

A child's silhouette is centered in the foreground, arms outstretched. The background is a sunset beach scene with waves and a large, circular, net-like structure. The text 'INNER CHILD WORK' is overlaid in white serif font.

INNER

CHILD

WORK

noble  
WORKSHOPS

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*“My dear,*

*I laugh non stop when I’m consumed with happiness. I am 7.*

*I am swept away by the lightest of kisses. I am 13.*

*I’m not afraid to speak my mind. I am 18.*

*I know when not to speak my mind. I am 28.*

*I know that love takes many forms. I am 35.*

*I know nothing lasts, so I enjoy everything to the fullest. I am 55.*

*I am all the ages I’ve ever been.*

*What has each of your ages built in you?”*

*– ANNE LAMOTT*

# Welcome.

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**M**y name is Sam Eldredge, and I am a therapist and the director of Noble Workshops. Whether you've downloaded this through listening to a podcast and wanting to know more, or if you were looking for a first pass of some holistic care before taking the plunge into the week-long retreat through Noble Workshops, I'm glad you're here.

What follows is a guide through an experiential exercise. That is, something for you to do and experience in addition to thinking about. So much of our internal world is shrouded in the fog of time, of pain, of fear, and of trauma... so that for many of us it can feel like trying to catch a glimpse of something that keeps flitting from our peripheral vision, leaving us frustrated and confused. Or, as Rollo May put it in *Man's Search for Himself*,

| *"Many people suffer from the fear of finding oneself alone, and so they don't find themselves at all."*

We all need guides to help us cut through the fog, and to help I have crafted an exercise for you that can act as signposts. While not quite the same as a living guide, which a skilled therapist would be, these signposts will take you on a journey to reconnect with your past, specifically your inner child who is very much a part of your present. But first, some context as to why our past matters.

We experience our inner child through a variety of ways in the present. They were often the target of abuse, neglect, shame, and vulnerability. They were also designed for love, safety, connection, and to be their unique and true Self. None of us managed to grow up in the perfect home environment, and even if home was safe there came a moment when we joined our peers in school and in work and looked to them to answer our questions: *Am I enough? Do I belong? Will I still be loved if you saw the real me?*













# ACE's: The Weight of the Past

The Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) test was designed to identify the ways that we were failed as children, so that we might be able to trace the symptoms that we experience today and curb their (potentially deadly) effects. The team who developed the ACE's test noticed that the impact of neglect is as deadly as the impact of abuse, and that the child who feels like they don't matter can suffer the same as a child who had an alcoholic or divorced parent.

For today, I ask you to set comparison aside. Some call it the "Trauma Olympics," that game where we measure the pain we experienced with the stories of others. It doesn't work. You live in your body, you think in your mind, you carry wounds in your heart.

Your story matters.

## Three Types of ACEs

ABUSE	NEGLECT	HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION	
 <p>PHYSICAL ABUSE</p>	 <p>PHYSICAL NEGLECT</p>	 <p>MENTAL ILLNESS</p>	 <p>INCARCERATED RELATIVE</p>
 <p>EMOTIONAL ABUSE</p>	 <p>EMOTIONAL NEGLECT</p>	 <p>MOTHER TREATED VIOLENTLY</p>	 <p>SUBSTANCE ABUSE</p>
 <p>SEXUAL ABUSE</p>		 <p>DIVORCE</p>	

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## ACEs Increase Health Risks

### BEHAVIOR



LACK OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



SMOKING



ALCOHOLISM



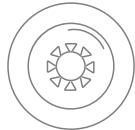
DRUG USE



ADDICTION



MISSED WORK



HYPER VIGILANCE

### PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH



SEVERE OBESITY



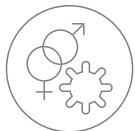
DIABETES



DEPRESSION



SUICIDE ATTEMPTS



STDS



HEART DISEASE



CANCER



STROKE



COPD



BROKEN BONES

## The Ripple Effects

The wounds, or trauma, of our past have rippling effects to today. We learned ways to adapt to either not feel the pain or created protective strategies in order to “deserve” the love, acceptance, and connection we so desperately need. For some, that continues to look like numbing through sex, alcohol, screens, or just not feeling anything at all. For others of us, that looks like perfectionism, people-pleasing, anger, or perhaps trying to convince ourselves that we aren’t actually lonely, we’re introverted.

Our past can have other effects too: the higher your ACE score, the more susceptible you are to a host of health conditions including asthma, cancer, obesity, and suicidality. Our bodies carry the memory for us.

Today, this information may feel overwhelming or perhaps it feels encouraging. Whatever your reaction, know that it is never too late to begin healing. Through the use of journaling and experiencing connection with a younger place in us, you can take a step forward on that journey.

Let’s begin...

# Inner Child Exercise

I need you to go and find a photo of yourself as a child, somewhere between the ages of 4 and 12. Take some time with a photo album and flip through it, when you find a photo that you feel strongly about (embarrassment, grief, shame, longing, even something unnamed) I want you to grab it and grab a journal.

