

**WHERE
DO I
EVEN
BEGIN?**

Published in, London England 2025

Copyright © Alison Rose

All rights reserved.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be resold, lent, hired out or otherwise circulated without express prior consent of the publisher. Every effort has been made to contact the copyright holders of the material reproduced in this book. If any have been inadvertently overlooked, please get in touch at the earliest opportunity.

This book exists to help us understand why we choose the things we choose, feel the way we feel, and think the way we think. Founder members and contributors have learned their lessons the hard way but in doing so they have discovered effective, workable, affordable ways to heal, flourish, and find meaning and purpose in their lives. All our books, blogs, journals, social media posts, online courses, and therapies have been tried and evaluated by us - if they don't work, they don't get shared. Our mission is to help everyone feel inspired to create, learn, and share sustainable, affordable ways to transform emotional suffering and live their lives with conscious awareness, peace of mind, and inclusivity.

One day, or day one? You decide.

This book is for the selfless souls who continue to share so much with me about life and healing. I hope by now you know how much you matter.

And it's also for **you**. It takes a brave soul to admit that they're not who or where they want to be, and then do something about it.

Here's to your courage, your determination, and your limitless potential.

CONTENTS

HOW DID WE GET HERE?	1
IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO BE WHO YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN	3
A PERSONAL NOTE.....	4
CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT!	5
WHERE DID YOU GO?.....	8
7 REASONS WHY WE <i>DON'T</i> HEAL	9
MENDING MENTAL HEALTH.....	14
PART I	16
4 UNDENIABLE TRUTHS	17
DID I EXPERIENCE TRAUMA?.....	22
HOW DO I RECOGNISE TRAUMA?	24
HOW PAST TRAUMA AFFECTS YOUR LIFE TODAY.....	27
WHEEL OF TRAUMA.....	28
HOW WE GOT HERE	29
GIVE BACK THE LIES, RECLAIM THE TRUTH.....	32
SO THAT'S WHY I DO THAT	33
S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.....	35
HOW EVIDENCE OF BEING S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D SHOWS UP IN YOUR LIFE.....	37
HOW WE SUFFER WHEN WE'RE S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D	38
YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME	40
WHY WAS I S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D?	42
THE TRAUMA SURVIVAL ZONE	43
STEPPING OUT OF THE ZONE	45
THE ONE QUESTION.....	46
WHAT YOUR PAST TAUGHT YOU ABOUT YOURSELF	47
I DON'T WANT TO BE LIKE THEM!	49
RECLAIMING MY TRUE PERSONALITY	50
INNER CHILD.....	51
DEPRESSION	54
BE KIND TO YOUR MIND.....	55
KINDER THOUGHTS ABOUT ME.....	55
SELF-KINDNESS	56

MAKING THE FAMILIAR UNFAMILAR...AND VICE VERSA	56
CHOICE.....	58
REMEMBER THREE THINGS.....	60
THINK ABOUT IT	61
STOP AND THINK	62
OVERTHINKING	62
MY '4 STICKY NOTES TO EMOTIONAL FREEDOM' PLAN.....	64
MINDSET.....	67
LEAVING THE TRAUMA SURVIVAL ZONE	72
AMAZING BRAINS	73
FIRST THINGS FIRST	75
PROVOKING FEAR-BASED MEMORIES.....	78
SUFFERING FROM MEMORIES	80
NEUROPLASTICITY.....	81
NEGATIVES AND THEIR OPPOSITES.....	83
EVERY TIME	83
HABITS	84
REWRITING HABITS, RECLAIMING POWER.....	85
CAN YOU TEACH AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS?	86
COPING MECHANISMS	88
'F' WORDS	90
AND WHAT ABOUT 'P' WORDS?	95
MANAGING YOUR FEAR RESPONSE	97
FEEL THE FEAR AND <i>DON'T</i> DO IT ANYWAY	97
TRIGGERS	98
WHO AND WHAT TRIGGERS YOU?.....	103
PHYSICAL REACTIONS TO TRIGGERS.....	103
REACTIVE ABUSE.....	105
TRIGGERS AND POWER-HUNGRY PEOPLE.....	105
READING BETWEEN THE LIES.....	106
ENDING THE TRIGGER CYCLE	108
FINAL WORD ON TRIGGERS	108
POWER AND CONTROL	108

7 STEPS TO HEALING CONTROL.....	111
HOW TO MANAGE CONTROL IN NEW RELATIONSHIPS	115
THE DANCE OF CONNECTION	117
S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D & SOCIAL CONNECTION	117
STARTING CONVERSATIONS WHEN YOU'RE ANXIOUS	118
MEETING NEW PEOPLE.....	120
OVERWHELM	121
YOU CAN COPE WITH ANYONE AND ANYTHING!.....	125
SO, WHO WERE YOU	129
THE SACRIFICIAL OVERWHELM SCREAM	130
I KNOW WHY I FEEL LIKE THIS	130
KNOWING YOUR LIMITS VERSUS BEING 'PERFECT'	131
A WORD ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE'S DENIAL OF YOUR PAIN	132
LOW 5 VIBE	133
PROCRASTINATION	134
HOW DO WE STOP PROCRASTINATING?.....	136
PROCRASTINATION vs CONTROL	138
COMPARISON.....	139
PERFECTIONISM.....	141
IMPOSTER SYNDROME.....	144
ACKNOWLEDGING AND EMBRACING YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS	147
HOW TO VALIDATE YOURSELF	149
SELF-VALIDATION	151
DO AFFIRMATIONS WORK?.....	152
INVALIDATION.....	154
MY SELF-VALIDATING STATEMENT	155
PASSIVE AGGRESSION	156
UNMET NEEDS.....	159
SIGNS YOUR CHILDHOOD NEEDS WERE NOT MET.....	160
(UN)REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS.....	164
GETTING OUR NEEDS MET	166
UNMET NEEDS AND RELATIONSHIP STRUGGLES	167
EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCE	169

PART II	174
THE SHADOW OF SHAME.....	176
WHAT IS SHAME AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?	176
RECOGNISING THE ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS OF SHAME.....	178
MY SHAME STORY.....	185
CAN SHAME EVER BE HEALTHY?	186
THE TOXIC POOPS.....	188
HEALING SHAME ONCE AND FOR ALL.....	190
THE TRUTH ABOUT FORGIVENESS.....	191
THE STEPS I TOOK TRYING TO FORGIVE OTHERS	191
FORGIVENESS AFTER TRAUMA IS HARD WORK.....	192
SELF-FORGIVENESS	192
THE THREE STEPS I TOOK TO <i>FORGIVE MYSELF</i>	193
SELF-PUNISHMENT	193
PUNISHING ME TO PUNISH THEM	194
THE UMBRELLA OF SELF-PUNISHMENT	195
HOW DO YOU PUNISH YOURSELF?.....	200
FORGIVING OTHERS.....	201
HOW CAN I TELL IF I WANT TO PUNISH OR FORGIVE?	202
JARS OF JUSTICE	203
A FINAL NOTE ON JUSTICE	205
APOLOGIES AND FORGIVENESS	206
WHEN FORGIVENESS NO LONGER MATTERS	207
WHEN SOMEONE CAN'T OR WON'T FORGIVE <i>YOU</i>	207
THE 'INNER CRITIC'	211
HOW TO MANAGE AN OUTER BULLY.....	211
A LITTLE NOTE ON CRITICAL PROJECTION	213
INNER WARRIOR <i>NOT</i> INNER CRITIC.....	215
ARE YOU TRADING YOUR STANDARDS?.....	216
BOUNDARIES.....	218
SAYING NO	225
WHEN WE WANT TO SAY NO BUT.....	225
CONFRONTATION.....	227

SELF-TRUST IS THE FIRST SECRET OF SUCCESS	230
SO HOW DO WE LEARN TO TRUST SOMEONE?	231
WHAT IS TRUST?.....	231
TRUST SPECTRUM	233
WHO CAN AND CAN'T YOU TRUST?	235
IS TRUST ALWAYS NECESSARY?	236
A CALMER ME.....	238
WHY REWARDING YOURSELF MATTERS.....	289
YOUR BRAIN ON RESET AND REWARD.....	290
EMPATHY FOR OURSELVES	301
A LITTLE NOTE ON OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM	303
I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS	309
MEDITATION.....	310
THREE LITTLE WORDS	311
A NOTE ABOUT MY TEENAGE SELF	314
YOUR NEW KNOWLEDGE...AND SETBACKS	318
I CHOOSE CONSCIOUS POWER OVER UNCONSCIOUS PAIN.....	320
PART III	325
THE UNDENIABLE POWER OF PERMISSION.....	326
SELF-PERMISSION	329
PERMISSION TO BE YOURSELF	332
HOW TO BE RESILIENT	333
FAILURE	334
13 REASONS WHY YOUR FAILURES ARE A	336
GOLDEN TICKET TO YOUR FUTURE SUCCESS.....	336
RECLAIMING RESILIENCE.....	337
EMBRACING FAILURE	338
CLOSURE	340
LAST WORD ON CLOSURE	346
BURNING THE PAST	348
APOLOGISING TO OURSELVES	349
RED FLAG PEOPLE	351
SHADOW VICTIMS	354

THE AWKWARDS.....	356
NARCISSISTS.....	357
HAS NARCISSISM BECOME A BUZZWORD?.....	359
DRAMA QUEENS.....	360
THE RESCUER AND RESCUEE.....	361
CO-DEPENDENTS.....	362
EMOTIONAL DISRUPTORS.....	364
NEGGING AND DESTABILISATION.....	365
GUILT-SHOVELLERS.....	365
WHO ARE THE RED FLAG PEOPLE IN YOUR LIFE?.....	367
YOUR WOUNDS + THEIR WOUNDS = MORE WOUNDS.....	368
A TEST TO SEE IF A PERSON IS TOXIC.....	370
REMOVING OURSELVES FROM TOXIC PEOPLE.....	371
WHERE DO WE EVEN BEGIN?.....	373
S.M.A.R.T GOALS.....	376
LIFE PURPOSE.....	376
WHERE ARE YOU NOW AND WHAT WILL YOU UNPACK?.....	380
TAKE YOUR BROKEN HEART AND MAKE IT INTO ART.....	381
YOUR THOUGHTS ABOUT YOU.....	383
10 TRUTHS TO HEAL YOUR CREATIVE HEART.....	384
HOW WOULD YOU DO IT ALL DIFFERENTLY?.....	385
THE VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF HOPELESS.....	386
TURN AROUND BRIGHT EYES, YOU ARE NOT YOUR PAST.....	387
TURN YOUR LIGHT ON.....	388
WHO ARE YOU?.....	389
IF YOU'RE HAVING SUICIDALTHOUGHTS.....	391
FROM MY MESSY HEART TO YOUR MESSY HEART.....	393
MY HEALING MANTRA.....	394
YOU ARE ENOUGH.....	395
FINAL TRUTHS (FOR NOW).....	396

The truth must dazzle gradually, or every man be blind.

Emily Dickinson

When we truly understand how the mind comes from the brain,
we will improve the lives of everyone who will have
a mental illness in their lifetime.

Kay M. Tye

Beneath the layers of emotional debris there's a version of you who's already healed. As you begin to untangle the confusion and shame of your past, this version of you will begin to rise.

It's time to stop punishing yourself for things that happened long ago, things you cannot change. It wasn't your fault, you're not to blame. The people who depressed your spirit and disempowered you no longer control you. Your truth starts there.

From the roots up, you can heal your past.

As you read the emotional truths in this book, please remember the **only** source of your self-doubt and shame are other people and the toxic opinions and criticisms they projected on to you.

If you read something and think 'that might work for other people, but it won't work for me' just pause, tune in to who that voice really belongs to, and ask yourself: what's my truth?

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

There comes a time in all our lives when we question who we might have become if the past had been any different. We think about what we might have achieved if encouragement, connection, and patience had been more abundant in our early years. As we learned to be wary of the world and the people around us, we adapted our behaviour to fit in. We questioned: Will they like me? Will they judge me? Will they include me? Will I be safe?

We learned to meet other people's needs before we met our own. Our purpose was invalidated and our potential overlooked as the people entrusted with our care were too preoccupied with their own dramas to notice us losing our way.

When we spend our younger years swamped with stress and disruption we grow into adults overwhelmed by life. We're vulnerable to triggers, struggle with anxiety and depression, we're helpless to bullies, and forced to create a persona to survive the harsh realities of our world. But when we address the root cause of our emotional suffering we can finally begin to uncover the truth of how we got 'here'.

When we stop re-tracing the same destructive pathways, deepening the missteps, the mistakes, and regrets, we get to tell a new truth - one that's free from the suffocating impact of self-criticism and distressing memories. Understanding how our emotional history continues to negatively shape and influence our mental health in the present day, means we can change and re-shape the damaged beliefs we hold about ourselves. When we understand why we are the way we are and do the things we do, when we're no longer suspicious, guarded, sabotaging our opportunities, or desperately trying to get our needs met, we *finally* get to embrace the undeniable power of emotional freedom, *and* the

undeniable truth of who we really are - and *that* may be someone we're yet to meet.

Healing our emotional history is the key to becoming the person we want to be - not a version of us that suits everybody else, but a version we would choose to be *without* the critical voices that have so far shaped us to be who we've become. Whatever your age, whatever your history, your emotional story is waiting to be told.

Within the pages of this book, we shine a bright light on a painful truth: emotional chaos and disruption experienced in our formative years carries long-term consequences for our wellbeing and adult mental health. But there's another truth we must also tell: **no matter what's been done to us or said to us, we can reclaim our power and win our emotional war.** I've done it, I've watched others do it, and I promise that you can do it too.

I know what it feels like to be at the bottom of the heap, to be hurt by people you should have been able to trust; those experiences leave deep wounds. But as we begin to untangle the past we uncover once unreachable truths about ourselves, and those truths will set us free. Someone else's controlling, toxic abuse may have got us here, but we decide how to get ourselves out. *We* are in control of our healing.

When we hold the appropriate people accountable for our emotional suffering - without them even knowing what we're doing - we can **stop blaming and punishing ourselves.** We heal the wounds that have held us back and turned us into someone we were never meant to be. Once we trace our difficulties, defences, and fears back to their source we no longer search in all the wrong places for approval and validation. Instead, with the self-worth and confidence we've reclaimed, we stop arguing for our limitations and become empowered to validate and approve of

ourselves. We finally give *ourselves* the permission we've been waiting for.

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO BE WHO YOU MIGHT HAVE BEEN

I wrote this book to share the knowledge I've gathered - personally and professionally - about why we are the way we are, why we do the things we do, and, despite our best efforts, why we often feel unable to turn it all around. What you'll find within the pages of this book will put you on a path that leads you to peace, contentment, and emotional freedom.

- You'll learn how to recognise and heal the **eight key emotional experiences** from childhood that continue to impact your wellbeing and your mental health to this day. You'll learn how to stop them from running and ruining your life.
- You'll discover how to break the disempowering mental and emotional patterns you picked up in childhood so you could survive your environment.
- You'll unravel the causes behind your self-sabotage, procrastination, and the coping mechanisms you created to stay safe.
- You'll learn how shame has controlled you but doesn't belong to you, that forgiveness is not necessary for peace of mind, that there's no such thing as an inner critic, *and* that you may have misunderstood the true meaning of trust.
- You'll learn how to meet your own emotional needs, heal your triggers, to set and keep unbreakable boundaries, to feel comfortable with confrontation, and how to finally show closure the door.
- You'll uncover the reasons why your emotional history still drives your decisions, beliefs, and perspectives, and you'll gain the awareness you need to regulate yourself emotionally calming your nervous

system when panic and anxiety creep in. I'm sharing a method that guarantees you'll retain your emotional power in even the most demanding situations with the most difficult people. This process has helped me and countless others to be underwhelmed by overwhelm and to manage anyone and anything with grace and dignity rather than anxiety and fear.

Whether you engage a little or a lot, the truths and practices in this book will bring you enlightening self-awareness and longed for peace of mind. By the end of the book, you'll have discovered eye-opening truths about yourself, your past, your purpose, and your future potential. You'll no longer be triggered or feel afraid to do the things you want to do. You may still see the same faces, interact with the same old negative people but inside you'll be smiling and not taking *anything* personally. You'll recognise their patterns and may even have compassion for the person they've become. Above all else I hope this book helps you realise that you're not alone. Whatever was done to you or said to you - whatever harmed and hindered you - can be healed and transformed.

The truths in this book will stay with you for a long time; they're here for you whenever you're ready. Make a note of any you're not ready to hear today, and come back to them tomorrow. This is a journey of discovery but also of *rediscovery* as the person you've always known yourself to be emerges from beneath layers of emotional debris left behind by the toxic power of other people's shame.

A PERSONAL NOTE

I'm not a celebrity therapist or a social media influencer. I don't speak five languages or have any idea how to walk into a party and be the life and soul of it. I'm not a great cook or artist although I'd love to be. But when it comes to healing and transforming the roots of emotional suffering, I

know what I'm talking about. I was a child who grew up fighting an emotional war on a battleground of domestic violence and shocking abuse. I struggled for a long time with the unmet needs and self-denial those experiences demanded from me. I buried my light and allowed darkness in. I carried the traumatic weight of those abusive years until, through urgent necessity, I learned what works when it comes to healing emotional wounds. I put the pieces of myself back together again from 50,000 feet below rock bottom. Time after time I wandered off, got lost, came back, started over, fell again, and climbed back up, again and again. Nowadays, I know enough to stay above ground. No more hiding. There will always be things that bother us. There will always be sadness, stressful situations, and people who try our patience. In this book you'll learn to swim with your feelings and emotions rather than drown in them. You'll learn to let yourself off the criticism-hook, to stop planning everything out, and stay in the present rather than futurising, and thinking long term. You'll learn to pause long enough to absorb your emotional truth and reclaim your emotional centre. Whatever's been done to you or said to you - or whatever you've done or said to someone else - you'll emerge from the shadows as you bring the light back into your life.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT!

Throughout the book you'll find reflective exercises called '**Challenge It to Change It Journal Prompts**'. These journal prompts provide a frame within which you can paint a clear picture of how you ended up fighting an emotional war. You don't need to respond to everything straight away - you can pass on anything that feels uncomfortable, revisit it later, or just let it rest in your mind as you doodle on the page and sit with the questions. Not all the experiences that brought you *here* will rise to the surface immediately - which is probably a good thing. You can come

back to the exercises whenever you experience or remember something that needs 'challenging and changing.'

These exercises are like finding a map when you're lost; when we zoom out and look at the bigger picture - the map - we can work out how we got here, how we get out, and, more importantly, how we **never** go back. We start noticing alternate paths that take us away from cliff edges and dangerous ground. As we become more aware of why and how our past still shapes our present, our emotional wounds will finally close and stay closed. Learning the truth about how we got 'here' finally feels cleansing and enlightening.

The '**Challenge It to Change It**' questions are borne from over 15-years of research. They've been refined and enriched by the many brave souls I've worked with who have navigated their way through their own emotional storms, and whose humbling transformations have all greatly contributed to this book. Nothing in these pages is difficult to achieve, but its transformational power is immeasurable. It's all 'easy when you know how'.

People often tell me they don't know where or how to begin healing. Whatever they try doesn't 'stick' and their emotional wounds remain open, raw, and unresolved. If that's been your experience too, you're not alone. The sooner we see the truth behind what we were taught to believe is 'wrong' with us, the sooner we can heal the confusion and pain of the past. When we ask ourselves the right questions healing can happen faster than we expected with a lot less fear and emotional overwhelm about what we may uncover. Healing shouldn't be confusing, guilt-inducing, or feel like an impossible uphill struggle. When we untangle the *root cause* of our emotional wounds we become empowered to regulate our emotions, validate ourselves with positive meaning, and finally find our purpose on this planet.

All the **Challenge It to Change It Journal Prompts** have been compiled in a free workbook available on my website. You can complete it online, print it out, or use your own journal to write down your answers.

This book is for *you*. Whether you read it cover to cover, dip in randomly, or re-read the bits that shout out to you...it's your choice. If you're on the verge of giving up, feeling hopeless, worthless, exhausted, and undone, take a break, sit back, give this book a chance to help you change your life. Allow the words to wash over you and the questions to either float by or sink in. I don't want you to suffer anymore, to keep struggling, or be vulnerable to anxiety, depression, or manipulative people for one more second of your precious life.

Emotional Freedom is all about truth, so let's tell it!

WHERE DID YOU GO?

Amidst the chaos and disruption of our younger years the truth of who we were meant to become definitely 'got lost', but our true self didn't really go anywhere; it just became very quiet. We forgot about our own needs as we tried to fit in, to keep the peace, and to please others. As our mind became clouded with confusion, fear and loss, we began to search outside ourselves for the missing pieces. But now, as we learn to open up and speak our truth, we get to reclaim the person who hid themselves away, who stayed under the radar keeping out of the firing line, trading their emotional freedom for safety. Now we get to create space and energy, to take back ownership of our precious life, and to stop searching outside of ourselves for what was never really missing in the first place.

Everything we need to know about our emotional history is revealed by looking at our emotional struggles in the present moment. So, ask yourself: *who and what is the source of the emotional war I'm fighting every day?* And then ask: *haven't I had enough yet?*

One of the most transformative truths we can embrace is this: **'I meet my own needs, and my healing belongs to me.'** Someone else's toxic power may have brought us here, but our determination, resilience, and desire for emotional freedom is what will get us out.

For decades my mental health and emotional wellbeing continued to decline. I sabotaged myself every day, deepening my wounds with self-blame and emotional punishment holding myself responsible for the mess I was in. Now I know different, I do different. And so can you. From this moment onwards, the shape of your life is no longer defined by anyone else. From this moment onwards *the shape of your life is defined by you*. In the millions of moments ahead of you, you now own every choice you make, every feeling you have, and every thought you think. You control them all.

7 REASONS WHY WE DON'T HEAL

Countless conversations with emotionally wounded people have shown me **seven main reasons** why we don't heal:

1. **BLAME**
2. **DENIAL**
3. **FEAR**
4. **SELF-PUNISHMENT**
5. **UNWORTHINESS**
6. **JUDGEMENT**
7. **CONDITIONAL HEALING**

Each one makes perfect sense when you've lived through emotional chaos and disruption, but each one is stopping us from healing. Let's look at them individually:

REASON 1: BLAME

When we're waiting for someone else to take responsibility for our pain (and they probably never will) we're not focussing on ourselves or addressing our own emotional recovery needs.

Blame means we're often passive-aggressive with people who have caused us pain. We're disrespectful, sarcastic, and we weaponize silence. But a passive-aggressive blaming-style is a *toxic* reclamation of our power. We must instead find *positively assertive* ways to reclaim what was taken from us. We do this by holding the appropriate people **accountable** for the damage they've done so we can finally say and wholeheartedly mean: *'This behaviour was not my fault. This betrayal is on them. The emotional outcome is mine to heal, but not mine to carry. That is theirs and I'm giving it back now.'*

This authentic statement is the truth, and the truth sets us free. This is where we begin offloading the emotional weight we've carried. Other people will *always* be accountable for what happened to you - you know that, and so do they.

Right now, you may feel like you still want to blame them because that's where you feel justice will be found but read on; I promise you'll discover better, more empowering ways to process blame.

REASON 2: DENIAL

If we're not seeing the emotional truth about how we got here then we're in denial. We can't help it. When we're scared to talk about our feelings in case we upset someone, or they ignore us and fail to validate our suffering, we learn to deny our pain so we can cope with it.

We've been taught through painful consequences that confronting and upsetting the people responsible for our heartache must be avoided at all costs. We've learned that staying in someone's 'good books' - and therefore staying emotionally safe - means we must stay silent and deny our truth. We've learned that expressing our feelings and wanting to talk about our painful past leads to rejection, the 'silent treatment', and dismissal. If we go down *that* path again we risk restarting the cycle of abandonment that we've spent our whole lives trying to avoid. This is why the content of this book is designed for you to heal without needing anyone else's input or them knowing what you're doing.

When we stop rolling our shame in glitter to block out our emotional pain, we can get to the root cause of our struggles. I promise you, moving out of denial and into the light of your truth will move you forward on your road to emotional freedom like nothing else. And the people you're scared of offending and upsetting won't even know what you're doing. You can reclaim your power and win your emotional war, and they won't

know a thing about it. Other people's denial of your pain and refusal to talk about it has added to your feelings of invalidation, but here's the truth:

- You know what happened.
- You know what you felt.
- You don't need their version of it.

REASON 3: FEAR

Fearing what we might **feel as we heal** stops us looking at the difficult stuff, but the worst may already be over. Chances are, nothing again will ever feel as painful as the experiences you've already survived. The burdens you've carried, borne from your painful encounters, is the heaviest it may ever get. Speaking your truth to the power of the past will lift those burdens and heal what you feel. There's nothing scary about healing emotional suffering; what *is* scary is *not* healing it. Are you afraid to heal because, in some way, staying wounded feels safer? Does it protect you from loneliness, criticism, or rejection? Does it help you to feel seen, even if it hurts? That's not weakness. That's survival. There is no benefit greater than emotional freedom and when you truly understand *that* you'll begin your healing journey *fearlessly*.

So, what are you afraid of?

- The envy of others as you rise?
- The possibility of being dismissed?
- The guilt of moving forward while others stay stuck?
- The shame and humiliation projected on to you by the very people who got you here?

Let me reassure you once again: nothing in this book requires you to confront, blame, or question anyone from your past. You don't have to explain yourself. You don't have to "clear the air." You don't need their

blessing. You are free to heal in your own time, in your own way, **as soon as you say so.**

REASON 4: SELF-PUNISHMENT

We'll talk a lot more about self-punishment later but for now, from this moment forward, please know that it's no longer necessary to punish *yourself* for anything that's been done to you or said to you or that you witnessed that caused you to feel emotional distress and suffering. Sometimes we believe that we deserve to suffer especially if we've been blamed and held responsible for the things that have happened to us. You are *not* to blame; you do *not* need to punish yourself anymore. What other people said or did - the insults, the dismissal, the abuse - was not your fault. Within you is the power to heal and transform your past. You just need reminding - sometimes repeatedly - that you're worth the effort and you matter enough to try.

If you were punished a lot during your childhood, if joy and safety and love were withheld from you, you may have continued to deprive yourself of these essential emotional building blocks. Self-punishment can become a habit, a reflex, a rule you never agreed to. But it's not a rule you have to keep following.

When we begin to replace self-punishment with self-compassion, our heart opens and we start to treat ourselves with the kindness we've always deserved. You wholeheartedly deserve compassion and kindness for the road you've travelled, and for every painful, confusing, or unkind experience you've survived.

REASON 5: UNWORTHINESS

I used to feel how you might be feeling right now. Despite everything that had been done to me and said to me, despite the pain, the self-blame, the shame, I eventually found myself feeling worthy of healing. I still had

a long way to go but this was a solid start. Yes I wandered off the path many times, but now something within me was determined to get back on track and hold on.

You may not feel worthy of something better right now and that's okay, but you can recognise *the value* of change and your ability to make it happen. Put another way: you can **value the chance** to feel something different even if you don't yet feel worthy of it. You're seeking solutions; you're here because you want to heal the emotional pain that's sabotaging your life and stealing your joy. That means something.

As an adult, not feeling worthy or deserving is a long-term consequence of emotional disruption and chaos in childhood. Maybe you were told 'you're not worth it' 'you don't deserve it' 'who do you think you are'. As you begin to untangle the lies and the betrayals of your past, you *will* begin to feel worthy of so much more than you do right now. You don't need to feel worthy to begin; you just need to recognise the *value* of feeling something different.

REASON 6: JUDGEMENT

We judge ourselves when healing doesn't happen quickly enough. Worse, we give up on recovery because we judge that it's hurting too much, requires too much effort, or it's a load of rubbish. Judgement stops us but so often the voice that's judging us isn't ours - it belongs to someone from the past whose judgements have landed us in the emotional mess we're in.

I'm sure those judgemental people with the critical voices would have something to say about you 'growing up' 'pulling yourself together' and 'not being so dramatic', but if their advice was helpful it would have worked by now...

The truth is, judging yourself for the pace of your healing only holds you back. It stops you immersing yourself in the process. It interrupts your progress with old stories that were never yours to begin with. Leave 'Judge Mental' at the door and give yourself time to tell your truth and win your emotional war.

REASON 7: CONDITIONAL HEALING

We stay in a state of limbo when we put conditions on our healing. We tell ourselves we'll be happy when...we'll be at peace when. I've lost count of the number of people who have said to me 'if only I could meet the right person' or 'if only ... would happen I'd finally feel happy/healed/free/complete/at peace.'

We spend our lives waiting for someone or something to fill the emotional spaces left by unmet needs and invalidating experiences from the past. So, ask yourself: who or what are you still waiting for? *Unconditional* healing says we can be whole and complete *without* the permission, validation, love, or approval we're still waiting for from someone else because here's the truth: when someone else supplies your peace, approval or worth they can take it away again. But when you create it for yourself, it can be shared but never taken.

There are few greater achievements on your road to emotional recovery than learning to meet your own needs and renouncing the old expectation that someone else will do it for you. You don't need a rescuer. You're not waiting anymore. Peace of mind and emotional freedom is 100% achievable the moment you stop waiting for someone else to save you.

MENDING MENTAL HEALTH

Be gentle with yourself during this work; it's important you know when you've had enough, and when you need to rest. During the 'Challenge It

to Change It' exercises you may feel uncomfortable writing down names of people you love and care about especially when those emotional ties have also wounded you. Remember what we said about denial and fear? If you need to write down 'she made some really stupid choices that ruined my life' or 'he should have had better values' then write it down. You're not being disloyal, you're not blaming anyone, you're simply acknowledging what happened, and you're telling your truth about how and what got you 'here'. That's essential for your healing.

Writing your truth creates profound shifts in your emotional wellbeing and mental health. It shifts the blame from you and puts accountability where it belongs. It opens space for self-compassion.

Helping ourselves recover from the emotional war we're fighting every day can feel like arduous work. Our minds have been flooded with warnings, fear-based lies, and a barrage of distorted truths. If you're worried about being disloyal then please know this: **anyone with your best interests at heart would want you to heal; they'd want you to stretch your wings and fly. Anyone who doesn't want this for you simply doesn't matter as you navigate your road to emotional freedom.** It's a measure of how deeply your past has affected you that you're still protecting other people's feelings instead of your own. You're safe now to uncover **the truth you need to hear** so you can heal yourself. You're not letting anyone down by putting your needs first. The healing process begins when you **stop minimising who and what hurt you.**

Where do you even begin? You begin **here**. Our motto is simple but powerful: **no shame, no blame, only awareness.**

**Stab the body and it heals,
but injure the heart and the wound lasts a lifetime.**

Mineko Iwasaki

PART I

HOW WE GOT HERE

4 UNDENIABLE TRUTHS

- Truth 1:** **There must be a reason that I am as I am, there must be.**
- Truth 2:** **One believes things because one is conditioned to believe them.**
- Truth 3:** **All battles are first won or lost in the mind.**
- Truth 4:** **You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards.**

We didn't just wake up one day and choose to be challenged by our emotions and our mental health. We'd had experiences that shaped us into who we became - often without our awareness or permission. But when we begin to see our emotional struggles through the lens of these **Four Undeniable Truths**, something shifts. They give us a foundation for decoding our past and an understanding of **why we choose, feel, and think** the way we do. This is where healing begins, by facing the truth of how we got here.

TRUTH 1: THERE MUST BE A REASON THAT I AM AS I AM

There is. There always was. As children we have no choice but to trust that the emotional foundations being laid for us are coming from emotionally grounded people who want the best for us.

In our developing years when our needs are met, when we're encouraged, praised, reassured, and loved, we develop an emotionally stable and secure outlook on life. But when our needs are not met, when we're blamed for problems, criticised, shamed, judged, ignored, bullied, neglected, or made to feel insignificant, unlovable, unwanted, or in the way, we do what children do best: **we adapt to survive**. We change our behaviour to fit in. We bury our light to stay safe. We become

hypervigilant, watching for signs of danger, doing everything we can to avoid rocking the boat. We learn to survive by staying in the shadows and away from the light.

As adults, this adaptation follows us. We struggle to recover from failure or rejection because failure once meant humiliation, trying meant risking shame, needing something meant opening the door to disappointment. The embarrassment we felt at 7 years old still overshadows our efforts decades later. How do we forget the sting of exclusion, rejection, and humiliation? We don't. But we can heal it. And that starts now.

TRUTH 2: ONE BELIEVES THINGS BECAUSE ONE IS CONDITIONED TO BELIEVE THEM

How we're conditioned as children doesn't just give us a superficial layer of influence we can shrug off later. Childhood conditioning is a cell-infusing, life-altering belief system, one that can take us from **limitless potential** to the darkest corners of **limited ability**. That's a tragic turnaround that without intervention may never again find its correct course.

If you had experiences in childhood that left you struggling emotionally with feelings of unworthiness and lack of purpose, feeling directionless, or undeserving then you were conditioned to believe things about yourself that are simply not true. The only way to untangle these emotional questions, quarrels, and quiet heartbreaks is to become informed about what happened, and aware of why it shaped you the way it did.

We all need to emerge from our childhood with the belief that we have something to contribute, that we matter, that we're entitled to live in this world taking up space and being seen and heard. For those of us who did receive that message we go on to learn the emotional language of

acceptance, resilience, and confidence. But for those of us who were conditioned to believe the opposite - that we're inconvenient, invisible, unwanted, or unworthy - we float through our life feeling confused, lost, lonely, and discouraged. Why am I here? What's the point of me?

Someone else's destructive behaviour filled us with a lifetime's worth of self-loathing, doubt, anxiety, awkwardness, self-punishment, and loneliness. Our fear of failure, rejection, abandonment, confrontation, and loss are all wrapped up in the overwhelming power of other people's toxic conditioning.

TRUTH 3: ALL BATTLES ARE FIRST WON OR LOST IN THE MIND

What finally begins to untangle the darkness and discomfort of our **adult experiences** is recognising this truth: **our roots are firmly planted in the humiliation, emotional chaos and shame of our past.** Our ability to live without irrational fears, chronic anxiety, depression, or emotional instability can be directly traced back to the failings and weaknesses of the people who shaped our earliest emotional world.

When we uncover the reasons behind *why* we choose the things we do, feel the way we feel, and think the way we think something miraculous happens: we start to unravel the long-term consequences of our emotional history and more importantly we begin to heal them.

Our emotions are no longer filtered through distorted perspectives created by our emotional wounds. Instead, they're seen with new eyes, the eyes of someone who finally understands where it all began. Why are we stuck, unsure, regretful, or afraid? Why do we keep choosing the same things that hurt us? Why do we struggle to live life confidently? Working out what we're *really* afraid of - and why we've been afraid of it for so long - is one of the greatest emotional investments we'll ever make in ourselves.

And the return on that investment?

- Emotional freedom.
- Self-trust.
- Peace of mind.

Even now you may not realise that the root of your present-day emotional struggles began with the **unspoken tension** you sensed as a child - the stress, fear, or instability that quietly began shaping you. **When we trace our emotional wounds back to the source of our unmet needs, we can finally begin to untangle the bewildering uncertainty our lives have been shaped by.**

From that place, something powerful begins to happen. We become resilient, optimistic, and grow into someone who is confident and capable. We *can* change our habits, unlearn our learned behaviours, and finally fulfil our potential. With patience and courage, we can look at our past and truthfully appraise how the grown-ups let us down. We get to see the truth, the reasons, the lapses, the gaffes, and the horrendous abuses that sharpened and shaped our sweet, trusting selves.

This is how the battle is won. When we see the truth without fear, when we stop carrying what was never ours - the emotional war in our mind finally ends. And in its place? Emotional freedom.

TRUTH 4: YOU CAN'T CONNECT THE DOTS LOOKING FORWARD YOU CAN ONLY CONNECT THEM LOOKING BACK

When we begin to connect the dots between our present-day emotional struggles and the criticisms, exclusions, abandonments, humiliations, and resentments we experienced in childhood, we finally see the truth: there is nothing wrong with us. We didn't deserve what happened, we didn't ask for it. More of us than ever before - of all ages - are realising

that we escaped the first 18 years of our lives with more than our fair share of emotional wounds - wounds that still whisper in our ears, wounds that still dictate the rhythm of our lives well into our 40s, 50s, 60s and beyond.

When we surface for air on the other side of our childhood, we expect to leave behind the unhappiness of the past, but we don't. We're leaving home wired for self-sabotage, primed for rejection and failure, and only prepared for more of the same. Our experiences have left us emotionally fractured, stumbling through a fog of confusion and self-doubt. We're carrying the crushing weight of inadequacy, hopelessness, guilt, confusion and we don't know how to replace that weight with self-validation, hope, and peace.

But when we finally understand how we got here, we begin to feel less afraid of what we're feeling now. We begin to name it, and we emerge from the toxic abuse that buried us. We reveal the warrior who's been waiting beneath the rubble to be seen, we see the heartbreaking truth that ***we've given up our emotional freedom for things we'd never dream of trading our physical freedom for.***

Thanks for the wisdom!

Truth 1: Robin Williams

Truth 2: Aldous Huxley

Truth 3: Joan of Arc

Truth 4: Steve Jobs

DID I EXPERIENCE TRAUMA?

“Trauma is the lasting emotional response that often results from living through distressing events. Experiencing traumatic events can harm a person’s sense of safety, sense of self, and ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. Long after traumatic events occurs, people with trauma can often feel shame, helplessness, powerlessness, and intense fear.”

Source:camh.ca

Without knowing how trauma is defined, we’re left wondering: “Did I even experience trauma? “If you look up trauma in a thesaurus you get alternative words like shock, upset, ordeal, suffering, pain, disturbance, distress, and damage. We can all remember an experience that caused *those* feelings but few of us would label them as ‘trauma.’

Do we avoid labelling our experiences as *traumatic* for fear of sounding *dramatic* and self-indulgent? Are we dismissing them because our low self-worth prevents us from acknowledging them? Harmful events are grouped as ‘little traumas’ or ‘big traumas’ without due consideration being given to individual sensitivities. We rationalise our experiences by saying ‘that’s just how it was back then’ or, heartbreakingly, ‘it wasn’t that bad’. Buried in the bones of those statements is the pain of silent suffering.

Denying our experiences, *fearing* what we might feel, and *judging* ourselves *for* our feelings all keep us from acknowledging the emotional impact of our past. We resist describing our experiences as traumatic because we’ve been taught that trauma means devastating abuse, living through a war, or surviving extreme neglect and abuse. We might think, ‘that wasn’t me, I didn’t go through anything like that; I couldn’t have experienced trauma.’ But this is how we miss the dots we need to join

between our adult struggles with our mental health, and the emotional disruption and chaos we experienced in childhood.

You may not see yourself as traumatised but if you relate to the camh.ca definition of trauma above and, despite trying your best to heal, you face a daily struggle with emotional overwhelm, anxiety, low self-worth, or sadness, then chances are you're living with unresolved trauma.

*

Unresolved trauma is a greedy bastard. It saps your energy, steals your peace, and blurs your focus. It clings to your life like smoke, suffocating your spark. It's a fierce and determined opponent. You must now be more fierce, and more determined than your unresolved trauma. It's won the battle so far, but you're about to win the war.

The trauma you've experienced - the emotional chaos and disruption - has shaped your life. Now you have the chance to change that shape to one that reflects who you truly are.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HOW DO I RECOGNISE TRAUMA?

(Page 5 of your workbook)

Do you feel like you're fighting an emotional war?	YES/NO
Are you struggling with your self-worth?	YES/NO
Do you have addictions - food, shopping, emotional dependence?	YES/NO
Are you socially anxious?	YES/NO
Do you sabotage your opportunities?	YES/NO
Do you procrastinate even when you want to move forward?	YES/NO
Do you do what you want to do?	YES/NO
Or what you must do?	YES/NO
Does your current mindset reject success and wellbeing?	YES/NO
Do you find yourself attracting emotional or financial poverty?	YES/NO
Do you keep settling for less than you deserve?	YES/NO
Have you ever been bullied, rejected or excluded?	YES/NO
Did you hear or see your parents' fighting?	YES/NO
Did you watch one of your parents leave?	YES/NO
Do you compensate by being good so no one else leaves you?	YES/NO
Do you still fight for closure that never comes?	YES/NO
Have you built an emotional wall around yourself?	YES/NO
Were you ever humiliated or shamed by criticism or rejection?	YES/NO
Were you scapegoated by a narcissistic parent or caregiver?	YES/NO
Were your emotional needs met during your childhood?	YES/NO
Did you have a close, safe protective bond with a parent?	YES/NO
Do you have a controlling personality to avoid feeling powerless?	YES/NO
Do you close yourself off from other people emotionally?	YES/NO
Do you struggle to trust other people even when you want to?	YES/NO

Do you find it hard to forgive yourself?	YES/NO
Do you dumb yourself down rather than dare to shine?	YES/NO
Are you a pain-filled perfectionist?	YES/NO
Are you a people-pleaser?	YES/NO
Did your family's cultural or religious expectations harm your sense of self?	YES/NO
Were you emotionally, physically, or sexually abused?	YES/NO

If you answered YES to even just a few questions it's a signpost pointing to the areas that need your love, attention, and healing. This isn't about labelling or diagnosing; it's about understanding the truth of what shaped you. Bring awareness to what stands out. Mark any statements that stirred strong emotions or made you pause and think - these may be the exact places where your healing begins.

Whether you lived through an actual war or hid from a family war, the long-term consequences of traumatic experiences may still have you in their grip.

Trauma sabotages our potential in devastating ways.

- It delivers tough, unrelenting lessons.
- It changes how our brain develops.
- It rewires our sense of self-worth.
- It distorts our feelings of safety.
- It affects our ability to trust, to regulate emotions, and to connect with others.

Trauma keeps us silent, and the fear of speaking up keeps us stuck. We judge ourselves and our capabilities through distorted lenses not based on the truth of who we are, but on the warped messages of what we were told or shown to be. We try to hide it, but trauma is never really hidden.

It seeps into everything we do, what we say, and everything we believe about ourselves. Our experiences may be different, but they often lead to the same heartbreaking outcomes. When we've learned that it's not safe to express our true selves, we gloss over the cold, hard facts of **how we got here** because we believe it's easier than facing the truth.

Remember: trauma is the lasting emotional response that often results from living through distressing events. Experiencing a traumatic event can harm a person's sense of safety, sense of self, and ability to regulate emotions and navigate relationships. Long after traumatic events occur, we often feel shame, helplessness, powerlessness, and intense fear.

