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Healing The Father Wound Clinical Practice Workbook

A clinically branded, function-preserving edition retaining the original exercises, psychoeducation, checklists, logs, planning tools, and response space.

DSM-5-TR · ICD-11 CLINICAL ALIGNMENT

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2 · Symptoms of the Father Wound

3 · Exploring Your Relationship With Your Father

4 · What's Your Father Wound?

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How to use this workbook

- Use this workbook selectively and collaboratively; it is educational and does not replace individualized assessment, diagnosis, treatment, medical care, or crisis services.
- Skip, pause, or modify any activity that increases distress, danger, shame, or loss of functioning. Adapt language for culture, disability, neurodivergence, health, resources, and lived context.
- Ratings in this workbook are reflection tools unless a named, validated measure and interpretation are explicitly provided.

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What Is The Father Wound?

The father wound is the absence of love and acceptance from your father.

The father wound can be caused by:

- Neglect – physical or emotions
- Abuse – physical, emotional, sexual, or spiritual
- Absence – due to separation, divorce, or death
- Withholding – love and/or affirmation

Effects of the father wound include low self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, shame, a performance orientation, etc.

Notes

Symptoms of the Father Wound

The following are common symptoms of the father wound. Check off the ones you relate to:

- ☐ Do you believe that love needs to be earned so you find yourself pushing yourself to perform better?
- ☐ Did you experience lack of love and acceptance from your father and blamed yourself for being unlovable or unworthy?
- ☐ Do you find yourself with romantic partners who remind you of your father, even though you've been hurt by your father?
- ☐ Do you sabotage your relationships and reject your partners for fear of being rejected?
- ☐ Have you been an "overachiever" throughout your life so you could counter your father's negative messages?
- ☐ Do you experience "father rage" that you often channel into food, alcohol, drugs, sex, success, or any other addiction?

How did your father wound interfere with your life? What fears are you living with today?

Exploring Your Relationship With Your Father

1. How would you describe your relationship with your father?

2. In what way was your father there for you?

3. In what ways was your unavailable or absent from your life?

4. What do you appreciate the *most* and the *least* in your relationship with your father?

5. How did your father influence your life (negatively or positively)?

6. If your relationship with your father was lacking, what did you do so far to fill this void?

7. If he died or abandoned you, what are the benefits as well as the disadvantages of his not being around?

[illegible]

8. What would you like to say to your father right now?

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

What's Your Father Wound?

The following are some negative core beliefs father wound instills in us:

1. I'm Not Good Enough

Someone with such core belief may feel like they can never be good enough to live up to the expectations of those around them, especially their father.

They feel ashamed and afraid of making mistake, which leaves them reluctant to live wholeheartedly.

Withdrawing is one way they protect themselves from being hurt. Because they didn't receive approval, validation, or support from important people in her life, they may use unhealthy ways to meet those needs.

This often creates more problems and leads to self-sabotage.

Can you relate to this belief? If so, explain why.

2. I'm Inadequate

People with such belief would drive themselves to the best in whatever they're doing.

At first glance this doesn't appear to be a problem. However, people with such believe are driven by fear of failure and disappointment.

They continue to do more and perform better in order to get the approval they never got as children, never feeling adequate enough.

Can you relate to this belief? If so, explain why.

3. What I Feel Isn't Important

In many cases, people suffering from the effects of the father wound have cut themselves off from their feelings and went numb.

They came to believe that if they allow themselves to feel their feelings, they'll hurt, so it's best to block off feelings.

They may not even allow themselves to feel anger towards their fathers.

To block off their feelings, they may keep themselves busy, use addictions to numb emotions, or any other coping mechanism (e.g. perfectionism, people-pleasing, caretaking, etc.).

Can you relate to this belief? If so, explain why.

