

# Meeting Needs with a Resource Sandwich

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Unmet childhood needs underlie many of the self-esteem issues clients face. Many have childhood traumas on top of unmet needs. Processing traumas can be helpful, but working to meet unmet needs may be of higher importance for clients with stressful childhoods, especially before targeting traumas. According to Erikson (1950), children have important needs to be met at each developmental stage. The consequences of needs being unmet at any stage can be life long. For example, if attachment needs in the client's earliest developmental stages are not met she may have a devastating ambivalence in forming relationships, and much difficulty attaching and detaching from others – a problem which can profoundly affect all areas of life. This article outlines a brief summary of an intervention for helping address and meet clients' unmet childhood needs. This intervention can be used for any and all developmental stages with deficits. It starts with helping the client assimilate two resources, a pre-traumatized self (PTS) and a competent adult self (CAS). The client is asked to picture a troubled part of self nestled in between these two resources - in a Resource Sandwich. Within this Sandwich the two resources attend to the needs of the troubled part. The Sandwich can be used for soothing and calming, meeting needs, creating a secure attachment, or processing anger. This is similar to ideas of Wesselmann (2000), Paulsen (2000) and others, who have taught guiding an adult self to nurture child ego states. The Resource Sandwich intervention described here is systematic and thorough. It can be used to meet the need for nurturing and all other developmental needs as well.

## Assimilating Resources

### The Pre-Traumatized Self

The idea of a prenatal pre-traumatized self may sound very odd and improbable to many readers. The best way to evaluate the validity of this is to try it out. Brian Lynn, MD (2000) writes about the pre-traumatized self, "As I reviewed embryology, I noted that before 5 or 6 weeks, gestational age, the placenta has not developed a connection between maternal and embryonic circulation that would allow for such transplacental transfer of the molecular mediators of the fight, flight, or freeze response." He argues that in the time period before placental connection, before the baby experiences mom's stress hormones, she is in a pre-traumatized state. He discovered he can invite clients back to this time and once there, they report a profound sense of relaxation and well being. I have found the same to be true for most of the clients I've tried this with. For many, the PTS is like a kitten. It is tender and innocent, playful and cuddly. It comforts by curling up in a lap and purring; just happy have a warm body to relax on. I will coax clients into their PTS with words like this:

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Now I'd like for you to go back, way, way back, to a time when you were very, very small... just a little tiny baby in the womb. Some time around the first 4 weeks or so. A time of no stress... a time when no demands were made on you... when nothing was expected of you. A time of just hanging out... of just being the essence of you... innocent and pure. And your body knows exactly how to get you there. Now, as you notice yourself connecting to this part of you, notice if your body changes, and when you're ready, tell me what you notice.

Some clients cannot tolerate the idea of returning to mom's belly at any prenatal stage, not even one day after conception. Perhaps mom's energy field was chaotic and stressful. Several clients have told me that, to contact their PTS, they must go back to a time just before conception. Now honestly I am not a theologian, so I cannot say what this means. But I can say that clients who access a preconception PTS report a powerful sense of connection to God and their PTS is often seen as a ball of light. This is a wonderful resource and powerfully enhances my clients' sense of self-esteem. If I suspect a client may need to access a preconception PTS I will use words like:

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Now I'd like for you to go back, way, way back, to a time when you were very, very young. Notice that window of time that begins just before conception and ends at about week 4 in the womb. Somewhere in this window you will find a very sweet and comfortable place. You'll know when you get there. It's a time of no stress... a time when no demands were made on you... when nothing was expected of you. A time of just hanging out... of just being the essence of you, in your core of goodness... innocent and pure. And your body knows exactly how to get you there. Now, as you notice yourself connecting to this part of you, notice if your body changes, and when you're ready, tell me what you notice.

When there is no possibility of connecting to either pre-traumatized self, it may be possible to contact a spiritual core self (SCS). The following guided meditation could be used:

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Now I'd like for you to get in touch with a place within yourself that feels like the center of your being, a place that is very quiet... peaceful... and still. And in this place... it's possible you'll have a sense of finding your spiritual core. This spiritual core has been a part of you since the moment of conception... it's the essence of who you are... your core of goodness. It's that part of you that is innocent, pure, and resilient... and your body knows exactly how to get you there. Now, as you notice yourself connecting to this part of you, notice if your body changes, and when you're ready, tell me what you notice.

