

## Navigating Relationships with H.E.A.R.T.

Relationships can often be challenging, but they can also provide wonderful opportunities for growth and healing. Hakomi Teacher **DR KAREN BAIKIE** introduces some aspects of the interpersonal skills model taught in the Hakomi Embodied and Aware Relationship Training (H.E.A.R.T.®) and shows how this mindfulness-centred approach can help two people see each other more clearly and connect more heartfully.

RACHEL STIRS IN BED AS SHE HEARS A FAMILIAR NOISE. Then, with a start, she's sitting up. The clock says 2:19am. Glancing over at her husband Craig, who is sound asleep, she raises her eyes to the ceiling, slips out of bed and makes her way down the corridor towards the noise. Quietly, but in haste, she opens the bedroom door to see her 4 year old son Joe sitting up on his bed, with tears that she too well knows are on the verge of escalating into screams that will surely wake his older sister in the bed next to him – not to mention the neighbours next door. This is the third time Rachel has rushed out of bed to attend to Joe tonight, and the umpteenth time this week. It's not like this every week, but Joe's never been the best sleeper, and Rachel is completely exhausted. In a manner that suggests she knows what she's doing and has the situation under control, Rachel speaks gently to Joe and gets him back to sleep. She makes her way back to the bedroom, quietly praying that it's the last time

for the night, so she can get at least a few hours of solid sleep before that crucial Board meeting with the head honcho from the USA at 10am tomorrow. As she gingerly creeps into bed, Craig rolls over and says "Is he ok?". At the realisation that Craig was awake all along, Rachel's entire body stiffens, her jaw locks, and a steely expression comes over her face. Her eyes narrow, her breath becomes shallow, and her heart rate increases. As she angrily pulls the covers up over her, she hisses "That's NOT cool" and tightens her body into a ball as she pretends to be going back to sleep. In turn, Craig's chest puffs up as anger and incredulity come over his face. His voice is harsh and aggressive as a tirade begins, saying, "How dare you? I'm trying to be supportive. What do you expect me to do?". Rachel responds with "You could help, for a change!". Craig explodes into a volatile attack, with statements like

“You had already gone, are you expecting me to get up and come with you too?”, “You are not the boss of everything, it doesn’t all have to be done exactly your way”, and finally “It doesn’t matter what I do I can never get it right, I can never do everything the way you expect. You’re completely ridiculous, no one can be so perfect like you”. Rachel and Craig descend into an all too familiar argument, slinging accusations and defending themselves with more attacks on each other, some things going back years in their marriage. It ends in the same familiar way, with Rachel, fighting back tears, yelling “It was a huge mistake marrying you, I really screwed up there didn’t I?” and Craig grabbing his pillow and the blanket on the end of the bed, carrying them down to the lounge room to sleep on the couch, yet again. They both lie awake for over an hour, churning over the events that just happened, trying to make sense of them and wondering how on earth they got here again, and whether there is any way out of this vicious cycle they keep finding themselves in.

CRAIG AND RACHEL ARE A FAIRLY TYPICAL COUPLE IN many ways, and the kind of couple I love to work with in my private practice. When I first met them, Craig said “We have many reasons to be happy but we are not very good at making each other happy”. They have been together for nearly 10 years, with two children who they both adore. They both work long hours in the corporate world, averaging 50 plus hours each most weeks and often travelling overseas at short notice. Craig has never been very happy in his job, but he feels competent at what he does and likes the boost it gives to his self esteem. Rachel loves her job, she’s well respected for her capacity to get things done, and manages a hundred ‘to do’ lists in her head (and on paper!). They are currently living in a two bedroom apartment while they do a massive ‘make-over’ renovation to their family home, and Rachel project manages this too, keeping tabs on all the tradesmen with on-site visits every week. The kids are doing well, excelling at school and a variety of extracurricular activities. They have a full social life, often take family holidays, and their friends admire them and are often envious of the life they’ve created for themselves.