If you identify with this statement then it's time to heal your trauma. One thing I know for sure: **it's not your fault.**

Now you know what trauma *really* is, and what it can look like, with the 'Challenge It to Change It' exercise over the page, take a moment to reflect on how your past trauma is still showing up in your life today. This isn't about blaming yourself or anyone else, this is about awareness, and awareness is where your power begins. Write freely. Be honest. Be kind to yourself. No shame. No blame. Only awareness.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS
HOW PAST TRAUMA AFFECTS YOUR LIFE TODAY

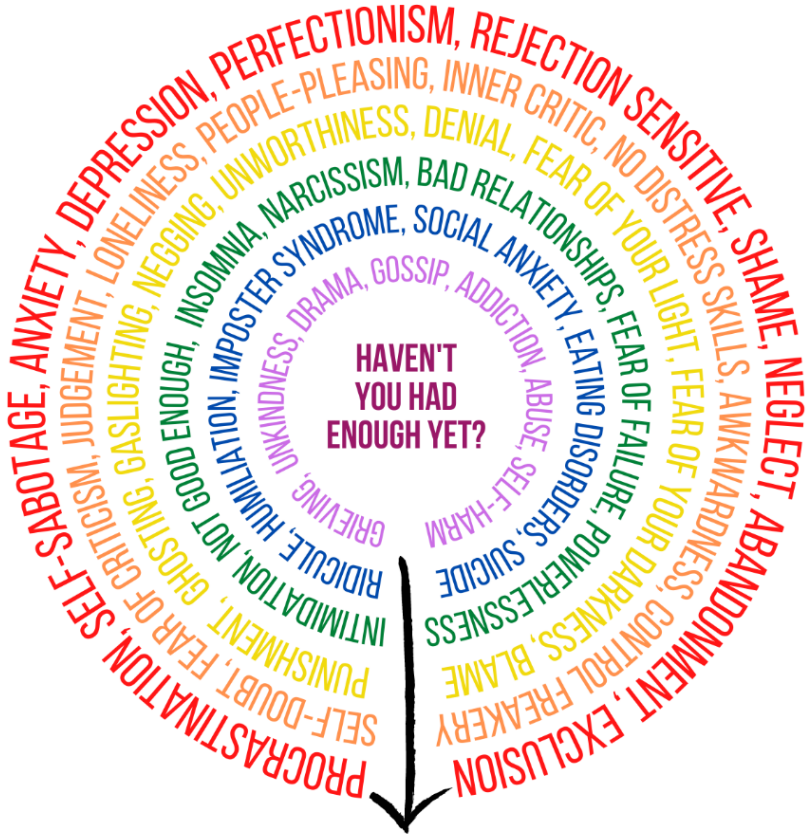
(Page 7 of your workbook)

- How is your past trauma affecting your thoughts, emotions, relationships, and choices today?
- What has past trauma stopped you doing that you'd love to do?
- What has past trauma made you do that you want to stop doing?

Trauma doesn't discriminate, it can happen to anyone, at any time. It's especially damaging to our future emotional wellbeing and mental health during childhood and adolescence. This is when our sense of self is being shaped, and our brain is being programmed by the sensory experiences we're bombarded with on a daily basis.

WHEEL OF TRAUMA

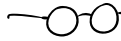
THE LONG-TERM EMOTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF TRAUMA
SHOW UP IN WAYS WE DON'T EVEN REALISE



THERE IS A WAY OUT!

**UNTIL YOU MAKE THE UNCONSCIOUS CONSCIOUS, IT WILL
DIRECT YOUR LIFE AND YOU WILL CALL IT FATE**

CARL JUNG



HOW WE GOT HERE

If you've ever questioned 'what went wrong' and how you've ended up feeling emotionally exhausted, forever wired for hypervigilance and stress, then let me explain.

From birth and throughout our developing years we're constantly picking up sensory signals from our environment. These signals let us know if we're safe, protected, nurtured, and loved and they have a profound impact on how our brain develops.

When our needs for safety, love, validation, and reassurance are met, we learn that we matter, that we'll be supported, cared for, and protected. We know it's safe to make mistakes, to take risks, and that even if we fail we'll be OK.

We become familiar with feelings of:

- kindness
- encouragement
- emotional safety
- resilience
- being nurtured

These feelings program our brain to respond to life in emotionally regulated ways. We grow into adults who:

- try new things
- take measured risks

- build friendships
- know how to have fun
- value themselves
- set and respect boundaries

We can feel deeply empathetic without feeling overwhelmed by other people's emotions. We still get triggered from time to time, of course we do, but we respond with rationality and regulation. We're not easily offended, or indignant. We were taught we are worthy of love and care, so we love and care for ourselves. Even in difficult times we feel secure enough to stay calm, kind, and capable. We've been taught how to cope, we've become resilient. We've been successfully prepared for life and all its trials and tribulations.

But what happens when we experience the opposite?

When our needs are not met, when we're ignored, invalidated, reprimanded for mistakes, or exposed to neglect, abuse, or emotional chaos, we internalise different messages. Instead of security and worthiness, we internalise:

- shame
- exclusion
- abandonment
- rejection
- criticism
- humiliation
- exploitation
- dismissal

We grow into adults who feel:

- easily triggered

- suspicious or paranoid
- emotionally detached or dissociated
- hypersensitive to rejection
- we carry open wounds, constantly at risk of re-infection by people who are just as wounded as we are
- we see the world through distorted lenses
- we struggle emotionally
- we blur boundaries
- we become controlling, possessive, insecure
- we people-please
- we self-sabotage
- we perfect, procrastinate, and then punish ourselves for it

We may suffer from:

- depression
- anxiety
- addictions
- emotional dysregulation
- personality disorders like BPD
- or develop narcissistic traits

We may struggle financially, socially, or within relationships

- We're unprepared for life's challenges
- When overwhelmed, we react in emotionally dysregulated ways
- We don't bounce back easily
- We may experience burnout, illness, divorce, or isolation

No one ever showed us compassion, so we don't show it to ourselves.

We tell ourselves to "get over it" to "stop being dramatic."

With willingness, understanding, awareness, and self-acceptance, we can overcome and transform our dysregulated behaviours. We can heal our emotional triggers, we can rewire our beliefs, we can uncover the truth of who we are and finally live as emotionally regulated people.

**THREE THINGS CANNOT LONG BE HIDDEN:
THE SUN, THE MOON, AND THE TRUTH**

CONFUCIOUS

GIVE BACK THE LIES, RECLAIM THE TRUTH

How long have you believed the stories you were told about yourself?

When we're children we believe what we're told. We don't question it; we don't have any reasoning ability. We label it 'true' and quietly store it away in our memory. That memory becomes a belief, that belief becomes a behaviour, that behaviour becomes a habit. So, when someone tells us:

- You're bad
- You're unkind
- You're stupid
- Nobody likes you
- You're not wanted

...we believe it and we remember it.

We believe it when we're told:

- You're no good at that
- You don't fit in
- You'll never be as clever/pretty/capable as...

And just like that, the lifelong habit of comparing ourselves to others begins.

It's not only the words people say that shape us; it's also:

- The weaponised silence that made us feel invisible.
- The dismissive glances that made us feel stupid.
- The physical, verbal, or sexual punishment that stole our dignity and made us feel unworthy of love or safety.

These sensory signals send messages to our brain that become the beliefs we carry, beliefs that make us believe we don't deserve to be protected, valued, heard, or seen. But those beliefs are false and they never belonged to us. They belonged to the people who did the damage.

SO THAT'S WHY I DO THAT

The lies we tell ourselves about ourselves are borne from the toxic lies other people projected on to us in our formative years. Those lies shaped us into people-pleasers, perfectionists, procrastinators, and self-saboteurs. They disconnected us from good, grounded people and instead drew us towards those who mirrored our pain – people who kept us trapped in cycles of false beliefs and betrayals.

So that's why I do that! is not just a throwaway line; it's an epiphany, a lightbulb moment that illuminates *everything*. It's the moment we realise why we choose, feel, and think the way we do. When those lightbulbs are switched on through realisation and awareness, when we begin to question the lies we've carried for years, our trapped potential starts to shine.

These lies restricted us, took away self-control, and left us without choice or voice. But once we trace those lies back to their source - once we understand where they came from and why - we get to rewrite the narrative. We can heal the difficulties, defences, and fears that were never

truly ours. We can begin to live an unrestricted, unapologetic, and emotionally free life no matter where we started from.

When our childhood wounds are healed, we stop needing permission or approval. We stop waiting to be chosen and we choose ourselves. We do our own thing, we live our truth, we find our people. Imagine how peaceful you'll feel when your life is shaped by your own beliefs, values, and truth.

What will you create?

**I'M NOT UPSET THAT YOU LIED TO ME,
I'M UPSET THAT FROM NOW ON I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU.**

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D

I've witnessed and experienced trauma in many forms and there are eight primary emotional weapons that are used to control, silence and shape us. Whether used deliberately or not, these emotional weapons have devastating long-term consequences for our emotional wellbeing and resilient mental health.

The eight emotional weapons are:

SHAME

EXCLUSION

ABANDONMENT

REJECTION

CRITICISM

HUMILIATION

EXPLOITATION

DISMISSAL

If you've suffered one or more of these devastating betrayals then you've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.

These experiences shut us down. They leave us feeling that love, connection, validation, safety, and nurturing will never find us. We're left walking through life with invisible scars, always fearing a repeat of past emotional chaos, disruption, and trauma.

Every time we dream of stepping outside our comfort zone, trying something new, bold, or exciting, our fear of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D once again holds us back.

- "What if I'm rejected again?"
- "What if they humiliate me?"
- "What if I'm abandoned, dismissed, or criticised?"

We've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. so often and in so many ways, that pain has been programmed into us. It lives in our choices, our moods, our thoughts, our reactions. It's behind the second-guessing, the self-sabotage, the people-pleasing, and the voice that whispers, "you're not good enough."

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS
HOW EVIDENCE OF BEING S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D SHOWS UP IN YOUR
LIFE

(Page 8 of your workbook)

Do you chase love?	YES/NO
Do you seek approval?	YES/NO
Are you highly agreeable?	YES/NO
Do you fear confrontation?	YES/NO
Are you afraid to set boundaries?	YES/NO
Do you keep quiet rather than speak up?	YES/NO
Are you scared of being left?	YES/NO
Are you a people pleaser or enabler?	YES/NO
Do you run from connection and commitment?	YES/NO
Do you struggle to trust others?	YES/NO
Do you test people to see if they'll leave?	YES/NO
Do you abandon your goals and never finish what you start?	YES/NO
Do you struggle financially?	YES/NO
Do you feel depressed and hopeless?	YES/NO
Do you suffer with panic attacks?	YES/NO
Are you socially anxious?	YES/NO
Do you feel resentful?	YES/NO

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HOW WE SUFFER WHEN WE'RE S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D

(Page 9 of your workbook)

Tick any that apply to you:

We:

- Don't feel good enough
- Betray & blame ourselves
- Detach/Zone out
- Compare ourselves to others
- Gloss over our pain
- Fake who we are/how we feel
- Procrastinate
- Sabotage ourselves
- Play small
- Can't rest or sleep
- Withdraw & isolate
- Lie to ourselves
- Feel resentful
- Feel empty and hopeless
- Think we're broken/worthless
- Are moody and snappy
- Feel restricted and trapped

It's why we:

- Are easily distracted
- Repeat toxic patterns
- Over-apologise
- Over-compensate
- Seek attention

It's why we become:

- Perfectionists
- People-Pleasers
- Peacekeepers
- Critical & Judgemental
- Risk averse
- Narcissistic
- Co-dependent
- Self-destructive
- Intolerant
- Bulimic/Anorexic
- Hypervigilant
- Lonely
- Anti-social
- Disempowered
- Reckless
- Needy
- Obsessive

It's why we have:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- BPD
- Intrusive thoughts
- Addictions

Don't trust or rely on ourselves	■	Anger issues	■
Feel suicidal	■	Imposter syndrome	■
Gossip	■	C/P.T.S.D	■
Overspend	■	Problems with trust	■
Settle for	■	No ambition	■
Underestimate our abilities	■	Fatigue	■
Can't forgive ourselves	■	Rejection Sensitive	
Punish ourselves	■	Dysphoria (RSD)	■
Can't cope with change	■	Dissociative Disorders	■
Struggle to relax	■	Separation issues	■
Neglect ourselves	■	Flashbacks	■
Feel irritable	■	Difficulty controlling	■
Can't focus	■	our emotions	
Deny our feelings	■	Overwhelming guilt	■
Keep busy	■	Overwhelming shame	■
Feel emotionally numb	■	Difficulty with recall	■
Avoid intimacy	■	Financial difficulties	■
Feel like a misfit	■	No self-control	■
Feel misunderstood	■	Physical symptoms:	
'Choose' not to have friends	■	Stomach aches	■
Ruminate	■	Headaches	■
Feel overwhelmed	■	Chest pain	■

These are not personal failings; they are symptoms of traumatic experiences.

After so many years of misunderstandings and playing down the catastrophic symptoms of my trauma, I finally felt heard and seen when I was diagnosed with Complex P.T.S.D. The severity of my childhood trauma had to be spelled out to me. I was typical of someone who had no idea how much other people's abusive behaviour had shaped me.

Growing up, I'd been blamed and shamed so much that I'd internalised the belief that everything - including the abuse I'd suffered - was my fault. It took a long time to emerge from a fog of rage and denial and finally face the source of my emotional suffering. Although Complex P.T.S.D was my *diagnosis*, I was only offered support for my *symptoms* and not for their *cause*. I was told I needed to 'put down' the emotional pain I was carrying, and 'let go'. But nobody taught me *how to do that*.

Like a crime with an obvious villain but no tangible evidence, the people responsible for my trauma weren't held accountable. No justice. No reckoning. And as that absence of accountability continued, so did the shame I carried. If the emotional agony I felt wasn't my fault, if it wasn't my responsibility, then whose was it? If I was to 'put it down' and 'let it go' I had to do it in a way that made sense to me, in a way that changed how I saw myself.

I needed to join the dots between my past traumatic experiences and the emotional struggles I fought and lost in the present. Then I could see the whole picture. I could understand how the suffering in my childhood had shaped a dysfunctional, numb-but-angry person. That connection was where my healing began.

YOU ARE NOT TO BLAME

I've spent a long time reflecting on who I became because of my S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences. For years I was so focused on being accepted and approved of that I became the ultimate people-pleaser

and perfectionist. These behaviours, fuelled by fear of criticism and rejection, only added to the mental and emotional trauma I already carried. I was ashamed of who I was. I avoided socialising, I didn't make friends, I settled for mundane jobs not having the confidence or self-worth to believe I was capable of anything better. Other people saw potential in me but the bright person I could have been was well and truly extinguished. I'd been worn down by the toxic influence of abusive, narcissistic parents, resentful siblings who were just as damaged, and bullies at both school and work. A lost and vulnerable young woman without resilience, confidence, education, or self-esteem, I became easy prey for manipulative people. They repeated the cycle of 'using and abusing' that I'd come to believe was normal. I learned not to shine, not to assert or protect myself. I wanted to avoid the pain of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D but my misguided efforts to stay safe only directed me along dark paths.

When we learn it isn't safe to be assertive or opinionated we live our lives afraid. We often find ourselves surrendering to people who are coercive or controlling, not because we're weak, but because our nervous system learned that this was the safest way to survive. We stay quiet to avoid conflict. We stay small to stay safe. We tolerate discomfort because it once protected us. Over time, these patterns can lead us into situations that hurt us – yet they make sense when we understand where they came from.

Nothing about this is your fault. These are old survival strategies doing their best to keep you alive. And the moment you begin to see them with compassion is the moment you begin to heal

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

WHY WAS I S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D?

(Page 11 of your workbook)

This next exercise will help you dilute the fear of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D that's been holding you back from your truth and your potential. Be gentle with yourself. No shame. No blame. Only awareness. And if you're not sure why they behaved the way they did, simply write what you think. Your understanding will deepen as you continue your journey. Think about who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D you.

- Do you have a theory about why it happened?
- Were they carrying unresolved pain or jealousy?
- Were they repeating patterns of harm that were once done to them?
- Were they overwhelmed by their own shame or fear?

Making these experiences conscious lessens their power over you. When you bring something out into the light, it begins to heal.

Reflection:

- When you read back over your answers, do you notice any traces of self-blame? Have you written 'because **I** wasn't good enough', 'because **I** made them angry'?
- Are you able to place accountability where it belongs with the person who caused the harm, not with yourself?
- Does it help to realise that you weren't S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D because of who **you** are, but because of who **they** are?
- Do you still risk being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D by any of these people today? If so, who and why?

Affirmation:

"I am no longer defined by the wounds others gave me. I see their pain without making it my own. Their choices are not my fault. Their actions are not my truth. I am free to write a new story rooted in my worth, my hope, and my light."

THE TRAUMA SURVIVAL ZONE

Our anticipation of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D makes us incredibly vulnerable. It stops us in our tracks every time we think about asserting ourselves or stepping outside the so-called comfort zone we've created to stay safe.

A 'comfort zone' is rarely comfortable. It's not a sanctuary; it's a cage. It's the place we go to avoid our potential. I call it the Trauma-Survival Zone, a space we occupy not because we're content, but because we're *terrified*. As our fears grow, so does the size of the zone. The more ways we find to avoid being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, the more ways we find to avoid becoming who we are meant to be. Our Trauma-Survival Zone is just a temporary stop on our way to emotional freedom - it's not where our story ends.

Inside the Trauma-Survival Zone is where we store everything that still requires a coping mechanism. It's where our wounds hide, and where our triggers live. But it's also where our healing begins - gently, safely, one truth at a time, we can safely begin to heal everything that's taken root there.

Our Trauma-Survival Zone isn't safe - it's familiar. It's made up of people, patterns, and protective behaviours that once helped us survive but now they're keeping us stuck. We stay in this zone because we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

TRAUMA-SURVIVAL ZONE

(Page 12 of your workbook)

This exercise invites you to notice what you've built around you that feels like safety... but isn't.

- Who and what are you keeping close in your Trauma-Survival Zone? Be honest. It may include people, habits, jobs, coping strategies, or beliefs.
- What dreams, desires, or goals are you sacrificing by staying there?
- What has your Trauma-Survival Zone helped protect you from?
- What has your Trauma-Survival Zone cost you?
- Now imagine stepping out of the zone with total reassurance that you will not be S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D again. What would you do differently? Who would you become?

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

STEPPING OUT OF THE ZONE

(Page 14 of your workbook)

Think about something you've been putting off - a project, a task, a dream - not because it's impossible, but because it's been buried in your Trauma-Survival Zone. Maybe fear, perfectionism, or self-doubt got there first and set up camp. Maybe you've told yourself you're not ready?

Let's change that.

- What's the project, goal, or desire that's still stuck in your T-S zone? Be as specific as you can - something you'd love to start, continue, or complete.
- Why is it still in the zone? What fear, belief, or behaviour has kept it there?
- What would it mean to you to complete or achieve it?
- What's the next smallest step you can take to move it forward - even just a tiny bit - today?
- How can you support yourself emotionally as you step out of the zone and into the life you want?
- You don't need to feel fearless. You just need to feel ready enough to take the next step.

Our painful experience holds us hostage and the ransom we pay day after day is our wellbeing, our creativity, our energy, and our truth. Anyone or anything still taking up space in your Trauma Survival Zone is sabotaging you in some way.

You're safe now. You're safe to start your projects, share your voice, live your life. Whatever was done to you, whatever was said to you that stopped you before, you're no longer prepared to be bullied back into the darkness. You, my friend, are healing.

Affirmation

"I am safe to grow beyond what once protected me. Each step I take is a quiet revolution toward my freedom."

THE ONE QUESTION

As we navigate our road to Emotional Freedom, the one question we must always ask ourselves is: **am I choosing, feeling, or thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D?**

Our choices, feelings, and thoughts are deeply influenced by our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences. From the most basic decisions to the biggest turning points, awareness of why we choose what we choose, feel what we feel, and think what we think changes everything.

Throughout my own recovery, every time I was about to punish myself with sabotaging words or actions, I learned to pause and ask:

"Am I choosing, feeling, or thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? Who planted those destructive seeds?"

Were the roots of my reactions planted by people who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D me? If I was about to sabotage myself with an angry outburst or get pulled into a debate determined to have the last word, then the answer was yes.

Eventually I realised: I had no power over who planted those toxic seeds, but I was 100% responsible for tearing them up by the roots and stopping them spreading. The people who got me here were not about to help me out, they never had. This was all me, and it felt great.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS
WHAT YOUR PAST TAUGHT YOU ABOUT YOURSELF
AND HOW TO HEAL IT

(Page 16 of your workbook)

Take a deep breath and give yourself time and space for this exercise. You're not here to shame or blame yourself or anyone else - only to gather awareness. Awareness is where your true power begins.

Reflect on the following questions:

- How did your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences shape the choices you've made about your life, your needs, and your dreams? What did you choose because of your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences? If you hadn't been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, what might you have chosen instead?
- Growing up, did you get the message that you mattered? Or did you feel invisible, unimportant, unwanted, or uncared for? What happened that made you feel that way?
- Did you have a safe place and a safe person to go to when you were hurt, afraid, or confused? Or was there no safe-haven or safe person for your younger self to seek protection from?
- Were your emotional needs met by your parents or caregivers? Think about both your father or primary caregiver and your mother or primary caregiver individually. How did each one respond to your emotions, needs, mistakes, dreams? What messages – spoken or unspoken – did you receive about your worth?
- What did you make their behaviour mean about you? What story about yourself have you been carrying because of their actions or inactions?
- Now, what's the truth? Who were they really? What were they carrying that had nothing to do with you?

- What's one truth you now choose to tell yourself instead of their story?
- Do you agree that the way you were treated was not your fault?

YES

NO

I'M BEGINNING TO AGREE

Affirmation:

I am not the product of their pain. I am not the reflection of their rejection. I am the keeper of my truth, the author of my life, and the guardian of my soul. I honour the child who survived, and I bless the version of me who now chooses to thrive.

*

Remember, you weren't born feeling unworthy or unwanted - you were shaped to believe it by people who hadn't healed their own wounds. You are worthy. You are loved. You are free to write a new story.

Your answers to the questions above paint a picture of your childhood, but it's a picture shaped by the behaviour of people who didn't know any better. You were a victim of their inexperience, their lack of awareness, and their own unmet needs.

Whatever image your answers reveal, it's not a true reflection of who you are or a measure of your worth. You are so much more than the meaning you gave to a picture drawn by someone else's toxic crayons - their beliefs, careless words, and hurtful actions are not who you are.

I DON'T WANT TO BE LIKE THEM!

Some of our personality traits are passed on from our parents just like the shape of our nose, the texture of our hair, or eye colour. But if you've ever caught yourself saying or doing something just like they did and felt horrified by the similarities, don't panic! Once we become aware of something we're doing that doesn't align with who we want to be, we can Challenge It and Change It.

Our character and personality evolve in response to our environment and the messages we receive growing up. So, if there's something about yourself you want to shift, you absolutely can. Nothing is fixed. If you don't like something about yourself you're not stuck with it. Start by noticing what you want to change, then take small, consistent steps to change it.

Maybe you're someone who does everything for everyone else but secretly craves more time alone. Maybe you're cautious and careful but you long to be more adventurous. Tune in to your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences and ask: what am I trying to avoid by not showing up as my true self? What would you change? Would you be more outgoing? Less of a people-pleaser? More sociable? Less impatient?

Being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D conditions us to develop our personalities from a place of fear and emotional vulnerability. It disconnects us from the powerful truth of who we could be. As children, we had no way of understanding why terrible, confusing things were happening. To cope, we developed personalities that often bear little resemblance to who we're truly capable of becoming. We hide our truth because we learned it wasn't safe to be open and honest about who we really are.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

RECLAIMING MY TRUE PERSONALITY

(Page 19 of your workbook)

You're allowed to change. You're allowed to grow. You're allowed to become the person you choose to be - not a version of you shaped by fear, shame, or rejection. In this exercise, you'll reflect on what parts of your personality you might like to change and explore the S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D fears that sometimes hold you back. This exercise is about reclaiming your right to evolve into your true self.

- If you could change something about your personality, what would it be? Example: I'd be more assertive. I'd allow myself to speak up without guilt.
- If you make this change, what are you worried you might feel...Example: rejected, criticised, abandoned.
- Who might trigger this fear or discomfort? Example: your mother, your boss, your partner.
- Does your current personality reflect who you truly are, or who you believed you needed to be to stay safe and fit in?
- Do you adapt, shrink, or silence yourself to please other people?
- When decisions are made, do you: go along with others, make your own choices, or compromise?
- Are there character traits in you that remind you of someone who once S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D you? No shame, or blame, just awareness.

Every choice to heal, evolve, and reclaim yourself is an act of courage. You're not here to perform. You're here to embody your truth, your worth, and your power. The more you become who you truly are, the more peace and freedom you'll find.

Affirmation: "I am safe to be my true self. I am allowed to change. I am allowed to grow. I am no longer bound by fear or by the past. I am free to become who I was always meant to be."

INNER CHILD

"Trauma meant that my **adult self** hardly spoke at all. My wounded **inner child** did most of the talking."

The unresolved trauma and open wounds we carry in *adulthood* are formed in the emotional turbulence of *childhood*. Too many of us felt, far too early, that we were unsafe, unwanted, or unloved; that feeling sits heavily in a child's heart and mind.

Unable to express how lonely and confused they feel, they bury the pain deep inside. Now, as adults, we must set that child free by talking about how we got here, how we get out, and how we never go back to that place of emotional pain and fear.

Stop for a moment and look at your life as it is right now.

Think about all the ways you've tried to keep yourself safe. Are you protecting *your adult self*... or that little kid who once stood alone, undefended?

I spent a lot of time and money on trying to heal my 'inner child' until I realised that my 'inner child' was me, my adult self, still trying to be heard and seen and to get her needs met. When we talk about our inner child what we're really describing is a version of our adult-self who's still crying out to feel protected and safe, loved and important. When we're triggered or upset, it's not always our adult-self who's reacting, but the child who was once overlooked, dismissed, and ignored. Nurturing our adult self is the gateway to freeing our inner child. Until then, our inner child is running our emotional show.

A therapist once asked me what I thought my emotional age was. I said "24" (my actual age at the time). He said, "I think it's 7." And he was right. Two shockingly disruptive events happened to me when I was 7. They ignited decades of depression, rage, anxiety, and self-abandonment. He believed the person sitting in front of him (me) was stumbling through life guided by her 7-year-old traumatised self.

We are still the children we used to be.

In fact, every version of ourselves we've ever been, is still alive inside us shaping how we respond, how we feel, and what we believe about the world. They're not separate from us. We have sensory experiences today with the same fingertips and the same nose we had when we children.

- We think with the same brain.
- We see through the same eyes.
- We hear with the same ears.

Just like our sensory memories are stored in our body, so are the coping mechanisms we've built up over the years. When our fear response becomes highly sensitised in childhood, it stays that way unless we consciously interrupt and rewire it.

When we heal the fear-based wounds formed in childhood, our adult self can finally take full control. They're permitted to step up and take over from the child who has managed until now.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

INNER CHILD

(Page 21 of your workbook)

- Who or what is your inner child still afraid of?
- In what ways are you dimming your inner child's light today?
- What would you like to say to your inner child? Write with tenderness, honesty, and hope.
- Give examples of when your wounded inner child does the talking. It will usually be a fear-based dialogue, such as:
"I'll mess it up."
"They'll leave me."
"I'm not good enough."
"It's safer to stay invisible."
"If I get it wrong, they'll hate me."

Reflection: when you notice fear-based thoughts, how can your conscious adult-self step in and respond differently, with protection, truth, and care?

Inner Child Closing Mantra: "I hear you, little one. I see your fears, but I will not abandon you. I am here now. You are safe with me. We are free to speak, free to dream, free to shine."

IT ISN'T THE MOUNTAINS AHEAD TO CLIMB THAT WEAR YOU OUT. IT'S THE PEBBLE IN YOUR SHOE.

MUHAMMAD ALI

We always look at the mountains ahead we are yet to climb, but we forget that the mountains behind us were just as steep and we made it. We can do this. And so can our inner child.

DEPRESSION

Deep Repression

One of the most significant life-changing realisations I had - which provided a major turning point in my recovery - was how my 'adulthood' struggles with depression and anxiety had developed because of my S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences in childhood.

Before I healed I'd always thought there was something wrong with me; that I wasn't a nice, kind or clever girl, one who people wanted to include and invite places. I'd been told enough times that I was awful, wicked, a pain, a problem, that I was unlovable, ugly, and that nobody did or would ever want me. I was told I should be poisoned, that I was a mistake, and to do everyone a favour and commit suicide. I shied away from good people and golden opportunities, trying to hide the dysfunctional, maladapted person I'd become. It's frightening now to think how the words and actions of other people had the power to fragment and destroy me. And I know I'm not alone.

When I finally joined the dots between my childhood trauma and my dysfunctional adult mental health my depression lifted and disappeared within days. The '**deep repression**' of my needs in childhood had taught me that I wasn't safe to **express** myself, so I **depressed** who I was. Discovering that truth felt like the light at the end of a very dark tunnel had finally been switched on.

Children don't have the vocabulary to eloquently verbalise their feelings. They can't say, 'I feel humiliated', or 'I feel rejected'. When we have nobody who notices us, listens to us, or encourages us to find other ways to **express** our feelings, we **depress** them instead. Our pain and confusion are kept hidden inside our minds and bodies until one day...BOOM! It all comes tumbling down.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

BE KIND TO YOUR MIND

(Page 23 of your workbook)

When we choose kinder thoughts about ourselves, we begin to **express** the little person we once were, the one who felt silenced and **depressed**. Below you'll find questions designed to help you **express** yourself more freely and connect with the empowered, authentic version of who you truly are.

Go ahead, dig deep - I'll wait.

KINDER THOUGHTS ABOUT ME

1. I am good at:
2. I can easily:
3. The best thing about me is:
4. If money were no object, I'd:
5. I could teach:
6. I enjoy listening to:
7. I'm most confident when:
8. I'd love to be a:
9. My favourite thing to do is:
10. My favourite thing about myself is:

Please don't worry if you've left blanks or found some of these difficult to answer. You can come back later as many times as you need and have another go... and another go... and another go. There are limitless opportunities for do-overs and glow-ups.

SELF-KINDNESS

In childhood when we don't experience or witness kindness, we have no blueprint or way of knowing that **self-kindness** is a cornerstone of resilient mental health.

Choosing kind thoughts about ourselves can feel completely alien if kindness was never modelled for us, but it's one of the essential changes we must make if we're to mend our mental health and improve our emotional wellbeing. How easily we practice self-kindness *today*, often depends on what was modelled for us in the past. A lack of self-kindness is not because there is something wrong with us or that we don't deserve kindness. It's because of how we've been treated by other people.

I grew up with people who were unkind to me, to themselves, and each other. I continued this cycle of behaviour towards other people, and towards myself.

Unkind people have had their own share of S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences. When we bear *that* in mind, our perspective about their behaviour may change. We no longer make their unkindness mean something **bad** about us; we realise that there's something **sad** inside them instead.

MAKING THE FAMILIAR UNFAMILIAR...AND VICE VERSA

Despite what the past has taught us, when our self-worth begins to grow, we realise that we have a choice between pain or peace. We begin to commit, gently but surely, to the path that leads to peace.

At first, this choice can feel awkward and unnatural, like learning a new language - choosing peaceful responses doesn't come easily when we've spent a lifetime wired for emotional survival. But, just like a new language, peaceful solutions can become familiar; they just need time, practice, and repetition. Unhealthy patterns and painful habits endure, not because

they serve us, but because they're familiar. Familiar feels safe, even when it hurts.

As our self-worth strengthens, so does our awareness. We begin to spot the moments when we're slipping into old patterns, and we learn to pause and choose again. Slowly, gently, we replace the **old** familiar with a **new** familiar that builds a version of us that feels peace instead of panic, confidence instead of chaos.

Remember the pandemic and how we all raged about lockdown? Queuing for groceries, home tutoring, and eating dinner at the same table we tried to work from? But we adjusted. What felt impossible at first eventually became routine. We proved to ourselves that unfamiliar things can become familiar, and what once seemed fixed can change.

You're now doing the same thing with your thoughts, your emotions, and your habits. You're replacing the way you've always done things with new ways of choosing, feeling, and thinking.

Choosing Kinder Thoughts about yourself may feel uncomfortably unfamiliar right now, but it's a non-negotiable practice for mending your mental health.

And the truth is: it's easier to learn than you think.

CHOICE

It's hard to make changes when we don't feel worthy. I've never met a traumatised person who truly believed they deserved to heal. For a long time, I didn't believe it either. That's what happens when you've been psychologically hammered into the ground. Your thoughts don't feel like your own and your opinions seem irrelevant. You stop trusting your instincts. You don't feel significant, loved, or worthy enough for healing and transformation. Who would notice? Who would care?

But by choosing a new thought, a new direction, a new outlook, we can change our patterns and our habits with a simple thing called 'choice.' We can't change where we've been, but we *can* change where we're going just as soon as we say so.

We know how we got here, and we know we're not to blame; we didn't deserve what's been said to us or done to us. Let's choose something better for ourselves instead, something that heals instead of hurts, something that lifts instead of depresses, something that reflects our truth, not our trauma.

You don't have to be or feel different to choose differently. Despite the layers of 'undeserving' and 'unworthiness' that have buried us, we still have the freedom to choose right now, in this moment, what happens next. Our life. Our choice.

And our choices are up to us.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

CHOICE

(Page 25 of your workbook)

- When you think about making new choices that would benefit your healing and emotional freedom, what stops you? Which of your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences might still have power over your ability to choose freely?

Is it the fear of:

- Shame?
- Exclusion?
- Abandonment?
- Rejection?
- Criticism?
- Humiliation?
- Exploitation?
- Dismissal?

Write about it openly and honestly.

- Which S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D fear rises first when you think about making a different choice today?
- How has that fear shaped your past decisions?
- If that fear no longer had control over you, what would you choose instead?

No shame, no blame, only awareness. With awareness we get our power back.

Affirmation:

My past shaped me, but it does not own me. I have the power to choose differently now.

REMEMBER THREE THINGS

When we believe we have no choice but to live with the pain and turmoil of the past, we're still listening to the critical voices that got us here.

I spent decades believing I didn't have a choice because those harsh, debilitating voices from my past told me I wasn't worthy or deserving of good things. Every day, I felt like my head was in a vice getting tighter. My inability to function emotionally, to socialise and make friends, to make good choices or stick at anything new and helpful, wasn't because I was broken, it was because my brain had been programmed to believe there was something very wrong with me.

When every day feels like your brain's being squeezed in a vice, and your eyes won't stop leaking tears of confusion, frustration, and despair, there are three truths worth remembering:

1.

Regardless of the overwhelming, toxic power someone projected onto you in the past you are in control now; *you get to choose what happens next*. Pause and ask yourself: is it my conscious adult-self making this choice, or is it my wounded inner child?

2.

Feeling something different to what you're feeling right now is possible. You can make the familiar pain unfamiliar and let peace, self-kindness, and confidence become your new normal. Start now: choose just one kind thought about yourself. Do you like the colour of your eyes? Can you cook? Sew? Draw? Are you a master organiser? Has your sense of humour helped you through your darkest times? Did you put your socks on this morning? Did you brush your teeth? That's self-care. Win-win.

3.

The commitment to reading this book is proof that you're already beginning to choose differently. With every insight, you're replacing pain with power. Your most capable, courageous, and emotionally free self is rising. Let them breathe. Let them lead. You have the power to choose. Choose well.

THINK ABOUT IT

When we're born, we're tiny bundles of feelings with no ability to choose what's best for us, to think for ourselves, or to meet our own needs. That's why we had caregivers and parents who, hopefully, did that for us - even with minimum effort. Thinking evolved so we could manage our needs in ways that our natural instincts didn't allow meaning that we could eventually become socialised.

Thinking helps us regulate our emotions, make sense of our environment, and adapt to the world around us. It exists to guide us, to stop our natural instincts from taking over, and to help us become more emotionally balanced. Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours continue to be shaped by our sensory experiences as we wait for our needs to be met.

Over time, most of us learn how to get our needs met without screaming, crying, or throwing things. We develop new responses that reflect our ability to think, rather than relying on instinctive or inappropriate reactions.

Thinking is the bridge between feelings and actions. It creates time and space for us to **consider our responses** rather than reacting impulsively. That moment of pausing and thinking might not seem powerful, but it's everything.

When we choose to **think first** we break the cycle of emotionally charged reactions and step into a new way of responding with calm, clarity, and self-respect. Thinking is a superpower; think first.

STOP AND THINK

Thinking is the evolved version of **instinct**.

It builds a bridge between **reaction** and **response**.

The **survival brain** thrives on **instinct and impulse**.

The **evolved brain** thrives on **thinking and choice**.

OVERTHINKING

Overthinking, or dwelling on the past, is called rumination. It often creeps in when we're stressed, depressed, fearful, or anxious. We get caught up in repetitive thoughts about something that happened years ago, or just last week - or sometimes about something that hasn't even happened yet. Our thoughts spin in circles as we imagine worst-case scenarios or consequences beyond our control.

Rumination is a mental compulsion. It's also a symptom of unresolved trauma. We don't realise that these intrusive, obsessive thoughts are long-term consequences of the emotional disruption and chaos we lived through in our earlier years. We ruminate about saying or doing the wrong thing. Did someone think I was rude? Over-the-top? Unfriendly? Around we go in our quest for answers and reassurance.

These negative thought loops become disempowering habits, so it makes sense to catch them and gently interrupt the cycle. When you become aware that you're overthinking, try saying to yourself: "Here I go again. I'm ruminating. I'm obsessing. I know why (past trauma), and I know this is a habit I'm now breaking. I understand it may take time, but I can do it."

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

OVERTHINKING

(Page 27 of your workbook)

- Do you ruminate or overthink?
- Do you understand why you might do this?
- Do your thoughts centre on a specific topic or person?
- Do you know why you ruminate about this topic or person?
- Are your thoughts rooted in any S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences? If so, which ones?
- Does your fear ease with rumination, or does it get worse?
- What negative experiences do you most often ruminate about?
- How would you feel if you stopped ruminating and accepted what is?
- Next time you catch yourself ruminating, what will you do instead to redirect your mind?

Awareness Prompt: Overthinking tries to protect you from pain, but it can also prevent your peace. You're safe now to choose calm instead of control.

We ruminate on the past and the reasons why people have hurt us. We replay conversations, imagine punishments, and rehearse the things we wish we'd said. When guilt creeps in, we overthink every move we made, agonising over what we could have done differently. But overthinking our regrets and betrayals won't change what's happened - and it won't help us win our emotional war. It just ties us in tighter knots and keeps us stuck in the fight.

Next time your thoughts leap on a "what if" or "if only" merry-go-round, or you wake up at 3 a.m. already spiralling, hit the brakes. Make a conscious choice to redirect your mind. Try reciting a nursery rhyme, singing lyrics from a favourite song, or repeating a line from a comforting

film. Anything simple that helps your overactive brain slow down and rest, so your rational mind can take control.

At 3 a.m., you don't need solutions; you need permission to rest. Affirm to yourself gently: I am worthy of sleep. I deserve rest. My mind and body now relax and welcome sleep. Repeat until sleep finds you. And it will.

The thoughts that once helped you survive can be replaced with thoughts that help you live wholeheartedly. When you're no longer scanning for danger or searching for ways to avoid being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, you're finally free to reset and reshape yourself. From this moment forward, you are who you say you are.

Only you get to decide what happens next.

MY '4 STICKY NOTES TO EMOTIONAL FREEDOM' PLAN

This plan formed the foundation of my emotional transformation. Writing it was my first step towards healing my rock-bottom self-worth and overcoming severe social anxiety and depression. These 4 sticky notes brought me back to life and helped me heal the suicidal depression that had threatened to capsize me for good.

They seem so simple when I look at them now, but these messages slowly lifted me from beneath the rubble left behind by the toxic power of my S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences. I lost the notes several times but always found them again, usually tucked inside the pages of a journal or self-help book. They stuck together as I re-built my life. I hope they do the same for you.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE!

Handwrite the words (don't type them) on four sticky notes and place them where you'll see them every day. No sticky notes? Use paper and tape. When you've handwritten them once, you can type and print them, but the power of the first handwritten notes is important.

Highlight the words that speak to you. Put them everywhere: your mirror, your fridge, your phone. Share them if you'd like to, but most importantly, use them. Use them like lifelines because that's what they are.

Sticky Note 1:

From this moment forward in any thought, belief, conversation, setting, or situation that feels challenging, intimidating, anxiety-inducing, or disempowering for me, I will ask myself...

Sticky Note 2:

...right now, who has control of my emotional power, who has control of my self-worth, and who has control of my voice? And if it's not me, if they're stuck somewhere in the past still controlled by someone who was unkind to me, then I'll remind myself...

Sticky Note 3:

...that whatever's been done to me or said to me, whoever once shamed, excluded, abused, rejected, criticised, humiliated, exploited, and dismissed me, I am safe now; they no longer have control over me. I am free to make empowered choices, to speak up, to believe in myself, and to know that I'm worthy of good things.

Sticky Note 4:

And with one deep calming breath, I will bring my emotional power, my self-worth, and my voice home to me where they belong. When I reclaim my emotional power, I win my emotional war.

Before I learned the '4 sticky notes' off by heart I had six simple words that I used in their place: **YOUR LIES ARE NOT MY TRUTH.** I called it my **TRUTH PHRASE.** It kept me safe when I felt silenced, invalidated, and pushed to the edge by other people's bullshit.

HOW TO USE THE TRUTH PHRASE

Look directly at the person or people who are contradicting your truth or picture their face/s in your mind. *Silently* repeat the truth phrase: **YOUR LIES ARE NOT MY TRUTH.**

As you silently repeat the truth phrase to yourself you'll remain **responsive in your thinking brain**, and **not reactive in your survival brain.** Accompanied by a few deep breaths, you'll soon feel a calm, dignified, and empowered energy flowing through you. Seriously, it works! I promise nothing and nobody will ruffle your feathers as you keep repeating your truth phrase: **your lies are not my truth.**

If you feel up to it you can repeat the truth phrase to photographs of people from your past who have hurt you. If you don't have a photo, and emotionally you're OK to do this, you can visualise them in your mind instead. If you'd prefer to sit an object in a chair to represent them or use a different picture and pretend it's them you can do that too. A client of mine used the poo emoji on her phone to represent her abusive ex-husband. His number was saved in her phone as 'TPS - Total Piece of Shit'. Laugh or you cry, right?

If you're having a difficult day telling yourself you can't do this, that's it's too late, you're too old/stupid/ugly to change, you must use the truth phrase on yourself...your own lies that you tell yourself aren't your truth either.

Be gentle with yourself. No shame, no blame, only awareness.

WHY THE TRUTH PHRASE MATTERS

Our truth is being censored and extinguished when someone denies or aggressively opposes our truth, when we're being spitefully teased, shouted down, censored, gossiped about, manipulated, put down, intentionally confused, humiliated, or bullied.

This type of behaviour feels like an attack on our personal safety. If someone calls you 'too sensitive' when you're calmly setting a boundary, that's not the truth; that's an assault on your right to assert your needs. Repeat your truth phrase: your lies are not my truth. Let it ground you in your own reality when someone tries to pull you into theirs. Their needs are not your truth either.

MINDSET

Our mindset is our internal lens. It's how we view ourselves, other people, and the world around us. It's a collection of beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, and emotional patterns that influence our thoughts, decisions, and behaviours.

Our mindset is shaped by the story we tell ourselves about what's possible for us, a story that was started by other people who didn't have much idea about who and what we could become. Our mindset informs us who we are and how life works. It's not just **what** we think, it's **how** we think. It's the automatic "tone" our brain uses when interpreting situations, setbacks, successes, relationships, and even our self-worth.

Our mindset is shaped mainly through:

Childhood Conditioning

- The beliefs our parents, caregivers, and environment modelled or repeated.
- What was praised or punished, encouraged or shamed.

- Whether our emotional needs were met or dismissed.
- If we're safe, if we're lovable, if we need to earn love, if the world is fair or dangerous.

Those answers become part of our 'unconscious operating system'. In other words, what we learn through sensory experiences creates our mindset.

Cultural & Social Influences

- Messages from media, school, religion, and community.
- What's considered 'normal', 'successful', or 'acceptable'.
- The roles we're expected to play - "be the good girl," "don't be too emotional".

This teaches us what to suppress or what to strive for, even if it disconnects us from who we really are.

Repetition of Thought

The more a thought is repeated - especially when charged with emotion - the more it becomes 'wired' into our brains.

