

**Once people enjoy the taste of freedom,
there is no turning back.**

Neil Bush

PART III

HOW WE NEVER GO BACK

THE UNDENIABLE POWER OF PERMISSION

Quiet the noise around you
soften its pitch
Our deepest stories are our best teachers
Let the weapons of the weak
- the poison, the nagging, the gossip -
burn themselves to ash
Cast them to the wind
Take back the permission to succeed.
Make it yours.

ELISSA ALTMAN

Permission is powerful. We understand it. We know we need it. We know what it does...what it's for...and we've sought it since birth. Permission is the fuel that drives our right to decide what's best for us. It's the force behind our achievements. It determines how free we feel. It's the secret sauce poured lovingly over our accomplishments. Permission delivers the courage we need to believe we are capable of incredible things. We must give ourselves permission:

- to fulfil our potential
- to stop doing things that no longer light us up and
- to heal from the shame and guilt that have forced us to become someone other than who we really are.

With permission we learn to walk away from who and what no longer serves us - even when shame and guilt threaten to drag us back into old patterns. We've spent too long waiting for permission to live the life we want to live and be the person we want to be. When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, giving ourselves permission to be, do, and have everything we missed out on is a minute-by-minute process. We must

stay aware, conscious, and logical. As old files in our mind try to tell us we don't have permission, we must replace them with new files that say we do.

- We must give ourselves permission to heal the emotional consequences of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.
- We must give ourselves permission to believe we are genuine and trustworthy, and to feel safe voicing our experiences and giving volume to our opinions.
- We must give ourselves permission to feel comfortable with the criticism and judgment that may come with our newfound confidence and truth.

On our road to emotional freedom, the most important permission we must give ourselves is the permission to put our needs first. Close behind that is the permission to walk away from any adult who still expects us to put their needs above our own. When we meet our own needs, we model something powerful and life-changing for others. We give *them* permission to grow, to evolve, to fulfil their own potential. And if we're worried about offending, upsetting, or alienating anyone we need only remind ourselves of the 'One Question' (am I choosing, feeling, or thinking **this** because of my emotional history), and we'll immediately shift ourselves out of our old peacekeeping, people-pleasing patterns and restore our emotional peace. *They'll* adjust, and *we'll* cope beautifully with the consequences.

When we give ourselves permission to do what we thought we couldn't or shouldn't do, we override the controlling, restrictive behaviours we grew up with. When I began to give myself permission to slow down and rest, I had to override the childhood conditioning that said I should be up at 7am even on weekends "doing something productive." Bang, bang,

bang on my bedroom door. I would jolt awake, my nervous system braced for fight or flight, only to be called lazy and good-for-nothing for “lying in bed all day.” That belief, lodged in my mind, contributed to the breakdown of my mental health. Can’t stop, can’t rest, keep going. To programme a child to believe they are lazy for sleeping and resting is deeply damaging to their self-worth.

For years I struggled with disrupted sleep patterns and deep anxiety around resting and ‘doing nothing’. When I changed the repetitive thoughts in my brain that told me I was lazy I began to acknowledge the truth that, I was not only worthy of rest, but rest was essential for my mental health and wellbeing. Permission to rest is no longer something I seek from others but something I give to myself.

By the way: the individual who programmed that destructive belief is one of the laziest people I know!

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

SELF-PERMISSION

(Page 127 of your workbook)

- With self-permission, what would you do?
Give yourself permission to do it.
- With self-permission, what would you say – and to whom?
Give yourself permission to say it.
- With self-permission, what would you start?
Give yourself permission to start it.
- With self-permission, what would you finish?
Give yourself permission to finish it.

LIKE A WINTER LEAF DRIFTING AWAY FROM A TREE, PERMISSION GIVES US THE CHANCE TO BE FREE.



When we're full of self-doubt what we need more than anything in the world is the power of our own permission to feel safe and validate ourselves. With self-permission, we can close the wounds left behind by the criticism and judgment inflicted on us by the very people we were seeking permission from. You may be someone who has learned to please others before you please yourself. Self-permission will set you free from old co-dependent, people-pleasing patterns. It's not selfish to prioritise your needs. It's self-preservation.

Self-permission is a game-changer.

When we invite permission in, we can achieve anything we set our minds to. We can start and finish abandoned projects. We can have difficult conversations, set boundaries, and stop worrying about the

consequences. With self-permission to express ourselves and embrace success we can rise up from despair, repression, and anxiety. With self-permission, we can fulfil our unique purpose and potential.

Without self-permission, we spin around in endless circles of procrastination, self-doubt, and indecision constantly ruminating on the shame and guilt we carry from the past. We can't move on. We continue to punish ourselves and others for what was done to us and said to us. We remain frozen in time by the people who broke our hearts and silenced our spirits. Without permission to heal and close emotional wounds, we are powerless to end the feelings of shame, abandonment, and rejection. We keep listening to the old, critical voices and the judgments that have ruled our lives. We stay tangled in old loyalties and commitments that no longer serve us. We remain painfully detached from new emotional pathways, denying ourselves permission to have something better. The people you think you still need permission from are the people who judge you, criticise you, and wear you down. They've disempowered you. All you've ever wanted is to please them hoping that one day, like a key turning in a lock, they would finally grant you the permission you've been waiting for to unlock your life. I understand that hope, I lived it too, but *you're* the one with the key. Not them. Their permission is never coming. The people we wait for, they know the power they hold. They know that if they withhold permission, they continue to pull our strings. They can keep us trapped. They can keep us small.

Haven't you had enough yet?

Starting today, give yourself permission to put your needs first. Give yourself permission to rest, to laugh, to say thanks but no thanks to the guilt, criticisms, and judgments that have kept you hiding in the shadows and away from the light. Self-permission stands between where you are now and where you want to be.

When we're children, permission validates us - it's the rubber stamp on our existence. When we feel validated, we feel worthy. And when we feel worthy, we can take on the world. As adults recovering from being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, we have a daily responsibility to remind ourselves that we have permission to exist, to feel our feelings and to show them too, and to have our own thoughts and opinions even when they contradict someone else's. We must give ourselves permission to live our lives the way we choose and to change our minds - and our points of view - without apology.

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, the common thread running through us is a cautious, suspicious pessimism - a belief that we will always be let down and disappointed. We need to give ourselves permission to think and live beyond these beliefs.

You now have permission to get to know yourself - the *real* you who has been buried for far too long beneath the toxic layers of other people's shame. You have permission to be content, joyful, curious, lazy...and bone-fucking-idle if you choose to be.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

PERMISSION TO BE YOURSELF

(Page 129 of your workbook)

Challenge the Old Message:

- What did you believe you needed permission for as a child?
Examples: to rest, to speak up, to be different, to say no.
- Write down three old beliefs you internalised about needing permission.

Name the Control:

- Who withheld that permission from you?
- How did it keep you small, silent, or scared?
- Write a few sentences about the impact it had on your self-belief:

Grant Yourself New Permission:

You are the authority in and of your life from now.

- What three permissions do you want to grant yourself today?
Example: "I have permission to trust my instincts" or "I have permission to rest without guilt".

Anchor It In:

- Complete this sentence: starting today, I give myself full permission to...

The moment you stop waiting for permission from others is the moment you start living freely.

HOW TO BE RESILIENT

Resilience is what we are. As human beings living through increasingly challenging times our hardiness and strength are required now more than ever. However, when we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, our resilience is often compromised. The fight has been knocked out of us. We don't have the emotional grit that helps other people recover quickly from mistakes and misdemeanours. If the sky is falling in, then so be it. It's not that we don't *care* - it's that we're not *brave* enough to stand up for ourselves and cope when things go wrong. Our ability to recover quickly and to bounce back from 'failures' feels non-existent. Once again, life is pulling the rug out from under our feet. Another disappointment. What's new?

Resilient people don't see hard times or failure as the end; they see them as opportunities to tweak their efforts, to try something different, to adapt. They don't care what people think. You're unlikely to find a resilient person crying helplessly in the corner or drinking themselves into oblivion. They'll be back on their game in the morning. Resilience is something they've developed and so can you. You're never too old to learn how to bounce back and have another go.

When we're kids our spirit starts off resilient. Then the critical, resentful, humiliating voices of childhood grow loud and hard to ignore. Our resilience ebbs away until we're dry-mouthed, indecisive, nervous wrecks. We become withdrawn, detached, and start failing. Eventually, we give up trying, we surrender to the bullies with their dream-stealing, overpowering projections.

The only effective therapist I ever worked with concluded that I was about seven years old when depression and anxiety first took hold. Decades later, I made myself a list like the ones you'll find on the following pages and setback by setback, failure by failure, I rediscovered my resilience.

Without those lists, this book and any other meaningful thing I've ever done would not exist.

Recovery from childhood wounds requires the belief that the casualties of other people's failings - you and me - are worth saving, rebirthing, and getting back on track. Endeavouring to fulfil that belief - as you are doing now - is proof that you *are* resilient.

Look around you at the world today: wars, poverty, the soaring cost of living. People are losing their homes. Children are growing up in overcrowded temporary accommodation while their parents battle with mental health challenges. Money, decent food, and safe housing will of course help them, but it's **resilience** that they need to overcome adversity, to thrive and to win their emotional war.

Being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D makes us reluctant to shine our light. It makes us cautious about bouncing back. When we stumble and fall, we're reminded of the people who once tripped us up and told us it "served us right." A lack of resilience has kept us where we fell: faceplanted, covered in wounds, dismissed as an unworthy mistake.

Resilience, on the other hand, sees us bounce back with a "fuck you, watch my dust" defiance. Resilience refuses to be held back and smiles quietly to itself as it pushes forward. When we embrace resilience, we *validate* ourselves. We reclaim our worth. How dare anyone suggest we don't deserve it.

FAILURE

Failure is one of those words that conjures up bleak images of loneliness, poverty, broken hearts, and broken dreams. The more we care about something or someone the more acutely we feel the impact of failing. Failure can be a mild sting or it can hurt like hell - either way, it's rarely welcomed or appreciated.

