

This is a profound shift in therapeutic focus—from asking “*What happened to you?*” to also asking “*What did not happen for you?*” This reframing moves attention from trauma as a punctuated event to developmental absence—what was missing in the emotional, relational, and environmental scaffolding of the self. Here's a synthesized view of what a model might look like, grounded in developmental, psychoanalytic, and ecological-spiritual thought.

Developmental Absence Therapy Model (DATM)

“Healing what was missing, not just what went wrong.”

Chapter 1

1. The Core Assumption

Symptoms emerge not only from traumatic events, but also from developmental non-events—missing experiences of attunement, recognition, security, and play.

This aligns with:

- **D.W. Winnicott:** *The absence of a “good-enough mother” leads to false self formations.*
 - **Allan Schore:** Right-brain attunement deficits cause long-term affect dysregulation.
 - **Attachment theorists:** Disorganized or absent caregiving leads to insecure internal working models.
 - **Thomas Berry:** Modern dislocation stems from lack of deep connection to community, cosmos, and the sacred Earth.
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2. Therapeutic Questions Shift

Traditional Trauma-Focused Inquiry

“What happened to you that caused this pain?”

DATM-Oriented Inquiry

“What needed to happen that never did?”

Traditional Trauma-Focused Inquiry

“How were you hurt?”

“What did you survive?”

DATM-Oriented Inquiry

“Where were you not seen, not held, not invited?”

“What did you miss out on growing into?”

3. Domains of Developmental Absence

Domain	What Was Missing	Clinical Symptoms
Relational/Attachment	Emotional attunement, mirroring	Shame, abandonment fears, anxious clinging
Play and Creativity	Safe, spontaneous play	Rigidity, anxiety, perfectionism
Recognition	Being delighted in	Core self-doubt, impostor syndrome
Containment	A holding environment for emotion	Flooding, dissociation, emotional dysregulation
Symbolic/Spiritual	Introduction to meaningful rituals and story	Existential void, disconnection, despair

4. Therapeutic Methods for What Didn't Happen

A. Relational Re-Patterning

- Using the therapeutic alliance as a *holding environment*
- Co-regulation and micro-attunement in sessions
- Allowing developmental "do-overs" (e.g., reparenting experiences)

B. Evoking the Imaginal and Symbolic

- Use of guided imagery, storytelling, or art to access lost inner worlds
- Dream work as access to latent developmental longings
- Engaging “potential space” (Winnicott) as sacred ground for becoming

C. Ritual & Communal Repair

- Creating rites of passage that were missed (e.g., initiation, grief rituals)
- Group work where recognition and witness can happen communally
- Eco-spiritual practices to restore connection to world as holding system

D. Narrative Reconstruction

- Mapping emotional fields and family systems not for pathology, but for **absence**
 - Naming the silence or “blank spaces” that shaped identity
 - Authoring “counter-scripts” rooted in possibility and grace
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5. Example: Gregory’s Lineage of Absence

- **Missing Attunement:** Father, shaped by war, unable to offer emotional warmth
 - **Missing Story:** Family avoids talking about grief and war
 - **Present Symptoms:** Stoicism, internalized guilt, difficulty with softness
 - **Healing Movement:** Gregory participates in art-based therapy, exploring childhood longings. Ritual to name what never came. Begins to offer emotional presence to his children.
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6. Philosophical & Theological Grounding

- **Tillich’s “Courage to Be”:** Acknowledging existential anxiety rooted in absence, and being accepted *in spite of* it.
 - **Charles Gerkin:** Pastoral presence can become the very “holding environment” needed for missed developmental grounding.
 - **Feminist Theology (e.g., Luce Irigaray):** Restoration of mutual becoming in spaces of absence—especially maternal and relational fields.
 - **Ecozoic Thought (Berry, Macy):** Re-rooting the self in a cosmic belonging that was severed by industrial disconnection.
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7. Outcome Vision: What Healing Looks Like

- Re-creation of internal structures that were never built
 - Freedom to play, create, relate—without shame or guardedness
 - Restoration of trust: in others, in the world, and in one’s unfolding self
 - Development not just arrested or rewired—but gently restarted, within community
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Chapter 2

A chapter that integrates:

- Core material from the *Belief Systems Therapy Workbook*, including specific exercises like 'Born onto a Stage' and 'Mapping the Emotional World'
- Foundational elements of the Ecozoic Bridge framework, with its emphasis on ecological-spiritual renewal
- Three additions: visual mapping (especially of what developmentally *didn't* happen), a self-help lens for those seeking change (like in the recovery movement), and liturgical/spiritual practices for healing and transformation. This will be written for a general audience, especially those seeking growth, healing, and transformation outside of traditional clinical settings.