What other messages did you receive as a child that you want to erase. The following are some examples. Check off the one you relate to and add ones of your own:

- ☐ “No man will want you.”
- ☐ “You can never please anyone.”
- ☐ “You’ll always be fat.”
- ☐ “You’ll never measure up.”
- ☐ “You’re a failure.”
- ☐ “You’re no good.”
- ☐ “You’re not pretty and never will be.”
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Put Your Thoughts On The Witness Stand

Once you identified negative messages from your father and childhood, start to challenge them with questions such as:

Negative belief: _____

1. Is this belief helpful?

2. What is the evidence that this it is not true?

3. Are you thinking in all-or-nothing terms?

4. Are you condemning yourself as a total person on the basis of a single event?

5. Are you blaming yourself for something which is not really your fault?

6. Are you taking something personally which has little or nothing to do with you?

7. Are you expecting yourself to be perfect?

8. Are you holding yourself to an unreasonable or double standard?

9. What or who else contributed to this situation?

10. What would a dear friend say about your belief?

11. What would you tell a friend if they had the same belief?

Getting to Know Your Father

Those questions aren't meant to excuse what your father did, but they can help you externalize the blame.

1. How was your father's childhood? Was he mistreated or bullied?

2. What was his adolescence and early adulthood like?

3. What was he going through while raising you?

4. Who do you think your father is? How well do you know him?

Read through the following list of traits and rate them on a scale from 0 to 3 (with 0 being “never”; 1 being “rarely”; 2 being “half the time”; and 3 being “almost always.”)

List of Negative Traits	Rate	List of Positive Traits	Rate
Angry		Accepting	
Anxious		Calm	
Arrogant		Caring	
Childish		Cheerful	
Cold		Compassionate	
Critical		Generous	
Demanding		Hardworking	
Impatient		Nurturing	
Irresponsible		Reliable	
Irritable		Responsible	
Selfish		Patient	
Total		Total	

A score higher than 30 in the positive column means that you have a very positive image of your father.

A score higher than 30 in the negative column means that you have a very negative image of your father.

5. Whatever is your score, ask yourself “Is my view realistic?”

6. Think back to different stages in your childhood. How did you see your father? What did you think and feel about him?

Age 4_____

Age 6_____

Age 9_____

Age 12_____

Age 15_____

Now_____

Holding an “Interview”

The best way to get to know your father is to ask him to talk about himself.

If you still keep in touch, you may suggest holding “an interview” so you can get to know him better.

The following are some questions to ask. Check off the ones you think you want to ask and add ones of your own:

- ☐ Do you have a favorite sibling, and if so, who are they and why?
- ☐ What’s the first memory you have as a child?
- ☐ What’s the best and the worst memory you have as a child?
- ☐ How did your father and mother show you love?
- ☐ How would you describe your mother and your father?
- ☐ How do you wish your mother and father had been different?
- ☐ Who were your best friends as a child and as a teen?
- ☐ What was the best gift you ever received?
- ☐ What was your first job?
- ☐ What has been your best job?
- ☐ Did you have a dream life when you were a teenager? If so, did you achieve those dreams?
- ☐ What’s the best advice anyone has ever given you?
- ☐ What advice would you give me at this time of my life?
- ☐ Which emotions are easiest and most difficult for you to express?
- ☐ How do you feel when you see someone crying?
- ☐ What was your experience when 9/11 occurred?
- ☐ Whom do you miss most in life at this time?
- ☐ What was your internal experience when I was born?

- ☐ What do I do or say that bothers you the most?
- ☐ What was the hardest time for you being a father?
- ☐ What do you see yourself doing in ten years?
- ☐ What diseases do you hope you never have to deal with?
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Notes

Letting Go of Self-Blame

Self-blame is a common symptom of the father wound.

We need to make sense of what happened. Yet, most of us won't blame our fathers.

This is usually because we don't want to believe that he could do something like that – we don't want to destroy our image of him.

Instead, we blame and hold ourselves accountable for what others have done.