BUT OF COURSE, THINGS ARE NOT ALWAYS AS THEY SEEM on the outside. Rachel feels totally overwhelmed and exhausted with everything on her plate. She’s been sleep deprived since Alice was born, and Joe’s issues just make that worse. Her boss is a slave-driver, and has no kids of his own, so he doesn’t appreciate the whole work-life balance concept. Craig hates how stressful, sterile and ordered their life has become. He longs for the passion

and spontaneity that characterised their early relationship. He feels intensely sexually frustrated, as their sex life has dwindled to almost nothing. No matter how hard he tries to please Rachel around the house, doing all the chores he thinks he should, it still doesn’t seem to make her happy enough to have sex with him. Rachel is too exhausted to want sex, and even if she did, Craig’s volatility and frequent outbursts don’t do anything for her desire to be intimate with him.

---

“ *... in our relationships these days, the old rules have been challenged and we live in a time where there are no clear agreed-upon rules. Everything needs to be negotiated which makes it more scary and difficult to navigate your way in your relationship.* ”

---

NEITHER ONE OF THEM WANTS TO SEPARATE, NOT really. They both recognise that they have so many good things to make the relationship worth holding on to. But neither of them can bear to continue the way they are going. It’s intolerably painful.

ONE OF THE PROBLEMS FACING A COUPLE LIKE RACHEL and Craig is that they are living in a ‘postmodern’ relationship. In the past, relationships came with a set of implicit rules with clear, traditional roles. There was a social reality that was accepted with no questioning. In the past, Rachel would have been the one to take care of and attend to the children, day and night, with no expectation that Craig would have much involvement in it – and certainly no expectation that he’d be getting up at 2:19am. However, in our relationships these days, the old rules have been challenged and we live in a time where there are no clear agreed-upon rules. Everything needs to be negotiated which makes it more scary and difficult to navigate your way in your relationship.

ANOTHER PROBLEM FACING CRAIG AND RACHEL is that our culture offers us the myth that at some point you’ll find a person who is your perfect match, who fits

perfectly, and from then on everything will be wonderful, and that's how it's meant to be. Fairytales like *Cinderella*, Rapunzel and Sleeping Beauty give us the implicit message that things always end "happily ever after". This cultural myth is perpetuated through many avenues, including books and movies. We believe that if our relationship is right, it will be happy and wonderful, so when it's not happy and wonderful, then something must be wrong. When our relationships feel difficult, we fall into thinking that this means something is seriously wrong or that we have made the wrong choice and the person we are with is not "the one". We see this happening for Rachel when she ends the argument saying that she made a huge mistake marrying Craig. The only way she can make sense of how terrible she feels in the relationship is by believing that he's not the "right" person for her.

THE APPROACH THAT I USE IN WORKING WITH couples like Rachel and Craig (and also other non-romantic relationships issues) is known as the H.E.A.R.T.® model which offers a unique approach to navigating postmodern relationships. H.E.A.R.T.® stands for Hakomi Embodied and Aware Relationship Training: A mindfulness-centred approach to interpersonal intelligence and seeing from the heart. It was created and developed by Halko Weiss, PhD, a Founding Hakomi Trainer and the Director of the Hakomi Institute of Europe. I've been fortunate enough to be trained by Halko since 2003 and to work together with him on his Australian H.E.A.R.T.® training. Just like Hakomi Psychotherapy, H.E.A.R.T.® is an experiential way of working, based on the Hakomi principles and grounded in mindfulness.

