

**INSANITY IS DOING THE SAME THING OVER AND OVER AND
EXPECTING DIFFERENT RESULTS**

ALBERT EINSTEIN

PART II
HOW WE GET OUT



THE SHADOW OF SHAME

**WHAT DO YOU REGARD AS MOST HUMANE?
TO SPARE SOMEONE SHAME.**

FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE

THE SHADOW OF SHAME

WHAT IS SHAME AND WHERE DOES IT COME FROM?

Shame is the belief that there's something wrong with us, that we're a mistake. Shame infiltrates our pure hearts and blameless souls; it suffocates our spirit from the inside out. Shame, when left unhealed, leaks into everything we do and say. It echoes through every wrong decision, every sabotaged opportunity, and every relationship we abandon.

Shame is a soul-eating emotion. It's the toughest opponent we'll ever face, one that steals every drop of joy, ambition, and dignity we cling to. Shame takes everything we have when it goes unchallenged. Just as we begin to rise, shame drags us back under. As we wrench ourselves free from its grip, it twists our arm and breathes noxious lies into our hearts.

Shame directs our reactions to everything we experience. It beds down and grows like knotweed as we, like sponges, absorb the self-loathing and anger projected on to us. Shame assigns us a lifetime of poor mental health and emotional struggles.

Children don't have the cognitive skills to recognise that anger and cruelty are someone else's problem; we believe it must be ours, it's our fault and we blame ourselves. We hear:

- "You're stupid."
- "You ruin everything."
- "You should be ashamed of yourself."
- "Why can't you be more like...?"

..and there it goes, stored into memory influencing every choice, feeling, and thought we have. Our sense of self becomes stained by someone else's shame. We don't realise that the adult who yells at us, mocks us, or belittles us is offloading an emotional weight that's too heavy for them to carry. We simply shrink in the shadow of their shame.

Maybe someone told you they were ashamed of you. Maybe you heard, 'I wish you'd never been born.' Shame feels dense, coercive, and punishing because it's projected by dense, coercive, and punishing people, people who have no idea how to love themselves, let alone love us.

Shame is a tool of control. It's used to silence us, diminish us, and make us feel responsible for things that are not ours to carry. We're blamed for *their* problems, *their* moods, *their* mistakes and we believe them. We believe we're a mistake because *they* told us so. We must *deserve* for bad things to happen, because *they* said so.

Internalised shame sounds like this:

- There's something wrong with me.
- They left because of me.
- She's upset because I'm bad.
- I made him feel angry.
- I wish I'd never been born.
- I don't matter.
- I ruin everything.
- I'm not good enough.
- I don't deserve nice things.
- Nobody wants me.
- Nobody likes me.
- They'd be better off without me.

If there's no one to counter these beliefs, to stand between us and the belief and say, 'that's not true', then we grow up believing every toxic statement uttered by the adults around us is the truth. That we are bad, that we are worthless. Eventually the light of hope that one day we will be loved and accepted goes out. We avoid connection. We play small.

We're terrified of being seen, of speaking up, of taking up space. We think our truth is dangerous, that being clever, funny, or joyful might get us shut down again. So, we hide. We become the person who fits in, who pleases everyone else because it's the safest role to play.

Shame has been the hardest thing for me to heal - in myself and in others - but because it so often underpins all our other emotional wounds, it deserves our undivided attention. To claim our lives back, to live without fear or apology, we must strip shame of its power. We must set ourselves free from the belief that there's something wrong with us, that we're broken. We must exchange *those* beliefs for ones that celebrate our goodness, our courage, our contribution, and our unconditional right to exist, and take up unlimited space.

Shame shrinks us. It makes us feel like we're squeezed and suffocated. The antidote to shame is to unleash and express your energy any way you damn well please.

RECOGNISING THE ACTIONS AND BEHAVIOURS OF SHAME

Shame doesn't always announce itself with words. It often shows up in the background, silently shaping how we think, feel, and behave. These are some of the ways you might be living with unhealed shame:

How you feel about yourself:

- You believe you're a mistake, that there's something fundamentally wrong with you.
- You often feel embarrassed, guilty, or overly responsible.
- You question why anyone would want to spend time with you.
- You feel uncomfortable talking about yourself.
- You compare yourself to others and always come up short.
- You may have experienced suicidal thoughts and/or made plans to end your life.

How you relate to others:

- You don't trust people easily - or at all.
- You avoid forming meaningful connections.
- You often turn down invitations, even when you want to say yes.
- You stay connected to people who continue to wound you.
- You project your shame outwardly by being critical, judgemental, or defensive.
- You assume people dislike you or are secretly talking about you.

How you behave to protect yourself:

- You're a people-pleaser and a fear-fuelled perfectionist.
- You tend to go 'above and beyond,' especially if you fear criticism.
- You meticulously plan everything or avoid planning at all.
- You procrastinate, often paralysed by the fear of doing things 'wrong.'
- You struggle to express yourself clearly.
- You avoid eye contact and find it difficult to be present with others.
- You isolate yourself or, alternatively, crave constant attention.

These behaviours aren't character flaws, they're trauma responses. They're the ways your nervous system, heart, and mind have tried to protect you. The more you recognise them, the more power you have to shift them, and the more you shift them, the more space you make for the 'you' beneath the shame to emerge - whole, free, and beautifully enough.

Who wouldn't like it if you stepped into the most powerful version of yourself? Who would try and tear you down and make you feel small?

There is no end to the destruction shame can cause. It drives us from one self-defeating pursuit to the next endlessly searching for the love and validation we never received. Believing we're damaged, worthless, and

deserving of poor treatment sends us down a pathway to hell. We ruin our lives while the perpetrators of our pain stand by smirking, smug, and rubbing their hands in glee.

When shame runs the show, it drains our hearts and minds of the very things we need to thrive: self-respect, values, self-worth, wisdom, and resilience. With shame at the wheel, we always feel wrong. Everything we do is wrong. We're suspicious. Untrustworthy. Up to no good.

Newsflash: we didn't deserve what they did to us. We didn't deserve what they said to us. We are *not* a mistake. We're *not* bad. There is *nothing* wrong with us.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

SHAME

(Page 71 of your workbook)

- What was done to you or said to you that planted the belief there was something wrong with you? Were you hit, blamed, ignored, humiliated? Were you told you were too much, not enough, or simply not wanted? Describe the moments that taught you to feel shame.
- What shaming experiences became so deeply imprinted on your brain and body that they continue to shape your self-image even now, years later?
- What memories do you still carry like wounds that haven't healed?
- Which of these experiences are you ready to pull up by the roots so you can stop blaming yourself, and place the shame where it truly belongs?
- Who might you have become if your self-image hadn't been shattered by someone else's shame? Let yourself imagine a life where you were free from their opinions, punishments, and projections.
- Do you still carry responsibility for their behaviour? Have you been blaming yourself for how they acted or what they said?
- What did shame prevent you from doing, becoming, or believing about yourself?
- Name four empowering truths about who you are and what you've achieved - even while carrying the weight of shame. Let these truths be your proof that you are not who and what they said you were.

Shame sends us down wrong paths and twisted roads towards loneliness, addiction, grief, self-sabotage, and pain. Other people's shame has been projected onto us for so long that it feels like our shame too. But it's not. It belongs to them and it's time to give it back.

When we look at life through a window smeared with shame, we see everything through a distorted lens: ourselves, the world, and our place in it. We can't see our true reflection or recognise what we're capable of achieving. Conditioned by criticism and judgement, it starts to feel like everyone, and everything is against us. This is called **cognitive distortion** - a backwards, twisted view of our identity, our potential, and our life.

That window on the world? It's covered in the shame other people have smeared on to it. But when we make the right people accountable for the shame we carry, we begin to heal. We shift from blaming ourselves to saying: *"this wasn't my fault. This story belongs to someone else. I was merely an unfortunate bystander on their stage. It's a role I no longer adhere to."*

Remember: it's not about blaming and shaming others for what they did or didn't do; it's about accountability. As you become more aware of what shame has stolen from you, you can start making choices not as someone who feels defective or unworthy, but as someone naturally deserving of peace, joy, and fulfilment. When you know you've something meaningful to contribute you no longer feel like an imposter. You feel real. Rooted. Whole. When self-value expands, shame shrinks.

Shame keeps us stuck. It kills joy. It blocks purpose. One way to tell if shame is still running the show? Ask yourself:

- Am I doing what I want to do... or only what I must do?
- Is this life I'm living built on opportunity or on a lack of self-worth?
- Am I joy-fuelled... or fear-fuelled?
- Have I been unknowingly engaged by a narcissist to fuel their unmet needs? Very likely, yes - and survivors of childhood abuse are especially vulnerable to it without realising.

Fear is often fuelled by shame. When our confidence and resilience are low, we settle. We tell ourselves, 'This is all I deserve.' That's shame talking. Not truth.

The people who shamed you were carrying their own shame. They projected their darkness onto you. The more they projected, the less brightly you shone. Some people are hell-bent on destroying others, but we don't need to continue the suffering they caused. Let's break the generational link.

"The older I get the more I realise it's not them who disapproves of me, but me who disapproves of them."

When we learn to think poorly of the people who shamed us rather than thinking poorly of ourselves, everything changes. That shift is the beginning of our emotional freedom. Shame cannot survive honesty. It cannot survive accountability. And it most definitely cannot survive truth.

When people can't carry the weight of their own shame, they offload it onto the nearest, most vulnerable person. When we became the target of someone else's shame, we inherited a burden that was never ours to carry. **So, how do we heal the toxic grip of other people's shame?** We do the opposite of what shame wants.

- We speak up.
- We share.
- We tell the truth.
- We stop hiding.

Shame demands silence, so we use our voice. Shame wants secrecy so we tell our story.

We send shame home.

When we give shame back, when we return it to its rightful owner, we break free from its emotional captivity. We loosen the grip it's had on our self-worth, our choices, our identity. And in doing so, we start to see the truth:

- There's nothing wrong with us.
- We are not a mistake.
- We are worthy of love - especially our own - and we are worthy to treat ourselves and to be treated in loving ways.
- We deserve good things and good people in our lives.

We no longer feel the need to cover up shame with overeating, overworking, over-giving, over-achieving, or fixing everything so everyone else feels comfortable - for those types of people whatever we do will never be enough. We felt wrong because we carried someone else's shame but now we know better, we do better. We have a voice and a choice and we are no longer staying silent.

If you're ready, and there's no pressure here, you can tell your shame story over the page:

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

MY SHAME STORY

(Page 75 of your workbook)

- When was the first time you remember feeling ashamed?
- What words have you used to describe yourself because of that shame?
- How do you feel now when you look back at the younger version of yourself who had to carry that unbearable burden?

If writing it down doesn't feel comfortable try recording your voice on your phone. The method doesn't matter; the **ex**pression does. When you speak your shame aloud, it loses its power. This is your moment to give back what never belonged to you. You don't want it anymore.



You bullied me for years.
You made me feel unsafe for years.
You were one of the reasons I wasn't kind to myself.
You're full of shame
and I choose not to be in that place anymore.
I've had to work really hard to value myself.
and I won't go back to hiding things about me again.

ERIC EFFIONG
SEX EDUCATION

Sometimes, healing shame means borrowing the strength of someone else's voice until we find our own. These words, spoken by Eric Effiong from the Netflix series 'Sex Education' offer a powerful reclamation of self-worth after years of being and feeling diminished. If you've ever felt like hiding parts of yourself just to feel safe or accepted, let these words echo through you. Let them remind you that shame does not belong to you, it was given to you by people who couldn't carry their own darkness, and you don't have to carry it for them anymore.

CAN SHAME EVER BE HEALTHY?

I've never met anyone with a healthy story about shame. Shame doesn't serve us. It doesn't evolve us. You might have heard people talk about 'healthy shame,' but what they're describing is our conscience, the part of us that recognises when something feels misaligned with our morals and values. Shame doesn't help us become better people. It doesn't lead to personal growth. Shame stops us from feeling decent, respectable,

valued, and included. Remember, shame is the belief that there's something wrong with us, that we're a mistake. There's nothing healthy about that.

Despite everything we've been through, shame *can* be transformed. We *can* emerge from the emotional wreckage it leaves behind. And when we truly understand how shame has driven our dysregulation and distorted our self-worth, the discoveries waiting for us are profound. We've drowned in oceans of shame as our emotional start in life sank us at every opportunity, but survivors of such trauma carry something else too: hope. The kind of hope that rebuilds and helps us rise from the ruins.

Shame walks with us every day until we heal it. Nowhere is its weight heavier than in the minds and hearts of those who have experienced sexual abuse. The shame is so unbearable that for some suicide feels like the only way out, the final full stop to a betrayal they should never have met. But when the burden of shame is traced back to its source and the silence is broken, healing becomes possible. **Shame shrinks in the presence of awareness and truth.** Yes, there will be debris - undoing the trauma of what was done and said to us will take time. But that version of you - the one 'they' tried to destroy, silence, erase - they are still here ready to rise.

Shame forces us to become someone we're not. It makes us silence ourselves to avoid further humiliation, criticism, dismissal and rejection. But the price we pay is steep: anxiety, depression, social discomfort, loss of identity. The more we try to please others, the more we abandon ourselves. The shame that underpins so many of our trauma-driven emotions does not belong to us. It's time to return it.

THE TOXIC POOPS

The kind of person who mistreats a child, a teenager, or another adult with cruelty, dismissal, or control isn't just unkind, they're unsafe. When people bully others to heal their own unmet needs their behaviour is deeply disturbing. They violate our boundaries, steal our dignity, crush our enthusiasm, and trample over our spirit. They don't just harm us; they hollow us out.

As I'm writing this chapter, the memories flood in. The dysfunctional, abusive parents. The cruel aunt. The resentful, heartless siblings. The teachers who dismissed me. The school bullies. The toxic relationships. I grieve for the losses. I mourn the struggles. But I'm no longer carrying responsibility for these confused and harmful individuals. I'm not ashamed of myself anymore. I **know and believe** that none of it was my choice or my fault.

Shame swallowed my sense of meaning, purpose, ambition, and joy. It weighed me down, it kept me hostage, hiding behind a smile that was begging not to be dismissed or criticised anymore. Shame almost killed me, but humour saved me. And it still does. It reminds me that even when traumatic memories resurface, I have the power to choose how I respond.

It's no laughing matter to live under the weight of shame, especially when it's been weaponised by narcissistic, resentful bullies, but one way I learned to describe having someone else's dysfunction dumped on me was by calling it what it is: **toxic shit**. We must heal the Toxic **P**ower **O**f **O**ther **P**eople's **S**hame, also known as 'The Toxic Poops'.



You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.
Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries?

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

Excerpted from Still I Rise
by Maya Angelou

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HEALING SHAME ONCE AND FOR ALL

(Page 76 of your workbook)

- Now that you understand how other people's shame was projected onto you and how it has blocked your potential, what will you do differently?
- That internal shame-voice isn't yours - it never was - so how will you silence it from now on?

Remember:

Our only source of shame is other people but now that you see it for what it is, you're not just healing, you're rising.

Affirmation: I was never the problem, their shame was. I return it, fully and finally. I am not broken. I am brave. I am not too much. I am finally enough. And I will rise again - and again - because my integrity, determination, resilience and the importance of my healing, is louder than their shame.

And so, it is.

THE TRUTH ABOUT FORGIVENESS

“Children begin by loving their parents. After a time, they judge them.
Rarely, if ever, do they forgive them.”

Oscar Wilde

I'd always felt confused about forgiveness. What did it mean? What purpose did it serve? What would it feel like to forgive? How would I know if I had? Or if I should? Was it even necessary? Forgiveness felt like a buzzword pedalled by religious zealots or those wrapped up in the spiritual bypassing of New Age hypocrisy. Nothing about it felt real or achievable.

The alternative definitions didn't help much. 'Pity.' 'Mercy.' 'Pardon.' Each one felt like a dilution of justice. For me, forgiveness only started to feel remotely possible when the most severe symptoms of my experiences began to ease. When I stopped punishing myself, when I stopped craving retribution, and when the injustices that had once crushed me no longer defined my every breath, forgiveness found its way onto my agenda.

I realised forgiveness, if it ever came at all, would arrive not as an offering to the people who hurt me, but as a quiet release within myself, a moment where I no longer felt shackled to their shame, when I finally said: I'm done carrying this.

THE STEPS I TOOK TRYING TO FORGIVE OTHERS

The first step was to stop blaming and punishing myself for what had been done and said to me. **The second step** was to work out who was accountable for the shameful experiences I'd been carrying, and then consciously, intentionally, hand back the suffering they had caused. **The third step** – and by far the hardest – is/was to dig deep enough to find an explanation to replace my rage with compassion and understanding for what had been said to me and done to me. Fast forward many years and

the truth is some people have proved harder to forgive than others. A few, if I'm honest, haven't been forgiven at all. But still I dig, rationalising, justifying, excusing, in the hope that maybe one day I'll strike gold in the emotional bedrock where the most unforgivable memories live.

What I know now is this: forgiveness is not a straight path. It's not a rational concept. It's not balanced, or neat, or tidy. Forgiveness is wild and unpredictable. It's an emotional rollercoaster, not a seamless ride. Exploring the process of forgiveness encourages us to work through our suffering which in turn helps us move towards our goal of emotional freedom. What's more, it's a mission that can be accomplished without anyone else knowing what we're doing. The practice of forgiveness is for *our* personal growth, not theirs.

FORGIVENESS AFTER TRAUMA IS HARD WORK

Forgiveness will mean different things to different people, but for people like us, people who were S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, there's a deeper reason for struggling with forgiveness that other people don't get: **forgiveness after trauma is hard work**. We feel guilty for not forgiving but we're also indignant about why we should. That's not contradiction. That's trauma doing what it does best: removing our confidence around decision making. It takes time - sometimes a lifetime - to release resentment and cultivate authentic compassion. You can't fake it, you can't rush it, and you can't flick it on like a light switch.

SELF-FORGIVENESS

I used to believe that forgiving others was the only way to find inner peace, but hindsight has shown me something even more important: forgiving others is not a compulsory step on our road to emotional freedom, but forgiving *ourselves* is.

You may wonder if there's anything you need to forgive yourself for but anyone who's suffered the emotional wreckage of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D will, in some way, punish themselves for something. When we truly forgive ourselves, forgiving others becomes far less important.

THE THREE STEPS I TOOK TO FORGIVE MYSELF

1. I stopped blaming myself for other people's bad behaviour.
2. I held the right people accountable for the damage they caused.
3. And then I did the hardest thing: I dared to find compassion for myself.

After decades of being told I didn't deserve good things, that I was wicked and not wanted, I learned to speak to my wounded inner child in a way that made her feel seen, valued, and safe. My Conscious Adult Self took control of the past with awareness, acceptance and a logical perspective.

