bedtime, tears, a falling-out)	What the child inside me needed	What my child in front of me needs right now	What I'll do

When my child triggers me

Strong reactions to our children often point to our own history. Maté encourages compassionate curiosity: asking "What is happening inside me?" before "What is wrong with my child?"

- What feeling comes up, and where do I feel it in my body?
- How old do I feel when this happens? Whose voice am I hearing?
- Am I reacting with my child lenses or my adult lenses?
- Instead of "Why are you behaving like this?", could I ask "What's happening for you right now?"

Rupture and repair

No parent gets it right all the time. What helps children most is that we notice and repair.

- How do I repair with my child after I've snapped or got it wrong?
- A simple repair: "I'm sorry I shouted. That wasn't about you. I was feeling stressed, and I'm working on it."
- What did repair look like in my own childhood, and what do I want it to look like now?

When your child is an adult

The relationship between parents and adult children can carry old patterns, resentments and hopes. Gabor and Daniel Maté explore this in their forthcoming book Hello Again.

- Can I see my adult child as they are now, rather than as the child they were, or the person I hoped they would be?
- What do they need from me now: closeness, space, an apology, acceptance, boundaries?



- What do I need to take care of myself, so that I am not asking them to meet my old needs?
- Is there something I could acknowledge or repair, without needing a particular response?

Caring for the child inside me

The more I care for my own inner child, the freer I am to meet my child where they are (see the Your Inner Child worksheet).

- One thing I needed as a child that I can give to myself this week:
- One way I can be more present with the child in front of me this week:

Inspired by: Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté, *The Myth of Normal* (2022); Gordon Neufeld and Gabor Maté, *Hold On to Your Kids* (2004). Gabor Maté and Daniel Maté's *Hello Again: A Fresh Start for Parents and Adult Children* is due to be published in 2027.

"The child in front of you is not the child you were."
"When you care for your own younger self,"
"you are free to see your child as they truly are."