



USING SCIENCE TO GET OVER ANXIETY, DEPRESSION,
ANGER, FREAK-OUTS, AND TRIGGERS

UNF#CK YOUR BRAIN

WORKBOOK

UPDATED AND EXPANDED

WITH NEW RESOURCES FOR THERAPISTS AND PROFESSIONALS

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LPC-S, ACS, ACN

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Unfuck Your Brain Workbook

EXPANDED EDITION

**USING SCIENCE TO GET OVER ANXIETY,
DEPRESSION, ANGER, FREAK-OUTS,
AND TRIGGERS**

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Unfuck Your Brain Workbook

**USING SCIENCE TO GET OVER ANXIETY, DEPRESSION, ANGER, FREAK-OUTS, AND TRIGGERS
(UPDATED AND EXPANDED)**

Part of the 5 Minute Therapy Series

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Introduction

How do our brains get fucked up? Let us count the ways.

Anger, depression, anxiety, stress, traumatic grief, substance use, crazy-ass behavioral patterns, dumb-ass relationship choices...

Or as someone said to me recently, “Yeah, that’s just a typical Tuesday.”

So much of what we call mental illness is really a case of brain chemicals gone batshit. And most of this comes from the stressful and traumatic life events we cope with.

We used to hold our poor genes accountable for all the different ways we responded to an environment of stress and trauma. But recent research shows that only two to five percent of the diagnoses people struggle with come from a singular, faulty gene. So we know that the cause of trouble is waaaaaaay more likely to be our environment and how we cope with it.

These things—anger, depression, the rest of it—are **adaptive strategies**. If you don’t believe anything else I have to say, I hope you believe this part. These feelings are normal. We’re wired for self-protection and survival, and that’s exactly what your brain is doing when it’s acting all fucked up.

Our behaviors are responses to the bullshit we have to deal with day in and day out. Our brains may be responding to big, life altering traumatic experiences...*but not always*. The trouble may also lie in our day to day toxic relationships and interactions...the small ways people push our buttons, violate our boundaries, and disrespect our need for safety. There’s also those oppressive systems and structures we are subjected to. And for most people? It’s a hot mess combination of the three.

And then, feeling fucked up becomes a vicious cycle. We feel weird and crazy for feeling weird and crazy. We feel like we are weak. Or broken. Or fundamentally flawed. And *that* is the most helpless feeling in the world. Fundamentally flawed means un-fixable. So why bother trying?

But what if you could understand where all of those thoughts and feelings are coming from? And understand how all the shit going on in your head came to be? What if it were actually entirely understandable? That means it might be *fixable*.

This is important shit. We are way more likely to get better if we know why we are having a certain problem rather than just focusing on the symptoms. If we treat stress, anxiety, or

depression, for example, without looking at some of the causes of the stress, anxiety, and depression, then we aren’t doing everything we can to make things actually better.

I’m a therapist working in private practice and my focus is on relationships and intimacy. Guess what the biggest issue I run into is? Trauma history. It rears its ugly head up everywhere. I found that when I explained everything that was going on in a way that was simple, my clients would say “Oh, shit! That makes sense!” My first book, *Unfuck Your Brain*, and now this workbook exist because nobody else had smushed all that stuff together in a way that is simple and practical. And I have seen how learning the simple and practical part helps people figure out the getting better part way more quickly.

Confession time. I am not a workbook person.

I’m a disaffected Gen Xer who hates being told what to do by anyone...especially if they are right and it is good for me. Add to my general grumpiness the fact that so many of the workbooks I’ve been handed are silly, superfluous, and pointless.

So anytime I have been tasked to create worksheets or workbooks (which started far before I started writing books about the neuroscience of fuckery) I wanted to make sure they were actually good. And useful. And clear about how to use them. Nothing sucks more than to think “am I doing this right?”

And feedback over the years has told me that yes, these worksheets do actually work. And how cool it would be to have them all in one place. Or at least a bunch of them in one place. You emailed us and we listened.¹ Everything in this book relates either directly to my book *Unfuck Your Brain* or operates as scaffolding to the ideas in that book.

Let’s look at what I mean by that.

How to Use this Book

This workbook is a compliment to all of the badassery healing work you are already doing! This isn’t meant to push you into uncharted territory, but to give you a clearer roadmap for where you already are.

If you are a licensed clinician, the tools in this book were intentionally designed to work well with a multitude of

¹ Well, except for the emails that tell me I’m a foul mouthed hack who needs to eat a bar of soap and then a big slice of shut-the-fuck-up-cake. That’s not happening and you’d be a happier human if you stopped reading my books.

theoretical orientations. If you notice stuff like that, you will clock me on a lot of different ways of looking at healing, including CBT, DBT, SFBT, positive psychology, metacognitive therapy, somatic trauma theory, neuro-linguistic programming, relational cultural theory, and on and on.

This book is meant to be a companion to my book *Unfuck Your Brain*. But, as with all my books and workbooks, it will work perfectly fine without buying the original book. As someone who has spent much of her life being really poor, I buck against anything that smacks of sneaking in extra expenses. So we aren't doing that. If a skill needs explaining, you will definitely get the info you need to understand the worksheet. And if you want to geek out and get more in depth about the science of what exactly is happening in your brain and why, only then do you need to go get a copy of *Unfuck Your Brain*.

Some of the worksheets and activities were in the original text and miniworkbook zine and are duplicated here. Not to pad out the book so I can be lazy, but to make as complete a toolbox as I possibly can. But as with late night infomercials.... wait, there's more!

When I was asked for worksheets I was thinking super-literally. Until I realized I needed to unfuck my own thought process about building this "super fancy professional edition" and realized that people need tools to support the healing process. Worksheets that augment the discussions this book was written to generate. Once I stopped being concrete as pavement, the ideas came flooding in.

This means that the worksheets will also be great tools with other conversations you may be having and aren't tied inextricably to the original book. Because that would be kinda a dick move. It's better to have a multipurpose tool in your pocket. Having only a hammer when you really need a screwdriver really sucks.

This book is structured a bit like *Unfuck Your Brain*—first we're going to look and see what you've got going on, then we'll figure out how trauma might come into it, and then we've got a bunch of exercises for various situations and diagnoses (but might help you even if you aren't dealing with that situation and diagnosis at the moment) like stress, anger, grief, anxiety, depression, and addiction.

Let the unfuckening begin!