LET'S COME BACK TO THAT FATEFUL EARLY MORNING incident with Rachel and Craig, to see if we can make sense of what is happening for them using some of the principles of the H.E.A.R.T.® model. One of the main reasons people in relationships get into trouble is because of the states they get into or the parts of themselves that show up. It's not 'the problem' itself that is the problem, it's the states that we get into that create the problem. So for Rachel and Craig, the real issue isn't about who does more getting up in the night, or who is more tired, or anything like that. What I did with Rachel and Craig is to help them identify the parts that emerged during that argument. As Craig and Rachel recounted the incident, I invited each of them to become mindful and report on their experience from a mindful state. I helped them to each identify their feelings, bodily sensations, thoughts, posture and anything else they noticed, as they replayed the scene. I then completed what Halko calls the *Reciprocal Interaction Loop* to help them identify the states or parts that show up in the difficult interaction. I'm interested in their outward, observable

behaviour, which is often more obvious to the other person than to the person themselves, and I record this in the upper two boxes. I'm also interested in their inner, felt experience as they remember the situation, which I record in the lower two boxes.

---

“ ***One of the main reasons people in relationships get into trouble is because of the states they get into or the parts of themselves that show up. It's not 'the problem' itself that is the problem, it's the states that we get into that create the problem.*** ”

---

WHEN RACHEL WAKES UP TO THE NOISE OF HER CHILD in the night, her *Superwoman Problem Solver* part takes over (Box 1). She quickly and efficiently manages the situation herself, even though she's really tired. She does this assuming Craig is asleep and it's all up to her. When she gets back to bed and Craig innocently asks if Joe is okay, this triggers Rachel's *Cinderella* part (Box 4). Internally she feels unsupported and abandoned. However, historically Rachel has learned not to let herself feel the pain of *Cinderella's* feelings – which date back to when her father died when she was a young girl. Her *Superwoman Problem Solver* automatically jumps in as a defender of these painful feelings, resulting in her angry statement "That's NOT cool". Rachel's critical voice and angry demeanour immediately triggers a core wound for Craig, that of feeling not good enough. Craig's *Hamlet* part (Box 2) carries deep feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness and powerlessness that are connected to growing up with a highly successful, ego-driven father who was seldom present, and even when he was, Craig recalls always feeling terrible in front of him. Again, these intensely painful feelings are quickly and automatically defended by Craig's *Freedom Fighter* part, which comes in to save the day (Box 3). In mindfulness, Craig is able to recognise that the angry, volatile tirade that ensues is actually a liberating release from the intense pain of the deep humiliation and worthlessness of the *Hamlet* part. However, Craig's *Freedom Fighter* is frightening, hurtful and confusing for Rachel, intensifying her experience of her *Cinderella* part. So her *Superwoman Problem Solver* steps up even more,

# Reciprocal Interaction Loop

	<b>RACHAEL</b>	<b>CRAIG</b>
<b>DEFENDER PART/S</b> <b>(OUTWARD, OBSERVABLE BEHAVIOUR)</b>	<b>OBSERVABLE PARTS (PROTECTORS)</b>	
	<p>Efficient <b>1</b></p> <p>Manages the situation herself</p> <p>Task oriented, problem solving</p> <p>“I have to do everything myself”</p> <p>Stiff body</p> <p>Locked jaw</p> <p>Steely facial expression</p> <p>Narrow eyes</p> <p>Shallow breath</p> <p>Heart pounding</p> <p>Angry, critical voice</p> <p>Says “That’s NOT cool”</p> <p>“I don’t understand”</p> <p>“Who is this monster?”</p> <p>“Why do I stay with him?”</p> <p>“I can’t trust him”</p> <p>“I should just leave”</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Superwoman Problem Solver</i></p>	<p>Puffed up chest <b>3</b></p> <p>Tense body</p> <p>Angry face</p> <p>Harsh, aggressive voice</p> <p>Incredulity in face</p> <p>Volatile</p> <p>Tirade of angry attacking words</p> <p>Intense narrow piercing eyes</p> <p>Body turned away slightly</p> <p>Says “How dare you?”</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Freedom Fighter</i></p>
<b>DEFENDED PART/S</b> <b>(INWARD, FELT EXPERIENCE)</b>	<b>HIDDEN PARTS (PROTECTED)</b>	
	<p>Exhausted <b>4</b></p> <p>Unsupported</p> <p>Hopeless</p> <p>Bleak</p> <p>Tragic</p> <p>Lonely</p> <p>Abandoned</p> <p>Anxious</p> <p>Tentative</p> <p>Scared</p> <p>Unsafe</p> <p>Wounded</p> <p>Misunderstood</p> <p>Hurt</p> <p>Powerless</p> <p>Confused</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Cinderella</i></p>	<p>Belittled <b>2</b></p> <p>Humiliated</p> <p>Worthless</p> <p>Inadequate</p> <p>Airbrushed out</p> <p>Not consulted</p> <p>Exploited</p> <p>Depressed</p> <p>Flat</p> <p>Disappointed in myself</p> <p>Frustrated</p> <p>Desperate</p> <p>Powerless</p> <p>“I’m not special”</p> <p>“I’m a chore”</p> <p>“I’m never good enough”</p> <p>“Leave me alone”</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Hamlet</i></p>

