

Absent Fathers:
How Sons and Daughters Carry the Father Wound Differently
Video Course

Dr Gwen Adshead and Dr Susan E. Schwartz

Video Course
CPD hours: 6



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“Growing up without a father is like being a bird with a broken wing. You long to fly but feel unable.”

“He was around but not available. His absence told me I wasn’t enough, even when his words didn’t.”

In the therapy room, the legacy of an absent father often hides in plain sight.

A successful executive who can never celebrate her achievements.

A teenager who lashes out, then retreats into sullen silence.

A client who appears self-possessed but cannot sustain intimacy.

A therapist who senses an aching silence beneath the narrative—but can’t yet name the wound.

These presentations have something in common—they’re clinical clues pointing to the *same hidden wound*.

They signal dissociation, imposter syndrome, perfectionism, identity fragmentation, and a struggle to feel real in relationships.

Again and again, we see it: when a father was absent—emotionally, physically, or psychologically—something essential went unmet. And decades later, our clients are still trying to fill that aching gap.

This wound isn’t always loud. Sometimes it arrives as compliance. Or perfectionism. Or aggression. It shows up in poor self-connection, body issues, emptiness, low self-esteem and dissatisfying relationships.

Beneath the varied presentation is the same psychic absence—a hunger for paternal recognition that shaped the nervous system, the self, and the capacity for connection.



In an era of increasingly changing family structures and father's absence – not always physical but also emotional or psychological - our clients are arriving with more nuanced questions about origin, worth, and who they're allowed to become.

For the first time, this extraordinary two-evening event brings together two of the leading distinctive voices in psychotherapy. **Dr Gwen Adshead**, attachment-informed forensic trauma specialist, and **Dr Susan E. Schwartz**, a leading author and Jungian analyst specialising in father-daughter relationships, join forces to explore the deep imprint of the absent father on sons, on daughters and on adult relationships and sense of self.

Gwen brings clinical precision. Susan brings symbolic resonance. Together their different approaches converge to allow for an electric dialogue that fosters deeper understanding, experiential learning and tools that expand the practical repertoire available to you as a clinician.

Together, they'll offer concrete tools, emotional language, and symbolic frameworks for helping clients reclaim what was never mirrored, name what was never spoken, and reconstruct an internal paternal presence that supports growth.

Evening One: Sons Without Fathers – Attachment, Aggression & the Shame That Follows

With Dr Gwen Adshead

What happens to a boy who grows up without a father to protect, challenge, or attune to him? Without a role model to look up to and mold himself on? Or a role model he shrinks away from? A presence that neither acknowledges nor celebrates him as a growing child?

Dr Adshead draws on decades of experience in forensic and clinical settings to explore the gendered **impact of a father's absence on boys—and the ways it manifests in therapy years or decades later. She examines how shame, defensive idealisation, internalised rage and perfectionism operate as survival strategies, and how they can be gently dismantled** through an attuned therapeutic relationship to create space for self-love that accepts and fosters emotional growth.

For some male clients, paternal absence is too dangerous to name—until the grief erupts sideways, as detachment, aggression, or shame-fuelled collapse.

Key themes we will explore:

- Attachment-based strategies for engaging clients who fear emotional exposure
- The defensive idealisation of the father, and how it blocks therapeutic exploration
- How aggression, silence, or intellectualised detachment can mask early paternal grief
- What sons need to hear when their father was physically present but emotionally absent
- How therapists can avoid becoming a surrogate father—or unconsciously replicating the same absence

Evening Two: The Daughter's Wound – Absence, Archetype & the Search for Self

With Dr Susan E. Schwartz

Daughters with absent or emotionally disengaged fathers often carry a subtle, lifelong wound.

They excel but feel like imposters. They seek intimacy but shrink from it. They hunger for recognition but dismiss it when it arrives. These themes explore the premise: the absence of the father is harmful not only due



to absence *but more due to the presence of the absence*, affecting a daughter in complex ways physically, mentally and emotionally, leaving threads of her personality ruptured. We'll explore the range of complex presentations arising from the negative father complex—including the 'daddy's girl' and the *puella archetype*, narcissistic patterns, the 'as-if' personality, and somatic collapse. We'll also draw on *Julia Kristeva's* theory of abjection to understand how these dynamics manifest in body and psyche. Informed by Jungian depth psychology, Susan Schwartz explores how this psychic gap shapes the internal world—and how dreamwork, myth, and symbol can begin to bridge it.

Without the mirroring gaze of a father figure, a daughter may come to believe she is unworthy of love—forced to perform for approval or disappear entirely.

Key themes we will explore:

- **The “father archetype” in Jungian psychology—and what happens when it’s missing**
- The internalisation of absence as imposter syndrome, self-doubt, and body alienation
- Using fairytales (including *The Handless Maiden*) to access unspoken grief and transformation
- How therapists can help clients rebuild a secure internal paternal structure
- Why symbolic language matters when working with wounds that have no words

What Makes This Collaboration Unmissable

This isn't just another trauma webinar. It's a live dialogue between two schools of thought that are rarely in the same room—let alone in conversation.