A Note for My Bad-Ass Wellness Professionals

All my books have been designed to be "public-facing," meaning designed to be read directly by the people who are working on the particular issue that I am writing about. What the industry calls "self-help," I call self-education, self-empowerment, and self-coaching, and these books and workbooks are designed to support that process.

But as time has passed, we hear more and more how these books and workbooks aren't just being recommended by mental health professionals to their clients, they are being used directly as part of therapy. Which is deeply cool. So if that's what you are doing with this workbook, that's awesome. Thank you for supporting my cat's wet food habit. In return, we are smattering a bunch of "pro tips" throughout the workbook to help you guide your processes, should that be helpful.

Additionally, I strived to keep the "mental health professionals" umbrella large. If you work in some capacity where you help others get better, these notes are for you. I happen to have a clinical license. But that is not a badass wellness professional requirement. You may be a recovery coach. Or life coach. Or a 12-step sponsor. We all have a rightful and needed place in unfucking the world. No matter your title, I'm glad you are here and doing the work that you do.

If you are not a licensed clinician, you have your level of training, certification, and scope of practice to inform you of where your work lies and what is out of your domain (you know, just like licensed therapists do). If you are providing psycho-ed or coaching, there are tons of resources in here that will fit within that framework.

No matter what your level of education, experience, and fancy certificates on the wall? If something feels like it's bigger than what you can handle, skip it and get more support. No shame in that, I sure as hell do it on the regular. Thank you for knowing where you rock and where you let others rock. That's legit the hallmark of professional bad-assery.

1

GET TO KNOW YOUR BRAIN

Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are rooted deep in our physical bodies and in how our brains perceive the world around us, based on past experiences and current information. So it might be the understatement of the decade to say that knowing what's going on in your brain and how all that shit works is *huge*. And when we totally get all that, we see that how we interact with the world around us is a completely normal response when we take into account brain functioning and our past experiences. If all is bopping along and the landing is smooth, we don't notice any problems. But when we have a rough landing? When brain-traffic control doesn't manage its shit properly, we see the effects:

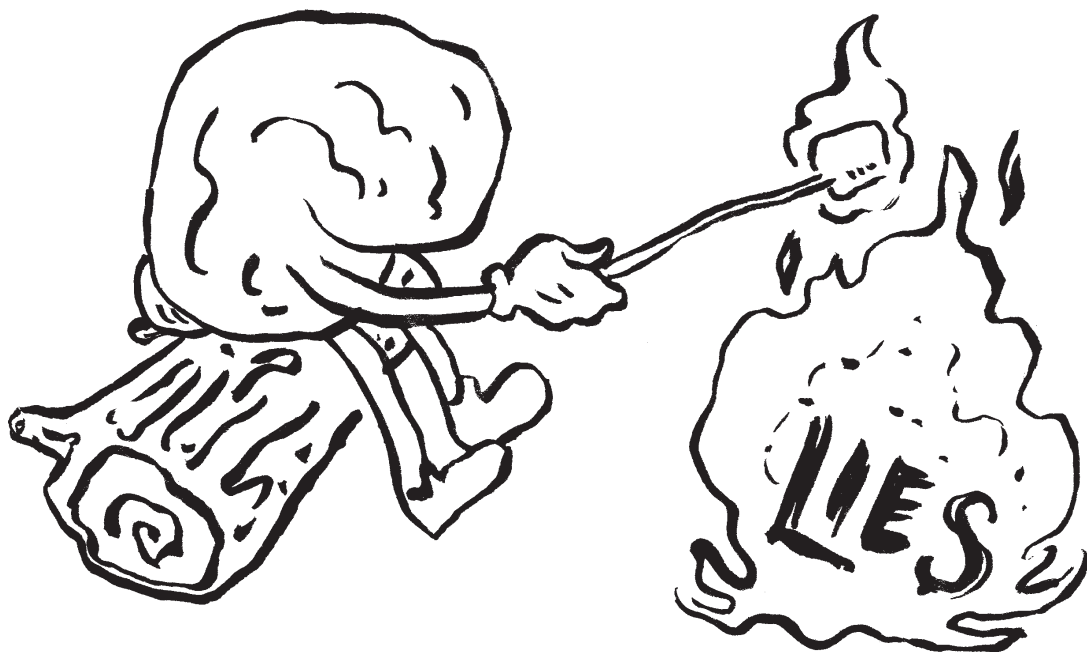
- Freaking the fuck out
- Avoiding important shit we need to take care of
- Feeling pissed off all the time
- Being a dick to people we care about

- Putting shit in our bodies that we know isn't good for us
- Doing shit we know is dumb or pointless or destructive

None of these things are fucking helpful. But they all make sense.

As we navigate the world, nasty shit happens. The brain stores info about the nasty shit to try to avoid it in the future. Your brain has adapted to the circumstances in your life and started doing things to protect you, bless it. Sometimes these responses are helpful. Sometimes the responses become a bigger problem than the actual problem was. Your brain isn't *trying* to fuck you over (even though sometimes it totally does).

The first part of this workbook is all about the inner workings of your particular brain fuckery. Because one-size-fits-all is even less effective in mental health treatment than it is in pants.



SUDs

Let's start with a metric. I'm pretty sure no one leaves therapy school without the SUDs in their back pocket. SUDs stands for Subjective Units of Distress, and is a scale (usually 0-10 or 0-100 if you wanna get sassy with it) used to measure your intensity of distress. Only you know your insides, and SUDs is the best way (no matter how imperfect) to make that experience known. You're right, it's not an objective measurement like your pulse or vagal tone. Because we aren't focusing on that, we are focusing on how you feel and how it's affecting your ability to do important life shit.

We're going to use SUDs in a bunch of the exercises throughout this book, so go ahead and make notes here about what each level looks and feels like in your experience.

0 = Totally fine. Peaceful and settled in your body, no underlying agitation, upsetness, anxiety, or stress.

1 = Basically okay. Not upset, maybe if you were being super aware you might notice something feels a little unpleasant but it's not a big deal.

Pro tip: Besides giving you really good information for a billable note with your clients ("Client was amenable to therapeutic intervention and reported a SUDs decrease from 8 to 4 during session, a 50% improvement in their self-reported anxiety"), a SUDs scale is also a great opportunity to work on perspective building with your clients. We've all had times in our lives where something felt like a "10" in a very real way, but when laid out against the rest of our lives, it clearly was not that bad. I am quite adept at being that dramatic in the perfect storm of circumstances. So you can coach clients to consider "If 0 is the best you've ever been, and 10 is the absolute worst, where do you fall right now?" Creating perspective is a hugely important part of self-awareness.