Integrating Personal Change and Ecological Spirituality

Many people in recovery or self-help communities discover that personal growth involves not just new actions but new stories about themselves. One powerful metaphor is that we were “**born onto a stage**” with no script. This means from childhood we internalize roles (hero, scapegoat, etc.) based on how our parents and culture responded to us. In **Belief Systems Therapy**, Gregory Wilson uses this idea to help people examine those hidden scripts and beliefs. For example, his core tool – the **Map of the Emotional World** – is “a quick and easy way to gain useful insights about the lasting effects of early life experiences” on our adult relationships. In practice, one exercise invites you to imagine the family “play” and ask, *What role did I learn I had?* reflecting on how that stage script still influences feelings today.

Exercises for Self-Insight: In a self-help chapter like this, we’d introduce concrete steps. For instance:

- *Born onto a Stage:* Envision yourself as a newborn entering a family drama. Ask what role you were assigned (hero, lost child, etc.) and how it made you feel. This can reveal hidden messages you grew up with.

- *Mapping the Emotional World*: List core emotions (anger, shame, joy, etc.) and trace each to childhood memories. This exercise (from Wilson’s model) shows how early events “map out” in your present life.
- *Triangles and Boundaries*: Many believe-systems models include identifying unhealthy relational triangles (conflict patterns) and practicing setting boundaries. Wilson’s workbook (for example) discusses **Triangles in Relationships** and Family Roles (Hero, Scapegoat, Lost Child, Mascot) to illuminate personal patterns. Working through these helps people in recovery stop repeating old scripts.

Each exercise is followed by journaling or discussion prompts, making the process concrete. The emphasis is on awareness: noticing how childhood “scripts” and cultural beliefs (like “I must always please others”) drive current behavior. By **rewriting** these beliefs, one can change how one feels and acts.

Bridging Inner Work with Nature’s Wisdom

True change often feels supported by something larger than ourselves. The **Ecozoic** vision (an emerging ecological age named by Thomas Berry) holds that healing involves reconnecting with Earth as well as self. In this sense, recovery and codependency work can borrow rituals from Earth-based spirituality to **bridge** inner transformation and ecological awareness. Thomas Berry even spoke of a “**cosmic liturgy**” – celebrating the cycles of nature as sacred drama. In his words, when we align with the “ever-renewing cycles of nature” (the flowers blooming, seasons changing, etc.), we become “celebrants of this vast cosmic liturgy”.

What might that look like in practice? Self-help groups can incorporate simple ecological rituals or liturgical elements such as:

- **Seasonal Earth Ceremonies**: Mark events like Spring Equinox or Winter Solstice together. For example, a group might plant bulbs or seeds in spring as a symbol of new growth, or light candles at the darkest point of winter while sharing intentions. In one account, a community held a *Samhain* (All Hallows) vigil: each person lit a candle from a **sacred flame** and brought natural offerings (flowers, leaves, moss, dried fruits) as tokens of what they loved about the Earth and life. These offerings were placed in a communal bundle, and everyone later lit their own candle from the flame, creating a period of silence and shared reflection.
- **Animal Blessing / Earth Mass**: Some churches now celebrate the Feast of St. Francis (patron of ecology) with an **animal blessing** and an “Earth Mass.” Composer Paul Winter’s famous *Missa Gaia: Earth Mass* (recorded in 1982) is a model: a musical Mass featuring wolf, whale, and loon voices alongside people, using St.

Francis's *Canticle of the Sun* as text. It is often performed on Earth Day or St. Francis Day, complete with a procession of animals in the liturgy. Such rituals explicitly bless the human-animal-nature connection. Bringing a pet to be blessed, or singing the song of Creation together, can reaffirm that our recovery journey is part of a larger web of life.

- **Community Drumming and Story:** Another example is the *River of Life* ceremony for a dying elder. Participants **brought candles, little instruments, and natural gifts (flowers, moss, fruit)** to a circle, lit their candles from a central flame, and made music together to honor life. They also shared memories aloud as a heartfelt storytelling circle. As one elder observed, the purpose was literally “to bridge between everything and the particular” – to use ritual as the basic way of connecting personal loss to the wider spirit of the world. In this way, grief and gratitude were processed through an ecological lens.
- **Prayer or Meditation Outdoors:** Even quiet practices count. A group might start meetings with a moment of silence in nature, reading a short “Earth prayer,” or practicing mindful walking together. One simple ritual is a **gratitude circle** around a tree or a river: each person speaks a word or sentence of thanks for the natural world. By consciously including Earth in our spiritual life, we transform recovery meetings into eco-spiritual gatherings.