SELF-PUNISHMENT

Self-punishment and self-forgiveness are two sides of the same coin. When we carry shame and misplaced responsibility for the damaging things other people have done to us and said to us, we end up punishing ourselves. We treat ourselves cruelly and unkindly, **we sabotage ourselves to show them how much damage they've caused.** "Look at the mess I'm in because of you." And it's true, we are in a mess because of them. But who are we really hurting when we keep punishing ourselves for their actions? What are we still hoping to receive from them that we never got and probably never will? An apology? Approval? Regret? Acknowledgment? Whatever it is, I can confidently assure you: the people who got you here are unlikely to be the ones who'll get you out.

As we tell our truth and make peace with it, the urge to punish ourselves starts to feel uncomfortable and illogical. It becomes harder to keep turning our pain inwards. This is when the real shift starts to happen, when we start replacing self-punishment with self-forgiveness. That shift doesn't have to be dramatic. It can be slow. It can be one small kind thought at a time. Whether we stop sabotaging ourselves completely or keep stumbling as we try, what matters most is awareness. Awareness gives us a choice, and choice changes everything. If you've been completing the Challenge It to Change It journal prompts you might already feel a pull towards self-forgiveness or at least an unwillingness to keep punishing yourself.

When our default belief is "I'm a bad person," or "It's all my fault," we'll always find ways to punish ourselves and make ourselves suffer. But here's the truth: the symptoms you carry of your pain and heartbreak are not proof that you're broken. They're proof of what you've survived.

Struggles with our emotional wellbeing and our mental health are hard enough to heal without adding self-punishment on top. When we begin showing kindness to the part of ourselves that thought we should have done better, even though we didn't know better, we make room for healing. **The reason we struggle to be kind to ourselves is because we haven't yet forgiven ourselves.**

PUNISHING ME TO PUNISH THEM

When I work with people who are punishing themselves to punish others, we don't focus on their need to forgive those people. We focus on something far more important: **self-forgiveness**. When we do that, self-punishment eases and the obsession with punishing others lightens. We finally realise the love, approval, and validation we're waiting for is something we can give to ourselves.

THE UMBRELLA OF SELF-PUNISHMENT

Imagine self-punishment is an umbrella. The raindrops are the painful, punishing experiences we carry, the ones we've internalised, blamed ourselves for, and continue to be controlled by. As we start to forgive ourselves, something extraordinary happens.

The sun comes out.

The raindrops dry.

We no longer need the umbrella.

When self-punishment no longer hangs over us, self-forgiveness takes its place.

Self-forgiveness is powerful, it's where truth is found and right now, as you read this, with all the emotional work you've already done, this is the perfect moment to stop punishing yourself and find the self-forgiveness that will heal your pain.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

SELF-FORGIVENESS

(Page 77 of your workbook)

Start simply.

Say to yourself: "I forgive myself." Then write down everything:

- you were ever blamed for.
- you've carried guilt or shame for.
- you've punished yourself over.

Ask yourself:

- Do you need to forgive yourself for being in the way?
- For being a mistake?
- For being too clever, too good-looking, too different, or not enough of something they wanted me to be?
- Were you too much or too little for someone else's comfort?
- What went wrong for someone else that you were blamed and held responsible for?
- Do you need to forgive yourself for simply being born?

Let this be the start of your release, the start of your healing, another leap on the path to emotional freedom. Take a deep breath, let your shoulders drop, and keep writing. What were:

- the mistakes you were told were yours.
- the things you internalised even when they were never your fault.

Fill the space with your own self-forgiving truths. When you're finished, take a moment to read your words back - out loud, or in your head.

- With your hand on your heart say, 'I forgive myself for' and write it down:

I was just a child trying to survive.

I forgive myself for believing I was the problem.

I forgive myself for the way I coped when no one showed me how.

I didn't deserve what happened to me.

I *do* deserve peace.

I forgive myself completely.

Self-forgiveness isn't a one-time event. It's a new habit. A new home. A new way of living.

Affirmations

Read them, write them, and say them to your soul.

- I forgive myself for the ways I survived.
- I forgive myself for not knowing then what I know now.
- I forgive myself for the beliefs I absorbed from people who were hurting me.
- I am not to blame for the wounds I carry.
- I give myself full permission to release the shame that was never mine.
- I forgive myself for believing I had to be perfect to be loved.
- I release the punishment I've placed upon myself for other people's pain.
- I am learning to treat myself with the same kindness I offer others.
- I forgive the version of me that didn't feel worthy. She was only trying to stay safe.
- I am allowed to be free. I am allowed to feel peace. I am allowed to move on.
- My self-forgiveness is my liberation. I choose to be free.

Repeat these affirmations as many times as you need. Write the ones that speak to your heart in your journal and make them your new normal. You're no longer punishing yourself for a story that was never yours to carry.

A lot of us didn't grow up with a soft and compassionate role model, and even if we did, there were other forces, external experiences and painful encounters that hardened our hearts and built walls around our fractured selves. Whatever you're still punishing yourself for, it's time to stop the relentless cycle of self-inflicted pain. You no longer need to carry the weight of what *they* did. It was never yours to hold. Set yourself free.

When we begin to practice self-forgiveness - truly practice it - and release the punishing grip we have on ourselves, we start to see clearly with honesty, with truth. We stop seeing ourselves as the broken ones and instead recognise the brokenness of the people who let us down. When we flick the switch from "it's my fault" to "they are accountable," we move from being the observed to being the observer.

For me, one of the biggest battles on my journey to emotional freedom wasn't forgiving others, it was forgiving myself. When you're no longer hellbent on destroying yourself, your whole perspective changes. No, you don't suddenly love everyone, you might not even love yourself yet. But when you stop being your own judge, jury, and executioner, you finally walk out of the 'shame prison' they built for you, and you taste emotional freedom.

When I first looked back at myself as a child, at the younger me shaped by abandonment, rejection, and shame, I didn't feel forgiving. I felt rage. I wanted vengeance for what had been done to me, and for who I became because of it. But I came to understand that carrying that anger was

keeping *me* stuck. It was poisoning *my* potential. And I realised the one person I needed to forgive most... was me.

- I had to forgive myself for absorbing the blame and the shame.
- I had to forgive myself for surviving in ways I judged myself for.
- I had to forgive myself for losing precious parts of myself to the pain.
- I had to forgive myself for the people I'd hurt along the way.
- I had to forgive myself for missing so many amazing opportunities.
- I had to forgive myself for the time I'd wasted and could never get back.
- I had to forgive myself for the belief I was undeserving of peace, joy, contentment, comfort.
- I had to forgive myself for sabotaging a calm life and trading it for the familiarity of chaos.

I began to see the perpetrators of my suffering not as powerful, but as small. As cowards. As dysfunctional people projecting their self-loathing onto a child. If the person who hurt you is out there living their life, seemingly unbothered, let me reassure you: life has a way of circling back. Truth has a way of settling the score. And when it comes to levelling the emotional playing field, it's never too late to seek your version of justice, especially the justice of reclaiming your emotional power.

You'll know you're healing when the self-punishing habits start to fade. When the rage dissolves into awareness. When self-compassion takes root. That's when you begin to reclaim the emotional power that was stolen from you.

And then, in your own time, in your own way, you get to decide: do I, can I, forgive them?

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HOW DO YOU PUNISH YOURSELF?

(Page 80 of your workbook)

- Write down ten things that you're doing to punish yourself for the cruel, vindictive things other people said or did to you. No shame, no blame, only awareness.
- Are you punishing yourself to punish someone else? For example, *"Look what you did to me. Look at the mess I'm in. How can I make them pay?"*
- Have you ever hurt someone else because of your own S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences? Do you punish yourself for how you treated them? Remember, this isn't about shaming you, we've all done things like this which is how we know to ask the questions. This is about self-awareness and healing, and sometimes that means gently confronting painful truths.
- What will you stop doing - or do differently - to end your self-punishment and how you punish others?
- Are you willing to replace self-punishment with self-forgiveness?

YES

NO

ALMOST

Forgive yourself for the many ways you hurt yourself as you did your best to survive. How do you know when you've forgiven yourself? You no longer punish yourself.

FORGIVING OTHERS

Even though self-forgiveness is your priority right now, there may come a time when you want to explore what forgiving someone else might mean for you. Many of us are made to feel guilty or even shamed if we don't forgive others. But the truth is, there are situations and people where forgiveness may never feel right, fair, or even possible. That's OK. You may always hold a quiet hope for justice, however small that desire may be, and that too is OK.

When you forgive yourself first, when you begin to blossom in new and powerful ways, *then* you get to decide whether forgiving others is essential to your peace of mind, or simply no longer relevant to your healing. The choice is always yours.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

HOW CAN I TELL IF I WANT TO PUNISH OR FORGIVE?

(Page 82 in your workbook)

This next exercise will help you recognise who you've forgiven, who you still need an apology from, or for whom you think a more formal punishment or consequence is still appropriate.

To help make this personal and visual, we're using Jars of Justice to gauge where you stand with the people who've caused you pain.

Full Jar - You still want to see this person face some kind of justice or consequence.

Half-Full Jar - You don't want punishment, but you do want an apology.

Empty Jar - You've forgiven them or no longer carry an emotional charge around the situation.

Not Sure Jar - You're undecided, and that's completely OK.

There's no pressure here. You can return to this exercise anytime and move the jars around as your healing progresses. How you feel today may not be how you feel tomorrow.

As you reflect, ask yourself:

- When I think about this person, do I feel peace, pain, or panic?
- If I saw them now, would they greet me with kindness or contempt?
- What did they emotionally take from me that I want to reclaim?
- Am I angry that they've never apologised?
- Or do I understand why they behaved the way they did? Maybe both?
- Do I want justice?
- Do I need closure?
- Do I still need to be heard?

You're not being asked to forgive what's unforgivable. You're being asked to honour how you feel.

JARS OF JUSTICE

Let's recap: these jars represent the degree of justice or emotional closure you still seek from the people who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D you and left emotional wounds. Think carefully about what each jar means for you. Is it justice you want (like an apology)? Or do you still feel a need for punishment (like formal consequences)?

This isn't about vengeance or guilt - it's about clarity and emotional truth. Remember to give yourself a jar too! As always - no blame, no shame, only awareness.



Who would you give a full jar to (seek punishment):

Why?

What do you feel still needs to be said or acknowledged to enable you to move on and heal?

Who would you give a half-full jar to (an apology):

Why?

What words or gestures would bring you peace?

Who would you give an empty jar to (I've forgiven):

Why?

What helped you reach that place of freedom?

Who are you not sure which jar you would give to:

Why?

What questions, emotions, or boundaries still feel unresolved?

*

Any surprises? Did you remember to give yourself a jar? The names you wrote under each jar might change over time. That's not a sign of inconsistency; it's a sign of healing. Someone who sits under your Empty Jar today may move to Half-Full Jar or even Full Jar next week as new memories surface or old pain reappears asking to be heard. Returning to this exercise regularly can show you just how far you've come and where your heart still needs care.

As you shine light into the darker corners of your emotional history you may find that forgiveness becomes less about them and more about you. You'll begin to realise that the act of forgiving others becomes less urgent as your sense of self-validation and self-trust rises.

I've witnessed people do this work and emerge stronger. If they've been carrying one-sided relationships for years they finally feel strong enough to disconnect completely. Others lay down their weapons and reconcile with those who hurt them. The surprise often comes when we look at the names we place under the Full or Empty jars: they don't always match our expectations.

Forgiveness will always be a personal choice, but what holds us back isn't a refusal to forgive others, it's the challenge of forgiving ourselves.

You're doing such powerful emotional work here, be patient with yourself. As your self-worth rises and your inner strength unfolds, you'll be amazed at how you ultimately feel about forgiveness. Manage yourself with gentleness. Lead with self-kindness. You're transforming one jar at a time.

A FINAL NOTE ON JUSTICE

If someone's name appears under your Full or Half-Full jar, you might want to take this exercise one step further by writing them a letter. You don't have to send it, though you can if you like. If you *do*, don't have any expectations about getting a response - you likely won't, but you may hear some rumours about angry indignation...

The real purpose of writing the letter is to shift the emotional weight you've been carrying. It's your opportunity to hold them accountable, to give your pain a voice, and to stop punishing yourself for what someone else did or said to you that's caused a lifetime of dysregulated and dysfunctional behaviour. Say everything you've never had the chance - or felt safe enough - to say. Be honest. Be raw. Be unfiltered. Don't protect their feelings. Protect yours. This is your letter, your moment, your release. You don't need to justify your hurt or explain why you're still carrying it. Your story, your voice, and your truth deserve space on the page, in your heart, and in your healing. When you're done writing, breathe. You've just taken another step towards reclaiming your emotional power.

Write or type this in your journal ten times, slowly and consciously: **I am not to blame for what was done to me, or what was said to me.**

- Let each repetition remind you of this truth.
- Let it echo through every moment you doubted yourself.
- Let it loosen the grip of shame, one word at a time.
- Let it rewrite the story you never asked to carry.
- You didn't deserve it.
- You didn't cause it.
- And it never, ever belonged to you.

EVERYONE THINKS FORGIVENESS IS A LOVELY IDEA UNTIL THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO FORGIVE

C.S. LEWIS

Our goal isn't to forgive others. It's to forgive ourselves. It's also to raise our self-awareness so harsh self-punishments are no longer necessary for what they did or said to us. When we stop self-punishment and begin to practice self-forgiveness, we take our emotional power back - we're telling ourselves we deserve better. From that place of emotional power, we're able to discern, without anger or spite, who is worthy of our time, our energy, and *possibly* our forgiveness.

Reluctance to forgive is not always about bearing grudges.

Sometimes, it's about prioritising ourselves in the healing process. The truth is, forgiving the people who stole so much from us becomes less significant the moment we start reclaiming what was taken from us through self-forgiveness. We may still wish for an apology or even justice, but the emotional grip they had on us is gone and with it, the urgency to forgive them.

You were never meant to carry the burden of someone else's wrongdoing, and you are *never* obliged to forgive anyone except yourself.

APOLOGIES AND FORGIVENESS

When I forgave myself I found peace with others without them knowing. There was no need to announce it, to reconnect, or tell them what I'd done, but within me I felt a restful peace. A soft exhale. A release. The knot in my stomach was gone. The weight in my chest lifted.

I forgave someone I thought I'd never forgive because they sincerely apologised: my father. Sometimes I feel sad, and I cry for that terrified little girl who he choked and kicked. There are days when I still feel

distressed about his behaviour and I grieve the relationship I never got to have with a kind, safe father. Who, I wonder, would I have become?

For a long time, I blamed myself for things he did to me that were not my fault, for the years of physical violence and verbal abuse where absolute terror desensitised me. When we practice self-forgiveness we thaw. Our numb and frozen hearts and minds begin feeling again.

WHEN FORGIVENESS NO LONGER MATTERS

If you're no longer triggered by what they did or said, if you're no longer fuelled by anger, or consumed by resentment, it doesn't mean you've forgiven them - it might just mean it doesn't matter anymore. Your life has expanded beyond the old story. You might not even remember when it stopped mattering. You just woke up one day and found you'd moved on. Forgiving others didn't lead you there, it just-not-mattering-anymore did.

When we stop waiting for an apology that will never come, when we accept the reality of what they cannot or will not give, our healing begins to move in a new direction. We don't need their apology to heal. Their silence already told us everything we needed to know. **Changed behaviour is the only apology worth having.**

WHEN SOMEONE CAN'T OR WON'T FORGIVE YOU

I know first-hand how the impact of chaos in childhood can create extreme behavioural problems in adulthood. A rough childhood is not an excuse for bad adult behaviour, but it is a valid reason. Unfortunately, the overwhelming symptoms of childhood trauma don't simply vanish when we turn 18. We carry them into adulthood where they show up as dysregulated behaviour, withdrawal, and emotional outbursts. We damage the very people who try to love us. We alienate them, scare

them, lose them. And when the fog clears, we're left with guilt and shame that threatens to swallow us whole.

Question: What happens when someone won't forgive you for your dysregulated behaviour that was a result of your childhood trauma? When they continue to punish you for mistakes you made that impacted them?

Answer: Where it is safe to do so, you apologise sincerely. You make amends where you can, you allow time for your new intentions to evolve and unfold. Then, if they're still unforgiving and punishing you, you step back. You keep yourself emotionally, mentally, physically, and financially safe.

Why?

Because amidst their attempts to make you suffer sits two wounded children: you, and them. Your job now is to stop sacrificing yourself in a desperate bid to be forgiven and to be the adult for both of you.

Some people won't forgive you, ever. That doesn't mean you haven't changed. It just means they're still attached to their story, still hurting, or getting more from hating you than showing compassion for your mistakes. You don't need to sacrifice yourself to prove you're sorry - and you *are* sorry, so, so sorry - but you don't need their forgiveness to forgive yourself. Respect their space, their needs, their absolute right to be angry with you and *never* forgive you. But for your sake as well as theirs, step back.

Not all wounds are visible. Just because you're ready to be forgiven doesn't mean they're ready to forgive. Make amends where you can without causing further harm and then let it and them be. When you've apologised with sincerity and done all you can to make peace, it's no longer your weight to carry. This isn't about halos or higher ground; it's

about finally choosing yourself. Emotional freedom begins with a desire to lift yourself up and out of the emotional hell you've been living. You don't need their apology. You don't need their forgiveness. But you do need your own.

INNER CRITICS OUTER BULLIES



Did you know there's no such thing as an inner critic? The voice inside your head that says, you're not good enough, not lovable, not capable, not wanted? That's not your inner anything; *that's* an outer bully. It's someone who once shamed you, criticised you, and projected their own pain onto you. You absorbed their critical voice and mistook it for your own.

This was the original voice that told you that you couldn't; the voice that still tries to convince you that it's your own. This shame-fuelled voice belongs to someone who treated you the way they were once treated - and it's convinced you that *you* are the problem.

This voice - this outer bully - has been the root cause of your Imposter Syndrome, your perfectionism, your procrastination, and your anxiety. It's stolen your potential and silenced your truth.

The so-called 'inner critic' has been posing as your self-doubt for years. The truth will set you free, and it's time to tell it.

THE 'INNER CRITIC'

That critical voice we hear in our head is the echo of bullies who we've internalised. For years, they've posed as part of us, whispering their shame-soaked lies to avoid responsibility for the damage that they've done. Their voices left us feeling invalidated, invisible, and never enough.

Outer bullies feel dreadful about who they are and resent the life they're living. They lash out, not because *we're* flawed, but because *they* are hurting. They wield superiority and judgement like weapons. They're imperious, patronising, and condescending. They're terrified of being criticised, so they punish others with judgement. That's *their* coping strategy, but it's not *your* truth. Remember what I said about our only source of self-doubt and shame being *other* people? This is them; the people who continue to stain our every waking moment.

