



Relational Trauma Repair® (RTR), Explained: How Experiential Methods Work With Attachment Wounds, Adaptations, and the Nervous System

With companion [Folder](#)

Created in collaboration with [Dr. Tian Dayton, PhD](#), Psychodramatist and Relational Trauma Expert.

Relational Trauma Repair® (RTR) is a structured, trauma informed approach to making implicit inner states explicit in the co-regulating comfort of a group. Developed by Tian Dayton, it brings experiential methods from psychodrama and sociometry - including role play, sociometrics, and other embodied processes - into social emotional learning and relational skill building.

Its premise: relational trauma is not only a memory to be discussed. It lives in expectations of relationship, in implicit memory held by the body, in the nervous system, and in the roles and strategies a person learned in order to stay connected and stay safe.

Why Insight Alone Can Stall

A person can understand a pattern precisely and still watch their nervous system react as though the past were happening now. Understanding and experience are stored differently. RTR® works with both.



What Relational Trauma Sounds Like

It rarely arrives named. It arrives as a question.

- Why do I keep choosing the same kind of person?
- Why do I panic when someone pulls away?
- Why do I shut down when someone is angry?
- Why do I take care of everyone except myself?
- Why do I know all of this and still do it?
- Why is it so hard to see my own part in the dysfunction in my life?

Underneath are adaptations that once made sense.

Fight

Flight

Freeze

Fawn

Hypervigilance

Acute sensitivity to other people's moods

Compulsive caretaking

Numbing

Difficulty holding boundaries

Perfectionism

Dissociation

What makes these wounds distinct is how they formed. When the person we depended on for care, comfort, and survival was also a source of fear or harm, love and fear became intertwined. The adaptation was intelligent for that environment, but it can interfere with adult relationships.



The Four Core Tools

RTR makes internal and relational experience visible, so it can be looked at rather than only lived inside. There are four families of tools, usually used in this order.



01: Floor Checks

Naming and Processing Inner States in a Group Setting

What It Is

Floor Checks™, Dr. Dayton's processes, use the power of the group to bring inner experience into the room, making it visible, shareable, and open to new perspectives. RTR pairs these experiential processes with neurologically informed psychoeducation about attachment, inner states, regulation, and resilience, emphasizing new ways of relating, regulating, and responding.

How It Works

Some experiences are difficult to talk about because we haven't yet found words for them. A Floor Check™ gives those experiences a place in the room: words representing feelings, beliefs, patterns, symptoms, or resilience are placed around the floor, and participants position themselves in relation to them.

What Happens

Something vague or confusing becomes named, shared, and heard. We choose what we move toward and what we move away from, learning through a repeating structure of naming, sharing, listening, and identifying, without anyone interpreting what our experience means. Through identification, connection, and co-regulation, we discover that our inner world can be explored with like-minded others.



02: Timelines

Putting experience back into time

Trauma collapses time, so something happening now can carry the weight of something decades old. The Attachment Trauma Timeline® places ruptures, losses, and survival strategies in developmental sequence. The Resilience Timeline® maps the same life for strengths and sustaining relationships. Together they separate then from now.



03: Social Atoms and Sculpting

Showing the architecture of relationship

Your relational system is revealed through symbols scattered across a page in relation to yourself. First locate yourself wherever feels right then others, including pets, relatives etc. Who is close? Distant? Large? Small? Overlapping? Missing? How does it feel to look at it?



04: Role Reversal, Doubling, Empty Chair

Completing what was left unfinished

Some experiences stay unfinished because at the time there was no safe way to respond. Once a pattern is externalized and the person is resourced, these methods allow words where there were none and agency where there was helplessness. Not to recreate what happened, but to let something frozen move.

The timelines can be completed on paper solo or shared with a therapist or group for deeper exploration.



The Work Moves at the Pace of the Nervous System

Intensity is not the goal. Integration is. Throughout, the aim is to stay connected to the adult, observing part of yourself while meeting what was once overwhelming.

01.
Safety and Connection
02.
Awareness
03.
Experience
04.
Integration and New Choice

Healing what overwhelmed a person does not require overwhelming them again.



From Adaptation to Agency

RTR is built to change the question being asked, from something is wrong with me to something happened to me or inside of me that I adapted to, and now I have choices.

The child who froze, fawned, fought, fled, disappeared, became perfect, or learned to read danger early was adapting intelligently or sometimes unconsciously in the environment they were in. Recognizing that makes room for a different question: do I still need to live this way?



Reflection

By examining your childhood choices through your adult lens, you can cease interpreting your present relationships through the eyes of your wounded child self.

Which of these adaptations are familiar to you? Name them without judging them.

What did that adaptation protect you from at the time?

Where does it still run automatically now, whether or not it fits?

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