After the client has connected with her PTS or SCS, the experience is strengthened with bilateral stimulation. It should feel very, very good. Sometimes fears or blocking beliefs interfere with the process, requiring some education and/or cognitive interweave to get the client back on track. Sometimes I will tell blocking ego states that their concerns are taken seriously, and that their unmet needs will be effectively addressed soon if they will simply tuck in for a while so the proper preparations can be made. The client may be satisfied to call this resource her "pre-traumatized self" or she may wish to name it something else. (Note: From here on wherever I write PTS, I mean PTS or SCS.)

### **The Competent Adult Self**

The Competent Adult Self (CAS) is a consolidation of a number of ideal parenting skills and traits acquired over a lifetime. I'll explain that we want to **custom order** this resource, with a specific set of traits necessary to do a specific job – meeting the needs of troubled parts of self. I might say:

Your brain holds lots of neural networks - some with adult information, some with hurt child information. The CAS will be formed from a specific subset of this adult information. The process of connecting to this information will be like going into a house with lots of rooms. We will turn off the lights in rooms with traits we don't need now, and turn on the lights in rooms with traits we do need. The neural nets we are interested in contain information appropriate for nurturing and protecting a child, with traits such as, understanding, empathy, caring, etc. This information is already in your brain, in one form or another; we are simply going to bring it all together and call this unique combination of neural nets, your competent adult self.

If she doubts she has these qualities, I'll discuss areas of her life, or times in the past, when she embodied these traits. Even if she is not fond of children, she may have experienced these traits while caring for her pets, plants, or someone else. Once she understands she already has these traits, I'll proceed with the following guided meditation:

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Now get in touch with the neural networks associated with the following traits: understanding... empathy... compassion... caring... nurturing... non-judgmental... good at listening... good at setting boundaries... patient... protective... intelligent... responsible... action-oriented... problem solver... loving... gentle... tender... mature... receptive... responsive... open... grounded. Now, as you begin connecting to these traits, notice if your body changes, and when you're ready, tell me what you notice.

Once the client reports a felt sense connection of the CAS resource, it is strengthened with bilateral stimulation. The client may be satisfied to call this resource her "competent adult self" or she may wish to name it something else.

### **Bringing the Resources Together**

I like to think of the PTS and CAS as the alpha and omega - the best of her beginning and the best of her adult self. Their traits are complementary. The PTS is innocent, contented, and playful, while the CAS is intelligent, responsible, and action-oriented. They are both non-judgmental, loving, and compassionate. They form the ultimate container for comforting and healing, and are a perfect pair for soothing and meeting unmet childhood needs. They form the outer halves of the Resource Sandwich.

I start with having the client picture the PTS and CAS together. Most often clients find this comforting and ego strengthening. Following up with bilateral stimulation enhances the good feeling. If the client has trouble visualizing the resources I may have her draw pictures which represent each one and post them side by side. Occasionally fears or blocking beliefs will interfere with the natural felt sense of well being these resources bring, necessitating some education and/or cognitive interweaves. Ironically, ego states which block the CAS and PTS from coming together can actually be soothed by the resources they are blocking.

### **Creating Real Relationships and Secure Attachments to Resources**

I emphasize the importance of the PTS and CAS in the healing process. I want the client to understand that she can form real relationships and secure attachments with these loving resources now, even if secure attachments did not happen in childhood. I'll explain by saying something like:

The extent to which your needs were not met in your developing years is the extent to which you may still be stuck in those years - stuck in old beliefs, fears, and insecurities. The [PTS] and [CAS] are resources available to you now, to meet those needs and help you get unstuck from the past. To get completely unstuck we will use a combination of needs meeting interventions and trauma processing. The traumas will be addressed a little later, but first we want to meet unmet needs. You've waited a long time for your needs to be met and now, the wait is over. [PTS] and [CAS] are permanent resources, available to you now and whenever you need them. The relationships you are forming with these resources are real, not imagined. We're talking about real neural networks in relationship with other real neural networks. Because these relationships are real, the ability of these resources to meet your needs is real. (Note: I write PTS and CAS in brackets here because the clients' names for these parts can be used instead.)