These practices take recovery principles – honesty, acceptance, surrender, community support – and express them in ecological symbols. As one teacher phrased it, **ritual itself can be a bridge**: “To bridge between everything and the particular is the basic ritual.” In other words, through ceremony we literally link the personal (“the particular”) with the universal (“everything”). The result is an **Ecozoic Bridge**: a lived commitment that personal healing and caring for the Earth go hand-in-hand.

Suggestions for Deepening Change

To weave all these ideas together, here are some guiding suggestions in bullet form (adapt these to your situation):

- **Notice Your Inner Story:** Use exercises like *Born onto a Stage* or mapping your emotional world to identify old beliefs (e.g. “I’m not good enough,” “I must please everyone”). Write them down and question them.
- **Practice New Rituals:** Design a small personal or group ritual that acknowledges your journey and the Earth. For example, you might each plant a seed in soil with a spoken intention, or light a candle outside while naming one value you want to grow.

(Even burning an Earth-friendly incense or saying a thankful prayer before a meal can be grounding.)

- **Build Community with Nature:** Share these practices in a supportive circle. Consider reading passages from an “eco-spirituality” source (like Thomas Berry’s **Universe Story** or works on creation care) in your next meeting. Walk together in a park, or end meetings with a communal vow to do one eco-friendly action that day (e.g. caring for a plant, picking up litter).
- **Create Personal Symbols:** You might make a simple “*belonging contract*” with the Earth. For instance, write on a piece of paper: “*I commit to listen to my inner guidance and act for the good of all life.*” Tie it to a tree or place it on your altar as a reminder that your recovery is part of Earth’s recovery.
- **Use Music and Art:** Sing, drum, draw or paint symbols from nature as part of reflection. Playing **Missa Gaia** music or similar eco-spiritual songs during a meditation can open the heart to the larger story.

By combining therapeutic introspection with ecological ritual, people in recovery or codependency support groups can reinforce their personal growth with a sense of meaning and belonging to something greater. This integrated approach reminds us that healing is not just “in our head” – it can be felt in our hearts, our bodies, and even in our relationship with the Earth itself.

Ultimately, this chapter suggests that change involves three interconnected dimensions: (1) rewriting personal beliefs and emotional patterns (using techniques like “Born onto a Stage” and emotional mapping), (2) enacting commitments through rituals that honor both our personal story and the wider ecosystem (blending spiritual and ecological elements), and (3) building community practices that support both recovery and stewardship of the planet. As one participant observed, **everything is spiritual** – our internal journey and our care for Earth arise from the same impulse to restore harmony.

Sources: The ideas and exercises above draw on Belief Systems Therapy by Gregory Wilson, family-role metaphors in the recovery literature, and eco-spiritual resources such as Thomas Berry’s vision of a cosmic liturgy and community ceremony examples. These citations illustrate how modern therapy and eco-spirituality can be integrated to support personal change within a healing Earth context.

Chapter 3

Integrating the Intrusive–Absent–Joining Model with the Developmental Absence Therapy Model (DATM)

Building on our work with Belief Systems Therapy and the Ecozoic Bridge, this exercise shows how to use:

1. Intrusive moments
2. Absent moments
3. Joining moments
4. DATM (Developmental Absence Therapy Model)

to map early relational experiences, uncover negative self-beliefs, and create new, life-affirming bridges.

1. Create Your Three-Layer Map

Draw three concentric circles labeled:

- Inner: Child’s Inner World
 - Middle: Family / Relational Field
 - Outer: Cultural / Ecological Context
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2. Mark Intrusive Moments

- Definition: When a caregiver’s needs or emotions overrode yours.
 - Exercise:
 1. Recall times you felt blamed, silenced, or overwhelmed by another’s emotion.
 2. Shade those spots red on your map.
 3. Next to each, note the internalized message (e.g. “I’m a burden,” “I must be perfect”).
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3. Spot Absent Moments

- Definition: When you needed care or protection—and none came.
 - Exercise:
 1. Recall moments of fear, grief, or confusion without someone to hold you.
 2. Circle them blue.
 3. Write the belief that filled that gap (e.g. “I’m unworthy,” “No one cares”).
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4. Identify Joining Moments

- Definition: When someone attuned to your needs provided age-appropriate care or encouragement.
 - Exercise:
 1. Remember times of genuine comfort or playful support.
 2. Mark them green.
 3. Jot the positive belief that arose (e.g. “I am loved,” “I matter”).
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5. Apply DATM: Developmental Absence Therapy Model

