

EP. 50_ Working With Our Young...Selves to Deepen Queer Healing

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Hi there, welcome to the Second Adolescence podcast here we talk about all things queer healing and Second Adolescence. So what is Second Adolescence you might ask? Second Adolescence is a sort of developmental life stage queer people navigate in our post coming out adult years after growing up within an anti queer world for many second adolescence is about healing the wounds of our younger queer selves, gaining the experiences they missed out on and unlocking what it means for us to exist as our most free and true selves. I am your host, Adam, James Cohen, psychotherapist and human who went through his own second adolescence today, it's gonna be just you and me spending some time together chatting about a topic that comes up in nearly every place I talk about Second Adolescence, avid listeners of the show, and folks who are part of our Instagram community know how I often reference the concept of our younger selves. It's everywhere I talk about Second Adolescence, I tend to bring in this lens or some reference to our younger selves because our younger selves or rather, our relationship with our younger selves is integral to this whole framework of Second Adolescence. And that's what Second Adolescence really is. It's a framework for queer healing frameworks are conceptual structures that guide the creation of something and in the lens of healing, a framework for healing is essentially a theoretical approach to how that healing can occur. And I've developed Second Adolescence as a framework for queer healing. And key to this framework is the idea of working with our younger selves in various ways in the process. And so I want to take some more time in this episode to chat about this because I often get asked questions about our younger selves, like how do we be in relationship with our younger selves? Or why do we need to be what exactly does this look like? So we're gonna spend some time with this today? So first, let's talk about why like why is it beneficial for us queer people to work with our younger selves, like whether in personal exploration in therapy, or ever why is this an effective and I'd argue necessary component for the queer person seeking to live a happy, healthy, liberated, empowered adult life. Why bother with this? And look, I can totally understand folks who hold this why bother belief many with difficult paths have developed resilience and have gotten through life to reach an adulthood they like despite perhaps harder times growing up, they've adapted to their circumstances, perhaps gotten themselves out of harmful circumstances, and are just eager to keep looking forward. Many of these people might

ask like, What good does it do for me to revisit childhood or adolescence, particularly when they were times of pain or shame, or trauma or other harm? Well, the reason really boils down to this, it is part of the human condition to be impacted and shaped by our experiences growing up. And when we experience pain, shame, and trauma as younger people, particularly pain, shame and trauma that at the time, we did not have the tools or resources to process and actively heal, the impact of these wounds still reside within us, we've just gotten better at adapting in spite of them. Simply put, we all carry the wounds of our younger selves, and it is a missed opportunity to not tend to them because like ghosts with unfinished business, the wounds of our younger selves, if left untended, can remain within us like a toxin and come out in ways that ultimately don't serve us. For nearly every queer person who is an adult. Today, we grew up in a world that did harm us in ways we are aware of, and perhaps in ways we aren't aware of we grew up in a world that sent direct and indirect messaging about the wrongness of who we gradually came to understand we were this happened within our schools, friend groups, families, sports teams, religious circles, and other relationships and communities at the local level, as well as through the greater beliefs perpetuated by our macro culture that really centered and empowered heteronormativity, cis normativity and anti queerness. And whether consciously or unconsciously, just about all of our younger selves experienced harm because of this, and this is just regarding our queerness additional layers of harm. We're of course likely experienced for folks who hold other aspects of identities oppressed and marginalized in our culture, and our experience other types of traumas or situations that caused harm for them in their younger years. So yes, pretty much all of our younger selves experienced harm by growing up in a world that did not always make them feel like they could belong. And even if you're someone who now feels such a sense of belonging, who now has community that affirms and lifts you up, who feels empowered Howard in different parts of your life like there's still likely benefit and perhaps even need to give space to address what younger you navigated and beyond the fact that there's likely wounds at Sony attending it is also just it's helpful to be in relationship with our younger selves simply as an effective psychological tool for any and all processing and personal growth and development work. It continues to be proven, endorsed and reinforced within the greater field of psychology that we humans are meaning making beings Our minds have evolved to needing to categorize and make sense of our experiences. This can happen in the unconscious mind in the form of internalized unconscious belief systems and in the conscious mind in terms of how we make sense of our own story and examining understanding and honoring the experiences of our younger selves is key to this whole process like bottom line, it only serves us to give intentional space to do this work. And within the lens of second adolescence, in particular, I've seen that folks who are able to have a deep and accessible relationship to their younger selves tend to have greater outcomes in their own healing and liberation process. The reason for this is that so much of second adolescence involves healing and growing parts of ourselves that were wounded and stunted by the trauma of growing up in anti queer world, all of the internalized shame, all the nests experiences and more. Second adolescence involves addressing these wounds, these unmet needs these missed experiences of our younger selves, and finally, ending to them now, there is a direct line between what we're trying to do now as adults, and what we weren't able to do as younger people. And because there is this direct line, second, adolescence presents non stop opportunities to be in relationship with our younger selves as we go, offering healing to them, and offering healing to us now. So all of that is why it can be so helpful and again, perhaps necessary for us to work with our younger selves. And so now let's step into how and what like how do we do this? And what exactly does this look like? Okay, to do so I guess, a first recommendation for a mindset to take with regards to our younger selves is this, it is helpful to essentially see them as their own entities in a way, their own characters in our own life story, our four year old self as their own entity, our 10 year old self, our capital N, capital S, middle school self, our 16 year old self, we want to be able to hold each of these as their own being