Criticism is external. It doesn't originate inside you. You were not born with an "inner critic", instead you were conditioned to host the voice of someone else's emotional dysfunction. You weren't born doubting your worth; you were *taught* to doubt it. You weren't born ashamed; someone handed you that emotion like a legacy of pain.

When we keep critical people close, we tiptoe around their moods, fawning and flattering, hoping to avoid another sting. We want their approval because we've been trained to equate their critical behaviour with survival. This critical voice is invasive, unwanted, and most importantly, it's not true. You're not their mirror, their scapegoat, or their emotional dumping ground. You are not the voice in your head that tells you you're not enough.

HOW TO MANAGE AN OUTER BULLY

When a critical onslaught comes your way, don't brace in silence - be ready to speak your truth. Tell them clearly how their words make you

feel. Yes, they might ridicule your feelings or double down with deflection, but that doesn't matter. Call them out anyway. Every time. Calmly. Honestly. Without shame. You can even take it a step further. Ask them:

- Has someone been this critical of you?
- Where did you learn to speak to people this way?
- Why do you feel the need to comment on my weight/hair/clothes/partner/lifestyle/sexuality/job/children?

Be their mirror. Be their lesson. Help them see that criticism is not care and shaming people is not a power move. They already know they're being toxic, but most people are too scared to make them aware of how much damage their criticism causes.

Something I've learned about critical people is that when they're criticising us they're really criticising themselves. Their harshest words reveal their deepest wounds. Their unkind, bullying behaviour is never about you. It only reflects how they feel about themselves. Their criticism isn't a truth-telling mission - it's a projection, a desperate attempt to offload their own unhealed shame onto someone else. Their words are not your truth. Their judgement is not your mirror. And you don't need to carry what was never yours. All they're doing is showing you how truly awful it is to be them.

Their criticism is a confession. Their cruelty is a mirror. And none of it belongs to you. The critic simply does not count. Ever. Their opinions, projections, and woefully tragic self-consciousness leave us stronger, not weaker. They don't get our respect. They don't get our trust. And they certainly don't get our time. When the voice of your so-called 'inner critic', your outer bully, shows up, don't resist it. Become the observer. Listen, wait, and watch.

A LITTLE NOTE ON CRITICAL PROJECTION

Psychologytoday.com says this about critical projection: "People tend to project because they have a trait or desire that is too difficult to acknowledge. Rather than confronting it, they cast it away and onto someone else. This functions to preserve their self-esteem, making difficult emotions more tolerable. It's easier to attack or witness wrongdoing in another person than confront that possibility in one's own behaviour. **How a person acts toward the target of projection might reflect how they really feel about themselves.**"

Yep, in a nutshell, critical projection is a self-loathing, passive aggressive emotion looking for an escape route. When someone criticises you - your choices, your look, your voice, your existence, they're often revealing the parts of themselves they can't bear to face. Their insecurities, their failures, and their fears are all being offloaded and dumped on to you.

Projection usually shows up when someone feels out of control. If someone projects on to you, the best way to manage them is to ask compassionately, 'where's that coming from? what happened to you?' Say it with compassion, say it without heat, but let them know you see them and that their inner strife doesn't get to land on you. Projection is their pain speaking. But you don't have to listen.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

INNER CRITIC/OUTER BULLY (ICOB)

(Page 85 of your workbook)

- What words does your ICOB use when it speaks to you?
- What's the tone of its voice? Is it sharp, sarcastic, patronising, or cold?
- Does your ICOB whisper insidiously or shout?
- Do you have a name for your ICOB? If not, give it one now - make it cheeky or ridiculous if that helps.
- Can you visualise your ICOB's face? What does it look like?
- Why do you still pay attention to your ICOB's criticism?
- What do you think your ICOB would say or do if you ignored it completely?
- What names or labels does your ICOB use when talking to you?
- Who in your life - past and present - has played the role of an ICOB?
- How did they criticise you? What specifically did they say?
- How has their criticism made you feel about yourself?
- What dreams, ideas, or actions has their criticism stopped you from pursuing?
- What meaning have you given to their words? What have you come to believe about yourself because of them?
- What do you imagine would happen if you disagreed with your ICOB and stood your ground?
- Do you now believe you can challenge and override your ICOB's criticism and reclaim your power?
- When you've finally shaken off the influence of other people's opinions and projections, how free do you think you'll feel?
- As you hold your ICOB accountable for shaming you and projecting their own emotional debris onto you, what do you want to say back to them?

“INSTEAD OF SPENDING OUR LIVES RUNNING TOWARDS OUR DREAMS, WE ARE OFTEN RUNNING AWAY FROM A FEAR OF FAILURE OR A FEAR OF CRITICISM.”

ERIC WRIGHT

This fear isn't yours by design. It's the legacy of critical voices, projected shame, and distorted beliefs that were never yours to carry. The more you challenge your ICOB, the closer you move towards your dreams - not away from pain, but towards purpose.

Let the fight or flight stop here and let the healing begin.

INNER WARRIOR NOT INNER CRITIC

You are a warrior. Despite the shame, rejection, and humiliation you've faced, you haven't given in. That's why you're here. You're searching for the truth behind your feelings, *and* you're determined to find it.

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, we move carefully, attuned to the memory of how things have gone before. But when you're ready to stand tall, even if you stand alone, that's your inner warrior showing up. Anything or anyone toxic to your wellbeing needs to know that this is your time, this is your life. Fall in or fall out. No shame. No guilt. Just boundaries. These ICOBs, their time is up. Enough is enough.

Be gentle with yourself, you'll get there. Start by focusing on your needs, practice saying no, and learn to be at peace with the consequences. Start small. Build-up.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

ARE YOU TRADING YOUR STANDARDS?

(Page 89 of your workbook)

When we finally understand that 'our inner critic' is in fact an outer bully, everything shifts. We begin to see how much we've been silencing ourselves to avoid being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D.

And in that quiet space between the people-pleasing version of us and our inner warrior, we can spot it clearly: the places where we've traded our standards to avoid criticism.

- Think of one situation in your life right now where you're doing this. What are you compromising on or giving up to stay 'safe' from judgement? What are you trading to avoid conflict, rejection, or criticism from your ICOB?
- What has it cost you so far to keep your ICOB quiet. Think about your energy, confidence, joy, peace, creativity, purpose, connection, money or time?
- When will you start choosing to do and say the things you want, and stop trading your standards to avoid discomfort or disapproval? Give yourself permission. What's your first step?
- Who are you expecting to criticise you for doing this? Whose disapproval do you still fear - and why?
- What do you believe the consequences might be? Are you afraid of conflict, exclusion, or being misunderstood? Are those fears rooted in the past - or are they true in the present?
- Think about three ICOBs in your life. What is the comment, criticism, or behaviour from each that has impacted you the most? Name them, claim them, and start loosening their grip.

- What boundaries will you now put in place with your ICOB(s)? What will you no longer tolerate, not even in your own mind? What will you say, do, or believe differently from now on?
- What would your voice sound like if it had never been criticised?
- How would you speak to yourself if you'd only ever been loved, encouraged, and believed in?

Final Thought: Replacing the Critic with a Guide

We weren't born with a critic. We were born with curiosity, creativity, and an instinct to survive. The voice we now hear as an "inner critic" is just an external voice of fear wearing a mask of projection. But fear doesn't get to be in charge anymore. From now on, we appoint a new voice – not a critic, but a guide. One that asks helpful questions instead of throwing insults. One that encourages learning, growth, and grace instead of shame.

Reminder: You Don't Have to Believe the Voice

The voice of your ICOB might hang around for a while. That's OK. Now you know you don't have to believe it, you're allowed to say, "that's not true, that's not welcome here."

You are not the problem. The voices that taught you to feel broken are the problem. You can now start to build the boundaries that keep them out for good.

Talking of boundaries...

BOUNDARIES

When we're recovering from the excruciating emotional impact of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, there's a high probability that we'll have emotional walls. We put these walls in place because we believe they'll protect us. As we find our way through the debris of emotional suffering we know walls won't keep the critics and manipulators out, but they play an important part in our recovery. Walls have a bad reputation, but all they are is an extreme form of a boundary built with only one intention: to protect us.

Quite often we're told by people who don't really know how we feel to tear down our walls and 'let people in.' While healing is in progress I'd like to offer you an alternative option: **keep your walls up**. Include a gate or two when you're ready to allow access to people you feel emotionally safe with, but everyone else needs to stay on the other side of the wall as you continue to heal your emotional history.

You decide the pace at which you move towards emotional freedom. When you see the changes that you're making are working - measured by how you're navigating your emotional battles - you'll have proof that you're winning your emotional war. Only then can you, and should you, begin to 'de-wall' and put boundaries in place instead.

Boundaries act like a personal rulebook. They tell people who we are and what we'll tolerate. They show the world that we're sticking up for ourselves, what's appropriate and achievable for us, and what's not.

With critical and manipulative people, we need strong boundaries more than ever. Very few of us fail to recognise the necessity of putting a boundary in place but setting boundaries isn't the problem - keeping them is and here's why: **consequences!** When you've set a boundary and it's on the verge of being broken, do you:

- Immediately reaffirm the boundary and stick to it, regardless of the consequences.
- Reset the boundary, making it so elastic it could stretch to the sun.
- Or give up, forget it, it's just not worth it.

Whatever you chose, it's the right option for you at this time. Why? Because having been to emotional hell, the right thing to do as you make your way *out* is to consciously protect yourself. When we know different, we do different but, as works-in-progress on our road to emotional freedom, there's a chance we'll *submit* before we *commit* to our newfound way of choosing, feeling, and thinking.

When we have awareness, we have insight into what and who is causing us to make or break our boundaries. Building awareness is the reward, regardless of the outcome. You can still have a congratulatory moment because you were consciously aware of *why* you broke your boundary.

A boundary is a need, *our* need. The threat of painful consequences surfaces when someone else wants their needs met first. In that grey area between asserting our boundary or having it challenged, we have a choice:

- Do we meet *our* needs and keep *our* boundary, or
- Do we fall back on old patterns of people-pleasing, meet someone else's needs, and give in?

Look at the list of S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. experiences - can you identify from the list the reason why you're most likely to break your boundaries? What are you worried you'll experience if you stick to them?

SHAME



EXCLUSION



ABANDONMENT



REJECTION	■
CRITICISM	■
HUMILIATION	■
EXPLOITATION	■
DISMISSAL	■

Or is it something else?

- Is there a family member who's threatening to disinherit you?
- A 'friend' who will stop speaking to you?
- A colleague who will bitch about you?
- A narcissistic bully who'll make your life a misery if they don't get their way?
- Are you tied up in a career where keeping your boundaries would mean financial consequences? Would appraisals, references, bonuses, or promotions suffer? When it comes to boundaries and insecure employment should we collaborate, or should we pushback? Isn't it just 'easier' to give in?

Look at it this way: kind, decent people would not ride roughshod over our boundaries. They'd respect them in the same way they respect themselves and us. The Bully-Boundary-Breakers (The B.B.Bs) on the other hand are no better than the bullies in our childhood who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D us. What kind of person disregards someone's boundaries in deliberately dismissive ways? We must respect ourselves and our boundaries and meet our own needs first.

When we look at the B.B.B through the eyes of our conscious adult-self and not through the eyes of our wounded inner child, we'll rise up and meet their bullshit head on.

If you're wavering on a boundary ask yourself: am I choosing, feeling, thinking *this* because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? How hard are you trying to keep the peace? If you have a boundary that would have profound consequences for you if you broke it then make people aware it's non-negotiable and *show them you mean it* by not changing your mind. If it's a time-critical boundary, then set it an hour early. If your antagonistic boss makes a point of saying what an excellent job your colleague did in your absence, then profusely thank your colleague - and identify your boss as an arsehole. Don't allow them to trigger you. There's one of you, and you have one life. There are other jobs you could be doing.

There's something else I've discovered about those Bully-Boundary-Breakers: they're in awe of assertive people. As we continue to stand up to them they back down. I've known B.B.Bs who have met a boundary they didn't like and turned into monsters when the boundary-owner didn't give in. 'No' is a complete sentence. So is, 'I'll think about it and get back to you.'

After a lifetime of people-pleasing and co-dependent relationships, effective boundary-setting requires practice, but you can do this. You might find it easier to start by helping someone else set a boundary and observe how you coach them to keep it. The friend who:

- wants to give up late nights and drinking but keeps partying.
- keeps spending money they don't have.
- moans about, but won't leave, a toxic relationship.

On countless occasions you may have thought, 'this is the last time I'm listening to this', but what if this really was the last time? Put a boundary in place with anyone who insists on swapping emotional trauma stories to bond with you. You're on a road to emotional freedom; going over the pain of the past retraumatizes you and strengthens the dominant neural

pathways formed by traumatic experiences. Ways to heal trauma can be talked about - books you've read that have helped you, courses you may have taken, or helpful quotes you've used - but make sure the focus is on healing, not on reopening each other's wounds. The unexpected dumping of traumatic feelings can leave us blindsided when we've experienced trauma of our own. For their sake as well as ours, we need to steer them away from oversharing. This is where our boundary could lose us a friendship, start a hate-campaign, or trigger a gossip-chain. So what? They're relying on our guilt and vulnerabilities to get their way. Don't give them what they want. Move the conversation forward; don't encourage wallowing. And if they continue to disrespect your boundary, walk away.

When I stopped ruminating on my past, I realised I didn't have much to talk about. There was no conversation, unless it was about trauma. I was ditched by people who only wanted to wallow or create further chaos rather than heal. Knowing we can set unbreakable boundaries to help other people helps us realise we can set them for ourselves too. People may not like it - but you'll love it! Boundaries help us plan our time and put limits in place with people who would otherwise bankrupt us emotionally, spiritually, and financially. Boundaries empower us to be peacefully assertive, so it never becomes necessary to push back or lock horns. There's less stress when there's more boundaries.

Bearing in mind everything we've talked about, take a moment to think about the questions in the next exercise and answer them as best you can. You can always come back to them later. There are no right or wrong answers, no judgement, and no criticism! You're in control. Let's go!!

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

BOUNDARIES

(Page 92 of your workbook, or complete below)

- Where in your life would it be **undeniably beneficial for you to have boundaries?**
- Why do you think there's an absence of boundaries here?
- When it comes to setting boundaries which S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences or consequences do you most want to avoid?
- Who comes to mind when you think about setting boundaries?
- What's your worst fear about setting boundaries?
- What would be your greatest freedom if you set a specific boundary today?
- Which boundary will you commit to setting this week - and keeping?
- What will you say to someone next time they exploit your boundary?
- If you could guarantee you wouldn't be S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D, or care if you were, what are the boundaries you would set and keep?

You already have unbreakable boundaries somewhere in your life, lines that get crossed where you have something to say. Have you consciously set these boundaries? Probably not. But when you're really pushed, you know when to say enough is enough. As your self-worth grows, you'll start to consciously set boundaries that best reflect the truth of who you really are. Keeping boundaries all comes down to accepting the consequences - and you're learning to *love* the consequences!


Do this exercise every time you set a new boundary.

This is my new boundary:

These might be the consequences:

Are you O.K with these potential consequences? YES/NO

If you answered no, do you think you could be O.K with them in the future? YES/NO?



**STRONG BOUNDARIES
WILL ONLY BE KEPT IF THEIR
CONSEQUENCES
ARE MET WITH
UNCONDITIONAL
DETERMINATION
NOT TO GIVE IN!**

**YOUR BOUNDARIES ARE IMPORTANT
AND WORTHY OF RESPECT**

SAYING NO

Like boundary-setting, saying 'no' can provoke memories of fear, disempowerment, exclusion, and rejection. We don't want to come over all 'Judge Mental', so we go along with other people's suggestions and persuasions and end up feeling an acute sense of self-betrayal. Saying 'no' doesn't feel like an option when our need for validation and acceptance dominates our decisions.

Hearing the word 'no' in childhood may have resulted in feelings of humiliation and self-doubt so why would we say it to other people when we assume they'll feel similarly humiliated and shamed? When our past experiences tell us to walk cautiously and be careful, we conform. We obey. We don't take risks or try new things. We say **yes** to remain safe. We're too scared of the consequences that saying **no** may bring. There's no doubt that being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. has left us with limited confidence and impaired judgement. We associate feelings like disappointment, unhappiness, grief, rejection, and regret with the word **no**. When I recall being told **no**, I only remember sadness, struggle, unhappy endings, and loss.

WHEN WE WANT TO SAY NO BUT...

So strong is our fear of offending someone and exposing ourselves to the danger of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. that we say **yes** even when we know we should say **no**. Next time you're struggling to say **no** try one of these phrases instead:

- I think I'm busy, I'll check.
- Not sure I can, I'll have to come back to you.
- I'll think about it.
- Thursday? This Thursday? Oh no, I've got therapy/karate/another date.

All these responses are statements, they're closed answers. They don't invite questions or debate. They're not asking for permission in the form of a question like: 'Is it OK if I let you know?' or 'Can I check and come back to you?'

If a pushy person keeps on keeping on, repeat your statement without smiling. If they're stupidly persistent (like they've just spent a weekend at an 'assertiveness' event), use a more forceful statement like:

- 'No' is a complete sentence.
- I think this constitutes harassment.
- You're entitled to your opinion, but it's still no.
- I'm in recovery – now back off.
- No! (said at a volume that shocks them into silence.)
- A blank stare and no response at all. Eventually they'll go away.

Never be intimidated by name-calling or being sworn at - even when it brings back horrible memories and triggers you. Having the last word stands between your ego, your dignity, and your self-worth. Walk away.

A word of caution: a person who is incapable of hearing no and accepting it has their own very serious issues. If you've said no and they've responded with, "OK, maybe next time," or "No problem, we'll miss you," just smile and get on with your day. This is a regulated response to an uncomfortable situation, but no harm done. **But** if you're challenged and the name-calling starts (even when disguised as 'a joke'), or there's more than one of them and you feel intimidated, then exit safely and as soon as possible. You're in recovery from emotional abuse. You don't need to say yes to an invitation to keep the peace. Those were your old habits, the ones you used when your self-worth was on the floor. Now is the perfect time to start putting your needs first and practice saying no or at least say, "I'll get back to you."

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

SAYING NO

(Page 95 of your workbook)

Practice saying no in as many silly voices and accents as you can. I know this might seem a bit weird but there are good reasons for my suggestion. We need to take the heat out of saying no, and humour will take the heat out of anything. Try it. I like to impersonate farm animals saying no – the cows sound best: "Nooooo!" If farm animals aren't your thing, imagine how your favourite actor, sports star, or musician might say no.