2 = A little upset. Maybe not even noticeable if you were busy, but if you're paying attention you would recognize something is bothering you a little.

3 = A little worried, noticing that you're mildly upset.

4 = Upset enough that it isn't easy to ignore. You can handle it, but it definitely doesn't feel good.

5 = Definitely uncomfortable, sorta upset. It feels unpleasant but it's still manageable with effort.

6 = Feeling bad. Recognizing you definitely need to do something about this.

7 = Heading into freak out. Sorta still in control, but almost barely.

8 = This is the official freak out point. No good is coming from this.

9 = Feeling at the edge. Oftentimes a 9 feels a lot like a 10 because you are getting really desperate. You're not at the point of unbearable quite yet, but are very scared that you are losing control and of what may happen.

10 = The worst it has ever felt or could feel. It feels literally unbearable and you feel out of control of your whole personhood.

Take Your Own Temperature

How often in life have you genuinely been given permission to feel what you feel? Rarely to fucking never is my bet.

So this book is all about working through the types of shit that get in the way of us having the lives we want and the sense of purpose and peace that we crave. The type of bullshit we call traumatic events. It's also for people with huge stress responses, anxiety, grief, anger, depression, and/or addictive behaviors. All the coping skills we develop to get through life without trying to end it.

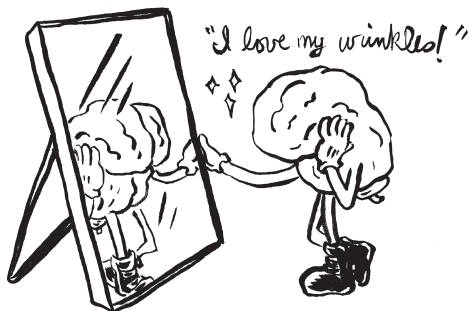
And that's stressful reading. Some exercise in here may end up sucker punching your ass because it hits a fundamental truth about your life and experience. And your brain isn't gonna be happy with those feels. Your brain may be all "Fuck this noise and toss that book."

Because we are generally told not to feel negative emotions. But it can be really helpful to tap into what you're feeling. Take your own temperature, so to speak. And have an action plan for if it gets too high.

This exercise is about giving you back your power to own what is going on inside you. *You have permission to feel what you feel.*

Finding a way to reconnect to the reality of your experience will help you gather the resources you need to move forward. Because you deserve to. We should honor the past, we should remember it, and we should respect what it has taught us. But we don't have to keep living there. That house is crumbling and toxic and far too small to contain you. It doesn't support your present experience and it sure as fuck doesn't fit into your future goals.

Pro tip: You can use this worksheet as a check-in for each individual session. It incorporates all the elements of breaking down a current situation using CBT (thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, external events). It can be very helpful to check in to their current experience of themselves (something we don't do nearly as often as we should).



What are you thinking? It may not be actual thoughts but flashes of memory tapes playing.

What are you feeling in response to that? Name those emotions. Use SUDs to rate the severity of them. (There's a list of emotions on page [X].)

What do you notice is going on in your body in a physical sense?

What behaviors are you exhibiting?


And, seriously, what other shit are you dealing with in your everyday life that's either helping you cope or making it worse?

Weekly Mood Tracker


It's really difficult to see patterns over days and weeks and months. A tracker helps us see that bigger picture that is so easy to miss when we are dealing with life shenanigans on a moment-to-moment basis.

Pro tip: If you are using a paper version of a weekly tracker with clients, have about a trillion extras on hand. They get lost, they get forgotten, etc. You can then pull out another one and say "No worries, let's try to get as much down that you remember while it is still fresh so we don't lose any potentially important information about both patterns and progress!"

WEEKLY MOOD TRACKER				
	SITUATION	MOOD	MAGNITUDE (0-100)	SYMPTOMS
SUNDAY				
MONDAY				
TUESDAY				
WEDNESDAY				
THURSDAY				
FRIDAY				
SATURDAY				

AM I IN A BAD MOOD OR... DO YOU SUCK? 

WEEKLY MOOD TRACKER				
	SITUATION	MOOD	MAGNITUDE (0-100)	SYMPTOMS
SUNDAY				
MONDAY				
TUESDAY				
WEDNESDAY				
THURSDAY				
FRIDAY				
SATURDAY				

AM I IN A BAD MOOD OR... DO YOU SUCK? 

Mood Tracker Part Two, the Experiment

Now that you're starting to get a handle on your moods, let's see what we can do to change them. Think of a new way to respond to your mood—you might want to draw from the

Coping Skills chapter later on—and give it a try next time you have that feeling. Record the results here.

WEEKLY MOOD TRACKER

AM I IN A BAD
MOOD OR...
DO YOU SUCK?



	SITUATION	MOOD	MAGNITUDE (0-100)	SYMPTOMS	NEW RESPONSE	SUDS AFTER NEW RESPONSE	SYMPTOMS AFTER NEW RESPONSE
SUNDAY							
MONDAY							
TUESDAY							
WEDNESDAY							
THURSDAY							
FRIDAY							
SATURDAY							

WEEKLY MOOD TRACKER

AM I IN A BAD
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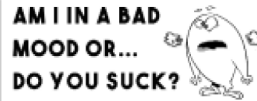
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Mood Tracker Part Two, the Experiment

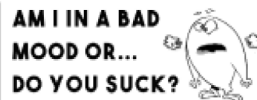
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FRIDAY							
SATURDAY							



Self-Compassion Exercises

Most of us live in cultures that do not emphasize self-compassion—quite the opposite. We're told that we're being lazy and self-indulgent if we don't harshly criticize ourselves. We're told that no matter how hard we try, our best just isn't good enough. I promise that if being hard on oneself worked... it would have worked by now. And it hasn't. So it's time for something different. We can all benefit by learning to be more self-compassionate, and now is the perfect time to start.

How do you typically react to yourself?

What types of things do you typically judge and criticize yourself for (appearance, career, relationships, parenting, etc.)?

What type of language do you use with yourself when you notice some flaw or make a mistake (do you insult yourself, or do you take a more kind and understanding tone)?

