

Closeness has a Cost:
Protected Loneliness and the Somatic Architecture of Disconnection

A Clinician's Guide to Relational Repair When Connection Itself Is Threatening

Video Course
Christiane Sanderson

Video Course
CPD hours: 6



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"I reply to texts, I meet friends socially. I smile at work, engage with colleagues. I sleep next to someone who shares my life. So why does it still feel like no one really knows me?"

Modern loneliness doesn't always look like solitude

It hides in WhatsApp chats and dinner parties. It walks into therapy smiling, saying, *"I'm just tired."* It lingers in relationships where two people share a bed but not a world. **For some clients, the greatest ache is not being alone—it's being alone while surrounded.**

These are the clients whose emotional self has been exiled by attachment trauma. For them, connection isn't a comfort—it's a neural warning. As Siegel and Schore have shown, repeated relational ruptures can rewire the brain's interpersonal circuitry, forging implicit links between emotional intimacy and threat. **Vulnerability, once punished, is now encoded as danger across both mind and body.**

They're not "lonely" in the way the word usually implies. They show up, make conversation, meet deadlines, play the role. But inside? A pervasive sense of being untouched, unseen, unfelt. *It's not the absence of people. It's the absence of presence.*

This is the ache behind the competence, the smile, the thoughtful insight. It's the ache that says: *"I'm here, but I'm not really here."*



This training invites us to meet that ache—not with urgency or insistence, but with clinical skill, patience, and the quiet power of presence. **We will learn how to identify the hidden faces of modern loneliness—including how emotional disconnection shows up in clients who appear socially engaged, articulate, and fine.**

This isn't about helping clients "connect better." It's about helping them feel safe enough to connect at all. Modern loneliness is no longer just about isolation—it's *about intimacy coded as danger, presence as loss, and closeness as a calculated risk.*

This training is grounded in contemporary research across affective neuroscience, developmental trauma, and embodied psychotherapy—including the work of Porges, Ogden, and others—while keeping the focus squarely on the human experience of *protected loneliness*, and how we as clinicians can meet it in the room.

Invisible Isolation: How protected loneliness shows up in therapy

This training is designed for psychotherapists, psychologists, and mental health professionals working with:

- Clients who appear socially connected but describe feeling emotionally invisible
- Adults with histories of neglect, relational trauma, or persistent rupture
- **"High-functioning" clients presenting with emotional vacancy or existential fatigue**
- Individuals who intellectualise closeness or appear emotionally unreachable
- **Clients who experience somatic dysregulation during moments of intimacy**

When Protection Becomes the Prison

Attachment trauma builds elegant defences. Over time, these defences become so practised, so refined, that they start to feel like personality. The client who always stays "one step ahead" of the conversation. The partner who gives generously but never receives. The therapist who can feel everyone's pain but not their own.

Underneath it all: a nervous system that's wired to equate closeness with danger. Their body remembers what their words may not say: **connection has a cost.**

We'll examine the neurobiological and embodied underpinnings of this phenomenon:

- Autonomic dysregulation in response to safety cues
- Overactivation of threat-detection networks during relational engagement
- Disrupted interoception and the inability to feel safe within the body
- Somatic signalling—breath, posture, voice—of internal emotional distancing

What may appear as disengagement is in fact a finely calibrated survival response. It is protected loneliness.

Lonely in the Room: When the Client is There, But Not

In this training, **we'll explore how to meet clients in this space—not by pushing for intimacy, but by offering safe relational micro-movements.** Our interventions will draw on somatic psychotherapy, Polyvagal Theory, and the therapeutic use of right-brain-to-right-brain communication. You'll learn how to:

- Make titrated relational offers that respect defensive architecture
- Use your own nervous system as a co-regulatory instrument
- Offer language that slips beneath cognitive defences
- Introduce somatic "bridges" that allow connection without flooding



- Gently expand temporal presence—from past and future to just this breath

Connection isn't demanded—it's grown, patiently and relationally.

The Therapist's Role: Honouring the Defended Heart

To sit with this kind of aloneness requires clinical skill and emotional courage. We become the field where a new kind of safety is tested—not through technique alone, but through who we are in the room.