- Who would you love to say no to?
- Why?
- What's stopped you saying no in the past?
- What have you made saying no mean about you?

As your true self continues to emerge from the emotional debris that's buried you, you'll say no more often. Remember the question: am I choosing, feeling, thinking this because I was S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D? It's when you want to say no, but you say yes instead that you must remember to ask the one question. Any consequences will only be caused by people you needed to say no to in the first place.

CONFRONTATION

One big reason why we don't say no and why we give up on our boundaries is our fear of confrontation. When we want to speak up or raise an issue with someone that they may disagree with we're immediately taken back to a time when we were shut down for speaking up. We remember feeling humiliated and shamed, dismissed, and embarrassed. That's why we hate confrontation.

Look up the word confrontation in the dictionary and you'll see it means 'a hostile or argumentative situation or meeting between opposing parties.' My question is: who makes it hostile and argumentative? We can certainly be opposing parties with different ideas and beliefs, but whatever happened to discussing something reasonably? Remember what we said about losing face and having the last word? When we reclaim our emotional power and take time to think things through consciously, we never need to fear confrontation because we're not bringing it.

As we sit there with awareness and a logical perspective, showing understanding and empathy for someone else's point of view, there is no chance of a confrontation. You might meet a self-opinionated dogmatist who loves the sound of their own voice but it's not a confrontation until *both* sides make it one.

When we want a conversation to be non-confrontational, we must approach it with a conscious mind, realistic expectations, and *without* emotional weapons. That's it. Regardless of the grenades the other person armours up with we'll remain untriggered. That way *we both* have a non-confrontational experience. If we go prepared to compromise and negotiate, even to walk away and reconvene another day, then confrontation will not be an issue for us ever again. If we go in peace, we'll leave in peace. If we go in anger, determined to get our way, stand our ground, have the last word, or get an answer at any cost, we're going in weaponised with a confrontational approach.

I know how hard you may have fought for the simplest things, but our fighting days are over. Yes, approach with caution, but also with compassion; there may be a S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D person behind the confrontational mask.

**I WONDER WHICH IS WORSE:
CONFRONTATIONAL PEOPLE WHO ARE AFRAID OF CARING
OR CARING PEOPLE WHO ARE AFRAID OF CONFRONTATION**

MARDY GROTHE

SELF-TRUST

SELF-TRUST IS THE FIRST SECRET OF SUCCESS

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

When we feel emotionally and physically safe with someone, we trust them. That's what trust is. It takes time to build and can be broken instantly. Because of our S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D experiences we either tend to be overly cautious before we trust or, as we get pulled in by 'charming' people, we trust too quickly. We might later kick ourselves for our eagerness to trust but we live and learn.

We often overlook the absence of trust, regardless of the cost to our integrity but when we don't feel emotionally or physically safe with someone, we won't trust them even if we say we do. We know in the depths of our soul that we're being lied to or betrayed. Despite our intuition telling us that all is not as it should be, we stay silent to avoid uncomfortable conversations and the fear of being disliked. The stronger our feelings, the more painful the absence of trust will feel. It's also true that the stronger the feelings, the more likely we are to give the benefit of the doubt when it comes to compromising over trust issues.

We must be extra careful to have our best interests at heart with people we know we can't yet trust. This is when our boundaries should be kept cemented in place or, if we're still learning to set and keep our boundaries, then our walls should be up. If we're not ready to speak up and raise questions, we must at least practice caution around anyone we doubt is trustworthy.

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. in childhood, and the trust in our adult relationships is tested, we'll brush over betrayals to avoid the risk of being S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. all over again. When children experience one emotional

or physical betrayal after another, is it any wonder they grow into adults with so many issues around trust?

SO HOW DO WE LEARN TO TRUST SOMEONE?

When we've been S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D we may not know how to gauge if someone or something is trustworthy. If we have *any* doubts, we must be prepared to walk away without looking over our shoulder for the consequences. That's basic self-care. If we're wrong, they'll understand. If we're *right*, we've saved ourselves a shitload of pain and aggravation.

Think about an airline with a faultless safety record. We're a nervous flyer with a few bad experiences behind us but they've been dependable, friendly, they've listened to our concerns, and we wholeheartedly trust we'll be safe with them. Or the doctor we've consulted for many years who always diagnoses us thoroughly and professionally, we trust them to look after our health. We trust a friend to have our back because they've proved time and time again that they've been there for us, just as we have for them. These examples boil down to one thing: evidence of trustworthiness. We've collected proof over a significant time that using this service or spending time with this person is emotionally and physically a safe option for us. We can trust them.

WHAT IS TRUST?

Chances are you've said you trust someone without knowing exactly what you mean by trust. When I've asked people what trust means to them, most say, "Hmm, I don't really know." One guy said, "Oh, I guess it means I'd leave my wallet on the table on a first date." To him, feeling safe was all about his money. Cheating on him might not break his trust - nicking his wallet would. Conversely, you might trust someone with your house keys but not with your kids or pets. Trusting others can be a minefield of unpredictable outcomes until experience tells us they've got our back.

On our road towards emotional freedom, we must never second-guess ourselves when it comes to trust. We must learn that trust takes time to build. It's not possible to say we trust someone after a day, or even a few weeks. The building blocks may be there, but the foundation is yet to be built. What I'd like you to decide is: **how much do you trust yourself?**

If you had doubts about someone's trustworthiness, how far would you allow yourself to be compromised by them just to avoid an uncomfortable conversation or the need to say no? Right now, how safe would you feel around someone who had S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. you? This is not about trusting *them*, it's about trusting *yourself* and your ability to manage yourself emotionally. You have your 'I'll let you know' boundary firmly in place, but during a manipulative or patronising conversation do you trust yourself enough to make your emotional and physical safety a priority and walk away from their intimidating tactics? Or to avoid an uncomfortable scene do you allow them to continue talking down to you? Would you trust someone who tells a good sob story to manipulate, or would you have doubts that their story may not be true? Do you feel emotionally compromised by these situations, or do you feel emotionally safe? When we're rebuilding our self-esteem and reclaiming our emotional power, we must keep ourselves emotionally and physically safe - in other words we must **trust ourselves** - not to be pressured into anything by anyone regardless of the consequences.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

TRUST SPECTRUM

(Page 96 of your workbook)

- Right now, out of 10, how much do you trust yourself to prioritise your emotional and physical safety when faced with a difficult situation or a critical person? There's no right or wrong answer, just whatever you feel in this moment:

MY NAME IS **AND I**

DON'T TRUST MYSELF

TRUST MYSELF

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

TO PRIORITISE MY EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL SAFETY.

- What fears sit in the space between the number you've given yourself and a 10?

Whatever your score right now, you can come back to the Trust Spectrum anytime and measure how your self-trust changes. Your score will change as you reclaim more of your emotional power. Please, please, please, always practice caution and discernment around anyone or anything where you feel emotionally or physically unsure or unsafe. When you're in any doubt, walk away; don't worry about how it looks. As I said, if you're wrong they'll understand but if you're right, you'll be relieved you walked away. Trusting ourselves to prioritise our emotional and physical safety in every situation helps us move past overwhelming feelings, returns us to a present-moment state of calm, and builds our self-esteem as we recognise our willingness to protect and care for ourselves.

Always remember that you're doing this work because you're a kind, loving, sensitive person who's committed to transforming their emotional pain and reclaiming their power and self-worth.

As you complete this next exercise, you may recall names of people who made you feel unsafe and insecure. If you're triggered in any way remember you're responding to a memory but you're safe now. Stop the exercise and return when you feel up to it. It might also be useful to look at the names you included under the full and half-full Jars of Justice. These are examples of people you cannot trust.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

WHO CAN AND CAN'T YOU TRUST?

(Page 96 of your workbook)

- Growing up, who **didn't** have your emotional and physical safety as their priority? Write down their names and hold them accountable.
- How about now? Who can't you trust and why?

This work will prompt you to question if you can trust the people around you. If you're still in touch with the people who S.E.A.R.C.H.E.D. you, it won't surprise you to learn that you don't feel emotionally or physically safe with them.

Realising that you *don't* trust someone empowers you to change how you see your relationship with them.

- It stops you taking the blame.
- It stops you feeling responsible for their behaviour.
- It stops you pleasing them and going out of your way to keep the peace.

Let them create all the havoc they want. You'll remain calm as you disregard their behaviour.

When we start to look at ourselves and our past with a new perspective on trust, we'll naturally distance ourselves from people and situations that don't have our best interests at heart. You may no longer want to punish someone for what they did or said to you, but the loss of trust may never be rebuilt and that's OK.

Armed with the knowledge you already have - and with more to come - you won't have any problem turning yourself from someone who doesn't trust themselves into someone who scores a '10' on the Self-Trust Spectrum every time.

Remember: nobody needs to know you're doing this work. You can't offend or upset anyone when you're working on yourself behind the scenes.

IS TRUST ALWAYS NECESSARY?

There may already be relationships in your life where you know trust is absent but the 'pay off' is worth turning a blind eye. It's serving you somehow even if it doesn't always feel worth it. In our relationships with family an absence of trust can be draining and makes for a depressing connection. From birth we're programmed to trust parents and caregivers but we get a rude awakening when we learn they are in fact untrustworthy. This early betrayal sets the tone for trust in all our relationships. **Is it possible to still have connections with family if they're untrustworthy?** If you feel unable to disconnect completely but you're fully aware of their limitations, then yes. But avoid having any expectations whatsoever of those family members and continue to keep yourself emotionally, physically, and financially protected.

I know how heartbreaking it is to live in hope that fractured familial relationships can be fixed. Be the Master Observer with these connections and always make sure you practice self-trust. It's worth remembering that you can forgive someone (no longer seek justice or apology), but you know in your heart you could never trust them. You can have compassion and empathy for someone, but the idea of trusting them? No way!

I would say the same rules apply with friendships - but I would go one step further. Friendships that test your trust are not worth your time and energy. Ask yourself why you're maintaining these friendships. Is there a fear-based reason rooted in your childhood that keeps you connected to someone who's pulling your strings...As for other connections such as

work colleagues or acquaintances I always think our personal values, boundaries, and **self-trust** are more important for guiding and building these kinds of connections than whether we trust them or not. Steer yourself away from emotionally investing and keep your own guidance. You can be dependable, co-operative, warm, and friendly but remember, you're the Master Observer. Keep your expectations in check and stay aware. Remember, you're in recovery, and you owe it to yourself to stay safe.

Closing Reflection

You're learning that trust isn't something you owe to anyone; it's something you honour within yourself first. When we've had a hard time emotionally we can easily fall into mean behaviour to be liked and included. This is fear-based, wounded inner child survival behaviour. Our conscious adult-self trusts themselves and says no to office gossip and being pressured to be part of the 'mean team'. Our conscious adult-self leads by example. You're reclaiming the right to feel safe, to choose consciously, and to live your life from a place of wisdom, not fear. Every moment you prioritise your emotional and physical safety you strengthen your self-trust and in turn you come closer to living as your most powerful, peaceful self.

Now it's time to build on that strength. In the next chapter, you'll learn everything you need to know about how to manage difficult, confrontational people - yep, I'm about to teach you how to swim like a dolphin in shark-infested water. You'll learn exactly how to stay calm, steady, and self-led, no matter who you're facing or what you're feeling.

A CALMER ME

A . C . A . L . M . E . R . M . E .



How often has your emotional history got the better of you? You try to assert and express yourself, but instead, you're taken back to a time when you were criticised and humiliated for your opinion. Speaking up cost you your dignity and your confidence. Someone shamed you and what's worse, it was someone you loved and trusted.

You felt betrayed, hurt, and confused.

Fast-forward to the present moment, and your past humiliations roll back in to shame you all over again. As you attempt to stand your ground you forget your words, you feel anxious and panicky, and you sense yourself falling back into a black hole of overwhelm.

As your unmet needs rush to the surface, you find yourself about to say or do something you know you'll regret. You feel disempowered but desperate to save face. What you choose to do and say in the next few seconds will either:

- Intensify the loss of control you're feeling, or
- Interrupt your autopilot habit of throwing a verbal grenade.

In those few seconds, when you ask the question, "Am I choosing, feeling, thinking *this* because of my emotional history?" the answer will always be YES.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. teaches us a method that ensures, whatever the challenge, overwhelm, or fear, we'll have a regulated process ready to interrupt our fear, and stop anxiety in its tracks. A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E becomes our new autopilot habit.

Self-regulation doesn't come easy to people who have experienced emotional chaos and trauma, whether in childhood or elsewhere.

- We've been conditioned to expect the worst-case scenario.
- We anticipate catastrophe and fear confrontation.

- We're sensitive to bad moods, terrified of offending people, and we compulsively worry about what others think ruminating on what we should have said or could have done better.
- We're hypervigilant for the slightest hint of a threat and can develop extreme coping mechanisms to protect ourselves.

There are many techniques that can ground and regulate us when panic and anxiety approach, but they tend to involve physical actions. Often, in those moments, we're stuck in a situation where traditional methods for re-regulating like stamping our feet or clapping our hands just aren't possible.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. teaches us how to speak to our overwhelm and our fear in any situation with any person without them knowing what we're doing. Whatever and whoever we're faced with, A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. teaches us to breathe, think, and respond instead of panicking and reacting.

When we've been adversely conditioned by our emotional experiences, feeling cool, calm, and emotionally collected in stressful situations especially with difficult people is not an easy reach.

Learning this process means you'll stay aware and maintain a logical thought process and self-control despite what's happening around you. As overwhelm peeps around the corner, you'll continue to affirm inner and outer calm remaining composed and dignified.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. has been shared with people who have struggled to overcome the devastating effects of trauma - whether experienced in childhood or at other times - as well as other emotionally debilitating experiences. They've managed to restore a sense of wellbeing, validation, and self-worth.

Severe anxiety, personality disorders, trauma, depression, anger issues, impulsivity, O.C.D., and panic disorders to name a few have been healed with this process.

Feeling triggered is not our fault, we're not to blame, we've been *conditioned* to feel tested. As we navigate our road to emotional freedom, we're bound to meet someone or something that feels like it's testing us. But in those first few seconds when the familiar rumbles of shame begin to stir A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E helps us choose between pain and peace. In those moments we can choose to remember who we really are.

Beneath the emotional debris, we're powerful, calm, wise, and intuitive. We are extraordinary copers.

As someone who's experienced the harmful and disruptive consequences of childhood trauma I know how vitally important it is to have a process that's:

- Easy to remember
- Easy to implement
- Easy to repeat

Practice Makes You Powerful

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. is learned and practiced when you're feeling calm. That way, when you're faced with someone or something that triggers you, you'll already know how to move your thoughts to a calm space rather than scrabble around mid-panic for a process to calm you down. The tools you need will already be present and with repetition they'll be on autopilot. 😊

Don't wait until you need the process; practice using it every day, in every way until it becomes the thoughts you automatically implement rather than the coping mechanism you'd normally react with.

Live minute-by-minute with this process

Use it consciously with everyone you meet and in everything you do. Even with people and situations you're comfortable with, practice using the process; that way you'll ensure it is front and centre in your mind when you really need it.

Support for Your Journey

This life-changing process has meant so much to so many people that there's a page on my website dedicated to it. Free to download, there's a meditation, and a free audio file. Try and listen to it as much as possible because the feedback I'm receiving is that just by listening people are noticing significant changes in their emotional responses. I'm adding free resources to the page all the time so do check it out.

Allow A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E to become deeply ingrained in your brain, and you'll override old programming sending it a very different message about how, these days, you manage fear and anxiety with grace and expertise.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. BUILDS DISTRESS TOLERANCE SKILLS

When chaotic and disruptive emotional experiences have left us with an over-sensitised fear response, raised voices, dismissive looks, sarcastic remarks, loud noises, and urgent requests can start an emotional rollercoaster of chaos, anxiety, and panic. We're plunged back into those fear-based memories of criticism, humiliation, and shame.

When we're hypervigilant for signs that we may again be shamed we fall back on coping mechanisms to protect ourselves. When we engage with an empowering way of coping with our feelings, we develop something called **distress tolerance skills**.

These are skills that help us manage actual or perceived emotional distress. A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. is a series of easily learned distress tolerance

skills that empower us to consciously move from chaos to calm reclaiming our emotional power as we go. When you've learned this process, you'll automatically stop the threat of overwhelm and anxiety from becoming a full-on emotional storm. Your fear response may be tickled but it won't be provoked. You'll take the path to peace instead of reaching for a coping mechanism and invoking a full-on protection squad.

*

If you hadn't already guessed, each letter of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. stands for an empowering step in the process. As you learn the steps, which are quick and easy, you'll re-regulate your fear response allowing the connections between strong emotions and fear-based memories to be soothed and healed. From now on, when you find yourself at an emotional fork in the road, you will always choose the path to peace.

Choosing not to engage in a process of defending and protecting ourselves can initially feel like we're backing down, losing our emotional war, or allowing someone else to have control and the last word.

Are we 'chickening out' of fighting for our right to be seen and heard? Not at all.

What this process teaches us is to protect ourselves without the familiar fear, rage, and indignation we've become used to. This method guarantees we maintain our dignity and self-control and keep winning our emotional war.

A PERSONAL NOTE

I created this process to heal my own dysfunctional and emotionally dysregulated behaviour. Panic attacks, anxiety, and suicidal depression, plus all the 'added extras' that accompany these soul-destroying experiences. It's the process that empowered me to finally heal my childhood trauma and reach emotional freedom. A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

released me from decades of dysfunctional and dysregulated choices, feelings, and thoughts. I slowly rebuilt my life and my mental health, and you can do the same.

When we see ourselves and our surroundings through a window of conscious awareness and logical perspective, we calmly and effectively manage anyone and anything. We no longer feel resentful, overwhelmed, or angry, imagining worst-case scenarios or communicating in defensive, passive-aggressive ways.

Instead, in our minds, we've created a relaxed and compassionate space, a space where the fear of being shamed, criticised, rejected, and excluded no longer triggers us.

Calmly dismissing someone's potential to provoke us and having the power to control our anxiety are powerful skills that transform our lives. When you learn this process, just by thinking the words "A Calmer Me", your fear-based thoughts and memories are soothed, and your fear response is regulated - and all of this is done without anyone knowing the secret of your composure.

I've taught this process in all sorts of circumstances, and I've seen incredible outcomes. I've witnessed nervous people remain rock steady in situations that would once have seen them either running from the room or engaging in mortal combat.

As they applied the simple techniques of the process, they replaced stress and awkwardness with calm awareness. They sussed what was going on and refused to play the game.