This information is very important because, along the way, as attachments are being formed and needs are being met the client may shift into despair about childhood needs that had not been met or bonding that did not occur. I stop the client from moving into the trauma by reminding her that, while the trauma is indeed very important, the focus of today's intervention is the nurturing provided now by the PTS and CAS. I grant permission for her to feel the despair, while drawing her attention away from the past and onto the present, where these two wonderful, tender, loving, and supportive resources are right now understanding her grief and honoring how she feels. If the client needs further clarification, I will draw a timeline of her life on my white board and illustrate how the childhood crises happened years ago but these needs can be met now, today – finally!

## **The Resource Sandwich<sup>1[1]</sup>**

There are many ways to use the Resource Sandwich. Below I use an example of a client who comes in grieving the loss of her precious dog. It has been 6 weeks since his death and the intensity of her grief suggests the loss has restimulated something painful from the past. Probing further I learn at age four, her closest companion, her cat, died. Not only did her parents trivialize her grief, they ridiculed her. They did not understand that her bond with her cat gave her a sense of safety and belonging which compensated for their inadequate caretaking and weak attachment to her.

### **Using the Resource Sandwich for Calming and Soothing**

I ask the client to picture the grieving, four-year-old part of her nestled in between the PTS and CAS. I may suggest she imagine the PTS and CAS holding hands, forming a circle by their arms, so she can feel comfortably contained inside their arms. The grieving part is allowed to position the PTS and CAS the ideal distance away – for optimal comfort. These resources offer positive, loving, emotional support, and the four-year-old is given permission to grieve as long as she needs to. I might say, "Notice how loving and supportive they are with you now. Notice how they accept you no matter what you feel." If she sinks into the trauma I will gently remind her the trauma will be processed later and refocus her attention on the wonderful resources now meeting her need to grieve. Usually this sort of grief resolves very nicely and the client begins to report a calming. This works when the resources are open, loving, and undisturbed by the distress of the troubled part.

### **Using the Resource Sandwich for Needs Meeting**

With the four-year-old nestled in between the PTS and the CAS, I say to her, "What do you need most right now?" She might answer, "To be accepted" I then say, "And can the [PTS] and [CAS] meet this need for you now?" Her answer is likely to be "Yes, they can". I then say, "Notice that" and strengthen it with bilateral stimulation. After awhile I say, "Now what do you notice in your body?" As this need is being met she reports feeling better. I then say, "Let me know when it isn't strengthening any more." Once it has finished strengthening I ask, "What else do you need?" She might say, "To be held", and I'll say, "Can the [PTS] and [CAS] meet this need for you now?" She says "Yes" and I strengthen it too with bilateral stimulation. I'll repeat the process as many times as needed until she says she has no more unmet needs. This intervention is very powerful. It is important not to rush this process. In some cases it might take a whole session or more for a troubled part to feel all needs are met. Typical needs reported include need for safety, protection, attention, affection, love, independence, and so forth. (See table below.) One client told me a young part's need was to

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<sup>1[1]</sup> The Resource Sandwich described here differs from Sandra Paulsen's (2000) Resource Installation Sandwich, which involves a resource installation, followed by trauma processing, followed by another resource installation.

be left alone. I probed a bit and learned this part really wanted a secure attachment and connection but only knew being left alone or being harassed. We successfully met this part's need for attachment.