If you feel that you lack sufficient self-compassion, check in with yourself – are you criticizing yourself for this too? If so, stop right there. This exercise is designed to help you create space for the work you are doing, not tell you that you are doing yet another thing wrong. “Be less self-critical, you dumb ass!” is not the self-talk we're looking for.

When you are being highly self-critical, how does this make you feel inside?

When you notice something about yourself you don't like, do you tend to feel cut off from others, or do you feel connected with your fellow humans who are also imperfect?

What are the consequences of being so hard on yourself? Does it make you more motivated and happy, or discouraged and depressed?

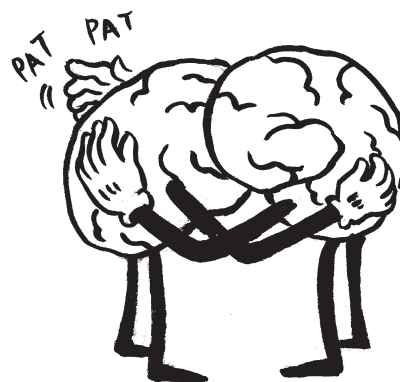
Do you tend to get carried away by the drama of the situation, so that you make a bigger deal out of it than you need to, or do you tend to keep things in balanced perspective?

How do you think you would feel if you could truly love and accept yourself exactly as you are? Does this possibility scare you, give you hope, or both?

Do you tend to feel cut off from others when things go wrong, with the irrational feeling that everyone else is having a better time of it than you, or do you get in touch with the fact that all humans experience hardship in their lives?

How do you typically react to life's difficulties?

How do you treat yourself when you run into challenges in your life? Do you tend to ignore the fact that you're suffering and focus exclusively on fixing the problem, or do you stop to give yourself care and comfort?



Self Empathy and Needs

When we're dealing with feelings, we often tend to label our emotions in some kind of binary. Good or bad, right or wrong, wanted or unwanted. There's a fuck-ton of problems associated with doing so however. Any negative labels lead us to trying to resist, or suppress, or transform those emotions. Or beat ourselves up for having them.

When we are being mindful of our emotions, on the other hand, we just notice them with curiosity instead of labeling them in a positive or negative category. As in "Oh, I'm feeling

. I wonder where that is coming from? I wonder what that's about? Is that emotion connected to something I'm not getting that I need?"

Difficult feeling: _____

Where is this feeling coming from?

What unmet needs might this feeling be connected to?

For this exercise, reflect on a difficult or painful feeling you recently experienced. Maybe you started to feel panicky before you left for work in the morning. Where did that come from? Was it related to a situation at home, at work, or along your commute? What unmet needs are at play in this situation? Is your safety at stake? Are you feeling disconnected or unsupported? Do you just need some space?

Pro tip: There is no empirically correct list of needs for all humans, right? Even things that are pretty universal (like safety and connection) are expressed and met in different ways. This is a great tool to help clients figure out what is important to and for them, setting aside what others are expecting and demanding of them. When y'all get real about this topic, you'll have a lot less resistance and self-sabotage around the work you are doing to help your clients align with what's truly important to them.

Difficult feeling: _____

Where is this feeling coming from?

What unmet needs might this feeling be connected to?

Needs Inventory

We all have needs. Needs are different from wants in that they are essential to our survival, not just our comfort or desire. You may want a burrito (because delicious). But what you need is food to provide energy to the cells of your body. Sometimes what we want can confuse us about what we need, and sometimes our weirdest wants are a signal that we may have an unmet need that we don't know how to fulfill in a healthy way. Like the person who grew up in a family where they weren't allowed to express themselves who now picks fights over everything they consider "disrespect."

Understanding your needs is a good place to start. Having a need doesn't obligate any specific person to provide it to you, but knowing what matters to you gives you the tools to ask for your needs to be met, and to filter out people who disregard or disrespect those needs.

The following list of potential needs isn't complete or universal, but it's a good place to start in considering what is most essential for you.

Connection

acceptance
affection
appreciation
belonging
cooperation
communication
closeness
community
companionship
compassion
consideration
consistency
empathy
inclusion
intimacy
love
mutuality
nurturing
respect/self-respect
safety
security
stability
support
to know and be known
to see and be seen
to understand and be understood
trust
warmth

Meaning

awareness
celebration of life
challenge
clarity
competence
consciousness
contribution
creativity
discovery
efficacy
effectiveness
growth

Physical Well-Being

air
food
movement/exercise
rest/sleep
sexual expression
safety
shelter
touch
water

Autonomy

choice
freedom
independence
space
spontaneity
hope
learning
mourning
participation
purpose
self-expression
stimulation
to matter
understanding

Honesty

authenticity
integrity
presence

Peace

beauty
communion
ease
equality
harmony
inspiration
order

Play

joy
humor

Read through the lists of possible needs. For each column, make a list of things that are non-negotiable, things that make you happy and are nice, and things that are important to other people but you don't care about. You can use the list on this page for inspiration, and add your own.

*Things I
need*

*Things I
want*

*Things that aren't
important to me*

Feelings Identification

Our emotions (also known as our feelings) are very similar to our thoughts but can be harder to pin down. And if we deal with anxiety on a constant basis, it's so overwhelming that anything else going on underneath tends to go unnoticed. But these other feelings could be what's activating the anxiety. Or they could be symptoms of other issues that also need your attention and care. Since a thought is just something that

your brain tells you, you already know the words to use. But emotions are a different form of communication from inside our bodies and brains, so we have to learn the language to describe them.

Here is a list to get you started, but you can also search online for a "feelings wheel" or add your own to this list.