Failure has so many different faces and so many different meanings that it's difficult to imagine anyone who hasn't met failure in some capacity. Some people recover quickly from failure (that's resilience), others wallow for a lifetime in its shame and humiliation.

Resilience is the antidote to failure. If we didn't grow up cultivating it, we can learn how to develop it now. Few things in this life are true failures - you can be the judge of what you believe them to be - but most things are re-doable and achievable one way or another.

13 REASONS WHY YOUR FAILURES ARE A GOLDEN TICKET TO YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS

1. You proved you can step outside your Trauma-Survival Zone.
2. You came back stronger from failure.
3. You believed you were capable of more.
4. Failure showed you what and who you need - and what and who you don't.
5. Now you know what *not* to do, you can focus on what to do.
6. You're in awe of the courage and gumption it's taken you to get here.
7. You made sure your needs were met as you pursued your goals.
8. You've faced and overcome many of your fears just to get this far.
9. You've shown perseverance and patience.
10. You've proven that you can get shit done.
11. Despite the outcome, you're wiser and more experienced.
12. Failure left you with insight, smoother edges, and innovative ideas.
13. You failed, and you lived. You can fail again, and live on.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

RECLAIMING RESILIENCE

(Page 131 of your workbook)

Resilience doesn't mean never falling - it's about refusing to stay down when you do. Failure isn't the enemy. It's the evidence that you were brave enough to try and always remember that you have permission to try again. These next exercises will help you reconnect with your resilient self, redefine your relationship with failure, and dare to move forward again on your own terms.

Reclaim the Real You:

- When you were a child what did you love to do?
- What did you stop doing because of your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences?
- What would you love to try doing again?
- What would you love to try again, but fear failing at?

Face the Fear:

- What first step could you take just to see how it feels?
- What's the worst that could happen if it doesn't turn out the way you hoped?
- Is that so bad?

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

EMBRACING FAILURE

(Page 133 of your workbook)

Redefine Failure:

- What are three things you know you would probably fail at if you tried them right now? Be playful or bold, even extreme!
- Does it bother you that you would fail at them? Why or why not?

Dig Deeper:

- Who would you most hate to see you fail at something you care about?
- Why would their opinion matter so much?
- Have you given them a Jar of Justice? If not, should you?

Challenge the Old Meaning:

- What have you made failure mean about you in the past?
- Whose voice do you hear in your mind when you "fail"?
- What do they say? How do they react?

Rebuild Your Resilience:

- If you knew you would recover quickly from any failure, what would you dare to try?

If you stumbled yesterday, stand up today - that is resilience. You are not sinking under your feelings anymore. You are learning to swim with whatever life brings you. Millions of mistakes are willingly, even gladly, made before success is found. Breathe that truth in.

I know life can be hard. It can feel frustrating, painful, and sometimes like it's just not worth it. But you know from the work you've already done in this book that there's a version of you who has the emotional strength and power to become the person you want to be. Make changes and

plans for that person. Hold your future self in your mind and heart and act on their behalf.

Remember: overwhelm bows down to extraordinary people who learn to cope, then manage, then thrive.

Despite everything that's been said to you and done to you, you already know how to make changes for yourself - changes that are kinder, wiser, more inclusive, and softer than anything you were shown by the people who hurt you. Those people broke your heart. They challenged your soul. They left you barely surviving. But just because things aren't working out the way you want *right now* doesn't mean they're not working out. When you feel like giving up, ask yourself (Page 135 of your workbook):

- What thought are you having about this failure that is making you feel like giving up?
- Then ask yourself: am I choosing, feeling, and thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D?

Yes, you probably are, but now you have the power to challenge it and to change it. As the hours, days, and weeks open up before you, you'll surprise yourself with how resilient, brave, courageous, and downright capable you really are. Past failures are just a drop in the ocean compared to the emotional power you're now reclaiming. Go out there and do something so huge, so brave, so amazing that you just might fail. And if you do? You'll rise from the ashes. You'll see the self-control, courage, and self-trust you've gained. You'll learn to look at the many successes within the so-called 'failure' and you'll try again.

As for the people who laugh at your failure - fuck them. Their lies are not your truth.

In the next chapter, we're talking about closure. If you look up the word "closure" in a thesaurus, one of its alternative meanings is failure. But if closure is an opportunity to leave behind what didn't work and embrace a new beginning, then failure can mean the same thing too.

With both failure and closure, you're offered the chance to build something you truly want from scratch. Let's do this.

CLOSURE

I've done it. I've watched other people do it, and we're all agreed: the mind-numbing pursuit of closure must be one of the most soul-destroying pursuits our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences and open wounds expose us to. We rarely seek closure from a person or situation that has been good to us. We might seek closure if we feel guilty about something, but more often-than-not, we pursue it when we're confused, invalidated, and desperate for transparency, clarity, and an explanation.

When we've been emotionally worn down, confused, manipulated, coerced, lied to, or deceived, we seek closure. We've felt unseen and unheard by someone we trusted who we believed was good, but who turned out to be anything but. We took them into our hearts because they supplied the perfect setting for a new connection to flourish. We were so desperate for a happy ending that we believed the promises and plans laid out before us by someone who simply saw our vulnerabilities, our willingness to please, and our unrelenting efforts to "get it right this time."

When the cracks appeared and the rot set in, we were already too far down the rabbit hole to turn back. Despite their increasingly critical behaviour and our increasingly desperate efforts to be perfect, we found ourselves frozen out, forgotten, censored, and ignored. We affirm, "I know they're here to teach me something, I know I'm here to learn from

them." And despite our intuition screaming at us to move on, we ignore the warning signs and plan our next co-dependent move.

Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, we blame ourselves. We tell ourselves we did something to burst the bubble, to break the spell. But what's really hurting us in those days, weeks, and months of seeking closure is not just the loss of that relationship but the deep, painful reminder of how rejection, criticism, and exclusion once tore us apart. It's the memory of how our hearts broke when the people we loved and trusted betrayed us. We hold on tight because we've already lost so much.

Seeking closure can seem like a crazy way to get clarity, but the need for closure takes on a whole new meaning when we've spent a lifetime being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. For us, the pursuit of closure is the pursuit of validation. For a little while, they made us feel seen. They listened to our faltering opinions. They empathetically justified our feelings. Or so it seemed. Only now, with time and clarity, do we see there was tolerance but no patience. There was manipulation but no love. They gave us hope that, finally, we meant enough to be someone's *first thought*, not their *afterthought*.

When we seek closure, we're not just chasing answers but the *feeling* that we were once important to someone - even if those feelings were built on sand. It's not the abysmal way we've been treated or the shock of the ending that has us climbing the walls; it's the shocking, frightening memory of being abandoned. It's the devastating realisation that we never meant *enough* for them to stay. We remember all too painfully what it felt like to be dismissed and rejected. Once again we're the child who cried alone in the dark.

Seeking closure gives us back a sense of control - or at least the illusion of it, but the toxic people we seek closure from enjoyed turning us into puppets. They pulled our strings and watched us dangle by a thread. They broke us down piece by piece and refused to acknowledge our pain. They blocked us, ignored our calls, and silenced our cries for help.

If we find ourselves pursuing closure, it's a warning sign that we've been snared by someone toxic. They played a game with us, a game we could never win. Seeking closure from someone who thrives on our confusion and suffering is a natural response for someone who has been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, but closure from a toxic person is unlikely to ever happen. They feed on the confusion and the pain. Every time we reach out to them to soothe our confusion, they are fed. When someone walks away leaving a trail of abuse, insults, and manipulation, our minds spiral:

- Where did I go wrong?
- What *didn't* I do?
- What *didn't* I say?
- Why *didn't* I try harder?

We torture ourselves with the belief that if only we had done something differently - been better, been more pleasing - they would have stayed.

If you take a moment and look back at all the painful times you've sought closure, would it surprise you to realise that it's not your conscious adult self who has sought it, but your wounded inner child? Your conscious adult self doesn't care that some nasty, manipulative narcissist abandoned you - good riddance. But your inner child, whose first experience of rejection and abandonment has left deep emotional wounds, they care very much that once again they've been thrown to the wolves and left without comfort, security, and reassurance.

- They are the ones crying for closure.

- They are the ones who need looking after.
- They are the ones we need to protect.

The big bad wolf who blew your house down, the 'hero' who you thought would heal your wounds, they're not the ones you need to seek closure from. You need closure for the person who lost themselves so they could please others. You need closure for your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D self.

When we look back, we'll find many examples of people we wanted to love and have love us back. From classmates in primary school, to the "cool kids" at big school, to college friends, workmates, relationships, and family. We've been wounded by the bullets of betrayal more than once. But now we know better. We know that our unmet needs stem from our childhoods. We know we can comfort the little child we once were who's crying out for love. We know we can finally give them their closure. Because we know better, we can do better.

You've already completed deep work in this book questioning your responses, your reactions, your patterns with difficult people and painful experiences. You've already started reclaiming the power that was taken from you. You may have already questioned why you tried so hard to fix unfixable relationships or sought closure from people who delighted in your pain. Make sure everyone you once sought closure from has their own Jar of Justice.

Now you have awareness, you have a clearer picture:

- Why you felt what you felt.
- Why you did what you did.
- Why you stayed as long as you stayed.

It's OK. Forgive yourself. With this knowledge, you will never seek closure from anyone again.

NOTE: Seeking closure doesn't always stem from chaotic, dramatic romantic relationships. You may still be seeking closure from childhood figures, people whose approval you endlessly craved but never received. As we know, those early relationships underpin so many of our emotional struggles. Forgive yourself for every time you sought closure from someone who revelled in your pain. No blame. No shame. Just massive awareness.

In the next exercise, you'll have the opportunity to write about when and how you sought closure in the past, and how you might still seek it today. I cringed my way through this exercise when I first did it thinking about the people I had begged for closure from. But now I know different I most definitely do different. Seeking closure from anyone who has abused, insulted, betrayed, or abandoned me is no longer something I desire...

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

CLOSURE

(Page 136 of your workbook)

Closure is not something others can grant us. It's something we learn to create within ourselves. This exercise helps you understand how you've sought closure in the past and how you can now offer healing directly to your wounded inner child instead.

