

The Early Recollection: A Clue to Present Behavior

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Early recollections can provide important insights into who you are today, according to the Adlerian perspective on memory interpretation. Alfred Adler believed that we choose to remember those few early experiences and associated feelings that best summarize our own current attitudes. We then use these memories to remind us of what to expect from life, ourselves and others.

Here are some hints for recalling and understanding your early experiences:

- Lose your eyes and visualize your earliest memory. The most useful memories are those that occurred before age 7 or 8.
- It is most important to remember your subjective experience — what was it like for you?
- Pay attention to the early memories of specific incidents, rather than a phase or series of events.
- Seemingly insignificant early recollections are as important as the dramatic ones.
- Don't worry about whether they are accurate representations of what happened. All early memories contain omissions and distortions constructed from information in your mind.
- Your feelings about the remembered event are an important part of the memory.

Interpreting Your Memories

Start to interpret your memory by asking these questions:

1. How does the role you played in your earliest recollection relate to the role you play today?
2. Based on these early memories, what kinds of self-messages have you learned?
3. If these memories reflect who you are today, what stress situations would make you vulnerable to self-destructive behavior?

Examples of the possible options for interpersonal roles recalled from early life include:

- acting out, observing, or being acted upon;
- leading or following;
- giving or receiving;
- being center stage or overlooked;
- feeling competent or inadequate, appealing or unappealing, encouraged or discouraged.

Making the Connection

It may be that your role in these early recollections touches a tender nerve about the way you interact with your world today. You may feel that this role is an ideal that you are obliged to live up to or a troublesome aspect of your personality that you should avoid or overcome.

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