- "I always mess up" → becomes a belief.
- "People can't be trusted" → becomes a worldview.
- "I'm not good enough" → becomes a default mindset, even though it's untrue.

Trauma and Emotional Wounds

Big or small traumas shape our core mindset because they interrupt our sense of safety and identity. We might internalize:

- "I have to be perfect to be loved."
- "My needs don't matter."
- "I must please others to stay safe."

And until we examine those thoughts, they run the show.

Can Mindset Be Changed?

YES! Mindset isn't fixed, it's learned, which means it can be unlearned, and reshaped. With conscious effort we can:

- Interrupt old beliefs
- Choose new interpretations
- Rewire our brain
- Heal the story underneath the mindset.

Dr. Carol Dweck's research has revealed there are two main types of mindset - growth and fixed.

Fixed Mindset

A fixed mindset believes that your abilities, intelligence, personality, and potential are set in stone: you either have it, or you don't.

People with a fixed mindset tend to think:

- "I'm just not good at that."
- "If I fail, it means I'm a failure."
- "There's no point trying if I'm not naturally talented."
- "Constructive criticism feels like a personal attack."

This mindset avoids challenge, resists feedback, and often fears failure because failure is seen as a reflection of who you are, not simply what happened. It's usually shaped by early experiences of shame, comparison, or pressure to perform, where the message was: be good, be quiet, be compliant, or be nothing.

Growth Mindset

A growth mindset believes your abilities, intelligence, and traits can be developed through effort, learning, and persistence.

People with a growth mindset think:

- "I'm not good at this yet."
- "Failure is part of learning."
- "I can improve with practice."
- "Feedback helps me grow."

This mindset embraces mistakes, feedback, and challenges as opportunities - not threats. It fosters resilience, curiosity, and a deeper sense of self-worth that isn't tied to constant success.

Why This Matters for Healing & Personal Growth

When we grow up in an environment where mistakes were punished, emotions were shamed, or love felt conditional, we're more likely to have a fixed mindset, especially about our emotional self.

For example:

- "I'll never change."
- "I'm just broken."
- "Healing works for others, just not for me."

Shifting to a **growth mindset** opens the door to emotional healing:

- "I've learned to survive a certain way, but I can change that and learn to thrive."
- "This is hard, but I'm growing through it."
- "Every emotion teaches me something new about myself."

People with a **'fixed mindset'** avoid taking risks and rarely colour outside the lines. They want to feel safe and approved of, validated, and trusted. People with a **'growth mindset'** see challenges are there to be tackled and conquered. They're not too worried about what other people think.

It would make sense if all children who'd had a troubled childhood grew up to be adults with a fixed mindset, but research has shown the opposite to be true: children who have traumatising experiences can still grow up with a growth mindset.

When we know *why* we have a fixed mindset we can train ourselves to overcome our resistance to trying new things. When we acknowledge that the source of our self-doubt and shame doesn't belong to us or isn't part of us, we can step outside our 'Trauma-Survival Zone' and give new things a go. We wake up to the fact that the fixed-mindset person we've become is a version of our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D self, not a true representation of who we are.

Imagine telling everyone you meet, 'I can't do that; I have a fixed mindset'; that's what you're telling yourself every time you say no to a new, unfamiliar experience that you believe will end in failure. Your mindset is fixed because it's how you've survived, but that's not who you *truly are*.

Throughout the pages of this book, as you learn to build healthy boundaries and to trust yourself, you'll shift your mindset from fixed to growth. You'll realise that you can allow new experiences into your life, and you'll manage risk and failure in ways you never imagined you could.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

LEAVING THE TRAUMA SURVIVAL ZONE

(Page 29 of your workbook)

- Since you last explored who and what lives with you in your Trauma-Survival Zone, what's changed?
- Have you removed or added anyone or anything?
- Have your boundaries strengthened?
- Has your awareness grown? Write down any shifts you've noticed, no matter how small.
- What's beginning to look more possible for you as you take your power back and step beyond old survival patterns?

AMAZING BRAINS

We can't win our emotional war without talking a bit about the brain. It might sound boring and OMG, but once you've read these next couple of pages you'll understand more about why you feel and think the way you do, and what you need to do to change it - because it can, **most definitely**, be changed. We are not stuck; we are evolving. Mindsets can be transformed.

I'm a 'why' person. I want to know *why* something, or someone can help me and *why* something or someone might not. Do I need to know how an engine works before I drive a car? No. But if the car breaks down miles from home it could be lifesaving to know a bit about how the engine works.

When we understand a bit about how our brain works we can understand what happens when it breaks down. When we know how adverse sensory experiences in our formative years influence our brain's development, it becomes easier to work out what needs to be done to undo the damage, heal a lifetime of mental and emotional health struggles, and win our emotional war.

When I discovered how my childhood experiences of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D had negatively changed how my brain had developed, it felt like I'd won the lottery. After years of feeling deeply ashamed of myself, I learned there was nothing wrong with me. I hadn't attracted the rejection and criticism I'd received, and neither had I deserved or asked for it.

The negative consequences of my childhood had created psychological changes in my brain that negatively affected how it functioned. These changes were responsible for why I felt so bad about myself, why I struggled to connect with other people, and why I often felt withdrawn,

shy, aggressive, and anti-social. They explained why I lacked motivation, acted impulsively, made choices and decisions that came back to bite me, and why I battled depression, frequent panic attacks, and extreme social anxiety. I finally learned that my dysfunctional behaviour wasn't my fault. It was the result of a brain changed by trauma. I was not broken; my brain could be reset and reshaped. It wasn't too late. I could be helped. I could unlearn what I'd learned. I could have the meaning, purpose, and peace of mind I'd longed for.

I'd been handed the key to my emotional freedom, and I cried with relief. I could change the damaged programming downloaded from people who told me I was rotten to the core, someone who deserved horrible things to happen to her.

I was just a little girl, a few years old, when shocking things started to be said and done to me that changed the development of my brain. If murdering someone's spirit was a crime, those guilty people would have been locked away for life.

What follows is my neuroscientist approved 'Keep It Sane & Simple' account (and it is very simple) of how our brain becomes over sensitised, and our fear response over developed during a stressful childhood.

I promise you that knowing this information about your brain will switch you on to a sustainable process of healing and help you challenge and change everything about yourself that holds you back from your potential and the truth of who you are. When we know better we really can do better.

Ready? Let's go!

FIRST THINGS FIRST

When we're born, our brain is 25% the size of an adult brain. Between birth and age five, another 65% of our brain is built by the sensory messages it receives from its environment. This includes messages from television, films, as well as everything happening around us. In other words, everything we see, hear, taste, smell, and touch sends a message to our brain with an emotional message attached. That's how our brain starts storing memories: by linking the sensory with the emotional.

These combined experiences create something called a neural pathway. When we repeat a thought or action enough times, that thought or action becomes a **dominant** neural pathway. Over time, these dominant pathways link up and carry messages all over our brain. We have trillions of neural pathways one being created every time **a sensory experience attaches itself to an emotional experience and they make a connection.**

As babies, we don't think, but by the time we're two years old we're not only connecting emotions to sensory experiences we're thinking about them too. Is this safe? Is this not safe? Our mindset is forming. From just two years old, we're building a brain that controls our responses and reactions for decades to come. Was I ignored when I cried? Is that why I'm needy? Was I punished a lot? Is that why I'm a people pleaser? Was I criticised and judged? Is that why I'm a perfectionist and procrastinator?

We learn by observing and receiving sensory messages from watching others. We learn to walk by pulling ourselves up and (hopefully) receive praise and reassurance for our efforts. That praise strengthens a neural pathway that connects positively to the risk/reward area of our brain. Next we learn to balance, then put one foot in front of the other, and soon we're toddling all over the place, delighted with our newfound skill.

We learn by absorbing sensory messages and repeating an action that creates a dominant neural pathway that we store to memory. We repeat the actions so often that we no longer need to think about it, we just do it. That's called an **autopilot** memory. Like footprints on a well-worn path, our thoughts and actions create the equivalent of footprints on our brain - dominant neural pathways. With repetition, our thoughts and actions create our brain.

Repetition builds and strengthens the trillions of neural pathways that make up our brain informing our habits, beliefs, and behaviours. Your sensory experiences have informed your brain whether you can, or you can't, whether you're good enough or you're not, whether you're lovable and safe, whether you'll be rewarded or reprimanded. Fixed or growth mindset. Safe or unsafe. That's the power of repetition. And it can all be changed.

Remember those early sensory experiences and the emotional connections we made to them? What might we have connected to the sound of yelling or the sight of an angry face? If we were S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, what emotional messages got hardwired into our developing sense of self?

Messages like:

- "I'm not good enough."
- "I'm a waste of space."
- "I can't do anything right."
- "Who do I think I am?"
- "I need to stay out of the way to stay safe."

Repeated all day, every day, these messages create dominant neural pathways and program our brains to be scared, anxious, and confused. This is why we put the brakes on our potential, our plans, our goals, and

our dreams. We dumb ourselves down. Settling. People-pleasing. Becoming co-dependent. It's not weakness. It's not failure. It's how our brain was programmed by our environment.

The brain doesn't distinguish between positive or negative thoughts; it just follows the most repeated message. In fact, neuroscience shows that negative experiences are more deeply embedded in our memory than positive ones. That's probably why we're hypervigilant perfectionists and procrastinators, full of self-doubt and self-criticism. When our lived experience has taught us that it's not safe to try, to risk, or to connect, we build dominant neural pathways that reinforce the belief: **I'm not safe.** That's how we get stuck in our Trauma-Survival Zone.

*

The part of the brain we're most interested in for the purpose of this book is called the amygdala. Its main job is to regulate emotions such as anger and fear. The amygdala specifically stores fear-based memories connected to shame, grief, and anger, and it attaches emotional meaning to those memories. It's also involved in decision-making and reward processing. Can you already see how the fear-based memories the amygdala stores will radically influence and explain why we make risk-averse decisions and why we so often don't reward ourselves?

Now, get this: when destabilising sensory experiences and fear-based memories become the building blocks of our neural pathways and, therefore, our brain, any challenge in our environment will trigger memories that transport us back to a time when we felt scared and unsafe.

Our amygdala's survival mode kicks in and our hypervigilant, over-sensitised brain goes into overdrive convinced we're facing another life-threatening experience. It floods our system with stress hormones,

preparing us to flee, fight, or freeze... (we'll explore these responses in more depth soon).

Before we can truly begin to heal our anxiety and calm our frazzled nervous system, we need to understand the link between our amygdala's fear response, those old fear-based memories, and the everyday challenges we're now facing.

PROVOKING FEAR-BASED MEMORIES

When our fear response is triggered and our brain and body are flooded with stress hormones, our ability to think clearly is shut down to make room for our survival brain to take charge. This is the brain that once screamed to get its needs met.

We shift from consciously responding to unconsciously reacting. Rather than stepping onto our Thinking Bridge, we become panicky and anxious. Our breathing becomes shallow and rapid. We feel light-headed. As our stress hormones surge, we feel overwhelmed, emotional, scared, angry, out of control, and dysregulated. Some of us may even pass out. If you've ever had a panic or anxiety 'attack' this is what's happening.

The truth is, in the first few seconds after our strong emotions and connected memories are triggered, our amygdala offers us a fork in the road. It gives us a choice:

- Do we need a full-on protection squad to fire up the alarms and launch into a coping mechanism to ensure survival?
- Or can we find a way to respond in a calm, regulated way?

If our wounded inner child is in charge, we're likely to pick the protection squad. But if we can engage our conscious adult self, if we can stay present (not trapped in the screaming baby brain), and think, breathe,

and self-soothe, we'll be empowered to choose peace and composure even when facing the most difficult emotions or people. **We don't have to choose a fear response; we have a choice between pain and peace.**

Remember: an overactive, defensive fear response in our adult life is most likely rooted in childhood experiences of fear-based sensory messaging. That's the source of your dysregulation. **There's nothing wrong with you.**

When our brain has become sensitised to threat and danger, our fear response becomes overdeveloped. The slightest hint of trouble can send us spiralling into anxiety, dread, or rage. But if we can understand what's happening *and why*, we can interrupt the pattern.

In that split second, we can either: have a full-blown meltdown throw a grenade and fight to have the last word or take a breath, walk away, and keep our frightened inner child calm.

Despite our past experiences we can learn how to soothe our fear response and desensitise it.

Until we understand the source of our struggle, we'll keep calling in the protection squad. But when we know we have a choice in how this plays out, we can train ourselves to choose the response that keeps us emotionally regulated even in the most stress-inducing situations.

Next time you become anxious or experience the overwhelming symptoms of a panic attack, remember: **'I have a choice'**. Step onto your 'Thinking Bridge' as soon as you can and interrupt the fear response with self-knowledge which can be as simple as repeating 'I know why this is happening'.

Regulate your breathing with deep breaths holding for a count of 5 and reassure yourself you're not in any danger. 'I am safe, what's my logical next step?' Probably 'walk away'...

Remember: The function of panic and anxiety is to prepare and protect, not to punish or attack. It's our job to continue the protection - not the panic - with a calm perspective and a steady voice.

There's no "one-size-fits-all" when it comes to panic and anxiety. Sometimes it rises without warning and feels debilitating. Other times, anxiety builds gradually in response to an obvious external trigger. Crowds, enclosed spaces, loud noises, these can all be sensory reminders that awaken fear in a brain wired for survival. But in both cases, the root is often the same: a sensory message that once taught us our environment is unsafe.

SUFFERING FROM MEMORIES

When our strongest emotional memories are of being shamed, humiliated, criticised, or judged, it makes perfect sense that our choices, thoughts, and feelings will be affected - until we untangle and heal our emotional history. We can't help but be influenced by our dominant memories because they're the ones pulling our strings.

Imagine you had a waiter who threw soup in your lap every mealtime - you'd get rid of them, right? It's the same with our neural pathways: we either replace or, at the very least, challenge the unhelpful ones, and get rid of what's no longer working for us.

Those disempowering, dominant neural pathways - the ones that keep throwing the soup - they can be replaced with new pathways built on truth, safety, and self-worth. The more we catch ourselves and interrupt the patterns of our wounded emotional history, the easier it becomes to replace the lies someone else has told us with the truth we tell ourselves.

NEUROPLASTICITY

Neuroplasticity is the brain's incredible ability to change itself. By repeating empowering thoughts and habits we create new dominant neural pathways that eventually override the old ones - especially if those older pathways are no longer useful, healing, or true.

To heal the pathways responsible for self-sabotage, perfectionism, or procrastination, we must:

- Catch ourselves in the moment
- Interrupt the self-critical thought
- And replace it with intentional behaviour

It's not always easy - it's harder to reach for the apple when you'd rather grab the donut - but you can change the habit. With positive repetition, we bloom and blossom instead of wilt and wither. Even minor shifts in thought and behaviour, repeated often, can begin reshaping our neural patterns and that's what begins to rewire our autopilot responses.

This is what it means to make the familiar unfamiliar, and the unfamiliar familiar. When it comes to neural pathways, **don't use it** to lose it, **challenge it and change it**.

Now that you understand a bit about your brain and how your pre-programmed neural pathways have been running the show, you're ready to start reprogramming yourself. You're in control! How amazing is that?

Catch yourself every time you think:

- 'I can't do it'
- 'I'm not good enough'
- 'I don't know enough'
- 'I'm not safe.'

Turn it on its head, interrupt the lie, and just go for it. Change your thoughts, change your habitual behaviour, change your life.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

NEGATIVES AND THEIR OPPOSITES

(Page 31 of your workbook)

- Write down the negative thoughts, feelings, and beliefs you have about yourself.
- Then write down the opposite of each one. These **O**pposite **T**houghts (O.Ts) are your new truth. By repeating them often - especially when old programming tries to resurface - you begin building new neural pathways and a new relationship with yourself.
- Who taught you these negative thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about yourself?
- What would you like to say to them?

On your journey towards emotional freedom, you may discover - as I did - that your fear response is in fact the voice of your wounded inner child. A brave, resilient child who adapted to emotional chaos in the only way they knew how.

Now, by understanding how your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. experiences shaped your brain, you can gently untangle those painful memories. You have the power to reprogram your mind with kindness and truth. You are no longer your negative thoughts, feelings, or beliefs. You are not broken. You are becoming.

EVERY TIME

Every time you doubt yourself, *they win*. Every time you lose your focus, *they win*. Every time you get angry, *they win*. Every time you suffer, *they win*. Every time you say no to something you'd love to do, *they win*.

It's time to reclaim your power and win your emotional war.

HABITS

Can you see how we develop habits? As our thoughts get repeated, we end up being directed by behaviours - good or not-so-good - that have become autopilot habits. Before we know it, we're not consciously thinking about much of anything anymore.

You know when an aircraft pilot needs a break and sets the plane to cruise on its own? It's called autopilot. Think about that for a minute: no pilot, just a programme. And you'd better hope that programme was put together by someone in a good mood who had the passengers' best interests at heart...!

Unfortunately for many of us, our mental programming was put together by someone in a bad mood - someone who *didn't* have our best interests at heart. Even if our parent or caregiver tried their hardest, our environment still sent the message that we weren't quite enough.

Ever wondered why you can't give something up, keep reacting to stress the same way, or keep sabotaging your diet, your finances, your goals? It's all down to autopilot responses. We're like robots, unconsciously driven, reacting to programming installed by people who didn't really have a clue.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

REWRITING HABITS, RECLAIMING POWER

(Page 33 of your workbook)

- What are the autopilot habits you want to change?
- What will you do differently to shift these habits over time?
- What S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. experiences are you unconsciously trying to avoid by keeping old habits alive?
- What are you afraid might happen if you let the habits go?
- Your fears are valid - naming them helps disarm them. What are you worried you'll hear and experience as you let the habits go?

Breaking a habit should really be called weakening a habit. With every new thought, decision, and action, the old neural pathways that once ran your life begin to lose their strength. As you build new habits, listen carefully - are you hearing someone else's voice in your head? A critical parent? A shaming teacher? A voice that whispers: don't try, don't change, you'll only fail.

You are not alone. These voices cling to your old habits because those habits once protected you. But now, they limit you. To move forward, we must quiet those voices, not by arguing with them, but by listening to ourselves instead. You are not your past habits. You are the powerful creator of new ones. You are winning your emotional war one conscious choice at a time.

Just for a minute, I'd like you to imagine your brain is a filing cabinet, like a hard drive. It's jam-packed with old information that's constantly being referred to, but the stored information is holding back your progress and potential. Its original files are old. They were written by someone who didn't care, someone who was angry, damaged, jealous, resentful - someone whose perspective and ideas came from a place of fear and

self-loathing. One day, someone decides they've had enough of this outdated system, and they begin updating the contents of the filing cabinet. They look through the old files and, one by one, choose to replace them. They know it'll take time. But from now on, whenever a file is needed, they'll create a new one and gradually all the old files will be replaced.

You're that person, the one choosing to replace the old files with new ones. You might hold on to some old files longer than you'd like because they're harder to replace but eventually, with awareness, commitment, determination, and HEALTHY REPETITION, you'll replace them all one by one.

Remember the 'one question'? Am I choosing, feeling, thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? When we ask this question, we become aware of what's motivating our reactions. We have the power to begin choosing a life that reflects the needs and ambitions of our conscious adult self not our wounded inner child.

You're safe now to choose. You're safe to set yourself free.

CAN YOU TEACH AN OLD DOG NEW TRICKS?

Research on neuroplasticity is a truly magnificent breakthrough in the war against trauma and damaged mental health. It proves that no matter how deeply entrenched our negative thoughts are they can be replaced with new thoughts that reflect the truth of who we are and what we're capable of being and doing.

By looking at the source of our fear-based thoughts and beliefs, we can join the dots between 'then' and 'now' and close our emotional wounds for good. Neuroplasticity means we can **switch the lights off** to:

- 'I can't do this'

- 'I can't cope'
- 'I'm not good enough'
- 'I'm useless'

and '**switch the lights on** to:

- 'I can do this'
- 'I can cope'
- 'I am enough'
- 'I am worthy'

The old belief that 'I'm not wanted, I don't matter' is replaced with the truth, 'I *am* wanted, I *do* matter.'

Rinse and repeat. Often.

When we catch ourselves before walking down dark and dangerous pathways littered with tripwires and landmines, we can choose a new direction. We can stay on brightly lit paths that take us towards safety and emotional freedom.

So yes, old dogs can learn new tricks and leopards can change their spots, which means YOU can absolutely start creating new neural pathways in your brain, ones that support healthier habits, empowered self-worth, and limitless self-belief.

Remember: **repetition creates habits** whether they're good or bad. It's our repeated thoughts and beliefs that determine if we stay stuck or keep moving forward towards emotional freedom. This is why we must stop beating ourselves up about the past, stop feeling guilty, stop trying to please everyone, and stop hating and resenting who we've become.

Never mind anybody else. We need our own help now more than ever.

COPING MECHANISMS

When I was growing up my go-to coping mechanism was to run and hide in my wardrobe. My mother's preferred phrase was 'get out of my sight' so that's what I did.

I repeated an adult version of this 'run and hide' behaviour for decades, showing up in the world with a defensive, non-committal, anti-social approach to life. Whatever or whoever triggered my 'run and hide' reaction had probably done nothing wrong. But my brain was recalling moments when people I'd been encoded to trust had lied to me, humiliated me, or made me feel worthless. All I wanted was to escape the growing weight of emotional overwhelm.

When our senses detect a potential threat, we instinctively engage a coping mechanism, a learned behaviour designed to 'cope' with whatever's threatening to undo us. If we've emerged from a disruptive childhood, by the time we're adults we're expecting catastrophe to spring up around every corner. We've become so defensive, so self-rejecting, that we're experts at using coping mechanisms without even realising it.

By using these behaviours, we unknowingly honour the silent vows we took as children:

- Stay out of sight and co-operate.
- Behave and be quiet.

We surrender, we tolerate, we want to be thought of as kind and patient, anything but undeserving and bad. We never felt wanted so we'll do anything to feel needed.

When we're using our coping mechanisms, we're not living in the present, we're responding to old wounds. We're surrendering to familiar

patterns that once kept us safe from being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. Our memories are so painful, we'll do almost anything to numb the suffering they stir up.

The more memories we carry of threat and danger, the more likely we are to live with our finger on the coping-mechanism trigger ready to press it the moment our fears are provoked. This constant readiness to protect ourselves is why we're so reactive instead of responsive. It's why we pick fights instead of listening. It's why we're defensive, guarded, shielding, and insecure.

'F' WORDS

So, what's your coping mechanism or stress response?

FLIGHT?

FIGHT?

FREEZE?

FLATTER?

FAWN?

FAINT?

I've used them all, but I'm especially embarrassed about flatter and fawn.
Ugh.

WHAT DO THEY MEAN?

Flight: At the first sign of overwhelm, or when a stressful situation arises, we leave. We run for safety, and we never look back. The 'flight' coping mechanism can take a while to build, and it might take months or even years before we make an exit. But when our wounded inner child can no longer cope, they run and hide...

Fight: Put 'em up, buddy, I'm not scared of you! We exchange verbal insults and fight to have the last word. If we sense we're about to be S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, we get ready to protect and defend ourselves. 'Fight' rarely ends well but if we grew up in a violent home we'll be conditioned to believe it's the only way to survive, and 'fight' becomes our default response to stress and how to cope with it.

Freeze: Do and say nothing. Just sit there and take it. History and experience have both shown us it's not safe to speak up - or stand up - for ourselves. The 'freeze' response tells us: if we don't move or speak, we'll stay safe. We might be shaking with fear inside, but at least we're delaying or hopefully avoiding further trouble. Unfortunately, it's unlikely we'll feel safe inside that silent bubble.

Flatter: Over-the-top compliments or false praise get piled onto the bullies and narcissists who threaten to criticise or intimidate us. Flattering them buys us time and valuable breathing space but often leaves us feeling uncomfortably compromised.

Fawn: Fawning has us submitting to a browbeating intimidator in the hope they'll leave us alone and spare us their mind games. Fawning is the F word I am most mortified at using, but fawning may be the only way to survive moody, sulky people who are desperate for an ego stroke. Ugh.

Faint: 'Faint' is a desperate attempt to protect ourselves by appearing vulnerable. We nervously hope that any encroaching tormenter will take

pity and back off. Sometimes it works. Most of the time, it doesn't. When intimidation becomes unbearable, 'faint' seems like the only viable escape. It might not be a literal faint, it could show up as a migraine, nausea, dizziness, or another physical reaction. Anything, as long as we feel safe.

MORE 'F' WORDS

Food and feeding... If you've developed an eating disorder to cope with fear or stress, you may have learned that by overfeeding or underfeeding yourself, you can reclaim a sense of control, one that people or circumstances have taken from you.

Since the beginning of humankind, food has been the ultimate survival tool determining whether we live or die. But in today's intense, high-pressure world, food has taken on a different role. What was once nourishment has become a shield, a sword, or a crutch. When we become aware of why we use food the way we do, we can put down our edible weapons and reclaim it as the life-giving nourishment it was meant to be.

Force... My heart goes out to anyone who's used force to cope with overwhelm or to protect themselves or someone they love.

If you've ever had to physically defend yourself against an overpowering bully or abuser, the first thing you need to know is this: you did the right thing. I understand how people are driven to the brink of insanity when their lives are shattered by abuse. I'm deeply sorry you had that experience. Please keep working your way through this book. Do the exercises. Listen to the free meditations on my website. You *will* emerge on the other side of these experiences with a new perspective. Email me for more support if you'd like to – I *will* reply. You're not alone.

alison@howtomendyourmentalhealth.com

Faking it...have you heard the phrase 'fake it 'til you make it'? It implies someone's pretending to be something or someone they're not, acting 'as if' until the person or thing they're trying to be, becomes a reality. Some folk may argue that 'faking' is a deliberate attempt to mislead; it's forgery, counterfeiting, and pretending. But for many of us, it's a coping mechanism. It's how we manage overwhelming people, situations, or expectations. We weren't faking to fool people. We were faking to function.

And the **Ultimate 'F' Word**... If you've made doing *that* mean something shameful about you, please don't; there was nothing wrong with you or your decision to cope and protect yourself in the best way you knew how. Whether you 'surrendered' to someone's coercion, whether you were trying to buy love and approval, or you acted from a place of fear and powerlessness, now that you know different you can choose different.

*

When unresolved trauma triggers our fear response all of these 'F' words are valid coping strategies to keep us protected and safe. They all have one thing in common: what's my best chance of survival in this situation with this person?

When we're being verbally or physically threatened, of course we want to protect ourselves. But if we're suffering from the long-term emotional consequences of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, we won't **know** how to protect ourselves in a regulated way until we **learn** how. Instead, our brain catapults us into its emergency survival mode activating whichever 'F' response we've learned to rely on.

I once found myself working alongside two women who reminded me of women from my past who were far from encouraging and supportive. These two colleagues took delight in ridiculing me: my clothes, the way I

spoke, my sensitivity, my people-pleasing approach were all material for their ridicule. They blamed me for things I had nothing to do with. They gave negative feedback about me for no reason.

And do you know what I did?

I laughed along. I agreed with every nasty thing they said. I tried to get them to like me. I flattered. I fawned. Didn't matter how fat they said I looked in my clothes...how tired I looked...how useless I was...how pathetic at my job...how disliked I was...I agreed with it all. I called myself stupid. An idiot. I dumbed myself down. I shrank. I continued to flatter and fawn as they continued to ridicule and humiliate. Eventually, I did exactly what they wanted me to do, and I left a job I loved.

We live. We learn. Now I know better I wouldn't take one single ounce of their crap.

If your self-image, opinions, lifestyle, or beliefs have been criticised and undermined by someone who projected an unforgiving and overwhelming toxic power onto you, then you've likely encountered an intimidating bully, and probably a narcissist. You may have responded in ways, just like I did, that supported their behaviour - all in a desperate attempt to avoid a re-enactment of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.

Forgive yourself. You did what you had to do. Awareness is our greatest friend in these types of situations. When you catch yourself about to use an 'F' word, with awareness you'll choose an alternative way to manage your fear (more on that coming soon), and always ask yourself the one question: **am I choosing, feeling, or thinking *this* because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D?**

These days, I know exactly how to respond to anyone who tries to bully me. I just wish I'd known back then.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

'F' WORDS

(Page 35 of your workbook)

- Take your time and write down all the ways you've used an 'F' word to avoid being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. And yes, I want you to include all the times you've faked, flattered, and fawned to stay safe. These 'F' words have protected your emotional and physical safety if only for a brief time, so no shame or blame is necessary, only awareness.

AND WHAT ABOUT 'P' WORDS?

There are countless ways we avoid the energy-sucking, soul-splintering feelings that come from being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D and it's not just 'F' words that help us survive this dizzying, bitchy, competitive world. We also lean on 'P' words:

People-Pleasing: because rejection hurts more than silence.

Projection: because it's safer to blame than to break.

Passive-aggression: because we're too scared to say what we really feel.

Patronising: because superiority can mask our own vulnerability.

Procrastination: because action requires responsibility and worthiness.

Peacekeeping: because conflict feels like danger.

Perfectionism: because we believe mistakes will cost us love.

Playing Small: because visibility feels unsafe.

Protection: because it's better to build walls than risk being seen.

Preparation: because we fear exhaustion less than we fear the unknown.

Piss-taking: because if we joke first, no one can hurt us later.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

'P' WORDS

(Page 36 of your workbook)

- How do you or have you used 'P' words to stay safe?

We're not always feeling submissive when we reach for a coping mechanism. Sometimes we feel angry, and we project that irritation in passive-aggressive ways. We might become patronising, or immerse ourselves in a power-play, all in an unconscious attempt to avoid feeling powerless once again.

Remind yourself: when those stress hormones kick in and you start feeling panicky or anxious, it's not your brain **attacking** you, it's your brain **protecting** you. It's preparing you so you stay safe. Your brain remembers that, once upon a time, you were frightened by someone or something that took away your control. You couldn't protect or defend yourself. That memory lives in your nervous system, not because you're weak, but because you were wired to survive. As you begin learning new ways to cope with stress, your fear response will gradually become less sensitive to triggers.

And always remember, you have a choice in whether you fire up the guns and throw that grenade...or not. Our Conscious Adult Self doesn't need the last word.

Once we're aware of how to cope when anxiety and panic are rising, we can **Challenge It and Change It.**

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

MANAGING YOUR FEAR RESPONSE

(Page 37 of your workbook)

- What other ways have you managed your fear response? No shame, no blame, only awareness.

FEEL THE FEAR AND DON'T DO IT ANYWAY

When we're sensitised to danger the feeling of fear conjures up memories of distressing experiences and terrifying events. So, when people say, 'feel the fear and do it anyway' what we hear is 'feel a debilitating sense of anxiety consume every cell in my body and just go for it.' Uh, no thanks.

'Feel the fear and do it anyway' doesn't work if your brain is already in a state of hypervigilant avoidance and survival. People like you and me don't embrace fear with open arms - we avoid it. When we feel fear, rather than 'do it anyway,' our next step is usually to grab an 'F word.' But maybe now is the time to look more deeply into why we feel the fear in the first place:

*We feel the fear because **of our past experiences**...but we know we're not in danger. We can walk away.*

*We feel the fear because **this person reminds us of**...but we know we're not in danger. We can walk away.*

*We feel the fear because **we hate confrontation**...but we know we're not in danger. We can walk away.*

*We feel the fear because **we don't feel safe**...but we know we're not in danger. We can walk away.*

*We feel the fear because **we don't trust this person or this situation**...but we know we're not in danger. We can walk away.*

*We feel the fear because **we're vulnerable right now**...but we know we're not in danger. We can walk away.*

Permit your conscious mind to keep repeating 'there is no danger here, we can walk away'. The reason I say 'we' and not 'I' is because our conscious mind and our wounded inner child are working together here, not separately, to overcome our triggers.

For us, fear is never irrational or unjustified. For us, fear is part of life just like heartbeats and breathing. Yes, we can absolutely overcome debilitating fear, but ignoring it and jumping in headfirst? That won't work for us. It's better to honour our vulnerabilities and set reasonable expectations for ourselves. When we recognise that fear is **there** for us and not **against** us, we can reason with it because we're not afraid of it anymore.

As we repeat our empowering new thoughts, fear transforms. It's no longer a looming, frightening, punishing threat. It becomes something we can thank for showing up. Fear becomes our friend, our supporter. We can tell fear: "I'm OK, I've got this" and let fear rest.

TRIGGERS

Triggers are a perfectly normal outcome of our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. experiences. We're triggered when:

1. We have a sensory experience - hearing, touching, seeing, tasting, or smelling something that...
2. Brings back a strong emotional memory that...
3. Activates the amygdala, which fires off stress hormones to help us manage the overwhelm.

For example, you see and hear a father loudly criticising his child (sensory experiences of both sight and sound), you have a painful recollection of

your father criticising you (strong emotional memory), you feel scared, anxious, angry, and helpless (stress hormones activated), and you probably want to go over there and punch him (*maybe that's just me*).

These three things - sensory experience, strong emotional memory, stress hormones activated - combine into what we call a trigger.

But here's the good news: with practice, when we feel a triggered reaction rising, we can interrupt it. We can step onto our Thinking Bridge, have a soothing, conscious conversation with our wounded inner child, and override our fear response with a logical perspective.

On the Thinking Bridge, we're consciously choosing the alternative path the amygdala offers us. Instead of engaging an armed reaction, we choose a logical perspective and a regulated response even when facing something deeply stressful (I'll teach you how to do this later in the book).

Healing the distressing memories that once triggered us is a liberating victory. It's one of the clearest signs that we're reclaiming our power and winning our emotional war. When someone or something that once stirred up a wasp's nest in our brain no longer provokes that intense emotional reaction, we know we're close to emotional liberation.

If we don't find a simple, sustainable way to calm our triggers, we will always feel controlled by someone or something. And maybe right now, there's someone in your life who enjoys pressing your buttons and lives for your reaction. We'll talk more about these people soon but for now, let's focus on how to look after you.

As you move through this book and reclaim more of your emotional truth, your triggers will lose their power but in the meantime prioritising your emotional and physical safety in every situation is key as you navigate your road to emotional freedom. Putting your needs first helps you move through overwhelm and maintain a sense of calm in the present moment.

And here's something that might surprise you: you're not always feeling anxiety and fear when you're triggered. Sometimes, you're feeling the long-buried sadness of unmet childhood needs. You might feel anger, indignation, or plain old offence. Being triggered is not your fault. There is nothing wrong with you.

When we speak the truth to toxic power, we conquer fear. When we understand its source, we realise what we're feeling is often based on old experiences that our brain has become conditioned to react to in familiar ways.

So, ask yourself, in this moment of overwhelming fear, am I in danger? Or **am I being threatened by a memory**? With that type of awareness, panic and anxiety no longer have control over us. We can choose to respond, rather than react. We're safe to replace dysfunctional with functional.

Your fears, the monsters under the bed, or the ones sat opposite you, can no longer pull your strings without your permission. When you're aware, they are powerless. **Their lies are not your truth.** We owe nothing to people who intentionally try to provoke or harm us. Blaze a trail. Walk away. As you watch the toxicity inside your saboteurs manifest in destructive ways, you become powerful; you become The Master Observer.

Observation softens edges. It obliterates threat. To observe is to detach from the drama. The very act of observation diminishes the power of what's being observed. As the observer, you hold the power.

When we've been through hard times, it takes a while for our memories - and our triggers - to heal. Despite the inner work you're doing, being triggered again may make you feel like a failure, like a lost cause, like you're not worth saving. You might think:

- I'm not healing.

- What's the point?
- I should've known better.
- I'll never be free from this.

But here's the truth: now that you're consciously practicing awareness, your emotional patterns are changing whether you realise it or not. Even if you lose your way from time to time, you're still moving forward.

- You're learning who and what triggers you.
- You're remembering who and what to avoid.
- You're changing your neural pathways.
- You're building self-worth.
- You're learning how to come back from experiences that once left you wrecked for days.

If you can't avoid the people and places that trigger you, you can at least prepare for the possibility that your triggers may be activated and plan what you'll do if they are. You always have a choice, and a few seconds of choice is all it takes to decide between your pain and your peace.

Remember the '4 Sticky Notes to Emotional Freedom'? Those little notes helped to heal my triggers, my panicked reactions, and my anxiety. Always remember: ***your only source of self-doubt and shame are other people*** which means the only source of your triggers is other people too.

You're feeling triggered because you were S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, not because there's anything wrong with you. If you were in recovery from anything else you'd look after yourself, this is no different. When we're aware of our triggers we can regain self-control by consciously interrupting our emotional responses. Breathe deeply, think, respond if you choose to but remember responding includes walking away.

Every time you step onto your Thinking Bridge, you take your power back. Sometimes all it takes is two or three seconds to take a breath and think...and the fear dissolves.

- You've taken the sting out of the moment.
- You've interrupted someone else's control over you.
- You've reclaimed your peace.

Tell your truth about who planted the toxic seeds. Explore why you believe they did what they did, said what they said, and what you made it mean about you. Then, refuse to give them another moment of your time, your energy, or your peace of mind. Replace the lies they told you...with the truth you're learning to live by.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

WHO AND WHAT TRIGGERS YOU?

(Page 38 of your workbook)

Awareness is your superpower. When you know why someone triggers you, their hold is loosened. You don't need to confront them, fix them, or even speak to them again. You just need to understand what they activated and why - and use that knowledge to set yourself free.

- The names of the people who trigger you are:
- If you stood up to this person/these people, what S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D feelings might you feel?
- You believe they did what they did because:
- You believe they said what they said because:
- Were they intentionally cruel? Or simply unaware of the damage they caused?
- What have you made it mean about you:
- What is the truth?
- How will you manage this person/these people going forward?

You are no longer controlled by old fears. You get to decide who has access to you. You are not responsible for their behaviour; you are responsible for your peace.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS TO TRIGGERS

Memories of shame, exclusion, criticism, and humiliation often come up in conversations about triggers. Decades later, when we sense the dreaded feelings of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D creeping back over us, it's no surprise that those memories may trigger intense physical reactions, not just emotional ones.

We're perfectly entitled to feel angry at injustice, but we must choose a reasonable response if we're to stay in control of our triggers rather than

allowing them to control us. If trigger-steam has ever made you hit out, throw something, slam a door, experience road rage, push someone, or self-harm, then you've had a physical reaction to a trigger.

When I look back to a physical reaction I had to a particular trigger, I can see how the validation I was searching for would never have materialised. For starters, the person I'd spent my life seeking validation from wasn't there to witness my reaction, and even if she had been, she'd have shamed and criticised me for my behaviour, not soothed or supported me. That realisation hit me like a speeding truck. The light of awareness was finally switched on. I could sabotage myself all I liked; I was never going to hear the words I longed for: "It's OK, you're safe now. You've had a real shit time, but I'm proud of you. Well done for getting this far."

When we answer a trigger 'out loud' in a performative way, what we're really doing is searching for someone to hear and see our pain. We're searching for validation for the hurt we feel. When we've grown up feeling unseen and unheard, we long for someone to say: "You matter. Your feelings are important." A physical outburst of trigger-steam can feel like our best shot at finally getting those needs met.

Physical reactions often stem from a lifetime of invalidation. We're still waiting to be seen, still waiting to be heard, still waiting for someone to show us that the pain we went through mattered and, whether they're accountable or not, they're sorry for what we experienced. Our silent scream is: someone, anyone, just show me that I matter.

When we understand how a nervous system built on emotional disruption and chaos is **wired to be triggered** we start to understand why we choose, feel, and think the way we do. Our lightbulb moment, the epiphany that lifts our shame, inspires us to change. We want to look after ourselves, nurture our frazzled nervous system, build our self-worth,

change how we speak to ourselves. We realise we're not a lost cause. We find our self-respect and we reclaim our emotional power.

Triggers are temporary. They pass. But whether they're mild or full-blown, they warrant serious attention. The first time you step onto your 'Thinking Bridge' and think before you react, you'll be so proud of yourself. As will I.

REACTIVE ABUSE

Reactive abuse occurs when a vulnerable person's triggers are provoked and they lash out in response to repeated harm. There are plausible reasons for physical reactions when we're pushed to breaking point but that doesn't make us an abuser. Now we know different, we can do different. We can walk away with awareness.

I've met people - men and woman - who lived with domestic abuse. They all eventually reacted physically to their abuser mainly in self-defence. Most people would say it's understandable, justified even. The reality is that whether you live or work with an abusive person everyone has a tipping point. Walking away isn't easy, but it might just save your life.

TRIGGERS AND POWER-HUNGRY PEOPLE

Knowing that people can be triggering gives us a head start when it comes to managing the difficult, narcissistic, people in our lives. I call them 'wound scratchers'. When we see their true colours, we can respond to their toxicity in regulated, responsive, ways.

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, we're easily triggered by people who willingly scratch our wounds and disrupt our need to feel emotionally and physically safe. I felt *unsafe* with the women at work who mocked me. I needed a haven, somewhere I could earn money, and go home at the end of the day with peace of mind. I fell into old survival patterns to cope

with their unconcealed wound-scratching. I dumbed down, hid my abilities, agreed that I was the idiot, and allowed them to dump their toxic shame all over me.

A power-hungry person (a narcissist) will only have the power to trigger our wounds if we're **unaware** of our potential to be triggered, and **unaware** of their toxic power games.

Power-hungry people are clever. They're cunning. They might even attempt to make you feel guilty for expressing reservations about them. Like a creeping shadow, they trigger you subtly. You might think you're paranoid, oversensitive, imagining things. You might feel sorry for them, or worse, end up apologising for something that doesn't warrant an apology.

People who extract pleasure from triggering others will keep pressing their buttons until they get the reaction they're seeking. They won't stop when they see you're upset because your pain fills their cup of power. You'll know when someone like this is around you, and you'll know in your heart what their game is. They can't pull your strings without your engagement, and your permission. When you're **aware**, they are **powerless**. Their lies are not your truth. I'll teach you game-changing ways to deal with these people in Parts II and III of this book.

READING BETWEEN THE LIES

Raising awareness of people and situations that provoke our triggers is a non-negotiable rule on our road to emotional recovery. If you live with, work with, or have power-hungry people in your friendship group, do the following exercise every day so you understand your reactions inside out and upside down; you'll soon see their behaviour no longer triggers you. You are the 'Master Observer', and as the observer you hold the power.

Toxic bullies project their acidity onto gentle, kind, and vulnerable people. Without awareness we might try to please them, be agreeable, try to be perfect. We must find the courage to prioritise our emotional and physical safety with these damaged individuals. Walk away. Don't give anyone the benefit of the doubt when it costs you your peace of mind and your dignity.

Rebelling against power-hungry people is scary. We don't want to be bitched about and excluded. But here's the thing: despite appearances, people like that don't have supporters. They have prey who fear becoming their next target.

You're not prey, you're powerful. Their lies are not your truth. Disengage, walk away.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

ENDING THE TRIGGER CYCLE

(Page 40 of your workbook)

- Think about how you'll respond differently to triggers going forward and, using what you've learned so far, write yourself a plan. Take your time, be gentle with yourself.

FINAL WORD ON TRIGGERS

Remember, a few seconds of choice stands between your pain and your peace. Ask yourself: am I choosing, feeling, or thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? In those seconds, despite triggering events, comments, or behaviour, step onto your 'Thinking Bridge' and ask yourself: am I in danger, is there any real threat to my safety?

You have the control, *and* the power to choose how to use it. When we transform our triggers, the reactions that once kept us slowly dying in the dark can be replaced with responses that help us thrive in the light.

If we give someone the power to control us, we give them the power to trigger us. We don't have to continue to do that.

Nothing we've talked about so far in this book stands alone in our library of S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. experiences. Like a chain of paper-dolls, one emotion is linked to another until one breaks free and begins treading its own path toward emotional freedom. You have the power to choose your chain of emotions.