Reflect on the Pursuit:

- When you seek closure, what does it usually look like?
- Describe your emotions, your behaviour, and the ways you've tried to get your needs met.

Identify the Sources:

- Who and what have you sought closure from? Think about people, relationships, groups, institutions - anywhere you sought validation, apologies, or understanding.

Acknowledge the Feelings:

- How were you feeling at the time you sought closure? Examples: abandoned, rejected, unimportant, confused.

Consider the Alternatives:

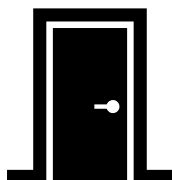
- If you hadn't sought closure from them, how might you have dealt with those feelings instead? Examples: self-soothing, boundary-setting, grieving the truth.

Heal Forward:

- If a similar situation arises in the future, what will you say to your wounded inner child instead of seeking closure from others? Examples: you are already enough, their behaviour does not reflect your worth, you are safe now, you don't need their permission to heal.

Your words of comfort:

The closure you are seeking is not in their hands, it's already inside you, waiting to be claimed. The only closure we ever need from toxic people is the closure of the door behind them as they leave.



LAST WORD ON CLOSURE

No relationship - and I do mean **no** relationship - will ever fulfil us unless there is an equal balance of emotional support. While we remain intent on being everything to someone just to be loved, we will always end up feeling 'less than' when our unmet needs attract shady characters into our lives.

Whether it's a grumpy parent, a non-communicative partner, a woe-is-me friend, or a demanding child - adult or otherwise - when we get the emotional balance right we no longer leave our needs at the door. The so-called "difficult people" who cross our paths, leaving us speechless, searching, and heartbroken, must never leave us feeling hopeless. They are damaged in ways that we cannot fix. And neither should we try.

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D we seek out people to soothe our pain to give us the validation and love we missed in childhood. But this often leads us into controlling relationships with equally wounded people, who's so-called "love language" is dominance, coercion, and cruelty. They don't want an equal, they want a puppet, and we are too often willing to be that puppet. They feed on our insecurity and our unmet needs.

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D we will seek love and approval from some really shitty people, and don't they do an excellent job of convincing us that they're the ones to heal our wounds. At first, as we're hooked in, we feel seen. Finally, finally, someone gets us. Or so we believe. But then the cracks appear. The mask slips. Their bloody wounds seep through to the surface. Once again, we are S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D by someone we thought would protect us, someone we believed we were safe with. We do everything we can to stop it happening, but no matter what we do, we're S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D all over again.

- We beg.
- We plead.
- We sacrifice.
- We dumb ourselves down.
- We become the ultimate people-pleaser.
- We lose ourselves.
- We lose our truth.

Like the S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D child we once were, we promise we'll be good, that we'll do better. We ask for love by abandoning ourselves, but who must we become just to get their love and approval? Don't lose yourself trying to hold on to someone who isn't afraid of losing you. Cut yourself free. It's better to stand alone than stumble around in the shadows.

Any day now you will realise that you are not broken. Although you feel the sadness of betrayal, the grief of rejection, and the confusion of abandonment, the fight is still within you to keep rising, and to keep feeling. You are not over. You will rise again.

BURNING THE PAST

Whether you prefer to talk about your experiences or write them down, making them conscious is the key to healing them. You may feel compassion and forgiveness for some of the people you've held accountable for your emotional struggles, for others, you may not - and that's fine. There's no timescale, no pressure, and no expectation for you to forgive or to reconnect with people who have harmed you - intentionally or otherwise.

Write letters, notes, poems, or limericks - whatever form calls to you. Put pen to paper, brush to canvas, or hands to dough and express yourself.

Give yourself permission to feel your feelings.

- Let them rise.
- Burn them.
- Frame them.
- Send them.
- Heal them.

Just express them.

Free yourself from the consequences of holding them inside. From depression to expression - this is how we burn the past and reclaim our future.

APOLOGISING TO OURSELVES

We can wait forever for an apology from people who have S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D us, though rarely do we receive one. But did you know that apologising to yourself carries its own unique and powerful energy? Try it.

- I'm so sorry I went through that.
- I'm deeply sorry for the pain I've carried.
- It is not my fault. I'm sorry if I made myself feel that it was.
- I'm so sorry if I blamed myself for any of the pain other people have caused me. I am not to blame.

An apology recognises injustice, unfairness, and wrongdoing. Even when we are not personally accountable for someone's suffering, offering an apology - "I'm sorry you went through that" - validates their pain.

- It recognises them.
- It hears them.
- It helps them to feel seen.

Like forgiveness, receiving apologies from others becomes less important as our self-worth builds. Those who once hurt us lose their grip on our emotions. Their past behaviour starts to feel less impactful, less defining. But with or without an apology, we can choose to dial up the brightness of our light. We exchange the hope of an apology for acceptance that it's not coming and, more importantly, that we no longer need it. We must become more resilient with these enduringly hurtful individuals. We must give up our longing for apologies and validation.

They will notice our unspoken withdrawal, the way we no longer seek emotional reassurance from them. They will notice our peace and that is enough. If suffering was the price we paid for our progress, then we're

fully paid up. We owe them nothing. They don't get to hurt us anymore just to make themselves feel better.

And if you're the one who needs to *make* an apology?

- Make sure it's safe to do so - for you and for them.
- Aim for sincerity.
- Do not expect forgiveness.
- Then release yourself from the guilt that has tied you to a chaotic, pain-filled past.
- Fly free.



RED FLAG PEOPLE



**SOMEONE I LOVED ONCE GAVE ME A BOX FULL OF DARKNESS.
IT TOOK ME YEARS TO UNDERSTAND THAT THIS TOO WAS A GIFT.**

MARY OLIVER

Red Flag People carry their own share of emotional trauma. They too have been led down difficult, damaging, and humiliating pathways. But that's where the similarities between us and them end. As we make our way towards truth and emotional freedom, Red Flag People stay in the dark. We're rising up and healing our emotional histories, they are still marinating in a toxic stew of projection, criticism, judgement, and the residual damage of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. We may once have been a Red Flag Person before we set out to reach emotional freedom and win our emotional war.

Red Flag People exploit their wounds using them as weapons against themselves and against others. They're self-punishing, manipulative, angry, and resentful. Everything is always someone else's fault. They share their S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences, wound-wallow, and trauma-dump with anyone willing to listen. They love nothing more than seeking out and finding a co-dependent people-pleaser, someone desperate for love and approval, who will do anything for them.

In **professional** situations with Red Flag People, we must always work with extreme self-awareness. In **personal** relationships with a Red Flag People, we must put on our running shoes and never look back. **Yes**, they **are** that toxic. **No**, you **cannot** change them. There's no better time to implement our newfound knowledge about triggers, self-trust, and boundaries than when we meet a **Red Flag Person**.

As you've diligently worked your way through this book and the Challenge It to Change It journal prompts, you'll have no problem keeping a Red Flag Person at arm's length. However, we are *all* works in progress and on our road to emotional freedom Red Flag People can set us back if we are caught unawares. If someone you've just met tells you that you're emotionally closed off, anti-social, or not a team player, recognise it for what it is: a Red Flag Person's attempt to undermine your

confidence and make you more likely to attach yourself to them for their love and approval. The worst outcome is that we're retraumatized by their behaviour, abandon the progress we've made, and fall back on old coping mechanisms. If you find yourself in the company of anyone who makes you feel even slightly S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, remember you can walk away without looking back or fearing any consequences. Remember your commitment to self-trust and put your emotional and physical safety first - if they turn out *not* to be a Red Flag Person they'll understand you putting yourself on top of the needs pile for a change. But if they *are* a Red Flag Person, dust off those running shoes and don't look back.

Your Conscious Adult Self is in charge now, not your wounded inner child. You are a warrior. You've got this.

*

If you recognise yourself in any of the following descriptions, give yourself a pat on the back for owning it. Kudos for being an aware and honest warrior. Your path to emotional freedom is so much easier when you're willing to raise your hand, recognise the things about yourself that need to change, and say: yep, I was that, I did that, but now I know different I can do different. That's you absolutely reclaiming your power. That's you winning your emotional war.

OK, so when you're ready, first up we have (drum roll)...Shadow Victims.

Shadow Victims

SHADOW VICTIMS walk around with open emotional wounds, still desperately trying to get their needs recognised and met. They haven't yet found any balm to soothe the deep rivets of traumatic memory that run through their mind and body – or if they have, they've chosen not to use it. They're getting more out of staying wounded than they would get if they healed their suffering.

Shadow Victims are "help-rejecting complainers." They need help but have a pattern of refusing advice and support. Some even take pride in being "un-helpable". Shadow Victims can either be highly emotional or pathologically unemotional. They have walls instead of boundaries but no intention of tearing them down. They're often co-dependent and may be described as "energy vampires" because of their relentless efforts to get their needs met with a woe-is-me approach to life. Everything is always someone else's fault. People may have challenged them on their victim mentality, but Shadow Victims simply add those people to their ever-growing list of unsympathetic people who lack compassion and emotional intelligence. Their wounds are open and raw as they seek out anyone willing to witness their ongoing pain.

They can appear sensitive and empathic towards other people's struggles, but often these connections are opportunities to wound wallow and trauma bond rather than heal. Emotionally regulated people tend not to understand Shadow Victims and usually avoid these troubled

souls at all costs. The Shadow Victim constantly seeks validation and is often labelled as needy and insecure.

A Shadow Victim chooses to stay wounded often clinging to a childlike need for reassurance and sympathy. As they retell their sad stories, they maintain a captive audience for a while. When the audience shrinks, the Shadow Victim simply moves on to the next willing listener. If they're lucky they'll find a co-dependent rescuer. If they're unlucky, a narcissist will trap them like prey.

Shadow Victims don't seek out people who are willing to help them heal. They seek out people willing to ride with them on a horse called 'Victim' that repeatedly falls in the same unforgiving race. As you're reading this if you're bravely identifying yourself as a Shadow Victim, I want you to know:

I see you.

