

# Solve Today's Problems by Tapping into Your Childhood

You're in a new situation, perhaps a new relationship or job that has progressed for a while. You begin to notice that you get angry easily, and seem to be pushing your boundaries just to see what you can get away with. "I'm acting like a 2-year-old," you say to yourself. "There must be something wrong with me."

Not so, says author Pamela Levin. According to Levin, you probably are indeed acting like a 2-year-old—but that just shows there's something right with you. No one knows more about pushing boundaries than your 2-year-old self, and if you didn't return to it, you'd be blocking off an important resource for dealing with new situations. In her book *Cycles of Power: A User's Guide to the Seven Seasons of Life*, Levin describes the useful ways people return over and over again to their early childhood patterns when confronting fresh challenges in their lives.

Based on her years of experience as a nurse counselor and consultant and on her training in transactional analysis—a therapy based on theories of personality and social behavior originated by Eric Berne, M.D.—Levin has classified the stages of the cycle, which begins in infancy and progresses through adolescence. By identifying these patterns, says Levin, you can use them to help solve problems—or control the excess when the 2 in you gets a little overbearing.

The cycle is divided into six stages: *being*, associated with infancy and the need to simply exist; *doing*, associated with ages 6 months through 18 months, when a baby begins to explore and interact with the world; *thinking*, associated with ages 18 months to 3 years, when a toddler begins to assert itself, pushing against others to understand boundaries; *identity*, associated with ages 3 to 6, when a child forms social relationships and begins to ask "why" questions; *being skillful*, associated with ages 6 to 12, when a child begins to gain skills and establish values; and *regeneration*, associated with adolescence, when a child develops a unique personality and establishes a sexual identity. Stage seven is the lifelong process of "recycling," the ability to progress through the cycle naturally. That may involve returning to more than one stage at once, when a new situation requires various coping skills.

Levin suggests that by understanding the cycle, you will be able to better understand why you're responding the way you are. For example, consider a new job. In such a new situation, people frequently undergo first a short period of adjustment (stage 1), during which they do little more than "be" in their environment. After that comes a period of "doing" (stage 2), in which they begin to interact with their new coworkers. After that, it's no surprise that they go through stage 3, a kind of "terrible twos" stage, during which they begin to assert their independence from the rules of the new situation, even going so far as to experience emotional and physical sensations associated with their own development through this childhood phase.

Levin's thesis is that by becoming aware of all the

stages and what they entail, you can take full advantage of this natural growth process and attend to your needs in the right order and at the right time. "The body is on a growth schedule and has its own seasons just like all of nature," Levin says. "It's good to do spring cleaning when it's spring, not when it's Christmas."

And it's good to assert your independence a little, rather than suppress that need as wrong. Just do it constructively.

Many problems, Levin says, result from inadequate attention to these natural developmental processes or from attention to the wrong needs.

What *Cycles of Power* does, according to Levin, is "give people permission to listen to their internal voices," to try to fulfill the needs natural in a given stage.

But simply understanding is not enough. *Cycles of Power* also explains methods by which people "sabotage" their internal cycles, describes their consequences, and offers ways to combat those urges to grow too quickly or not at all. It also outlines developmental exercises to improve passage through each stage of the cycle.

One especially helpful exercise is the "Affirmations" given for each stage. When feeling like a petulant 2-year-old, for example, remembering to say "It's okay . . . to push and test, to find out limits. . . . You can think for yourself. . . . You can let people know when you feel angry. . . ." will help you to express rather than repress those feelings.

Levin believes that awareness of this natural cycle translates into straightforward benefits: "It'll mean a lot fewer visits to the doctor," she says, noting that harmony with the internal cycle prevents both physical and psychological illness.

Nonetheless, Levin cautions against cavalier application of the methods described in *Cycles of Power*. Sometimes the needs of the 2-year-old within you spring from the unmet needs of the 2-year-old you once were, and you may even need, according to Levin, to work with a professional to experience a regression and feel those needs fulfilled. In such a case, the professional setting is important: "Regression is a healing process. . . . It's part of the body wisdom to do it, but it's not part of the body wisdom to do it while driving down the freeway."

But more frequently, the needs just need to be understood: "You don't need to be a baby anymore," Levin notes, "but you still need to be nurtured and held." Being aware of those needs, of their cyclic appearance, and your body's messages to you about those needs, can help you find a harmony with your body's true cycles: As Levin says, "Getting back to our own fundamental nature is what we all need." □



Pamela Levin

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## Love Needn't Last Forever

A transitional relationship can actually be a healthy way to recover from a painfully ended long-term relationship, says Stephen Gullo, Ph.D., author of *Love-shock, How to Recover from a Broken Heart and Love Again*. By getting interested in relationships that may not be permanent, you'll develop new social skills, discover specific needs of your own and find out in a low-pressure situation what's important about relationship-building.