FEELINGS WHEN YOUR NEEDS ARE SATISFIED

Peaceful

calm
clear headed
comfortable
centered
content
equanimous
fulfilled
mellow
quiet
relaxed
relieved

Engaged

absorbed
alert
curious
engrossed
enchanted
entranced
fascinated
interested
intrigued
involved
spellbound
stimulated

Affectionate

compassionate
friendly
loving
open hearted
sympathetic
tender
warm

Exhilarated

blissful
ecstatic
elated
enthralled
exuberant
radiant
rapturous
thrilled

Hopeful

expectant
encouraged
optimistic

Confident

empowered
open
proud
safe
secure

Refreshed

enlivened
rejuvenated
renewed
rested
restored
revived
satisfied
serene
still
tranquil
trusting

Joyful

amused
delighted
glad
happy
jubilant
pleased
tickled

Inspired

amazed
awed
wonder

Grateful

appreciative
moved
thankful
touched

Excited

amazed
animated
ardent
aroused
astonished
dazzled
eager
energetic
enthusiastic
giddy
invigorated
lively
passionate
surprised
vibrant

FEELINGS WHEN YOUR NEEDS ARE NOT SATISFIED

Disconnected

alienated
aloof
apathetic
bored
cold
detached
distant
distracted
indifferent
numb
removed
uninterested
withdrawn

Afraid

apprehensive
dread
foreboding
frightened
mistrustful
panicked
petrified
scared
suspicious
terrified
wary
worried

Sad

depressed
dejected
despair
despondent
disappointed
discouraged
disheartened
forlorn
gloomy
heavy hearted
hopeless
melancholy
unhappy
wretched

Disquiet

agitated
alarmed
discombobulated
disconcerted
disturbed
perturbed
rattled
restless
shocked
startled
surprised
troubled
turbulent
turmoil
uncomfortable
uneasy
unnerved
unsettled
upset

Fatigue

beat
burnt out
depleted
exhausted
lethargic
listless
sleepy
tired
weary
worn out

Tense

anxious
cranky
distressed
distraught
edgy
fidgety
frazzled
irritable
jittery
nervous
overwhelmed
restless
stressed out

Annoyed

aggravated
dismayed
disgruntled
displeased
exasperated
frustrated
impatient
irritated
irked

Pain

agony
anguished
bereaved
devastated
grief
heartbroken
hurt
lonely
miserable
regretful
remorseful

Vulnerable

fragile
guarded
helpless
insecure
leery
reserved
sensitive
shaky

Yearning

envious
jealous
longing
nostalgic
pining
wistful
incensed
indignant

Embarrassed

ashamed
chagrined
flustered
guilty
mortified
self-conscious

Angry

enraged
furious
incensed
indignant
irate
livid
outraged
resentful

Confused

ambivalent
baffled
bewildered
dazed
hesitant
lost
mystified
perplexed
puzzled
torn

Aversion

animosity
appalled
contempt
disgusted
dislike
hate
horrified
hostile
repulsed



Name your Emotions

In this exercise we will tease out the physical, visual, and mental manifestations of your primary emotions. Next to each dot, list an emotion that you frequently experience. Then list everything that you associate with that emotion. Feel free to start with anxiety, that's the big one you are working on right now...

●

●

●

●

●

●

But don't forget the other ones! E.g. "When I'm angry, I think that everyone has betrayed me and I want to smash things. People notice that my face tenses and keep their distance."

By each dot below, list an emotion and then make some notes about how you know that you are experiencing these emotions.

You will often feel a disconnect or a betrayal between your body and your mind as values from your upbringing are instilling feelings that you don't want to have because they aren't consistent with how you see the world now. If you were taught that you should always respect authority figures but one routinely insults you, your feelings will tell you when your actions are not in line with your values. Sit with your feelings and process what is going on in your body and mind. This is how you work them out of your life. What are some examples of this in your life now?

Make a list of events or behaviors that frequently cause those emotions, rating each one 1-10 on the scale of unpleasantness, using the SUDs scale from the first exercise.

What do you appreciate or need when experiencing each feeling? What is the useful information?

Name Your Sensations

As you feel more comfortable in working with your felt sense you can expand your awareness of the sensations you are experiencing. Just like emotions, sensations are intended to give us information not to last forever.

Here is some sensory vocabulary:

Burning/Hot/Cold/Warm/Chilly/Icy/Cool/Clammy/
Chilly/Sweaty/Gentle
Sharp/Dull/Rough/Smooth
Shaky/Trembly/Tingly/Twitchy/Butterflies/Jittery/
Jumbled/Jangly/Itchy/Jumpy
Weird/Off-Kilter/Off-Center/Edgy/Tearful/Owie
Hard/Soft
Stuck/Weak
Strong/Tough
Small/Large
Sour/Sweet/Bitter/Salty/Pungent
Relaxed/Calm/Peaceful/Flowing/Spreading/Silky/Still/
Tranquil/Comfortable
Undisturbed/Chill/Still/Quiet/Peaceful Empty/Full Fast/
Slow/Still
Tight/Tense/Pressure/Vibrating/ Dizzy/Fuzzy/Blurry/
Woozy/Faint/Light-Headed
Numb/Prickly/Tickly/Goose-Bumpy/Uncomfortable
Light/Heavy
Open/Closed/Loose/Tight

Some of the body sense words that may help you define your experience include:

Pressure, Air Current, Pain, Tingling, Itching, Temperature, Size, Weight, Shape, Motion, Speed, Texture, Earth Element, Color, Smell, Taste, Sound, Lack of Sensation

Because this is a pretty big list it may feel like writing a thesis on your body. Start by just noticing a couple of things. Maybe start with two or three opposite possibilities and decide which fits best. For example, does it feel tight or loose? Heavy or light?

It can also help to compare your feelings at different times. Practice by examining your current feelings, and then pick this book up in various other situations and see what changes you might notice when you're stressed, when you're unwinding, after different kinds of interactions, first thing in the morning, before bed, or whatever other situations you find yourself in.

Sensations I am experiencing *right now*:

Situation:

How I felt

Situation:

How I felt

Situation:

How I felt

Strengths Map

You know what sucks ass? How often therapy (or self-help work) focuses on the negative. What you fucked up. What you need to change. What's all broken and jacked. And yeah, we are doing this work so we can make shit better. But being totally neg-focused is depressing as all fuck. And it also isn't helpful to the getting better part if we don't use our strengths to get there.

You are good at shit. You fucking have to be, right? You survived this long, after all. So this worksheet is about untethering the strengths you developed from some of the not so good habits that you used to get through that no longer serve you.

Let's stop focusing on the things we want to change for 5 fucking minutes, OK? For now, just look at the stuff that makes you a badass who is completely capable of change.

First of all... What is a positive experience?

It can be:

- An event that went well because you made positive things happen
- Something that you are proud of
- Something you really enjoyed or gave you satisfaction

Describe an experience that was positive because of the things that you did to make it so:

What did you put into this event that made it successful for you?