I was you.

And with deep respect and kindness I want you to hear this truth: whether you're punishing yourself or someone else, life as a Shadow Victim will never deliver what you're waiting for. **Life as a Shadow Victim is a total waste of your precious time.** Permit yourself a deep sense of peace as you breathe that truth in. Recognising your role as a Shadow Victim gives you a wonderful opportunity to:

- heal your past.
- look deeply into your triggers and your emotional wounds.
- lay to rest your grievances and your grudges.
- begin a process of self-forgiveness and self-trust.
- look within yourself and shine a light on your unmet needs.

When darkness is met with light, the fear of what might be found is transformed into compassion for what was endured. We may not have received the validation, protection, love, inclusion, or encouragement that we needed but if you recognise yourself as a Shadow Victim you have an extraordinary opportunity to meet your own needs and save yourself.

If you identify as a Shadow Victim, congratulations on your insight and your honesty. You are well on the road to real freedom. You're a brave soul. Thank you for your honesty. It's the most empowering thing you can do for yourself.

THE AWKWARDS

Anyone

Waiting for

Kindness

Will

Always

Radiate

Discomfort

My heart goes out to the AWKWARDS. I used to be such an awkward person that someone once called me "gauche." I thought it meant mysterious and interesting. It doesn't.

Awkwardness is... awkward. And when we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, chances are we're going to feel awkward socially, professionally, and personally. We feel awkward because we don't know our place. We feel surplus, uncomfortable, unwanted, and in the way. Imposter Syndrome is our thing. So why am I including AWKWARDS under Red Flag People? Don't they just need a bit of kindness and compassion? Yes, they do. And that's *exactly* why I'm including them on the Red Flag People list.

When we're recovering from being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D we must say no to supporting anyone else until we've stopped plunging headfirst into co-dependent, people-pleasing friendships and relationships. If you meet any AWKWARDS tell them kindly that you're in emotional recovery. Give them this book if you feel inclined but for now you must avoid people who are likely to reinfect your emotional wounds and your tendency to rescue. Be honest. Communicate kindly and compassionately. Offer simple, kind words - 'you've got this', 'you're alright', 'you're safe' - but don't try to fix another set of broken wings. Heal yourself first.

Can you work together with an AWKWARD, and both heal simultaneously? Like your own support group of two?

Possibly.

But stay super-aware of any tendency you or they may have towards co-dependency and rescuing. You don't need to carry someone else's pain to prove you're a good person.

Is there a crossover between Shadow Victims and AWKWARDS? Not, the two are quite distinct. A Shadow Victim wallows openly in self-pity, but an AWKWARD will try hard to hide their wounds. You'll know everything about a Shadow Victim within minutes of meeting them. An AWKWARD is too self-conscious to show their pain, they don't want to be a bother - too many people have already told them that they're a burden.

NARCISSISTS

I WANT POWER AND CONTROL AT ANY COST

We all know the type. They gain our trust, lure us in with kindness, with consideration, a bright smile, they love bomb us, they may even project a neediness that triggers our need to rescue them. Then, out of nowhere, come the criticisms, the subtle put-downs, the humiliation, and the

silences. The underlying intention of the narcissist is simple: they want power and control at any cost and what better way than to weaken their prey before the kill? The jaw-dropping, self-serving lengths a narcissist will go to leave us stunned and re-wounded. On our road to emotional freedom, we are easy targets for narcissists who trigger our need to please, our readiness to be guilt-tripped, and our desperate search for love and approval.

There are many reasons why people become narcissists but your only concern, as someone recovering from emotional abuse, is this: get the hell away from them.

- Don't pander to them.
- Don't be bribed or manipulated.
- Don't try to save them.
- Don't try to fix them.
- Don't believe you're the one who can change them.

Just recognise them for who and what they are - and leave. There are no second dates. No second chances. They're not looking for love or friendship - they're looking for prey.

Trying to get the last word with a narcissist stands between them and your sanity. It's a battle between the forces of good and evil and you're worth far more than the cost of that battle. Never waste your time trying to be seen and heard by someone who is blind and deaf to your needs. That isn't your Conscious Adult Self fighting for recognition - that's your shamed inner child still holding on for validation that is never, ever coming. Let their behaviour reinforce your awareness. Let it strengthen your commitment to new habits and behaviours that protect your emotional recovery. Don't slip back into old habits.

Even after nearly two decades of doing this work I continue to be amazed at the extent a narcissist will go to get their needs met. Don't kick yourself for being taken in by a woeful story, a tragic tale, or a big fat lie. Despite being mentally frazzled and confused, thank your lucky stars that your integrity is intact and you're nothing like the narcissist who pulled you in and made you doubt yourself. We've all been taken in by the charmers at some point. Forgive yourself. With awareness, we can protect ourselves from their hooks and claws. Narcissists go all out for victory, and they don't care whose day they ruin for the cause. They never listen because the only voice they ever want to hear is their own. Leave these walking health hazards swimming in their own toxic juices and exit like your life depends on it - because it does.

HAS NARCISSISM BECOME A BUZZWORD?

Yes, narcissism has become a buzzword. It's thrown around casually to describe anyone who's selfish, arrogant, or self-absorbed. But true narcissism runs far deeper than a competitive ego or a bad attitude. It's a relentless hunger for validation, control, and admiration, no matter the cost to others.

When we casually label difficult people as narcissists we risk minimising the very real emotional damage that true narcissists cause. We risk blaming ourselves for not "fixing" relationships that were never safe or sustainable to begin with. Actual narcissistic behaviour leaves deep wounds, not just a little confusion over a few bad days or selfish behaviour. Narcissists create patterns of control, erosion, gaslighting, and emotional starvation. If you've been entangled with a true narcissist, you know the difference. You don't just feel annoyed, you feel erased. You feel empty. You feel unsafe.

Narcissism is real and the consequences are too. And while it's important not to throw the word around lightly, it's just as important not to downplay the devastation it can cause when it's genuinely present.

DRAMA QUEENS

Unlike the cunning narcissists, Drama Queens are upfront. They're blatant and often unapologetic about the drama they cause. They'll often laugh at themselves despite the chaos they're capable of creating. They may be irritating, demanding, and huffy, but at least you know where you stand with a Drama Queen.

So why are they Red Flag People?

Because although they're rarely vindictive or cruel, true Drama Queens can still undermine the emotional centre of someone who is vulnerable enough to be intimidated by their intensity. Someone in recovery from being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D might feel tempted to rescue a Drama Queen (male or female) and try to 'make it all better' by meeting their attention-seeking needs.

Drama Queens are crying outwards not inwards for attention and validation. They're trying to get their needs met in ways that seem extreme - sometimes exhausting - but unlike shadow victims and narcissists, they don't intentionally take prisoners along the way.

Rejection and abandonment often run rampant in the childhoods of Drama Queens. For many of them it's the only way they know to get the attention they were once denied. Drama Queens tend to have hearts of gold. They would be devastated if they knew they'd upset an innocent bystander but, equally, they have no plans to change anytime soon.

They can be grand, colourful, generous, a laugh a minute, and undeniably brighten up any life they star in, but if you meet a Drama

Queen make sure your boundaries are in place, and you prioritise *your* needs first. If your self-trust and self-care habits are unbreakable, they'll feel more like 'Pink Flag' than 'Red Flag', but you still need to look after yourself.

If you recognise yourself as a Drama Queen? Rock on with your bad self but heal where you need to. Your life is a masterpiece - not a theatre. You don't need the drama.



THE RESCUER AND RESCUEE

The Rescuer and Rescuer dynamic satisfy their fears of abandonment by depending on each other to get their needs met. One gives attention the other receives it but each fuels the other's desperate need to feel wanted. They'll refer to themselves as 'soulmates' or 'twin flames' bandaging each other's wounds and pledging lifelong vendettas against the people who have let them down and disappointed them.

At first, we might think it's a kind and benevolent connection. But over time, these relationships often turn toxic. Rescuers can project their hidden resentments and grudges onto the Rescuer, while the Rescuer becomes increasingly dependent and needy, draining the Rescuer's emotional resources.

Both are emotionally wounded and despite outward appearances of kindness and generosity, are often a seething mass of contradictions and

short fuses. Each eventually stretches the limits of the other and both can be passive-aggressive.

There is an enormous difference between supporting and nurturing a friend or partner and seeking emotional reward from the rescuer-rescuee dynamic. I know how tempting it is to allow yourself to be looked after or be the one who looks after someone else in the hope that finally, *finally*, you'll be loved and appreciated. But on our road to emotional freedom, we're *healing* our anxious attachments. Our desire to wrap these wounds in someone else's approval rather than our own self-validation means we're losing – not winning – our emotional war. Have you played or are you playing the role of Rescuer or Rescuee? No shame. No blame. Only awareness.

CO-DEPENDENTS

Co-dependence is a common emotional outcome of trauma and being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. We believe that if we create a pain-free existence for someone else we're guaranteed a pain-free existence for ourselves. Never again (we hope) will we experience the terror of judgement, criticism, rejection, or abandonment. Our **illogical** perspective tells us: if I make their life easy and myself indispensable, they'll never criticise, judge, reject, or abandon me. Unfortunately, they often do. The co-dependent says: 'as long as you're OK, I'm OK' even when they're not.

Co-dependent people rely on others for their peace of mind. They solve problems and meet needs for people who are only too willing to exploit them. Enough is *never* enough for the person who takes advantage of the co-dependent.

If you've ever thought, 'I need to please this person to keep the peace' or 'I need to make everything OK for this person' or 'I owe this person my

time and money' and they allowed you to, or even expected you to, then you had a co-dependent connection with them.

They present the problem; you provide the solution. You'll do anything to ensure the connection remains peaceful. You need each other – but in very different ways. It's a mutually dependent relationship, but with a deeply unequal balance of give and take.

I was co-dependent for much of my life until the penny finally dropped. I saw that certain people were simply playing me. They cottoned on to my need to please, to my guilty conscience, and they exploited it. They knew I would jump in and clean up the mess they'd made. I would pay their bills, their rent, listen to their (probably made-up) problems and still be left wondering if I'd done enough. Their needs would escalate, and I would keep finding ways to try to make things better - which of course, I never could. As I willingly fixed the latest round of problems, bigger problems would appear.