taking her to a cascade of thoughts, eventually resulting in “I’ve made a big mistake marrying him, I should just leave”. Again, in mindfulness, Rachel is able to identify that when she goes to this place in her mind, she actually feels more powerful and more peaceful – ironically thinking of leaving feels better than staying with the pain of feeling unsupported and afraid. She recognises a connection to her father saying “It felt so awful when my father died and I couldn’t fix it – ever since then I’ve tried to solve every problem I’ve had”. But of course, more of *Superwoman Problem Solver* triggers more of Craig’s *Hamlet*, and this will just result in more of his *Freedom Fighter* coming out. The Reciprocal Interaction Loop shows how the interaction of these parts results in a “Figure 8” pattern – also the symbol for eternity. The vicious cycle persists, and Rachel and Craig are left feeling hopeless about their marriage.

USING THE RECIPROCAL INTERACTION LOOP HELPS Craig and Rachel see their dynamic more clearly, and to recognise that this is a familiar one in their relationship. They can now see the essence of their relationship difficulty. Rachel’s core issue is that she feels there is no support for her. She longs for relief, rest and support from her world and looks to Craig to get that support. Craig’s core issue is that he feels he’s not good enough. He longs for freedom from judgement and criticism, and looks to Rachel to trust that he’s good enough as he is. Rachel attempts to organise and micromanage their world so that she can get rest and relief triggers Craig’s feelings of being judged, criticised and worthless. They are also able to develop some compassion for their Defended Parts – both in themselves and in the other. Rachel says she feels terribly sad when she hears about *Hamlet* and how worthless Craig feels. Likewise, Craig is able to soften around Rachel’s efficiency and micromanagement of their lives when he can see how unsupported and afraid she feels.

OF COURSE, THIS IS NO MAGIC CURE. RACHEL AND Craig will continue to fall into this pattern often, as these parts are automatic and easily triggered. However, with mindfulness, Craig and Rachel can learn to self soothe their own parts and learn new ways of relating to each other’s parts. As Halko says, with mindfulness, we keep doing it, we just do it with the lights on.

IN THE H.E.A.R.T.® MODEL, WE HELP PEOPLE to develop skills that will help them relate differently to the other person in their relationship – and this might be a romantic partner, a friend, a colleague, a boss, a parent, a child, a neighbour, or anyone else. In this example, if Rachel and Craig continue relating to each other from the one Defender part to the other Defender part (that is,

*Superwoman Problem Solver* to *Freedom Fighter*) then they will continue to find themselves stuck in their unhappy loop. They need to do something differently. There are four alternatives that will help Craig and Rachel out of the loop.