The following are some common self-blaming thoughts. Check off the ones you relate to and add ones of your own:

- ☐ “I must have done something to make it happen.”
- ☐ “I didn't do all I could to prevent it from happening.”
- ☐ “I should have said no more forcibly.”
- ☐ “I could have done more.”
- ☐ “I should have seen it coming.”
- ☐ “I have ignored the signs of what might happen.”
- ☐ “I expected too much.”
- ☐ “If only I had been better, smarter, more compliant, prettier, stronger born a boy, . . .”
- ☐ “If only I had not . . .”
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Such statements express regret. But you can't hold yourself responsible for what didn't know or couldn't have done as a child.

When we self-blame, we refuse to admit or face the fact that it was our father's fault.

1. Identify things you're blaming yourself for. Think about hurtful events that occurred in the past and complete the following phrases:

_____ wouldn't have happened if

_____ wouldn't have happened if

_____ wouldn't have happened if

_____ wouldn't have happened if

_____ wouldn't have happened if

_____ wouldn't have happened if

2. What do your answers say about a tendency to self-blame? Why do you need to blame yourself?

3. In what way were you responsible?

4. Would others say you were at fault?

5. Read the following list aloud and allow yourself to feel the validity of each statement and add any other painful experiences that you've always felt responsible for.

- ☐ I'm not responsible for the way my father neglected or ignored me.
- ☐ I'm not responsible for the way my father made me feel unlovable.
- ☐ I'm not responsible for my father's cruel or thoughtless comments.
- ☐ I'm not responsible for the bad names my father called me.
- ☐ I'm not responsible for my father's unhappiness or illness.
- ☐ I'm not responsible for my father's problems and his choice not to do anything about his problems.

- ☐ I'm not responsible for my father's anger or what he did when he was angry.
- ☐ I'm not responsible for the fact that my father hit me.
- ☐ I'm not responsible for _____

- ☐ I'm not responsible for _____

- ☐ I'm not responsible for _____

6. Take each statement you checked off or added to the list and adapt it to read "My father was responsible for..."

- ☐ My father was responsible for _____

- ☐ My father was responsible for _____

- ☐ My father was responsible for _____

- ☐ My father was responsible for _____

- ☐ My father was responsible for _____

- ☐ My father was responsible for _____

Addressing Unresolved Grief

Most people with the father wound have unresolved grief, which often manifest as depression or anger.

Talking about your hurt often means you have to relive the experience and reexperience the pain. This can push you to avoid processing your hurt at all costs.

However, out of mind doesn't mean out of memory.

Over time, your stuffed hurt intensifies and turns into anger or depression.

1. What do you feel most when you think of your father wound? Anger? Depression? Where do you feel it in your body?

2. What losses did you experience related to your father wound that you've never fully grieved yet? What happened and when?

3. Sit down with a trusted friend or by yourself and admit to your losses by repeating the following statements

- ☐ “I was hurt.”
- ☐ “What happened still hurts.”
- ☐ “I’ve suffered because of what happened.”
- ☐ “No child deserves to be treated that way.”
- ☐ “It was wrong.”
- ☐ “It was not okay.”
- ☐ “It was that bad.”
- ☐ “I haven’t gotten over it yet.”
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

4. What do you wish was different? What do you wish your father did or said?

Getting Closure

If your father is dead or is no longer in your life, write a letter to say good-bye and gain closure.

1. Begin by stating the facts of what happened in your childhood, Write down all the ways your father hurt you or failed you. Write down about how it affected your life.

2. Now share things you miss about your father.

3. Now reintroduce yourself to your father. Bring him up to date with your current life. Share what you're doing presently, what you hopes and dreams are, and other things he never knew about you.

4. You may take this a step further and write a letter from your father to yourself where you put yourself in your father's shoes but also express what you wish you could hear from him.

Assessing Your Relationship With Your Father

Many of us continue to have a relationship with our fathers despite our father wound. Some of us wish to fix the relationship. Others want to just maintain a civil relationship with their fathers.

What is your relationship with your father right now?

Read through the following statements and rate each one on a scale from 0 to 3 (with 0 being “never”; 1 being “rarely”; 2 being “half the time”; and 3 being “almost always.”)