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**To begin, write down how you feel towards this part of you, this part of your story.** Do you like yourself? Why, or why not? Do you fear for his or her context? For the future?

What does this younger you have that you need back? Were they more playful, more joyful, friendlier, more trusting? Do they feel close to you, or hidden in the fog?

**What were the messages that were delivered to this younger you that never should have been? What did younger you need to hear, but never did?**

Some of us can be cruel to our younger places, because they get us into trouble. It's not very convenient to suddenly feel six years old inside and be more goofy or more vulnerable than people expect of you. Be careful of your inner dialogue, especially if it begins to feel condemning or critical of yourself.

I'd like you to think of two surgeons, equally skilled and able to assist in a difficult situation. One is pissed at you. The other is kind. Which one would you like to have work on you?

Today, let's practice being the kind surgeon...





What you'll do next is write yourself a letter from the perspective of younger you, to yourself today.

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I'll share mine as an example, but first some more context for your letter.

Be sure to include the following:

- 1. How does younger you feel toward adult you?**
- 2. How do they feel about how you have been treating them?**
- 3. What do they want to ask you?**
- 4. What do they need from you, today?**
- 5. Is there a part of me that is protecting them, or in the way?**
- 6. Is there some memory that younger you would like you to see, then would like to leave behind?**
- 7. Is there anything else they want you to know, or to hear?**

Here is my photo and a version of one of my letters, by way of example...

## Sam's Photo and Letter

*Samuel,*

*I have been here. Waiting. I know that you have felt me. Longed for me, even. But you have spent years running from me, leaving me in the dark. Afraid of me and joining in the shaming to keep yourself safe.*

*I need to know that you like me. I need to know that I don't embarrass you. I need to feel safe with you. Free from your anger. Free from the fear of others.*

*I'd like to show you what you've left behind. The ability to connect with others, freely, openly, genuinely. I know that not everyone is safe, but you don't think anyone is.*

*Let me remind you what delight feels like. Let me teach you how to trust and long for things again.*

*I know you can handle hard things. I know you can keep us safe, but safety isn't the same thing as living. Let's live again.*

*Your cowboy,*

*Sam*







**T**his exercise required me to find some space, outside in the sun. It took me a few hours to begin writing the first words, and then the rest came in a rush. Taking the plunge into the exercise can be the scariest part. If you are having trouble with it, begin by centering yourself through sitting down, breathing deeply and regularly, and visualizing how you might feel if younger you walked into the room. If you need to, you can even begin by “writing” the letter out loud, then start putting pen to paper once things are flowing.

Now what? Now comes a really scary part, but one which is huge on the path to healing: I want you to read it, out loud, to someone you trust. I won't go into all the details, but we were designed to heal in connection with others, not isolated on our own. Give them a little context, and be sure to pick someone who isn't going to try and fix you, but just listen and express gratitude for sharing with them.

Some of us don't have anyone that we can ask, either because we don't trust the people in our lives, or because we are in a long season of isolation. If this is the case, I'd encourage you to look for a therapist to begin working with. This letter can be a really good jumping off point for your work with them. I also work with clients virtually, so you can reach out if you'd like to try that route ([SAM@NOBLEWORKSHOPS.COM](mailto:SAM@NOBLEWORKSHOPS.COM)).

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*Our adult self is more capable of keeping us safe and navigating the world, but our inner child helps us connect with play, delight, and feeling our need for love and connection.*

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After reading your letter to someone, take some time to journal about what that experience was like, and about how you might want your dynamic with your younger place to change going forward. Our adult self is more capable of keeping us safe and navigating the world, but our inner child helps us connect with play, delight, and feeling our need for love and connection.

I have done the above exercise with several different moments from my past, sometimes even revisiting one in a dialogue. Part of what we are after is a Corrective Emotional Experience, that is: what should have been felt, done, said, etc. and wasn't, that now as an adult with resources, safety, and language we can go back and correct about the past by emotionally experiencing the event in a correct way?

## Where Next?

There's a lot there, I know. Remember the kind surgeon? Have patience with yourself. If you are able to do any part of this exercise, that is a victory. If you find yourself stuck or wanting more, I would encourage you to join us for an in-person event in Colorado. Consider reaching out to a counselor, if you have not yet. If you are interested in reading on some of these topics, I'd look for *The Body Keeps the Score*, *When the Body Says No*, and *Man's Search for Meaning*.

For now, I'll finish with a benediction from John O'Donohue:

*"You have traveled too fast over false ground;  
Now your soul has come, to take you back.  
Take refuge in your senses, open up  
To all the small miracles you rushed through.  
Become inclined to watch the way of rain  
When it falls slow and free.  
Imitate the habit of twilight,  
Taking time to open the well of color  
That fostered the brightness of day.  
Draw alongside the silence of stone  
Until its calmness can claim you.  
Be excessively gentle with yourself."*

– SAM ELDREDGE,  
FOUNDER, NOBLE WORKSHOPS