- Definition: DATM focuses on key supportive experiences that never occurred—rituals of initiation, attuned play, storytelling, celebration—critical to healthy development.
 - Exercise:
 1. List 3–5 developmental needs you lacked (e.g. bedtime stories, encouragement of curiosity, acknowledgment of milestones).
 2. Place these as purple “missing bridges” outside your circles.
 3. For each, note how its absence still affects you (e.g. “I struggle to trust my intuition,” “I minimize my own successes”).
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6. Surface Negative Self-Beliefs

- Exercise:
 1. Review your red (intrusive) and blue (absent) markings.
 2. Next to each, record the negative self-belief it reinforced.
 3. Cross-reference with purple DATM items—ask *which beliefs filled these developmental gaps?*
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7. Craft Counter-Belief Statements

Transform each negative belief into an Ecozoic Bridge affirmation:

- “I’m a burden” → “My presence enriches those around me.”
 - “I’m unworthy” → “I deserve care and belonging.”
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8. Ritualizing Repair

- Personal Ritual: Write each counter-belief on a stone or leaf. Plant or place them in a “holding space” (garden corner, altar) to symbolize new growth.
 - Group Practice: In a circle, share one DATM item and its counter-belief. Place a shared object (candle, pebble) on a communal altar, offering mutual witness and support.
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Why This Works

- Intrusive/Absent mapping pinpoints early wounding.
- Joining highlights resilience.
- DATM reveals unbuilt developmental supports.
- Visualization & ritual engage heart, mind, and body—bridging old wounds into new possibility.

“Healing flourishes when we build the bridges our childhood never offered.”

Use this IAJ + DATM process as a core tool on your journey. Your completed map will guide you in authoring a new story—one rooted in care, connection, and ecological belonging.

Chapter 4

Using the **Developmental Absence Therapy Model (DATM)** alongside **Carol Gilligan's theory of moral development** and a **Gilligan-informed revision of Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages**, we can trace what *did not happen* developmentally—and how such absences echo through a person's sense of self, self-ardency (capacity to value and act from one's inner voice), relational style, and worldview.

Framework Overview:

What is DATM?

The **Developmental Absence Therapy Model** helps identify not what *happened* to a person, but what *did not happen*—the crucial affirmations, relational mirrors, and experiences of joining that were missing. These absences often go unrecognized, yet profoundly shape the internal world.

Gilligan's Contribution:

Carol Gilligan challenged Erikson's and Kohlberg's stage theories, which emphasized autonomy, justice, and detachment as markers of maturity. She emphasized **relational ethics**, the **ethic of care**, and the **voice of self-in-relation**—especially in the development of girls and women, though broadly applicable.

Developmental Stage Examples: What Didn't Happen (DATM) + Effects

Infancy: Trust vs. Mistrust (Erikson)

Gilligan's Lens: Root moral knowing in *attuned responsiveness*, not authority.

DATM Absence:

- No consistent, soothing caregiver presence
 - Emotional attunement was mechanical or absent
- Impacts:**
- Deep fear of abandonment masked by self-reliance
 - “I can't trust my needs” → worldview of threat and scarcity
 - Later relational style: hyper-independent or anxiously fused

- Self agency: “My needs burden others”
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Early Childhood: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

Gilligan’s Lens: Development of care-in-relationship, not control

DATM Absence:

- Punishment for exploring autonomy (e.g., mess, tantrums, boundary-testing)
- Lack of mirroring or encouragement for the child’s will

Impacts:

- Internalized self-judgment as morally wrong or “too much”
 - Voice of the self silenced in favor of compliance
 - Relational style: pleasing, conflict-averse
 - Worldview: “I earn belonging by disappearing”
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Middle Childhood: Initiative vs. Guilt

Gilligan’s Lens: Recognition of relational intelligence and moral complexity

DATM Absence:

- No one asked, “What do you think?” or “How do you feel about this?”
- Creativity or moral intuition dismissed as naive

Impacts:

- Guilt for asserting desires
 - Loss of narrative authority: “My story doesn’t count”
 - Relational style: self-doubt, deference
 - Self agency: low; suppresses visionary or imaginative action
 - Worldview: “Adults define what matters”
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Adolescence: Identity vs. Role Confusion

Gilligan's Lens: The emergence of moral voice in dialogue with others

DATM Absence:

- No safe space for questioning social scripts, gender roles, or inner conflict
- No mentors who modeled integrated identity

Impacts:

- Identity foreclosure or fragmentation
 - Inability to risk authenticity
 - Relational style: codependence or detachment
 - Worldview: "The world wants a mask, not my truth"
 - Self agency: stifled by internalized expectations
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Young Adulthood: Intimacy vs. Isolation

