

Relationships: Human beings are born as relational beings. What does this mean? Well, babies are not born independent, and whether it is the biological mother, or some sort of other carer, if that baby is to survive, it needs to depend on someone else to do so. So, from the moment we are conceived, we are dependent on others. While the nature of the dependency changes over time, we will always be looking to others for *something* and we cannot get on without some kind of relating.

Relating is most intense when we are babies and children. Anyone who has experienced the “terrible two” tantrum will be fully aware of this! What people tend to be less aware of is the fact that the patterns of relating that we develop as children, can often continue right through our adult lives. The less conscious we are of these dynamics, the less power we have to make different choices in our adult relationships. All relationships offer challenges -- whether it is relating to our parents as adults; our bosses, colleagues and subordinates at work; or most intimately, or sexual and intimate partners. Each relationship offers its own challenges and rewards.

A long time ago Sigmund Freud coined the phrase “repetition compulsion” to describe the odd trait that many human beings have of repeating situations in their lives that simply do not work for them. For example, do you find that you continually seek out the same sort of person to relate with that always seems to end in failure? If you have a partner, do you find yourself engaging in the same sort of destructive behavior over and over again? Where do these repetition compulsions come from, and why do we go ahead and do things that don’t work for us over and over again?

One of the main tasks in psychotherapy of any depth is to come to know and come to terms with your relational dynamics. Popular images of psychotherapy often depict individuals lying on the couch, going deep into their past, and relating stories about their childhood, difficulties at home, etc. While going into the past is a very important part of the work, this is not all there is. In fact, we have found that just reflecting on the past doesn’t really work. The REAL task is how we relate our past to our present. How we perceive our current or potential relationships -- including your relationship to your therapist. Your therapist can provide a crucially important informed perspective on these very dynamics.



Psychotherapy can be very difficult and challenging, but ultimately rewarding. By reworking our repetition compulsions; by learning to understand how we make sense of the world by making sense of our past; and by linking our past history to our present decisions, we can make great strides to improve our sense of self, and by doing this, greatly improve the quality of our relationships with others.