1. I can't seem to find the right words to express myself when I'm with my father. _____
2. I worry that if I share my feelings, I'll be rejected. _____
3. I don't say what I want to because I'm not sure if my opinion is right. _____
4. I worry that I speak up, it will only make things worse. _____
5. My father doesn't say much. I tend to do most of the talking. _____
6. I don't look forward to face-to-face conversations with my father. _____
7. I don't look forward to phone conversations with my father. _____
8. I tend to be defensive when I'm with my father. _____
9. I find it difficult to listen to my father. _____
10. I find it difficult to bring up significant thing to talk about with my father. _____

Score ____/30

The higher your score, the more difficult your relationship with your father is.

Requesting A Change

1. What kind of relationship do you want to have with your father at this time in your life?

2. How does that compare with how your relationship looks at this time? Are there huge gaps between the two?

3. Realistically, what do you think you could both do to maintain a healthy relationship?

4. What requests do you need to make to maintain a healthy relationship with your father? Try to make just one request each time.

It's not only important what you say, but how you say it.

For example, instead of saying, "You don't show interest in my job," try, "Dad, it means so much to me when you ask about my job."

5. If you want your father to somehow make up for what he didn't give you or apologize for what he did in the past, is that really realistic? Is it even possible? And if he did that, how would that make a difference for you?

6. How will you approach your father with the changes you want to make in your relationship?

7. If your father isn't open to change, how can you give him permission to be who he is? How can you respond to his criticism in new ways? How can you cope with the painful interactions?

Establishing Boundaries

Part of maintaining a healthy relationship with your father is establishing healthy emotional boundaries.

Emotional boundaries are the protective emotional limits that we use to define how we regulate our acceptance of how others treat us.

1. What concerns do you have about setting boundaries with your father?
What has held you back from setting boundaries in the past?

2. How can you challenge those concerns? What would you tell a friend in the same situation?

3. What treatment you don't wish to tolerate anymore? How can you communicate this boundary to your father?

4. Try using affirmations to inspire you to firmly establish your boundaries. The following are some example. Check off the ones you think you can use and add ones of your own:

- ☐ “It’s okay to prioritize my own needs.”
- ☐ “I’m not responsible for my father’s feelings.”
- ☐ “It is not my responsibility to make sure my father is happy.”
- ☐ “It is okay to be myself and not what my father want me to be.”
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

Should You Forgive?

Forgiveness isn't about excusing poor behavior.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with whether or not your father deserves to be forgiven.

Forgiveness can be given without your father ever knowing they have been forgiven.

Forgiveness is about letting go of toxic feelings – anger, resentment, and fear. It is a commitment you make to yourself to heal your wounds and allow yourself to begin life with a clean slate.

Ann Landers said, *“Hanging on to resentment is letting someone you despise live rent-free in your head.”*

However, forgiveness should never be forced. You may need to hold onto anger until you have processed what happened and were able to externalize the blame.

Only forgive when you feel ready.

How ready do you feel to forgive your father right now? If you're not ready yet, what price are you paying by holding onto resentment? How far into the future do you want your father to continue to influence you?

Forgiving Your Father

There are many ways to help you forgive:

1. Write a letter in which you express your pain and your commitment to let it go.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

2. Use an empty chair

Sit across from an empty chair and speak to it as if your father is sitting on it. Then switch seats and imagine their response to what you just told them. (Gestalt therapy, formulated by Fritz Perls 1893-1970)

3. Use forgiveness meditation

1. Take your time to relax and clear your mind by focusing on your breath.
2. Then let yourself picture and remember the many ways you were hurt by your father.
3. Feel the sorrow you have carried from this past and sense that your heart is ready to release this burden of pain by extending forgiveness.
4. Now say to yourself “I have been carrying this pain in my heart for too long. I am ready now to release the pain. To those who have caused me harm, I offer my forgiveness, I forgive you.”
5. Gently repeat this statement to yourself until you feel a release in your heart.