I did

I did

I did

I did

I did

Strengths Vocabulary

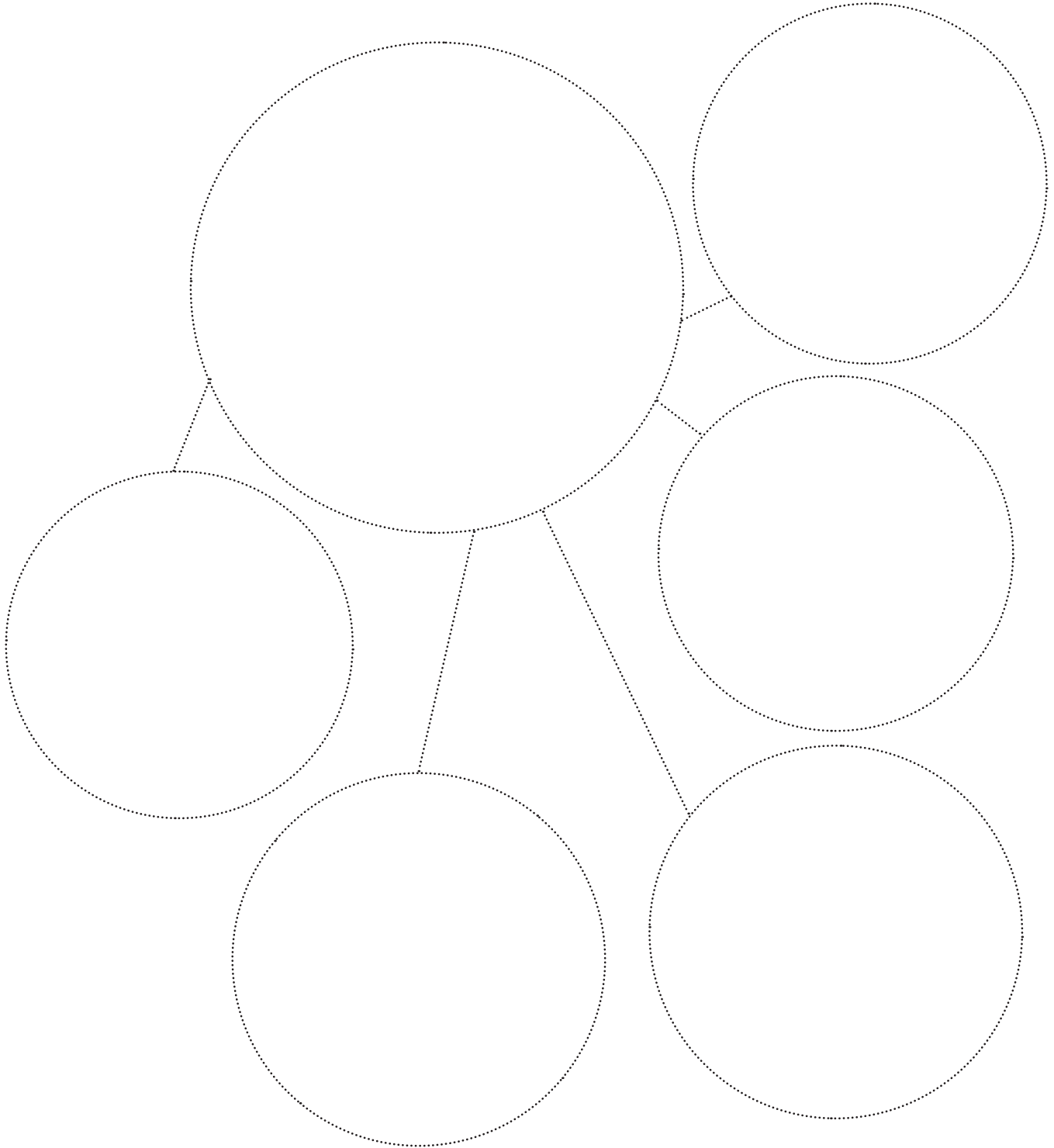
Accurate	Focused	Persistent	Straightforward
Action oriented	Forgiving	Practical	Tactful
Adventurous	Friendly	Precise	Team oriented
Ambitious	Generous	Respectful	Thoughtful
Analytical	Good-Looking	Responsible	Thrifty
Appreciative	Grateful	Self-Assured	Tolerant
Artistic	Helpful	Serious	Trustworthy
Athletic	Honest	Self-Controlled Spirituality	Versatile
Authentic	Hopeful	Spontaneous	Wise
Bravery	Humble	Social	
Caring	Idealistic		
Clever	Independent		
Compassionate	Ingenuity		
Charming	Industrious		
Communicative	Intelligent		
Confident	Kind		
Considerate	Knowledgeable		
Courageous	Leader		
Creativity	Lively		
Critical Thinker	Logical		
Curious	Loving		
Dedicated	Motivated		
Determined	Observant		
Disciplined	Optimistic		
Educated	Open		
Empathetic	Orderly		
Energetic	Original		
Entertaining	Organized		
Enthusiastic	Outgoing		
Fair	Patient		
Fast	Perseverant		
Flexible	Persuasive		

What other strength words can you think of that I didn't?

Now Map It!

Using the list of strengths below (or choosing any of your own), create a strengths map. In the center, create a label for your positive experience. In the outer circles, add all the strengths that you used to make that experience a positive one

Now describe this positive experience to someone else, focusing on all the things you did and the strengths you utilized to accomplish these tasks!



Music Chronology

Music chronology is a therapeutic technique developed by Dr. Thelma Duffey to use the power of music to facilitate healing by connecting the good memories of your past with painful events that you are still struggling to reconcile. Create a list of songs that reflect important times, events, and experiences in your life. Listen to the songs (you can do this by yourself, with a friend, or with your therapist) and discuss which periods of your life these songs represent. Sometimes there is a deeper meaning within the music or lyrics that was not readily apparent when making the list.

Next, choose one or two songs that encapsulate your past as a whole. And choose a song to represent your present—this

can be your current struggle or biggest issue. Finally, choose a song to represent your hopes for your future.

Pro tip: Depending on your client's access to resources you may need to help them find the music in question. In the past I have created playlists for clients who had limited access. You may be able to stream for them during the session even if they do not have a device to do so. If you are working with a group, you can play portions of each group member's songs and discuss common themes and notice differences. If you are interested in reading more on the technique, there have been multiple articles published in academic journals. You can also find the more basic elements through older issues of Counseling Today (which do not require journal access to read online).