By using A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. they learned to recognise the disruptive intentions of difficult people, and step back from overwhelming situations. More importantly, they began to transform their fear of

speaking up and their old belief that tolerating the intolerable meant something terrible about them.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. creates the space for us to reclaim our emotional power and keep winning our emotional war.

A FINAL WORD BEFORE WE BEGIN

Are you still rooted in feelings of unworthiness, or believing you don't deserve good things?

- Dare to believe you're worth it.
- Dare to believe you deserve to feel calm.
- That a peaceful life is normal.
- That there's no need for chaos and drama.

Defending and protecting yourself was once necessary, as was waiting to be heard and seen, but those critically abusive people who got you here no longer have the power to control your life or your emotions. You're now engaging with a process that allows your conscious thoughts to gently move you forward and out of the emotional pain caused by chaos and disruption.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. makes room for our conscious adult self to be a kind protector and for our wounded inner child's needs to finally be met and soothed.

The best time to get to know our fears and anxiety is when we're feeling calm so let's begin.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

A IS FOR AWARENESS

'When I have awareness, I have self-control, and I own myself. When I don't have awareness, I don't have self-control and someone or something else owns me.'

Awareness is the first step in our process. When we become aware of the source of our emotional struggles and suffering and hold the appropriate people accountable, confusion and shame about who we were in the past can be transformed.

We no longer blame or punish ourselves for what someone else did or said to us that damaged us so profoundly. With awareness, we can tell our truth and release ourselves from the belief that the emotional pain we feel is all our fault.

When we learn to merge *awareness of our own sensitivities* (self-awareness) with *awareness of our environment* (situational awareness), we have the golden ticket to *radical awareness* wherever we are and whoever we're with.

Radical awareness means fewer shocks, fewer surprises, and a conscious mind that gets to write a new script.

So, what is awareness?

Awareness is knowledge. It's consciousness. When we have knowledge about a person's ability to provoke us, or about a situation that might trigger us, our awareness fuels us to remain conscious and think about our responses. For those of us who have experienced trauma, awareness gives us the ability to read the room and check for any possible dangers or threats.

When we have awareness, we know how our potential triggers may be ignited and we're empowered to step back and walk away, rather than engage in yet another emotional battle.

- Awareness is perception. It's mindfulness. It's the fuel our conscious adult self requires to soothe our fearful inner child.
- Awareness means identifying how our senses can ground us, allowing our bodies and minds to be calm amid chaos. Awareness is not intimidated by distressing memories because it has knowledge about them.
- Awareness will not bend to people who attempt to hinder or sabotage us because it knows their destructive intention, and it won't play their game.

When we have awareness, we're conscious. And when we're consciously aware, we're empowered to think first.

A PRACTICE IN AWARENESS

How aware of your surroundings are you right now? Would you know without looking up the five nearest objects to you? Become aware of the words you're reading. Really see them. Are you reading them on a screen or on paper? Are you at home? On public transport? In a café? A library? College? Are you outside on a beach, or in a park? Are you in a prison? A hospital?

Look up. What do you see? Observe the colours around you. The aromas. The noise. Do you sense a shift in your posture as you become aware of your surroundings? Or a change in how you're feeling, breathing, or what you're thinking?

Do background noises blend in or do they annoy and trigger you?

THE AWARENESS STEPS

Awareness is the beginning, but it leads to so much more.

- Each time you choose awareness, you're choosing presence.
- Each time you choose presence, you're choosing consciousness.
- Each time you choose consciousness, you're choosing self-control.

The more you practice awareness, the more you quietly reclaim your emotional power one moment, one breath, one choice at a time.

*

Think about the mantra I gave you at the start of this chapter: *'When I have awareness I have self-control, and I own myself. When I don't have awareness, I don't have self-control and someone or something else owns me.'*

For this exercise, we're using awareness to gain knowledge about our environment and the people around us. If we know there's a chance someone may do or say something that provokes us - intentionally or otherwise - we can think before we respond to any triggers. And remember, walking away is also an empowering response.

When we take time to think, we can prepare - even if it's to excuse ourselves and leave the situation. Awareness means we can choose to remain present and practice self-control. No more plunging into dysregulated reactions.

Knowing where potential triggers may be lurking and why and how they may provoke us, means we can unplug ourselves from the power they once had over us.

I had a long list of potential triggers and one day I thought about how to prepare myself for the next time I felt provoked. The 'one question' 'am I choosing/feeling/thinking this because of my emotional history helped

dissolve the trigger. Alongside self-compassion and patience my triggers finally defused completely. When we have knowledge and awareness about how we might be overwhelmed, we can practice self-control and stay empowered.

As we practice awareness, our perceptions of places and people change.

Practice becoming aware as you stand in a queue, walk along a street, or go into a shop:

- Are you making choices or having feelings and thoughts because of your past emotional experiences?
- Are you preparing to defend yourself?
- Or are you choosing, feeling, and thinking in more regulated ways?

If someone dismisses you, knocks into you, or jumps a queue, would they trigger your fear of being bullied, overlooked, unheard and unseen? Or does having awareness and knowledge of your potential triggers mean you can respond calmly with self-control - which also includes walking away and getting on with your day.

GROUNDING IN THE PRESENT

Become aware of where you are right now. Hold your head up and look around. You have permission to be here, and you're entitled to feel safe.

It's our **Conscious Adult Self** who's practicing this awareness. When anxiety or panic rise up, it's our **Wounded Inner Child** who will need to know:

- Am I safe?
- Can I breathe?
- Will this pass?

Our Conscious Adult Self - and their awareness - will always answer yes, yes, and yes.

When we're aware of potential triggers in our environment, and we're equipped to think about our responses, we can't be provoked.

When we recognise someone's attempt to press our buttons, goad us, or trigger us, we ask ourselves the one question - am I choosing, feeling, or thinking this because of my emotional history - or simply affirm and repeat:

"I won't allow past pain to ruin present peace."

One of the sweetest feelings you'll ever have on your road to emotional freedom is the moment you realise you've disarmed your fear response and its old coping mechanisms and replaced them with Conscious Awareness. The satisfaction you'll feel when you realise that awareness helped you stop at the emotional fork in the road and choose the path to peace will be the moment you know you're truly winning your emotional war.

When you've faced, unpacked, and overcome a trigger and you've controlled your fear response rather than letting it control you, that will be the moment you see the empowered truth of who you really are. And you'll have done it all in your conscious mind, without saying a word, without confrontation, without defensiveness, without needing to ruminate afterwards about what you should have said or done. You may not even remember the trigger.

You've become aware - the Master Observer.

Seriously, High 5 yourself.

AWARENESS MEDITATION

To help you practice awareness and self-control you can visualise yourself in the following meditation. Below is the meditation script but I recommend plugging yourself in and absorbing the powerful vibrations of the audio version which is available free of charge on my website. Play it when you're out and about, on your way to work, college, an interview, at home, in the garden...anywhere! When you're stuck somewhere that feels oppressive or when you begin to feel overwhelmed, remembering this meditation will help you feel comforted, protected, and safe. The meditation is available as a free audio file at:

www.howtomendyourmentalhealth.com/acalmerme

And if it gets too much you can stop the meditation any time you choose.

MEDITATION

You enter a room through a door that only you have the key to. You unlock the door, walk through with your head held high, and close the door behind you. You decide to lock the door from the inside.

You find yourself in a large room. You choose to sit down in a soft, comfortable chair. In the middle of the room stands a clear-glass partition. The partition is soundproof and unbreakable. It stretches from floor to ceiling and wall to wall. *Nothing and nobody can cross the partition.*

You are safe.

Take a deep breath.

On the other side of the partition are people from your past who have shamed you. Some of them you've forgiven, others not. Be aware of how you're feeling and take a moment to reassure yourself that all is well. You are safe.

You stand up and walk slowly to the partition. The people who have shamed you are seated. They are so burdened by the shameful things they have said and done to you that they cannot move.

After a few moments you return to your chair and sit down. You have nothing to fear; they no longer have any power over you. You are stronger, calmer, and wiser. Whole and complete.

You relax into the chair. Your hands rest gently in your lap, and your feet are placed lightly on the floor. The muscles in your legs, back, neck, and arms are relaxed and soft.

As you look around the room, you notice details you hadn't seen before:

A vase full of flowers on a table.

A lampshade with a fringe and tiny beads stitched to the fabric.

Three pictures hanging to the right of you and a mirror to your left.

You look closely and make out faces in the pictures. Who do you see?

On a shelf, you notice books by your favourite author, several you recognise. Who is the author? What are the titles of the books?

You become aware of noise from outside. A siren blares past. You smile to yourself remaining calm, untriggered by the loud, disturbing noise. You hear laughter and chatter from a café opposite and inhale a mouthwatering aroma. You imagine the taste of spices and soft bread on your tongue.

Your awareness floats gently back to the people on the other side of the glass partition. Their expressions don't bother you at all. Their mouths are moving, but you cannot hear their words or voices. You look at each one in turn and tell them: "Your lies are no longer my truth." You smile to yourself as you affirm: "Nothing and nobody can shame me. Nothing and nobody can harm me."

You are consciously aware of your surroundings. You feel safe. You are in control. You hold your head up and look around. You tell yourself: "I am powerful. I am strong. I am looking forward."

You have permission to be here.

You deserve to feel safe.

You take one last look at the people seated beyond the partition.

You have a message for them, a message only you can deliver.

What is your message?

Now, they are silent. You unlock the door and leave the room, locking the door behind you. You won't return to the room again. You are at peace.

All is well.

*

When you're ready, gently bring your awareness back to the present moment. Notice your breath. Notice your body. Feel the safety that still surrounds you. You have practiced awareness. You have strengthened your self-control. You have honoured your power. Carry this calmness with you now, knowing you have everything you need to manage anyone and anything with grace, dignity, and strength. Let's continue your journey.

AWARENESS IN THE REAL WORLD

Practice becoming aware of yourself as you speak. Visualise your mouth moving, the words you choose, the pace and tone of your voice.

Slow down.

Breathe deeply.

Listen.

This simple practice will increase your sense of self-control and awareness. We want to ensure that the foundation of our emotional power is built from awareness. When we're aware of what's going on

externally as well as internally, when we're aware of what or who could trigger us, and why, we can reclaim our power and win our emotional war.

We are aware.

We are present.

We have self-control.

We have the power to choose what happens next.

Fork in the road.

Pain, or peace?

When we're out and about, most of our stress and overwhelm is created by the sensory connections between ourselves and other people talking too loudly, moving too quickly. People can feel scary!

Our senses pick up messages from our environment that put our fear-based memories on alert. Before we know it, we're open to provocation from innocent passers-by, processing loud traffic noises, sirens, scooters, bikes, demands for money from charities, buskers, "5-minutes of your time?" from someone who thinks we want to go paintballing, and *the curse of the modern age*: eyes glued to screens, *nobody* looking where they're going, *nobody* practising awareness.

No wonder we feel overwhelmed!

The good news is, with awareness, we can prepare ourselves. We can anticipate and navigate around these environmental triggers.

We are no longer helpless. We are no longer unconscious. We are aware. And with awareness comes calm, choice, and power.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

AWARENESS

(Page 98 of your workbook)

- What have you learned about awareness?
- What does awareness mean to you?
- Where are you most aware of your emotions? With family, at work, in crowds, with strangers?
- Where do you find it hardest to stay aware and calm?
- What one trigger do you now feel more prepared to manage with awareness?
- How will choosing awareness instead of reaction change your next difficult moment?

Final reflection:

When you next feel triggered, what words will you quietly affirm to yourself to stay aware and choose peace? For example: the one question – am I choosing/feeling/thinking this because of my emotional history, or “I won’t allow past pain to ruin present peace.” or “I choose calm. I choose me.”

Think about yourself in the following scenarios. Choose your answer A B or C based on your current feelings.

Scenario 1:

You’re in the supermarket and it’s busy. The lighting’s too bright, the music’s too loud, people are walking in front of you, bumping into you, reaching across you, and generally behaving like you’re invisible. You finally get to the front of a slow-moving ‘5-items-or-less’ queue for the checkout. Suddenly a person behind you, who’s been complaining loudly about the wait, pushes in front of you and gets to the checkout with way more than 5 items in their basket. Do you:

A: Throw your basket at their head.

B: Say 'I was next if you don't mind.'

C: Think to yourself 'I used to be like that' and gratefully use the next free checkout.

Scenario 2:

You're walking along the high street. It's just after 1pm. There's lots of activity as people rush to get lunch and run errands. You see a guy on a scooter. He's weaving his way down the high street only just missing pushchairs and screaming toddlers. You're almost face to face with him. Do you:

A: Scream and theatrically leap out of the way.

B: Step aside calling him an asshole and tell him he's breaking the law.

C: Purposefully stand still in all your power and wait for him to pass.

Scenario 3:

You're sat uncomfortably in the reception area of a company with whom you're interviewing for a job. You're called 30-minutes late (no apology) into a freezing cold room. Nobody offers you a drink although they all have water, tea or coffee. Not once during the interview do they use your name. Do you:

A: Thank them for their time but tell them they can stick their job where the sun doesn't shine.

B: Thank them for their time and tell them **they** wouldn't be a good fit for **you**.

C: Thank them for their time and tell **yourself** they wouldn't be a good fit for you. You deserve better.

Scenario 4:

It's Saturday and you've decided to say yes to an online date. You've turned up ten minutes early and waited 15 minutes for your date to arrive.

You order a drink as do they and you both have a starter and main. You find the conversation dull and slow, and you call for the bill. Do you:

A: Go to the loo and climb out the window.

B: Pay your half and, for your date's benefit, summarise your negative experience there and then.

C: Pay the bill and wish them good luck and goodnight.

SCORES:

MAINLY A: Really?

MAINLY B: Good. Work in progress!

MAINLY C: Good job. My work is done. Almost.

Now, let's go deeper. Working with the scenarios above describe yourself without awareness versus yourself with awareness. What's the biggest difference you notice between the two?

Scenario 1:

Me before awareness:

Me after awareness:

What's the biggest difference?

Scenario 2:

Me before awareness:

Me after awareness:

What's the biggest difference?

Scenario 3:

Me before awareness:

Me after awareness:

What's the biggest difference?

Scenario 4 :

Me before awareness:

Me after awareness:

What's the biggest difference?

Reflection:

- Describe a 'real-life' situation that overwhelmed you. There's probably a few, just pick one.
- How did you **react without** awareness?
- Now imagine how you would **respond with** awareness, self-control, and compassion for yourself?

STAYING AWARE IN UNEXPECTED MOMENTS

How do we stay aware when the unexpected happens, when most people would burst a blood vessel to have the last word or run screaming for the door? First thing to remember: even an FBI agent needs a few seconds to sweat and shake before their thinking brain kicks in.

Remember Clarice Starling in *Silence of the Lambs* when she realises she's knocked on the kidnapper's door? You can almost see the word "fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuck" go through her mind. Her throat muscles ripple as she swallows. And then boom, she's in FBI mode. Awareness working overtime. Heart racing, senses highly tuned, body trembling but composed. Aware as if her life depends on it because, of course, it does.

When the shit really hits the fan, most of us feel something else before we feel "aware." But what matters is not the first wave of reaction - it's how quickly we reengage with conscious awareness. By the time you get to the end of this book - if not by the end of this exercise - you'll have a mindset that naturally reengages with awareness, consciousness, and logic.

That's the kind of person you're becoming - aware, conscious, and logical. No longer will there be space in your brain for illogical nonsense.

- We're human.
- We've had traumas.
- We've developed sensitivities.
- We'll be works in progress for a while yet.

But whatever chaotic thoughts race through your mind in the first second of provocation, challenge yourself to get back onto the path to peace before you can even finish saying: A CALMER ME!

Remember the mantra: I no longer allow past pain to ruin present peace.

Awareness is the first step. And you're taking it beautifully.

The Awareness Checklist on the next page is another tool to get you consciously thinking about awareness. It's available as a free downloadable PDF at:

howtomendyourmentalhealth.com/acalmerme

AWARENESS CHECKLIST FOR MANAGING ANYONE AND ANYTHING

From this moment forward, this checklist goes where you go! It will fuel your self-control, prepare you for the unexpected, and reduce both social and general anxiety.

Preparation + **A**wareness + **C**ontrol + **E**motional Strength = **PACE** yourself!

Prepare Yourself Before You Leave Home:

- If you're travelling somewhere for the first time, research the location.
- Check maps and familiarise yourself with the area.
- Plan your route - choose the safest, most direct path.
- Have alternative routes ready in case of unexpected changes.
- Look up reviews and feedback about the place if possible.
- Identify landmarks and nearby facilities like bathrooms, cafés, and safe zones.
- Set reminders for appointments and departure times.
- Take your time, don't rush yourself out the door.

Prepare Essentials:

- Pack ID, phone, charger, wallet, keys, tissues, book, water, lip balm, and any medication you might need.
- Carry a small amount of cash securely in case you lose your wallet.
- Bring a small notepad and pen for jotting down important information.
- Let a trusted person know where you're going and when you expect to return.
- Save emergency numbers to your phone but also...
- Write important contacts in your notepad in case your phone dies.

- Keep your phone charged when you can and check in periodically with your trusted contact.

When You Arrive at Your Location:

- Don't rush. Give yourself time to assess your surroundings.
- Acclimatise. Let yourself settle.
- Find a quiet spot to rest if you feel overwhelmed.
- Identify exits and entry points.
- Locate bathrooms and seating areas.
- Find staff members and notice who seems approachable.
- If unsure about anything, ask staff or friendly locals for help but never go anywhere with someone you don't know.
- Assert your right to say no. If they mind, you've dodged a bullet.
- Trust your instincts: if something feels off, it's okay to leave or seek assistance.
- Stick to well-lit, safe, and populated areas.
- Avoid isolated spots, especially if you're alone.

When Meeting New People:

- Observe body language - gauge their approachability and feel free to use your judgement.
- If they're sarcastic, confrontational, or unhelpful, don't personalise it. Observe. Nothing more. And then walk away.
- Trust your instincts, don't second-guess yourself.
- If you get "low vibes," trust them.
- Don't dismiss yourself as "just being paranoid or over-sensitive."
- When meeting new people, observation first.
- Trust yourself to stay emotionally and physically safe. Never mind everybody else. Your people-pleasing days are so over.

One of the biggest obstacles we face when meeting new people is the tendency to overcompensate for not feeling good enough. That's when the people-pleasing, fear-fuelled perfectionist version of us surfaces and thwarts our self-control. But when awareness highlights this tendency, we can stop it in its tracks.

Remember: "No thank you" or at the very least "I'll think about it" are the only responses you need to give. You don't owe anyone your safety or your peace of mind.

Emergency Protocols:

Know what to do in case of an emergency.

- Have a clear plan for leaving quickly if you feel anxious or unsafe.
- Identify safe spots and safe people ahead of time if possible.
- Use calming techniques like deep breathing, slow counting, or visualisation - like the Awareness Meditation.