Gilligan's Lens: Self-in-relation must be rooted in voice and care, not loss of self

DATM Absence:

- No modeling of healthy emotional vulnerability or boundary-setting
- Unavailable or emotionally absent caregivers created fear of closeness

Impacts:

- Confusion between merging and disappearing
 - Intimacy becomes threatening or obligatory
 - Relational style: clinging, avoidance, or idealization
 - Worldview: "Closeness means loss"
 - Self agency: dependent on validation from others
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Later Stages: Generativity vs. Stagnation / Integrity vs. Despair

Gilligan's Insight: Mature voice embraces interdependence and ecological care

DATM Absence:

- No encouragement to pass on wisdom or reshape the world

- Aging seen as decline, not ripening
- **Impacts:**
- Shame about purpose, regret
- Emotional isolation and narrative disorientation
- Worldview: “I missed my real life”
- Self-ardency: confused with productivity or sacrifice

Summary Table

Developmental Stage	What Was Absent (DATM)	Internalized Belief	Impact on Self-Ardency & Relationships
Infancy	Emotional mirroring, consistent care	“I’m alone in the world”	Avoidant or anxious attachment
Early Childhood	Supported autonomy	“My will is dangerous”	People-pleasing, shame-based self-concept
Middle Childhood	Valued inner life	“My thoughts don’t matter”	Silencing of creative/moral voice
Adolescence	Encouragement of identity exploration	“I must be what others need”	Inauthentic roles, split identity
Young Adulthood	Modeled mutual intimacy	“Real closeness erases me”	Hyperindependence or merger
Adulthood	Recognition of generativity, spiritual depth	“It’s too late for me”	Narrative regret, withdrawal, despair

Ecological and Relational Implications (Ecozoic Integration)

When developmental absences are not metabolized:

- We may see the world as a place of **survival, not relationship**
- Healing includes learning to **belong**—to others, to self, and to the Earth

- The Ecozoic Bridge invites us to create **rituals of rejoining** and **spaces of re-parenting** not only for humans, but for the web of life
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Transformational Practices

- **From Belief Systems Therapy:**
 - "Born onto a Stage": Explore inherited scripts of detachment or over-control
 - "Mapping the Emotional World": Spot patterns of pleasing or numbing
 - **From Gilligan's Work:**
 - Voice-centered journaling: "What do I really feel? Who taught me to silence this?"
 - Storytelling circles where different voices and perspectives are witnessed
 - **From Ecozoic Ritual:**
 - Grief and renewal ceremonies for what never occurred
 - Ecological rituals that rejoin self to Earth as caregiver and kin
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Let me know if you'd like:

- Clinical vignettes of each stage
- Ritual guides and journaling prompts
- Companion diagrams for educational use
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Absolutely. Below is a revised integration of the **Developmental Absence Therapy Model (DATM)** with **Carol Gilligan's moral development theory**, a **Gilligan-informed reworking of Erikson's psychosocial stages**, and a **focus on how self-agency forms—or is hindered—through relational dynamics** at each stage. It explores what *did not happen* developmentally and how that impairs the formation of *self-agency*, particularly in relationships.

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-  **Self-Agency Formation and Developmental Absence**

- **Key Concepts:**
 - **Self-agency** is the capacity to know, value, and act from one’s inner truth in a relational world.
 - **Relational dynamics** either support or suppress the emergence of agency.
 - **Developmental absence** refers not to trauma by commission, but trauma by omission—what should have happened but didn’t.
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-  **Revised Developmental Stages: Absence, Self-Agency, and Relational Dynamics**
 -  **Infancy — Trust vs. Mistrust**
 - **Relational Need:** Responsive attunement
Absent Experience: Consistent, empathic holding
Relational Dynamic: Caregiver avoids or misattunes to need
Impact on Self-Agency:
 - Self-agency begins with *sensing I matter when I signal*.
 - Without mirrored responsiveness, the infant internalizes: *“My needs are too much or irrelevant.”*
Relational Legacy: Becomes over-self-reliant or clinging in adulthood
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-  **Early Childhood — Autonomy vs. Shame**
 - **Relational Need:** Encouragement to explore and self-initiate
Absent Experience: Celebration of budding autonomy and will
Relational Dynamic: Caregiver controls or shames expressions of will
Impact on Self-Agency:
 - Agency is discovered in “I can do it!” moments.
 - Shamed autonomy leads to internal belief: *“My will brings rejection.”*
Relational Legacy: Self-erasing compliance or oppositional defiance
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-  **Middle Childhood — Initiative vs. Guilt**