POWER AND CONTROL

The malicious intention behind all S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D behaviours is to gain power and control. Ironically, a need *for* control is born from a fear of not having it - or from a fear of losing it. Let's look again at our list of

S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D behaviours, and see how control clearly sits at the centre of each one:

Shame = control

Exclusion = control

Abandonment = control

Rejection = control

Humiliation = control

Criticism = control

Exploitation = control

Dismissal = control

If you look up the meaning of control, you'll find words like domination, manipulation, constraint, discipline, and oppression. What you won't find are words like kindness, protection, patience, compassion, or empathy - and yet many of us experience control cleverly disguised as one or more of these things.

People who want to control everything and everyone often use kindness and empathy to reach the core of our vulnerabilities. Whether it's within friendships, relationships, families, therapy, churches, schools, or workplaces, when we're vulnerable - and seeking to get our needs met - control can look like care and concern. But when we separate slightly from the tribe, when we form our own opinions and preferences, we start to see the destructive power behind the so-called 'concern' more clearly.

What once felt like support begins to feel like restriction, suffocation, and control.

One of the outcomes of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D is developing a controlling personality of our own often without seeing the damage that we're doing.

- A perfectionist desperate to avoid criticism may try to control everything and everyone around them.

- A parent might over-control their children to deflect judgment of their parenting.
- A partner might use S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D behaviours to hold power in a relationship.
- A boss who lacks people skills may resort to control through fear threatening job security, cutting bonuses, or denying pay increases.

There's a world of difference between someone who organises, manages, directs, oversees, advises, or guides with care and attention and those who control with fear, domination, and punishment. The malevolent bullies who 'wear the trousers,' 'hold the purse strings,' or 'call the shots' don't effectively lead - they control and intimidate.

When we're coercively controlled in childhood we become adults who seek ways to reclaim the control we once lost. We believe regaining control will offset our feelings of worthlessness and vulnerability. We also steadfastly reject attempts by others to control *us* which can make for difficult adjustments in the workplace, friendships and relationships. On the other hand, we may feel *drawn* to the familiarity of controlling people mistaking their behaviour for care and safety.

Understanding and breaking patterns of controlling behaviour, or being controlled, helps us heal the residual emotional turmoil left over from our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. experiences. Learning **self-control** is the best way to rebuild self-worth, self-reliance, and resilience.

'Letting go' means *letting go of control*. When we understand it's a fear of **losing control** that stops us 'letting go' we can more comfortably approach the idea. We're not 'losing control' but rather loosening our grip on the reins.

When we let go of trying to control the past, we free ourselves to change the conversations we're having about our experiences. We begin to

accept that we couldn't control what happened, but we **can** control how we respond from now on. With the work you're completing in this book you can also control whether you allow past events to continue influencing and shaping your choices, feelings, and thoughts.

When control becomes non-negotiable, peace becomes impossible. We're too frightened of the unknown, too busy micromanaging every outcome to enjoy what's in front of us. Fear of not getting what we want pushes us to control the outcome. If we 'let go of control' we believe we risk losing everything. How do we get the balance right?

7 STEPS TO HEALING CONTROL

Awareness is the first step.

Are you aware of your controlling behaviours?

Look back at your emotional history.

If you tend to be controlling, explore what triggers that need. Who in your past would have criticised or punished you if you hadn't kept control? What did you fear would happen?

Catch yourself in the act.

In the moment, make a conscious choice: will you continue the pattern of control, or will you take a step towards healing your emotional history?

Remember how it felt to be controlled.

Reconnect with those memories. Let them remind you why it's so important not to pass that pain on to others.

Ask for feedback – safely.

Choose someone you trust, someone with no hidden agenda and ask if they see you as controlling. Invite honesty. If it's too uncomfortable for them to speak freely, suggest they write it down instead.

Check in with kindness.

Be gentle with yourself as you reflect on what or who you try to control and where in your life **you** feel controlled. These realisations can hurt, but they will also heal.

Define your dynamic.

Are you practising self-control? Are you controlling others? Are you being controlled? More than one may apply. And remember: no shame, no blame, only awareness.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

POWER AND CONTROL

(Page 41 of your workbook)

- Where did you feel unsafe or out of control during your childhood? Think about times you felt powerless, overlooked, manipulated, or scared. Who was present? What was happening?
- When we're 'out of control', we've literally run out of self-control. When and where has this happened to you? How did it hurt you?
- What are your controlling behaviours? Be honest. Do you try to control situations, people, or outcomes to feel safe?
- How has controlling others affected you emotionally, mentally, or physically? What has it cost you in terms of relationships, peace, or self-worth?
- How has being controlled impacted your life? Think about your freedom, your sense of identity, your ability to trust, or your confidence.
- Who or what still controls you? This might be a person, memory, belief system, or the voice in your head.
- Have you ever used S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D behaviours to control others? If so, who was affected and how? Be honest and gentle with yourself.

REMEMBER THIS

You are not here to punish yourself. You're here to tell the truth, reclaim your power, and choose better for yourself. Controlling behaviour was once your way of surviving emotional chaos but survival isn't your only option anymore. You can choose to thrive not just survive. Awareness is always the beginning of change. Self-kindness is always the path to healing. And truth? Truth will always set you free.

I had no idea how controlling I used to be. I tried to control everything and everyone, not out of malice but because I grew up in a deeply insecure and unsafe environment where I had no control.

As an adult, I believed that if I was in control of everything, I couldn't be criticised for being lazy or neglectful. I believed that control meant safety. If I knew exactly what to expect there could be no surprises. But if I let something slide, a critical voice from my past would chime in and tell me I was ungrateful, careless, wicked, or shameful.

When you've grown up being undermined by coercive control you often make it your mission to seize control wherever you can - of your environment, of other people, and of yourself. Have you ever seen a controlling person involuntarily start to lose their grip? It's unmodified panic, it's hysteria, it's rage, it can be violent projection. Not because they're cruel, but because they're terrified. They fear being judged, exposed, or humiliated all over again. Their nervous system believes that staying in control equals safety and - conversely - losing control equals danger.

I used to believe I had to do everything myself, that I'd be let down if I relied on anyone else. I had sky-high expectations of myself and everyone around me - classic S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D symptoms. I was a nervous breakdown waiting to happen. I watched everything crash and burn as I let go of the need to control everyone and everything. Practising self-control saved my sanity and helped me discover my emotional stability.

Another character trait of a controlling personality is a pathological need to keep other people safe. When someone who's been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D becomes a parent, their children are often controlled within an inch of their lives. The overprotection, the fear that if we don't micromanage every detail, someone we love might get S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D too. It's

understandable but it doesn't excuse the control. It's emotionally unhealthy for them, and for you. Let's be clear: who you can control? Yourself. Who can't you control? Other people.

HOW TO MANAGE CONTROL IN NEW RELATIONSHIPS FORMING, STORMING, NORMING, AND PERFORMING

When you've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, a new human connection in any capacity can feel like walking into a lion's den wearing a meat suit. Whether it's a new friendship, relationship, support group, job, or social circle, even casual connections can be daunting.

The process I'm about to share was originally created to describe how a team develops in a business environment but it's just as relevant for understanding how we behave in new social settings if social anxiety is one of our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D symptoms - it certainly was one of mine.

Let's walk through the four stages of human interaction:

STAGE 1: FORMING

This is the moment the group meets. Everyone quietly gauges strengths, weaknesses, and likeability. We test boundaries, scan for safety, and make a mental note of who we might click with and who might be a threat.

To move beyond this stage, we need to be open about who we are and that's not always easy. You may experience or witness awkward interactions or insensitive comments - some people don't possess emotional intelligence or know how to engage gently. This is where people like you and me may reach for one of our 'F' words: freeze, fawn, fake, or flee. We're not ready for vulnerability yet, and we can't always 'hold our own' if the atmosphere turns sharp. So, what should you do?

If you start to feel unsettled, remind yourself: 'this is a normal reaction to unfamiliar social territory. I'm allowed to feel this way.' Don't try too hard

to impress or fit in. Avoid reading too much into sarcastic or teasing comments - they're often just social power plays. Let other people play the 'Alpha' if they need to. You be the Master Observer - watch and wait.

STAGE 2: STORMING

Here's where things get interesting, or uncomfortable. In this stage, trust is either built or lost. Any triggering behaviour you witnessed in the forming stage will now colour how you feel about people. You may start to notice control games, clashes of opinion, and competition for dominance. Don't talk yourself into giving people the benefit of the doubt too early. Trust your first gut instinct, don't override it. You don't owe anyone instant access to your openness.

Power dynamics will rise to the surface here, the controlling characters will reveal themselves. This is your cue to remain in your power, stay grounded, and continue observing.

STAGE 3: NORMING

This is the "settling in" stage. The creases begin to smooth out. People start understanding each other better, and true personalities begin to show. Tolerance starts to replace control. Those who came in hot and heavy with dominance, manipulation, or overcompensation will either back off, burn out, or move on. The observers - the quiet, grounded thinkers - start gaining respect and influence. That's you.

You don't have to control the group to have power in it. Your stillness and wisdom will begin to speak louder than bravado ever could.

STAGE 4: PERFORMING

By this point, the group has settled into its rhythm. The roles are clear. Boundaries have been established. Your initial suspicions or anxieties will have either been confirmed or disproven. You'll have a clearer idea of who you're comfortable with, who you can trust, and who is still acting

from their emotional wounds. Even if you didn't connect deeply with anyone, you haven't failed. It simply means that this group, at this time, wasn't your match, and that's okay. You've still grown. You've still moved forward. You've still proven to yourself that you can show up in new spaces and be exactly who you are. Even small shifts like this can create monumental changes in your emotional landscape if you choose to let them. Give it a few days and notice how you're thinking more confidently about meeting new people and social situations.

THE DANCE OF CONNECTION

These four stages - Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing - tell us everything we need to know about how human beings dance around each other as they assess dynamics and vie for control.

Observing how people interact reveals so much about how they feel about themselves and how comfortable or uncomfortable they are with power, connection, and vulnerability. For us, observing is the best approach, because the symptoms of our emotional history are easily triggered. We're not in danger but we need to be aware of our limits around new people. Not aloof. Not unfriendly. Just aware.

And if, later, we realise we were hasty or misread someone? That's okay too. The people worth knowing will understand, especially if we explain that we're in emotional recovery.

We're so eager to find trustworthy, supportive friendships that we often leap before we look but that's the habit we're breaking. We're learning to look before we leap instead.

S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D & SOCIAL CONNECTION

Being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D makes it difficult to form positive, fulfilling relationships. We've been trained to believe we don't matter that much

or at all, so when someone genuinely cares we don't trust it or worse, we sabotage it. We don't recognise what a good relationship looks like or feels like. And when we don't know what "safe" feels like, we isolate. We tell ourselves it's better to be alone than to risk being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D all over again.

Even when we meet someone kind, our guard goes up. We may project our wounds onto them, we may become overly dependent, we may feel rejected or abandoned when they simply need space. We struggle with our own boundaries, and we find other people's boundaries difficult to accept too.

One of the most powerful things you can do on your healing journey is slow down and take your time with new people. Observe. Reflect. Learn. That way you'll know if they're trustworthy, if they're safe, and if your connection is genuine.

STARTING CONVERSATIONS WHEN YOU'RE ANXIOUS

Here's a simple, honest way to break the ice: *Hi, my name's (your name). I'm feeling a bit nervous; I've never been here/done this before.* They will likely respond in one of four ways:

- They'll frown or smirk and maybe walk away.
- They'll give a closed response that's hard to follow.
- They'll smile and say, "Me too."
- They'll smile, say "Come and sit with me," and ask you an open question.

So, what will you ask?

- How far have you travelled to get here?
- Do you live locally?
- Have you been to one of these before?

- What made you come today?
- I love your coat/hair/glasses - such a great colour! Keep compliments light and appropriate.
- Isn't this space beautiful?
- Have you read/seen the news about...? Tread carefully if it's political.
- What are you hoping to get from today (perfect for events or courses)?
- What do you do for work (if relevant and appropriate)?

A few gentle rules

- Avoid personal compliments unless it truly fits the context.
- Don't bring up politics, religion, or age unless it's part of the event.
- Stay upbeat. It's easy to trauma bond, but we're aiming for healthy connection, not wound wallowing.

Most people feel unsure in new groups, even the ones who look confident. I used to babble nervously, speaking at a high pitch, often defaulting to a rant or complaint just to seem relatable. Now I know silence is better than babble. And authentic listening? That's one of the most powerful ways to connect.

As you practice your new way of showing up in the world, remember this: what feels uncomfortable now won't feel uncomfortable forever. Soon, it will be over, you'll have done something hard, you'll have stepped outside your Trauma-Survival Zone, and you'll have made a bold move towards emotional freedom.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

MEETING NEW PEOPLE

(Page 43 of your workbook)

- What if anything will you say next time you meet a new person or group of people? Will you jump straight in and overshare, be a general conversationalist, or stay quiet? There's no right or wrong answer, just what you feel.
- Will you be comfortable with silences or will you try and fill them?
- Do you understand why you might feel nervous or scared?
- Which of the S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences are you most afraid of feeling again?
- If you do experience any of them, how will you manage them? With self-kindness, observation, boundaries, or by taking a break?

Affirmation: I am safe to take things at my own pace. I do not need to perform or pretend to belong. My presence is enough. I will observe, stay grounded, and trust myself to know who feels good and what feels right for me. There is no rush, only growth.

OVERWHELM

Feelings of overwhelm arise when our fear response is triggered by a crushing memory of not coping and we feel control slipping away. Our brain and body are flooded with stress hormones, and we engage in one of our now familiar 'F' words.

Overwhelm is anxiety. It's panic. It's a cry for help. When we finally reach a state of overwhelm we've arrived at the conclusion that: **I CAN'T DO THIS. I CAN'T COPE!!!!!!!**

A bit like a physical reaction to a trigger, overwhelm is a call for recognition and validation. It's a familiar destination for those of us who have been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. We've spent a lifetime feeling overwhelmed by other people's toxic power and once again our wounded inner child is crying out to be seen and heard. We may have once been criticised, humiliated, or shamed, told we're not good enough or that we'll never cope with a challenge or a change in our life.

As our environment is telling us to step up, our stored memories of feeling controlled and not coping rise to the surface and once again we're overwhelmed. Yes, there is a darn good reason - and an explanation - for our debilitating experiences of overwhelm.

When we're overwhelmed, there's a clash between our natural capacity for *self-control* and the painful memories of *being controlled*. Nestled in the gap between the two is resistance to the truth **that we can cope with anything and anyone.**

The gap is full of other unconscious triggers that until they're made conscious will continue to rule our lives. We may already be hypervigilant - constantly alert, always switched on, trying to stay safe - but every now and again it all becomes too much. Despite seeking a safe harbour from the choppy waters and rough seas of our childhood, the waves of anxiety

sweep us away from the safe harbour and plunge us headfirst into the deep waters of overwhelm.

When we constantly make ourselves wrong (hello, shame), when we live in fear of criticism (I get it), when we'd rather stick pins in our eyes than be disapproved of, humiliated, criticised and dismissed, then we'll live a life overwhelmed...with overwhelm.

The good news is that we can learn to conquer overwhelm and embrace our dazzling ability to not just cope with life but to manage it spectacularly. To fulfil our undeniable potential for coping and managing, we must lose our fear of making mistakes and needing help. We must understand that we're not alone in our need for support and connection. Nobody came to help us before so why, we ask ourselves, would they help now? Because now is a different time, now is a time when there *are* good people willing to help who won't expect anything in return.

Feelings of overwhelm come from disempowering, dominant memories of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D and they *urgently* need to be replaced with new truths about our ability to manage anyone and anything - old file exchanged for new file.

Starting now, get back in touch with your voice and your opinion. In moments of overwhelm remind yourself that there's an external reason why you feel the way you feel. Breathe deeply and repeat, 'I can do this, I can do this'. Stop allowing your 'inner critic' (more about them soon) to overrule your own voice.

Who would you be in those moments of overwhelm if you stopped listening to the critical voices from your past? They did you no good then, and they're doing you no good now. We know that repetition creates new memories and new beliefs so dare to contradict the voice

that says, 'you can't' and tell it that you bloody well can. Repeat often: 'I can do this.' Because you can!

Overwhelm is defeated by extraordinary people. People who learn to cope, then to manage, then to thrive. Be that extraordinary person.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

OVERWHELM

(Page 45 of your workbook)

- What empowering beliefs about yourself are you resisting - beliefs that could turn overwhelm into underwhelm in a matter of seconds?
- Can you recall a time when you coped easily - even unexpectedly? What happened, and how did it make you feel?
- What are you afraid might happen if you show people you can cope?
- When you feel overwhelmed, what are you thinking?
- I now choose to exchange that feeling of overwhelm for a feeling of (fill in the blanks).

As with our other experiences of anxiety and panic, once we know what's happening and why, we can shift our perspective from "I'm being attacked" to "I'm being protected." And that's not just a pacifying affirmation – it's the truth of what's happening.

When we feel overwhelmed, our survival brain is reminded of a time when we had to run away, freeze, or fight back. Overwhelm and anxiety are far easier to manage when we understand that their true function is to protect us – not to punish or attack us.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

YOU CAN COPE WITH ANYONE AND ANYTHING!

(Page 46 of your workbook)

- When overwhelm strikes, which of these would you rather affirm?

Scenario 1: 'I don't know what's happening to me! I'm having a heart attack! I feel like I'm dying! **I can't cope!**'

Or:

Scenario 2: "I recognise this feeling. It's here to protect me. I know why, it's because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D and my brain learned to manage fear in this way. There's nothing wrong. I'm safe now. Let's move on."

One path leads back into panic, the other leads forward into peace.

- What do you think is happening to your brain and body in Scenario 1? Is there panic, hypervigilance, fight-or-flight, spiralling thoughts, rapid heart rate? All of the above?
- What do you think is happening to your brain and body in Scenario 2? Is there awareness, slowing down, nervous system regulation, logical thinking, emotional safety? All of the above?
- Did you step onto your Thinking Bridge?

You're learning how to turn fear into awareness and understanding.

HOW TO RECLAIM YOUR EMOTIONAL POWER AND TURN OVERWHELM INTO UNDERWHELM

1. You can walk away (yes you can).
2. Keep your expectations to a minimum while maintaining 'good enough' standards. The writer Anne Lamott says expectations are just resentments waiting to happen. I agree.
3. When overwhelming sensory messages creep in step on to your Thinking Bridge. Think logically and calmly: 'I am safe.'
4. Shift your focus to avoid the overload. Look outside or visualise a place you love, think about the taste of your favourite food and its aroma, put in earplugs or wear headphones, rub your hands together or stamp your feet to get stagnant energy flowing again.
5. Remind yourself the past is over; what hurt you then can't hurt you now. **You** are in control.
6. Whatever's happening around you right now, you're protected.
7. Choose a Kinder Thought about yourself and repeat it until the overwhelm passes.
8. Be optimistic - you *can* do this.
9. Ask yourself: am I choosing, feeling, thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? If you're overwhelmed the answer is 'yes'.

Affirm: the pain of the past no longer controls the peace of the present.

Ask yourself: what are the thoughts behind this feeling of overwhelm and my absence of peace?

Overwhelm doesn't belong to us. Give it back to whom and where it came from.

Visualisation: Return to peace

Find a quiet space. Sit or lie down comfortably. Let your shoulders drop. Place one hand on your heart, the other on your belly. Breathe in slowly. As you inhale, imagine drawing in light – calm, soft, and warm, like golden sunlight on your skin. As you exhale, let go of tightness, stress, and that heavy ‘I can’t cope’ feeling.

Now, imagine a peaceful room. It’s safe here. The light is gentle. The air smells clean and comforting. You feel understood, warm, and grounded. In this room, you are fully in control. You are the authority, the energy, the peace.

Beside you is a small suitcase. This is where you place the emotional overwhelm that doesn’t belong to you. Slowly recall one overwhelming feeling. You don’t have to name it, just feel it. Notice where it sits in your body. Now gently lift that feeling out of your body, as if it were an object. Maybe it’s jagged, maybe heavy, maybe dark. See yourself placing it into the suitcase. One by one, gently, kindly, remove each piece of emotional weight. Keep going, no rush. Everything that’s not yours, everything that feels too heavy, too much, too old - place it in the suitcase.

Now speak this truth out loud or in your mind: *this pain is not mine to carry. I return it to where it came from. I am safe now. I choose peace. I choose calm. I choose me.*


Watch as the suitcase gently disappears. It simply dissolves into light, into space, into nothingness. It cannot return to you. It’s gone. You remain. Peaceful. Whole.

Feel your emotional power return to your body. Back to your heart. Back to your breath. Back to your voice. You are strong. You are safe. You are free.

Say to yourself: the pain of the past no longer controls the peace of the present. I am calm. I am in control. I can cope. I choose emotional freedom.

Take one more deep breath... release, and one more for luck, release. Smile gently. You did it. You are home.

*

Overwhelm does this  to your brain because someone tried to turn you into someone you're not. Overwhelm is not your *flaw*. It's a *response*. Overwhelm is your brain choosing pain instead of peace when your truth has been silenced, your intuition overridden, and your identity hijacked.

- Reclaim your truth.
- Reclaim your power.
- Reclaim yourself.

People will always tell you who they want you to be unless you teach them to listen to who you are. Be who you were before their shit stole your sunshine. And never let them dim your light again.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS
SO, WHO WERE YOU
BEFORE ALL THEIR SHIT BLOCKED OUT YOUR SUNSHINE?

(Page 48 of your workbook)

- What did you love to do?
- Who were you becoming before you were made to shrink, hide, or shape yourself into someone else's version of acceptable?
- What are the lost abilities, gifts, and talents that you're now reclaiming?
- What's rising from the ashes? What sparks are returning?

THE SACRIFICIAL OVERWHELM SCREAM

Being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D teaches us that we'll never be good enough. The critical voices we grew up with still echo today, restricting our potential, controlling our self-worth, and depressing our spirit. We strive to be perfect, to please, and thanks to our deep determination to avoid being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D again we over-commit... then we ruminate... and then we unleash what I call the S.O.S: the **Sacrificial Overwhelm Scream**.

In the moment, we didn't think twice. We were taken by surprise, and weren't ready with a 'let me think about it' response. We agreed to something that, ever since, has made us feel resentful, moody, irritable, snappy, and restricted.

When being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D has left us with a 'disease to please' agreeing to meet other people's needs and expectations can overwhelm us leaving us roaring like a lion with a thorn in its paw. Rather than honouring our limits, we sacrifice our time, wellbeing, and energy to meet someone else's expectations. Our past emotional experiences have made us fearful of being *re*-S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. To avoid any repeat performances of past pain we agree to things that will cause us worry, keep us awake at night, and leave us feeling overstretched and exhausted. Internally, we are screaming with the pressure we've piled on ourselves. and sometimes the scream is so loud it's seen and heard externally.

I KNOW WHY I FEEL LIKE THIS

Overwhelm is unresolved trauma that's built up and up and up. If you're taking on additional stress it will eventually explode as a blood curdling S.O.S. Next time, before you over-commit and run the risk of S.O.S, remind yourself that you're *choosing* to feel overwhelmed to avoid being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. Is that a choice you want to make?

In future, when you're already anxious, be aware that your anxious feelings may turn into overwhelm if you take on more pressure before you've managed what's already on your plate. We'll talk more about saying no in a short while, but when other people have an expectation that you can't comfortably meet, prepare yourself to manage their expectations, or say no. You're not letting anyone down or disappointing them. Their expectations of you were unfounded; they're letting down and disappointing themselves. Your fear of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D is leading you into overwhelm. Stop. Step onto your Thinking Bridge, breathe, and ask yourself 'why am I choosing to say yes? What are the emotions behind my choice? What are the consequences of saying no?'

Feeling overwhelmed is a symptom of our past emotional experiences; it isn't something we should feel ashamed about. When we honour ourselves and acknowledge that sometimes we need to hide from the world rather than be actively in it, we take another step towards winning our emotional war. We'll learn more techniques later in the book about managing overwhelm but for now I want you to practice self-awareness and learn to say when enough is enough. **Know your limits...**

KNOWING YOUR LIMITS VERSUS BEING 'PERFECT'

People who believe "good enough" is an acceptable standard rarely feel overwhelmed. Regardless of what it is, who it is, where you are, or what you're doing, the moment you prioritise your wellbeing over your desire to do it all and do it perfectly you begin to reclaim your emotional balance and your power. Maintaining "perfect" is exhausting, and it always leads to overwhelm.

Every time we prioritise being a perfect 'yes person' over self-kindness and self-compassion we overfill our commitment plate and pull the plug on our emotional recovery. We can't afford to do that, not even once.

Make mistakes. Be imperfect. Be a human who sleeps at night with peace, not pressure. Be a Good Enough Revolutionary.

A WORD ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE'S DENIAL OF YOUR PAIN

As we begin to recognise and honour our limits, we may encounter people who ignore or deny that our feelings of overwhelm even exist. Some people, whether through extroversion, extreme resilience or insensitivity, find the idea of overwhelm strange. We can't blame them for not understanding.

Then there are the ones who do know. The ones who witnessed our suffering - or caused it - and still, they deny our pain. Maybe they feel guilty, responsible, or too uncomfortable to acknowledge it. Maybe they simply don't want to hear our truth. Either way, when our feelings are dismissed, especially by those who know what we've endured, we feel invalidated and unseen.

That kind of denial sends us straight back to those days when we were punished or disbelieved for having needs. When someone repeatedly denies your experience, it's time to stop explaining. Accept that they will never listen. They may pretend it didn't happen, but they know. They remember. It takes courage to face the truth. Not everyone has that kind of courage. That's why this book is designed to support your healing without needing input from anyone in your past. You know your truth. Their denial cannot erase it. We rise, even as they remain unenlightened.

When we keep returning to those who judged, criticised, or ignored us, still hoping they'll finally see and validate us, we're quietly telling ourselves we can't manage without their approval. That we still need their permission to believe in ourselves. Their criticism turned us into their obedient servants. Their denial of our pain, their silence, their lack of compassion was never about love. It was about control.

Breaking away from those who harmed us is never easy, especially when our self-esteem is still entangled with the hope of being loved by them. But we **must choose separation** if we're ever to win our emotional war.

Every time we settle for the emotional crumbs they throw at us, we turn away from the feast of empowerment and self-validation that belongs to us, that's already within us. It's time to rise from the floor and take our seat at the table.

LOW 5 VIBE

You've heard of a High 5, right? That victorious, celebratory moment, your hand held high waiting to be met by another in an act of shared success.

Well, the Low 5 is the opposite. The **Low 5 Vibe** is the self-sabotaging kick delivered by five of the biggest emotional obstacles we face on the road to emotional freedom. They are:

PROCRASTINATION

PERFECTIONISM

COMPARISON

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

If you're not feeling engaged or empowered on your healing journey, if you find yourself hesitating, doubting, spiralling, or self-sabotaging, then it's likely your Low 5 Vibe is jamming your frequency.

These disempowering patterns aren't just bad habits. Like most emotional derailers, they're symptoms and their source can almost always be traced back to your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences.

PROCRASTINATION

Procrastination is not laziness. Procrastination is a genuine fear that we're not capable of tackling the task ahead, so we put it off. We worry it's too much for us, we'll do something wrong, or we'll let people down. The seeds of procrastination are often planted in childhood by an overbearing figure who made us feel nervous about making decisions, leaving us with the belief that our efforts were not worthwhile or valuable.

When we're encouraged and supported we develop confidence and resilience. We dare to try, to have a go because even if we fail, we know we'll still be loved and supported. But if experience has taught us that we'll be S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D if we fail then fear casts a long shadow over every attempt to begin or complete something meaningful.

We want to step outside our Trauma-Survival Zone, but when we try to start or finish something, we're reminded of what happens when we fail. We buckle under the weight of our own expectations. We become seriously distressed at the thought of offering up something less than perfect. And so, we decide the safest thing to do... is nothing.

By not trying at all, we avoid the painful memories of what failure once meant and the consequences it carried. When more is demanded of a procrastinator, when they're already teetering on the brink of overwhelm, their inner critic joins the party to remind them how much it hurts to fall short.

Procrastination often partners with people-pleasing, self-sabotage, and its most vindictive cellmate, perfectionism. "If I can't do it perfectly (and that voice from the past insists you can't), then why even bother trying?"

Some describe procrastination as rebellion, an F.U. to being told what to do, but it's deeper than that. Procrastination isn't defiance-based; it's fear-based. When we procrastinate, what we're really saying is:

- I'd rather have the comfort of not doing it than the criticism of doing it wrong.
- I'd rather have the safety of underachievement than the shame of failure.
- They'll criticise me no matter what, so I might as well not even try.

Overcoming procrastination begins with understanding how our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences shaped us into being perfectionistic people-pleasers. We usually procrastinate over something we care about, something we can't ignore, which adds a layer of anxiety and stress to the mix.

When we procrastinate, it's our inner child who's panicking. We're letting that part of ourselves whose needs were ignored live yet another day of stress, fear, and paralysis. Pick that child up. Take them by the hand. Show them what an empowered adult looks like. We *must* show them what's possible beyond the shame and criticism that conditioned them to believe 'I can't'.

Ask yourself:

- When did you first get the message that your efforts were never good enough?
- When did it become safer to ignore something than to try and fix it?
- When were you taught that risk or effort would only end in shame or disappointment?

Every time we attempt something new we're pushing against a wall of painful emotional history. That's why we procrastinate. But walls can be knocked down. And you have the tools to do it.

HOW DO WE STOP PROCRASTINATING?

When we allow our conscious, adult self to take over decision-making from our wounded inner child, we shift our beliefs from “this is too hard for me” to “I can do this, I can cope with anything and get it done.” That’s the first and most powerful step in challenging procrastination.

Whatever it is that you’re putting off, know this: the self-doubt that stops you isn’t really your voice. It’s the voice of the critical people from your past whose relentless judgments created a fear of failure. Understanding this disarms the shame. It’s not you stopping you. It’s the emotional residue of people who once did.

The antidote to procrastination is action. Taking one small step towards the task, however tiny, breaks the spell procrastination has over you. Procrastination thrives in stillness, but the moment you move, even an inch, it loses power, and you gain it.

Your only real source of self-doubt is other people, you know that. Reclaim your thoughts. Reclaim your momentum. And if that giant task ahead still feels overwhelming ask yourself: how would I eat a giant cake? One slice at a time!

HOW TO TACKLE PROCRASTINATION

- **Give yourself time.** Rushing things triggers the same fear that made you procrastinate in the first place. Slow down. You’re not in a race.
- **Get clear.** What exactly needs to be done? Define it. The clearer you are the calmer you’ll feel.
- **Break it down.** Write a list of small steps. Don’t aim for perfection, aim for movement.
- **Tick** each step off as you go.
- **Celebrate** progress, not completion.

Listen to the voice in your head. Who are you hearing? Is it really your voice? Or someone else's? Maybe you're even picturing their face? Remember what's at stake. When you stop procrastinating, what are you reclaiming? Who or what are you liberating from your Trauma-Survival Zone?

Affirmation: I'm not scared of the task. I'm scared of what I was made to believe about myself. I challenge that lie every time as I take one step forward and I question, 'what did they achieve?'

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

PROCRASTINATION

(Page 49 of your workbook)

- Look at the list of S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences. Do you identify with any that are causing your procrastination?
- When you procrastinate, what are you really trying to avoid feeling? Is it fear of failure? Of getting it wrong? Of being visible?
- Are there any other hidden reasons for your procrastination? Is it linked to burnout? People-pleasing? Overwhelm? What are you really protecting yourself from?
- Now imagine procrastination as a little voice in the room with you. Talk to it. What would you say? How would you reassure it? Can you remind it that you're not a frightened child anymore, that you're safe now?

Procrastination is not the enemy. It's a coping mechanism and you're learning to cope in new, powerful ways. Tell procrastination: "I see you. I know why you're here. But I've got this now."

PROCRASTINATION vs CONTROL

Sometimes it's not the task itself we resist; it's the sense of powerlessness the task brings up in us. A task that demands our time, focus, and attention but offers no flexibility can subtly echo a time in our life when we had no control. It's not the to-do list that bothers us ; it's the emotional memory of having our choices controlled and stripped away.

This isn't laziness or defiance. It's an emotional wound calling for understanding. The fear of not having a say, of being boxed in, of being judged, shamed, or humiliated can resurface the moment we feel pressured. And when we feel controlled, we procrastinate to reclaim a sense of freedom.

So, if you're putting something off, pause and ask yourself: **am I avoiding the task, or am I avoiding a feeling of being controlled?** You may not have control over the outcome of the task, but you do have control over how you approach it. You get to decide:

- What music plays in the background.
- What time you begin.
- Whether you wear socks, your comfiest hoodie, or both.
- What pen you use to write the first word.
- How you reward yourself afterwards.

Making small choices reclaims your emotional power. Procrastination isn't a flaw, it's a cry for help, a distress signal. When you see it, respond with compassion and reclaim your autonomy, one small decision at a time. And remember: an imperfect step taken today far outweighs a perfect step that never gets taken.

COMPARISON

Sometimes we procrastinate because we compare ourselves to others. We think we're finally on the right track, we've got our plan, our fresh notebook, our new pens, and then we take a scroll through social media and see a post from someone who seems to be miles ahead from where we are - and it's game over. We lose momentum before we've even begun.

Most people are struggling with something, whether in big ways or small. They're confused, insecure, winging it, projecting, and panicking just like you and me. Some of the most polished people talk about how they have bone-shaking, teeth-rattling comparison issues behind the gloss. When you've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, comparison cuts even deeper. It chips away at already fragile self-worth and whispers that you should just give up, stop trying.

Comparison isn't just toxic. It's deadly to dreams, hopes, self-esteem, and emotional resilience. It gives us the perfect excuse to stay small. It tells us we're too late, not enough, or just plain ridiculous for trying. When we believe that, we sit down and we stay quiet. We censor our creativity. We dim our light. We abandon our truth.

Comparing ourselves to others and coming up short is a significant consequence of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. When you've been made to feel less than everyone else, it's natural to assume you don't have what it takes to succeed. But you're not here to do it like them, you're here to do it like you, with all your perceived flaws and challenges.

People want authenticity. Not everyone wants cookie-cutter perfection. You are here to do it like you. There's more than one star that shines at the same time, and together they complete a beautiful picture. Someone else's light doesn't mean there's less light for you. Learn from them if you must, but don't compare yourself. You are unique. You are incomparable. Shine on.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

COMPARISON

(Page 51 of your workbook)

- Who compared you to someone they thought you should be?
- How did that make you feel at the time?
- How does it make you feel now?
- Who do you compare yourself to now?
- What does this person have or do that you think you're missing?
- What do you admire in them and what does that say about your own dreams and values?
- Now... what is unique and beautifully different about you?

PERSONALITY BEGINS WHERE COMPARISON ENDS

KARL LAGERFELD

PERFECTIONISM

Perfectionists fall into two categories. In the first category are those who aim for excellence with a genuine love for what they're doing. They're driven by the joy of achievement and growth. They are the ones who take breaks, laugh easily, socialise, and sleep soundly at night. They have a reputation for producing excellent work - they're punctual, polished, and full of pride. Behind the scenes, they're confident and generous, eager to share tips and celebrate others. They were likely the kids who felt safe to fail, encouraged by praise and not punished for mistakes. These are the **Joy-Fuelled Perfectionists.**

Then there's the rest of us.

The ones for whom judgement is poison, and criticism? You might as well take a penknife to our colour-coded bookshelf and mess up our sock drawer. We're driven not by joy, but by fear. We over-function, work long

hours, take on too much, and can't switch off. We don't laugh, don't rest, and sleep evades us as we rehearse, ruminate, and replay the S.O.S. We were the children shamed for failing, humiliated instead of helped.

We are the **Fear-Fuelled Perfectionists.**

Which one are you? Joy-Fuelled, or Fear-Fuelled?

The well-worn path of the Fear-Fuelled Perfectionist is paved with the belief: "They'll see the real me if my perfect mask slips." We are relentlessly hard on ourselves. We believe approval and acceptance are rewards for being flawless.

When we grow up feeling unloved, unseen, or judged, we may spend our adult lives trying to be 'better than' just to feel good enough. The high expectations we place on ourselves often belong to the critical voices we internalised long ago. When we're striving for perfection, we're not really striving to be our best, we're trying to meet someone else's expectations so we can avoid being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D all over again. But perfectionism at the cost of creativity, meaning, and self-worth isn't excellence, it's emotional exhaustion. And it's a trap.

Can we be both Joy-Fuelled and Fear-Fuelled?

I don't think so. When it comes to perfectionism, we're either driven by joy or driven by fear. Not both.

The good news? If you currently identify as a Fear-Fuelled Perfectionist, you can learn to become Joy-Fuelled. When you retrace your steps to the source of your fear, when you uncover who or what is fuelling it, you can release yourself from the pressure. You can reclaim joy. You can bring purpose and peace back to what you create.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

PERFECTIONISM

(Page 53 of your workbook)

- Are you a Joy-Fuelled Perfectionist or a Fear-Fuelled Perfectionist?
- What does Fear-Fuelled perfectionism look like in your life?
- What are the habits, patterns, or expectations you hold that come from fear rather than joy?
- What does Fear-Fuelled perfectionism cost you? Think about time, energy, sleep, relationships, self-worth, creativity...
- Who taught you to be a Fear-Fuelled Perfectionist? Was it a parent, teacher, sibling, boss, or even a societal message?
- How did they do that? What were the words, actions, rules, or environments that shaped your Fear-Fuelled drive for perfection?
- What's one thing you can change today to start moving from Fear-Fuelled to Joy-Fuelled perfectionism? Something small but meaningful like leaving something unfinished, not apologising for resting, or saying "this is enough."
- Would you accept yourself more if you didn't try so hard to be perfect? Why or why not?
- There are already areas of your life where you've let go of perfectionism. What are they? How can you use those as proof that it's possible to live with more freedom and less fear?
- What could you do right now to ruffle the feathers of your Fear-Fuelled Perfectionism and cut yourself some slack? Think rebellion. Think liberation. Think 'good enough'.

IMPOSTER SYNDROME

When we're S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D in childhood and our self-image and confidence are obliterated by the overwhelming toxic power of other people, we grow into adults who deny and reject themselves. We constantly question our value and our relevance. We believe we're pulling the wool over everyone's eyes - that we're bad, that we're liars, and that, very soon, everyone will see us for who we really are.

We're so used to denying ourselves that we convince ourselves our success must be down to a lucky break or someone else's help. We were probably told, repeatedly, that we were "lucky" to have achieved something or that we only succeeded because we "had so much help", or worse, that we didn't deserve any recognition at all. These types of comments quietly dismantle our ability to believe in our own contribution and self-worth.

When we live with Imposter Syndrome we dismiss praise, compliments, and recognition. We assume anyone who thinks anything good about us must be delusional. We panic when others rely on us. We question their judgement. Why would anyone trust us? We're suspicious of anyone who believes in us because we don't believe in ourselves. That trust they place in us? It feels misplaced. We don't feel capable, credible, or consistent enough to hold it. We think they must be desperate to have faith in us. We live life feeling like a fraud as we internalise the conviction that we're ripping people off and misleading them.

'Imposter Syndrome' isn't humility; it's not about acknowledging we're part of a team or giving credit where it's due. It's the painfully ingrained belief that we're faking our entire adult identity. That behind the bills, the job, the parenting, the meetings, the brave face, we're still a frightened child trying not to be found out, we're still the kid who got sent to bed for "showing off," still the teenager who was punished for standing out, still

the person who got called a cheat, a liar, or “too big for their boots” just for succeeding. When we have imposter Syndrome we don’t believe we’ve earned our place. We don’t believe we belong. We’re terrified someone will figure it out.

Our thoughts, beliefs, and decisions have been shaped by years of criticism and emotional wounding. Imposter Syndrome becomes the lens through which we see every opportunity with suspicion, shame, and the conviction that we’re undeserving. We reject our own truth before someone else gets the chance to.

IF WE HAVE IMPOSTER SYNDROME WE BELIEVE:

About being “found out”

- If they really knew me, they wouldn’t trust me or like me.
- I feel like a fraud.
- People will be disappointed when they meet the real me.
- I’m not the good person they think I am.

About belonging

- They must’ve made a mistake if they want to include me.
- Who do I think I am?
- Who am I kidding?

About praise and validation

- They’re only complimenting me because they feel sorry for me.
- They don’t really mean it when they say that.
- I can’t accept that; I don’t deserve it.

About capability

- I’m not capable of this.
- I just got lucky.
- I won’t be able to do this again.

About expectations

- I must keep proving myself.
- Sooner or later, I'll be exposed.

The Way Through? Self-Validation.

We begin to break free when we validate ourselves; when we acknowledge our skills, our effort, our talent, and our truth.

When we accept that we have something valuable, something needed, to offer this world, we loosen the grip of Imposter Syndrome. When we allow our Conscious Adult Self, who is grounded in emotional healing and truth, to take charge, Imposter Syndrome ceases to run the show. You're not a fraud. You're not a fluke. You are exactly what this world needs.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

ACKNOWLEDGING AND EMBRACING YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS

(Page 56 of your workbook)

Take a moment to explore the connection between your early experiences of achievement and your current beliefs about success. The answers may surprise you and they may also liberate you.

- When you were growing up, how did the people around you react when you achieved something? Was there celebration? Jealousy? Dismissal? Indifference?
- Were you ever S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D because you achieved something? Did someone shame, criticise, humiliate, exclude, or dismiss you when you succeeded?
- Or did you witness someone else being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D for their achievements? What impact did that have on your willingness to try or to succeed?
- Were you ever told or made to feel that your ambitions, skills, or talents were silly, unrealistic, or laughable?
- Did anyone call you a show-off, accuse you of trying too hard, or suggest that you “shouldn’t get ideas above your station”?
- Did you feel pressured to achieve? Like you were the only one in the family who could go to college? That pressure, combined with low self-belief, can absolutely cultivate Imposter Syndrome because it teaches you that your worth is conditional, your success is fragile, and any *failure* would let everyone down. Instead of feeling proud of your achievements you feel like a fraud - not because you aren’t capable, but because the pressure to *prove* yourself stopped you feeling emotionally safe when you achieved something good.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

IMPOSTER SYNDROME: GATHERING EVIDENCE

(Page 58 of your workbook)

It's time to step away from the exhausting belief that you're a fraud. You are not an imposter, you are gifted, capable, and becoming more aligned with your truth every single day.

To help rewire your thinking and break free from the limiting beliefs shaped by your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences, it's time to gather evidence to support your brilliance.

- Write down ten skills, talents, achievements, or accomplishments that prove you are a gifted and authentic person who shines with integrity and honesty. Even if some feel small or obvious, write them anyway because they all matter.

As we heal from Imposter Syndrome, awareness is our greatest ally. Old beliefs and behaviours don't just disappear overnight, they linger. But with conscious effort, we can catch them before they take root and gently choose a new truth.

- Write down **three beliefs** and **three behaviours** that you know are driven by your Imposter Syndrome. These are not the truth of who you are - they're just echoes of old programming, ready to be rewritten.

Now take a breath and remind yourself: I am not a fraud. I am a work in progress becoming more powerful by the day. I trust myself to show up as the real me.

HOW TO VALIDATE YOURSELF

When someone's feelings and opinions are affirmed as valuable, meaningful, and worthwhile, that person feels validated. We may not always agree with their feelings or perspective, but acknowledging and discussing them is **validating** for them. Ranting, raging, dismissing, or shaming someone for daring to express themselves is **invalidating**.