When You're Back Home Tucked Up in Bed

- Reflect on your experience.
- What went well?
- What would you do differently next time?
- Adjust your plans based on what you observed.

Ask yourself: How will I reward myself for staying aware and keeping hold of my power today?

And finally, have a beautiful, restful night's sleep. You deserve it.

YOU'RE READY!

You've just given yourself something most people never will: **P**reparation. **A**wareness. **C**ontrol. **E**motional Strength. You're no longer moving through the world hoping for peace, you're creating it, with every step you take.

Every time you practice awareness, even in small ways, you are proving to yourself that you're capable, conscious, and in control.

Now that your foundation is strong, it's time to build even higher. Let's take the next step towards becoming A Calmer Me and discover how Conscious Conversation transforms not just what you say, but how you feel about yourself when you say it.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

C IS FOR CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION

When our Conscious Adult Self and our Wounded Inner Child have a Conscious Conversation we're empowered to soothe, calm, and soften our fear-based memories.

Our Conscious Adult Self is a kind and mature protector. We may not have had someone like this in our lives when we were children but it's time now for us to become that protector for ourselves and manage our emotions with grace and dignity.

When our emotional needs in childhood are not met, we spend a lifetime hoping someone will come forward, recognise our pain, and save us. Have you ever done that? I know I have. But we must learn to tell ourselves - and truly mean it - what we once longed to hear from someone else:

- You matter.
- You are wanted.
- You are loved.
- You deserve to be here.
- I'm *glad* you're here.

When emotional chaos and disruption have formed the basis of our earliest emotional experiences we must learn to self-validate.

When fear and anxiety surface, it's the perfect moment for our Conscious Adult Self to step forward and affirm, 'I've got this, I'm safe. Whatever happens next I'll be OK.' This is the day we save ourselves. Our Wounded Inner Child no longer needs to suffer in fear.

What would your Wounded Inner Child like to say to your Conscious Adult Self? Maybe something like:

Dear Conscious Adult Self,

It's me, (fill in your name). I want to speak to you about how we manage our fear. Next time I feel worried, triggered, or overwhelmed, I'd like you to take control. Please interrupt our fear response and look after us.

Say it in your own words. It doesn't have to be perfect or poetic, it just must be honest. You don't need to create a new name or identity for your Conscious Adult Self. You *are* your Conscious Adult Self, and you are also your Wounded Inner Child. Your Conscious Adult Self knows what - and who - caused your dysregulated feelings. And it knows these feelings are not your truth.

Allowing your Conscious Adult Self to stay aware of potential triggers prepares you to consciously manage your emotional responses. It gives you space to think clearly instead of reacting automatically from the fear-based perspective of your wounds.

Don't let your Wounded Inner Child take the wheel. Stop. Think. Be aware. This is not the anxious fear of hypervigilance. This is the cool, calm, collected energy of common sense and conscious awareness. Because if you're not conscious... what are you? You're unconscious! Other words for unconscious? Unaware. Oblivious. Asleep. Do you really want any of those in charge when you're feeling nervous, unsure, or scared? Of course you don't.

You want to be:

- Aware
- Awake
- Logical
- Purposeful
- Sensible

That's what being conscious looks like.

A conscious conversation with our Wounded Inner Child is essential if we're ever going to end the emotional tsunamis of panic and anxiety that threaten to overwhelm us. When we *don't* consciously intervene, our fear-based memories provide endless material for our Wounded Inner Child to have lonely conversations with itself reinforcing old messages:

- I don't matter.
- I can't do it.
- I'll never be good enough.
- Look at all my mistakes.

That is an unconscious autopilot dialogue. It was born from trauma. It is not the conversation we are having with ourselves anymore.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION

(Page 105 of your workbook)

When fear surfaces and old programming takes over, we can fall back into unconscious dialogue - the voice of panic, helplessness, and past pain. But when we consciously interrupt that dialogue, we give ourselves a new voice.

- A voice of calm.
- A voice of self-trust.
- A voice of emotional freedom.

Below are examples of how unconscious dialogue sounds and how Conscious Conversation responds:

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I'm not safe!

Conscious Conversation says:

There's no danger here.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I might suffer if I don't do what they want.

Conscious Conversation says:

This will pass.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

They say it's for my own good.

Conscious Conversation says:

I have my own opinion about what's best for me.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I can't cope.

Conscious Conversation says:

I am an extraordinary copier.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I need someone to look after me.

Conscious Conversation says:

I look after myself.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I can't walk away. I'll look weak.

Conscious Conversation says:

Walking away is the best option to maintain my peace, integrity and dignity.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

They'll judge me.

Conscious Conversation says:

I don't fear judgement from others.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I will have the last word.

Conscious Conversation says:

I don't need to have the last word.

Unconscious Dialogue says:

I must fight to be seen and heard and get my needs met.

Conscious Conversation says:

I'll meet my own needs, in my own way, in my own time.

What are some of your own examples?

Unconscious Dialogue says:

Conscious Conversation says:

Remember: when you catch yourself spiralling into unconscious dialogue stop, breathe, and let your Conscious Adult Self take the lead.

- You *are* safe.
- You *are* awake.

- You *are* powerful.

This is how you rewire your mind one conscious conversation at a time.

CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION IN ACTION

When we consciously ask ourselves 'am I choosing, feeling, thinking this because of my emotional history' we give ourselves the chance to challenge what we're choosing, feeling, and thinking - and change it.

In the past, you may have found yourself caught up in unconscious dialogues when faced with overwhelming situations. That's normal. That's survival. But now, you have a new skill; you can practice having Conscious Conversations with yourself anytime, anywhere, with anyone.

Next time you're speaking - whether out loud or in your mind - be aware of your voice. Listen to it.

- Is fear talking?
- Is old pain talking?
- Or is your Conscious Adult Self taking care of you?

Remember, if we're not changing it, we're choosing it. Pull yourself back from the old streams of unconscious, fear-based dialogue that once ran your life. Think about what you're saying. Choose to say something different.

You can practice having Conscious Conversations with yourself every day, so that when feelings of fear, panic, or anxiety begin to rumble on the horizon, you'll already know how to hold back your fear response and speak to yourself with strength, calm, and self-trust.

If you ever need inspiration, refer to the list of Conscious Conversations you just created. Keep practicing. You're not just thinking differently, you're *becoming* different.

**"THE PENDULUM OF THE MIND SWINGS BETWEEN
SENSE AND NONSENSE."**

CARL JUNG

When we live in awareness, we catch the pendulum when it swings into unconsciousness. We feel it moving between clarity and confusion, between emotional truth and emotional distortion. Calmness slows the pendulum. It's the steady hand on the clockwork of our mind, allowing us to think, breathe, and respond rather than react. When we have calmness, we have conscious choice. We have the power to stay anchored in peace, even when fear, overwhelm, or old memories try to swing us into panic.

Calmness is not about never feeling fear. It's about meeting fear and choosing to stay steady anyway. As you practice A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E, you'll learn that calmness is not something that "happens" to you, it's something you choose, moment by moment, through your awareness, your breathing, your words, and your inner dialogue. You can call calmness into your mind and body even when chaos is all around you.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

CONSCIOUS CONVERSION IN ACTION

(Page 106 of your workbook)

- Use the list of Conscious Conversations on the previous page plus your own examples and write/type in your workbook/journal the Conscious Conversation you'll have with your Wounded Inner Child next time your past experiences try to take control of your present peace.

Wherever you are on your road to emotional freedom, write your letter in a way that nurtures, protects, and prioritises you first and foremost. If you feel yourself becoming triggered while writing, pause and practice awareness. Change the conversation you're having with yourself. It's hard being an adult when part of you is still waiting to be parented. Have realistic expectations of yourself as you do this work. You're learning to become your own greatest protector. No blame, no shame, only awareness.

Gentle Note: There is no "perfect" letter. There's only your voice, meeting your pain with your love. That's more than enough.

Dear Wounded, Inner Child...

When you've finished your letter have a think about these two journal prompts:

- What have you learned about Conscious Conversations.
- What will Conscious Conversations help you remember about yourself when fear tries to take over.

Conscious Conversation is our second step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E
A IS FOR ACCEPTANCE

For a long time, I misunderstood the meaning of acceptance when it came to recovery and healing. I believed that accepting a distressing experience meant I was condoning it. Surely if I accepted it, I was saying it was OK. My misunderstanding kept me trapped for years.

Despite all my efforts the absence of real change and healing in my life came down to one thing: I resisted accepting how I got 'here.' No matter how hard I tried I couldn't change the belief that there was something wrong with *me*. I was at fault. I was the villain.

The shame grew stronger. I kept blaming myself for my dysregulated behaviour and emotional pain, stuck in a cycle of reliving my traumatic childhood, raging against the abuse, but punishing *myself* for someone else's horrendous choices and terrible mistakes.

I was so conditioned to believe it was all my fault that I resisted seeing who was truly accountable for my loneliness, my anger, and my despair. Other people's neglectful, abusive behaviour shaped me into someone I should never have had to become. I was conditioned by them to blame myself. I plunged headfirst into darkness. Their abuse buried my light.

When you've been told repeatedly that you're a liar, can't be trusted, and have ruined people's lives, you believe you deserve bad things to happen to you. You don't believe or trust yourself to tell the truth, you question everything. My healing journey began when, guided by a therapist, I wrote down every traumatic experience I'd ever had.

When our recollections *are* believed, when our experiences *are* validated, when we learn that it wasn't *our* fault, that *we* weren't to blame, we can give back the shame and guilt we've carried for so long and we can come out of the shadows. We can switch our light back on.

I have learned that:

Acceptance is not approval.

- It's not surrender.
- It's not saying what happened was okay.

Acceptance is freedom.

It's the moment you stop self-blaming, start holding the right people accountable, and finally tell *your* truth.

When you accept how you got here, the question stops being: "what's wrong with me?" and becomes "what's wrong with them?"

- You stop punishing yourself for their actions.
- You stop waiting for apologies that will never come.
- You stop living in self-rejection and start living in self-reclamation.

It's not easy. You may feel uncomfortable holding certain people emotionally accountable. That's okay. They don't need to know what you're doing. This is about you. This is your private revolution. Acceptance allows the truth to be told within you. It frees your Wounded Inner Child from believing they were ever at fault.

Instead of fighting or denying painful memories, you'll pull them closer and reclaim the version of yourself who was silenced, rejected, and abandoned. The pain lives in resistance. The power lives in acceptance.

When we accept the truth - no matter how devastating - we transform our relationship with ourselves. We no longer see ourselves as the villain. We no longer stay trapped in *their* lies. We step into the real story:

- We were the victim.
- But we are also the survivor.
- We are the warrior.
- We have the guts to face the past and defeat it.

Whatever is happening around you, whatever emotional chaos you may face when you meet it with acceptance, be determined to meet it with power and courage. Stop making it mean something terrible about you. Stop replaying old pain. Start to meet life with a logical, conscious mind and a heart that knows it deserves to heal.

When your Wounded Inner Child begins the old unconscious dialogue of fear and blame, your Conscious Adult Self must step in - calm, kind, grounded, ready to accept, soothe, and protect.

Acceptance isn't giving up.

It's waking up.

Acceptance sets you free.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

A IS FOR ACCEPTANCE

(Page 108 of your workbook)

- What are you or were you rejecting that is refusing to heal?
- What have you learned about Acceptance?
- How will Acceptance set you free from blame, shame, and guilt?
- What truth about your emotional history are you now ready to accept?

Acceptance is our third step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

L IS FOR LOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

When we combine **Awareness** with **Conscious Conversation** and **Acceptance**, we're empowered to look at things with a **Logical Perspective**.

Logical means rational. It's reasonable, plausible, sensible - in other words, it's our Conscious Adult Self responding to potential overwhelm with clarity and control.

Illogical, on the other hand, means nonsensical. It's unreasonable, contradictory, unfounded. It's the Wounded Inner Child grabbing a coping mechanism and fighting to survive.

Perspective is a viewpoint, an angle, a picture, a lens. When we're focussed on remaining calm we see our situation clearly; no smears of shame, no fear-based distortions, just a grounded, common-sense view.

Put **Logical** and **Perspective** together and you get something powerful: a Sensible Viewpoint, a Common-Sense Picture that keeps you steady even in the stormiest situations.

When our Wounded Inner Child paints the picture it tends to be distorted. The canvas is smeared with fear-based memories. The perspective becomes illogical, and our emotions unravel. We know where this fear comes from, and a **Logical Perspective** does *not* invite it to stay.

When we've experienced emotional disruption and trauma, at first a **Logical Perspective** does *not* come naturally. It takes **conscious practice** to calm the distorted view that trauma and fear have wired into our brains. When our Conscious Mind is aware and our Logical Perspective is soothing and steady, our Wounded Inner Child feels seen, heard, and safe. Calm is restored.

If, instead, we allow our fear response/wounded inner child to lead, it will scream:

- You're about to be shamed again!
- The bad guys are coming!
- Grab a coping mechanism!
- Armour Up!
- Fight or flee!

This is understandable - *completely understandable* - but it will lose us the emotional battle and let the **old wounds win the war**.

Remember the mantra:

'When I have awareness I have self-control, and I own myself. When I don't have awareness, I don't have self-control, and someone or something else owns me.'

Awareness and Logical Perspective go together. You can't have an illogical perspective when you're awake, aware, and self-controlled. It's like spreading jam on mashed potato. Illogical.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

LOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

(Page 109 of your workbook)

- What Logical Perspective will you practice from now on in circumstances that once overwhelmed you? Tip: In most situations there's always a peaceful exit to be had. Make your Logical Perspective simple, achievable, and easy to recall. Write your Logical Perspective as a simple statement you can remember and repeat when you feel triggered. My Logical Perspective is:
- What have you learned about Logical Perspectives? Why are they important to your emotional freedom?

Remember: I choose the logical perspective that calms me, not the fear that controls me.

Logical Perspective is our fourth step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

M IS FOR MEANING

The people who are impossible to please, the angry ones, the sarcastic ones, the demanding divas, and the gossips you just know have bitched about you behind your back, what exactly have you made their behaviour mean about you?

Let me tell you what it means.

It means nothing.

Yep, that's right. **Nothing.**

We spend a lifetime making other people's shameful behaviour mean terrible things about ourselves.

- We blame ourselves.
- We hold ourselves responsible for their toxic choices, actions, and moods.
- We can't help it - we were literally programmed to take the blame.

Until we understand that our dysregulated choices, feelings, and thoughts have been shaped by the toxic messages other people have projected onto us, we stay:

- Emotionally stuck.
- Hypervigilant.
- Self-critical.
- Constantly making everything that goes wrong mean something dreadful about us.

When someone acts in an intimidating, critical, or unkind way, our past emotional experiences are immediately triggered. Our fear response kicks in. We don't stop to think: is this even about me?

Instead, we rush to blame ourselves because long ago, it felt safer to admit it was our fault than to stand up to an angry or neglectful adult. We made their projections mean:

- We were wrong.
- We were stupid.
- We were too much.
- We were not enough.

We punished ourselves then and if we're not careful, we'll punish ourselves now.

But now you know better, you can do better. You have a choice. You can either continue making other people's moods, cruelty, or chaos mean something devastating about you or, you can make it mean nothing at all.

Their behaviour says *everything* about them and *nothing* about you.

Line drawn.

The meaning you once attached to these painful experiences is simply not true. It never was. Throughout your childhood you were conditioned to believe something was wrong with you. You were shamed and blamed for other people's unhappiness. You learned to overcompensate, to fix, to people-please - all to survive. That survival strategy is the root cause of every self-sabotaging behaviour you've struggled with:

- the perfectionism.
- the addictions.
- the broken relationships.
- the endless guilt and shame...

...and it changes today. Every pain, every heartbreak, every wound - they are all linked to the false meanings you attached to yourself because of other people's failures.

Next time someone criticises, intimidates, dismisses, or hurts you, pause; do *not* make it mean anything about you. Instead, silently send it back to where it belongs. Their lies are not your truth. If you feel strong enough, you can even calmly ask:

- What do you mean by that?
- Why do you feel that way?

You don't have to explain yourself, defend yourself, or apologise for existing. Do not feed the beast.

I used to be so over-sensitised to shame and ridicule that even light-hearted jokes could wound me. Anything anyone said - every eyeroll, every comment - I made it mean something terrible about me. It was exhausting. Now I know better, I do better and so will you.

- We must stop dragging painful meanings from the past into the present.
- We must allow Awareness, Conscious Conversation, Acceptance, and Logical Perspective to give meaning to who we are *today*.

Catch yourself before you spiral into the old rabbit hole of self-punishment and guilt.

It's not called an emotional war for nothing!

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

M IS FOR MEANING

(Page 110 of your workbook)

- What have you made your pain-filled past **mean about you?**
- What changes today?
- What have you learned about 'giving meaning':

Meaning is our fifth step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

E IS FOR EXIT

We're learning strategies throughout this book that guarantee we will win our emotional war, but when we first begin to implement them, there's often a messy crossover between our old ways of *reacting* and our new ways of *responding*.

When feelings of overwhelm surface and threaten to undo all our hard work, we need a clear exit strategy, one we are not afraid to use. When fear-based memories take us to the fork in the emotional road, we must know we can walk away from anyone and from anything without losing our dignity or our composure. In difficult circumstances, when your anxiety surfaces around difficult people, exiting the 'scene of the crime' is not just smart; it's essential for protecting your emotional wellbeing.

The core question is simple: **in this moment who has control of my self-worth, my opinion, and my voice.**

If the answer isn't you, then you may need to exit.

- This isn't about protecting them and their feelings.
- This is about protecting *you* and *your* feelings.

You are in charge of you. You get to decide what happens next. It may not always have been that way, but from now on, this is exactly how it's going to be.

If people are difficult, or situations feel overwhelming, you have permission to exit *regardless of the consequences*. Knowing you can leave at any time with your dignity intact may empower you to stay. And even if you exit this time, next time you might not. Either way, no loss of face. No last word needed. No drama. Just self-respect. You're saving yourself. Finally.

Always exit with grace. You don't need to have a meltdown to justify yourself. You don't need to explain, argue, apologise, or seek permission - that was the old way of **doing**, this is the new way of **being**. A simple but assertive: 'excuse me, I need a moment' will do. And if anyone protests, simply repeat it: 'I just need a moment', and keep walking. No arguments. No apologies. No guilt. Just a graceful exit. Emotional power reclaimed.

- Give yourself permission to meet your own needs without second-guessing, and without delay.
- Give yourself permission to leave if staying costs you your peace of mind.
- Give yourself permission to choose yourself again, and again, and again.

