



Client Handout

# The Principle of Holes & Piles

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Years ago, in an effort to plan for my retirement, I bought a piece of property and built an office building to use for my therapy practice. As I designed the building and managed the process, I learned a lot about building construction. When I purchased the land, there were a dozen trees that had to be removed before construction could begin. After the trees were cut, and the stumps pulled from the ground, holes where the stumps had been dotted the property. The property was excavated and eventually, the building was constructed. After the construction workers left, there were piles of construction debris that had to be hauled off before the landscaping could begin. In order to landscape the property, the holes had to be filled and the piles of debris hauled away. This introduced me to the principle of Holes and Piles in our own lives.

After childhood has been constructed and finished, we are all just trying to build a landscape that we want to live in. When young, we envision our lives looking a particular way in adulthood. We often imagined an adulthood that included elements like satisfying relationships, marriages, families, homes, work we enjoy, security, stability, comfort, and leisure. Unfortunately, for many, there are unresolved aspects of childhood trauma that can get in the way of establishing the kind of landscape we want to live in. These are holes and piles that we bring with us into adulthood and our relationships.

The holes in our story represent needs we had that were unmet, and the piles in our story represent experiences we didn't want but were subjected to anyway. Holes could include childhood needs like attention, affirmation, approval, affection, and acceptance. Piles could include experiences like physical and sexual abuse, domestic violence, alcoholism, or family instability.



## Holes & Piles

Creating the Landscape of our Lives, we respond to the Holes and Piles differently.:



### HOLES

Unmet Needs  
What we run toward  
What we try to fill  
Unhealthy Pursuit  
Struggle to get them met

### PILES

Unresolved Hurts  
What we run from  
What we try to avoid  
Unhealthy Avoidance  
Struggle to get them resolved

***Note: The piles are easier to see, but the holes are not any less damaging.***