Remember how my depression developed? I wasn't allowed to **express** my creativity or be my authentic self. That's invalidation in action.

In childhood, our validation comes from feeling seen and heard through praise, encouragement, attention, and emotional safety. But when we're S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D we're invalidated. Our feelings are ignored. Our opinions are irrelevant. Decisions are made for us, and we're expected to comply. We're made to feel there's something wrong with us (shame) and we're **excluded** rather than **included** and involved, opening wounds of rejection and abandonment. Being invalidated teaches us that we don't matter. That we're not valuable. That our lives have no meaning. That is *not* the truth of who we are.

People living with the long-term effects of an emotionally disrupted childhood often say they never felt heard or seen. They were ignored, dismissed, mocked, or punished - just for expressing a feeling or asking a question. So how do we heal this?

By validating ourselves.

We commit to giving ourselves the love, value, and recognition we never received. We tell ourselves: I matter. I am real. My thoughts and feelings are valid. My life has purpose.

Self-validation takes courage and consistency. Even the most confident people sometimes struggle to believe their voice deserves space. But like every other healing skill, self-validation can be learned.

Watch for the inner critic creeping in. Notice when self-doubt disguises itself as humility...then stop, replace the old files, those heavy with invalidation, with new beliefs grounded in truth, safety, and self-worth.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

SELF-VALIDATION

(Page 60 of your workbook)

Remember: self-validation means you affirm that your feelings and opinions are valuable, meaningful, and worthwhile, even if someone in your life has told you otherwise.

- Write down ten self-validating truths about yourself.

Read and repeat these ten self-validating truths every day.

When they've become new habits and beliefs, find the next ten self-validating truths about you. And don't tell me ten is too many! We have thousands of thoughts every day and most of those thoughts will be invalidating. Please empower yourself by replacing at least twenty of them with validating thoughts instead. Catch the wound and replace it with self-compassion and self-kindness.

As self-validation becomes your new normal, you'll rely less on external validation and feel less like an imposter. You'll start to recognise when you're being *invalidated* - either by yourself or by others. Instead of shrinking or people-pleasing, you'll question the invalidation and turn it around.

You'll begin to move away from people who invalidate you. Rather than hoping they'll change their minds and agree with you, making you feel accepted and approved of, you'll stop caring what they think. Eventually, you'll ask yourself the game-changing question: why did I ever seek validation from people like that in the first place?

Affirmations for self-validation

Repeat daily, especially when self-doubt or invalidation creeps in.

- I am not too much. I am not too little. I am exactly the right quantity in all ways.
- My feelings matter. My needs are valid. My voice deserves to be heard.
- I honour my truth, even if others couldn't or wouldn't.
- I do not need permission to believe in myself.
- I am allowed to take up space, speak my truth, and be seen.
- My experiences shaped me, but they do not define my worth.
- I choose to trust myself more than I trust the voices that silenced me.
- I am worthy of kindness, including from myself.
- I am growing into someone my younger self would feel safe with.
- I validate my own existence. That is everything. That is enough.

Think of three of your own self-validating affirmations, write them down in your journal and use them regularly. Make sure they sound like you - not your mother, not a teacher, not your 'inner critic'. Just you. These are *your* words for *your* healing, so choose affirmations that feel honest, comforting, and empowering. Let your voice be the one that reminds you: I matter. I'm enough. I'm allowed to be here.

DO AFFIRMATIONS WORK?

Yes, but only with repetition and realness. For affirmations to have any power, we need to believe them or at the very least, not follow them with a sarcastic eye roll and a 'whatever'. The key is finding affirmations that feel true and possible.

Some of us struggle with saying I love myself - it can feel too far removed from where we're at. But 'I like myself' or 'I value myself' feels more real. We understand what it means to like or value something. Love, on the

other hand, might feel blurry or complicated. And let's be honest, 'I am beautiful' might not land well on the days we're scraping ourselves off the floor emotionally, but 'I'm kind', or 'I'm worthy of rest' are grounded and achievable. Try both. Feel the difference.

When we take care of ourselves, speak kindly to ourselves, and act in ways that support our emotional wellbeing, we begin replacing those old, corrupted files with newer, healthier ones.

For me, the most powerful affirmation is: "I can do this." It works. It's simple. It's believable. "I can do absolutely anything" on the other hand sounds exhausting, unrealistic, and untrue. I can't do absolutely anything - nobody can. I think that's why affirmations get a bad press. Expectations must still align with our current levels of energy.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

INVALIDATION

(Page 61 of your workbook)

- How have you experienced invalidation in your life whether recently or in your past? This could be someone ignoring your feelings, mocking your dreams, or dismissing your pain.
- Imagine a vulnerable child or someone you care about going through the same experience. What would you say to comfort and support them?

You've just told *yourself* what you needed to hear back then.

- During your childhood, what words of praise or validation would have made a real difference to how you feel about yourself now?

Now say those words to yourself. Out loud. Every day. For 90 days.

- Have you already walked away from people or situations that consistently invalidated you? If so, give examples of how you chose yourself instead.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

MY SELF-VALIDATING STATEMENT

(Page 63 of your workbook)

I _____ am a human being with unmet needs for which I am now lovingly responsible. From this moment forward, I will care for and nurture myself with kind thoughts, gentle actions, and comforting routines. As I heal, I will make myself a priority and protect myself emotionally, financially, and physically.

Even though I have waited, hoped, and wished that my needs would be seen, understood, or met by _____ and it saddens me deeply that they never acknowledged what I was going through, I now commit to recognising my pain, honouring my healing, and meeting my own needs with compassion.

I will give myself time to consider any future connection with them from a place of emotional safety and strength. I will practice self-trust. I will forgive myself. I will create and maintain boundaries that honour my worth. I affirm that my feelings and opinions matter. I now commit to validating myself today, and for the rest of my life.

Signed: _____

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

ALSO KNOWN AS LOADED CANDY FLOSS

Passive-aggressive behaviour is one of the 'Low 5 Vibe' habits because it's such a toxic symptom of unresolved trauma. When I look at the words separately - passive and aggressive - I can better understand why so many of us recovering from being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D sometimes communicate in this way. We learned that expressing anger and aggression isn't safe, so we try to disguise these 'forbidden' feelings with sweetness and light.

In other words, we cloak irritation, anger, hostility, and indignation with submission, obedience, agreement, and compliance. Or at least, we think we do. Often our true fears and feelings betray us, and we end up delivering a messy mix of passive and aggressive energy instead.

When we feel hostile but try to present ourselves as calm and pleasant, there's a disconnect between what we feel and what we say, and that disconnect shows up as passive aggression. As our self-awareness grows, so does our understanding of how our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences drive this behaviour. Passive aggression can show up in many forms. Now you're more aware of what it is you'll begin to spot it in yourself and others.

Recognising my own passive-aggressive behaviour was a game-changer. It stopped me projecting my unmet needs through thinly disguised resentment and sarcasm and huffing and puffing my way through the day. It also helped me end my habit of ruminating on past conversations, wishing I'd said what I'd meant instead of smiling through the resentment, only to later explode with an S.O.S, or lay awake as I stewed in silence.

Next time in conversation when you feel disagreement, resentment, anger, or irritation bubbling beneath the surface, pause. Be aware that

your tone, words, or body language may become passive-aggressive, and stop yourself; find a way to express your feelings calmly and rationally - even if you worry they may be laughed at or dismissed. 'I'm overwhelmed right now, can it wait?' is better than a passive-aggressive response. There's nothing wrong with letting people know how you feel. The problems start when the unexpressed pain of the past continues to poison the way we communicate in the present.

Listen to yourself. Listen to others. Catch the tone. Hear the edge. Recognise passive aggression not to judge it, but to heal it. Passive-aggressive behaviour always highlights unmet needs. It reminds us that it's hard to meet someone else's needs when our own have been overlooked for so long.

LOADED CANDY FLOSS

I once shared an office with a passive-aggressive woman named Cassandra - Candy, for short. We both worked for a boss who was kind, generous, well-educated, and a woman Candy secretly resented.

On the surface, Candy sugar-coated everything. She'd gush over our boss and her appearance, appear modest when given gifts, and be as indispensable as she could be. But. There was always a tinge of resentment or sarcasm, so subtle it could easily be missed. The moment the door closed, Candy would criticise her accent, fashion sense, and the business decisions she made. We would cringe as she fumed, and I thought our boss was completely unaware. She wasn't.

Candy's 'fall from grace' came when a colleague overheard her ranting about our boss and pulled her up on it. Humiliated, Candy didn't apologise. Instead, she wrote a nasty letter filled with threats and accusations. She resigned the next day.

We divided up her duties while the company looked for someone new to replace her. I'll always remember our boss commenting: "I think Candy was a sweet girl who'd had a sour life. My husband called her 'Loaded Candy Floss'."

Looking back, I can see how Candy showed the signs of being deeply S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. She was a defensive person, but beneath the passive-aggressive shell, I believe there was a little girl who was still waiting to get her needs met. Wherever she is now, I hope she's OK. I have a feeling she will be.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

(Page 64 of your workbook)

Passive-aggressive behaviour often stems from fear, frustration, or the belief that it's not safe to speak openly. Let's bring those hidden patterns into the light with gentle honesty.

- Can you give examples of passive-aggressive behaviour either in yourself or that you've witnessed in others? Think about moments where someone said one thing but clearly felt another, or where you smiled on the outside while burning up on the inside. Maybe you said "it's fine" when it really wasn't, maybe someone used sarcasm when they felt hurt, maybe the silence was louder than the words?

UNMET NEEDS

Not getting our needs met as children creates one of the hardest, most invalidating journeys anyone can face. We grow into adults believing we're unlovable, unwanted, and not enough. We push for a win because we're tired of being walked over. We battle to be validated by people who sense our vulnerabilities, but who enjoy watching us struggle with anxiety and confusion. They get their toxic needs for power and control met by watching us unravel.

We gravitate towards groups and practices in search of the love, inclusion, and validation we never received, but many of us are disappointed not to find what we're looking for. Instead, our hearts remain broken as every wound caused by an unmet need is deepened by the continued absence of what we so desperately seek to feel validated.

SIGNS YOUR CHILDHOOD NEEDS WERE NOT MET

(no blame, no shame, only awareness).

1. You're often stuck in a 'Low 5 Vibe.'
2. You rarely feel emotionally safe.
3. You're terrified of being alone, abandoned, or rejected.
4. Or conversely you're a loner who avoids connection.
5. You struggle to form meaningful, secure bonds.
6. You over-compensate always giving too much and being the 'life and soul.'
7. You often feel anxious, afraid, or on edge.
8. You feel awkward asking for help or stating your needs.
9. You believe you're not good enough.

Identifying your unmet needs helps you see how you're still trying to get those needs met. The types of person you look to as a mother or father figure will likely reveal your unmet emotional needs. For me, the mother figures in my life are women who treat me as an equal. They make tea. They listen, support, encourage. They offer feedback but never judge. They smile and laugh, hug me hello, kiss me goodbye. They let me rest. They have time for me. We meet for coffee, lunch, we might go shopping or see a movie. I know their families, they're proud to have me in the lives and as a friend. And they are all at least ten-years older than me.

Above all else, I trust these women. I feel emotionally safe with them. Their emotional landscape never changes. They never tell me I remind them of someone they don't like. They never sigh when I speak, patronise, ridicule, or belittle me. It's a two-way connection, an equal balance of give and take. Nothing one-way. No hard work. No bitching about other women.

Interestingly, I don't have any father figures in my life despite my own fathers' shortcomings and premature death. I wonder if it's because my father is truly irreplaceable to me – even if for all the wrong reasons.

My father was a complicated man. He had a violent childhood that he replicated for his own children and suffered with clinical depression. I believe the absence of a father figure in my life is mainly due to the quiet fear I still have for my father, but also of the incredible love I feel for the dad I had. In many ways he remains unforgiven. In many others, I forgive him wholly and completely.

Despite his many limitations, weaknesses, and inadequacies he was still my dad who on good days would build a campfire and cook sausages, call me down to watch Laurel and Hardy, and laugh along with the high jinks of Tom and Jerry. My happiest and cruellest memories are of my dad.

Has your boss quietly filled the shoes of an emotionally absent parent? Is it your partner? Your children? A friend? How does it feel when you fall out with them? How hard do you try to make amends or apologise? Have you ever noticed yourself over-explaining, over-apologising, or over-functioning to avoid losing the relationship?

Understanding the emotional 'empty spaces' left by unmet needs helps us heal. We finally start to hear and see ourselves clearly, above the confusion those needs still cause. Are you even aware of what you like or want? Have you ever taken time to meet yourself and say hello?

Remember, whatever's been said or done to you is not your fault. Whoever stole your 'voice and your choice' is no longer in charge - **you** are. That they didn't meet your needs was their failure, not yours. That their needs overwhelmed yours? That's on them, too.

If you've been projecting your unmet needs onto others, this next exercise will support you to start reclaiming the power those needs have held over you. No shame, no blame, only awareness.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

NEEDS

(Page 65 of your workbook, or complete below)

- Did you grow up with attentive caregivers who tried to meet your needs or inattentive caregivers who ignored or dismissed them?
- Did you often feel forgotten, unwanted, or like your needs didn't matter?
- Did you sense irritation, guilt, or resentment when you asked for something you needed?
- Is your adult need for validation rooted in childhood experiences of rejection, criticism, or feeling invisible?
- What are some of your unmet needs - then and now?
- Who (if anyone) are you still blaming - consciously or unconsciously - for not meeting those needs?
- How do you feel when those needs still go unmet today?
- How have you been trying to meet those needs in ways that may not be healthy or helpful?
- Now that you're aware of where these needs come from, what's one new, empowering thing you'll do differently going forward?

With this new awareness, you'll notice all the ways you've been trying to get your needs met. You'll see how you persuade, how you withdraw, how you over give, how you get upset, and how you long, often silently, to be seen, heard, and validated.

And do you know what? It's OK. You're OK. You've simply been trying to get your needs met like any other child who was once ignored, silenced, or dismissed. And now you know different...you can do different.

There's nobody more at peace than the person who can say: *my needs weren't met in childhood. I understand why. I accept it. And I now choose to meet those needs in kind and loving ways for myself.*

So, what's going to change? Maybe there's a need or two that's past their sell-by date. Maybe you've been chasing praise, affection, attention, or approval from people who never had the capacity to give it and never will. Whatever you did in the past to quench that thirst, to fill the void, to feel enough, to feel lovable, it's OK. But it's over now.

We've spent too long knocking on the same closed doors, begging for acknowledgement that was never going to come, at least not from them. But we kept knocking, because our hearts wanted to mend. Enough is enough. Meet your own needs now in kind and loving ways and set yourself free.

(UN)REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

When we were children we may have noticed our parent or caregiver had the ability to meet someone else's needs - but not ours. And we wonder: what was wrong with me?

There was *nothing* wrong with us, but there was plenty wrong with the parent or caregiver who decided to play favourites, ignore our needs, or make us feel invisible. Someone who has never shown the capacity to meet our needs is unlikely to suddenly become the source of the love, approval, and validation we've longed for. But until we know better, we keep trying. We keep hoping. Doesn't matter how old we get; we keep bending ourselves into impossible shapes to gain their attention and earn their affection.

As you continue rebuilding yourself emotionally, I promise you that you'll eventually lay to rest that aching need you have for their love. You'll stop searching for their validation, you'll stop chasing the impossible. But in

the meantime, your expectations of them must be realistic. ***Someone who has never met your needs is unlikely to start meeting them now.***

So how have you tried to get your needs met? Recognising your patterns is liberating and although your perfectionism, people-pleasing, and over-functioning won't vanish overnight, they will lose their grip when you realise the lengths you've travelled to get your unmet needs met.

I'll be honest, this next exercise might stir some shocking realisations. It did for me. I was embarrassed when I realised how far I'd gone to try and meet my own unmet needs. The masks I wore. The sacrifices I made. The shame I tried to hide...but that was the old me. As an adult in recovery from childhood trauma, I forgave myself and you will too.

We'll talk more about self-forgiveness in Part II. For now, I just want to remind you not to be hard on yourself when difficult truths and memories arise in this next exercise. You know different now and you'll do different. No blame. No shame. Only awareness.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

GETTING OUR NEEDS MET

(Page 67 of your workbook)

- In the past what have you done to get your needs met?
- If your needs weren't met, how would you react?
- What's the most extreme thing you've done to try and get your needs met?
- When you're seeking to meet a need, who are you most likely to emotionally lean on, manipulate, or unintentionally exploit?
- Now choose someone significant from your childhood. Reflect on how they operated emotionally and what it taught you.
- How did they try to get their needs met?
- What happened when their needs weren't met?
- What's the most extreme thing they did to get their needs met?
- Who were they most likely to lean on, manipulate, or exploit to meet those needs?
- Did they usually succeed?
- Do you think you've ever behaved like them - consciously or unconsciously - to get your own needs met?
- And finally, if you could say something honest to this person right now about how their behaviour hurt you, what would it be?
- Today, you will meet one of your unmet needs by:

Reflection & Regulation: after the awareness, grounding yourself in truth.

You've just done some incredibly brave emotional work. Reflecting on unmet needs and the patterns that formed around them is not easy, but it is powerful. You're not stuck in those patterns anymore. You're aware. And awareness is the turning point.

Let's pause. Breathe. Come back to yourself. Take a moment to regulate your nervous system. Try this simple grounding practice:

- Place both feet flat on the ground.
- Gently press your fingertips together.
- Take 3 deep, calming breaths, in through your nose, out through your mouth.
- Whisper to yourself: I am safe. I am seen. I am healing. I am home to myself.

Affirmations to heal unmet needs:

Choose one of the following that resonates most with you or write your own:

- I am learning to meet my needs with compassion and care.
- I no longer chase approval from people who withhold love.
- My needs are valid, and I honour them without shame.
- I forgive myself for the ways I tried to feel loved.
- I choose peace over people-pleasing, emotional safety over shame.
- I am reparenting my inner child with grace, not guilt.

UNMET NEEDS AND RELATIONSHIP STRUGGLES

You may already know what it feels like to plunge into a new connection - romantic or otherwise - while still carrying open emotional wounds left by unmet needs. I certainly do.

We carry expectations we're not always aware of, hoping someone else will finally fill the gaps left behind by those who never saw, heard, or valued us. Sometimes, we unload our pain onto someone, other times we're drawn to someone equally wounded, believing we can save each other.

In normal circumstances, relationships of any kind can be emotionally complex. Add a history of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, and they become emotional minefields. When you're trying to create a loving connection but fear, rejection, abandonment, or a desire to keep the peace are all masking your authenticity, you're not building intimacy, you're building a ticking time bomb.

We test our partner's commitment without even realising it. We cross boundaries, cause drama, and create chaos - not because we're difficult, but because our *unmet* needs are still crying out to be met. We want reassurance that we're lovable, wanted, accepted. But no one - no matter how kind or available - can heal wounds they didn't cause.

That's why, on your journey to emotional freedom, your emotional wellbeing and mental health must take priority. Whether you're meeting new friends, dating, or reconnecting with old relationships, be aware how your S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences have shaped your sensitivities. You may be more prone to triggers, more vulnerable to rejection, and more likely to expect too much, too soon.

A healthy relationship requires mutual effort, emotional self-responsibility, and time. It's about balance, something most of us were never taught, but can absolutely learn.

Thanks to the work you've already done in this book, you now have the self-awareness to see your unmet needs for what they are: echoes from the past, not instructions for your future. Before you get to know someone else, get to know yourself. Build your emotional toolkit:

- Clear boundaries.
- Strong values.
- Know your limits.

When you understand how your unmet needs shape your patterns, you'll be far less likely to enter relationships based on fear, performance, or perfectionism. You'll no longer need to chase love or manipulate connection. You'll attract people who meet you where you are - whole, self-aware, and healing.

Slow down. Choose wisely. You may already know, deep down, who is right for you and who is not. And if you need time alone to heal and recalibrate I promise you, that is never a waste. Being by yourself for a while is better than being with someone who manipulates or exploits your vulnerabilities.

This is your time. The healed version of you - the one waiting beneath all the emotional debris - is ready to rise. Let them take the lead. When you understand the link between your childhood overwhelm and your adult search for validation, inclusion, and acceptance, you stop needing someone else to complete you because you know you're already enough.

**AT THE ROOT OF EVERY TANTRUM AND POWER STRUGGLE
ARE UNMET NEEDS.**

MARSHALL B. ROSENBERG

EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCE

When we rely on other people to meet our unmet needs, we trap ourselves in a continual cycle of people-pleasing and validation-seeking - just to feel emotionally safe.

We shape ourselves in unnatural and uncomfortable ways to earn the love, approval, and attention we're hungry for. Sometimes, we even play the role of the submissive or 'damaged' person, hoping to gain sympathy

for our emotional wounds. But when validation is an unmet need, emotional dependence on others becomes the inevitable outcome.

When we emotionally depend on someone else to make us feel safe, we're suspended in a temporary illusion of being "enough." But the moment that person pulls away taking their emotional support with them, we spiral. The safety vanishes, panic takes its place, and old addictions or coping mechanisms rush in to fill the void. This is a pattern. And before we can break a pattern, we must become aware of it.

So think about it: where in your life is your inner child still depending on someone else to feel safe? Is that dependence stopping you from **setting** boundaries or **keeping** them? Does it lure you towards people who feel 'familiar', but who are, ultimately, unsafe? Do you want your inner child around those people?

We often assume emotionally dependent people are passive or submissive, but that's not always the case. Emotional dependence can also express itself as criticism, manipulation, control, or anger. It can look like obsession, an intense loss of perspective - especially when we're triggered by fears of abandonment, rejection, or losing the companionship we're desperate for.

When emotionally dependent relationships end, we may struggle to accept they're over. That's when we become obsessed with closure which we'll talk more about later in the book. We feel rejected, and it hurts like nothing else. We convince ourselves that the only person who can soothe the pain is the person who caused it. It's a cruel loop: the same person who created the wound is the one we run towards for healing. And whether you're a child or an adult, it never, ever works.

Emotional dependence is a symptom of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. Once we understand how our past affects our present, we become empowered to

change the ways we depend on others to feel emotionally safe. That's when we see the difference between healthy emotional connection and emotional reliance. And that awareness? It's everything.

When we reclaim our emotional power, we not only begin to trust and connect with others, we also finally connect with ourselves. And that is where the deepest emotional transformation happens.

When we can be alone with ourselves, rely on ourselves, and meet our own needs, we start to build our emotional life on a solid foundation, one made of stability, self-worth, and resilience - not on the shaky ground of co-dependency and people-pleasing. When we no longer need someone else's approval to feel good in our skin, when we wear what we want, weigh what we want, do what we want without looking over our shoulder, we begin to find ourselves, our peace, and our people.

To become emotionally dependent *on ourselves* while still being emotionally open to others is one of the clearest signs we've reached maturity and emotional freedom.

As adults, the **presence** in our lives of emotional dependence on others is a result of the **absence** of love, validation, and approval we felt in childhood. The less we feel emotionally safe within ourselves, the more we'll depend on others to create that feeling for us. Wanting someone to fix us or complete us is understandable after everything we've experienced but it's not a sustainable solution. The work of healing unmet needs and learning to emotionally rely on ourselves is ours, and ours alone.

The good news? It's entirely possible. We can change the patterns, we can undo the pain, we can rebuild our emotional foundations and become whole. When we do the work, we heal. We stop craving the love we were denied and we give it to ourselves.

And that concludes Part I of the book.

Everything you've uncovered so far - every realisation, every Challenge It to Change It exercise - has helped you understand how you got here. At the heart of it all are deeply wounding emotional experiences that shamed you, shaped you, and convinced you that you had no power, but now you know better. And in Part II, you're going to *do* better.

You'll learn how to unburden yourself from the toxic weight of shame and break free from its grip. I'll be sharing a powerful, foolproof method to help you set and maintain healthy boundaries, rebuild self-trust, and finally stop people from draining your emotional energy.

You'll also discover the truth about forgiveness and it's not as essential to healing as you might think. We'll explore a revealing exercise that will help you understand who you've truly forgiven and who you haven't...

I'll also be busting one of the biggest myths in emotional healing: that you have an "inner critic." You don't. I'll also be sharing the exact method that turned my life around. A simple, memorable, easy-to-use technique that will teach you how to manage anyone and anything. It's the tool I wish I'd had decades ago. We're dismantling every outdated idea about "managing people" and the false belief that being powerful means having the last word. Instead, we're shifting the focus to what really matters: learning how to manage yourself, your emotions, your needs, your peace, in any situation with any type of person.

The exercises you'll find in Part II are your opportunity to override outdated, disempowering neural pathways and replace them with powerful new ones. You're not just thinking differently, you're becoming different. You learned how you got here, now let's learn how you get out.

IT'S THE COURAGE TO CONTINUE THAT COUNTS.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

**INSANITY IS DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AND
EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS**

ALBERT EINSTEIN

PART II
HOW WE GET OUT



THE SHADOW OF SHAME

**WHAT DO YOU REGARD AS MOST HUMANE?
TO SPARE SOMEONE SHAME.**

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

THE SHADOW OF SHAME

WHAT IS SHAME AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Shame is the belief that there's something wrong with us, that we're a mistake. Shame infiltrates our pure hearts and blameless souls; it suffocates our spirit from the inside out. Shame, when left unhealed, leaks into everything we do and say. It echoes through every wrong decision, every sabotaged opportunity, and every relationship we abandon.

Shame is a soul-eating emotion. It's the toughest opponent we'll ever face, one that steals every drop of joy, ambition, and dignity we cling to. Shame takes everything we have when it goes unchallenged. Just as we begin to rise, shame drags us back under. As we wrench ourselves free from its grip, it twists our arm and breathes noxious lies into our hearts.

Shame directs our reactions to everything we experience. It beds down and grows like knotweed as we, like sponges, absorb the self-loathing and anger projected on to us. Shame assigns us a lifetime of poor mental health and emotional struggles.

Children don't have the cognitive skills to recognise that anger and cruelty are someone else's problem; we believe it must be ours, it's our fault and we blame ourselves. We hear:

- "You're stupid."
- "You ruin everything."
- "You should be ashamed of yourself."
- "Why can't you be more like...?"

..and there it goes, stored into memory influencing every choice, feeling, and thought we have. Our sense of self becomes stained by someone else's shame. We don't realise that the adult who yells at us, mocks us, or belittles us is offloading an emotional weight that's too heavy for them to carry. We simply shrink in the shadow of their shame.

Maybe someone told you they were ashamed of you. Maybe you heard, 'I wish you'd never been born.' Shame feels dense, coercive, and punishing because it's projected by dense, coercive, and punishing people, people who have no idea how to love themselves, let alone love us.

Shame is a tool of control. It's used to silence us, diminish us, and make us feel responsible for things that are not ours to carry. We're blamed for *their* problems, *their* moods, *their* mistakes and we believe them. We believe we're a mistake because *they* told us so. We must *deserve* for bad things to happen, because *they* said so.

Internalised shame sounds like this:

- There's something wrong with me.
- They left because of me.
- She's upset because I'm bad.
- I made him feel angry.
- I wish I'd never been born.
- I don't matter.
- I ruin everything.
- I'm not good enough.
- I don't deserve nice things.
- Nobody wants me.
- Nobody likes me.
- They'd be better off without me.

If there's no one to counter these beliefs, to stand between us and the belief and say, 'that's not true', then we grow up believing every toxic statement uttered by the adults around us is the truth. That we are bad, that we are worthless. Eventually the light of hope that one day we will be loved and accepted goes out. We avoid connection. We play small.

We're terrified of being seen, of speaking up, of taking up space. We think our truth is dangerous, that being clever, funny, or joyful might get us shut down again. So, we hide. We become the person who fits in, who pleases everyone else because it's the safest role to play.

Shame has been the hardest thing for me to heal - in myself and in others - but because it so often underpins all our other emotional wounds, it deserves our undivided attention. To claim our lives back, to live without fear or apology, we must strip shame of its power. We must set ourselves free from the belief that there's something wrong with us, that we're broken. We must exchange *those* beliefs for ones that celebrate our goodness, our courage, our contribution, and our unconditional right to exist, and take up unlimited space.

Shame shrinks us. It makes us feel like we're squeezed and suffocated. The antidote to shame is to unleash and express your energy any way you damn well please.

RECOGNISING THE ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS OF SHAME

Shame doesn't always announce itself with words. It often shows up in the background, silently shaping how we think, feel, and behave. These are some of the ways you might be living with unhealed shame:

How you feel about yourself:

- You believe you're a mistake, that there's something fundamentally wrong with you.
- You often feel embarrassed, guilty, or overly responsible.
- You question why anyone would want to spend time with you.
- You feel uncomfortable talking about yourself.
- You compare yourself to others and always come up short.
- You may have experienced suicidal thoughts and/or made plans to end your life.

How you relate to others:

- You don't trust people easily - or at all.
- You avoid forming meaningful connections.
- You often turn down invitations, even when you want to say yes.
- You stay connected to people who continue to wound you.
- You project your shame outwardly by being critical, judgemental, or defensive.
- You assume people dislike you or are secretly talking about you.

How you behave to protect yourself:

- You're a people-pleaser and a fear-fuelled perfectionist.
- You tend to go 'above and beyond,' especially if you fear criticism.
- You meticulously plan everything or avoid planning at all.
- You procrastinate, often paralysed by the fear of doing things 'wrong.'
- You struggle to express yourself clearly.
- You avoid eye contact and find it difficult to be present with others.
- You isolate yourself or, alternatively, crave constant attention.

These behaviours aren't character flaws, they're trauma responses. They're the ways your nervous system, heart, and mind have tried to protect you. The more you recognise them, the more power you have to shift them, and the more you shift them, the more space you make for the 'you' beneath the shame to emerge - whole, free, and beautifully enough.

Who wouldn't like it if you stepped into the most powerful version of yourself? Who would try and tear you down and make you feel small?

There is no end to the destruction shame can cause. It drives us from one self-defeating pursuit to the next endlessly searching for the love and validation we never received. Believing we're damaged, worthless, and

deserving of poor treatment sends us down a pathway to hell. We ruin our lives while the perpetrators of our pain stand by smirking, smug, and rubbing their hands in glee.

When shame runs the show, it drains our hearts and minds of the very things we need to thrive: self-respect, values, self-worth, wisdom, and resilience. With shame at the wheel, we always feel wrong. Everything we do is wrong. We're suspicious. Untrustworthy. Up to no good.

Newsflash: we didn't deserve what they did to us. We didn't deserve what they said to us. We are *not* a mistake. We're *not* bad. There is *nothing* wrong with us.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

SHAME

(Page 71 of your workbook)

- What was done to you or said to you that planted the belief there was something wrong with you? Were you hit, blamed, ignored, humiliated? Were you told you were too much, not enough, or simply not wanted? Describe the moments that taught you to feel shame.
- What shaming experiences became so deeply imprinted on your brain and body that they continue to shape your self-image even now, years later?
- What memories do you still carry like wounds that haven't healed?
- Which of these experiences are you ready to pull up by the roots so you can stop blaming yourself, and place the shame where it truly belongs?
- Who might you have become if your self-image hadn't been shattered by someone else's shame? Let yourself imagine a life where you were free from their opinions, punishments, and projections.
- Do you still carry responsibility for their behaviour? Have you been blaming yourself for how they acted or what they said?
- What did shame prevent you from doing, becoming, or believing about yourself?
- Name four empowering truths about who you are and what you've achieved - even while carrying the weight of shame. Let these truths be your proof that you are not who and what they said you were.

Shame sends us down wrong paths and twisted roads towards loneliness, addiction, grief, self-sabotage, and pain. Other people's shame has been projected onto us for so long that it feels like our shame too. But it's not. It belongs to them and it's time to give it back.

When we look at life through a window smeared with shame, we see everything through a distorted lens: ourselves, the world, and our place in it. We can't see our true reflection or recognise what we're capable of achieving. Conditioned by criticism and judgement, it starts to feel like everyone, and everything is against us. This is called **cognitive distortion** - a backwards, twisted view of our identity, our potential, and our life.

That window on the world? It's covered in the shame other people have smeared on to it. But when we make the right people accountable for the shame we carry, we begin to heal. We shift from blaming ourselves to saying: *"this wasn't my fault. This story belongs to someone else. I was merely an unfortunate bystander on their stage. It's a role I no longer adhere to."*

Remember: it's not about blaming and shaming others for what they did or didn't do; it's about accountability. As you become more aware of what shame has stolen from you, you can start making choices not as someone who feels defective or unworthy, but as someone naturally deserving of peace, joy, and fulfilment. When you know you've something meaningful to contribute you no longer feel like an imposter. You feel real. Rooted. Whole. When self-value expands, shame shrinks.

Shame keeps us stuck. It kills joy. It blocks purpose. One way to tell if shame is still running the show? Ask yourself:

- Am I doing what I want to do... or only what I must do?
- Is this life I'm living built on opportunity or on a lack of self-worth?
- Am I joy-fuelled... or fear-fuelled?
- Have I been unknowingly engaged by a narcissist to fuel their unmet needs? Very likely, yes - and survivors of childhood abuse are especially vulnerable to it without realising.

Fear is often fuelled by shame. When our confidence and resilience are low, we settle. We tell ourselves, 'This is all I deserve.' That's shame talking. Not truth.

The people who shamed you were carrying their own shame. They projected their darkness onto you. The more they projected, the less brightly you shone. Some people are hell-bent on destroying others, but we don't need to continue the suffering they caused. Let's break the generational link.

"The older I get the more I realise it's not them who disapproves of me, but me who disapproves of them."

When we learn to think poorly of the people who shamed us rather than thinking poorly of ourselves, everything changes. That shift is the beginning of our emotional freedom. Shame cannot survive honesty. It cannot survive accountability. And it most definitely cannot survive truth.

When people can't carry the weight of their own shame, they offload it onto the nearest, most vulnerable person. When we became the target of someone else's shame, we inherited a burden that was never ours to carry. **So, how do we heal the toxic grip of other people's shame?** We do the opposite of what shame wants.

- We speak up.
- We share.
- We tell the truth.
- We stop hiding.

Shame demands silence, so we use our voice. Shame wants secrecy so we tell our story.

We send shame home.

When we give shame back, when we return it to its rightful owner, we break free from its emotional captivity. We loosen the grip it's had on our self-worth, our choices, our identity. And in doing so, we start to see the truth:

- There's nothing wrong with us.
- We are not a mistake.
- We are worthy of love - especially our own - and we are worthy to treat ourselves and to be treated in loving ways.
- We deserve good things and good people in our lives.

We no longer feel the need to cover up shame with overeating, overworking, over-giving, over-achieving, or fixing everything so everyone else feels comfortable - for those types of people whatever we do will never be enough. We felt wrong because we carried someone else's shame but now we know better, we do better. We have a voice and a choice and we are no longer staying silent.

If you're ready, and there's no pressure here, you can tell your shame story over the page:

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

MY SHAME STORY

(Page 75 of your workbook)

- When was the first time you remember feeling ashamed?
- What words have you used to describe yourself because of that shame?
- How do you feel now when you look back at the younger version of yourself who had to carry that unbearable burden?

If writing it down doesn't feel comfortable try recording your voice on your phone. The method doesn't matter; the **ex**pression does. When you speak your shame aloud, it loses its power. This is your moment to give back what never belonged to you. You don't want it anymore.



You bullied me for years.
You made me feel unsafe for years.
You were one of the reasons I wasn't kind to myself.
You're full of shame
and I choose not to be in that place anymore.
I've had to work really hard to value myself.
and I won't go back to hiding things about me again.

ERIC EFFIONG
SEX EDUCATION

Sometimes, healing shame means borrowing the strength of someone else's voice until we find our own. These words, spoken by Eric Effiong from the Netflix series 'Sex Education' offer a powerful reclamation of self-worth after years of being and feeling diminished. If you've ever felt like hiding parts of yourself just to feel safe or accepted, let these words echo through you. Let them remind you that shame does not belong to you, it was given to you by people who couldn't carry their own darkness, and you don't have to carry it for them anymore.

CAN SHAME EVER BE HEALTHY?

I've never met anyone with a healthy story about shame. Shame doesn't serve us. It doesn't evolve us. You might have heard people talk about 'healthy shame,' but what they're describing is our conscience, the part of us that recognises when something feels misaligned with our morals and values. Shame doesn't help us become better people. It doesn't lead to personal growth. Shame stops us from feeling decent, respectable,

valued, and included. Remember, shame is the belief that there's something wrong with us, that we're a mistake. There's nothing healthy about that.

Despite everything we've been through, shame *can* be transformed. We *can* emerge from the emotional wreckage it leaves behind. And when we truly understand how shame has driven our dysregulation and distorted our self-worth, the discoveries waiting for us are profound. We've drowned in oceans of shame as our emotional start in life sank us at every opportunity, but survivors of such trauma carry something else too: hope. The kind of hope that rebuilds and helps us rise from the ruins.

Shame walks with us every day until we heal it. Nowhere is its weight heavier than in the minds and hearts of those who have experienced sexual abuse. The shame is so unbearable that for some suicide feels like the only way out, the final full stop to a betrayal they should never have met. But when the burden of shame is traced back to its source and the silence is broken, healing becomes possible. **Shame shrinks in the presence of awareness and truth.** Yes, there will be debris - undoing the trauma of what was done and said to us will take time. But that version of you - the one 'they' tried to destroy, silence, erase - they are still here ready to rise.

Shame forces us to become someone we're not. It makes us silence ourselves to avoid further humiliation, criticism, dismissal and rejection. But the price we pay is steep: anxiety, depression, social discomfort, loss of identity. The more we try to please others, the more we abandon ourselves. The shame that underpins so many of our trauma-driven emotions does not belong to us. It's time to return it.

THE TOXIC POOPS

The kind of person who mistreats a child, a teenager, or another adult with cruelty, dismissal, or control isn't just unkind, they're unsafe. When people bully others to heal their own unmet needs their behaviour is deeply disturbing. They violate our boundaries, steal our dignity, crush our enthusiasm, and trample over our spirit. They don't just harm us; they hollow us out.

As I'm writing this chapter, the memories flood in. The dysfunctional, abusive parents. The cruel aunt. The resentful, heartless siblings. The teachers who dismissed me. The school bullies. The toxic relationships. I grieve for the losses. I mourn the struggles. But I'm no longer carrying responsibility for these confused and harmful individuals. I'm not ashamed of myself anymore. I **know and believe** that none of it was my choice or my fault.

Shame swallowed my sense of meaning, purpose, ambition, and joy. It weighed me down, it kept me hostage, hiding behind a smile that was begging not to be dismissed or criticised anymore. Shame almost killed me, but humour saved me. And it still does. It reminds me that even when traumatic memories resurface, I have the power to choose how I respond.

It's no laughing matter to live under the weight of shame, especially when it's been weaponised by narcissistic, resentful bullies, but one way I learned to describe having someone else's dysfunction dumped on me was by calling it what it is: **toxic shit**. We must heal the Toxic **Power Of Other People's Shame**, also known as 'The Toxic Poops'.



You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Excerpted from Still I Rise
by Maya Angelou

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HEALING SHAME ONCE AND FOR ALL

(Page 76 of your workbook)

- Now that you understand how other people's shame was projected onto you and how it has blocked your potential, what will you do differently?
- That internal shame-voice isn't yours - it never was - so how will you silence it from now on?

Remember:

Our only source of shame is other people but now that you see it for what it is, you're not just healing, you're rising.

Affirmation: I was never the problem, their shame was. I return it, fully and finally. I am not broken. I am brave. I am not too much. I am finally enough. And I will rise again - and again - because my integrity, determination, resilience and the importance of my healing, is louder than their shame.

And so, it is.

THE TRUTH ABOUT FORGIVENESS

“Children begin by loving their parents. After a time, they judge them.
Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.”

Oscar Wilde

I'd always felt confused about forgiveness. What did it mean? What purpose did it serve? What would it feel like to forgive? How would I know if I had? Or if I should? Was it even necessary? Forgiveness felt like a buzzword pedalled by religious zealots or those wrapped up in the spiritual bypassing of New Age hypocrisy. Nothing about it felt real or achievable.

The alternative definitions didn't help much. 'Pity.' 'Mercy.' 'Pardon.' Each one felt like a dilution of justice. For me, forgiveness only started to feel remotely possible when the most severe symptoms of my experiences began to ease. When I stopped punishing myself, when I stopped craving retribution, and when the injustices that had once crushed me no longer defined my every breath, forgiveness found its way onto my agenda.

I realised forgiveness, if it ever came at all, would arrive not as an offering to the people who hurt me, but as a quiet release within myself, a moment where I no longer felt shackled to their shame, when I finally said: I'm done carrying this.

THE STEPS I TOOK TRYING TO FORGIVE OTHERS

The first step was to stop blaming and punishing myself for what had been done and said to me. **The second step** was to work out who was accountable for the shameful experiences I'd been carrying, and then consciously, intentionally, hand back the suffering they had caused. **The third step** – and by far the hardest – is/was to dig deep enough to find an explanation to replace my rage with compassion and understanding for what had been said to me and done to me. Fast forward many years and

the truth is some people have proved harder to forgive than others. A few, if I'm honest, haven't been forgiven at all. But still I dig, rationalising, justifying, excusing, in the hope that maybe one day I'll strike gold in the emotional bedrock where the most unforgivable memories live.

What I know now is this: forgiveness is not a straight path. It's not a rational concept. It's not balanced, or neat, or tidy. Forgiveness is wild and unpredictable. It's an emotional rollercoaster, not a seamless ride. Exploring the process of forgiveness encourages us to work through our suffering which in turn helps us move towards our goal of emotional freedom. What's more, it's a mission that can be accomplished without anyone else knowing what we're doing. The practice of forgiveness is for *our* personal growth, not theirs.

FORGIVENESS AFTER TRAUMA IS HARD WORK

Forgiveness will mean different things to different people, but for people like us, people who were S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, there's a deeper reason for struggling with forgiveness that other people don't get: **forgiveness after trauma is hard work**. We feel guilty for not forgiving but we're also indignant about why we should. That's not contradiction. That's trauma doing what it does best: removing our confidence around decision making. It takes time - sometimes a lifetime - to release resentment and cultivate authentic compassion. You can't fake it, you can't rush it, and you can't flick it on like a light switch.

SELF-FORGIVENESS

I used to believe that forgiving others was the only way to find inner peace, but hindsight has shown me something even more important: forgiving others is not a compulsory step on our road to emotional freedom, but forgiving *ourselves* is.

You may wonder if there's anything you need to forgive yourself for but anyone who's suffered the emotional wreckage of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D will, in some way, punish themselves for something. When we truly forgive ourselves, forgiving others becomes far less important.

THE THREE STEPS I TOOK TO FORGIVE MYSELF

1. I stopped blaming myself for other people's bad behaviour.
2. I held the right people accountable for the damage they caused.
3. And then I did the hardest thing: I dared to find compassion for myself.

After decades of being told I didn't deserve good things, that I was wicked and not wanted, I learned to speak to my wounded inner child in a way that made her feel seen, valued, and safe. My Conscious Adult Self took control of the past with awareness, acceptance and a logical perspective.

SELF-PUNISHMENT

Self-punishment and self-forgiveness are two sides of the same coin. When we carry shame and misplaced responsibility for the damaging things other people have done to us and said to us, we end up punishing ourselves. We treat ourselves cruelly and unkindly, **we sabotage ourselves to show them how much damage they've caused.** "Look at the mess I'm in because of you." And it's true, we are in a mess because of them. But who are we really hurting when we keep punishing ourselves for their actions? What are we still hoping to receive from them that we never got and probably never will? An apology? Approval? Regret? Acknowledgment? Whatever it is, I can confidently assure you: the people who got you here are unlikely to be the ones who'll get you out.