This is you, reclaiming your emotional power. Any way you look at it, you win. Those who matter won't mind if you exit. Those who *do* mind, don't matter.

In a few pages' time, you'll learn a breathing technique that when paired with the Exit strategy will guarantee you always leave with regulation, resilience, and respect for yourself.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

EXITING

(Page 111 of your workbook)

The Scenario:

You've worked hard to understand and unravel the confusion and pain of your past. Despite your newfound knowledge, you find yourself feeling anxious in a situation with a difficult person. Overwhelm starts to take hold, and you arrive at the emotional 'fork in the road.'

- What do you do next?
- What do you say next?

Next time you find yourself in a tough situation:

- What conscious steps will you take to exit gracefully?
- What empowering words will you say to yourself?
- What physical actions will support your emotional safety?
- Next time you're feeling overwhelmed by someone or something, will you implement your Exit Strategy? YES or NO?
- How does giving yourself permission to leave change how you feel about your emotional power?
- What does a graceful exit protect inside you?

"A wise exit is never a defeat.

It's a declaration that you choose yourself first, every time."

Emotional Freedom Exit Mantra

I protect my peace. I choose myself. I leave with dignity.

Calm Strength Exit Mantra

My safety matters. My voice is my own. I owe no explanations.

Warrior of Peace Exit Mantra

I step away with strength. I release their energy. I stay true to myself.

Self-Worth Exit Mantra

I don't stay where I'm not respected. I don't fight battles I've already won.

I honour my healing.

Fast Empowerment Exit Mantra

Pause. Protect. Proceed.

When you feel overwhelmed, quietly repeat your chosen mantra to yourself as you exit. It becomes the last word you *tell yourself*, not the last word you *give them*.

A QUICK NOTE ABOUT LOSING FACE AND THE LAST WORD

As we tell our truth and reclaim our emotional power, we no longer need to have the last word - *ever*. The last word is the battleground between our Wounded Inner Child's fear and the calm presence of our Conscious Adult Self.

We often think we'll 'lose face' if we don't have the last word. But the truth is, we gain far more by letting it go. We gain self-respect. We gain calm. We gain mastery over the moment.

Not having the last word will unsettle your 'opponent' far more than any sharp comeback ever could. Let your silence - your conscious composure - be the unspoken last word.

IT REALLY DOESN'T MATTER ANYMORE is a fabulous affirmation. Use it often. Repeat it with love. Wear it like armour.

Remember: the loudest person isn't always the strongest person. The calmest person walks away victorious.

Exiting is our sixth step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E

R IS FOR RESET AND REWARD

Challenging and changing our emotional responses to stressful situations is a life-altering achievement. Whether we choose to exit or stay, by the time we reach this seventh step, we are ready - ready to reset and ready to reward ourselves for the courage and determination we've shown.

Here's what you need to know: we don't always need to exit to reset, sometimes the greatest reset happens when we stay put, breathe, regulate and choose peace over panic. In the workplace one of the best habits I developed was imagining people's faces comically change as they critically 'appraised' me. I once imagined an ex-boss's nose growing so long it reached the other side of the room. I'd people-pleased and perfected my way through that job for 3 years. During my appraisal he told me I was 'difficult to manage'. No, I'm not, Pinocchio, you're just a terrible manager.

This "Pinocchio Method" still puts a smile on my face today. It resets my brain, soothes my fear-based memories, and gives me a healthier, more conscious perspective on the everyday nonsense we all experience as humans.

Resetting our emotional selves gets easier with practice. Before long, even after stressful encounters, you'll naturally realign your emotions with peace and composure.

And once you've reset? It's time to reward yourself!

WHY REWARDING YOURSELF MATTERS

Rewarding ourselves is an act of self-validation and self-validation encourages us to keep pushing forward on our road to emotional freedom.

Start by recognising that you deserve a reward for everything you've already done: the work, the healing, and the bravery it's taken to get this far.

Then, reward yourself consciously. Choose something meaningful. It doesn't have to cost a lot or anything, but it must feel good to your soul. And if it does cost money and you feel guilty, pause and ask yourself:

- Who taught me that I didn't deserve to reward myself?
- Who taught me that good things were rare, and nice things were a waste of money?
- Who taught me that I had to go without or work hard for what I had?

If the words 'deserve' and 'reward' trigger uncomfortable emotions, you're not alone. When I was growing up, I was told I didn't deserve nice things, but it seems that I did deserve *bad* things. As an adult, when good people praised me, I felt like a fraud. I felt like I'd "duped" them into thinking I was worthy.

If your story is anything like mine, please know that you can rewire those old beliefs. You can create new neural pathways that say:

- I deserve kindness.
- I deserve peace.
- I deserve to celebrate myself.

Change begins when you challenge what's no longer working.

YOUR BRAIN ON RESET AND REWARD

Our brain has a huge role to play in whether we think we deserve reward or not. When it's hijacked by fear-based memories, the reward circuits go to sleep. But when we shift ourselves out of fear and into conscious awareness our brain's natural reward system wakes up again. Healing the fear response heightens our ability to experience joy.

Remember:

- Reward yourself every time you say YES to awareness, conscious conversations, acceptance, and logical perspectives.
- Reward yourself every time you interrupt an autopilot habit that made everything mean something terrible about you.
- Reward yourself BIG every time you exit a toxic situation or walk away from someone who would have once had power over your peace.

You matter. Recognise your progress and reward yourself for it. The courage it takes to do these things is heroic.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

R IS FOR RESET AND REWARD

(Page 113 of your workbook)

- Growing up, what did you learn - directly or indirectly - about deserving rewards? Example: rewards had to be earned through perfection, or I was made to feel guilty for wanting nice things.
- How *were* you rewarded as a child?
- Were rewards consistent, loving, chaotic, conditional or absent altogether?
- How has your childhood understanding of rewards affected how you treat yourself today? Example: I don't celebrate my achievements because I worry it looks selfish.
- Who's in charge of your rewards now – your Wounded Inner Child or your Conscious Adult Self?
- What do your patterns around reward and self-recognition reveal about your healing journey?
- Look closely at your responses and you'll see the patterns, and you'll also see the power you have to change them.
- When you're faced with overwhelm, criticism, or confrontation, what will you now say or do to consciously reset yourself in the moment? Example: deep breath, mental image of Pinocchio, silent mantra: "I choose peace."
- What is your new truth about deserving and rewarding yourself? Write a short, powerful affirmation or statement you can come back to whenever old guilt or doubt creeps in. Example: I deserve to be celebrated just for being me.
- List three meaningful rewards you will give yourself this week when you successfully reset - no matter how big or small the challenge. Example: a coffee in the sunshine, a new book, an early night.

- What have you learned about resetting and rewarding?

Reset Mantra: I don't need a reason to be kind to myself. Peace is my reward.

Reset and reward is our seventh step towards emotional freedom.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E
M IS FOR MINUTE-BY-MINUTE

When we've experienced emotional trauma, chaos, and disruption, time-pressure can feel explosive. In our minds we've set a timer, and the tick-tick-tick is deafening. We'll do everything and anything to avoid being late, wasting time, and missing our often very tight deadlines. Time pressure can cause procrastination, it's why we meltdown, it's why we have panic attacks.

As our fear-based memories of being shamed, criticised, and excluded kick in, our brain hits the brakes on regulated responses. We're thrown into survival mode, and logical thinking goes out the window. Our Wounded Inner Child grabs the wheel, floors the accelerator, and panics. How different would your day look if instead of being a perfectionistic people-pleaser and rushing to beat the clock, you slowed down?

Imagine doing everything minute-by-minute, calmly, consciously, and with self-trust, breathing deeply as you go. As you structure your tasks into achievable segments you have time to take regular breaks. You're thinking logically and breathing deeply through the urgency projected onto you by other people.

You notice that you're not only getting more done but you're being more efficient. You're accomplishing everything in a way that gives you a sense of genuine achievement.

Part of winning our emotional war is learning how to take our time. Ticking off tasks at our own pace without overwhelm makes the tasks more achievable and helps us build our distress tolerance and resilience skills.

When our priority is to meet other people's emotional needs before we meet our own, we tend to do things as quickly as possible to avoid the looming possibility of being shamed and criticised. Even now, when I sense someone's impatience, I can momentarily start to feel nervous about what's coming next. I gently reassure my Wounded Inner Child and interrupt any rising panic. Then, my conscious adult-self soothes my fear-based memories with reassurance that we've got this, easy-peasy.

Go at your own pace.

I used to pride myself on how quickly and efficiently I could do things. I'd find shortcuts for everything and achieve impossible demands just so I could be thought of as indispensable. I even stopped taking holidays because my boss (Pinocchio) panicked when I wasn't in the office. Co-dependent-fear-fuelled-people-pleaser? Me? Well, maybe then, but not anymore! Instead of the praise and approval I'd expected all I got was severe burn-out. I sobbed my way, exhausted, through two months of sick leave.

For people like us, people who have experienced emotional trauma, being put under time pressure is a recipe for overwhelm and disaster. As we heal more of our emotional history, rushing to get things done will become less important as we become more aware of the self-punishing expectations behind our motivation.

Important to remember: if you show signs of people-pleasing perfectionism there will always be 'personality types' who will take advantage of your need to please. All this work you're doing **will help you** recognise these personalities *and* manage them.

When we're emotionally exhausted and time-pressured events kick-in, they could eventually lead to an emotional breakdown - and that's serious.

- If you work at a job where time pressure is 'a thing' and it's affecting your mental health, then find another approach to your job - or find another job. Start aiming for good enough standards and drop the perfectionism.
- If time-pressure is the nature of your job, then decide if you're cut out for the work.
- Is time-pressure created by a lack of organisation, leaving everything to the last minute, time wasting, or procrastination? If so, you might be able to save your job and yourself if you can restructure your methods and look for a more logical and self-empathetic approach to your work.

Whatever's causing your time-pressure you must find an alternative to the energy-zapping demands you're facing. You may even love the feeling of indispensability (I get it), but is the price you pay for that momentary glow worth it? I'd say not.

When we're under time-pressure we must tell ourselves: 'my needs matter.' If we need a break, a drink, a sandwich, we must take the time to meet our needs. When we take care of **ourselves first**, we gain the awareness and perspective to take care of **someone else next**. You've heard the saying about putting on your own oxygen mask first? Even if you're in charge of a child you need oxygen first *before* you can help them.

When you're feeling the burn from time-pressure, STOP. Become aware of yourself and your surroundings, return to the present moment, calm your wandering thoughts, take a few deep breaths. Don't make any further decisions until you have a clear mental space to think from. Being rushed or rushing yourself into decisions means you're likely to decide something for the wrong reasons and regret it. Step back and step away

from what or who is overwhelming you. Do so with dignity, no drama. Exit if you need to, then reset, and reward.

Time-pressure is a trigger for an emotionally exhausted person. It looms over us like a demon, cloaking us in shame and judgement. We believe if we can't meet our deadlines we'll be humiliated, criticised, and dismissed - at least that's what our wounded inner child believes. Our Conscious Adult Self however is wiser to the shenanigans of the pushy people who tell us, 'it must be done now!' even if that pushy person is us...

Time is precious, **but it never needs to feel pressured**. We are the bosses of our time; we're lighting the way and slowing down to get more done.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

MINUTE-BY-MINUTE

(Page 116 of your workbook)

- What needs to change in your life to allow you to slow down and live minute-by-minute? Think about your job, your studies, your relationships, your day-to-day habits.
- What time commitments or expectations create a feeling of stress just thinking about them?
- What time-pressured obligations are you still carrying that you don't even want anymore?
- Whose approval, whose expectations, whose deadlines are you still trying to meet - and why?
- What have you learned about living minute-by-minute?

When we're moving through our day minute-by-minute, we have awareness. When we practice awareness, we are conscious. Our focus is here, now, with the task right in front of us. Our Conscious Adult Self is at the wheel, and our Wounded Inner Child is asleep in the back seat. Bliss.

Whatever's waiting to be done will just have to wait while we focus on this moment, this task, this breath. If we allow the future to distract us, we suspend our conscious awareness. We slip back into survival mode meeting someone else's needs to avoid confrontation and chasing a false sense of safety.

When we slow down, we become mindful of our choices, feelings, and thoughts. When we live minute-by-minute, we stay present, we stay calm, and most importantly we stay empowered.

Minute-by-Minute is our eighth step.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E
E IS FOR EMPOWERED

We've arrived at the final step of our process. We've walked through emotions that once had the power to overwhelm us - and we didn't just survive; we learned how to transform them.

When we intentionally choose, feel, and think with awareness, consciousness, acceptance, and logic, we're no longer trapped by our past. We're travelling with emotional freedom and moving towards an even greater version of ourselves.

It's not selfish to meet our own needs, it's not wrong to prioritise our peace. It's self-compassion, it's self-preservation, it's empowerment.

When we're:

- Practising awareness, having conscious conversations, prioritising our emotional needs.
- Accepting not rejecting our emotional history.
- Allowing a Logical Perspective to give us a clear view.
- Making our past mean something powerful and positive.
- Stepping away and exiting when we need to.
- Resetting and rewarding ourselves.
- And changing our minds if we choose to.

This is when we have all the evidence we need that we're becoming our most powerful selves.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

E IS FOR EMPOWERED

(Page 118 of your workbook)

- Right now, how would you rate your emotional power out of ten?
- What would need to change for you to raise that number?
- What does the empowered version of you believe about themselves?
- What does the empowered version of you look like?
- How do they move through the world?
- What do they do differently compared to how you used to live?
- How do they feel inside?
- What changes will your empowered self create in your life, starting today?
- Think about what disempowerment has cost you over the years. What would you reclaim if you took your power back?
- When you don't feel empowered, you feel like this:
- When you feel empowered, you feel like this:
- Who or what stole your emotional power in the past?
- How did they do it? What weapons did they use – shame, criticism, fear, neglect?
- And finally, what would your empowered conscious adult self tell you about your past self?

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

EMPOWERING 'I AM' STATEMENTS

(Page 122 of your workbook)

You've come a long way emotionally since the start of this book.

- What do you believe is true for you now that you didn't believe before? Write as many truths as you want. Let your empowered voice be loud and clear.
- How has your opinion about the part you played in your emotional history changed?
- How do you feel about your future now?

Empowering Words

Think about the Empowering Words you'll use to describe yourself going forward. Examples include:

Dignified, Brave, Kind, Expressive, Alluring, Independent, Clever, Patient, Sociable, Generous, Open-hearted, Loving, Tolerant, Determined, Organised, Decisive.

- Do any of these words spark something in you?
- Do any of them feel out of reach or triggering?
- Or do they make you feel motivated, excited, and powerful?

The possibilities are endless. Choose the words that honour who you are and who you're becoming.

Empowering mantra to repeat every day

I am not my past. I am my power

EMPATHY FOR OURSELVES

I want to stop for a moment and acknowledge you for everything you've been through. The mountains of emotional pain you've climbed, and the hours, days, months and years of loneliness, sadness, and grief that brought you here. It's an achievement that you're still willing to do what it takes to release yourself from the ties that have bound you to the pain of your past. When was the last time you looked in the mirror and acknowledged yourself for how far you've come?

Empathy is about having compassion for our experiences, but it's also about understanding the limits our experiences have placed on us. Whatever's been done to us or said to us, we can still go from strength to strength but sometimes we need to do it minute-by-minute.

If we've never been shown empathy, we won't know what it looks like, and we won't practice it. We're often so resistant to being a victim and feeling sorry for ourselves that saying 'poor me' feels self-indulgent and wrong. But empathising with ourselves doesn't mean we feel sorry for ourselves or that we're trapped in victimhood. It means we recognise that what we experienced wasn't normal. It came at a high price to our progress and psychological strength, and self-empathy is our reward.

We know we've been emotionally challenged by what we've been through; self-empathy means we're prepared to treat ourselves with patience and kindness as we conquer our battles and win our emotional war. There are no brave faces required here. Judge Mental has left the room. All you need is your truth about how you feel right now. Practice empathy and speak kindly and compassionately to yourself in those moments when you feel overwhelmed. You always have the exit option if you need it. Honour your journey. Know your limits.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

EMPATHY

(Page 125 of your workbook)

- How will you show empathy to yourself for the tough times you've been through?
- Next time you find yourself in a tough situation, what will you do and say to yourself?
- How will you speak to yourself from now on?
- If you showed a difficult person empathy, what do you think would happen?

If you offer empathy to someone else and an uncomfortable response triggers you, don't panic. It's completely normal to feel unsettled or even embarrassed if your offer of empathy feels rejected. Remember not to make it mean anything bad about you. Whatever response you receive, honour the progress you've made and leave it at that. You've shown someone that they matter despite their discomfort, and whether they show it or not, they will remember how your kindness made their pain feel validated.

They have also been a mirror for you and shown you that rejecting empathy is quite normal when you're not accustomed to it. Practice giving yourself empathy and allow yourself to be a mirror for others.

Affirmation: *I honour how far I've come; I respect what I've survived, and I choose to meet myself with kindness every day.*

A LITTLE NOTE ON OUR NERVOUS SYSTEM

When we're children and we're blamed for things going wrong - for other people's problems, moods, or pain - our nervous system learns to interpret any suggestion of blame or a potential problem as incoming threats to our safety and survival. Now as adults - even if it's subtle or not even about us - our body reacts like it's back in those moments of being unfairly accused and in imminent danger.

It's not just "overreacting" - it's our survival system doing exactly what it was wired to do. It scans for danger - am I going to be blamed again? It gets defensive - I must protect myself before they hurt me. Or it shuts down completely - I must stop the threat.

These feelings are still there after all these years because our nervous system is **pattern-based, not logic-based**. It doesn't care that you're an adult now. It still holds the blueprint from when you were small. You're affirming, however unwittingly, that, "when problems come up, I am the target. I will be blamed. I must defend myself."

That's why even gentle comments or neutral statements can make you feel attacked or on guard. It's old wiring trying to keep you safe. How can you start changing this? Here are a few powerful but gentle steps:

Name it in the moment

When you notice yourself tensing up, becoming frustrated, or feeling like you want to push back, pause and say to yourself: this is my old 'blame alarm' going off but I don't need it anymore. I'm safe right now. This helps you separate the past from the present.

Soothe your body first

Because your reaction is coming from the fear centre in your brain (fight or flight), you can calm it with a breathing technique (that I'm about to teach you) and a positive affirmation: 'it's okay, I'm not in danger'. Keep your feet planted firmly on the floor.

Reframe what's being said

Instead of automatically hearing, 'there's a problem, so it must be my fault,' consciously tell yourself: 'there's a problem, I'm not to blame and I don't have to fix it.' You can even make it playful: not everything is my circus, and they are not my clowns...