Playlist of Past Experiences	What This Song Represents
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

Do these songs represent larger themes? Any beliefs about yourself or the world around you?

Think about the difference between the songs that represent your past and present. Can you see any new patterns of thinking or reinforcement of old patterns?

Songs that encapsulate my entire past:

A song that represents my hopes for the future:

Why these songs?

What about this song draws you to it?

A song that represents the present:

How is it different from the others and what is similar?

Why this song?

What needs to happen for you to move in the direction of living this song?

Episodic Autobiographical Memories

What fires together, wires together.

Most of what we now know about how trauma affects the brain is tied into research about the amygdala. The amygdala's job is to relate memories to emotions. True dat. But, to be more specific, the amygdala has been found to only store a *specific* kind of memory, not all of them. The amygdala doesn't give a shit where you left your car keys. The amygdala's function is to manage *episodic autobiographical memory* (EAM). Essentially this is the storage of event-based knowledge. Times, locations, people. Not your great-aunt's banana pudding recipe. Your stories about the world and how it works. *The shit that happens to you.*

So why the fuck is this important? EAM memories are *events-based knowledge*. That is, the memories about things that have happened to you which then inform your decisions about how to handle future events. These memories are also stored in a way that triggers a strong emotional reaction. Remembering where you left your phone does not produce a strong emotional

reaction, but memories of a time when something terrible happened to you does. Because that's how the brain protects you in the future. By remembering what events are a threat to you. Or what the brain *thinks* might be a threat to you.

If something happened in your life that was really significant to you, the emotions tied to that memory become attached like cat hair or static cling. So when we have an emotional response in the future, the amygdala immediately pulls this EAM file in order to decide how to respond.

Pro tip: The point of this worksheet is to unpack specifically how EAM memories affect our present functioning. Not just in maladaptive ways, but in helpful and constructive ways. We are constantly learning from our environment and wiping the entirety of these experiences actually puts us at great risk. If we can evaluate our EAMs proactively, we can start to determine where they have provided us protection and benefit, and where they have operated problematically. That allows us to work with those memories to start to change our responses.

EAM	How this memory has protected you	How this memory has started to overprotect you and needs dialing back down

Dear EAM

Now choose one of your episodic autobiographical memories that you've decided could be dialed down a little, and thank it for its service to you in the past. It's kinda silly but it's a reminder that it was a protective feature. For example, "*Dear Fear of Dogs: Thank you for wanting to make sure I didn't get bit again. I was little and it was really scary to get bit. And then I had to*

go to the doctor and get stitches and it hurt and I was confused and my mom was yelling and crying. All this wired to make me really scared of all dogs. And while I definitely want to be able to notice if a dog is unfriendly and doesn't want to be approached, I would also love to go over to my friend's house for game night and chill with her big loveable mutt. So I want to work on a compromise between healthy fear of some dogs and an irrational fear of all dogs. Let's come up with a plan, okay brain?"

Types of Trauma

A trauma is an event that happens outside our understanding of how the world is supposed to work. A traumatic response is when our ability to cope with what happened goes to shit and it's affecting other areas of our life.

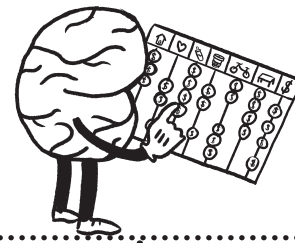
There are lots of things that can operate as a trauma. To be honest, there are plenty of things that are deeply traumatic for many people that aren't really considered by our diagnostic manuals. It's one of the things that burns my ass, because it then leads to people feeling ashamed that their trauma wasn't traumatic enough to warrant attention. And that's some bullshit right there. Because fancy terms and definitions aside? A trauma is a "What the fuck was *that*?" situation.

A trauma can be an accident, an injury, a serious illness, a loss... or any kind of life event that kicks your ass.

But in the end? We all experience trauma differently, and are impacted by too many things to list. Creating a list that touches only on the big "diagnosable" categories dismisses other experiences that shouldn't be dismissed. Beyond the obvious traumas, there are other, truly terrible and painful things that happen to us that inform our mental health and our perspective of being safe in the world.

Pro tip: More and more programs are moving to providing trauma informed care, even when the individuals served do not qualify for a diagnosis of PTSD. I can't yet die thinking "my work on this planet is done" cuz there are some asshole politicians I have to beat and then outlive but we're getting there. This list serves as a reminder to not just be a trauma-aware practitioner, but a trauma-informed one. Make sure that if your client has a trauma history that is impacting their present functioning, that your interventions take this into account. Research I mentioned in the book Unfuck Your Brain shows that individuals that were subthreshold to a PTSD diagnosis after 9/11 had full-blown PTSD some years later. And? Why in the chicken-fried-fuck were people with some trauma symptoms left hanging for months and years until things got worse? We are not going to do that shit around here, right?

This list is by no means complete, but has more on it than more traditional lists. Do any painful events in your life fall into any of these categories?



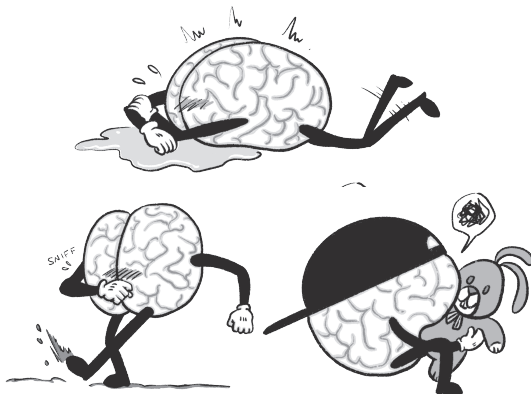
	I have experienced this in the past	I am experiencing this now
Child Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Domestic/Intimate Partner Violence (physical, sexual, emotional, economic, psychological)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Elderly/Disabled Adult Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, neglect, exploitation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Impaired Caregiver	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
School Violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Bullying/Cyberbullying	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Sexual Violence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Medical (illness or accident)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Natural or Human-made Disasters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
War/Terrorism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Forced Displacement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Traumatic Grief/Bereavement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Systems Trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Intergenerational Trauma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

About two-thirds of the time, we can recover from a trauma, finding a new normal no matter how awful the event or circumstance was. But the other third of the time we struggle and get stuck. The National Center for PTSD (VA.gov) has collected research regarding what makes it more likely for traumatic stress to turn into PTSD. Do any of these apply to you?