As we tell our truth and make peace with it, the urge to punish ourselves starts to feel uncomfortable and illogical. It becomes harder to keep turning our pain inwards. This is when the real shift starts to happen, when we start replacing self-punishment with self-forgiveness. That shift doesn't have to be dramatic. It can be slow. It can be one small kind thought at a time. Whether we stop sabotaging ourselves completely or keep stumbling as we try, what matters most is awareness. Awareness gives us a choice, and choice changes everything. If you've been completing the Challenge It to Change It journal prompts you might already feel a pull towards self-forgiveness or at least an unwillingness to keep punishing yourself.

When our default belief is "I'm a bad person," or "It's all my fault," we'll always find ways to punish ourselves and make ourselves suffer. But here's the truth: the symptoms you carry of your pain and heartbreak are not proof that you're broken. They're proof of what you've survived.

Struggles with our emotional wellbeing and our mental health are hard enough to heal without adding self-punishment on top. When we begin showing kindness to the part of ourselves that thought we should have done better, even though we didn't know better, we make room for healing. **The reason we struggle to be kind to ourselves is because we haven't yet forgiven ourselves.**

PUNISHING ME TO PUNISH THEM

When I work with people who are punishing themselves to punish others, we don't focus on their need to forgive those people. We focus on something far more important: **self-forgiveness**. When we do that, self-punishment eases and the obsession with punishing others lightens. We finally realise the love, approval, and validation we're waiting for is something we can give to ourselves.

THE UMBRELLA OF SELF-PUNISHMENT

Imagine self-punishment is an umbrella. The raindrops are the painful, punishing experiences we carry, the ones we've internalised, blamed ourselves for, and continue to be controlled by. As we start to forgive ourselves, something extraordinary happens.

The sun comes out.

The raindrops dry.

We no longer need the umbrella.

When self-punishment no longer hangs over us, self-forgiveness takes its place.

Self-forgiveness is powerful, it's where truth is found and right now, as you read this, with all the emotional work you've already done, this is the perfect moment to stop punishing yourself and find the self-forgiveness that will heal your pain.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

SELF-FORGIVENESS

(Page 77 of your workbook)

Start simply.

Say to yourself: "I forgive myself." Then write down everything:

- you were ever blamed for.
- you've carried guilt or shame for.
- you've punished yourself over.

Ask yourself:

- Do you need to forgive yourself for being in the way?
- For being a mistake?
- For being too clever, too good-looking, too different, or not enough of something they wanted me to be?
- Were you too much or too little for someone else's comfort?
- What went wrong for someone else that you were blamed and held responsible for?
- Do you need to forgive yourself for simply being born?

Let this be the start of your release, the start of your healing, another leap on the path to emotional freedom. Take a deep breath, let your shoulders drop, and keep writing. What were:

- the mistakes you were told were yours.
- the things you internalised even when they were never your fault.

Fill the space with your own self-forgiving truths. When you're finished, take a moment to read your words back - out loud, or in your head.

- With your hand on your heart say, 'I forgive myself for' and write it down:

I was just a child trying to survive.

I forgive myself for believing I was the problem.

I forgive myself for the way I coped when no one showed me how.

I didn't deserve what happened to me.

I *do* deserve peace.

I forgive myself completely.

Self-forgiveness isn't a one-time event. It's a new habit. A new home. A new way of living.

Affirmations

Read them, write them, and say them to your soul.

- I forgive myself for the ways I survived.
- I forgive myself for not knowing then what I know now.
- I forgive myself for the beliefs I absorbed from people who were hurting me.
- I am not to blame for the wounds I carry.
- I give myself full permission to release the shame that was never mine.
- I forgive myself for believing I had to be perfect to be loved.
- I release the punishment I've placed upon myself for other people's pain.
- I am learning to treat myself with the same kindness I offer others.
- I forgive the version of me that didn't feel worthy. She was only trying to stay safe.
- I am allowed to be free. I am allowed to feel peace. I am allowed to move on.
- My self-forgiveness is my liberation. I choose to be free.

Repeat these affirmations as many times as you need. Write the ones that speak to your heart in your journal and make them your new normal. You're no longer punishing yourself for a story that was never yours to carry.

A lot of us didn't grow up with a soft and compassionate role model, and even if we did, there were other forces, external experiences and painful encounters that hardened our hearts and built walls around our fractured selves. Whatever you're still punishing yourself for, it's time to stop the relentless cycle of self-inflicted pain. You no longer need to carry the weight of what *they* did. It was never yours to hold. Set yourself free.

When we begin to practice self-forgiveness - truly practice it - and release the punishing grip we have on ourselves, we start to see clearly with honesty, with truth. We stop seeing ourselves as the broken ones and instead recognise the brokenness of the people who let us down. When we flick the switch from "it's my fault" to "they are accountable," we move from being the observed to being the observer.

For me, one of the biggest battles on my journey to emotional freedom wasn't forgiving others, it was forgiving myself. When you're no longer hellbent on destroying yourself, your whole perspective changes. No, you don't suddenly love everyone, you might not even love yourself yet. But when you stop being your own judge, jury, and executioner, you finally walk out of the 'shame prison' they built for you, and you taste emotional freedom.

When I first looked back at myself as a child, at the younger me shaped by abandonment, rejection, and shame, I didn't feel forgiving. I felt rage. I wanted vengeance for what had been done to me, and for who I became because of it. But I came to understand that carrying that anger was

keeping *me* stuck. It was poisoning *my* potential. And I realised the one person I needed to forgive most... was me.

- I had to forgive myself for absorbing the blame and the shame.
- I had to forgive myself for surviving in ways I judged myself for.
- I had to forgive myself for losing precious parts of myself to the pain.
- I had to forgive myself for the people I'd hurt along the way.
- I had to forgive myself for missing so many amazing opportunities.
- I had to forgive myself for the time I'd wasted and could never get back.
- I had to forgive myself for the belief I was undeserving of peace, joy, contentment, comfort.
- I had to forgive myself for sabotaging a calm life and trading it for the familiarity of chaos.

I began to see the perpetrators of my suffering not as powerful, but as small. As cowards. As dysfunctional people projecting their self-loathing onto a child. If the person who hurt you is out there living their life, seemingly unbothered, let me reassure you: life has a way of circling back. Truth has a way of settling the score. And when it comes to levelling the emotional playing field, it's never too late to seek your version of justice, especially the justice of reclaiming your emotional power.

You'll know you're healing when the self-punishing habits start to fade. When the rage dissolves into awareness. When self-compassion takes root. That's when you begin to reclaim the emotional power that was stolen from you.

And then, in your own time, in your own way, you get to decide: do I, can I, forgive them?

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HOW DO YOU PUNISH YOURSELF?

(Page 80 of your workbook)

- Write down ten things that you're doing to punish yourself for the cruel, vindictive things other people said or did to you. No shame, no blame, only awareness.
- Are you punishing yourself to punish someone else? For example, *"Look what you did to me. Look at the mess I'm in. How can I make them pay?"*
- Have you ever hurt someone else because of your own S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences? Do you punish yourself for how you treated them? Remember, this isn't about shaming you, we've all done things like this which is how we know to ask the questions. This is about self-awareness and healing, and sometimes that means gently confronting painful truths.
- What will you stop doing - or do differently - to end your self-punishment and how you punish others?
- Are you willing to replace self-punishment with self-forgiveness?

YES

NO

ALMOST

Forgive yourself for the many ways you hurt yourself as you did your best to survive. How do you know when you've forgiven yourself? You no longer punish yourself.

FORGIVING OTHERS

Even though self-forgiveness is your priority right now, there may come a time when you want to explore what forgiving someone else might mean for you. Many of us are made to feel guilty or even shamed if we don't forgive others. But the truth is, there are situations and people where forgiveness may never feel right, fair, or even possible. That's OK. You may always hold a quiet hope for justice, however small that desire may be, and that too is OK.

When you forgive yourself first, when you begin to blossom in new and powerful ways, *then* you get to decide whether forgiving others is essential to your peace of mind, or simply no longer relevant to your healing. The choice is always yours.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HOW CAN I TELL IF I WANT TO PUNISH OR FORGIVE?

(Page 82 in your workbook)

This next exercise will help you recognise who you've forgiven, who you still need an apology from, or for whom you think a more formal punishment or consequence is still appropriate.

To help make this personal and visual, we're using Jars of Justice to gauge where you stand with the people who've caused you pain.

Full Jar - You still want to see this person face some kind of justice or consequence.

Half-Full Jar - You don't want punishment, but you do want an apology.

Empty Jar - You've forgiven them or no longer carry an emotional charge around the situation.

Not Sure Jar - You're undecided, and that's completely OK.

There's no pressure here. You can return to this exercise anytime and move the jars around as your healing progresses. How you feel today may not be how you feel tomorrow.

As you reflect, ask yourself:

- When I think about this person, do I feel peace, pain, or panic?
- If I saw them now, would they greet me with kindness or contempt?
- What did they emotionally take from me that I want to reclaim?
- Am I angry that they've never apologised?
- Or do I understand why they behaved the way they did? Maybe both?
- Do I want justice?
- Do I need closure?
- Do I still need to be heard?

You're not being asked to forgive what's unforgivable. You're being asked to honour how you feel.

JARS OF JUSTICE

Let's recap: these jars represent the degree of justice or emotional closure you still seek from the people who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D you and left emotional wounds. Think carefully about what each jar means for you. Is it justice you want (like an apology)? Or do you still feel a need for punishment (like formal consequences)?

This isn't about vengeance or guilt - it's about clarity and emotional truth. Remember to give yourself a jar too! As always - no blame, no shame, only awareness.



Who would you give a full jar to (seek punishment):

Why?

What do you feel still needs to be said or acknowledged to enable you to move on and heal?

Who would you give a half-full jar to (an apology):

Why?

What words or gestures would bring you peace?

Who would you give an empty jar to (I've forgiven):

Why?

What helped you reach that place of freedom?

Who are you not sure which jar you would give to:

Why?

What questions, emotions, or boundaries still feel unresolved?

*

Any surprises? Did you remember to give yourself a jar? The names you wrote under each jar might change over time. That's not a sign of inconsistency; it's a sign of healing. Someone who sits under your Empty Jar today may move to Half-Full Jar or even Full Jar next week as new memories surface or old pain reappears asking to be heard. Returning to this exercise regularly can show you just how far you've come and where your heart still needs care.

As you shine light into the darker corners of your emotional history you may find that forgiveness becomes less about them and more about you. You'll begin to realise that the act of forgiving others becomes less urgent as your sense of self-validation and self-trust rises.

I've witnessed people do this work and emerge stronger. If they've been carrying one-sided relationships for years they finally feel strong enough to disconnect completely. Others lay down their weapons and reconcile with those who hurt them. The surprise often comes when we look at the names we place under the Full or Empty jars: they don't always match our expectations.

Forgiveness will always be a personal choice, but what holds us back isn't a refusal to forgive others, it's the challenge of forgiving ourselves.

You're doing such powerful emotional work here, be patient with yourself. As your self-worth rises and your inner strength unfolds, you'll be amazed at how you ultimately feel about forgiveness. Manage yourself with gentleness. Lead with self-kindness. You're transforming one jar at a time.

A FINAL NOTE ON JUSTICE

If someone's name appears under your Full or Half-Full jar, you might want to take this exercise one step further by writing them a letter. You don't have to send it, though you can if you like. If you *do*, don't have any expectations about getting a response - you likely won't, but you may hear some rumours about angry indignation...

The real purpose of writing the letter is to shift the emotional weight you've been carrying. It's your opportunity to hold them accountable, to give your pain a voice, and to stop punishing yourself for what someone else did or said to you that's caused a lifetime of dysregulated and dysfunctional behaviour. Say everything you've never had the chance - or felt safe enough - to say. Be honest. Be raw. Be unfiltered. Don't protect their feelings. Protect yours. This is your letter, your moment, your release. You don't need to justify your hurt or explain why you're still carrying it. Your story, your voice, and your truth deserve space on the page, in your heart, and in your healing. When you're done writing, breathe. You've just taken another step towards reclaiming your emotional power.

Write or type this in your journal ten times, slowly and consciously: **I am not to blame for what was done to me, or what was said to me.**

- Let each repetition remind you of this truth.
- Let it echo through every moment you doubted yourself.
- Let it loosen the grip of shame, one word at a time.
- Let it rewrite the story you never asked to carry.
- You didn't deserve it.
- You didn't cause it.
- And it never, ever belonged to you.

EVERYONE THINKS FORGIVENESS IS A LOVELY IDEA UNTIL THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO FORGIVE

C.S. LEWIS

Our goal isn't to forgive others. It's to forgive ourselves. It's also to raise our self-awareness so harsh self-punishments are no longer necessary for what they did or said to us. When we stop self-punishment and begin to practice self-forgiveness, we take our emotional power back - we're telling ourselves we deserve better. From that place of emotional power, we're able to discern, without anger or spite, who is worthy of our time, our energy, and *possibly* our forgiveness.

Reluctance to forgive is not always about bearing grudges.

Sometimes, it's about prioritising ourselves in the healing process. The truth is, forgiving the people who stole so much from us becomes less significant the moment we start reclaiming what was taken from us through self-forgiveness. We may still wish for an apology or even justice, but the emotional grip they had on us is gone and with it, the urgency to forgive them.

You were never meant to carry the burden of someone else's wrongdoing, and you are *never* obliged to forgive anyone except yourself.

APOLOGIES AND FORGIVENESS

When I forgave myself I found peace with others without them knowing. There was no need to announce it, to reconnect, or tell them what I'd done, but within me I felt a restful peace. A soft exhale. A release. The knot in my stomach was gone. The weight in my chest lifted.

I forgave someone I thought I'd never forgive because they sincerely apologised: my father. Sometimes I feel sad, and I cry for that terrified little girl who he choked and kicked. There are days when I still feel

distressed about his behaviour and I grieve the relationship I never got to have with a kind, safe father. Who, I wonder, would I have become?

For a long time, I blamed myself for things he did to me that were not my fault, for the years of physical violence and verbal abuse where absolute terror desensitised me. When we practice self-forgiveness we thaw. Our numb and frozen hearts and minds begin feeling again.

WHEN FORGIVENESS NO LONGER MATTERS

If you're no longer triggered by what they did or said, if you're no longer fuelled by anger, or consumed by resentment, it doesn't mean you've forgiven them - it might just mean it doesn't matter anymore. Your life has expanded beyond the old story. You might not even remember when it stopped mattering. You just woke up one day and found you'd moved on. Forgiving others didn't lead you there, it just-not-mattering-anymore did.

When we stop waiting for an apology that will never come, when we accept the reality of what they cannot or will not give, our healing begins to move in a new direction. We don't need their apology to heal. Their silence already told us everything we needed to know. **Changed behaviour is the only apology worth having.**

WHEN SOMEONE CAN'T OR WON'T FORGIVE YOU

I know first-hand how the impact of chaos in childhood can create extreme behavioural problems in adulthood. A rough childhood is not an excuse for bad adult behaviour, but it is a valid reason. Unfortunately, the overwhelming symptoms of childhood trauma don't simply vanish when we turn 18. We carry them into adulthood where they show up as dysregulated behaviour, withdrawal, and emotional outbursts. We damage the very people who try to love us. We alienate them, scare

them, lose them. And when the fog clears, we're left with guilt and shame that threatens to swallow us whole.

Question: What happens when someone won't forgive you for your dysregulated behaviour that was a result of your childhood trauma? When they continue to punish you for mistakes you made that impacted them?

Answer: Where it is safe to do so, you apologise sincerely. You make amends where you can, you allow time for your new intentions to evolve and unfold. Then, if they're still unforgiving and punishing you, you step back. You keep yourself emotionally, mentally, physically, and financially safe.

Why?

Because amidst their attempts to make you suffer sits two wounded children: you, and them. Your job now is to stop sacrificing yourself in a desperate bid to be forgiven and to be the adult for both of you.

Some people won't forgive you, ever. That doesn't mean you haven't changed. It just means they're still attached to their story, still hurting, or getting more from hating you than showing compassion for your mistakes. You don't need to sacrifice yourself to prove you're sorry - and you *are* sorry, so, so sorry - but you don't need their forgiveness to forgive yourself. Respect their space, their needs, their absolute right to be angry with you and *never* forgive you. But for your sake as well as theirs, step back.

Not all wounds are visible. Just because you're ready to be forgiven doesn't mean they're ready to forgive. Make amends where you can without causing further harm and then let it and them be. When you've apologised with sincerity and done all you can to make peace, it's no longer your weight to carry. This isn't about halos or higher ground; it's

about finally choosing yourself. Emotional freedom begins with a desire to lift yourself up and out of the emotional hell you've been living. You don't need their apology. You don't need their forgiveness. But you do need your own.

INNER CRITICS OUTER BULLIES



Did you know there's no such thing as an inner critic? The voice inside your head that says, you're not good enough, not lovable, not capable, not wanted? That's not your inner anything; *that's* an outer bully. It's someone who once shamed you, criticised you, and projected their own pain onto you. You absorbed their critical voice and mistook it for your own.

This was the original voice that told you that you couldn't; the voice that still tries to convince you that it's your own. This shame-fuelled voice belongs to someone who treated you the way they were once treated - and it's convinced you that *you* are the problem.

This voice - this outer bully - has been the root cause of your Imposter Syndrome, your perfectionism, your procrastination, and your anxiety. It's stolen your potential and silenced your truth.

The so-called 'inner critic' has been posing as your self-doubt for years. The truth will set you free, and it's time to tell it.

THE 'INNER CRITIC'

That critical voice we hear in our head is the echo of bullies who we've internalised. For years, they've posed as part of us, whispering their shame-soaked lies to avoid responsibility for the damage that they've done. Their voices left us feeling invalidated, invisible, and never enough.

Outer bullies feel dreadful about who they are and resent the life they're living. They lash out, not because *we're* flawed, but because *they* are hurting. They wield superiority and judgement like weapons. They're imperious, patronising, and condescending. They're terrified of being criticised, so they punish others with judgement. That's *their* coping strategy, but it's not *your* truth. Remember what I said about our only source of self-doubt and shame being *other* people? This is them; the people who continue to stain our every waking moment.

Criticism is external. It doesn't originate inside you. You were not born with an "inner critic", instead you were conditioned to host the voice of someone else's emotional dysfunction. You weren't born doubting your worth; you were *taught* to doubt it. You weren't born ashamed; someone handed you that emotion like a legacy of pain.

When we keep critical people close, we tiptoe around their moods, fawning and flattering, hoping to avoid another sting. We want their approval because we've been trained to equate their critical behaviour with survival. This critical voice is invasive, unwanted, and most importantly, it's not true. You're not their mirror, their scapegoat, or their emotional dumping ground. You are not the voice in your head that tells you you're not enough.

HOW TO MANAGE AN OUTER BULLY

When a critical onslaught comes your way, don't brace in silence - be ready to speak your truth. Tell them clearly how their words make you

feel. Yes, they might ridicule your feelings or double down with deflection, but that doesn't matter. Call them out anyway. Every time. Calmly. Honestly. Without shame. You can even take it a step further. Ask them:

- Has someone been this critical of you?
- Where did you learn to speak to people this way?
- Why do you feel the need to comment on my weight/hair/clothes/partner/lifestyle/sexuality/job/children?

Be their mirror. Be their lesson. Help them see that criticism is not care and shaming people is not a power move. They already know they're being toxic, but most people are too scared to make them aware of how much damage their criticism causes.

Something I've learned about critical people is that when they're criticising us they're really criticising themselves. Their harshest words reveal their deepest wounds. Their unkind, bullying behaviour is never about you. It only reflects how they feel about themselves. Their criticism isn't a truth-telling mission - it's a projection, a desperate attempt to offload their own unhealed shame onto someone else. Their words are not your truth. Their judgement is not your mirror. And you don't need to carry what was never yours. All they're doing is showing you how truly awful it is to be them.

Their criticism is a confession. Their cruelty is a mirror. And none of it belongs to you. The critic simply does not count. Ever. Their opinions, projections, and woefully tragic self-consciousness leave us stronger, not weaker. They don't get our respect. They don't get our trust. And they certainly don't get our time. When the voice of your so-called 'inner critic', your outer bully, shows up, don't resist it. Become the observer. Listen, wait, and watch.

A LITTLE NOTE ON CRITICAL PROJECTION

Psychologytoday.com says this about critical projection: "People tend to project because they have a trait or desire that is too difficult to acknowledge. Rather than confronting it, they cast it away and onto someone else. This functions to preserve their self-esteem, making difficult emotions more tolerable. It's easier to attack or witness wrongdoing in another person than confront that possibility in one's own behaviour. **How a person acts toward the target of projection might reflect how they really feel about themselves.**"

Yep, in a nutshell, critical projection is a self-loathing, passive aggressive emotion looking for an escape route. When someone criticises you - your choices, your look, your voice, your existence, they're often revealing the parts of themselves they can't bear to face. Their insecurities, their failures, and their fears are all being offloaded and dumped on to you.

Projection usually shows up when someone feels out of control. If someone projects on to you, the best way to manage them is to ask compassionately, 'where's that coming from? what happened to you?' Say it with compassion, say it without heat, but let them know you see them and that their inner strife doesn't get to land on you. Projection is their pain speaking. But you don't have to listen.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

INNER CRITIC/OUTER BULLY (ICOB)

(Page 85 of your workbook)

- What words does your ICOB use when it speaks to you?
- What's the tone of its voice? Is it sharp, sarcastic, patronising, or cold?
- Does your ICOB whisper insidiously or shout?
- Do you have a name for your ICOB? If not, give it one now - make it cheeky or ridiculous if that helps.
- Can you visualise your ICOB's face? What does it look like?
- Why do you still pay attention to your ICOB's criticism?
- What do you think your ICOB would say or do if you ignored it completely?
- What names or labels does your ICOB use when talking to you?
- Who in your life - past and present - has played the role of an ICOB?
- How did they criticise you? What specifically did they say?
- How has their criticism made you feel about yourself?
- What dreams, ideas, or actions has their criticism stopped you from pursuing?
- What meaning have you given to their words? What have you come to believe about yourself because of them?
- What do you imagine would happen if you disagreed with your ICOB and stood your ground?
- Do you now believe you can challenge and override your ICOB's criticism and reclaim your power?
- When you've finally shaken off the influence of other people's opinions and projections, how free do you think you'll feel?
- As you hold your ICOB accountable for shaming you and projecting their own emotional debris onto you, what do you want to say back to them?

“INSTEAD OF SPENDING OUR LIVES RUNNING TOWARDS OUR DREAMS, WE ARE OFTEN RUNNING AWAY FROM A FEAR OF FAILURE OR A FEAR OF CRITICISM.”

ERIC WRIGHT

This fear isn't yours by design. It's the legacy of critical voices, projected shame, and distorted beliefs that were never yours to carry. The more you challenge your ICOB, the closer you move towards your dreams - not away from pain, but towards purpose.

Let the fight or flight stop here and let the healing begin.

INNER WARRIOR NOT INNER CRITIC

You are a warrior. Despite the shame, rejection, and humiliation you've faced, you haven't given in. That's why you're here. You're searching for the truth behind your feelings, *and* you're determined to find it.

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, we move carefully, attuned to the memory of how things have gone before. But when you're ready to stand tall, even if you stand alone, that's your inner warrior showing up. Anything or anyone toxic to your wellbeing needs to know that this is your time, this is your life. Fall in or fall out. No shame. No guilt. Just boundaries. These ICOBs, their time is up. Enough is enough.

Be gentle with yourself, you'll get there. Start by focusing on your needs, practice saying no, and learn to be at peace with the consequences. Start small. Build-up.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

ARE YOU TRADING YOUR STANDARDS?

(Page 89 of your workbook)

When we finally understand that 'our inner critic' is in fact an outer bully, everything shifts. We begin to see how much we've been silencing ourselves to avoid being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.

And in that quiet space between the people-pleasing version of us and our inner warrior, we can spot it clearly: the places where we've traded our standards to avoid criticism.

- Think of one situation in your life right now where you're doing this. What are you compromising on or giving up to stay 'safe' from judgement? What are you trading to avoid conflict, rejection, or criticism from your ICOB?
- What has it cost you so far to keep your ICOB quiet. Think about your energy, confidence, joy, peace, creativity, purpose, connection, money or time?
- When will you start choosing to do and say the things you want, and stop trading your standards to avoid discomfort or disapproval? Give yourself permission. What's your first step?
- Who are you expecting to criticise you for doing this? Whose disapproval do you still fear - and why?
- What do you believe the consequences might be? Are you afraid of conflict, exclusion, or being misunderstood? Are those fears rooted in the past - or are they true in the present?
- Think about three ICOBs in your life. What is the comment, criticism, or behaviour from each that has impacted you the most? Name them, claim them, and start loosening their grip.

- What boundaries will you now put in place with your ICOB(s)? What will you no longer tolerate, not even in your own mind? What will you say, do, or believe differently from now on?
- What would your voice sound like if it had never been criticised?
- How would you speak to yourself if you'd only ever been loved, encouraged, and believed in?

Final Thought: Replacing the Critic with a Guide

We weren't born with a critic. We were born with curiosity, creativity, and an instinct to survive. The voice we now hear as an "inner critic" is just an external voice of fear wearing a mask of projection. But fear doesn't get to be in charge anymore. From now on, we appoint a new voice – not a critic, but a guide. One that asks helpful questions instead of throwing insults. One that encourages learning, growth, and grace instead of shame.

Reminder: You Don't Have to Believe the Voice

The voice of your ICOB might hang around for a while. That's OK. Now you know you don't have to believe it, you're allowed to say, "that's not true, that's not welcome here."

You are not the problem. The voices that taught you to feel broken are the problem. You can now start to build the boundaries that keep them out for good.

Talking of boundaries...

BOUNDARIES

When we're recovering from the excruciating emotional impact of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, there's a high probability that we'll have emotional walls. We put these walls in place because we believe they'll protect us. As we find our way through the debris of emotional suffering we know walls won't keep the critics and manipulators out, but they play an important part in our recovery. Walls have a bad reputation, but all they are is an extreme form of a boundary built with only one intention: to protect us.

Quite often we're told by people who don't really know how we feel to tear down our walls and 'let people in.' While healing is in progress I'd like to offer you an alternative option: **keep your walls up**. Include a gate or two when you're ready to allow access to people you feel emotionally safe with, but everyone else needs to stay on the other side of the wall as you continue to heal your emotional history.

You decide the pace at which you move towards emotional freedom. When you see the changes that you're making are working - measured by how you're navigating your emotional battles - you'll have proof that you're winning your emotional war. Only then can you, and should you, begin to 'de-wall' and put boundaries in place instead.

Boundaries act like a personal rulebook. They tell people who we are and what we'll tolerate. They show the world that we're sticking up for ourselves, what's appropriate and achievable for us, and what's not.

With critical and manipulative people, we need strong boundaries more than ever. Very few of us fail to recognise the necessity of putting a boundary in place but setting boundaries isn't the problem - keeping them is and here's why: **consequences!** When you've set a boundary and it's on the verge of being broken, do you:

- Immediately reaffirm the boundary and stick to it, regardless of the consequences.
- Reset the boundary, making it so elastic it could stretch to the sun.
- Or give up, forget it, it's just not worth it.

Whatever you chose, it's the right option for you at this time. Why? Because having been to emotional hell, the right thing to do as you make your way *out* is to consciously protect yourself. When we know different, we do different but, as works-in-progress on our road to emotional freedom, there's a chance we'll *submit* before we *commit* to our newfound way of choosing, feeling, and thinking.

When we have awareness, we have insight into what and who is causing us to make or break our boundaries. Building awareness is the reward, regardless of the outcome. You can still have a congratulatory moment because you were consciously aware of *why* you broke your boundary.

A boundary is a need, *our* need. The threat of painful consequences surfaces when someone else wants their needs met first. In that grey area between asserting our boundary or having it challenged, we have a choice:

- Do we meet *our* needs and keep *our* boundary, or
- Do we fall back on old patterns of people-pleasing, meet someone else's needs, and give in?

Look at the list of S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. experiences - can you identify from the list the reason why you're most likely to break your boundaries? What are you worried you'll experience if you stick to them?

SHAME



EXCLUSION



ABANDONMENT



- REJECTION** 
- CRITICISM** 
- HUMILIATION** 
- EXPLOITATION** 
- DISMISSAL** 

Or is it something else?

- Is there a family member who's threatening to disinherit you?
- A 'friend' who will stop speaking to you?
- A colleague who will bitch about you?
- A narcissistic bully who'll make your life a misery if they don't get their way?
- Are you tied up in a career where keeping your boundaries would mean financial consequences? Would appraisals, references, bonuses, or promotions suffer? When it comes to boundaries and insecure employment should we collaborate, or should we pushback? Isn't it just 'easier' to give in?

Look at it this way: kind, decent people would not ride roughshod over our boundaries. They'd respect them in the same way they respect themselves and us. The Bully-Boundary-Breakers (The B.B.Bs) on the other hand are no better than the bullies in our childhood who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D us. What kind of person disregards someone's boundaries in deliberately dismissive ways? We must respect ourselves and our boundaries and meet our own needs first.

When we look at the B.B.B through the eyes of our conscious adult-self and not through the eyes of our wounded inner child, we'll rise up and meet their bullshit head on.

If you're wavering on a boundary ask yourself: am I choosing, feeling, thinking *this* because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? How hard are you trying to keep the peace? If you have a boundary that would have profound consequences for you if you broke it then make people aware it's non-negotiable and *show them you mean it* by not changing your mind. If it's a time-critical boundary, then set it an hour early. If your antagonistic boss makes a point of saying what an excellent job your colleague did in your absence, then profusely thank your colleague - and identify your boss as an arsehole. Don't allow them to trigger you. There's one of you, and you have one life. There are other jobs you could be doing.

There's something else I've discovered about those Bully-Boundary-Breakers: they're in awe of assertive people. As we continue to stand up to them they back down. I've known B.B.Bs who have met a boundary they didn't like and turned into monsters when the boundary-owner didn't give in. 'No' is a complete sentence. So is, 'I'll think about it and get back to you.'

After a lifetime of people-pleasing and co-dependent relationships, effective boundary-setting requires practice, but you can do this. You might find it easier to start by helping someone else set a boundary and observe how you coach them to keep it. The friend who:

- wants to give up late nights and drinking but keeps partying.
- keeps spending money they don't have.
- moans about, but won't leave, a toxic relationship.

On countless occasions you may have thought, 'this is the last time I'm listening to this', but what if this really was the last time? Put a boundary in place with anyone who insists on swapping emotional trauma stories to bond with you. You're on a road to emotional freedom; going over the pain of the past retraumatizes you and strengthens the dominant neural

pathways formed by traumatic experiences. Ways to heal trauma can be talked about - books you've read that have helped you, courses you may have taken, or helpful quotes you've used - but make sure the focus is on healing, not on reopening each other's wounds. The unexpected dumping of traumatic feelings can leave us blindsided when we've experienced trauma of our own. For their sake as well as ours, we need to steer them away from oversharing. This is where our boundary could lose us a friendship, start a hate-campaign, or trigger a gossip-chain. So what? They're relying on our guilt and vulnerabilities to get their way. Don't give them what they want. Move the conversation forward; don't encourage wallowing. And if they continue to disrespect your boundary, walk away.

When I stopped ruminating on my past, I realised I didn't have much to talk about. There was no conversation, unless it was about trauma. I was ditched by people who only wanted to wallow or create further chaos rather than heal. Knowing we can set unbreakable boundaries to help other people helps us realise we can set them for ourselves too. People may not like it - but you'll love it! Boundaries help us plan our time and put limits in place with people who would otherwise bankrupt us emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Boundaries empower us to be peacefully assertive, so it never becomes necessary to push back or lock horns. There's less stress when there's more boundaries.

Bearing in mind everything we've talked about, take a moment to think about the questions in the next exercise and answer them as best you can. You can always come back to them later. There are no right or wrong answers, no judgement, and no criticism! You're in control. Let's go!!

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

BOUNDARIES

(Page 92 of your workbook, or complete below)

- Where in your life would it be **undeniably beneficial for you to have boundaries?**
- Why do you think there's an absence of boundaries here?
- When it comes to setting boundaries which S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences or consequences do you most want to avoid?
- Who comes to mind when you think about setting boundaries?
- What's your worst fear about setting boundaries?
- What would be your greatest freedom if you set a specific boundary today?
- Which boundary will you commit to setting this week - and keeping?
- What will you say to someone next time they exploit your boundary?
- If you could guarantee you wouldn't be S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, or care if you were, what are the boundaries you would set and keep?

You already have unbreakable boundaries somewhere in your life, lines that get crossed where you have something to say. Have you consciously set these boundaries? Probably not. But when you're really pushed, you know when to say enough is enough. As your self-worth grows, you'll start to consciously set boundaries that best reflect the truth of who you really are. Keeping boundaries all comes down to accepting the consequences - and you're learning to *love* the consequences!


Do this exercise every time you set a new boundary.

This is my new boundary:

These might be the consequences:

Are you O.K with these potential consequences? YES/NO

If you answered no, do you think you could be O.K with them in the future? YES/NO?



**STRONG BOUNDARIES
WILL ONLY BE KEPT IF THEIR
CONSEQUENCES
ARE MET WITH
UNCONDITIONAL
DETERMINATION
NOT TO GIVE IN!**

**YOUR BOUNDARIES ARE IMPORTANT
AND WORTHY OF RESPECT**

SAYING NO

Like boundary-setting, saying 'no' can provoke memories of fear, disempowerment, exclusion, and rejection. We don't want to come over all 'Judge Mental', so we go along with other people's suggestions and persuasions and end up feeling an acute sense of self-betrayal. Saying 'no' doesn't feel like an option when our need for validation and acceptance dominates our decisions.

Hearing the word 'no' in childhood may have resulted in feelings of humiliation and self-doubt so why would we say it to other people when we assume they'll feel similarly humiliated and shamed? When our past experiences tell us to walk cautiously and be careful, we conform. We obey. We don't take risks or try new things. We say **yes** to remain safe. We're too scared of the consequences that saying **no** may bring. There's no doubt that being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. has left us with limited confidence and impaired judgement. We associate feelings like disappointment, unhappiness, grief, rejection, and regret with the word **no**. When I recall being told **no**, I only remember sadness, struggle, unhappy endings, and loss.

WHEN WE WANT TO SAY NO BUT...

So strong is our fear of offending someone and exposing ourselves to the danger of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. that we say **yes** even when we know we should say **no**. Next time you're struggling to say **no** try one of these phrases instead:

- I think I'm busy, I'll check.
- Not sure I can, I'll have to come back to you.
- I'll think about it.
- Thursday? This Thursday? Oh no, I've got therapy/karate/another date.

All these responses are statements, they're closed answers. They don't invite questions or debate. They're not asking for permission in the form of a question like: 'Is it OK if I let you know?' or 'Can I check and come back to you?'

If a pushy person keeps on keeping on, repeat your statement without smiling. If they're stupidly persistent (like they've just spent a weekend at an 'assertiveness' event), use a more forceful statement like:

- 'No' is a complete sentence.
- I think this constitutes harassment.
- You're entitled to your opinion, but it's still no.
- I'm in recovery – now back off.
- No! (said at a volume that shocks them into silence.)
- A blank stare and no response at all. Eventually they'll go away.

Never be intimidated by name-calling or being sworn at - even when it brings back horrible memories and triggers you. Having the last word stands between your ego, your dignity, and your self-worth. Walk away.

A word of caution: a person who is incapable of hearing no and accepting it has their own very serious issues. If you've said no and they've responded with, "OK, maybe next time," or "No problem, we'll miss you," just smile and get on with your day. This is a regulated response to an uncomfortable situation, but no harm done. **But** if you're challenged and the name-calling starts (even when disguised as 'a joke'), or there's more than one of them and you feel intimidated, then exit safely and as soon as possible. You're in recovery from emotional abuse. You don't need to say yes to an invitation to keep the peace. Those were your old habits, the ones you used when your self-worth was on the floor. Now is the perfect time to start putting your needs first and practice saying no or at least say, "I'll get back to you."

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

SAYING NO

(Page 95 of your workbook)

Practice saying no in as many silly voices and accents as you can. I know this might seem a bit weird but there are good reasons for my suggestion. We need to take the heat out of saying no, and humour will take the heat out of anything. Try it. I like to impersonate farm animals saying no – the cows sound best: "Nooooo!" If farm animals aren't your thing, imagine how your favourite actor, sports star, or musician might say no.

- Who would you love to say no to?
- Why?
- What's stopped you saying no in the past?
- What have you made saying no mean about you?

As your true self continues to emerge from the emotional debris that's buried you, you'll say no more often. Remember the question: am I choosing, feeling, thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? It's when you want to say no, but you say yes instead that you must remember to ask the one question. Any consequences will only be caused by people you needed to say no to in the first place.

CONFRONTATION

One big reason why we don't say no and why we give up on our boundaries is our fear of confrontation. When we want to speak up or raise an issue with someone that they may disagree with we're immediately taken back to a time when we were shut down for speaking up. We remember feeling humiliated and shamed, dismissed, and embarrassed. That's why we hate confrontation.

Look up the word confrontation in the dictionary and you'll see it means 'a hostile or argumentative situation or meeting between opposing parties.' My question is: who makes it hostile and argumentative? We can certainly be opposing parties with different ideas and beliefs, but whatever happened to discussing something reasonably? Remember what we said about losing face and having the last word? When we reclaim our emotional power and take time to think things through consciously, we never need to fear confrontation because we're not bringing it.

As we sit there with awareness and a logical perspective, showing understanding and empathy for someone else's point of view, there is no chance of a confrontation. You might meet a self-opinionated dogmatist who loves the sound of their own voice but it's not a confrontation until *both* sides make it one.

When we want a conversation to be non-confrontational, we must approach it with a conscious mind, realistic expectations, and *without* emotional weapons. That's it. Regardless of the grenades the other person armours up with we'll remain untriggered. That way *we both* have a non-confrontational experience. If we go prepared to compromise and negotiate, even to walk away and reconvene another day, then confrontation will not be an issue for us ever again. If we go in peace, we'll leave in peace. If we go in anger, determined to get our way, stand our ground, have the last word, or get an answer at any cost, we're going in weaponised with a confrontational approach.

I know how hard you may have fought for the simplest things, but our fighting days are over. Yes, approach with caution, but also with compassion; there may be a S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D person behind the confrontational mask.

**I WONDER WHICH IS WORSE:
CONFRONTATIONAL PEOPLE WHO ARE AFRAID OF CARING
OR CARING PEOPLE WHO ARE AFRAID OF CONFRONTATION**

MARDY GROTHE

SELF-TRUST

SELF-TRUST IS THE FIRST SECRET OF SUCCESS

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

When we feel emotionally and physically safe with someone, we trust them. That's what trust is. It takes time to build and can be broken instantly. Because of our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences we either tend to be overly cautious before we trust or, as we get pulled in by 'charming' people, we trust too quickly. We might later kick ourselves for our eagerness to trust but we live and learn.

We often overlook the absence of trust, regardless of the cost to our integrity but when we don't feel emotionally or physically safe with someone, we won't trust them even if we say we do. We know in the depths of our soul that we're being lied to or betrayed. Despite our intuition telling us that all is not as it should be, we stay silent to avoid uncomfortable conversations and the fear of being disliked. The stronger our feelings, the more painful the absence of trust will feel. It's also true that the stronger the feelings, the more likely we are to give the benefit of the doubt when it comes to compromising over trust issues.

We must be extra careful to have our best interests at heart with people we know we can't yet trust. This is when our boundaries should be kept cemented in place or, if we're still learning to set and keep our boundaries, then our walls should be up. If we're not ready to speak up and raise questions, we must at least practice caution around anyone we doubt is trustworthy.

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. in childhood, and the trust in our adult relationships is tested, we'll brush over betrayals to avoid the risk of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. all over again. When children experience one emotional

or physical betrayal after another, is it any wonder they grow into adults with so many issues around trust?

SO HOW DO WE LEARN TO TRUST SOMEONE?

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D we may not know how to gauge if someone or something is trustworthy. If we have *any* doubts, we must be prepared to walk away without looking over our shoulder for the consequences. That's basic self-care. If we're wrong, they'll understand. If we're *right*, we've saved ourselves a shitload of pain and aggravation.

Think about an airline with a faultless safety record. We're a nervous flyer with a few bad experiences behind us but they've been dependable, friendly, they've listened to our concerns, and we wholeheartedly trust we'll be safe with them. Or the doctor we've consulted for many years who always diagnoses us thoroughly and professionally, we trust them to look after our health. We trust a friend to have our back because they've proved time and time again that they've been there for us, just as we have for them. These examples boil down to one thing: evidence of trustworthiness. We've collected proof over a significant time that using this service or spending time with this person is emotionally and physically a safe option for us. We can trust them.

WHAT IS TRUST?

Chances are you've said you trust someone without knowing exactly what you mean by trust. When I've asked people what trust means to them, most say, "Hmm, I don't really know." One guy said, "Oh, I guess it means I'd leave my wallet on the table on a first date." To him, feeling safe was all about his money. Cheating on him might not break his trust - nicking his wallet would. Conversely, you might trust someone with your house keys but not with your kids or pets. Trusting others can be a minefield of unpredictable outcomes until experience tells us they've got our back.

On our road towards emotional freedom, we must never second-guess ourselves when it comes to trust. We must learn that trust takes time to build. It's not possible to say we trust someone after a day, or even a few weeks. The building blocks may be there, but the foundation is yet to be built. What I'd like you to decide is: **how much do you trust yourself?**

If you had doubts about someone's trustworthiness, how far would you allow yourself to be compromised by them just to avoid an uncomfortable conversation or the need to say no? Right now, how safe would you feel around someone who had S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. you? This is not about trusting *them*, it's about trusting *yourself* and your ability to manage yourself emotionally. You have your 'I'll let you know' boundary firmly in place, but during a manipulative or patronising conversation do you trust yourself enough to make your emotional and physical safety a priority and walk away from their intimidating tactics? Or to avoid an uncomfortable scene do you allow them to continue talking down to you? Would you trust someone who tells a good sob story to manipulate, or would you have doubts that their story may not be true? Do you feel emotionally compromised by these situations, or do you feel emotionally safe? When we're rebuilding our self-esteem and reclaiming our emotional power, we must keep ourselves emotionally and physically safe - in other words we must **trust ourselves** - not to be pressured into anything by anyone regardless of the consequences.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

TRUST SPECTRUM

(Page 96 of your workbook)

- Right now, out of 10, how much do you trust yourself to prioritise your emotional and physical safety when faced with a difficult situation or a critical person? There's no right or wrong answer, just whatever you feel in this moment:

MY NAME IS **AND I**

DON'T TRUST MYSELF

TRUST MYSELF

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

TO PRIORITISE MY EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY.

- What fears sit in the space between the number you've given yourself and a 10?

Whatever your score right now, you can come back to the Trust Spectrum anytime and measure how your self-trust changes. Your score will change as you reclaim more of your emotional power. Please, please, please, always practice caution and discernment around anyone or anything where you feel emotionally or physically unsure or unsafe. When you're in any doubt, walk away; don't worry about how it looks. As I said, if you're wrong they'll understand but if you're right, you'll be relieved you walked away. Trusting ourselves to prioritise our emotional and physical safety in every situation helps us move past overwhelming feelings, returns us to a present-moment state of calm, and builds our self-esteem as we recognise our willingness to protect and care for ourselves.

Always remember that you're doing this work because you're a kind, loving, sensitive person who's committed to transforming their emotional pain and reclaiming their power and self-worth.