Heal the old wound

Ultimately, these reactions soften when the original wound gets acknowledged and healed. That means:

- Validating that as a child you were unfairly blamed.
- Grieving the time lost as you carried the adult's problems.
- Reparenting yourself with compassion: little me, you didn't deserve that. You were just a kid.

Journaling, therapy, or even talking to yourself in the mirror can start to rewrite these old scripts.

A script for yourself

When you feel defensive or blamed, gently say to yourself:

- I'm allowed to be human.
- Not everything is my fault.
- I don't have to defend myself against the ghosts of the past.

Daily practice: The “Blame Release Pause”

Notice when you feel that restrictive, defensive, bracing feeling, and pause. Put your hand on your heart, name the feeling. Say quietly: *this is my old blame wound. It's okay to feel this.*

Imagine yourself breathing out the old blame, breathing in safety. Reassure yourself. Whisper: I am safe now. Not everything is my fault. I don't have to carry this anymore.

A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E RECAP

AWARENESS

CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION

ACEPTANCE

LOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

MEANING

EXIT

RESET AND **R**EWARD

MINUTE-BY-**M**INUTE

EMPOWERED

AWARENESS

“I no longer allow past pain to ruin present peace.”

When we have awareness, we have self-control, and we own ourselves. Without awareness, we lose self-control and someone or something else owns us. When we learn to merge awareness of our own sensitivities (self-awareness) with the sensitivities in our environment (situational awareness), we hold the golden ticket to radical awareness wherever we are, and whoever we're with.

CONSCIOUS CONVERSATION

When our Conscious Adult Self and our Wounded Inner Child have a Conscious Conversation, we're empowered to soothe, calm, and soften our fear-based memories. Our Conscious Adult Self is a kind and mature protector. We may not have had someone like this in our lives when we

were children, but it's time now for us to be our own protector. It's time to step up and take charge.

ACCEPTANCE

The pain lies in the resistance. When we accept, rather than reject, our painful emotional histories, we can heal the memories that distort the truth of who we really are. We become empowered to contradict and defy the adults who kept us imprisoned and restricted. Acceptance is freedom. When we stop blaming and punishing ourselves for what was said to us and done to us, the question stops being "what's wrong with me?" and instead becomes "what's wrong with them?"

LOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

When we combine Awareness with Conscious Conversation and Acceptance, we're empowered to look at things with a Logical Perspective. When we put 'Logical' and 'Perspective' together, we create a Sensible Viewpoint - a Common-Sense Picture that will see us through the most challenging situations with the most difficult people.

MEANING

We spend a lifetime making other people's shameful behaviour mean terrible things about us. We blame ourselves for their toxic actions because it's how we were programmed to survive. But now we know better, we can do better. We made their behaviour mean something devastating about us. That meaning changes today.

EXIT

When our fear-based memories take us to the fork in the emotional road, we need to know we can get away from whatever or whoever is pushing our buttons without losing our dignity or composure. Exiting the scene of the emotional chaos is essential to our wellbeing and peace of mind.

Always exit with grace. A simple, assertive “excuse me, I need a moment” will suffice.

RESET AND REWARD

Resetting our emotional selves gets easier with practice. And once we’ve reset, we’re ready for our reward. Rewarding ourselves is self-validating, and self-validation encourages us to keep pushing forward on our road to emotional freedom.

MINUTE-BY-MINUTE

How different would your day look if, instead of rushing to beat the clock, you slowed down and lived minute-by-minute? When you feel the burn of time-pressure, STOP. Become aware. Return to the present moment. Calm your wandering thoughts. Take a few deep breaths.

Being rushed or rushing yourself means you’re likely to make decisions for the wrong reasons and regret it. We are the bosses of our time. We’re lighting the way and slowing down. We’re achieving with joy.

EMPOWERED

When you arrive at the final step of this process, you’ll have worked your way through difficult emotions that once overwhelmed you. You’ve told your truth, reclaimed your emotional power, and you’re within reach of winning your emotional war. This is emotional freedom.

I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS

This is a short meditation named after Maya Angelou's wonderful book of the same name.

As I emerged from my struggles with my mental health, I saw myself like a bird in a cage - until I realised the cage door had always been open. All I'd had to do was step outside and learn how to fly. Even if it took me a while to get off the ground or to stay in the air once I was up (which it did), I eventually became determined to free myself from the emotional cage I'd been caught in. I realised that nobody had the power to take away my chance, or my choice, to fly except me.

Would other birds be upset or angry as I dared to stretch my wings? You bet they would. Would they try time and time again to bring me down and clip my wings? Absolutely. So what? The birds who matter will find you and fly by your side giving you strength when you need it most.

The image of the bird in a cage represents how our mental health and emotional challenges keep us caged, but the open cage door reminds us that we always have the choice to stretch our clipped wings and find a way to fly. Visualising this meditation will remind you that, however anxiety and overwhelm have caged you up until now, you can set yourself free any time you choose. The meditation script is over the page, and the audio meditation is available as a free download on my website.

MEDITATION

I see a bird sitting in a cage.
The door of the cage is open.
Even though the bird knows it could be free,
it remains in its cage.

Does the bird feel safer in its cage?
Has it forgotten how to fly away
from places and people
who try to clip its powerful wings?
Does the bird wonder if life would be peaceful
beyond its cage?

I know you're scared, little bird, but you are safe.
The Universe belongs to you.
You can choose to remain in your cage,
or you can choose to fly free.

The bird wonders about life beyond its cage.
It takes its time, it looks around, and it steps outside.

The cage no longer traps the bird.
It stretches its wings, and flies.

Now, we are both free.

THREE LITTLE WORDS

We've known each other a while now and there are three little words I want to whisper in your ear: breathe, truth, reassure. I know, and I mean every word.

First up, I'd like to share a deep-breathing technique that enhances everything you've just learned in A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E. After that, we'll look at how a simple truth phrase, and a reassuring affirmation, round off our empowering new way of managing anyone and anything.

THE FIRST LITTLE WORD: BREATHE

I used to roll my eyes whenever I heard anyone talk about the 'calming and healing benefits' of deep breathing. One day, feeling desperate, I tried it - and I've never looked back.

When our fear-based memories are provoked our breathing quickens to pump more blood into our muscles preparing us for flight or fight. When we breathe slowly and more deeply, we're sending a message to our brain that says: 'It's OK, we're cool. We don't need a coping mechanism or an escape route.'

Slow, deep breathing is a sign that we've got this, everything's under control. Even when our fear response starts revving its engine, our slow, deep breathing allows us to reclaim conscious self-control.

As we focus on slow, deep breathing - also called diaphragmatic breathing - we allow more air to flow into our body, which decreases our stress and anxiety. Through our slow, deep breathing our flight-or-fight response - which is always active to some degree - is desensitised. We can't turn it off completely, but slowing and deepening our breathing turns the volume right down. As you continue along your path to emotional freedom, the following breathing technique will be your new best friend:

HOW TO BREATHE: 555

- Breathe in deeply for 5 seconds.
- Hold your breath for a count of 5 seconds.
- Breathe out slowly for 5 seconds.
- Repeat steps 1, 2, and 3 until you feel calm and regulated.
- Sense the awareness and self-control you're now feeling.

PRACTICE MAKES GOOD ENOUGH

I find this breathing technique particularly effective when I can't sleep. Combined with the affirmation 'I have permission to rest and sleep', you'll be out like a light in no time.

As with everything else on this road to emotional freedom, practice the 555 Breathing Method as often as possible - even when you're not feeling stressed or anxious. The more you practice when you're calm, the easier it will be to access when you're not.

THE ONE WITH ROSS'S TAN

Any Friends fans among you will know that you count to 5 like this:

1 Mississippi, 2 Mississippi, 3 Mississippi, 4 Mississippi, 5 Mississippi

And that's exactly how we need to breathe for maximum benefit when calming our nervous system.

THE SECOND LITTLE WORD: TRUTH

I KNOW WHY I FEEL THIS WAY.

I'M NOT IN DANGER.

THIS IS MY TRUTH.

In those moments of overwhelm and anxiety when our fear-based memories are provoked, this truth statement acknowledges the source of our distress. It lifts us out of overwhelm, grounds us in the present, and

restores our sense of calm. It knows there's nothing wrong with us - but it also knows there's a reason why we feel the way we do. This is not delusion or denial. This is truth.

Repeat it until it becomes a dominant belief. Write it down, type it up, print it out, record it, film yourself saying it, get it printed on a T-shirt, a shot glass, a coffee mug... whatever it takes - just remember it.

I KNOW WHY I FEEL THIS WAY.

I'M NOT IN DANGER.

THIS IS MY TRUTH.

BREATHE 555 AND PRACTICE YOUR TRUTH.

STEP 1: BREATHE IN

I know why I feel this way.

STEP 2: HOLD

I'm not in danger.

STEP 3: BREATHE OUT

This is my truth.

Breathe it.

Believe it.

Become it.

THE THIRD LITTLE WORD: REASSURE

When panic and anxiety threaten to overwhelm us, we must reach out and reassure our wounded inner child that all is well, they *are* safe. What would you say to your wounded inner child, or to your struggling teenage self, in that moment of dread and panic? Would you tell them to pull themselves together and grow up? Or would you reach out, put your arm around them, and tell them everything's OK and you've got them?

Be there for them like no one else ever was. Your role now, as the kind supporter - even if you never had one to show you how it's done - is to step up and consciously restore harmony with calm words and calm actions.

Give yourself the time, attention, and compassion you didn't get. See yourself. Hear yourself. Tell your wounded inner child or struggling teenage self:

- You're OK. I've got you.
- You're not in danger anymore.

A NOTE ABOUT MY TEENAGE SELF

Hmm. As I write these words, I realise something important, in fact something I hadn't seen clearly until now. Although I was familiar with abuse from a very young age, it's my *teenage self* who feels the most worn down and broken. She's the version of me who I choose to nurture now.

- It's her voice I'll listen for.
- It's her pain I'll soothe.
- It's her battles I'll fight with awareness, truth, and self-assurance.

- It's her confidence and self-worth I'll help her build by encouraging her creativity and giving her the permission she never had to achieve and accomplish her dreams.

She's the version of me who stayed the course, even when everything inside her was screaming to give up.

As you move forward with your own healing, I invite you to think about this:

- Which version of you most needs your compassion?
- Which version of you needs their hand held the tightest?
- Which version of you most needs to hear, "You're OK. I've got you now. You're safe to be you."

The relationship you build with that version of yourself will change everything. It's not about dwelling in the past; it's about meeting the needs and healing the parts of you that were left behind.

Daily Healing Practice: Three Minutes to Reconnect

Every day - morning, night or both - take just three minutes to:

See your younger self

Close your eyes and imagine your teenage self.

- Where are they today?
- What do they need?

Speak to them

Say something kind to them. It can be simple:

- "You are safe now."
- "You're gifted and intelligent."
- "You don't have to hide anymore."

Show them

Promise them one small action you'll take today to protect them and honour them. For example:

- Stand up for yourself when needed.
- Say no without guilt.
- Let yourself enjoy something fun.
- Rest without apology.
- Pursue a dream they had, or something related to the dream.

Consistency builds trust. The more often you reconnect, the stronger and more secure they will feel - and so will you. You're building a bridge from your past to your present, and to your future.

Affirmation Mantras for Healing and Reconnection

- I protect you. I honour you. I set you free.
- Your light is safe with me now.
- I am the love you waited for.
- You survived. I will help you thrive.
- I walk with you, not without you.
- Together, we are unstoppable.
- You shine through me. I shine for you.
- I am the home you always needed.

If you want something even simpler, almost like a whispered pocket mantra to carry everywhere, here are a few:

- I've got you. I always will.
- You are safe. You are free.
- We rise together. We always will.

RECAP

THREE LITTLE WORDS

BREATHE

Breathe in for 5

Hold for 5

Release for 5

TRUTH

I know why I feel this way.

I'm not in danger.

This is my truth.

REASSURE

You're OK.

I've got you.

You're not in danger anymore.

CHALLENGE IT TO CHANGE IT JOURNAL PROMPTS

YOUR NEW KNOWLEDGE...AND SETBACKS

(Page 126 of your workbook)

As you become more familiar with the practices of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E and Three Little Words, you'll notice the signs of healing: greater self-awareness, emotional self-control, and the unmistakable feeling of calm that tells you that you are winning your emotional war. The goal of this process is simple: to move away from fear-driven reactions and consciously choose a calmer, more empowered response.

If you **experience a setback** - and setbacks are simply invitations to deepen your awareness - take a moment to gently reflect:

- Who or what triggered your fear-based memories?
- What specific memories were triggered?
- Did you experience any feelings of shame, criticism, or rejection?
- How quickly did you remember and implement A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E and Three Little Words?
- What could you do next time to support yourself even sooner?
- How has your ability to reset, breathe, and self-reassure grown since you first started this journey?

Every reflection strengthens your healing. Every small victory rewires your emotional responses towards peace. Our fear recalls those early, scary moments when anger and rejection made us feel invalidated and worthless. The hopelessness we feel in these moments stirs a painful question: **"What's the point in trying to feel better?"** That is precisely the moment we must pull ourselves back from the brink of unravelling and return to our road of emotional freedom.

We are shaped by shocks, insults, and tantrums, and when we're emotionally exhausted the road to recovery can be rocky. We must stay

aware of how easily our fears can be triggered by even the smallest ripple of tension or stress. Feeling retraumatised, anxious, or panicked is exhausting and upsetting but we are in control of our emotional responses - and you know by now that they include walking away, breathing deeply, resetting ourselves, and choosing the path to peace no matter what or who tries to provoke us. You don't need to save face or have the last word. You really don't.

Now that you know why you've been choosing, feeling, and thinking the way you have, you are free to choose, feel, and think differently.

And **that** is emotional freedom!

ALSO...

We're tired of defending ourselves. We're tired of obeying what 'Judge Mental' tells us to do. Next time someone's rude, confrontational, or aggressive don't waste time wondering what *you've* done wrong or thinking of a clever comeback. Instead, ask yourself:

- I wonder what happened to *them*.
- Is their story like mine?
- What or who do they remind me of?

Refuse to allow other people's overwhelming, toxic behaviour to make you feel emotionally unsafe. Break the chain. Reject the temptation to be dragged into an emotional battle of wills.

When we carry unresolved trauma, we can be tempted to offload our pain in ways that we later regret. Trust me on that one. If we approach life with an 'eye-for-an-eye' attitude it's not a sign of our strength - it's a sign of the pain we're still in. We've been conditioned to defend and protect ourselves but now we're changing that conditioning. We're moving from *defensive reaction* to *conscious response*. We're breaking the habits that

kept us stuck. We're creating new habits that will take us somewhere far healthier, far stronger, and far more comfortable than we've ever been before.

I CHOOSE CONSCIOUS POWER OVER UNCONSCIOUS PAIN

Other people's anger and criticism bring back memories of frightening experiences, memories that reverberate throughout our nervous system. These people may or may not know about our emotional history, their behaviour may or may not be deliberately designed to trigger us, but it still does. Our response, however, is our responsibility and we're choosing **not** to allow other people's toxic projections to trigger us anymore.

Very few people become difficult, critical, judgmental, angry, defiant, defensive, or argumentative unless they carry traumatic experiences of their own. What's really going on behind their mask? With practice and experience, you'll be empowered to ask: *what or who caused them so much pain?* And that's a great example of making someone's behaviour mean something worrying *about them, not about you.*

Being at peace with others becomes much easier when we're at peace with ourselves. When we end the *internal* emotional war, the *external* emotional war is won. We might still have the occasional blip but now, we're empowered to respond differently. We're asking big questions and receiving big answers, all of which help us heal our emotional history.

We're lifting ourselves out of confusion by telling the truth about our emotional history, healing our emotional present, and protecting our emotional future. We're directing ourselves into a space of conscious curiosity and emotional freedom whilst remembering that we can only control ourselves.

I'm not suggesting you spend hours analysing every encounter, but over the next few weeks you might want to reflect on:

- Why did I feel triggered?
- Who triggered me?
- What old memory or wound did it touch?

We tend to feel deeply invalidated as adults when we were deeply invalidated as children. With hearts and minds full of **invalidating** experiences, we must build a new store of **validating** experiences instead. We must rise above the old provocations. We must own our worth.

Affirmation: I matter. I count. I am valid.

When we accept that our lives have been shaped by the wounds we've borne from past trauma, when we understand who and where that trauma came from and how it still influences us, we can energetically give it back to its rightful owner. This creates the space we need to reclaim our emotional power, embrace emotional freedom, and win our emotional war.

As you move further down the road towards emotional freedom it won't matter how stropy, irritable, or dysregulated other people are - they can be as chaotic as they like. You'll remain calm and untriggered, because you've learned to switch your focus from them to you and to ask yourself:

"I wonder what happened to them...?"

And there you have it! You've equipped yourself with a straightforward but profoundly powerful process that teaches you how to manage anyone and anything, despite your emotional history.

How subtle and quiet - or loud and emotional - has the impact of this process been for you?

Every empowering step of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E offers its own gifts. Feel free to revisit them as stand-alone practices, focusing on whichever step you need most at any moment.

Once we embrace the healing powers of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E, something incredible happens:

- We can afford to be emotionally generous.
- We can smile, say hello, and be the person who calmly says, "don't worry, we can sort this out."

For the first time in our lives, we're not the person desperately trying to be validated. We're not the one scrambling to avoid anxiety, begging to have our needs met, dodging criticism, or trying to redirect a catastrophe with frantic, stress-inducing fixes. Once upon a time, in someone else's broken story, we thought we had to save the day to be worthy.

No more.

It's time to tell the truth of who we really are. It's time to put our needs first.

With awareness and conscious conversation, we can soothe sensory experiences and restore calm. We know the only source of our self-doubt and shame has been other people. We weren't born carrying these disempowered feelings - they were programmed into us.

They no longer serve us.

They once led us down paths of drama, confrontation, and chaos, convincing us that life had to be loud and catastrophic to be meaningful.

We're done with that.

Learn the values and purpose of A.C.A.L.M.E.R.M.E, and it will run quietly in the background like a healing operating system, guiding you every time you feel overwhelmed, anxious, intimidated, or scared.

- Allow awareness to wash over you.
- Have a conscious conversation with yourself.
- Let a logical perspective be your guide.

Allow your nervous system to return to its natural state of calm, conscious composure.

Emotional Closing

- You are no longer who they made you believe you were.
- You are not broken.
- You are not less-than.
- You are not the shame they projected onto you.
- You are who you choose to become – aware, conscious, calm, and free.
- You are the calm in your own storm.
- You are the voice of your own compassion.
- You are the safe place you have been searching for all along.
- You have rewritten the story they tried to write for you, and that changes everything, beginning now, and for every day to come.