- **Relational Need:** Validation of initiative, curiosity, and moral voice
Absent Experience: Being asked “What do you think/feel?”
Relational Dynamic: Authority silences or ignores child’s sensemaking
Impact on Self-Agency:
 - Agency emerges in “I can have ideas, imagine, decide.”
 - Silencing breeds self-doubt: “*My voice isn’t welcome or safe.*”
Relational Legacy: Becomes passive, overly deferential, or rigidly righteous
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- 🧒 **Adolescence — *Identity vs. Role Confusion***

- **Relational Need:** Holding environment for exploration and dissent
Absent Experience: Safe space for experimenting with values, roles, beliefs
Relational Dynamic: Conformity demanded or rebellion punished
Impact on Self-Agency:
 - Agency matures in discovering one’s authentic voice in tension with others
 - Without that, internal narrative becomes: “*To belong, I must betray myself.*”
Relational Legacy: Masking true self, cycling between fusion and alienation
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- 🧑 **Young Adulthood — *Intimacy vs. Isolation***

- **Relational Need:** Mutual recognition and emotional vulnerability
Absent Experience: Emotional modeling for deep relational honesty
Relational Dynamic: Past absence leads to fear of being seen or known
Impact on Self-Agency:
 - Intimacy requires agency that says “This is me, in your presence.”
 - Instead, belief may form: “*If I show who I am, I’ll be hurt or lost.*”
Relational Legacy: Avoidance of intimacy or complete merging
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- 🧓 **Adulthood — *Generativity vs. Stagnation***

- **Relational Need:** Purpose in giving forward and creating meaning
Absent Experience: Being mentored to believe one’s life matters

Relational Dynamic: Internalized unworthiness undermines contribution
Impact on Self-Agency:

- Generativity flows from *“I matter enough to offer something real.”*
- Absence leads to: *“There’s no place for my voice or gifts now.”*

Relational Legacy: Withholding creativity or passing along absence to others

•  **Intergenerational Echo: How Relational Absence Is Passed On**

• Developmental Stage	• If Absence Is Unhealed...	• As Parent or Partner...
• Infancy	• Feels unsafe needing others	• May withdraw from child’s neediness or be anxiously overattuned
• Early Childhood	• Fears their own power or decision-making	• May control child’s will or fear boundary testing
• Middle Childhood	• Avoids conflict or self-expression	• May dismiss or overcorrect child’s feelings
• Adolescence	• Conforms or rebels compulsively	• May shame or suppress child’s differentiation
• Young Adulthood	• Cannot risk intimacy or gets lost in it	• May seek partner to complete self, or isolate entirely
• Adulthood	• Stagnates or acts from legacy guilt	• May avoid mentoring, purpose-sharing, or emotional generosity

•  **Building Self-Agency Through Relational Repair**

- **Therapeutic and Spiritual Practices:**
- **From Belief Systems Therapy Workbook:**

- *Born onto a Stage*: Expose inherited scripts that limit agency
- *Mapping the Emotional World*: Track patterns of joining, absence, intrusion
- **From the Ecozoic Bridge**
- *Eco-spiritual ritual*: Reconnect with belonging through nature-based rite (e.g. voice-claiming at sacred sites)
- *Liturgy of Self-Reclamation*: Ceremony that names absences and affirms one's inner voice
- **From Gilligan's Work**
- *Voice Dialogue*: Facilitated sessions where one speaks what was silenced
- *Circle of Witnessing*: Others echo what they hear as one's authentic voice emerges
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Developmental Absence and Its Impacts

Psychologists describe **developmental absence** as the early failure of caregivers or communities to meet an infant's basic social and emotional needs. In effect, a child is "born onto a stage" already scripted by family dynamics. When crucial needs (connection, validation, competence, etc.) go unmet, the child may experience a subtle yet pervasive wound: "others have remarked that 'neglect is often neglected' in developmental research," with long-term consequences for self-worth. Benau et al. note that infants' fundamental needs "to be seen, felt, held, known, and delighted in" must not "go unmet," or the child may suffer a profound sense of annihilation. In practice, children whose needs are absent often "act out" to satisfy them. For example, Alfred Adler and Amy Lew emphasize that **behavior develops in context**: as psychologist Lew puts it, children intuitively seek to fulfill **Crucial C's** – the needs to be *Connected*, *Capable*, *Counted*, and *Courageous*. If these needs are not met at home, a child may express distress through attention-seeking or defiant behavior.

- **Crucial Needs (C's)** – All humans strive to feel *connected* to others, to be *capable* (competent), to *count* (feel significant), and to have *courage* to face challenges. Chronic absence of these needs (e.g. secure attachment) can lead to anxiety, shame, or acting-out.
- **"Born onto a Stage" Metaphor** – Lew's metaphor highlights how children enter an ongoing family "play" without a script. They learn their roles by observing others'

reactions. This underscores that unmet developmental needs become the “driving plot” for a child’s behavior.