---

“ ***Our Defender parts act automatically and quickly, and we are usually unaware of the state that we are in when they are running the show. Using mindfulness, you can begin to notice when you are getting triggered into your Defender part, and only then will you have a chance to step out of the automatic and make a decision about whether to continue to interaction or not.*** ”

---

THE FIRST IS **SELF-REGULATION**. THIS INVOLVES USING mindfulness to develop the capacity to identify your own Defender part when it comes on. Our Defender parts act automatically and quickly, and we are usually unaware of the state that we are in when they are running the show. Using mindfulness, you can begin to notice when you are getting triggered into your Defender part, and only then will you have a chance to step out of the automatic and make a decision about whether to continue to interaction or not. In other words, you start to be able to see it coming and you can change things before it gets out of hand. In our example, Craig began to identify the early signs of his *Freedom Fighter* by sensing his own tense body and puffed up chest in mindfulness. He then began to catch these sensations when he was relating to Rachel, and he learned to say to her “My chest is puffing up and my body is getting tense, I can feel my *Freedom Fighter* is coming on, I want to stop talking now so that we don’t get into a bad place together”. Rachel had a harder time tuning into her bodily sensations, but she was able to catch herself as soon as her mind raced to thoughts of “I made a mistake, I should just leave”. Because she was now aware that these

thoughts were simply her *Superwoman Problem Solver* trying to get her out of her pain and solve her problem, she was able to see this as just a part and not the whole of her. In the H.E.A.R.T.® model, we call this disidentification. Doing this really helped Rachel step out of the loop as well.

---

“ ***One of the main difficulties in relationships is that when you are in pain or distress, you want the other person to take care of you and soothe you. However, in difficult interactions, the other person is the last person who can actually take care of you, because they are also in pain and distress and looking to you to take care of them.*** ”

---

THE SECOND ALTERNATIVE IS **SELF-LEADERSHIP**. THIS involves learning and practicing a skill that uses mindfulness to take care of your own Defended parts, self-soothing and nurturing them yourself. One of the main difficulties in relationships is that when you are in pain or distress, you want the other person to take care of you and soothe you. However, in difficult interactions, the other person is the last person who can actually take care of you, because they are also in pain and distress and looking to you to take care of them. Practicing Self-Leadership enables you to take care of your own distressed parts, so that you are more able to be in relationship. This means using mindfulness, coming from a wiser, more compassionate part of yourself, to nurture your Defended parts. For Rachel, this means mindfully acknowledging to herself how scared and powerless her *Cinderella* feels, and validating how she felt as a young girl when her father died. When she does this, Rachel's *Superwoman Problem Solver* does not need to come in so strongly to defend against *Cinderella*'s pain. She often softens and becomes tearful, and then Craig is generally able to support her in her grief – and so this way she ends up getting the care and support that her *Superwoman Problem Solver* is so longing for. Likewise

for Craig, by practicing Self-Leadership, he learned to stay with *Hamlet*'s intolerable pain of feeling worthless, and in individual therapy, he began to work on these strong feelings and his childhood experiences related to his own father.

THE THIRD OPTION IS **SELF-REPORT**. THIS INVOLVES sharing with the other person something about your own experience and what you are feeling, but without asking for any change. So here the focus is on disclosing something about your own Defended part. This takes the interaction away from being that of one Defender to another Defender. Whilst Craig had often told Rachel how worthless and inadequate she made him feel, the reason this generally didn't work was because he shared this from his *Freedom Fighter* state – that is, with anger and harshness. The difference was when he shared his experience of feeling worthless and inadequate whilst in his *Hamlet* state and without expecting Rachel to make him feel good about himself. The skill of Self-report means informing the other of something that the other is not yet aware of, or sharing it at a level that the other doesn't know of. It also means that you have to be willing to delve inside yourself to find that kind of deeper, more substantial information. As Craig explored inside himself, he was able to share with Rachel his deep fear that she really would find him lacking, and then leave, which would repeat the kind of pain he experienced when his beloved mother died. Similarly, when Rachel learned to drop into her *Cinderella* part and tell Craig how exhausted, scared and powerless she felt, without expecting him to step up and take care of her 'to do' list, Craig was able to hear her and validate her experience of feeling so tired and hopeless she felt. When she could disclose like this, Craig no longer felt that it was all his fault that she was so tired, and so he could hear her feelings more clearly.