When I began my journey towards emotional freedom, I went cold turkey on co-dependent connections. The outcomes presented a 'learning curve' of their own. As I took away money, time, and energy, my once co-dependent connections turned hysterical, abusive, accusatory, blaming and, finally, thankfully, silent. I became, and remain, unwavering in my quest for balanced connections or no connections at all. The door closed on co-dependent associations for good. Never again will I tolerate a co-dependent dynamic.

Remember the 'One Question': am I choosing, feeling, thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? After *everything* we've been through, it's OK to reject repetitive painful patterns of behaviour where we're exploited and used. On our road to emotional freedom having awareness of why we have been - or still are - co-dependent helps us

protect ourselves from people who take from us and exploit our vulnerabilities. We must stay aware of and distance ourselves from them. There will be accusations. There may be threats. Each one will remind you of how used and exploited you once felt; you may be tempted to revert to old, co-dependent habits to soothe the pain and keep the peace. Don't. Those days are over. We don't collect users and abusers anymore. People treat us with respect, or we walk away for their sake and for ours.

We no longer enable abusers to abuse.

EMOTIONAL DISRUPTORS

An 'Emotional Disruptor' would likely describe themselves as a "practical joker" or the "family clown." To the rest of us, Emotional Disruptors are offensive annoying piss-takers who are never actually funny. They humiliate others under the guise of humour, attempting to embarrass people with sexist, homophobic, or racist comments. When you object, they'll furiously claim to feel offended by your accusations, and launch a self-righteous attack against *you*. At some point we all meet an Emotional Disruptor who triggers us and revels in the power of doing so.

When an Emotional Disruptor makes humiliating comments disguised as jokes, the best response is simple: ask them, poker-faced, 'what do you mean by that - are you trying to upset me'? They'll laugh it off. They'll tell you amongst other things that 'you're too sensitive' or that you need to 'lighten up' but in that moment, you'll have broken the power they thought they had over you. When we're dealing with an Emotional Disruptor we must rewrite the distorted rules we once learned about speaking up and expressing our opinions.

Emotional Disruptors don't push their luck with assertive people; they know they won't be tolerated just to keep the peace. Call them out. Let

them know - without anger, without drama - that you're onto them. They'll never bother you again..

NEGGING AND DESTABILISATION

Put-downs and criticisms are the work of the unenlightened. Both are beloved tactics of the Narcissist and the Emotional Disruptor. Negging - a negative comment disguised as a casual remark - is used to destabilise our already shaky self-esteem and confidence. Negging creates confusion, uncertainty, and insecurity. It plays directly on our fears of, once again, being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.

When we're in emotional recovery it's all too easy to become prey to the type of person for whom negging is a cruel and destructive sport. Their remarks aren't accidents; they're calculated attacks, designed to make us question our worth, our attractiveness, our intelligence, and our right to feel emotionally safe and secure.

I shouldn't *need* to tell you to get away from them, to exit quickly, cleanly, and without looking back, but maybe I do. Because sometimes, when we're still healing, we second-guess the harm. We rationalise the comment. We give them another chance. We tell ourselves we're too sensitive but let's be clear: negging is emotional abuse. No one who genuinely cares for you would ever make you feel smaller so they can feel bigger. If someone negs you, leave. Immediately. And *without* apology.

GUILT-SHOVELLERS

We talked about guilt in our chapter on forgiveness, but guilt-shovellers warrant a separate mention. They are Red Flag People because they do astonishing emotional damage in their quest for the "Three R's": Retaliation, Retribution, and Revenge. Their anger and resentment fuel manipulative, coercive, and cruel behaviour. If they're allowed, a guilt-shoveller will create hell on earth.

When we've made mistakes, when our pain has clouded our judgement, a guilt-shoveller will make sure we stay buried in sorrow and regret for what we've done. But here's the truth: *we can't turn back the clock, and we're entitled to heal our past without constant reminders of where we went wrong.* Rectify the damage caused where possible. Apologise, where appropriate. Then take yourself off-grid, somewhere the guilt-shoveller can't track you down and make your life hell. When you recognise that their relentless, guilt-shovelling behaviour is fuelling sleepless nights, anxiety, and depression, you need to draw a finish line that you cross in time to save your sanity.

When the guilt-shoveler realises that their guilt-shovelling has run its course and you're no longer parting with your money, time, and energy, expect an even more intense effort from them to emotionally batter you with their shovel. But remember, we're doing more harm than good by playing along and enabling a guilt-shoveler. This is where our boundaries are essential to preserve our wellbeing and our sanity.

No joke, guilt-shovelers will guilt-trip their targets till the end of time if they're enabled to. They will choke you with their merciless shovelling. They've proved they're resourceful and resilient so let them use those skills elsewhere by getting a job, paying their own rent.

It's hard to trust a guilt-shoveler even when they appear to have changed. The guilt-shoveler can either choose to clean up their act or continue to punish themselves to punish us. Stand back, pace yourself, *don't* get taken in. Sometimes the healthiest thing you can do is fight back.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

WHO ARE THE RED FLAG PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE?

(Page 138 of your workbook)

Now that you know who Red Flag People are, take a moment to honestly reflect.

- Who in your life fits the patterns we've explored? And don't forget to include yourself if you recognise an old version of you in any of the flags. This exercise is not about creating a list of enemies. It's about reclaiming your energy, your freedom, and your right to peace. Take your time. Breathe deeply. And answer from the strongest part of yourself. Awareness is power. It doesn't mean you have to confront, explain, or fix anyone. It simply means you get to see clearly and choose consciously who deserves a place in your life, and who doesn't.
- The Shadow Victims in your life are:
- The AWKWARDS in your life are:
- The Narcissists in your life are:
- The Drama Queens in your life are:
- The Rescuers in your life are:
- The Rescues in your life are:
- The Co-Dependents in your life are:
- The Emotional Disruptors in your life are:
- The Guilt-Shovellers in your life are:

You're not here to fix, rescue, or hate any of them. You're here to free yourself. Your awareness is your exit door and your ticket to something infinitely better. There could be, or once was, a person in your life who flies a flag in every category (yep). The emotional work you've done and

continue to do will empower you to see them for who they are and give you the courage to disconnect from them entirely if you choose.

The trail of havoc and disruption these people leave behind must be taken seriously, but you can still have a bit of fun with this exercise and identify offending individuals on a regular basis. It will have such a positive impact on your perception of people if you're aware of how they scheme and strategize to get their needs met.

YOUR WOUNDS + THEIR WOUNDS = MORE WOUNDS

When we're making progress towards emotional freedom it makes good emotional sense to stay aware of what and who can trigger our painful memories. We've talked about the power of triggers, how to heal them, and how to give them less meaning, but in the initial stages of emotional recovery, it's not always easy to walk away from Red Flag People. We understand that sometimes people just want an audience rather than a solution. But enabling someone to repeat the same traumas persistently is not truly helpful to them or us. We want to be supportive, we really do, but we can't keep listening to the same stories that pull us back down and threaten our own recovery.

Repetition reinforces memories. That's why it's so important not to go over the same painful events time after time but to focus instead on ways to heal. People who trauma dump and wound wallow retraumatise and trigger themselves as well as us. We can show support without enabling wallowing. We can be compassionate without sacrificing our emotional and physical wellbeing. When we align with our truth we're empowered to push through disempowering patterns of behaviour and keep moving towards Emotional Freedom.

It's natural to think that angry, forceful, unpleasant, intrusive, and narcissistic personalities have all the power and control. They don't.

They're emotionally dangerous people showing their trauma vindictively and punitively. That isn't power. That's pain.

You have every right to tell a Red Flag Person: 'I'm not buying your crap. I know your game.' Yes, they'll be pissed off, yes, they'll try to retaliate, but you'll have won another battle on your road to winning your emotional war.

Now you know better you can most definitely do better.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

A TEST TO SEE IF A PERSON IS TOXIC

(Page 141 of your workbook)

Think of the people in your life who you believe might be toxic. Pause. Breathe. Be honest. Then ask yourself:

- Who are they? What 'red flag' role do they play.
- Why do you believe they're toxic? Trust your gut before you rationalise your doubt.
- Have they S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D you? How?
- When you express an opinion, ask for something, or express anxiety or concern, how do they react?
- Do they listen, support, and help? Or do they dismiss, belittle, mock, or ignore you?
- Do you walk on eggshells around them? Not sure? Think about whether you carefully edit yourself before speaking.
- If you explained that you find them too critical or controlling would they be horrified and apologetic? Or would they deny it, blame you, and make you the problem?
- Would they change their behaviour or escalate it? Would they shout, swear, sulk, withdraw affection, or use the silent treatment?
- Would they slam doors, throw things, or threaten physical intimidation?
- Do they seem to enjoy watching you wrestle with anxiety?
- Do they gloat if something unfortunate happens to you?
- Do you honestly believe they are capable of real change? And more importantly, even if they changed, would you ever truly feel emotionally safe with them?

Toxic people don't just create drama; they create fear, instability, and self-doubt. Healthy people create safety, stability, and peace.

- You deserve to feel emotionally safe.
- You deserve to be heard without punishment.
- You deserve connections that uplift, not connections you struggle to survive.

Expecting toxic people to change for us, or to help us heal our wounds, is a fast ticket to hell. Finding our way out of an abusive situation that another person fuels can feel so overwhelming that we may not even try to leave. We give up before we've even started to plan our escape and we find ways to cope with the toxicity instead. If this is you right now, please hear this:

- You matter.
- You are worth saving.
- You do not need to tolerate abuse.
- You are not to blame for the cruelty you've endured.
- You are not destined to live in fear, guilt, or shame.

Find a way out. No matter how small the first step is - take it. Don't allow guilt and shame to drag you down and keep you prisoner. You're stronger, wiser, and far more deserving than the story about yourself that you've listened to.