Yet this work asks something of us, too. Clients who cannot stay in connection may evoke in us frustration, efforting, or even a quiet echo of our own attachment patterns. That's not a problem—it's the work. We will explore:

- Recognising your own autonomic responses to client withdrawal
- Tracking countertransference as data, not deficit
- Holding steady when connection falters
- The therapist's own need for nourishment and relational anchoring outside the room

The therapist's regulated presence isn't an optional extra—it is the intervention.

Case vignette

Take Anna (not her real name), a 36-year-old consultant with a busy social life and a partner she describes as "solid." She rarely misses a session, speaks fluently about her past, and laughs easily. And yet, when asked how she feels in relationships, she pauses and says quietly, *"Like I'm always performing."* In therapy, she shares stories but rarely feelings. Her posture is poised, her eye contact steady—but in moments of closeness, her breath shortens, and her voice flattens. She is surrounded by people, yet profoundly alone.

This training is for clinicians who recognise that kind of loneliness—and want to know how to reach the heart of it.

What You'll Take Away

By the end of this training, you will be able to:

1. **Identify the hidden faces of modern loneliness**—including how emotional disconnection shows up in clients who appear socially engaged, articulate, and "fine"
2. **Recognise the somatic and behavioural markers** of shame-driven withdrawal and relational vigilance as they emerge moment-to-moment in the therapy room
3. **Use micro-interventions that respect defences**—inviting connection without demanding it, and offering presence without flooding the nervous system
4. **Work with real-time disconnection in the therapeutic relationship** as a pathway to repair—not as a rupture to avoid but as a pattern to gently rewire
5. **Explain the neurobiological mechanisms** behind relational threat responses, including insights from Polyvagal Theory, affective neuroscience, and attachment-based trauma research
6. **Apply a relationally anchored rupture-and-repair model** tailored to clients with early attachment trauma and defended relational systems
7. **Use your own embodied presence as a clinical instrument**—helping clients feel co-regulated, safe, and met, even when words fail or connection feels dangerous

Why Christiane Sanderson



This training is led by **Christiane Sanderson**, one of the UK's most respected voices on relational trauma, shame, and attachment disruption. With over 30 years' experience as a lecturer, trainer, and therapist, Christiane brings a rare combination of psychological depth and clinical precision. Her work bridges trauma theory and human complexity, always returning to the question: *What helps people feel safe enough to come back into connection?*

Known for her warmth, clarity, and grounded presence, Christiane is ideally placed to guide clinicians through the intricate terrain of defended loneliness. She doesn't just teach the theory—she models the kind of attunement this work requires.

Join Us

Two evenings. One deep dive into the loneliness that hides behind connection. Join us as we explore how to meet defended hearts with presence, patience, and clinical skill. Early bird places are limited—secure yours today.

About the speaker

Christiane Sanderson BSc, MSc. is an Honorary Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Roehampton, of London with 35 years of experience working with survivors of childhood sexual abuse and sexual violence. She has delivered consultancy, continuous professional development and professional training for parents, teachers, social workers, nurses, therapists, counsellors, solicitors, the NSPCC, the Catholic Safeguarding Advisory Committee, the Methodist Church, the Metropolitan Police Service, SOLACE, the Refugee Council, Birmingham City Council Youth Offending Team, and HMP Bronzefield.

She is the author of *Counselling Skills for Working with Shame*, *Counselling Skills for Working with Trauma: Healing from Child Sexual Abuse, Sexual Violence and Domestic Abuse*, *Counselling Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse*, 3rd edition, *Counselling Survivors of Domestic Abuse*, *The Seduction of Children: Empowering Parents and Teachers to Protect Children from Child Sexual Abuse*, and *Introduction to Counselling Survivors of Interpersonal Trauma*, all published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers. She has also written *The Warrior Within: A One in Four Handbook to Aid Recovery from Sexual Violence*; *The Spirit Within: A One in Four Handbook to Aid Recovery from Religious Sexual Abuse Across All Faiths* and *Responding to Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse: A pocket guide for professionals, partners, families and friends for the charity One in Four* for whom she is a trustee.

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