- **Flow of Influence (Illustrated by Flowcharts)** – Clinicians often map the **sequence** from early absence to adult outcomes. For example, a flowchart (like the one above) could trace how *early caregiver absence* leads step-by-step to *chronic shame and dysregulation*, and eventually to repeated relational struggles. Visually mapping these stages (flowchart style) can clarify how “what never happened that should have” casts long shadows into later development.

These ideas come from developmental and psychodynamic research. In summary, developmental absence means a child’s core needs weren’t met, leading to long-term emotional gaps. Recognizing this helps therapists and educators design **rituals, rites of passage, and supportive relationships** to “renew” the child’s sense of belonging and worth.

Ecozoic Integration and Renewal

On a planetary scale, **Ecozoic** thinking (from Thomas Berry) envisions an era where human societies live in *mutually enhancing relations* with Earth’s systems. Berry coined “Ecozoic” to emphasize the **integral functioning of life systems**: in his words, Ecozoic refers to the “integral functioning of life systems in their mutually enhancing relations”. In practice, this means viewing humans not as masters of nature but as one **branch of the Life Community**. Berry argues that the Earth “exists, and can survive, only in its integral functioning” – so our communities must foster the health of whole ecosystems, not exploit isolated parts.

- **Communion of Subjects** – The Ecozoic vision holds that “every being has its own inner form, its own voice”. In other words, all creatures (including humans) are **subjects** with value, not mere resources. A tree-diagram view can help here: imagine a “Tree of Life” showing how human, animal, plant and microbial communities interlock in a single web. This reinforces that all branches depend on the integrity of the whole.
- **Earth as Primary** – Berry stresses that the **Earth economy** is more fundamental than the human economy: “the Earth exists...and can survive, only in its integral functioning”. Thus humans must live by *Earth-first* principles (e.g. renewable cycles, conservation) rather than dominating nature. One bulleted list of conditions for an Ecozoic Era (from Berry’s outline) would include:
 - Humans recognize the **Earth is primary, humans are derivative**.

- Human institutions cultivate a **new mode of presence** with nature – Berry calls for a “mutual presence” between people and the natural world.
- All communities (human and nonhuman) act as an **Integral Life Community**, respecting bioregional interdependence.

In short, Ecozoic themes of **renewal** and **integration** demand that we repair broken relationships with the land and one another. Just as developmental absence asks us to heal personal relationships, Ecozoic thinking asks us to heal the human-Earth relationship. Conceptually, we might use a **tree diagram** to map out these connections (for example, a branching chart linking local ecosystems, economies, and cultural practices). This highlights how restoring one branch (say, community education) can support others (biodiversity, mental health).

Bridging Themes: Practical Integration and Visual Tools

To bring these threads together, educators and therapists use concrete exercises and visuals to illuminate both personal and ecological transformation. For instance, the exercise “**Born onto a Stage**” (mentioned above) can be extended from family dynamics to broader life context: adults can reflect on the “roles” and narratives they inherited in society and consider what new roles they might play in a healing world. Similarly, guided **imaginal landscapes** help people connect inner feelings with outer change. Art therapists invite clients to “**imagine that their emotions could form a landscape**” – choosing colors, settings (ocean, desert, forest), and intensity to map their feelings. This metaphorical mapping can make abstract emotions concrete: as one author notes, placing feelings in a broader inspired scene “opens up more symbolic space for the emotions, while grounding them in our connection to the greater world”.

Key strategies often employ all three visual styles together:

- **Flowcharts & Sequences:** Visualize the stepwise journey from trauma to healing, or from unsustainable practices to sustainability. A flowchart might show, for example, how restoring community rites of passage sets off positive ripple effects for personal confidence and ecological care.
- **Tree Diagrams:** Map hierarchical and networked relationships. For example, a tree diagram could chart how individual identity, family systems, and ecological regions form nested layers of influence. Such diagrams emphasize that change in any one branch (self, community, environment) propagates through the entire living system.
- **Emotional Landscapes:** Use natural imagery to process feelings and envision renewal. Sharing emotional–landscape art (e.g. a turbulent sky vs. a sunrise) can

help people express inner blockages or hope. In group settings, showing diverse landscape paintings often sparks discussion about personal resilience (e.g. “I bend like a tree but don’t break”).