As you complete this next exercise, you may recall names of people who made you feel unsafe and insecure. If you're triggered in any way remember you're responding to a memory but you're safe now. Stop the exercise and return when you feel up to it. It might also be useful to look at the names you included under the full and half-full Jars of Justice. These are examples of people you cannot trust.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

WHO CAN AND CAN'T YOU TRUST?

(Page 96 of your workbook)

- Growing up, who **didn't** have your emotional and physical safety as their priority? Write down their names and hold them accountable.
- How about now? Who can't you trust and why?

This work will prompt you to question if you can trust the people around you. If you're still in touch with the people who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. you, it won't surprise you to learn that you don't feel emotionally or physically safe with them.

Realising that you *don't* trust someone empowers you to change how you see your relationship with them.

- It stops you taking the blame.
- It stops you feeling responsible for their behaviour.
- It stops you pleasing them and going out of your way to keep the peace.

Let them create all the havoc they want. You'll remain calm as you disregard their behaviour.

When we start to look at ourselves and our past with a new perspective on trust, we'll naturally distance ourselves from people and situations that don't have our best interests at heart. You may no longer want to punish someone for what they did or said to you, but the loss of trust may never be rebuilt and that's OK.

Armed with the knowledge you already have - and with more to come - you won't have any problem turning yourself from someone who doesn't trust themselves into someone who scores a '10' on the Self-Trust Spectrum every time.

Remember: nobody needs to know you're doing this work. You can't offend or upset anyone when you're working on yourself behind the scenes.

IS TRUST ALWAYS NECESSARY?

There may already be relationships in your life where you know trust is absent but the 'pay off' is worth turning a blind eye. It's serving you somehow even if it doesn't always feel worth it. In our relationships with family an absence of trust can be draining and makes for a depressing connection. From birth we're programmed to trust parents and caregivers but we get a rude awakening when we learn they are in fact untrustworthy. This early betrayal sets the tone for trust in all our relationships. **Is it possible to still have connections with family if they're untrustworthy?** If you feel unable to disconnect completely but you're fully aware of their limitations, then yes. But avoid having any expectations whatsoever of those family members and continue to keep yourself emotionally, physically, and financially protected.

I know how heartbreaking it is to live in hope that fractured familial relationships can be fixed. Be the Master Observer with these connections and always make sure you practice self-trust. It's worth remembering that you can forgive someone (no longer seek justice or apology), but you know in your heart you could never trust them. You can have compassion and empathy for someone, but the idea of trusting them? No way!

I would say the same rules apply with friendships - but I would go one step further. Friendships that test your trust are not worth your time and energy. Ask yourself why you're maintaining these friendships. Is there a fear-based reason rooted in your childhood that keeps you connected to someone who's pulling your strings...As for other connections such as

work colleagues or acquaintances I always think our personal values, boundaries, and **self-trust** are more important for guiding and building these kinds of connections than whether we trust them or not. Steer yourself away from emotionally investing and keep your own guidance. You can be dependable, co-operative, warm, and friendly but remember, you're the Master Observer. Keep your expectations in check and stay aware. Remember, you're in recovery, and you owe it to yourself to stay safe.

Closing Reflection

You're learning that trust isn't something you owe to anyone; it's something you honour within yourself first. When we've had a hard time emotionally we can easily fall into mean behaviour to be liked and included. This is fear-based, wounded inner child survival behaviour. Our conscious adult-self trusts themselves and says no to office gossip and being pressured to be part of the 'mean team'. Our conscious adult-self leads by example. You're reclaiming the right to feel safe, to choose consciously, and to live your life from a place of wisdom, not fear. Every moment you prioritise your emotional and physical safety you strengthen your self-trust and in turn you come closer to living as your most powerful, peaceful self.

Now it's time to build on that strength. In the next chapter, you'll learn everything you need to know about how to manage difficult, confrontational people - yep, I'm about to teach you how to swim like a dolphin in shark-infested water. You'll learn exactly how to stay calm, steady, and self-led, no matter who you're facing or what you're feeling.

A CALMER ME

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E.



How often has your emotional history got the better of you? You try to assert and express yourself, but instead, you're taken back to a time when you were criticised and humiliated for your opinion. Speaking up cost you your dignity and your confidence. Someone shamed you and what's worse, it was someone you loved and trusted.

You felt betrayed, hurt, and confused.

Fast-forward to the present moment, and your past humiliations roll back in to shame you all over again. As you attempt to stand your ground you forget your words, you feel anxious and panicky, and you sense yourself falling back into a black hole of overwhelm.

As your unmet needs rush to the surface, you find yourself about to say or do something you know you'll regret. You feel disempowered but desperate to save face. What you choose to do and say in the next few seconds will either:

- Intensify the loss of control you're feeling, or
- Interrupt your autopilot habit of throwing a verbal grenade.

In those few seconds, when you ask the question, "Am I choosing, feeling, thinking *this* because of my emotional history?" the answer will always be YES.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. teaches us a method that ensures, whatever the challenge, overwhelm, or fear, we'll have a regulated process ready to interrupt our fear, and stop anxiety in its tracks. A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E becomes our new autopilot habit.

Self-regulation doesn't come easy to people who have experienced emotional chaos and trauma, whether in childhood or elsewhere.

- We've been conditioned to expect the worst-case scenario.
- We anticipate catastrophe and fear confrontation.

- We're sensitive to bad moods, terrified of offending people, and we compulsively worry about what others think ruminating on what we should have said or could have done better.
- We're hypervigilant for the slightest hint of a threat and can develop extreme coping mechanisms to protect ourselves.

There are many techniques that can ground and regulate us when panic and anxiety approach, but they tend to involve physical actions. Often, in those moments, we're stuck in a situation where traditional methods for re-regulating like stamping our feet or clapping our hands just aren't possible.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. teaches us how to speak to our overwhelm and our fear in any situation with any person without them knowing what we're doing. Whatever and whoever we're faced with, A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. teaches us to breathe, think, and respond instead of panicking and reacting.

When we've been adversely conditioned by our emotional experiences, feeling cool, calm, and emotionally collected in stressful situations especially with difficult people is not an easy reach.

Learning this process means you'll stay aware and maintain a logical thought process and self-control despite what's happening around you. As overwhelm peeps around the corner, you'll continue to affirm inner and outer calm remaining composed and dignified.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. has been shared with people who have struggled to overcome the devastating effects of trauma - whether experienced in childhood or at other times - as well as other emotionally debilitating experiences. They've managed to restore a sense of wellbeing, validation, and self-worth.

Severe anxiety, personality disorders, trauma, depression, anger issues, impulsivity, O.C.D., and panic disorders to name a few have been healed with this process.

Feeling triggered is not our fault, we're not to blame, we've been *conditioned* to feel tested. As we navigate our road to emotional freedom, we're bound to meet someone or something that feels like it's testing us. But in those first few seconds when the familiar rumbles of shame begin to stir A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E helps us choose between pain and peace. In those moments we can choose to remember who we really are.

Beneath the emotional debris, we're powerful, calm, wise, and intuitive. We are extraordinary copers.

As someone who's experienced the harmful and disruptive consequences of childhood trauma I know how vitally important it is to have a process that's:

- Easy to remember
- Easy to implement
- Easy to repeat

Practice Makes You Powerful

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. is learned and practiced when you're feeling calm. That way, when you're faced with someone or something that triggers you, you'll already know how to move your thoughts to a calm space rather than scrabble around mid-panic for a process to calm you down. The tools you need will already be present and with repetition they'll be on autopilot. 😊

Don't wait until you need the process; practice using it every day, in every way until it becomes the thoughts you automatically implement rather than the coping mechanism you'd normally react with.

Live minute-by-minute with this process

Use it consciously with everyone you meet and in everything you do. Even with people and situations you're comfortable with, practice using the process; that way you'll ensure it is front and centre in your mind when you really need it.

Support for Your Journey

This life-changing process has meant so much to so many people that there's a page on my website dedicated to it. Free to download, there's a meditation, and a free audio file. Try and listen to it as much as possible because the feedback I'm receiving is that just by listening people are noticing significant changes in their emotional responses. I'm adding free resources to the page all the time so do check it out.

Allow A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E to become deeply ingrained in your brain, and you'll override old programming sending it a very different message about how, these days, you manage fear and anxiety with grace and expertise.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. BUILDS DISTRESS TOLERANCE SKILLS

When chaotic and disruptive emotional experiences have left us with an over-sensitised fear response, raised voices, dismissive looks, sarcastic remarks, loud noises, and urgent requests can start an emotional rollercoaster of chaos, anxiety, and panic. We're plunged back into those fear-based memories of criticism, humiliation, and shame.

When we're hypervigilant for signs that we may again be shamed we fall back on coping mechanisms to protect ourselves. When we engage with an empowering way of coping with our feelings, we develop something called **distress tolerance skills**.

These are skills that help us manage actual or perceived emotional distress. A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. is a series of easily learned distress tolerance

skills that empower us to consciously move from chaos to calm reclaiming our emotional power as we go. When you've learned this process, you'll automatically stop the threat of overwhelm and anxiety from becoming a full-on emotional storm. Your fear response may be tickled but it won't be provoked. You'll take the path to peace instead of reaching for a coping mechanism and invoking a full-on protection squad.

*

If you hadn't already guessed, each letter of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. stands for an empowering step in the process. As you learn the steps, which are quick and easy, you'll re-regulate your fear response allowing the connections between strong emotions and fear-based memories to be soothed and healed. From now on, when you find yourself at an emotional fork in the road, you will always choose the path to peace.

Choosing not to engage in a process of defending and protecting ourselves can initially feel like we're backing down, losing our emotional war, or allowing someone else to have control and the last word.

Are we 'chickening out' of fighting for our right to be seen and heard? Not at all.

What this process teaches us is to protect ourselves without the familiar fear, rage, and indignation we've become used to. This method guarantees we maintain our dignity and self-control and keep winning our emotional war.

A PERSONAL NOTE

I created this process to heal my own dysfunctional and emotionally dysregulated behaviour. Panic attacks, anxiety, and suicidal depression, plus all the 'added extras' that accompany these soul-destroying experiences. It's the process that empowered me to finally heal my childhood trauma and reach emotional freedom. A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

released me from decades of dysfunctional and dysregulated choices, feelings, and thoughts. I slowly rebuilt my life and my mental health, and you can do the same.

When we see ourselves and our surroundings through a window of conscious awareness and logical perspective, we calmly and effectively manage anyone and anything. We no longer feel resentful, overwhelmed, or angry, imagining worst-case scenarios or communicating in defensive, passive-aggressive ways.

Instead, in our minds, we've created a relaxed and compassionate space, a space where the fear of being shamed, criticised, rejected, and excluded no longer triggers us.

Calmly dismissing someone's potential to provoke us and having the power to control our anxiety are powerful skills that transform our lives. When you learn this process, just by thinking the words "A Calmer Me", your fear-based thoughts and memories are soothed, and your fear response is regulated - and all of this is done without anyone knowing the secret of your composure.

I've taught this process in all sorts of circumstances, and I've seen incredible outcomes. I've witnessed nervous people remain rock steady in situations that would once have seen them either running from the room or engaging in mortal combat.

As they applied the simple techniques of the process, they replaced stress and awkwardness with calm awareness. They sussed what was going on and refused to play the game.

By using A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. they learned to recognise the disruptive intentions of difficult people, and step back from overwhelming situations. More importantly, they began to transform their fear of

speaking up and their old belief that tolerating the intolerable meant something terrible about them.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. creates the space for us to reclaim our emotional power and keep winning our emotional war.

A FINAL WORD BEFORE WE BEGIN

Are you still rooted in feelings of unworthiness, or believing you don't deserve good things?

- Dare to believe you're worth it.
- Dare to believe you deserve to feel calm.
- That a peaceful life is normal.
- That there's no need for chaos and drama.

Defending and protecting yourself was once necessary, as was waiting to be heard and seen, but those critically abusive people who got you here no longer have the power to control your life or your emotions. You're now engaging with a process that allows your conscious thoughts to gently move you forward and out of the emotional pain caused by chaos and disruption.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. makes room for our conscious adult self to be a kind protector and for our wounded inner child's needs to finally be met and soothed.

The best time to get to know our fears and anxiety is when we're feeling calm so let's begin.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

A IS FOR AWARENESS

'When I have awareness, I have self-control, and I own myself. When I don't have awareness, I don't have self-control and someone or something else owns me.'

Awareness is the first step in our process. When we become aware of the source of our emotional struggles and suffering and hold the appropriate people accountable, confusion and shame about who we were in the past can be transformed.

We no longer blame or punish ourselves for what someone else did or said to us that damaged us so profoundly. With awareness, we can tell our truth and release ourselves from the belief that the emotional pain we feel is all our fault.

When we learn to merge *awareness of our own sensitivities* (self-awareness) with *awareness of our environment* (situational awareness), we have the golden ticket to *radical awareness* wherever we are and whoever we're with.

Radical awareness means fewer shocks, fewer surprises, and a conscious mind that gets to write a new script.

So, what is awareness?

Awareness is knowledge. It's consciousness. When we have knowledge about a person's ability to provoke us, or about a situation that might trigger us, our awareness fuels us to remain conscious and think about our responses. For those of us who have experienced trauma, awareness gives us the ability to read the room and check for any possible dangers or threats.

When we have awareness, we know how our potential triggers may be ignited and we're empowered to step back and walk away, rather than engage in yet another emotional battle.

- Awareness is perception. It's mindfulness. It's the fuel our conscious adult self requires to soothe our fearful inner child.
- Awareness means identifying how our senses can ground us, allowing our bodies and minds to be calm amid chaos. Awareness is not intimidated by distressing memories because it has knowledge about them.
- Awareness will not bend to people who attempt to hinder or sabotage us because it knows their destructive intention, and it won't play their game.

When we have awareness, we're conscious. And when we're consciously aware, we're empowered to think first.

A PRACTICE IN AWARENESS

How aware of your surroundings are you right now? Would you know without looking up the five nearest objects to you? Become aware of the words you're reading. Really see them. Are you reading them on a screen or on paper? Are you at home? On public transport? In a café? A library? College? Are you outside on a beach, or in a park? Are you in a prison? A hospital?

Look up. What do you see? Observe the colours around you. The aromas. The noise. Do you sense a shift in your posture as you become aware of your surroundings? Or a change in how you're feeling, breathing, or what you're thinking?

Do background noises blend in or do they annoy and trigger you?

THE AWARENESS STEPS

Awareness is the beginning, but it leads to so much more.

- Each time you choose awareness, you're choosing presence.
- Each time you choose presence, you're choosing consciousness.
- Each time you choose consciousness, you're choosing self-control.

The more you practice awareness, the more you quietly reclaim your emotional power one moment, one breath, one choice at a time.

*

Think about the mantra I gave you at the start of this chapter: *'When I have awareness I have self-control, and I own myself. When I don't have awareness, I don't have self-control and someone or something else owns me.'*

For this exercise, we're using awareness to gain knowledge about our environment and the people around us. If we know there's a chance someone may do or say something that provokes us - intentionally or otherwise - we can think before we respond to any triggers. And remember, walking away is also an empowering response.

When we take time to think, we can prepare - even if it's to excuse ourselves and leave the situation. Awareness means we can choose to remain present and practice self-control. No more plunging into dysregulated reactions.

Knowing where potential triggers may be lurking and why and how they may provoke us, means we can unplug ourselves from the power they once had over us.

I had a long list of potential triggers and one day I thought about how to prepare myself for the next time I felt provoked. The 'one question' 'am I choosing/feeling/thinking this because of my emotional history helped

dissolve the trigger. Alongside self-compassion and patience my triggers finally defused completely. When we have knowledge and awareness about how we might be overwhelmed, we can practice self-control and stay empowered.

As we practice awareness, our perceptions of places and people change. Practice becoming aware as you stand in a queue, walk along a street, or go into a shop:

- Are you making choices or having feelings and thoughts because of your past emotional experiences?
- Are you preparing to defend yourself?
- Or are you choosing, feeling, and thinking in more regulated ways?

If someone dismisses you, knocks into you, or jumps a queue, would they trigger your fear of being bullied, overlooked, unheard and unseen? Or does having awareness and knowledge of your potential triggers mean you can respond calmly with self-control - which also includes walking away and getting on with your day.

GROUNDING IN THE PRESENT

Become aware of where you are right now. Hold your head up and look around. You have permission to be here, and you're entitled to feel safe.

It's our **Conscious Adult Self** who's practicing this awareness. When anxiety or panic rise up, it's our **Wounded Inner Child** who will need to know:

- Am I safe?
- Can I breathe?
- Will this pass?

Our Conscious Adult Self - and their awareness - will always answer yes, yes, and yes.

When we're aware of potential triggers in our environment, and we're equipped to think about our responses, we can't be provoked.

When we recognise someone's attempt to press our buttons, goad us, or trigger us, we ask ourselves the one question - am I choosing, feeling, or thinking this because of my emotional history - or simply affirm and repeat:

"I won't allow past pain to ruin present peace."

One of the sweetest feelings you'll ever have on your road to emotional freedom is the moment you realise you've disarmed your fear response and its old coping mechanisms and replaced them with Conscious Awareness. The satisfaction you'll feel when you realise that awareness helped you stop at the emotional fork in the road and choose the path to peace will be the moment you know you're truly winning your emotional war.

When you've faced, unpacked, and overcome a trigger and you've controlled your fear response rather than letting it control you, that will be the moment you see the empowered truth of who you really are. And you'll have done it all in your conscious mind, without saying a word, without confrontation, without defensiveness, without needing to ruminate afterwards about what you should have said or done. You may not even remember the trigger.

You've become aware - the Master Observer.

Seriously, High 5 yourself.

AWARENESS MEDITATION

To help you practice awareness and self-control you can visualise yourself in the following meditation. Below is the meditation script but I recommend plugging yourself in and absorbing the powerful vibrations of the audio version which is available free of charge on my website. Play it when you're out and about, on your way to work, college, an interview, at home, in the garden...anywhere! When you're stuck somewhere that feels oppressive or when you begin to feel overwhelmed, remembering this meditation will help you feel comforted, protected, and safe. The meditation is available as a free audio file at:

www.howtomendyourmentalhealth.com/acalmerme

And if it gets too much you can stop the meditation any time you choose.

MEDITATION

You enter a room through a door that only you have the key to. You unlock the door, walk through with your head held high, and close the door behind you. You decide to lock the door from the inside.

You find yourself in a large room. You choose to sit down in a soft, comfortable chair. In the middle of the room stands a clear-glass partition. The partition is soundproof and unbreakable. It stretches from floor to ceiling and wall to wall. *Nothing and nobody can cross the partition.*

You are safe.

Take a deep breath.

On the other side of the partition are people from your past who have shamed you. Some of them you've forgiven, others not. Be aware of how you're feeling and take a moment to reassure yourself that all is well. You are safe.

You stand up and walk slowly to the partition. The people who have shamed you are seated. They are so burdened by the shameful things they have said and done to you that they cannot move.

After a few moments you return to your chair and sit down. You have nothing to fear; they no longer have any power over you. You are stronger, calmer, and wiser. Whole and complete.

You relax into the chair. Your hands rest gently in your lap, and your feet are placed lightly on the floor. The muscles in your legs, back, neck, and arms are relaxed and soft.

As you look around the room, you notice details you hadn't seen before:

A vase full of flowers on a table.

A lampshade with a fringe and tiny beads stitched to the fabric.

Three pictures hanging to the right of you and a mirror to your left.

You look closely and make out faces in the pictures. Who do you see?

On a shelf, you notice books by your favourite author, several you recognise. Who is the author? What are the titles of the books?

You become aware of noise from outside. A siren blares past. You smile to yourself remaining calm, untriggered by the loud, disturbing noise. You hear laughter and chatter from a café opposite and inhale a mouthwatering aroma. You imagine the taste of spices and soft bread on your tongue.

Your awareness floats gently back to the people on the other side of the glass partition. Their expressions don't bother you at all. Their mouths are moving, but you cannot hear their words or voices. You look at each one in turn and tell them: "Your lies are no longer my truth." You smile to yourself as you affirm: "Nothing and nobody can shame me. Nothing and nobody can harm me."

You are consciously aware of your surroundings. You feel safe. You are in control. You hold your head up and look around. You tell yourself: "I am powerful. I am strong. I am looking forward."

You have permission to be here.

You deserve to feel safe.

You take one last look at the people seated beyond the partition.

You have a message for them, a message only you can deliver.

What is your message?

Now, they are silent. You unlock the door and leave the room, locking the door behind you. You won't return to the room again. You are at peace. All is well.

*

When you're ready, gently bring your awareness back to the present moment. Notice your breath. Notice your body. Feel the safety that still surrounds you. You have practiced awareness. You have strengthened your self-control. You have honoured your power. Carry this calmness with you now, knowing you have everything you need to manage anyone and anything with grace, dignity, and strength. Let's continue your journey.

AWARENESS IN THE REAL WORLD

Practice becoming aware of yourself as you speak. Visualise your mouth moving, the words you choose, the pace and tone of your voice.

Slow down.

Breathe deeply.

Listen.

This simple practice will increase your sense of self-control and awareness. We want to ensure that the foundation of our emotional power is built from awareness. When we're aware of what's going on

externally as well as internally, when we're aware of what or who could trigger us, and why, we can reclaim our power and win our emotional war.

We are aware.

We are present.

We have self-control.

We have the power to choose what happens next.

Fork in the road.

Pain, or peace?

When we're out and about, most of our stress and overwhelm is created by the sensory connections between ourselves and other people talking too loudly, moving too quickly. People can feel scary!

Our senses pick up messages from our environment that put our fear-based memories on alert. Before we know it, we're open to provocation from innocent passers-by, processing loud traffic noises, sirens, scooters, bikes, demands for money from charities, buskers, "5-minutes of your time?" from someone who thinks we want to go paintballing, and *the curse of the modern age*: eyes glued to screens, *nobody* looking where they're going, *nobody* practising awareness.

No wonder we feel overwhelmed!

The good news is, with awareness, we can prepare ourselves. We can anticipate and navigate around these environmental triggers.

We are no longer helpless. We are no longer unconscious. We are aware. And with awareness comes calm, choice, and power.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

AWARENESS

(Page 98 of your workbook)

- What have you learned about awareness?
- What does awareness mean to you?
- Where are you most aware of your emotions? With family, at work, in crowds, with strangers?
- Where do you find it hardest to stay aware and calm?
- What one trigger do you now feel more prepared to manage with awareness?
- How will choosing awareness instead of reaction change your next difficult moment?

Final reflection:

When you next feel triggered, what words will you quietly affirm to yourself to stay aware and choose peace? For example: the one question – am I choosing/feeling/thinking this because of my emotional history, or “I won’t allow past pain to ruin present peace.” or “I choose calm. I choose me.”

Think about yourself in the following scenarios. Choose your answer A B or C based on your current feelings.

Scenario 1:

You’re in the supermarket and it’s busy. The lighting’s too bright, the music’s too loud, people are walking in front of you, bumping into you, reaching across you, and generally behaving like you’re invisible. You finally get to the front of a slow-moving ‘5-items-or-less’ queue for the checkout. Suddenly a person behind you, who’s been complaining loudly about the wait, pushes in front of you and gets to the checkout with way more than 5 items in their basket. Do you:

A: Throw your basket at their head.

B: Say 'I was next if you don't mind.'

C: Think to yourself 'I used to be like that' and gratefully use the next free checkout.

Scenario 2:

You're walking along the high street. It's just after 1pm. There's lots of activity as people rush to get lunch and run errands. You see a guy on a scooter. He's weaving his way down the high street only just missing pushchairs and screaming toddlers. You're almost face to face with him. Do you:

A: Scream and theatrically leap out of the way.

B: Step aside calling him an arsehole and tell him he's breaking the law.

C: Purposefully stand still in all your power and wait for him to pass.

Scenario 3:

You're sat uncomfortably in the reception area of a company with whom you're interviewing for a job. You're called 30-minutes late (no apology) into a freezing cold room. Nobody offers you a drink although they all have water, tea or coffee. Not once during the interview do they use your name. Do you:

A: Thank them for their time but tell them they can stick their job where the sun doesn't shine.

B: Thank them for their time and tell them **they** wouldn't be a good fit for **you**.

C: Thank them for their time and tell **yourself** they wouldn't be a good fit for you. You deserve better.

Scenario 4:

It's Saturday and you've decided to say yes to an online date. You've turned up ten minutes early and waited 15 minutes for your date to arrive.

You order a drink as do they and you both have a starter and main. You find the conversation dull and slow, and you call for the bill. Do you:

A: Go to the loo and climb out the window.

B: Pay your half and, for your date's benefit, summarise your negative experience there and then.

C: Pay the bill and wish them good luck and goodnight.

SCORES:

MAINLY A: Really?

MAINLY B: Good. Work in progress!

MAINLY C: Good job. My work is done. Almost.

Now, let's go deeper. Working with the scenarios above describe yourself without awareness versus yourself with awareness. What's the biggest difference you notice between the two?

Scenario 1:

Me before awareness:

Me after awareness:

What's the biggest difference?

Scenario 2:

Me before awareness:

Me after awareness:

What's the biggest difference?

Scenario 3:

Me before awareness:

Me after awareness:

What's the biggest difference?

Scenario 4 :

Me before awareness:

Me after awareness:

What's the biggest difference?

Reflection:

- Describe a 'real-life' situation that overwhelmed you. There's probably a few, just pick one.
- How did you **react without** awareness?
- Now imagine how you would **respond with** awareness, self-control, and compassion for yourself?

STAYING AWARE IN UNEXPECTED MOMENTS

How do we stay aware when the unexpected happens, when most people would burst a blood vessel to have the last word or run screaming for the door? First thing to remember: even an FBI agent needs a few seconds to sweat and shake before their thinking brain kicks in.

Remember Clarice Starling in *Silence of the Lambs* when she realises she's knocked on the kidnapper's door? You can almost see the word "fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck" go through her mind. Her throat muscles ripple as she swallows. And then boom, she's in FBI mode. Awareness working overtime. Heart racing, senses highly tuned, body trembling but composed. Aware as if her life depends on it because, of course, it does.

When the shit really hits the fan, most of us feel something else before we feel "aware." But what matters is not the first wave of reaction - it's how quickly we reengage with conscious awareness. By the time you get to the end of this book - if not by the end of this exercise - you'll have a mindset that naturally reengages with awareness, consciousness, and logic.

That's the kind of person you're becoming - aware, conscious, and logical. No longer will there be space in your brain for illogical nonsense.

- We're human.
- We've had traumas.
- We've developed sensitivities.
- We'll be works in progress for a while yet.

But whatever chaotic thoughts race through your mind in the first second of provocation, challenge yourself to get back onto the path to peace before you can even finish saying: A CALMER ME!

Remember the mantra: I no longer allow past pain to ruin present peace.

Awareness is the first step. And you're taking it beautifully.

The Awareness Checklist on the next page is another tool to get you consciously thinking about awareness. It's available as a free downloadable PDF at:

howtomendyourmentalhealth.com/acalmerme

AWARENESS CHECKLIST FOR MANAGING ANYONE AND ANYTHING

From this moment forward, this checklist goes where you go! It will fuel your self-control, prepare you for the unexpected, and reduce both social and general anxiety.

Preparation + **A**wareness + **C**ontrol + **E**motional Strength = **PACE** yourself!

Prepare Yourself Before You Leave Home:

- If you're travelling somewhere for the first time, research the location.
- Check maps and familiarise yourself with the area.
- Plan your route - choose the safest, most direct path.
- Have alternative routes ready in case of unexpected changes.
- Look up reviews and feedback about the place if possible.
- Identify landmarks and nearby facilities like bathrooms, cafés, and safe zones.
- Set reminders for appointments and departure times.
- Take your time, don't rush yourself out the door.

Prepare Essentials:

- Pack ID, phone, charger, wallet, keys, tissues, book, water, lip balm, and any medication you might need.
- Carry a small amount of cash securely in case you lose your wallet.
- Bring a small notepad and pen for jotting down important information.
- Let a trusted person know where you're going and when you expect to return.
- Save emergency numbers to your phone but also...
- Write important contacts in your notepad in case your phone dies.

- Keep your phone charged when you can and check in periodically with your trusted contact.

When You Arrive at Your Location:

- Don't rush. Give yourself time to assess your surroundings.
- Acclimatise. Let yourself settle.
- Find a quiet spot to rest if you feel overwhelmed.
- Identify exits and entry points.
- Locate bathrooms and seating areas.
- Find staff members and notice who seems approachable.
- If unsure about anything, ask staff or friendly locals for help but never go anywhere with someone you don't know.
- Assert your right to say no. If they mind, you've dodged a bullet.
- Trust your instincts: if something feels off, it's okay to leave or seek assistance.
- Stick to well-lit, safe, and populated areas.
- Avoid isolated spots, especially if you're alone.

When Meeting New People:

- Observe body language - gauge their approachability and feel free to use your judgement.
- If they're sarcastic, confrontational, or unhelpful, don't personalise it. Observe. Nothing more. And then walk away.
- Trust your instincts, don't second-guess yourself.
- If you get "low vibes," trust them.
- Don't dismiss yourself as "just being paranoid or over-sensitive."
- When meeting new people, observation first.
- Trust yourself to stay emotionally and physically safe. Never mind everybody else. Your people-pleasing days are so over.

One of the biggest obstacles we face when meeting new people is the tendency to overcompensate for not feeling good enough. That's when the people-pleasing, fear-fuelled perfectionist version of us surfaces and thwarts our self-control. But when awareness highlights this tendency, we can stop it in its tracks.

Remember: "No thank you" or at the very least "I'll think about it" are the only responses you need to give. You don't owe anyone your safety or your peace of mind.

Emergency Protocols:

Know what to do in case of an emergency.

- Have a clear plan for leaving quickly if you feel anxious or unsafe.
- Identify safe spots and safe people ahead of time if possible.
- Use calming techniques like deep breathing, slow counting, or visualisation - like the Awareness Meditation.

When You're Back Home Tucked Up in Bed

- Reflect on your experience.
- What went well?
- What would you do differently next time?
- Adjust your plans based on what you observed.

Ask yourself: How will I reward myself for staying aware and keeping hold of my power today?

And finally, have a beautiful, restful night's sleep. You deserve it.

YOU'RE READY!

You've just given yourself something most people never will: **P**reparation. **A**wareness. **C**ontrol. **E**motional Strength. You're no longer moving through the world hoping for peace, you're creating it, with every step you take.

Every time you practice awareness, even in small ways, you are proving to yourself that you're capable, conscious, and in control.

Now that your foundation is strong, it's time to build even higher. Let's take the next step towards becoming A Calmer Me and discover how Conscious Conversation transforms not just what you say, but how you feel about yourself when you say it.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

C IS FOR CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION

When our Conscious Adult Self and our Wounded Inner Child have a Conscious Conversation we're empowered to soothe, calm, and soften our fear-based memories.

Our Conscious Adult Self is a kind and mature protector. We may not have had someone like this in our lives when we were children but it's time now for us to become that protector for ourselves and manage our emotions with grace and dignity.

When our emotional needs in childhood are not met, we spend a lifetime hoping someone will come forward, recognise our pain, and save us. Have you ever done that? I know I have. But we must learn to tell ourselves - and truly mean it - what we once longed to hear from someone else:

- You matter.
- You are wanted.
- You are loved.
- You deserve to be here.
- I'm *glad* you're here.

When emotional chaos and disruption have formed the basis of our earliest emotional experiences we must learn to self-validate.

When fear and anxiety surface, it's the perfect moment for our Conscious Adult Self to step forward and affirm, 'I've got this, I'm safe. Whatever happens next I'll be OK.' This is the day we save ourselves. Our Wounded Inner Child no longer needs to suffer in fear.

What would your Wounded Inner Child like to say to your Conscious Adult Self? Maybe something like:

Dear Conscious Adult Self,

It's me, (fill in your name). I want to speak to you about how we manage our fear. Next time I feel worried, triggered, or overwhelmed, I'd like you to take control. Please interrupt our fear response and look after us.

Say it in your own words. It doesn't have to be perfect or poetic, it just must be honest. You don't need to create a new name or identity for your Conscious Adult Self. You *are* your Conscious Adult Self, and you are also your Wounded Inner Child. Your Conscious Adult Self knows what - and who - caused your dysregulated feelings. And it knows these feelings are not your truth.

Allowing your Conscious Adult Self to stay aware of potential triggers prepares you to consciously manage your emotional responses. It gives you space to think clearly instead of reacting automatically from the fear-based perspective of your wounds.

Don't let your Wounded Inner Child take the wheel. Stop. Think. Be aware. This is not the anxious fear of hypervigilance. This is the cool, calm, collected energy of common sense and conscious awareness. Because if you're not conscious... what are you? You're unconscious! Other words for unconscious? Unaware. Oblivious. Asleep. Do you really want any of those in charge when you're feeling nervous, unsure, or scared? Of course you don't.

You want to be:

- Aware
- Awake
- Logical
- Purposeful
- Sensible

That's what being conscious looks like.

A conscious conversation with our Wounded Inner Child is essential if we're ever going to end the emotional tsunamis of panic and anxiety that threaten to overwhelm us. When we *don't* consciously intervene, our fear-based memories provide endless material for our Wounded Inner Child to have lonely conversations with itself reinforcing old messages:

- I don't matter.
- I can't do it.
- I'll never be good enough.
- Look at all my mistakes.

That is an unconscious autopilot dialogue. It was born from trauma. It is not the conversation we are having with ourselves anymore.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION

(Page 105 of your workbook)

When fear surfaces and old programming takes over, we can fall back into unconscious dialogue - the voice of panic, helplessness, and past pain. But when we consciously interrupt that dialogue, we give ourselves a new voice.

- A voice of calm.
- A voice of self-trust.
- A voice of emotional freedom.

Below are examples of how unconscious dialogue sounds and how Conscious Conversation responds:

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I'm not safe!

Conscious Conversation says:

There's no danger here.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I might suffer if I don't do what they want.

Conscious Conversation says:

This will pass.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

They say it's for my own good.

Conscious Conversation says:

I have my own opinion about what's best for me.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I can't cope.

Conscious Conversation says:

I am an extraordinary copier.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I need someone to look after me.

Conscious Conversation says:

I look after myself.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I can't walk away. I'll look weak.

Conscious Conversation says:

Walking away is the best option to maintain my peace, integrity and dignity.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

They'll judge me.

Conscious Conversation says:

I don't fear judgement from others.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I will have the last word.

Conscious Conversation says:

I don't need to have the last word.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I must fight to be seen and heard and get my needs met.

Conscious Conversation says:

I'll meet my own needs, in my own way, in my own time.

What are some of your own examples?

Unconscious Dialogue says:

Conscious Conversation says:

Remember: when you catch yourself spiralling into unconscious dialogue stop, breathe, and let your Conscious Adult Self take the lead.

- You *are* safe.
- You *are* awake.

- You *are* powerful.

This is how you rewire your mind one conscious conversation at a time.

CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION IN ACTION

When we consciously ask ourselves 'am I choosing, feeling, thinking this because of my emotional history' we give ourselves the chance to challenge what we're choosing, feeling, and thinking - and change it.

In the past, you may have found yourself caught up in unconscious dialogues when faced with overwhelming situations. That's normal. That's survival. But now, you have a new skill; you can practice having Conscious Conversations with yourself anytime, anywhere, with anyone.

Next time you're speaking - whether out loud or in your mind - be aware of your voice. Listen to it.

- Is fear talking?
- Is old pain talking?
- Or is your Conscious Adult Self taking care of you?

Remember, if we're not changing it, we're choosing it. Pull yourself back from the old streams of unconscious, fear-based dialogue that once ran your life. Think about what you're saying. Choose to say something different.

You can practice having Conscious Conversations with yourself every day, so that when feelings of fear, panic, or anxiety begin to rumble on the horizon, you'll already know how to hold back your fear response and speak to yourself with strength, calm, and self-trust.

If you ever need inspiration, refer to the list of Conscious Conversations you just created. Keep practicing. You're not just thinking differently, you're *becoming* different.

**"THE PENDULUM OF THE MIND SWINGS BETWEEN
SENSE AND NONSENSE."**

CARL JUNG

When we live in awareness, we catch the pendulum when it swings into unconsciousness. We feel it moving between clarity and confusion, between emotional truth and emotional distortion. Calmness slows the pendulum. It's the steady hand on the clockwork of our mind, allowing us to think, breathe, and respond rather than react. When we have calmness, we have conscious choice. We have the power to stay anchored in peace, even when fear, overwhelm, or old memories try to swing us into panic.

Calmness is not about never feeling fear. It's about meeting fear and choosing to stay steady anyway. As you practice A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E, you'll learn that calmness is not something that "happens" to you, it's something you choose, moment by moment, through your awareness, your breathing, your words, and your inner dialogue. You can call calmness into your mind and body even when chaos is all around you.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

CONSCIOUS CONVERSION IN ACTION

(Page 106 of your workbook)

- Use the list of Conscious Conversations on the previous page plus your own examples and write/type in your workbook/journal the Conscious Conversation you'll have with your Wounded Inner Child next time your past experiences try to take control of your present peace.

Wherever you are on your road to emotional freedom, write your letter in a way that nurtures, protects, and prioritises you first and foremost. If you feel yourself becoming triggered while writing, pause and practice awareness. Change the conversation you're having with yourself. It's hard being an adult when part of you is still waiting to be parented. Have realistic expectations of yourself as you do this work. You're learning to become your own greatest protector. No blame, no shame, only awareness.

Gentle Note: There is no "perfect" letter. There's only your voice, meeting your pain with your love. That's more than enough.

Dear Wounded, Inner Child...

When you've finished your letter have a think about these two journal prompts:

- What have you learned about Conscious Conversations.
- What will Conscious Conversations help you remember about yourself when fear tries to take over.

Conscious Conversation is our second step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E
A IS FOR ACCEPTANCE

For a long time, I misunderstood the meaning of acceptance when it came to recovery and healing. I believed that accepting a distressing experience meant I was condoning it. Surely if I accepted it, I was saying it was OK. My misunderstanding kept me trapped for years.

Despite all my efforts the absence of real change and healing in my life came down to one thing: I resisted accepting how I got 'here.' No matter how hard I tried I couldn't change the belief that there was something wrong with *me*. I was at fault. I was the villain.

The shame grew stronger. I kept blaming myself for my dysregulated behaviour and emotional pain, stuck in a cycle of reliving my traumatic childhood, raging against the abuse, but punishing *myself* for someone else's horrendous choices and terrible mistakes.

I was so conditioned to believe it was all my fault that I resisted seeing who was truly accountable for my loneliness, my anger, and my despair. Other people's neglectful, abusive behaviour shaped me into someone I should never have had to become. I was conditioned by them to blame myself. I plunged headfirst into darkness. Their abuse buried my light.

When you've been told repeatedly that you're a liar, can't be trusted, and have ruined people's lives, you believe you deserve bad things to happen to you. You don't believe or trust yourself to tell the truth, you question everything. My healing journey began when, guided by a therapist, I wrote down every traumatic experience I'd ever had.

When our recollections *are* believed, when our experiences *are* validated, when we learn that it wasn't *our* fault, that *we* weren't to blame, we can give back the shame and guilt we've carried for so long and we can come out of the shadows. We can switch our light back on.

I have learned that:

Acceptance is not approval.

- It's not surrender.
- It's not saying what happened was okay.

Acceptance is freedom.

It's the moment you stop self-blaming, start holding the right people accountable, and finally tell *your* truth.

When you accept how you got here, the question stops being: "what's wrong with me?" and becomes "what's wrong with them?"

- You stop punishing yourself for their actions.
- You stop waiting for apologies that will never come.
- You stop living in self-rejection and start living in self-reclamation.

It's not easy. You may feel uncomfortable holding certain people emotionally accountable. That's okay. They don't need to know what you're doing. This is about you. This is your private revolution. Acceptance allows the truth to be told within you. It frees your Wounded Inner Child from believing they were ever at fault.

Instead of fighting or denying painful memories, you'll pull them closer and reclaim the version of yourself who was silenced, rejected, and abandoned. The pain lives in resistance. The power lives in acceptance.

When we accept the truth - no matter how devastating - we transform our relationship with ourselves. We no longer see ourselves as the villain. We no longer stay trapped in *their* lies. We step into the real story:

- We were the victim.
- But we are also the survivor.
- We are the warrior.
- We have the guts to face the past and defeat it.

Whatever is happening around you, whatever emotional chaos you may face when you meet it with acceptance, be determined to meet it with power and courage. Stop making it mean something terrible about you. Stop replaying old pain. Start to meet life with a logical, conscious mind and a heart that knows it deserves to heal.

When your Wounded Inner Child begins the old unconscious dialogue of fear and blame, your Conscious Adult Self must step in - calm, kind, grounded, ready to accept, soothe, and protect.

Acceptance isn't giving up.

It's waking up.

Acceptance sets you free.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

A IS FOR ACCEPTANCE

(Page 108 of your workbook)

- What are you or were you rejecting that is refusing to heal?
- What have you learned about Acceptance?
- How will Acceptance set you free from blame, shame, and guilt?
- What truth about your emotional history are you now ready to accept?

Acceptance is our third step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

L IS FOR LOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

When we combine **Awareness** with **Conscious Conversation** and **Acceptance**, we're empowered to look at things with a **Logical Perspective**.

Logical means rational. It's reasonable, plausible, sensible - in other words, it's our Conscious Adult Self responding to potential overwhelm with clarity and control.

Illogical, on the other hand, means nonsensical. It's unreasonable, contradictory, unfounded. It's the Wounded Inner Child grabbing a coping mechanism and fighting to survive.

Perspective is a viewpoint, an angle, a picture, a lens. When we're focussed on remaining calm we see our situation clearly; no smears of shame, no fear-based distortions, just a grounded, common-sense view.

Put **Logical** and **Perspective** together and you get something powerful: a Sensible Viewpoint, a Common-Sense Picture that keeps you steady even in the stormiest situations.

When our Wounded Inner Child paints the picture it tends to be distorted. The canvas is smeared with fear-based memories. The perspective becomes illogical, and our emotions unravel. We know where this fear comes from, and a **Logical Perspective** does *not* invite it to stay.

When we've experienced emotional disruption and trauma, at first a **Logical Perspective** does *not* come naturally. It takes **conscious practice** to calm the distorted view that trauma and fear have wired into our brains. When our Conscious Mind is aware and our Logical Perspective is soothing and steady, our Wounded Inner Child feels seen, heard, and safe. Calm is restored.

If, instead, we allow our fear response/wounded inner child to lead, it will scream:

- You're about to be shamed again!
- The bad guys are coming!
- Grab a coping mechanism!
- Armour Up!
- Fight or flee!

This is understandable - *completely understandable* - but it will lose us the emotional battle and let the **old wounds win the war**.

Remember the mantra:

'When I have awareness I have self-control, and I own myself. When I don't have awareness, I don't have self-control, and someone or something else owns me.'

Awareness and Logical Perspective go together. You can't have an illogical perspective when you're awake, aware, and self-controlled. It's like spreading jam on mashed potato. Illogical.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

LOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

(Page 109 of your workbook)

- What Logical Perspective will you practice from now on in circumstances that once overwhelmed you? Tip: In most situations there's always a peaceful exit to be had. Make your Logical Perspective simple, achievable, and easy to recall. Write your Logical Perspective as a simple statement you can remember and repeat when you feel triggered. My Logical Perspective is:
- What have you learned about Logical Perspectives? Why are they important to your emotional freedom?

Remember: I choose the logical perspective that calms me, not the fear that controls me.

Logical Perspective is our fourth step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E
M IS FOR MEANING

The people who are impossible to please, the angry ones, the sarcastic ones, the demanding divas, and the gossips you just know have bitched about you behind your back, what exactly have you made their behaviour mean about you?