REMOVING OURSELVES FROM TOXIC PEOPLE

One of the most important things we S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D survivors will ever learn is this: **we have full permission to remove ourselves from anyone who makes us feel emotionally or physically unsafe.**

- We don't have to explain ourselves.
- We don't have to give them more time.

- We don't have to apologise.

Cut yourself free before they do even more damage to your self-worth and wellbeing.

- Your peace matters.
- Your safety matters.
- You matter.

WHEN SOMEONE SHOWS YOU WHO THEY ARE, BELIEVE THEM

MAYA ANGELOU

When emotional freedom is finally in our sights, our budding self-worth begins to ask a new set of questions. Instead of the disempowering, judgemental ones we *used* to ask, we now ask ourselves questions like:

- Do I still want to **be** this? The version of myself shaped by survival, not by choice.
- Do I still want to **do** this? The habits, the roles, the responsibilities that no longer feel right?
- Do I still **want** that person in my life? Are they helping me grow or holding me hostage to my past?
- Am I **proud** of myself? Not perfect, just proud of my courage, my growth, my honesty.
- Am I at **peace** with myself? Do I feel safe in my own mind and body, even when everyone is watching?

You have the power to change the things that no longer suit you. Your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences are no longer in charge, you are.

- You are in control now.
- You get to choose what and who stays and what and who goes.

- You get to decide what feels right, what feels wrong, and what deserves your energy.
- You are the one holding the pen. **You.** Write yourself a new future.

WHERE DO WE EVEN BEGIN?

I thought I'd leave the chapter about 'where do we even begin' until the end of the book because new beginnings can happen at any time. Even when we think we're done, when everything feels lost, when it seems like it's all over, there's always an opportunity to begin again.

Whenever we start something new, whatever we hope it might eventually look like, the journey rarely unfolds how we expect it to. We might have a clear idea of what we're aiming for, but we can never know for sure whether our first attempt will end up as nothing, something, or everything. And that's OK. Struggling to begin - and struggling to build momentum - is often rooted in a Low 5 Vibe. You already know the signs: **procrastination, perfectionism, comparison, imposter syndrome, and passive-aggression.** When we take a moment to clear the noise in our minds, we give our ideas a chance to be heard and our true feelings a chance to be felt.

Imagine you're lost somewhere with just a pinprick of light to help you read a map. You're trapped in a car full of people giving advice, whining for the toilet, wanting food, and generally being annoying. You're overwhelmed. You can't figure out where you are on the map. So, you step outside, take a few deep breaths, and calm your overwhelmed mind. The moon comes out from behind the clouds. Suddenly you realise the map was upside down. You turn it around and, finally, you can see where you are. Answers come when there's a little light and a little space.

If you're looking for inspiration about where to start:

- Close your eyes.
- Take a deep breath.
- Ask yourself: what do I do first?
- Keep your eyes closed for 10 or 20 seconds.
- Open them slowly.
- Wait.
- Let the thoughts come and go.
- Write down anything interesting or engaging.
- Trust that something inspirational will emerge.
- Accept all thoughts.
- Reject nothing.

Stay open to the journey - however unexpected; it will take you where you need to go.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

WHERE DO WE EVEN BEGIN?

(Page 144 of your workbook)

Wherever you're starting from, give yourself a massive pat on the back. You're here, you want change, and you've got a good idea about how to create it. Pick one main project to start and finish, and don't deviate! Have a think about the following questions and watch your project unfold. Write about it clearly and proudly:

- The main project you'd like to start, and finish, is:
- What's the first step you need to take to move this project forward?
- And the next step after that?
- And the next?
- And the next?

As you become immersed in completing the steps, you may have spin-off ideas that feel exciting or important. Write them down separately and then return to where you left off. Stay focused on your main project. When there's continuity and consistency momentum builds, and when momentum builds you start to take your project and yourself seriously.

Don't worry about words like "focus" and "motivation." When you build momentum, motivation, focus, and engagement follow - like night follows day. On the days when you're feeling uninspired, do something small and practical like tidying your digital files or sorting your emails. Write down random words and find five more words with similar meanings. Stretch your creative muscles any way you choose. Small movements keep the energy flowing, and small wins lead to big wins. When you've completed your project you'll feel amazing. Just keep going.

S.M.A.R.T GOALS

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D the last thing we need is an unachievable goal that we might start but won't finish. We can avoid the horror of yet another unfinished project by making sure our plans are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-Scheduled

S.M.A.R.T projects are achievable projects. When we set ourselves a goal that's truly achievable, we'll achieve it. It's as simple and as powerful as that.

When we start small we give ourselves space to navigate the inevitable hiccups along the way because the hiccups will be small too. Realise what you're capable of achieving and achieve it. Then, when you're ready, go a little bit bigger.

LIFE PURPOSE

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D we often find our purpose later in life. Once the bone-shaking, nerve-jangling impact of our emotional histories has healed - or at least worn off a little - we can finally see ourselves and our future with clarity and purpose. Once you've recovered from your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences - or even simply understood them - you may feel called to share parts of your journey with people who could genuinely benefit from your newfound clarity.

My own life-purpose began to take shape on the very same evening I had given up hope of ever finding kindness, compassion, or any sense of inclusion or value. After decades of emotional chaos, I became a frequent

caller to Samaritans, and I credit this incredible charity with helping me glue the fragments of myself back together. In 2005, I took the leap from 'caller' to 'listening volunteer,' and that single step opened a path that grew into something bigger and more meaningful than I could ever have imagined. I adored my fellow volunteers, who welcomed me like a much-loved member of the family - truly, a first for me - and I found a powerful purpose in my new role which has grown and evolved ever since. I can't imagine a purpose I would feel more passionate about than helping someone feel heard and seen. I don't covet money, awards, followers, or fame but when someone tells me I've helped them change their life, for me that is the highest honour.

We all have purpose, meaning, worth, and value. Not all of us have a global platform, but we can still have enormous influence and impact that gets passed on. The ripple effect of compassionate acknowledgement reverberates in limitless ways - that's purpose. It only takes one light in the darkness for change, *real change*, to happen.

When we're searching for validation, we struggle to see our purpose beneath the layers of emotional debris that buries us. Often we're still struggling through self-doubt. We feel ungrounded, lost, and unsure. Who will listen to us, who will take us seriously. Sound familiar? But when we push the debris aside and discover what feels meaningful to us, we can determine our life's purpose. I made one phone call to Samaritans from beneath emotional debris that was killing me and, although unaware of it at the time, I found my purpose.

Purpose can be found anywhere but it often shows up when we least expect it. As we stumble along managing the ordinary and the mundane, ideas occur to us in the strangest of places. Some of us follow them. Some of us don't. Purpose is like an acorn. You become invested in its potential, and you want to help it grow into an oak tree. You don't care about the

money, the likes, the time it takes, or the acknowledgement. You care about nurturing the project because it feels like your soul's mission. Purpose is not a choir of angels singing our praises or begging us to save the world - that's inflated ego. We choose our own purpose.

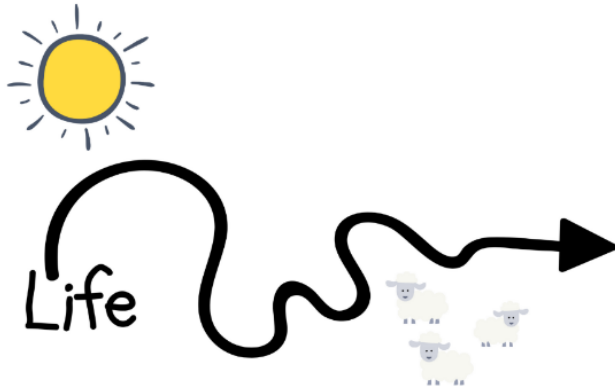
You might find a clue to your purpose by asking yourself: if I could never again (fill in the blank) I'd be heartbroken? What's in the space?

If you're struggling to find any clue to your purpose, you might choose to discuss your ideas, passions, and feelings with a coach or a mentor but make sure you choose someone who reflects your dreams back to you, not someone who tethers you with fear disguised as "practicality." Reality is not where dreams are found. Reality is where dreams come to life.

If someone suggests you'd be good at something, make sure it speaks to you. Don't agree just to please them. Does the idea excite you? Do you feel an internal "aha!" when you think about it? Does something spark inside you?

If you're still unsure about your purpose, you may simply need to untangle a bit more of your emotional history before the confusion and fog lift. That's OK. An important thing to remember about purpose is that we're rarely born knowing it. It's something that life experience shapes for us. My purpose showed up when I was close to giving up completely so hold on.

It's OK to take the scenic route towards your life purpose, you'll arrive when you're ready. Sometimes the journey feels like the pits, but never underestimate the experience, resilience, and wisdom you're gathering along the way. Spoken like a true survivor!



CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

WHERE ARE YOU NOW AND WHAT WILL YOU UNPACK?

(Page 145 of your workbook)

Whether you're focused on a complete life overhaul or simply taking one brave step at a time, rest assured your life will change for the better just by allowing the emotional truths in this book to shift your mindset and heal your heart. It starts here. It starts now. Take an honest appraisal of your life as it looks today:

- Where are you now? Describe it honestly: the good, the difficult, the in-between.
- Where do you want to be instead? Imagine it - the peace, the freedom, the new beginnings.
- What are you willing to do to get there? This includes giving up old thoughts, old habits, and old fears that no longer serve you.

Now, let's unpack what you're carrying. Think of your emotions like the clothes you'd pack if you were heading off on a beautiful sunshine holiday.

- Ask yourself: what emotions would feel light to carry? List the feelings that lift, energise, and empower you.
- What emotions feel heavy to carry? List the feelings that weigh you down, burden you, or keep you stuck.

All emotions are valuable and important but carrying too many heavy emotions too often keeps us trapped in emotional spaces that need awareness and healing. When we consciously recognise and unpack heavy emotions, we're not just freeing ourselves from their burden; we're creating space for empowering feelings of self-care, self-forgiveness, and emotional strength to rise within us.

Light emotions support our awareness and allow Conscious Conversations to flourish. You weren't born carrying emotional baggage, you were shaped by it, and you have the power to repack your life - lighter, freer, and stronger than ever before.