and be able to externalize them as their own being when we are doing the psychological work with them. And the reason why is because when we externalize a part of us say a younger self, or even other parts of us, like our anxiety or depression, when we externalize a part of us to become its own separate entity, more psychological space gets created between our core self today as an adult, and that one aspect of our story and having this psychological space is what gives us the ability to really work with these parts of us in a deep and meaningful way, versus them all just being kind of blurred within us. In different forms of therapy and psychological healing, we seek to both understand how we are made up of so many different parts and also seek to have the psychological flexibility to separate out and extrapolate individual parts of us in times when it serves us to really do so and holding our younger selves in this way. And seeing them as parts within us really allows us to separate out and engage them along our healing path. And okay, you might be wondering, Okay, so what's an example of when we might want to do this? What's an example of when having this psychological flexibility to externalize and engage our younger self can be a super beneficial one in support of the growth and healing of ourselves within second adolescence? Well, first, I just want to highlight how this whole idea of looking at how to engage our younger selves is really just a tool to deepen the healing that is all ready happening just by living our lives and our second adolescence living this life that you know, for many didn't feel accessible to us when we were closeted, or otherwise unable to live fully as our true selves. By simply going after the life we want by coming out by having more and more people know our full self by having dating experiences by finding queer community by having fun by simply pursuing a life that feels full and enjoyable and fulfilling. In all of this. The queer person is naturally healing. And this whole notion of developing and maintaining relationship with our younger selves is just a way to deepen different parts of our healing and liberation process. So for example, think about a meaningful and enjoyable experience of queer joy that happened recently for you. That was not something younger you was able to experience like perhaps this is a moment of you hanging out with a friend who knows and celebrates all of your identities, and you feel so comfortable around, or perhaps this was you recently being on a date, or having an exciting sexual experience, or we're out having fun in some primarily queer space, or we're snuggling on the couch with a partner Pick, pick one moment, okay, first, again, just getting that experience, which for you now, maybe something you're super used to, or maybe something that is still new, just getting that experience in itself is healing, you're getting to live life much different than when you were closeted, or otherwise not living as your true self. Like that, in itself is powerful. But a deeper level of impact might come by engaging our younger self in this experience, and ways to do this can range from simply thinking about our younger selves, like, oh man, 16 year old me would be so pumped now I get to do this now. Or I can feel 15 year old me being so excited right now. So it can range from just thinking about our younger selves in this way to creating space to more intentionally connect with them. Okay, what do I mean by Connect? Well, an exercise I often lead folks through is one where they use the tool of imagination to find this connection with their younger selves. In this case, after reflecting about a recent experience of queer joy, for example, I then invite the person to see if a particular younger version of them comes to mind as being one who would have been blown away and so excited to get to have this experience, perhaps that's 12 year old them, 16 year old them 19 year old them, ask them to kind of notice, okay, which younger self really comes up, when we think about this experience, then I'd invite the person to bring that younger them to life a bit more, I'd have them close their eyes and allow themselves to see this younger version of them in their mind, seeing what they are wearing, what their body postures, like what facial expressions they make, just really bringing the image of this younger self to life, and also referring to them as their own separate identity, or a separate entity, like I talked about earlier, like calling them younger me or fill in the blank year old me, then I'd invite the person to see if they can connect to how that younger them in their mind feels like what does it feel like being that younger them