Let me tell you what it means.

It means nothing.

Yep, that's right. **Nothing.**

We spend a lifetime making other people's shameful behaviour mean terrible things about ourselves.

- We blame ourselves.
- We hold ourselves responsible for their toxic choices, actions, and moods.
- We can't help it - we were literally programmed to take the blame.

Until we understand that our dysregulated choices, feelings, and thoughts have been shaped by the toxic messages other people have projected onto us, we stay:

- Emotionally stuck.
- Hypervigilant.
- Self-critical.
- Constantly making everything that goes wrong mean something dreadful about us.

When someone acts in an intimidating, critical, or unkind way, our past emotional experiences are immediately triggered. Our fear response kicks in. We don't stop to think: is this even about me?

Instead, we rush to blame ourselves because long ago, it felt safer to admit it was our fault than to stand up to an angry or neglectful adult. We made their projections mean:

- We were wrong.
- We were stupid.
- We were too much.
- We were not enough.

We punished ourselves then and if we're not careful, we'll punish ourselves now.

But now you know better, you can do better. You have a choice. You can either continue making other people's moods, cruelty, or chaos mean something devastating about you or, you can make it mean nothing at all.

Their behaviour says *everything* about them and *nothing* about you.

Line drawn.

The meaning you once attached to these painful experiences is simply not true. It never was. Throughout your childhood you were conditioned to believe something was wrong with you. You were shamed and blamed for other people's unhappiness. You learned to overcompensate, to fix, to people-please - all to survive. That survival strategy is the root cause of every self-sabotaging behaviour you've struggled with:

- the perfectionism.
- the addictions.
- the broken relationships.
- the endless guilt and shame...

...and it changes today. Every pain, every heartbreak, every wound - they are all linked to the false meanings you attached to yourself because of other people's failures.

Next time someone criticises, intimidates, dismisses, or hurts you, pause; do *not* make it mean anything about you. Instead, silently send it back to where it belongs. Their lies are not your truth. If you feel strong enough, you can even calmly ask:

- What do you mean by that?
- Why do you feel that way?

You don't have to explain yourself, defend yourself, or apologise for existing. Do not feed the beast.

I used to be so over-sensitised to shame and ridicule that even light-hearted jokes could wound me. Anything anyone said - every eyeroll, every comment - I made it mean something terrible about me. It was exhausting. Now I know better, I do better and so will you.

- We must stop dragging painful meanings from the past into the present.
- We must allow Awareness, Conscious Conversation, Acceptance, and Logical Perspective to give meaning to who we are *today*.

Catch yourself before you spiral into the old rabbit hole of self-punishment and guilt.

It's not called an emotional war for nothing!

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

M IS FOR MEANING

(Page 110 of your workbook)

- What have you made your pain-filled past **mean about you?**
- What changes today?
- What have you learned about 'giving meaning':

Meaning is our fifth step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

E IS FOR EXIT

We're learning strategies throughout this book that guarantee we will win our emotional war, but when we first begin to implement them, there's often a messy crossover between our old ways of *reacting* and our new ways of *responding*.

When feelings of overwhelm surface and threaten to undo all our hard work, we need a clear exit strategy, one we are not afraid to use. When fear-based memories take us to the fork in the emotional road, we must know we can walk away from anyone and from anything without losing our dignity or our composure. In difficult circumstances, when your anxiety surfaces around difficult people, exiting the 'scene of the crime' is not just smart; it's essential for protecting your emotional wellbeing.

The core question is simple: **in this moment who has control of my self-worth, my opinion, and my voice.**

If the answer isn't you, then you may need to exit.

- This isn't about protecting them and their feelings.
- This is about protecting *you* and *your* feelings.

You are in charge of you. You get to decide what happens next. It may not always have been that way, but from now on, this is exactly how it's going to be.

If people are difficult, or situations feel overwhelming, you have permission to exit *regardless of the consequences*. Knowing you can leave at any time with your dignity intact may empower you to stay. And even if you exit this time, next time you might not. Either way, no loss of face. No last word needed. No drama. Just self-respect. You're saving yourself. Finally.

Always exit with grace. You don't need to have a meltdown to justify yourself. You don't need to explain, argue, apologise, or seek permission - that was the old way of **doing**, this is the new way of **being**. A simple but assertive: 'excuse me, I need a moment' will do. And if anyone protests, simply repeat it: 'I just need a moment', and keep walking. No arguments. No apologies. No guilt. Just a graceful exit. Emotional power reclaimed.

- Give yourself permission to meet your own needs without second-guessing, and without delay.
- Give yourself permission to leave if staying costs you your peace of mind.
- Give yourself permission to choose yourself again, and again, and again.

This is you, reclaiming your emotional power. Any way you look at it, you win. Those who matter won't mind if you exit. Those who *do* mind, don't matter.

In a few pages' time, you'll learn a breathing technique that when paired with the Exit strategy will guarantee you always leave with regulation, resilience, and respect for yourself.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

EXITING

(Page 111 of your workbook)

The Scenario:

You've worked hard to understand and unravel the confusion and pain of your past. Despite your newfound knowledge, you find yourself feeling anxious in a situation with a difficult person. Overwhelm starts to take hold, and you arrive at the emotional 'fork in the road.'

- What do you do next?
- What do you say next?

Next time you find yourself in a tough situation:

- What conscious steps will you take to exit gracefully?
- What empowering words will you say to yourself?
- What physical actions will support your emotional safety?
- Next time you're feeling overwhelmed by someone or something, will you implement your Exit Strategy? YES or NO?
- How does giving yourself permission to leave change how you feel about your emotional power?
- What does a graceful exit protect inside you?

"A wise exit is never a defeat.

It's a declaration that you choose yourself first, every time."

Emotional Freedom Exit Mantra

I protect my peace. I choose myself. I leave with dignity.

Calm Strength Exit Mantra

My safety matters. My voice is my own. I owe no explanations.

Warrior of Peace Exit Mantra

I step away with strength. I release their energy. I stay true to myself.

Self-Worth Exit Mantra

I don't stay where I'm not respected. I don't fight battles I've already won.

I honour my healing.

Fast Empowerment Exit Mantra

Pause. Protect. Proceed.

When you feel overwhelmed, quietly repeat your chosen mantra to yourself as you exit. It becomes the last word you *tell yourself*, not the last word you *give them*.

A QUICK NOTE ABOUT LOSING FACE AND THE LAST WORD

As we tell our truth and reclaim our emotional power, we no longer need to have the last word - *ever*. The last word is the battleground between our Wounded Inner Child's fear and the calm presence of our Conscious Adult Self.

We often think we'll 'lose face' if we don't have the last word. But the truth is, we gain far more by letting it go. We gain self-respect. We gain calm. We gain mastery over the moment.

Not having the last word will unsettle your 'opponent' far more than any sharp comeback ever could. Let your silence - your conscious composure - be the unspoken last word.

IT REALLY DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE is a fabulous affirmation. Use it often. Repeat it with love. Wear it like armour.

Remember: the loudest person isn't always the strongest person. The calmest person walks away victorious.

Exiting is our sixth step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

R IS FOR RESET AND REWARD

Challenging and changing our emotional responses to stressful situations is a life-altering achievement. Whether we choose to exit or stay, by the time we reach this seventh step, we are ready - ready to reset and ready to reward ourselves for the courage and determination we've shown.

Here's what you need to know: we don't always need to exit to reset, sometimes the greatest reset happens when we stay put, breathe, regulate and choose peace over panic. In the workplace one of the best habits I developed was imagining people's faces comically change as they critically 'appraised' me. I once imagined an ex-boss's nose growing so long it reached the other side of the room. I'd people-pleased and perfected my way through that job for 3 years. During my appraisal he told me I was 'difficult to manage'. No, I'm not, Pinocchio, you're just a terrible manager.

This "Pinocchio Method" still puts a smile on my face today. It resets my brain, soothes my fear-based memories, and gives me a healthier, more conscious perspective on the everyday nonsense we all experience as humans.

Resetting our emotional selves gets easier with practice. Before long, even after stressful encounters, you'll naturally realign your emotions with peace and composure.

And once you've reset? It's time to reward yourself!

WHY REWARDING YOURSELF MATTERS

Rewarding ourselves is an act of self-validation and self-validation encourages us to keep pushing forward on our road to emotional freedom.

Start by recognising that you deserve a reward for everything you've already done: the work, the healing, and the bravery it's taken to get this far.

Then, reward yourself consciously. Choose something meaningful. It doesn't have to cost a lot or anything, but it must feel good to your soul. And if it does cost money and you feel guilty, pause and ask yourself:

- Who taught me that I didn't deserve to reward myself?
- Who taught me that good things were rare, and nice things were a waste of money?
- Who taught me that I had to go without or work hard for what I had?

If the words 'deserve' and 'reward' trigger uncomfortable emotions, you're not alone. When I was growing up, I was told I didn't deserve nice things, but it seems that I did deserve *bad* things. As an adult, when good people praised me, I felt like a fraud. I felt like I'd "duped" them into thinking I was worthy.

If your story is anything like mine, please know that you can rewire those old beliefs. You can create new neural pathways that say:

- I deserve kindness.
- I deserve peace.
- I deserve to celebrate myself.

Change begins when you challenge what's no longer working.

YOUR BRAIN ON RESET AND REWARD

Our brain has a huge role to play in whether we think we deserve reward or not. When it's hijacked by fear-based memories, the reward circuits go to sleep. But when we shift ourselves out of fear and into conscious awareness our brain's natural reward system wakes up again. Healing the fear response heightens our ability to experience joy.

Remember:

- Reward yourself every time you say YES to awareness, conscious conversations, acceptance, and logical perspectives.
- Reward yourself every time you interrupt an autopilot habit that made everything mean something terrible about you.
- Reward yourself BIG every time you exit a toxic situation or walk away from someone who would have once had power over your peace.

You matter. Recognise your progress and reward yourself for it. The courage it takes to do these things is heroic.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

R IS FOR RESET AND REWARD

(Page 113 of your workbook)

- Growing up, what did you learn - directly or indirectly - about deserving rewards? Example: rewards had to be earned through perfection, or I was made to feel guilty for wanting nice things.
- How *were* you rewarded as a child?
- Were rewards consistent, loving, chaotic, conditional or absent altogether?
- How has your childhood understanding of rewards affected how you treat yourself today? Example: I don't celebrate my achievements because I worry it looks selfish.
- Who's in charge of your rewards now – your Wounded Inner Child or your Conscious Adult Self?
- What do your patterns around reward and self-recognition reveal about your healing journey?
- Look closely at your responses and you'll see the patterns, and you'll also see the power you have to change them.
- When you're faced with overwhelm, criticism, or confrontation, what will you now say or do to consciously reset yourself in the moment? Example: deep breath, mental image of Pinocchio, silent mantra: "I choose peace."
- What is your new truth about deserving and rewarding yourself? Write a short, powerful affirmation or statement you can come back to whenever old guilt or doubt creeps in. Example: I deserve to be celebrated just for being me.
- List three meaningful rewards you will give yourself this week when you successfully reset - no matter how big or small the challenge. Example: a coffee in the sunshine, a new book, an early night.

- What have you learned about resetting and rewarding?

Reset Mantra: I don't need a reason to be kind to myself. Peace is my reward.

Reset and reward is our seventh step towards emotional freedom.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E
M IS FOR MINUTE-BY-MINUTE

When we've experienced emotional trauma, chaos, and disruption, time-pressure can feel explosive. In our minds we've set a timer, and the tick-tick-tick is deafening. We'll do everything and anything to avoid being late, wasting time, and missing our often very tight deadlines. Time pressure can cause procrastination, it's why we meltdown, it's why we have panic attacks.

As our fear-based memories of being shamed, criticised, and excluded kick in, our brain hits the brakes on regulated responses. We're thrown into survival mode, and logical thinking goes out the window. Our Wounded Inner Child grabs the wheel, floors the accelerator, and panics. How different would your day look if instead of being a perfectionistic people-pleaser and rushing to beat the clock, you slowed down?

Imagine doing everything minute-by-minute, calmly, consciously, and with self-trust, breathing deeply as you go. As you structure your tasks into achievable segments you have time to take regular breaks. You're thinking logically and breathing deeply through the urgency projected onto you by other people.

You notice that you're not only getting more done but you're being more efficient. You're accomplishing everything in a way that gives you a sense of genuine achievement.

Part of winning our emotional war is learning how to take our time. Ticking off tasks at our own pace without overwhelm makes the tasks more achievable and helps us build our distress tolerance and resilience skills.

When our priority is to meet other people's emotional needs before we meet our own, we tend to do things as quickly as possible to avoid the looming possibility of being shamed and criticised. Even now, when I sense someone's impatience, I can momentarily start to feel nervous about what's coming next. I gently reassure my Wounded Inner Child and interrupt any rising panic. Then, my conscious adult-self soothes my fear-based memories with reassurance that we've got this, easy-peasy.

Go at your own pace.

I used to pride myself on how quickly and efficiently I could do things. I'd find shortcuts for everything and achieve impossible demands just so I could be thought of as indispensable. I even stopped taking holidays because my boss (Pinocchio) panicked when I wasn't in the office. Co-dependent-fear-fuelled-people-pleaser? Me? Well, maybe then, but not anymore! Instead of the praise and approval I'd expected all I got was severe burn-out. I sobbed my way, exhausted, through two months of sick leave.

For people like us, people who have experienced emotional trauma, being put under time pressure is a recipe for overwhelm and disaster. As we heal more of our emotional history, rushing to get things done will become less important as we become more aware of the self-punishing expectations behind our motivation.

Important to remember: if you show signs of people-pleasing perfectionism there will always be 'personality types' who will take advantage of your need to please. All this work you're doing **will help you** recognise these personalities *and* manage them.

When we're emotionally exhausted and time-pressured events kick-in, they could eventually lead to an emotional breakdown - and that's serious.

- If you work at a job where time pressure is 'a thing' and it's affecting your mental health, then find another approach to your job - or find another job. Start aiming for good enough standards and drop the perfectionism.
- If time-pressure is the nature of your job, then decide if you're cut out for the work.
- Is time-pressure created by a lack of organisation, leaving everything to the last minute, time wasting, or procrastination? If so, you might be able to save your job and yourself if you can restructure your methods and look for a more logical and self-empathetic approach to your work.

Whatever's causing your time-pressure you must find an alternative to the energy-zapping demands you're facing. You may even love the feeling of indispensability (I get it), but is the price you pay for that momentary glow worth it? I'd say not.

When we're under time-pressure we must tell ourselves: 'my needs matter.' If we need a break, a drink, a sandwich, we must take the time to meet our needs. When we take care of **ourselves first**, we gain the awareness and perspective to take care of **someone else next**. You've heard the saying about putting on your own oxygen mask first? Even if you're in charge of a child you need oxygen first *before* you can help them.

When you're feeling the burn from time-pressure, STOP. Become aware of yourself and your surroundings, return to the present moment, calm your wandering thoughts, take a few deep breaths. Don't make any further decisions until you have a clear mental space to think from. Being rushed or rushing yourself into decisions means you're likely to decide something for the wrong reasons and regret it. Step back and step away

from what or who is overwhelming you. Do so with dignity, no drama. Exit if you need to, then reset, and reward.

Time-pressure is a trigger for an emotionally exhausted person. It looms over us like a demon, cloaking us in shame and judgement. We believe if we can't meet our deadlines we'll be humiliated, criticised, and dismissed - at least that's what our wounded inner child believes. Our Conscious Adult Self however is wiser to the shenanigans of the pushy people who tell us, 'it must be done now!' even if that pushy person is us...

Time is precious, **but it never needs to feel pressured**. We are the bosses of our time; we're lighting the way and slowing down to get more done.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

MINUTE-BY-MINUTE

(Page 116 of your workbook)

- What needs to change in your life to allow you to slow down and live minute-by-minute? Think about your job, your studies, your relationships, your day-to-day habits.
- What time commitments or expectations create a feeling of stress just thinking about them?
- What time-pressured obligations are you still carrying that you don't even want anymore?
- Whose approval, whose expectations, whose deadlines are you still trying to meet - and why?
- What have you learned about living minute-by-minute?

When we're moving through our day minute-by-minute, we have awareness. When we practice awareness, we are conscious. Our focus is here, now, with the task right in front of us. Our Conscious Adult Self is at the wheel, and our Wounded Inner Child is asleep in the back seat. Bliss.

Whatever's waiting to be done will just have to wait while we focus on this moment, this task, this breath. If we allow the future to distract us, we suspend our conscious awareness. We slip back into survival mode meeting someone else's needs to avoid confrontation and chasing a false sense of safety.

When we slow down, we become mindful of our choices, feelings, and thoughts. When we live minute-by-minute, we stay present, we stay calm, and most importantly we stay empowered.

Minute-by-Minute is our eighth step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E
E IS FOR EMPOWERED

We've arrived at the final step of our process. We've walked through emotions that once had the power to overwhelm us - and we didn't just survive; we learned how to transform them.

When we intentionally choose, feel, and think with awareness, consciousness, acceptance, and logic, we're no longer trapped by our past. We're travelling with emotional freedom and moving towards an even greater version of ourselves.

It's not selfish to meet our own needs, it's not wrong to prioritise our peace. It's self-compassion, it's self-preservation, it's empowerment.

When we're:

- Practising awareness, having conscious conversations, prioritising our emotional needs.
- Accepting not rejecting our emotional history.
- Allowing a Logical Perspective to give us a clear view.
- Making our past mean something powerful and positive.
- Stepping away and exiting when we need to.
- Resetting and rewarding ourselves.
- And changing our minds if we choose to.

This is when we have all the evidence we need that we're becoming our most powerful selves.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

E IS FOR EMPOWERED

(Page 118 of your workbook)

- Right now, how would you rate your emotional power out of ten?
- What would need to change for you to raise that number?
- What does the empowered version of you believe about themselves?
- What does the empowered version of you look like?
- How do they move through the world?
- What do they do differently compared to how you used to live?
- How do they feel inside?
- What changes will your empowered self create in your life, starting today?
- Think about what disempowerment has cost you over the years. What would you reclaim if you took your power back?
- When you don't feel empowered, you feel like this:
- When you feel empowered, you feel like this:
- Who or what stole your emotional power in the past?
- How did they do it? What weapons did they use – shame, criticism, fear, neglect?
- And finally, what would your empowered conscious adult self tell you about your past self?

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

EMPOWERING 'I AM' STATEMENTS

(Page 122 of your workbook)

You've come a long way emotionally since the start of this book.

- What do you believe is true for you now that you didn't believe before? Write as many truths as you want. Let your empowered voice be loud and clear.
- How has your opinion about the part you played in your emotional history changed?
- How do you feel about your future now?

Empowering Words

Think about the Empowering Words you'll use to describe yourself going forward. Examples include:

Dignified, Brave, Kind, Expressive, Alluring, Independent, Clever, Patient, Sociable, Generous, Open-hearted, Loving, Tolerant, Determined, Organised, Decisive.

- Do any of these words spark something in you?
- Do any of them feel out of reach or triggering?
- Or do they make you feel motivated, excited, and powerful?

The possibilities are endless. Choose the words that honour who you are and who you're becoming.

Empowering mantra to repeat every day

I am not my past. I am my power

EMPATHY FOR OURSELVES

I want to stop for a moment and acknowledge you for everything you've been through. The mountains of emotional pain you've climbed, and the hours, days, months and years of loneliness, sadness, and grief that brought you here. It's an achievement that you're still willing to do what it takes to release yourself from the ties that have bound you to the pain of your past. When was the last time you looked in the mirror and acknowledged yourself for how far you've come?

Empathy is about having compassion for our experiences, but it's also about understanding the limits our experiences have placed on us. Whatever's been done to us or said to us, we can still go from strength to strength but sometimes we need to do it minute-by-minute.

If we've never been shown empathy, we won't know what it looks like, and we won't practice it. We're often so resistant to being a victim and feeling sorry for ourselves that saying 'poor me' feels self-indulgent and wrong. But empathising with ourselves doesn't mean we feel sorry for ourselves or that we're trapped in victimhood. It means we recognise that what we experienced wasn't normal. It came at a high price to our progress and psychological strength, and self-empathy is our reward.

We know we've been emotionally challenged by what we've been through; self-empathy means we're prepared to treat ourselves with patience and kindness as we conquer our battles and win our emotional war. There are no brave faces required here. Judge Mental has left the room. All you need is your truth about how you feel right now. Practice empathy and speak kindly and compassionately to yourself in those moments when you feel overwhelmed. You always have the exit option if you need it. Honour your journey. Know your limits.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

EMPATHY

(Page 125 of your workbook)

- How will you show empathy to yourself for the tough times you've been through?
- Next time you find yourself in a tough situation, what will you do and say to yourself?
- How will you speak to yourself from now on?
- If you showed a difficult person empathy, what do you think would happen?

If you offer empathy to someone else and an uncomfortable response triggers you, don't panic. It's completely normal to feel unsettled or even embarrassed if your offer of empathy feels rejected. Remember not to make it mean anything bad about you. Whatever response you receive, honour the progress you've made and leave it at that. You've shown someone that they matter despite their discomfort, and whether they show it or not, they will remember how your kindness made their pain feel validated.

They have also been a mirror for you and shown you that rejecting empathy is quite normal when you're not accustomed to it. Practice giving yourself empathy and allow yourself to be a mirror for others.

Affirmation: *I honour how far I've come; I respect what I've survived, and I choose to meet myself with kindness every day.*

A LITTLE NOTE ON OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

When we're children and we're blamed for things going wrong - for other people's problems, moods, or pain - our nervous system learns to interpret any suggestion of blame or a potential problem as incoming threats to our safety and survival. Now as adults - even if it's subtle or not even about us - our body reacts like it's back in those moments of being unfairly accused and in imminent danger.

It's not just "overreacting" - it's our survival system doing exactly what it was wired to do. It scans for danger - am I going to be blamed again? It gets defensive - I must protect myself before they hurt me. Or it shuts down completely - I must stop the threat.

These feelings are still there after all these years because our nervous system is **pattern-based, not logic-based**. It doesn't care that you're an adult now. It still holds the blueprint from when you were small. You're affirming, however unwittingly, that, "when problems come up, I am the target. I will be blamed. I must defend myself."

That's why even gentle comments or neutral statements can make you feel attacked or on guard. It's old wiring trying to keep you safe. How can you start changing this? Here are a few powerful but gentle steps:

Name it in the moment

When you notice yourself tensing up, becoming frustrated, or feeling like you want to push back, pause and say to yourself: this is my old 'blame alarm' going off but I don't need it anymore. I'm safe right now. This helps you separate the past from the present.

Soothe your body first

Because your reaction is coming from the fear centre in your brain (fight or flight), you can calm it with a breathing technique (that I'm about to teach you) and a positive affirmation: 'it's okay, I'm not in danger'. Keep your feet planted firmly on the floor.

Reframe what's being said

Instead of automatically hearing, 'there's a problem, so it must be my fault,' consciously tell yourself: 'there's a problem, I'm not to blame and I don't have to fix it.' You can even make it playful: not everything is my circus, and they are not my clowns...

Heal the old wound

Ultimately, these reactions soften when the original wound gets acknowledged and healed. That means:

- Validating that as a child you were unfairly blamed.
- Grieving the time lost as you carried the adult's problems.
- Reparenting yourself with compassion: little me, you didn't deserve that. You were just a kid.

Journaling, therapy, or even talking to yourself in the mirror can start to rewrite these old scripts.

A script for yourself

When you feel defensive or blamed, gently say to yourself:

- I'm allowed to be human.
- Not everything is my fault.
- I don't have to defend myself against the ghosts of the past.

Daily practice: The “Blame Release Pause”

Notice when you feel that restrictive, defensive, bracing feeling, and pause. Put your hand on your heart, name the feeling. Say quietly: *this is my old blame wound. It’s okay to feel this.*

Imagine yourself breathing out the old blame, breathing in safety. Reassure yourself. Whisper: I am safe now. Not everything is my fault. I don’t have to carry this anymore.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E RECAP

AWARENESS

CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION

ACEPTANCE

LOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

MEANING

EXIT

RESET AND **R**EWARD

MINUTE-BY-**M**INUTE

EMPOWERED

AWARENESS

“I no longer allow past pain to ruin present peace.”

When we have awareness, we have self-control, and we own ourselves. Without awareness, we lose self-control and someone or something else owns us. When we learn to merge awareness of our own sensitivities (self-awareness) with the sensitivities in our environment (situational awareness), we hold the golden ticket to radical awareness wherever we are, and whoever we're with.

CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION

When our Conscious Adult Self and our Wounded Inner Child have a Conscious Conversation, we're empowered to soothe, calm, and soften our fear-based memories. Our Conscious Adult Self is a kind and mature protector. We may not have had someone like this in our lives when we

were children, but it's time now for us to be our own protector. It's time to step up and take charge.

ACCEPTANCE

The pain lies in the resistance. When we accept, rather than reject, our painful emotional histories, we can heal the memories that distort the truth of who we really are. We become empowered to contradict and defy the adults who kept us imprisoned and restricted. Acceptance is freedom. When we stop blaming and punishing ourselves for what was said to us and done to us, the question stops being "what's wrong with me?" and instead becomes "what's wrong with them?"

LOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

When we combine Awareness with Conscious Conversation and Acceptance, we're empowered to look at things with a Logical Perspective. When we put 'Logical' and 'Perspective' together, we create a Sensible Viewpoint - a Common-Sense Picture that will see us through the most challenging situations with the most difficult people.

MEANING

We spend a lifetime making other people's shameful behaviour mean terrible things about us. We blame ourselves for their toxic actions because it's how we were programmed to survive. But now we know better, we can do better. We made their behaviour mean something devastating about us. That meaning changes today.

EXIT

When our fear-based memories take us to the fork in the emotional road, we need to know we can get away from whatever or whoever is pushing our buttons without losing our dignity or composure. Exiting the scene of the emotional chaos is essential to our wellbeing and peace of mind.

Always exit with grace. A simple, assertive “excuse me, I need a moment” will suffice.

RESET AND REWARD

Resetting our emotional selves gets easier with practice. And once we’ve reset, we’re ready for our reward. Rewarding ourselves is self-validating, and self-validation encourages us to keep pushing forward on our road to emotional freedom.

MINUTE-BY-MINUTE

How different would your day look if, instead of rushing to beat the clock, you slowed down and lived minute-by-minute? When you feel the burn of time-pressure, STOP. Become aware. Return to the present moment. Calm your wandering thoughts. Take a few deep breaths.

Being rushed or rushing yourself means you’re likely to make decisions for the wrong reasons and regret it. We are the bosses of our time. We’re lighting the way and slowing down. We’re achieving with joy.

EMPOWERED

When you arrive at the final step of this process, you’ll have worked your way through difficult emotions that once overwhelmed you. You’ve told your truth, reclaimed your emotional power, and you’re within reach of winning your emotional war. This is emotional freedom.

I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

This is a short meditation named after Maya Angelou's wonderful book of the same name.

As I emerged from my struggles with my mental health, I saw myself like a bird in a cage - until I realised the cage door had always been open. All I'd had to do was step outside and learn how to fly. Even if it took me a while to get off the ground or to stay in the air once I was up (which it did), I eventually became determined to free myself from the emotional cage I'd been caught in. I realised that nobody had the power to take away my chance, or my choice, to fly except me.

Would other birds be upset or angry as I dared to stretch my wings? You bet they would. Would they try time and time again to bring me down and clip my wings? Absolutely. So what? The birds who matter will find you and fly by your side giving you strength when you need it most.

The image of the bird in a cage represents how our mental health and emotional challenges keep us caged, but the open cage door reminds us that we always have the choice to stretch our clipped wings and find a way to fly. Visualising this meditation will remind you that, however anxiety and overwhelm have caged you up until now, you can set yourself free any time you choose. The meditation script is over the page, and the audio meditation is available as a free download on my website.

MEDITATION

I see a bird sitting in a cage.
The door of the cage is open.
Even though the bird knows it could be free,
it remains in its cage.

Does the bird feel safer in its cage?
Has it forgotten how to fly away
from places and people
who try to clip its powerful wings?
Does the bird wonder if life would be peaceful
beyond its cage?

I know you're scared, little bird, but you are safe.
The Universe belongs to you.
You can choose to remain in your cage,
or you can choose to fly free.

The bird wonders about life beyond its cage.
It takes its time, it looks around, and it steps outside.

The cage no longer traps the bird.
It stretches its wings, and flies.

Now, we are both free.

THREE LITTLE WORDS

We've known each other a while now and there are three little words I want to whisper in your ear: breathe, truth, reassure. I know, and I mean every word.

First up, I'd like to share a deep-breathing technique that enhances everything you've just learned in A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. After that, we'll look at how a simple truth phrase, and a reassuring affirmation, round off our empowering new way of managing anyone and anything.

THE FIRST LITTLE WORD: BREATHE

I used to roll my eyes whenever I heard anyone talk about the 'calming and healing benefits' of deep breathing. One day, feeling desperate, I tried it - and I've never looked back.

When our fear-based memories are provoked our breathing quickens to pump more blood into our muscles preparing us for flight or fight. When we breathe slowly and more deeply, we're sending a message to our brain that says: 'It's OK, we're cool. We don't need a coping mechanism or an escape route.'

Slow, deep breathing is a sign that we've got this, everything's under control. Even when our fear response starts revving its engine, our slow, deep breathing allows us to reclaim conscious self-control.

As we focus on slow, deep breathing - also called diaphragmatic breathing - we allow more air to flow into our body, which decreases our stress and anxiety. Through our slow, deep breathing our flight-or-fight response - which is always active to some degree - is desensitised. We can't turn it off completely, but slowing and deepening our breathing turns the volume right down. As you continue along your path to emotional freedom, the following breathing technique will be your new best friend:

HOW TO BREATHE: 555

- Breathe in deeply for 5 seconds.
- Hold your breath for a count of 5 seconds.
- Breathe out slowly for 5 seconds.
- Repeat steps 1, 2, and 3 until you feel calm and regulated.
- Sense the awareness and self-control you're now feeling.

PRACTICE MAKES GOOD ENOUGH

I find this breathing technique particularly effective when I can't sleep. Combined with the affirmation 'I have permission to rest and sleep', you'll be out like a light in no time.

As with everything else on this road to emotional freedom, practice the 555 Breathing Method as often as possible - even when you're not feeling stressed or anxious. The more you practice when you're calm, the easier it will be to access when you're not.

THE ONE WITH ROSS'S TAN

Any Friends fans among you will know that you count to 5 like this:

1 Mississippi, 2 Mississippi, 3 Mississippi, 4 Mississippi, 5 Mississippi

And that's exactly how we need to breathe for maximum benefit when calming our nervous system.

THE SECOND LITTLE WORD: TRUTH

I KNOW WHY I FEEL THIS WAY.

I'M NOT IN DANGER.

THIS IS MY TRUTH.

In those moments of overwhelm and anxiety when our fear-based memories are provoked, this truth statement acknowledges the source of our distress. It lifts us out of overwhelm, grounds us in the present, and

restores our sense of calm. It knows there's nothing wrong with us - but it also knows there's a reason why we feel the way we do. This is not delusion or denial. This is truth.

Repeat it until it becomes a dominant belief. Write it down, type it up, print it out, record it, film yourself saying it, get it printed on a T-shirt, a shot glass, a coffee mug... whatever it takes - just remember it.

I KNOW WHY I FEEL THIS WAY.

I'M NOT IN DANGER.

THIS IS MY TRUTH.

BREATHE 555 AND PRACTICE YOUR TRUTH.

STEP 1: BREATHE IN

I know why I feel this way.

STEP 2: HOLD

I'm not in danger.

STEP 3: BREATHE OUT

This is my truth.

Breathe it.

Believe it.

Become it.

THE THIRD LITTLE WORD: REASSURE

When panic and anxiety threaten to overwhelm us, we must reach out and reassure our wounded inner child that all is well, they *are* safe. What would you say to your wounded inner child, or to your struggling teenage self, in that moment of dread and panic? Would you tell them to pull themselves together and grow up? Or would you reach out, put your arm around them, and tell them everything's OK and you've got them?

Be there for them like no one else ever was. Your role now, as the kind supporter - even if you never had one to show you how it's done - is to step up and consciously restore harmony with calm words and calm actions.

Give yourself the time, attention, and compassion you didn't get. See yourself. Hear yourself. Tell your wounded inner child or struggling teenage self:

- You're OK. I've got you.
- You're not in danger anymore.

A NOTE ABOUT MY TEENAGE SELF

Hmm. As I write these words, I realise something important, in fact something I hadn't seen clearly until now. Although I was familiar with abuse from a very young age, it's my *teenage self* who feels the most worn down and broken. She's the version of me who I choose to nurture now.

- It's her voice I'll listen for.
- It's her pain I'll soothe.
- It's her battles I'll fight with awareness, truth, and self-assurance.

- It's her confidence and self-worth I'll help her build by encouraging her creativity and giving her the permission she never had to achieve and accomplish her dreams.

She's the version of me who stayed the course, even when everything inside her was screaming to give up.

As you move forward with your own healing, I invite you to think about this:

- Which version of you most needs your compassion?
- Which version of you needs their hand held the tightest?
- Which version of you most needs to hear, "You're OK. I've got you now. You're safe to be you."

The relationship you build with that version of yourself will change everything. It's not about dwelling in the past; it's about meeting the needs and healing the parts of you that were left behind.

Daily Healing Practice: Three Minutes to Reconnect

Every day - morning, night or both - take just three minutes to:

See your younger self

Close your eyes and imagine your teenage self.

- Where are they today?
- What do they need?

Speak to them

Say something kind to them. It can be simple:

- "You are safe now."
- "You're gifted and intelligent."
- "You don't have to hide anymore."

Show them

Promise them one small action you'll take today to protect them and honour them. For example:

- Stand up for yourself when needed.
- Say no without guilt.
- Let yourself enjoy something fun.
- Rest without apology.
- Pursue a dream they had, or something related to the dream.

Consistency builds trust. The more often you reconnect, the stronger and more secure they will feel - and so will you. You're building a bridge from your past to your present, and to your future.

Affirmation Mantras for Healing and Reconnection

- I protect you. I honour you. I set you free.
- Your light is safe with me now.
- I am the love you waited for.
- You survived. I will help you thrive.
- I walk with you, not without you.
- Together, we are unstoppable.
- You shine through me. I shine for you.
- I am the home you always needed.

If you want something even simpler, almost like a whispered pocket mantra to carry everywhere, here are a few:

- I've got you. I always will.
- You are safe. You are free.
- We rise together. We always will.

RECAP

THREE LITTLE WORDS

BREATHE

Breathe in for 5

Hold for 5

Release for 5

TRUTH

I know why I feel this way.

I'm not in danger.

This is my truth.

REASSURE

You're OK.

I've got you.

You're not in danger anymore.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

YOUR NEW KNOWLEDGE...AND SETBACKS

(Page 126 of your workbook)

As you become more familiar with the practices of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E and Three Little Words, you'll notice the signs of healing: greater self-awareness, emotional self-control, and the unmistakable feeling of calm that tells you that you are winning your emotional war. The goal of this process is simple: to move away from fear-driven reactions and consciously choose a calmer, more empowered response.

If you **experience a setback** - and setbacks are simply invitations to deepen your awareness - take a moment to gently reflect:

- Who or what triggered your fear-based memories?
- What specific memories were triggered?
- Did you experience any feelings of shame, criticism, or rejection?
- How quickly did you remember and implement A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E and Three Little Words?
- What could you do next time to support yourself even sooner?
- How has your ability to reset, breathe, and self-reassure grown since you first started this journey?

Every reflection strengthens your healing. Every small victory rewires your emotional responses towards peace. Our fear recalls those early, scary moments when anger and rejection made us feel invalidated and worthless. The hopelessness we feel in these moments stirs a painful question: **"What's the point in trying to feel better?"** That is precisely the moment we must pull ourselves back from the brink of unravelling and return to our road of emotional freedom.

We are shaped by shocks, insults, and tantrums, and when we're emotionally exhausted the road to recovery can be rocky. We must stay

aware of how easily our fears can be triggered by even the smallest ripple of tension or stress. Feeling retraumatised, anxious, or panicked is exhausting and upsetting but we are in control of our emotional responses - and you know by now that they include walking away, breathing deeply, resetting ourselves, and choosing the path to peace no matter what or who tries to provoke us. You don't need to save face or have the last word. You really don't.

Now that you know why you've been choosing, feeling, and thinking the way you have, you are free to choose, feel, and think differently.

And **that** is emotional freedom!

ALSO...

We're tired of defending ourselves. We're tired of obeying what 'Judge Mental' tells us to do. Next time someone's rude, confrontational, or aggressive don't waste time wondering what you've done wrong or thinking of a clever comeback. Instead, ask yourself:

- I wonder what happened to *them*.
- Is their story like mine?
- What or who do they remind me of?

Refuse to allow other people's overwhelming, toxic behaviour to make you feel emotionally unsafe. Break the chain. Reject the temptation to be dragged into an emotional battle of wills.

When we carry unresolved trauma, we can be tempted to offload our pain in ways that we later regret. Trust me on that one. If we approach life with an 'eye-for-an-eye' attitude it's not a sign of our strength - it's a sign of the pain we're still in. We've been conditioned to defend and protect ourselves but now we're changing that conditioning. We're moving from *defensive reaction* to *conscious response*. We're breaking the habits that

kept us stuck. We're creating new habits that will take us somewhere far healthier, far stronger, and far more comfortable than we've ever been before.

I CHOOSE CONSCIOUS POWER OVER UNCONSCIOUS PAIN

Other people's anger and criticism bring back memories of frightening experiences, memories that reverberate throughout our nervous system. These people may or may not know about our emotional history, their behaviour may or may not be deliberately designed to trigger us, but it still does. Our response, however, is our responsibility and we're choosing **not** to allow other people's toxic projections to trigger us anymore.

Very few people become difficult, critical, judgmental, angry, defiant, defensive, or argumentative unless they carry traumatic experiences of their own. What's really going on behind their mask? With practice and experience, you'll be empowered to ask: *what or who caused them so much pain?* And that's a great example of making someone's behaviour mean something worrying *about them, not about you.*

Being at peace with others becomes much easier when we're at peace with ourselves. When we end the *internal* emotional war, the *external* emotional war is won. We might still have the occasional blip but now, we're empowered to respond differently. We're asking big questions and receiving big answers, all of which help us heal our emotional history.

We're lifting ourselves out of confusion by telling the truth about our emotional history, healing our emotional present, and protecting our emotional future. We're directing ourselves into a space of conscious curiosity and emotional freedom whilst remembering that we can only control ourselves.

I'm not suggesting you spend hours analysing every encounter, but over the next few weeks you might want to reflect on:

- Why did I feel triggered?
- Who triggered me?
- What old memory or wound did it touch?

We tend to feel deeply invalidated as adults when we were deeply invalidated as children. With hearts and minds full of **invalidating** experiences, we must build a new store of **validating** experiences instead. We must rise above the old provocations. We must own our worth.

Affirmation: I matter. I count. I am valid.

When we accept that our lives have been shaped by the wounds we've borne from past trauma, when we understand who and where that trauma came from and how it still influences us, we can energetically give it back to its rightful owner. This creates the space we need to reclaim our emotional power, embrace emotional freedom, and win our emotional war.

As you move further down the road towards emotional freedom it won't matter how stropy, irritable, or dysregulated other people are - they can be as chaotic as they like. You'll remain calm and untriggered, because you've learned to switch your focus from them to you and to ask yourself:

"I wonder what happened to them...?"

And there you have it! You've equipped yourself with a straightforward but profoundly powerful process that teaches you how to manage anyone and anything, despite your emotional history.

How subtle and quiet - or loud and emotional - has the impact of this process been for you?

Every empowering step of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E offers its own gifts. Feel free to revisit them as stand-alone practices, focusing on whichever step you need most at any moment.

Once we embrace the healing powers of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E, something incredible happens:

- We can afford to be emotionally generous.
- We can smile, say hello, and be the person who calmly says, "don't worry, we can sort this out."

For the first time in our lives, we're not the person desperately trying to be validated. We're not the one scrambling to avoid anxiety, begging to have our needs met, dodging criticism, or trying to redirect a catastrophe with frantic, stress-inducing fixes. Once upon a time, in someone else's broken story, we thought we had to save the day to be worthy.

No more.

It's time to tell the truth of who we really are. It's time to put our needs first.

With awareness and conscious conversation, we can soothe sensory experiences and restore calm. We know the only source of our self-doubt and shame has been other people. We weren't born carrying these disempowered feelings - they were programmed into us.

They no longer serve us.

They once led us down paths of drama, confrontation, and chaos, convincing us that life had to be loud and catastrophic to be meaningful.

We're done with that.

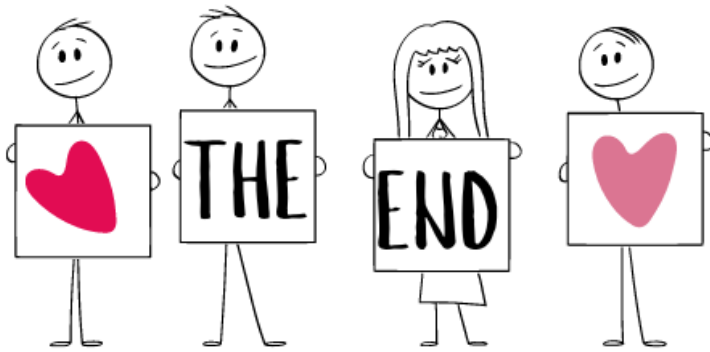
Learn the values and purpose of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E, and it will run quietly in the background like a healing operating system, guiding you every time you feel overwhelmed, anxious, intimidated, or scared.

- Allow awareness to wash over you.
- Have a conscious conversation with yourself.
- Let a logical perspective be your guide.

Allow your nervous system to return to its natural state of calm, conscious composure.

Emotional Closing

- You are no longer who they made you believe you were.
- You are not broken.
- You are not less-than.
- You are not the shame they projected onto you.
- You are who you choose to become – aware, conscious, calm, and free.
- You are the calm in your own storm.
- You are the voice of your own compassion.
- You are the safe place you have been searching for all along.
- You have rewritten the story they tried to write for you, and that changes everything, beginning now, and for every day to come.



This part of the journey ends here... but the real adventure is just beginning.

I hope you're enjoying your journey of emotional truth and learning how to win your emotional war! In Part III of the book, we'll shine a light on some of the more challenging personality types we attract because of our emotional history. We'll learn how to give ourselves permission, how to end our search for closure, how to become impervious to failure, how to build resilience, and how to take our broken hearts and turn them into amazing art.

See you there!

**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:

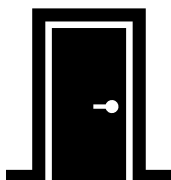
- If you hadn't sought closure from them, how might you have dealt with those feelings instead? Examples: self-soothing, boundary-setting, grieving the truth.

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.

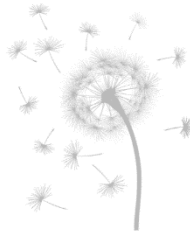
But everything that's been done to you, everything that's been said to you, must be brought out of the unconscious darkness into the light of conscious awareness so it and you can be healed.

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,

Alison Rose

London, England

2025

alison@howtomendyourmentalhealth.com

**ANYONE CAN BE
PERFECT
GOOD
ENOUGH
TAKES PRACTICE!**



For more information about sustainable and effective ways to mend your mental health please visit:

HOWTOMENDYOURMENTALHEALTH.COM

and join other **Good Enough Revolutionaries** who are changing how they see themselves and the world around them.