Page 149 of your workbook:

Every thought carries energy. Some thoughts feel light and expansive, some feel sharp and stinging, some feel heavy and slow. Spend a few moments noticing your thoughts today - without judgement - write down 4 or 5 and assign one of these feelings to them:

- Light (expansive, uplifting)
- Sharp (critical, painful)
- Heavy (weighing you down)

Awareness is the first step to change. Notice your emotional patterns and remember that you are not your thoughts. You're the one observing them. Find a place where your thoughts become peaceful and allow the peace to dissolve the pain. When your darkness is met with your light, your fears will be humbled by your courage.

TAKE YOUR BROKEN HEART AND MAKE IT INTO ART

Amidst all the chaos you've experienced you're still capable of shining your brightest light no matter how dark your shadows might be. Dreams may feel harder to achieve when fear dominates your mindset, but you can begin a journey of a thousand emotional steps even when you're scared, feeling worthless, or believe you're too broken to try. I've seen hopelessly dysregulated people achieve things they never thought they could - and I'm proud to include myself in that group.

In my deepest, darkest moments, when I felt hopeless and exhausted, I found an emotional saviour in creativity. Doodling, journaling, sketching,

cutting and gluing, even when the results were absolute rubbish I found them all to be powerful ways to turn my deep **repression** into transformative, original **expression**. Even scribbling aimlessly on a piece of paper, then adding eyes, arms, and legs to my scribbles gave me much-needed 'time out' from the endless streams of mental-nonsense that weighed me down.

Creative expression isn't about being an artist, designer, or painter. It's about using the power of original thought to give your repression and depression a much-needed way out. There are no conditions, no critics, no rules to hold you back.

- It's pen-to-paper outside the lines.
- It's imperfection personified.
- It's a glorious mess.
- It's wild dancing or drumming.
- It's decorating a plate with plastic gemstones.
- It's journaling with different coloured pens.
- It's styling your hair or clothes however you like.
- It's baking the most lopsided, lovingly chaotic cake the world has ever seen.
- It's pouring your heart and soul into the pages of a rom-com or murder mystery
- It's really putting yourself out there and writing a self-help book!

Between you and your creative expression, there are no rules. There is only truth, feeling, and liberation. Creativity **is** emotional freedom.

So how will you express yourself creatively? What 'art' will you create from your broken heart? What beauty will you allow to rise from what was once buried? There's a reason why you became someone you didn't want to be. It's time to reclaim your voice and let your truth be told and heard.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT YOU

(Page 150 of your workbook)

In this next exercise, allow yourself complete freedom to contradict and challenge every negative thing you were taught about yourself by other people. Only you will see the results of this exercise, nobody else gets to know what you're writing – it's for your eyes only. Get ready to welcome back the amazing version of yourself who's been hidden beneath decades of projection and toxic conditioning. It's time to bring yourself home.

- Who is the real you, hidden beneath layers of limiting behaviours and beliefs?
- Who have you discovered yourself to be beyond the toxic projections of other people's shame and distorted stories? You may have been told that other people wouldn't like something you loved about yourself, and because of that, you rejected it. You may have had a dry sense of humour but were told you were 'sarcastic.' You may be energetic but were told 'you're too much.' If you're kind and generous were you told you try too hard or that you're a pushover?
- Who was wrong about you in the past, and why were they wrong?
- What parts of yourself did you once love but have since lost?
- What do you now choose to reclaim?

10 TRUTHS TO HEAL YOUR CREATIVE HEART

When the noise of old conditioning gets loud, and your doubts start whispering again, return to these truths. They belong to you now. They are your roots and your wings.

1. You're more creative than you think you are.
2. Genuine people prefer sincerity over perfection. Always aim for sincerity. Perfection is so last century.
3. If you don't stand for something, you'll fall for anything. Find three things you stand for with passion and don't waver.
4. You can begin again as many times as you need.
5. The kindest things you can ever say to yourself are: you matter, you're doing well, keep going.
6. Whatever's been done to you or said to you, you can reclaim your power and win your emotional war. None of it was your fault.
7. You matter. You matter. You matter.
8. Yes, you can.
9. Fighting back, standing up for yourself, and saying 'no' are excellent ways to connect your heart to your soul.
10. You're reborn every day. You can begin again every day. You are a new person every day. Your new life starts today.

Carry these truths with you. Breathe them in when you falter. They are the bridge between who you were and who you are becoming. You don't need permission anymore. You already have it

.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HOW WOULD YOU DO IT ALL DIFFERENTLY?

(Page 154 of your workbook)

I thought for a long time about whether to ask this question in case it triggered sad memories and regrets. But then I thought, we've come a long way; should we still be blocking out the truths that could illuminate our future, even if they made our past journey sad? Knowing what we would have done differently if we had the chance helps us do things differently going forward.

As always, this is about awareness - no shame, no blame, and no guilt either. When we know better, we do better. When we see clearly, we can heal fully. Do this exercise any time, about any subject, whenever you need it. It's for your eyes only.

- So, how would you do it all differently?

THE VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF HOPELESS

HOW LIFE LOOKS WHEN WE TELL OUR TRUTH

When I look back at things I thought I would never survive, I can see how they made me a wiser, calmer, and a more discerning person. We emerge stunned and shattered from our experiences of psychological, physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. There is no gentle way back from those breath-holding, heart-stopping, horrifying moments. The only way forward is to look closely at the impact they had on our sense of safety, on our self-worth, our ability to express ourselves, and on our belief that we could never feel truly secure in the world.

Hope, peace, and optimism can be rediscovered, nothing is lost forever. I've seen the very worst experiences transformed from pain to peace once the truth about the source of the suffering was recognised and told. We stop blaming and shaming ourselves when we hold the right people accountable for our broken hearts and shattered minds.

Be the authority in your life. Honour yourself. Treat yourself with respect. You don't need confessions, apologies, or forgiveness practices to know - and tell - your truth. You didn't imagine what happened, even if they'd prefer you to believe you did.

You matter.

Your hopes and dreams matter.

Your feelings matter too.

Life may have broken your heart but one day, without even realising it, you'll know your heart is whole again. When that day comes, don't let the memories of a few bad apples put you off apples forever. There are still good apples in the orchard.

TURN AROUND BRIGHT EYES, YOU ARE NOT YOUR PAST

The storms will come, and we cannot stop them.

But remember, not all storms come to disrupt your life.

Some come to simply clear your path.

Paulo Coelho

I wanted to end this book with what may seem like an all-too-simple observation about troubled childhoods and their long-term emotional consequences: **You Are Not To Blame**. Whatever was done to you, whatever was said to you, it never was and it never will be your fault.

Coming to terms with our mental and emotional struggles by telling the truth about what happened to us is the key to a healthy, prosperous, and emotionally free life. Some of the things we've explored in this book will feel instantaneous for you - simple shifts you can implement immediately like tackling procrastination by taking smaller steps toward achievement and completion - and yes, getting out of bed and cleaning your teeth do count as achievements.

Other things will take time, patience, and practice. That's why phrases like "get over it," "move on," and "let go" don't work. There are new habits to be formed and new memories to be made that will become more important and more powerful than the ones that once held you back.

Awareness is our superpower and it will get us through anything. Awareness interrupts old pessimistic thoughts and patterns and makes room for new optimistic ones instead. When we're aware of why we choose, feel, and think the way we do, we can change it. With self-trust and self-forgiveness, we build courage, we heal anxiety, we reclaim our lives. We know enough now to validate ourselves and our feelings; we don't need 'them' to do that for us anymore. As the saying goes: you didn't come this far to only come this far. There will be days when you feel

pessimistic, destructive, and discouraged. These feelings are completely normal. You've lived with them for a long time and it'll take a little while for them to quieten down completely. On those days, you'll ask yourself: what's the point? You'll wonder: who do I think I am? I'm too old, too damaged, too broken to change. But those thoughts aren't the truth. They're old fears, still trying to protect you from the lingering terror of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D again. It's just old fear looking for some reassurance. When it rises up, meet it with this truth: I'm here. I'm ready. Place your hand on your heart. Breathe with a 5-5-5 rhythm. Watch how, before you know it, you're back in the flow, feeling calm again. Whatever you do next, do it for you. Do it because it's asking to be done.

TURN YOUR LIGHT ON

My heart breaks when I hear personal accounts of childhood abuse, neglect, and abandonment. It breaks even more when I hear how children are blamed for an adult's unhappiness and their inability to create a safe and loving environment for them to grow up in. When it feels like you're swimming through life in a bottomless pool of enduring grief, you must remind yourself: *it's not my fault I'm in this situation*. When you're searching for reasons and answers to the confusion that surrounds your emotional and mental health struggles, it's all too easy to keep blaming yourself.

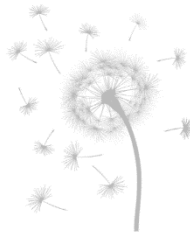
But everything that's been done to you, everything that's been said to you, must be brought out of the unconscious darkness into the light of conscious awareness so it and you can be healed.

Turn your light on.

WHO ARE YOU?

When we look in the mirror and see the pain of our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences we *must* do the work it takes to heal those wounds and embrace emotional freedom. Look in the mirror and see how much there is to respect and value about yourself. Today is the first day of the rest of your life. Care deeply for who you are. You are a blessing. You always have been. You always will be..

They tried to bury us. They didn't know we were seeds.



Your journey towards emotional freedom is unique. As you put in place non-negotiable boundaries, as you practice self-trust and self-forgiveness, you'll plant seeds for a new way of being that gives everything you've been through a greater meaning. You are honouring, at last, who you are and who you were always meant to be. You're holding yourself in high esteem and if people attempt to tear you down, so be it. You're breaking the chains of generational trauma. You're breaking habits, patterns, and old ways of being and doing things. You're breaking connections that never truly served you.