really inviting the person to see if they can feel in their body now what it felt like when they were them when they were that younger them moving through the world, really connecting with younger them on the feelings level. And then once the person has the image of younger them and can feel a bit what they are feeling, I then invite them to notice how it feels to be connected with this younger them in this way, like how does it feel to see and feel them noticing whatever feelings come up, which can range from grief, to care to everything in between just noticing these feelings. And also noticing if there is any message or words the person feels pulled to say to this younger them. Perhaps it's Oh, it's nice to be with you or I see you and feel you here with me or I love you or really whatever comes to mind. Then coming back to the experience of queer joy we are wanting to breathe more intentional healing and to invite the person to bring back to mind this experience that would have made this younger them so pumped again, that date that hanging out with a friend being their full self, that sexual experience, whatever it was. So thinking about that experience, and then really begin to share with this younger them about this recent experience. So whether in their mind, or even speaking aloud, I really invite the person to show younger than what that experience was and how it felt having it showing younger them this is something finally happening for you. I invite the person to notice what it feels like to be able to show this to this younger them and also notices if they sense what it is like for younger than to see it how they might feel. For many in this process. There can be again a range of feelings brought up joy or grief, anger, excitement, we want to have feelings evoked because these are what we then can work deeper with. Someone might say, gosh, it was really painful for me to see younger me there's a lot of pain still there. Or I might say oh, it was so nice to feel younger me's and joy and seeing we are finally getting to have these experiences they wanted or man it was really hard to feel that younger me was still so upset that he didn't get to have these experiences in his own time, like a wide range of reactions can come up and within each reaction is essentially more material that is being called to be processed and work with engaging our younger selves is a path to evoke and unlock some unprocessed parts of our experience still held within us. And this specific tool of using imagination to create this line of connection between us and our younger selves can be used in so many other scenarios. goes another big one is in supporting our grief process within second adolescence really acknowledging and moving with the grief that comes for so many queer adults and second adolescence when processing the fact that our younger selves didn't get the adolescence and life we wish they could have. I really laid this out in the earlier episode of the show called The grief within second adolescence just about after Episode 10, I believe and illustrate how we can use the same general approach to working with our younger selves in that way. And I show in that episode a level kind of deeper than how we're engaging now how we can engage with our younger selves and something that's called an imaginative dialogue back and forth and how this is a therapeutic tool for really helping us heal pain from our younger years. I've also found this to be super helpful when helping queer people who are trying to heal and let go of various forms of shame that they are still impacted by as adults that they came to internalize as younger people. So lots of different types of shame, for example, like internalized shame that makes people feel uncomfortable with queer public displays of affection, even in safe queer spaces, or for shame around sexual desire or For shame that leads to perfectionism being a driving part of the person's experience today, all the different ways that shame can be getting in the way of the life they're wanting for themselves as adults. And it's just so effective to work with our younger selves in the process, because they were the ones who first internalize the shame beliefs to begin with the task. Then here, when working with our younger selves with such interventions as this imaginative dialog where we are seeing and talking to our younger selves, the task is to from our wise adult mind, help them unlearn that shame belief talking with them about how we empathically understand how they came to believe that given their circumstances, but also how this was so not okay, and so not true, and how we want them to see that things are different now. And this thing does not have

to come with any shame anymore. It is something they can feel empowered by, like, essentially, we're working with our younger selves through what I call like retroactive healing. And because we hold these beliefs and wounds of our younger selves, still, when we help them heal from them, we in turn heal. When we help them feel less shame. We feel ashamed. It's just really cool. I mean, it's cool, yes, but also, the warning is that it can also be painful. And that is the kind of warning if you will, for creating space to intentionally work with and connect with our younger self. Because a lot can be brought up in the process. It can be hard, it can be unsettling, it can be painful. And that's why it's so important and beneficial to do this work in a space that feels contained and safe like therapy, because so much can come up. But again, we want this stuff to come up because like goes with unfinished business, the wounds of our younger selves that we hold within. If left untended, can remain within us like those toxins that interrupt the life we want for ourselves, it is so helpful and important to find ways to be in relationship with our younger selves, whether through thought like six year old me would love this or this act of imagination exercise I was talking about in this episode, or keeping photos of your child and adolescent selves around to daily see and give them love or writing letters to your younger self to share about your life now and reflect your awareness of what life was like for them. And, and sidebar like this last bit about reflecting your awareness of what life was like for them like this can't be underlined enough. This is such an important component to this whole work of working with our younger selves, it is so helpful to really have the experiences of our younger self be seen. So many of us as younger people didn't feel seen, didn't feel able to be seen didn't share what we were actually feeling or didn't understand what we were actually feeling. Because of these blocks. It is so helpful as adults to find ways to help the experiences of our younger selves be acknowledged, be reflected, be validated, and be given compassion. This is the essence and the crux of why we want to find ways to engage our younger selves we want to help them feel seen and all the ways they didn't. We want to help them feel understood in all the ways they didn't we want to help them feel more okay, in all the ways they didn't. This is the power of working with our younger selves. This is okay. There's more to say. But that was a lot that I just threw at you. Digest, reflect, do what you need. But I wanted to share all this today because I wanted to send out an invitation essentially for you to think about if you feel a pull to more intentionally develop and engage relationship with your younger selves and in what ways feel most true and interesting for you. Like I said before we all carry the wounds of our younger selves. We also carry the opportunity to bring healing to these wounds and joy to these younger us as we hold within. Okay, more to come. As always. Thank you so much for being here Before you go, a couple things. Ff after listening to today's episode you notice having a particular question you'd be curious to hear talked about or a comment you'd like to make and have these be included in a future q&a episode of the show, head on over to secondadolescencepod.com/ask to submit this for show notes of today's episode, visit the episodes page of secondadolescencepod.com And if you're interested in coming on to be a future guests of the show, visit secondadolescencepod.com/beaguest to submit your interest there. And as always, check out our Instagram at [@secondadolescencepod](https://www.instagram.com/secondadolescencepod) for continued dialogue on all things Second Adolescence. Okay, that's it for me for now. Whether it's morning, afternoon, night, wherever we're finding you and your day. I hope you continue to go out there and keep doing things that would make younger you absolutely thrilled. That is what it's all about. All right. Till next time, take good care.