

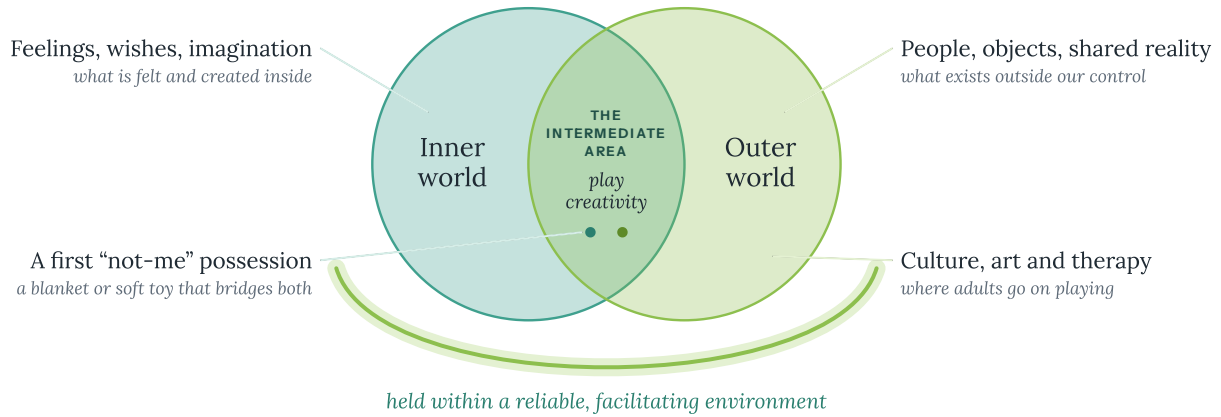
Donald Winnicott

PSYCHOANALYTIC THINKERS · CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND THE SELF

Paediatrician, psychoanalyst, and the idea of the good-enough parent

Donald Woods Winnicott (1896–1971) was an English paediatrician and psychoanalyst who spent decades working with children and families. His plain-spoken ideas about caregiving, play and the self continue to shape how many therapists think about relationships.

01 Between inner and outer worlds

an original illustration of his ideas

02 Six key ideas

*in plain language***1953**

The good-enough parent

A caregiver who adapts closely to a baby's needs at first, then gradually less, as the child can manage small frustrations.

*Perfection is neither possible nor needed.***1960**

Holding

A reliable physical and emotional environment that lets a person feel safe enough simply to be. Therapy can be a holding environment too.

*Being held in mind, not only in arms.***1960**

True and false self

The true self is a spontaneous sense of feeling real. A compliant “false self” may develop to meet others' expectations; some adaptation is a normal part of life.

*Feeling real, rather than performing.***1953**

Transitional objects

A first “not-me” possession, such as a blanket or soft toy, which may help a young child move between inner and outer worlds.

*A bridge, not a substitute.***1958**

The capacity to be alone

Paradoxically, it may grow from the experience of being alone in the presence of someone reliable.

*Alone, yet not abandoned.***1971**

Playing

Play, for children and adults, is where creativity and a sense of self can grow. Therapy happens where two people's play overlaps.

Space to explore, without pressure.

03 A life in brief



04 Reflecting on these ideas

optional

What helped me feel held or cared for, growing up or now?

When do I feel most real, most like myself?

Where do I find room to play, create or rest?

To bring to my next session: _____

A NOTE ON THE EVIDENCE

Winnicott's ideas come mainly from clinical observation and theory rather than controlled research, so they are best read as influential ways of thinking, not tested findings. “Mother” is often read today as any primary caregiver.

GO AT YOUR OWN PACE

Reflecting on early care can bring up emotions. You can pause, skip a question, or return to this later, perhaps exploring these themes with your psychologist.

SOURCES

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