

FROM
ATTUNEMENT TO
ATTACHMENT

*Supporting a Survivor
Through Recovery*

BY SHARRI BURGGRAAF

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My husband Frank has been my biggest supporter for 34 years. He was the first person who showed me love, respect, and treated me like a lady. He asked me if he could hold my hand. He asked me if he could kiss me. He held me while I cried a river that seemed like it would never end as I had emotional flashbacks. He loved me and stuck with me through flashbacks that were so horrific I just wanted to die. We learned together what worked and what didn't work as I told him what I needed and told him what was not helpful for me. He was safe, supportive, and willing to stay with me during fearful nights that were long and hard without getting much sleep. This ebook comes out of those years with the experience of finding out what we as survivors need. What worked for me may not necessarily work for you. We are each unique individuals with different experiences and differing needs. I'm praying that this book brings hope and healing in your recovery and in the life of someone you support.

From Attunement to Attachment

Attunement is the reactivity we have to another person as we show them that we care and is the process by which we form trusting relationships. Secure attachment is established through attunement in infancy. It was very hard for me as it is for all survivors who were not given the care or connection needed as a child, to emotionally connect to a therapist, support person or have close relationships especially if you've developed an insecure attachment style because of trauma. For me to have healing and develop a healthy attachment with others and myself, it was important to have this from my therapist and support person. And to give these things to myself. How does a person give attunement and create an environment that is conducive to forming attachment? By offering a safe presence, providing meaningful reflection, guidance, helping me learn to set boundaries, regulate my emotions, and gain self awareness that led to positive change, growth and secure

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attachment with my inner selves and others. My husband Frank who has been my biggest support person for 34 years gave me love for the first time in my life. Because of his love and compassion and the safety I felt with him, I was able to learn how to trust, and began my healing journey. I started remembering my abuse that had been completely blocked out. I went to therapy, but he was my greatest support. I would like to share with you the things during my recovery that I found to be the most helpful for me to achieve the attunement and attachment I needed that I wasn't given as a child and that I could learn to give myself and the things my husband did to best support me. If you are a support person or therapist for a survivor these are things that can be helpful for you to know. These came out of our 34 year journey together and was most relevant to my healing. As I became like my own parent or own mother I was able to need this from others less and less and be able to give these things to myself.

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Promoting Trust

Trust is damaged for survivors during abuse. A large percent of abusers are someone that the victim knows and loves, not a stranger from down the street like children are warned about. For a survivor to learn how to trust, a support person needs to be reliable. If you say you're going to do something, then you need to follow through with it. Saying that you will do something and then not showing up or not doing what you say you were going to do can cause a survivor to feel more mistrust. Of course, things come up that are completely out of our control, but being as trustworthy as you possibly can is very important for a survivor to have healing of that damage that betrayed trust can cause. Being reliable can give a survivor stability in a relationship and promote the trust that is so desperately needed. Being dependable, being consistent, and predictable provides stability and is a foundation that a healthy relationship is built on. Be there.

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Be genuine without teasing or saying or doing things to cause them to question their reality. Otherwise it can feel like being tricked or not being supported. Some people in an effort to show affection will tease and not realize how harmful that can be. It may be what was done to them in their family. It is important for a survivor to be able to say what they need. No one can read another person's mind. Be truthful. It is always best to be genuine and authentic. This gives the survivor permission to be real with you in return. Believing what the survivor says is paramount, no matter how bizarre or how outrageous what they remember or went through sounds. Not being believed is retraumatizing and harmful and could be a setback. Support them so that when they are having feelings they can emotionally regulate. Processing emotions is an important part of healing. Give guidance and offer information that could be helpful for them. Make suggestions if they ask for feedback. Don't give advice or your opinion unless they ask you for it.

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Soothe with appropriate safe touch. Touch can diffuse anger and help the other person to emotionally regulate by helping them to feel grounded. This can facilitate a part who may be feeling afraid to know that they are safe and can help bring the person back to the present day. Encourage them to trust their own reality. Showing them affection can help them to know that you care. Give comfort using kind words. **Connecting** Put yourself in their shoes to give them connection and compassion at the same time. Allow them to be their genuine authentic self/selves. By seeing things from their perspective even if you disagree you are letting them know that you understand. Be attentive to nonverbal clues and body language (facial expressions, body posture). Ask first but holding the other person without expectations (appropriate safe touch) can help them to feel the love and support there is from you while connecting at the same time. This need can change depending on emotions and what part is

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Receiving Being receptive, by being fully present can let the other person feel that you are receiving what they are saying. . Nodding, making eye contact goes a long ways to attune with the other person. Actively listening without trying to fix the other person can be hard to do, especially when you care about the survivor and it's hard to see them in pain. Allowing them to express their feelings and to go into flashbacks is best. Reflect back what they've said by repeating back to them what you heard them say and ask if you heard them correctly. Perhaps not with everything that they have said but enough so they know that you heard them. Have a positive expression on your face. (like smiling at them). Don't give your personal feelings on the topic while they're sharing. Keep that for a later time unless they want feedback.

Encouraging Be warm and friendly. Affirm and validate their feelings and experience. Wait for a break as you listen,

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then name what you notice. Thank them for being brave and courageous enough to share. Tell them that it's reasonable and normal to have these feelings for what they went through. Be aware of and process your own emotions, talking with a therapist, if necessary.