When we're submerged in the residue of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, we don't dare believe it's possible to live beyond our restrictions and to see what might be waiting outside the walls we've built around ourselves. Intolerance towards people who break away from a lifetime of conditioning is nothing new. Rebels, misfits, free thinkers - we've always been judged harshly by those too afraid to change, to step outside the

box. We can all remember times when we dared to defy expectations and were shamed for it. When we stop betraying the truth of who we are, when we stop conforming to family, cultural, or religious expectations just to be accepted, some people will see us as defiant, wilful, or uncontrollable. Let them. Not that long ago it was isolating, even dangerous, to be the odd one out. Now we see something different emerging. I see it every day in the people I work with, a new determination to be their true selves, to break free from conditioning, people who think outside the box, who ask questions about everything, who are no longer willing to stay locked into relationships fed by trauma and shame. They recall being humiliated for their differences. They remember how they were taught to dislike and abandon the most beautiful parts of themselves. How sad that is. How sad that they didn't have wise, loving caregivers who protected them, who celebrated the very bones of who they were.

But we're not living in that sadness anymore. We're reclaiming our truth. We're learning that fitting in and shutting up is not a virtue. It's not offering us safety, decency, or respect. It never did. Standing out and speaking up is the way forward. It's no longer so rare to be different, to be a misfit. We find our tribe when we find our vibe. Human beings have always needed groups to survive - 'better together' is in our DNA. But survival isn't enough anymore. Evolution is calling for something deeper. Something freer. Something beyond a one-size-fits-all robotic human race. Maybe once it felt safer to obey, to stay within the walls, to seek validation from those who never saw us. But not anymore. We are freer than we have ever been.

Our new mantra: the more unique I am, the more content I feel.

There might still be people, addictions, behaviours, and habits that feel like they hold more power over us than we'd like. That's OK. Those

connections will weaken and fall away in time as you reclaim your emotional power and withdraw your energy from unappreciative people. You will look back and wonder: how did they ever hold me captive for so long? When your opinion is your opinion, and your decision is your decision, and you can hold yourself steady no matter who or what tries to shake you. That's how you know you've won your emotional war.

- Standing up, all by yourself.
- Learning to walk, all over again.
- Your truth told.
- Your head held high.
- Your heart healed.

IF YOU'RE HAVING SUICIDALTHOUGHTS

I used to live my life with suicide as my get-out clause. I thought if it gets too bad, I can always... It was my secret. No one else knew. There were no cries for help, just a silent, burnt-out.

My pain wasn't soothed until I made that anonymous call to a suicide helpline. Samaritans is a charity that exists to support people with their feelings, whatever they may be. One kind, patient volunteer - who will never know it - helped save my life. He was my turning point when I had lost all hope.

I spent an hour on the phone with him and he helped me see that my life mattered. He didn't tell me what I should do. He didn't plead with me to live. He simply listened, accepted me, and asked the kind of quiet, thoughtful questions that opened a small window in my pain, just enough to let some light in.

The volunteer sounded like an older man - a father figure - someone who, based on my past, might have triggered me to hang up and hide away.

But somehow, I held on. I kept talking, kept hoping he would hear me and not dismiss me. He asked me careful, friendly questions that seemed so simple, yet they had me thinking about my emotional history for the first time without self-blame. He gave his time, his wisdom, and his support for no reason other than he could. For that one hour me and my life mattered. And you and your life matter too.

When I was well enough, I trained to become a Samaritan's volunteer myself. The training taught me something that changed my life forever: suicide is self-determined but so is living. When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D we often don't have much self-determination. We might have a lot of fight, a lot of defiance if we're lucky, but not a lot of quiet, grounded determination to heal and live our best lives with what we know and what we've got.

As a volunteer, I listened to people who were lonely, scared, confused, angry, broken, desperate, and hanging on by a thread. Wealthy, poor, healthy, sick - suicide does not discriminate, anyone can have suicidal thoughts. I learned that whatever someone is projecting we never know what's going on behind their mask. In your darkest and loneliest moments, I want you to remember you are not alone. You are *never* alone. If you need a connection, if you need to be heard, you can reach out. I am here: alison@howtomendyourmentalhealth.com. You can email me and I will reply.

If today feels heavy, remember heavy days pass. Your light is still within you, waiting. It always has been and it always will be. If you're struggling right now, hold on. Today is like a thunderstorm; the rain is heavy, the clouds are dark, but soon the sun will come out. You're going to be OK.

FROM MY MESSY HEART TO YOUR MESSY HEART

Have you started to see how far you've come in the fight to win your emotional war? As the knowledge you now have continues to shape you in amazing ways, you'll continue to rise-up and transform your emotional suffering into emotional courage, resilience, and strength. The truth of who you are will continue to emerge as you understand and heal the person you became to protect yourself. The deep repression of your truth is being told and you're becoming the person you were born to be.

You're giving yourself every chance to be emotionally free as you become more aware of the peace and the power you have within you to transform painful memories. Be brave enough to look at yourself and don't fear the potential that you see. As you become more empowered you'll see transformations beyond anything you imagined, and the good things and people you weren't ready for will find you again. The quiet satisfaction of a still mind free from turmoil, strife, confusion, and pain is achievable for you even if at first it feels unfamiliar.

Accept yourself completely, your apparent flaws, your so-called failures. Release the sadness you've carried for the endings that came too soon. Forgive yourself for the choices you made that were harmful or ended differently to how you'd hoped. Find peace with the choices that kept you in the dark and hidden from the light. Lay to rest your memories of those who left too soon, and of those who stayed too long.

As for the people who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D you one day you may wish them well on their journey but for now it's time to believe in yourself again. Forgive yourself always, and I mean REALLY forgive yourself. It's OK now. You're free to begin again once, twice, a thousand times, however many times you need. Whoever you are, whatever your story, there's a new truth waiting with your name on it. Life *can* move from pain-filled to peace-filled just as soon as you say so.

**It begins now.
Take a deep breath, dive in.
You are enough.
And you matter.**



MY HEALING MANTRA

I'm in emotional recovery. I may be sensitive for a while as I soothe my triggers and untangle the lies I once believed about myself. My conscious adult self now protects the wounded child within me. Together, we are free to be whoever we choose to be.

I am aware that my co-dependent self must not rush in to rescue others. I am also aware that some people will try to prioritise their needs over mine as I heal.

I see you.

I hear you.

And I walk away from you.

I wish you only good things, but I wish even better things for myself.

Signed: _____

YOU ARE ENOUGH

Yes, you are.

Yesterday.

Today.

Tomorrow.

Always enough.

Beautiful.

Clever.

Kind.

Whole.

Complete.

Enough.

You are loved.

You are wanted.

You matter.

FINAL TRUTHS (FOR NOW)

Life is hard, but when we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D it can feel like an even tougher uphill struggle with obstacles blocking our way at every turn. Telling the truth about who and what got us here means we can finally heal self-blame, end self-punishment, and clean our shame-smearred windows. We've learned how to practice conscious awareness, how to breathe through and soothe our triggers, and how to trust and forgive ourselves. We've discovered that our depression is really a **deep repression** of our true self, that panic, and anxiety are protecting us not attacking us, and that we must prioritise our emotional and physical safety *always* in all ways.

We are empowered to set boundaries and manage their consequences. We've begun dissolving the layers of conditioning that once held us back, and we're fully aware of the 'F' words and 'P' words we once used to protect ourselves from further experiences of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.

All the work we've done has helped reveal the resilient version of ourselves that was hidden for so long beneath the toxic power of other people's shame (also known as 'the toxic poops'). We can now recognise Red Flag People when they try to tear us down. Their lies are not our truth.

We've traded the who and the what we became for the truth of who we really are. Keep focusing on the reclamation of your emotional power and be proud of what you've achieved so far. When self-doubt creeps in, stop and think: what's the source? Is my wounded inner child choosing, feeling, or thinking **this** or is it my conscious adult self? You now have the awareness to take yourself beyond the walls other people built to block out your light.

You're safe now to stretch your wings, change your mind, agree, disagree, care deeply, or move on. When we look beyond the walls, we

see an endless expanse of potential. We see what and who we really are.
We see that we are limitless.

It's a clean page; what will you create?

It always looks impossible until it's done... and that's how it's done. You've made it through every twist, turn, mountain, and storm of this journey. You now hold in your hands something extraordinary: the map home to yourself, the tools to rescue yourself from overwhelm, the permission to stop fighting old wars and start living your life.

You've dismantled the chaos that other people planted inside you, challenged the lies you were taught to believe, witnessed your own courage and your own calm, and you no longer need to fear being overwhelmed by the world around you - because you know the truth. You are the calm. You are the compass. You are the authority and the peace you were always searching for.

You'll still face difficult people and walk into situations that test your patience, your resilience, and your faith. But the difference now is simple, powerful, and undeniable: you are free to choose your response. You're not at the mercy of your past, you're not trapped inside old pain, you're not obligated to relive someone else's dysfunction. You are your Conscious Adult Self - aware, empowered, kind, and in control.

You now know:

- How to read the moment with radical awareness.
- How to speak to yourself with compassion and clarity.
- How to hold yourself steady when the old fear rises.
- How to exit, reset, and reclaim your peace with grace and dignity.

You have everything you need to protect yourself, look after yourself, and guide yourself forward. No one owns your story anymore, no one gets to define your worth, no one gets to take your peace away unless you hand it to them - and you won't do that now. Not ever again.

You are powerful. You are wise. You are home. And this right here, right now is just the beginning.

If you found this book useful, helpful, pointless, dull, cool, kind, interesting, comforting, or downright annoying, let me know! If you liked it - or even if you didn't - please visit me for more help, support, cheesy lines, and comfort at: www.howtomendyourmentalhealth.com

Let me say how proud I am of you. You're doing your best as you figure out some heavy burdens. Our experiences may differ, but our emotions and feelings are often the same.

Your story's not over; there are chapters full of joy yet to be written. I would be honoured to walk with you through the unfolding of your potential, the discovery of your gifts, the grace of your healing, and the uniqueness of your story. Don't leave before the miracle; you're going to be OK. I know you can live a life you love. I just know it.

Keep in touch!

With love,

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2025

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ANYONE CAN BE
PERFECT
GOOD
ENOUGH
TAKES PRACTICE!

