

**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 <b>want</b> to do?	YES/NO
Or what you <b>must</b> 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)

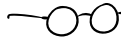
- How is your past trauma affecting your thoughts, emotions, relationships, and choices today?
- What has past trauma stopped you doing that you'd love to do?
- What has past trauma made you do that you want to stop doing?

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.



**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 UNFAMILAR...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.

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**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