Being attentive Turn towards the person you are with. Make eye contact. Have a friendly posture. Give of your time. Actively listen without interrupting. Give them space. Show empathy. Allow them to express all of their emotions. *Note* Without getting defensive or taking it personal. (Especially true with anger) . If you have a tendency to react with defensiveness when you know someone is angry, take a few deep breaths and then respond in a loving way instead of reacting. Reflect back to them what you hear them saying and feeling.

By doing all of these things you send the message without saying a word that "I am here with you".

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Having open and honest conversations with each other goes a long way towards having a healthy meaningful connection. Communication is an essential part of any relationship and is a two way street. However, there are times that a survivor may need more of your presence, support and comfort, especially during times of flashbacks. The extra time it takes to be there for a survivor can leave a support person feeling like they are not getting their own needs met. Navigating a relationship where trauma is involved can be extra difficult but not impossible. It's important for a support person to be able to express their feelings and thoughts and say what they are going through. During times of triggers and flashbacks this may need to wait until the storm is over and the survivor is emotionally regulated. When a person is having intense emotions or reactions, their logic and ability to think or reason is effected. Neurologically our brain can not process information at that point. Allowing them the time they need to go through the abreactions from the past

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is key. Waiting until the person is more calm and is neurologically capable of hearing you is essential. Being patient with them and waiting until an opportune time may be inconvenient but will go much better for both people. Then the survivor can effectively listen and be able to receive what you have to say. Women process emotions differently than men; usually by talking. Let them take the time to journal, talk with their therapist. There may be times you will need to take off work when there is a crisis especially during the early days of recovery as the survivor may be just surviving. Both of you will learn how to balance everything. There will be times that you are not able to be there because of work or other responsibilities and you may have to set boundaries when necessary but reassure them that you are there when you can be. Having your own therapist or someone to talk to while the survivor is going through extra rough times can get you through an exceptionally hard time so that you can

process your own emotions. Knowing that these times usually end up being their biggest breakthroughs can help to give you a motivation to wait it out with them. The support person's thoughts and emotions are just as important as the survivors. It may seem unfair or out of balance when in a relationship with a survivor. If you can remind yourself that you want the best possible outcome for the person's recovery and that they are someone you love or care about, this can help you to be more willing to make sacrifices and set your own needs aside temporarily. Conflicts are bound to come up especially when a survivor gets triggered and responds in a protective way. Your knee jerk reaction may be to become defensive and react to protect yourself from what feels like an attack. Try identifying your emotions and what the protective response the survivor is having is bringing up in you. It may be fear from the child that you were. Take some deep breaths, take a step back and then you can respond more lovingly instead of just

reacting, becoming defensive or taking it personally. Conflicts can be opportunities to learn about ourselves as well as the other person. Looking at the areas in our lives that need improvement can produce growth and change in our own character. Resolution can come when we take responsibility for our own actions, take a look at ourselves and see what we need to do to improve, and learn to respond to each other in kind ways. A survivor of trauma will give as much as they can when they can. I know many times I felt guilty for being such a burden on my husband. He reminded me each time I shared those thoughts and feelings with him how I was there for him too in so many ways when I could be and how the love that I showed him in between the flashbacks and the struggles were what kept him going. As a survivor it was important for me to have my husband support me, but I also went to several support groups so that I wasn't just relying solely on him for support. It was important for both of us to have time with

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our friends and family, time to engage in our own hobbies and interests as well as time for self care and time to ourselves. Having a date night or time set aside to do something fun together helped to lighten the mood and have a distraction from the serious effects of trauma. Being on a healing journey is hard work and takes a lot out of both people. Having some laughs and time to relax together as well as apart can be just what is needed to be ready for another round of recovery and be just what the relationship needs. When both people unite together dedicated to do what it takes to get through recovery with the relationship intact there really is nothing the two of you can't get through, being willing to do what it takes. Both people need to be determined to do what is best at any given moment to make sure the survivor feels safe and they can have the best possible outcome in times of flashbacks as well as learning how to thrive and have a life worth living now.

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Sharri Burggraaf is a warrior, wife, mother, Nana, a survivor of extreme abuse RA/MC (Ritual Abuse and Mind Control) which is a documented reality for far too many. She is an example for other survivors that a person can go through anything and come out on the other side of just surviving, to start thriving and living life more abundantly with DID. First diagnosed in the early 1990's, with what she says is not a disorder but the body's amazing response to trauma, she began recovery helping other survivors along the way, She started a non profit organization titled S.H.O.U.T. for Help (Survivors Helping Others Unite Together) and put together a National 3 day Conference in 1994 in Des Moines, IA. After a break in her recovery, she then came back more dedicated than ever to do what it takes to heal. As passionate as she is about her own recovery, she has a desire and love to speak out for those who can't yet speak for themselves encouraging them to find their own voice, sharing the hope that she has been given in hopes that they find their me, the person God created them to be. She leads, braves and paves the way for others to follow their own path individually. She now shines more brightly because she has had much deliverance from the darkness she was born into and advocates for others to do the same while continuing her own healing. She lives in Iowa with her husband Frank.