THE FORTH OPTION, **EMPATHIC CONTACT**, IS OFTEN trickier but can be very powerful in shifting the interaction. This means you contact something of the other person's experience, saying something about how you imagine your partner might be feeling. This can be incredibly validating for the other person, but can be really hard to do when you are already in pain and distress yourself. When Craig is able to slow down during an argument and say to Rachel, "I imagine you are feeling exhausted and unsupported, and you are just longing for a way to get some relief", Rachel feels really validated and her *Superwoman Problem Solver* slows down. Likewise, if Rachel is able to say to Craig "I wonder, when I keep telling you all the things I want you to do today, I imagine you might be feeling frustrated and belittled by me". Craig's *Hamlet* part feels validated, and they can speak more easily about the tasks at hand.

AFTER WORKING IN THIS WAY, RACHEL AND CRAIG began to see improvements in their relationship. They felt closer, and began to enjoy spending time together – both making an effort to turn off their phones, shut out work, and focus on each other. Rachel said “I’m starting to see that this actually genuinely could work – it feels great”. Craig told Rachel in a session “You’ve started saying you love me again, and it feels so validating”. They began having sex, hesitantly on Rachel’s part, and still not enough for Craig, but Rachel even reported that she enjoyed it sometimes. Rachel and Craig are still exploring their relationship with me and they continue to have good and bad moments, but overall their path forward looks promising and they feel more connected.

WORKING WITH THE RECIPROCAL INTERACTION LOOP and these four alternatives options is just one of many ways I work with couples and others with relationship difficulties using the H.E.A.R.T.® approach. There are many other aspects that H.E.A.R.T.® offers in understanding all kinds of relationships. Of course, there is much value in working with mindfulness and in an experiential way, as those of us familiar with Hakomi know well. In relationships, mindfulness is the key to seeing things differently. With mindfulness you can see how you are activated and then have the chance to do something different to the automatic. Working in this way helps couples develop a conscious, aware and authentic relationship. When things are automatic, it feels stuck

and boring. Working in this way brings a level of creativity, adventure and newness into the relationship. By exploring their parts together, couples learn to see their partner with fresh eyes, and it feels very rich and honouring. I feel passionate about this work because I feel honoured to support a couple into this deeper and more connected space, where love can really grow. For me, it’s all about “The more clearly I can see me, the more chance I have to really see you”. ■



**DR KAREN BAIKIE**  
*Certified Hakomi Therapist and Hakomi Teacher  
Clinical Psychologist in Private Practice, Sydney  
Organiser and Co-Facilitator of the H.E.A.R.T.  
training in Australia*

## Hakomi Embodied and Aware Relationship Training:

A mindfulness-centered approach to interpersonal intelligence and seeing from the heart

**One Year H.E.A.R.T.® training in SYDNEY - With Halko Weiss & Karen Baikie**

Module 1:	February 2014	7 Days
Module 2:	July 2014	7 Days
Module 3:	February 2015	7 Days

The H.E.A.R.T.® training includes the opportunity to learn and practice the four relationship skills outlined in this article, as well as many other interpersonal skills. The training is not about couple therapy alone, but provides maps and skills to navigate any kind of relationship. It is open to individuals, couples, and therapists wanting to learn more about how to develop more conscious, heartfelt relationships for themselves and for clients.

**Final Two Introductory H.E.A.R.T.® workshops in SYDNEY & MELBOURNE - With Karen Baikie**

A great way to learn about the model and see if you are interested in undertaking the full training. These will be held in Melbourne on 12-13 October and in Sydney on 8-10 November. For more details about the training or workshops, contact Karen on [karen@hakomi.com.au](mailto:karen@hakomi.com.au) or see details later in Dairy Dates.