Age	Some Typical Needs
0-1 year	Food, Safety, Nurturing, Warmth, Love, Attachment to Caretaker, Attunement with Caretaker
1-3 years	All age 0-1 needs <i>plus...</i> Reassurance, Unconditional acceptance, Good correction, Praise, Respect, Play, Consistency, Stimulating stuff to explore, Freedom to develop sense of self control
3-6 years	All age 0-3 needs <i>plus...</i> Encouragement, Validation, Approval for accomplishments, Opportunities for expression, Opportunities to make things, Opportunities to master activities
6-12 or so	All age 0-6 needs <i>plus...</i> Learning opportunities, Mastery opportunities, Intellectual challenges, Physical challenges, Freedom to develop and express opinions
12-18 or so	All age 0-12 needs <i>plus...</i> Freedom to begin separating from parents, Freedom to find a sense of identity, Encouragement and support for making education and occupational decisions

### Using the Resource Sandwich to Create a Secure Attachment

With the death of her cat, the four-year-old is painfully reminded of how much her connection to mom is missing intimacy and closeness. After doing some needs meeting work, I ask the four-year-old to look into the eyes of the CAS and to tell me what she sees. Typical answers are “kindness,” “love,” and “caring.” I ask if there is a bond forming with the CAS. When she says “yes” I strengthen the bond with bilateral stimulation. Sometimes there are fears and blocking beliefs that interfere with bonding. For example, many clients have reported a fear that, in attaching to the CAS, they betray their real mom. I offer a metaphor about gassing the car for a long drive. “It takes \$10 worth of gas to drive to the next town. Paid the pump \$10 but only got \$5 worth of gas. Half way to the next town had to pull over and put more gas in the car. Is this betraying the first gas station?” I emphasize that meeting needs in the present moment will not alter past events or harm past relationships in any way. Another blocking fear is that the CAS will abandon her after their bond is formed, as others have abandoned her in the past. I validate this fear, then compare and contrast the nurturing traits of the CAS with caretakers from the past. It usually doesn't take long for the differences to be clear, and the attachment can begin to form. Reassuring words from the CAS to the fearful child can be very helpful here.

### Using the Resource Sandwich for Processing Anger

Our four-year-old is still angry with her parents for ridiculing her and trivializing her grief. She has a need to express her anger and can easily do so within the safety of the Resource Sandwich. As she expresses the anger, by crying, screaming, punching, or whatever, I remind her that the PTS and CAS care about her, support her, and cheer her on. I make sure this is a very safe container for letting any and all feelings come up, and emphasize they are being acknowledged and honored. I encourage her to take as long as she needs to be with her anger, and keep reminding her she has all the support she needs from PTS and CAS now. It is remarkable how quickly anger dissipates with this intervention.

### Paring Down the CAS

Sometimes a troubled part that's nestled in the Resource Sandwich will report a sudden aversion to the CAS. Exploring further I learn that the CAS has acquired a few judgmental thoughts. I remind the client that these resources are simply neural networks – or packages of information in the brain. I ask that she pare down the size of the CAS to just those traits the troubled child part needs now. This can have an immediate positive result, and the young part needing nurturing opens to the loving support of the modified CAS.

### When to Use the Resource Sandwich

There are times it is not necessary to use a Resource Sandwich before processing trauma. However, when a client reports present day attachment problems and a history of childhood neglect, abuse, or enmeshment, it may be safer and faster to start with meeting needs. I often find that, as the needs of a particular developmental stage get completely met, the traumas from that stage partially or completely desensitize automatically. I use

trauma-focused protocols after needs meeting, as needed, to desensitize traumas that needs meeting work missed.

## **Conclusions**

I am consistently amazed with the outcomes of using the Resource Sandwich. Other clinicians who try it report remarkable results as well. My clients are reporting greater affect tolerance, diminishing attachment disorder symptoms, and increased self-esteem. They report using the Resource Sandwich between sessions for self-soothing. I integrate the Resource Sandwich with trauma processing by constantly reminding clients of their current secure attachments to their CAS and PTS. Furthermore, I am experimenting with using the Resource Sandwich chronologically, meeting the clients' needs from the earliest days of life forward, making developmental repairs in the order the deficits occurred. Resource Sandwich approach is not for every client, but when it works it's wonderful.

I consider this a work in progress and encourage feedback. I can be contacted at (210) 561-9200 or at [sjs@shirleyjeanschmidt.com](mailto:sjs@shirleyjeanschmidt.com).

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