If you didn't feel ready to let go and move on yet, be compassionate with yourself. Forgiveness cannot be forced. Simply continue the meditation and let the words and sensations gradually work in their own way.

Notes

Forgiving Yourself

You may also need to forgive yourself for things you've been blaming yourself for.

1. The following are some common examples. Check off the ones you relate to and add ones of your own:

- ☐ Not being able to change your father or fix whatever problems he had.
- ☐ Not being able to make your father happy or proud.
- ☐ Not being able to make your father love you or accept you.
- ☐ Not being perfect in some way, or in every way.
- ☐ Treating yourself the way your father treated you because you believed you deserve it.
- ☐ Choosing partners like your father.
- ☐ Developing similar problems you despised in your father.
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____
- ☐ _____

2. Allow yourself to release these regrets. Finish the following statement:

I forgive myself for _____

I forgive myself for_____

I forgive myself for_____

I forgive myself for_____

I forgive myself for_____

I forgive myself for_____

I forgive myself for_____

2026 Clinical Alignment

DSM-5-TR (including Sept. 2025 update) · ICD-11 CDDR / 2026 MMS

Classification status

- DSM-5-TR: No diagnosis under this title · No diagnosis is established by the title.
- ICD-11 CDDR: · No diagnosis is established by the title.
- This workbook is non-diagnostic. A title, checklist, or completed activity never establishes a diagnosis.

Pages requiring the updated interpretation

- The audit identified source pages 1, 2, 3, 5, 15, 16, 20, 22, 24, 25, 28, 31, 32, 35, 36. The statements below supersede incompatible diagnostic, scoring, safety, or resource wording on those pages.

Diagnostic and differential limits

- Assess duration, distress/functional impairment, cultural and medical context, substance/medication effects, and relevant differential diagnoses before assigning any diagnosis.

Document-specific corrections

- Pages [1, 2, 3, 5, 20, 25] · Frame ·Healing The Father Wound· using the DSM/ICD status below; add duration, impairment, exclusions, and differentials without reproducing criteria. The title alone must never be treated as a diagnosis.
- Pages [1, 2, 16, 28] · Treat the Healing The Father Wound ratings/checklists as author-created reflection tools only. Remove unsupported severity bands, cutoffs, totals, or language suggesting diagnostic validity; label response anchors and recall period explicitly.
- Pages [2, 15, 32, 35] · Do not use joint disclosure, confrontation, forgiveness, or boundary exercises when coercive control or retaliation is possible. Prioritize private safety assessment, choice, documentation safety, and specialist domestic-abuse resources where applicable. Apply this specifically to the workbook's What Is The Father Wound?, Symptoms of the Father Wound, Exploring Your Relationship With Your Father, What's Your Father Wound? sections.
- Pages [1, 22, 24, 31, 35, 36] · Review all medical assertions in Healing The Father Wound with a qualified medical professional; distinguish psychoeducation from individualized advice and add referral thresholds, contraindications, and medication/procedure cautions appropriate to this population.

Measures, scoring, and permissions

- Treat the Healing The Father Wound ratings/checklists as author-created reflection tools only. Remove unsupported severity bands, cutoffs, totals, or language suggesting diagnostic validity; label response anchors and recall period explicitly. custom/unvalidated unless evidence is supplied confirm no third-party item wording was adapted

Intervention scope and contraindications

- Do not use joint disclosure, confrontation, forgiveness, or boundary exercises when coercive control or retaliation is possible. Prioritize private safety assessment, choice, documentation safety, and specialist domestic-abuse resources where applicable.

Crisis and current resources

- For immediate danger or a medical emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department. In the U.S., call or text 988 or use 988lifeline.org. Outside the U.S., use verified local emergency and crisis services. A workbook is not a crisis service or safety plan.

Authoritative references

- <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/practice/dsm/updates-to-dsm/updates-to-dsm-5-tr-criteria-text>
- <https://icd.who.int/browse/2026-01/mms/en>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240077263>
- <https://988lifeline.org/>