

## **How To Self-Determine And Choose For Yourself**

### **QUESTION:**

How can I rebuild my ability to make choices for myself after years of being controlled, criticised, and silenced?

### **ANSWER:**

By healing the damage trauma has done to your 'choice-making system' and gently practising self-led decisions every day, you can rebuild the trust, confidence, and freedom that true self-determination brings. With all the work you've done so far in this book you'll already have a sense of personal ownership and a clear idea of who is accountable for why you are the way you are and choose the things you choose.

Part of emotional freedom is having the self-rulership that empowers you to make choices that are best for your continuing emotional growth, not for everybody else's benefit. There's a fine line between choosing for yourself and making an equally beneficial choice in mutually supportive relationships and friendships. But when your 'choices' feel disempowering, and your heart sinks at yet another agreement to do something or go somewhere you just don't want to do or go, that's the time when choice-empowerment must start to kick in.

Here's how:

## **1. Understanding the Wound**

When you've lived in environments where your decisions were overridden, mocked, or punished, your brain learns a 'rule of survival': it's safer not to have an opinion, to speak up, state a preference, or put your choices first. Over time, denying your preferences and choices creates a deep wound in your self-trust.

Even when the controlling forces are no longer present, the damage lingers. You may still second-guess yourself, delay decisions, or automatically defer to others. This is not weakness; it's conditioning; this is where your struggles with procrastination begin.

Trauma doesn't just harm your feelings; it rewires how your nervous system responds to choices. Recognising that this hesitation is not your fault, is a major step towards emotional freedom. With this compassion, you stop judging yourself for the very survival strategies that once kept you safe. Self-determination begins with this truth: you were never at fault; you were simply modifying your behaviour to survive your environment.

## **2. Why Choice Feels Unsafe**

For someone who has been controlled, even small decisions can trigger anxiety. This is because your nervous system remembers the consequences of getting it wrong.

Your body can't yet tell the difference between choosing what to eat for lunch and making a choice that once brought punishment or shame. This is why people recovering from control sometimes feel paralyzed over trivial decisions – the stakes feel enormous. The healing work here is to bring those stakes back down to reality. That starts with awareness: noticing when fear rises around a decision and telling yourself: 'this is a small choice. I am safe to make it.' Over time, this reconditions your system to believe that decisions can be safe, even enjoyable.

### **3. The Echo of Old Voices**

One of the most damaging effects of control is that the controlling voices don't always leave when the people do. They echo inside you, disguised as your own thoughts. This is why you might hear criticism in your mind when you try something new, or why you feel guilty for saying no. These voices are not your own – they're the recordings of the 'outer bullies' from your past. Becoming self-determined means learning to separate your authentic voice from these echoes. You can do this by pausing before a decision and asking: is this my true voice, or the echo of someone else? The more often you identify and reject these 'borrowed voices', the more space you create to speak your own truth.

#### **4. The Overcompensation Trap**

Some survivors of control try to protect themselves by swinging to the opposite extreme – rejecting all help, isolating themselves, or refusing to compromise. While this can look like strength, it's often just fear wearing armour. Self-determination is not about doing everything alone; it's about choosing freely when to connect and when to stand alone. A choice made from fear is still not freedom.

True self-determination is flexible – you can accept advice without feeling controlled, and you can say no without feeling selfish. The goal is not rigid independence but empowered choice.

#### **5. Rebuilding in Micro-Steps**

Because decision-making can feel overwhelming at first, the most effective healing approach is to start with micro-choices – small, low-stakes decisions that let you practise without fear. This could be deciding what mug to drink from in the morning, what music to listen to while working, or which route to take on a walk. These choices may seem trivial, but they are building neural pathways of self-determination. With each decision, you are teaching your nervous system that you can make a choice, and nothing bad happens. This daily repetition is what eventually makes bigger choices feel safe again.

## **6. Anchoring in Values**

Self-determination becomes easier when your decisions are anchored in your personal values. When you know what truly matters to you – freedom, integrity, simplicity, generosity, creativity, rest – choices stop being about pleasing others and start being about honouring yourself. Values act like a compass, guiding you even when old fears or voices try to interfere. To strengthen this, list your top three values and keep them visible. Before deciding, ask yourself: does this align with my values? If the answer is yes, move forward with confidence. If it's no, give yourself permission to choose differently. Over time, you'll notice that your choices feel lighter, clearer, and far more your own.

### **Affirmation:**

I trust myself to choose for my own life and my highest good. My decisions are mine to make, and I am safe in my own hands.

**Journal Prompts:**

1. What were three situations in my past where my choices were dismissed or punished? How did that shape how I make choices today?
2. Which old voices do I still hear when I try to decide? Whose voices are they?
3. What are three small, safe decisions I can make for myself today?
4. What are my top three personal values, and how do they guide my choices?

**Visualisation:**

Imagine yourself standing at a crossroads. The path behind you is lined with voices telling you what to do. The path ahead is open, bathed in light. Take a slow, deep breath and feel the pull of the old voices fade until they disappear to nothing. Step forward onto the open path, feeling the ground firm beneath your feet. Notice the feeling of freedom in your chest as you walk, each step lighter than the last. This is your path – chosen by you, led by you, walked by you.

**Conclusion:**

Reclaiming self-determination after stress and trauma is not a single act of defiance – it's a series of gentle, persistent steps. Every small decision you make for

yourself is a declaration that you are no longer living under someone else's rule. You'll meet fear, you'll hear echoes, and sometimes you'll hesitate. But each time you choose, regardless of the fear you feel, you grow stronger. Freedom is not given, it's reclaimed, choice by choice.

**Final Thought:**

Your life is not a script to be written or read by other people. It's a pen in your own hand, and every choice is another word in the story you get to write.