



# Map of Closeness:

## A Visual-Relational Model of Psychological Proximity

The Map of Closeness is a visual-conceptual framework designed to represent the dynamic, layered experience of psychological proximity, disconnection, and relational movement within the self and between individuals. Grounded in integrative counseling theory, including relational, trauma-informed, and experiential approaches, this model conceptualizes closeness not as a fixed state, but as a fluid, multidimensional process shaped by internal, interpersonal, and contextual factors.

At the center of the map lies the core self, represented as a stable yet responsive point of awareness. Surrounding this center are concentric layers that reflect varying degrees of emotional accessibility, vulnerability, and connection. Movement toward the center symbolizes increasing psychological closeness, characterized by safety, attunement, and integration, while movement outward reflects experiences of distance, fragmentation, or protective withdrawal. These outer regions, labeled as “lands of the disconnected” and “estranged,” highlight the adaptive nature of disconnection as a response to overwhelm, threat, or unmet relational needs.

The radial and circular geometry of the model emphasizes both continuity and cyclical movement. Rather than implying linear progression, the map allows for

oscillation between states, reflecting the non-linear nature of healing and relational engagement. Symbolic markers distributed throughout the map represent internal parts, relational encounters, or salient emotional experiences, suggesting that individuals navigate closeness through interactions among multiple internal and external influences.

This model is informed by Internal Family Systems (Schwartz, 1995, 2021), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988; Johnson, 2019), trauma-informed frameworks (Herman, 1992; van der Kolk, 2014), polyvagal theory (Porges, 2011), and ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), conceptualizing psychological closeness as a dynamic, layered process shaped by internal organization, relational safety, and contextual influences.

Clinically, the Map of Closeness may be used as a reflective and collaborative tool to help clients externalize and explore their internal landscape. By visualizing their position within the map, clients can develop greater awareness of their emotional states, relational patterns, and pathways toward increased connection. For clinicians, the model offers a way to integrate assessment, conceptualization, and intervention within a shared visual language that supports attunement and meaning-making.

Ultimately, this framework invites a shift from pathologizing distance to understanding it as part of a broader relational system, one in which movement toward closeness is supported through safety, curiosity, and compassionate engagement.

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