Conclusion: Ultimately, developmental and Ecozoic perspectives converge on the need for **renewal and integration** at every level of life. Both emphasize “**what should have happened**” – for children, loving guidance; for the Earth, sustainable reciprocity – and how to creatively bridge the gaps. By using metaphors and visual tools (flowcharts, trees, landscapes), we can help individuals and communities see their part in a larger story. Recognizing that we all were “born onto a stage” of interwoven relationships, we can rewrite the script together – restoring wounded psyches and ecosystems alike, toward a future in which all life thrives in harmony.

Sources: Psychological research on early attachment and trauma; Amy Lew on developmental needs; Thomas Berry’s vision of the Ecozoic Era; art therapy literature on emotional landscapes.

Developmental Absence and Its Impacts

Psychologists describe **developmental absence** as the early failure of caregivers or communities to meet an infant’s basic social and emotional needs. In effect, a child is “born onto a stage” already scripted by family dynamics. When crucial needs (connection, validation, competence, etc.) go unmet, the child may experience a subtle yet pervasive wound: “others have remarked that ‘neglect is often neglected’ in developmental research,” with long-term consequences for self-worth. Benau et al. note that infants’ fundamental needs “to be seen, felt, held, known, and delighted in” must not “go unmet,” or the child may suffer a profound sense of annihilation. In practice, children whose needs are absent often “act out” to satisfy them. For example, Alfred Adler and Amy Lew emphasize that **behavior develops in context**: as psychologist Lew puts it, children intuitively seek to fulfill **Crucial C’s** – the needs to be *Connected*, *Capable*, *Counted*, and *Courageous*. If these needs are not met at home, a child may express distress through attention-seeking or defiant behavior.

- **Crucial Needs (C’s)** – All humans strive to feel *connected* to others, to be *capable* (competent), to *count* (feel significant), and to have *courage* to face challenges. Chronic absence of these needs (e.g. secure attachment) can lead to anxiety, shame, or acting-out.
- **“Born onto a Stage” Metaphor** – Lew’s metaphor highlights how children enter an ongoing family “play” without a script. They learn their roles by observing others’

reactions. This underscores that unmet developmental needs become the “driving plot” for a child’s behavior.

- **Flow of Influence (Illustrated by Flowcharts)** – Clinicians often map the **sequence** from early absence to adult outcomes. For example, a flowchart (like the one above) could trace how *early caregiver absence* leads step-by-step to *chronic shame and dysregulation*, and eventually to repeated relational struggles. Visually mapping these stages (flowchart style) can clarify how “what never happened that should have” casts long shadows into later development.

These ideas come from developmental and psychodynamic research. In summary, developmental absence means a child’s core needs weren’t met, leading to long-term emotional gaps. Recognizing this helps therapists and educators design **rituals, rites of passage, and supportive relationships** to “renew” the child’s sense of belonging and worth.

Ecozoic Integration and Renewal

On a planetary scale, **Ecozoic** thinking (from Thomas Berry) envisions an era where human societies live in *mutually enhancing relations* with Earth’s systems. Berry coined “Ecozoic” to emphasize the **integral functioning of life systems**: in his words, Ecozoic refers to the “integral functioning of life systems in their mutually enhancing relations”. In practice, this means viewing humans not as masters of nature but as one **branch of the Life Community**. Berry argues that the Earth “exists, and can survive, only in its integral functioning” – so our communities must foster the health of whole ecosystems, not exploit isolated parts.

- **Communion of Subjects** – The Ecozoic vision holds that “every being has its own inner form, its own voice”. In other words, all creatures (including humans) are **subjects** with value, not mere resources. A tree-diagram view can help here: imagine a “Tree of Life” showing how human, animal, plant and microbial communities interlock in a single web. This reinforces that all branches depend on the integrity of the whole.
- **Earth as Primary** – Berry stresses that the **Earth economy** is more fundamental than the human economy: “the Earth exists...and can survive, only in its integral functioning”. Thus humans must live by *Earth-first* principles (e.g. renewable cycles, conservation) rather than dominating nature. One bulleted list of conditions for an Ecozoic Era (from Berry’s outline) would include:
 - Humans recognize the **Earth is primary, humans are derivative**.

- Human institutions cultivate a **new mode of presence** with nature – Berry calls for a “mutual presence” between people and the natural world.
- All communities (human and nonhuman) act as an **Integral Life Community**, respecting bioregional interdependence.

In short, Ecozoic themes of **renewal** and **integration** demand that we repair broken relationships with the land and one another. Just as developmental absence asks us to heal personal relationships, Ecozoic thinking asks us to heal the human-Earth relationship. Conceptually, we might use a **tree diagram** to map out these connections (for example, a branching chart linking local ecosystems, economies, and cultural practices). This highlights how restoring one branch (say, community education) can support others (biodiversity, mental health).

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