Gwen Adshead works through structure—attachment, regulation, and relational trauma.

Susan Schwartz works through story—fairytales, dreams, and the symbols where absence hides.

When these perspectives meet, the result is more than insight – it's intellectual ignition capable of re-writing therapeutic engagement. This is the kind of clinical exchange that's both deeply grounded and unexpectedly expansive—a rare convergence of disciplines that may not happen again.

Whether your work is rooted in psychoanalytic clarity or archetypal meaning-making, this event invites you to expand your lens—and gain a new vocabulary for what so many clients carry in silence.

What You'll Walk Away With

- ◆ A therapist's checklist for identifying paternal absence in the first three sessions
- ◆ Clear distinctions between how sons and daughters manifest father wounds—from aggression to self-erasure
- ◆ **Concrete phrases and questions to safely introduce *the father who wasn't there* into the therapeutic conversation**
- ◆ Somatic and emotional markers of hidden grief and internalised shame
- ◆ Narrative and dream-based tools to externalise buried stories and promote re-integration
- ◆ A practical framework for helping clients construct or repair an inner paternal image
- ◆ Countertransference guidance for clinicians who risk over-functioning or becoming the *good father* in the room
- ◆ **A blended model integrating trauma theory, attachment repair, and symbolic thinking—for work that is both grounded and transformative**
- ◆ Symbolic strategies for helping clients re-imagine a lost or never-known father through guided imagery and myth



Without these tools, we risk missing the wound that hides behind compliance, success, or silence—the wound that says, *“He wasn’t there. So who am I without him?”*

Who This Is For

- ✓ Psychotherapists, counsellors, psychologists, and analysts supporting clients with attachment wounds or identity struggles
- ✓ Clinicians drawn to either Jungian or trauma-informed frameworks—who want to bridge the two
- ✓ Professionals working with perfectionism, self-doubt, dissociation, or relationship difficulties rooted in parental absence
- ✓ Therapists who want to better understand the emotional logic of absence, and how to work with grief that’s never been named—and silence that was never safe to break.

Final Thoughts: Naming What Was Missing, Rebuilding What Was Never There

This collaboration between two master clinicians—whose perspectives rarely converge—is genuinely once-in-a-lifetime.

Whether you’re supporting high-functioning clients who can’t shake imposter syndrome, or those whose grief is buried under aggression and silence or perfectionism, this training will give you a new language for the unseen wounds that shape identity, relationship, and self-worth.

Join us for two evenings of insight, depth, and clinical transformation—where attachment meets archetype, and absence is finally given a voice.

Book your place now—this event will not be repeated.

A recording will be available, but nothing compares to being in the room when these two brilliant minds meet.

About the speaker

Dr Gwen Adshead is a Forensic Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist. She trained at St George’s Hospital, the Institute of Psychiatry and the Institute of Group Analysis. She is trained as a group therapist and a Mindfulness-based cognitive therapist and has also trained in Mentalisation-based therapy. She worked for nearly twenty years as a Consultant Forensic Psychotherapist at Broadmoor Hospital, running psychotherapeutic groups for offenders and working with staff around relational security and organisational dynamics. Gwen also has a Masters’ Degree in Medical Law and Ethics; and has a research interest in moral reasoning, and how this links with ‘bad’ behaviour.

Gwen has published a number of books and over 100 papers, book chapters and commissioned articles on forensic psychotherapy, ethics in psychiatry, and attachment theory as applied to medicine and forensic psychiatry. She is the co-editor of *Clinical topics in Personality Disorder* (with Dr Jay Sarkar) which was awarded first prize in the psychiatry Section of the BMA book awards 2013; and she also co-edited *Personality Disorder: the Definitive Collection* with Dr Caroline Jacob. She is the co-editor of the *Oxford Handbook of Forensic Psychiatry* (2013) and the *Oxford Handbook of Medical Psychotherapy* (2016). She is also the co-editor of *Munchausen’s Syndrome by Proxy: Current issues in Assessment, Treatment and Research*. Her latest book, *The Deluded Self: Narcissism and its Disorders* (2020) is out now with nscience publishing house.

Susan E. Schwartz, Ph.D., is a Jungian analyst trained in Zurich, Switzerland. She is a frequent podcast guest and a sought-after speaker at Jungian conferences and teaching programs in the USA and internationally.



Susan has published extensively in journals and edited volumes on topics in Jungian analytical psychology. Her books include *The Absent Father Effect on Daughters: Father Desire, Father Wounds* (2020), translated into multiple languages; *Imposter Syndrome and the 'As-If' Personality: The Fragility of Self* (2023); *A Jungian Exploration of the Puella Archetype: Girl Unfolding* (2024); and *An Analytical Exploration of Love and Narcissism: The Tragedy of Isolation and Intimacy* (2025). Her forthcoming title, *Missing Fathers; Yearning Sons*, will be published in 2026. All are published by Routledge.

For more information, visit www.susanschwarzphd.com.

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