

Each chair corresponds to a developmental phase or the perspective one is taking at any moment. We definitely are not adults all of the time even though we think we are as we move around in our adult bodies. We often act and re-act to life using maps and strategies from our childhood and adolescence for better or worse. Chalfant says we ‘make decisions while stuck with emotions equivalent to those of a 12-year-old’. She believes that the Adult Chair is a ground-breaking shortcut to self-realization and authentic living and when we work with the three chairs that correspond to the different parts of our self: the child, the adolescent and the adult, we begin to see the maps, the masks and the triggers that we’ve been living with and this awareness gives us the chance to work on integrating experiences and changing our ways of being.

In a nutshell, each chair represents one of the three distinct developmental phases, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. During the first six years of our life we absorb everything around us and we store all this experience in our subconscious and unconscious minds. When we are safely held, and as Chalfant notes firmly seated in our Child Chair, we learn about our feelings and needs, creativity and fun, trust and passion, about our vulnerability and intimacy and about what works and what doesn’t. We rely on the adults in our environment to mirror back to us who we are, but unfortunately, most of the time, we receive projections of their woundedness and belief systems. More often than not during this phase of development we receive loud and subtle messages that we need to bury our vulnerability and true self in order to remain safe or / and be allowed to stay in the tribe. We quickly figure out whether it’s safe to express feelings and how to get our needs met. We experience having our basic needs met and not having them met. To use the author’s example a colic baby crying for hours on end and left to cry alone in its crib learns that it cannot rely on others to have its needs met. It experiences a sense of abandonment and maybe helplessness.

Then around the age of seven, we become aware that we are separate from others and this awakening of our ego marks the beginning of our move into the adolescent phase of life. She writes that ‘we are programmed to react to anything that shows up as a threat as if our life is in danger’. We learn that it’s safer to be what we think others want us to be so we build a variety of defenses in our attempt to fit in and remain safe. We use the maps and masks of our younger years, which we take into adulthood. Chalfant writes that ‘if we have parents or caretakers who are able to model for us what an emotionally healthy adult looks like, we quite naturally slide into a healthy adulthood around the age of 25’, but

unfortunately, 'only '97% of us were not given the tools to mature into emotionally healthy adults'.

It is around the age of seven that we slide from our Child Chair and into our Adolescent Chair. Our adolescent self relies on the child's learning and experiences and relates to this learning as a map to navigate life. We create a map of how the world works, how to show up in it and how to stay safe. During this phase it is the ego's job to take over and keep us safe and alive. Chalfant writes that the beginning of the move into our Adolescent Chair happens when 'we realize that "I" also exist separately from the "we" of our family and the world and like a relay runner, the ego takes everything the child has collected and recorded, including inner programming and strategies, and runs with it'. Our ego follows the child's roadmap and develops more tactics along the way to keep us alive and free from physical and emotional pain. When in the Adolescent Chair, we do not know what to do with our pain. Difficult emotions cause distress and we learn to push them down or project them on others and we cast aside our true needs and feelings. We learn to use a variety of masks to cover up our true self so that we will be accepted, rather than judged, rejected or abandoned and each mask takes us further away from our authentic self. So within this framework when we are in our Adolescent Chair, we are navigating the world with the emotional intelligence and tactics of a twelve or fifteen year old. Some of the problems that might arise from being stuck in the adolescence chair in adulthood might be a sense of urgency, being unconscious to the underlying motives and bigger picture, living too much in the past and future, relying on many stories and assumptions based on beliefs that are not even our own, absolutes and extremes and wearing acceptable masks.

Of course, we need this chair and cannot exist without it because it is where we connect with our ego and the logical part of our mind, the left brain part of us that is necessary to help us go about our daily living on this planet/ Similarly, our young inner child is also the carrier of our innocence, authentic essence and true feelings and needs, our creativity and spontaneity and capacity for joy. We need these qualities, too. But remaining stuck in the traumas and beliefs held by our little self and meaning making and defenses of our adolescent do not serve our well-being, actualization and growth. In order to heal and grow and move out of an adolescent mode of being it is suggested we bring in our healthy adult to bring our child and adolescent together to create integration and bring consciousness into the triad. During this process of getting to know ourselves at our deepest levels we heal and grow some and become resilient from the inside out.

Living more consistently in our Adult Chair requires we learn about the earlier chairs we have occupied to understand our experiences. Both the Child Chair and the Adolescent Chair have their purposes and their own set of wounds that need to be healed. Our adult is asked to re-parent and guide our younger aspects and bring consciousness and clear thinking to our life. Our adult can discern the triggers, masks and personas the adolescents have adopted. It is empowering to be able to observe and discern which chair we are at any given moment and consciously choose to slide into our adult chair. Chalfant cites Bruce Lipton, the stem cell biologist and epigeneticist, who believes that ‘we rarely live “in consciousness.” Most of us live unconsciously, in routines, with little idea how to get out of our ruts. This also means we live from a reactionary place, a place where we make quick judgments and fast decisions and do anything we can to stay safe. Living from this place can be exhausting’.

In this framework the Adult Chair is the seat of consciousness and allows one to live from the highest and most healed version of ourselves in the present moment. From this place we experience our own power and we discover our voice and are better able to set boundaries. Chalfant writes we also become a *Story Buster* through learning to stay present to what’s happening in our lives and by being conscious and mindful about stories and focusing on what is fact and truth. When we are in the more empowered Adult Chair, we are more grounded in the moment. So when we are “triggered” by circumstances or people we can observe ourselves and recognize what has activated us and view the trigger is a healing opportunity. Meditation can help us remain grounded in the here and now and our physicality because through practice it helps slow down the mind and calm the nervous system. Deep, conscious breathing also activates the relaxation response and triggers the parasympathetic nervous system, releasing endorphins that help us sleep, lower our blood pressure, improve our immune function and so on. On the other hand, shallow breathing activates our sympathetic nervous system which releases cortisol into the bloodstream and taxes our adrenals. Compassion for self and others also facilitates this process or way of going about integrating our experiences and growing.