	I have experienced this in the past	I am experiencing this now
Being directly exposed as a victim or an in-person witness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiencing something that was very severe, or someone (including yourself) was hurt badly as a result of the incident	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experiencing a severe physical or emotional response during the traumatic situation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Long-lasting traumas	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Believing you were in danger and feeling helpless to protect yourself	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Believing someone you loved was in danger and feeling helpless to protect them	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Our backgrounds can make us more susceptible to a trauma response, as well:

	I have experienced this in the past	I am experiencing this now
Having had other traumas at a young age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having other mental health problems or having family members with mental health problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having little support from family or friends, either by not having many individuals or being surrounded by individuals who don't understand your experience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having recently had stressful life changes, or having recently lost a loved one.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being female or in a minority cultural group (because you are statistically more likely to experience a trauma to begin with)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Using mind-altering substances like drugs or alcohol	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being younger	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Having less education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Coming from a cultural group or family system where you are less likely to talk about problems.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



The Life Events Timeline

This worksheet is another way of helping us see the ways we are shaped by our life experiences. Many times, disruptions to our mental and physical health aren't tied to one event but are part of a longer process of stressful life events, no matter if they were exciting, challenging, or traumatic. The event that propels us into treatment is often the deal-breaker for our systems, not the sum total cause of the crisis. By looking at the patterns of challenging events in our lives, both good and bad, we can often see patterns in how our brains and bodies respond over time. It's also great information for your treatment providers!

Pro tip: If your clients see how many of the other circumstances in their life have affected their ability to manage their trauma response,

Life-changing events (positive and negative)

Physical illnesses, traumas, and issues (acute or chronic)

Emotional health issues (acute or chronic)

it takes a lot of the shame and stigma out of it. Everything affects everything. And knowing how our past has affected our present is a key component to our healing. This version is based on the one created by Gary Kaplan for the Kaplan Center For Integrative Medicine and includes both physical health and mental health events while being simpler than the "Unfuck Your Mental Health Paradigm" questionnaire in the next exercise.

Below, write down all the important events you can think of in your life - anything that changed you, shocked you or was especially good or bad. Then choose a symbol or sticker for each type of event and track them on the timeline on the next page.

Relational stressors impacting you (i.e., people you care for going through shit which is causing secondary stress to you)

Larger cultural events impacting everyone

Other stressors (acute or chronic, positive or negative)

<i>Decade</i>						
Life-Changing Events						
Physical Illnesses, Traumas, and Issues						
Emotional Health Issues						
Relational Stressors						
Larger Cultural Events						
Other Stressors						

Unfuck Your Mental Health Paradigm

So you know how most therapy and trauma healing and stuff is about figuring out what is not working in your brain and teaching you coping skills and new tricks to make it work? And how they tell you that even if you feel like the rest of the world is crazy, the real answer to your own behavior, feelings, and thinking lies within your own mental processes, self-control, and agency?

What if that weren't true? What if your brain is doing exactly what a healthy brain is designed to do. . . just in response to a threat? What if the trauma you have experienced, coupled with the power dynamics in the world around you are the problem, not you? Maybe we didn't buy the ticket but it is now, officially, both our circus and our monkey.

Here's a framework that was developed by a bunch of smart people for figuring out why your brain is freaking out at you:

It's called the Power Threat Meaning (PTM) framework and it says that threatening power dynamics experienced during your brain's development or adulthood have created

How has power operated in your life? What kinds of things happened to you because power was wielded over you in harmful ways? This could be anything from growing up with a domineering parent to experiencing systemic racism to living through a war.

systems in your brain that produce the symptoms leading to your diagnosis. For example, if you have social anxiety, it's probably due to your early experiences, maybe coupled with some predisposition to an anxiety disorder. If we considered the whole context of your life, we'd probably treat you a lot differently than just based on a diagnosis.

So how does the PTM framework work? It starts by asking the following questions:

Pro tip: The point of this worksheet is not just to gather clinical information, but to help the people we serve gain validation for their experiences. Just because something is not DSM worthy, doesn't make it less of a traumatic experience. For example, intergenerational trauma is an experience that many people resonate with once they know more about it. If we understand, then we can heal, right? It also helps highlight how trauma is a singular event, but a complex network of life events. And why "just getting over it" is so damn difficult.

What kinds of threats did this pose to you? How did this harmful use of power against you cause harm to you or otherwise affect you? For instance, maybe now you can't stand being around someone yelling, or maybe you lost a leg.

What meaning did you develop based on these situations and experiences to you? How did you make sense of these experiences? What did they tell you about the world and other people in it? Maybe you learned that all people in authority are potential threats to your safety, or that loud bangs mean you or someone around you will be hurt or killed.

What kind of threat response did you develop due to these events? What did you do to survive? How did you cope? How did you behave to protect yourself? So now you literally don't hear someone's words when they're yelling, or you feel compelled to physically attack any sort of authority figure.

Unpacking Then

What events in your life had a negative impact on you? In other words, what scared you, threatened your security, harmed you or traumatized you? It's generally easier to compile this as a timeline in five-year increments because it can be hard to remember things in great detail, especially from periods where we were really young and/or there was a lot going on. Keep in mind that sometimes terrible things are normalized around us to the point that we don't even register them as traumatic.

What events had an impact on your parents and other caregivers?

How did those events inform their interactions with you?

What social systems were in place that exacerbated these negative experiences?

How did they impact your relationships at that time?

What social systems are in place that continue to operate as a barrier to healing in the present?

How did they impact your physical body?

What were the consequences of your negative life events?

How did they impact your view of yourself? What feelings did you notice? What did you tell yourself about your experience?

How did these events impact your daily life? Surroundings?

How did they impact your behaviors? Meaning...what did you need to do to survive?

What rules did you figure out about how the world works based on these events?

How did you come to define "normal" based on these experiences?

What labels were used to describe you (diagnoses, things people called you based on your behavior)?

Which of these labels are still used to describe you, either by others or by your internal voice?

How did you expect others to treat you and/or interact with you? We don't exist in isolation, but in interactions with others which we then use to create rules about the world. These rules are often in the form of "If I _____, other people will _____." Write down the rules you've learned:

If I am hurt, other people will: _____

If I am scared, other people will: _____

If I am angry, other people will: _____

If I am peaceful, other people will: _____

If I am honest, other people will: _____

If I am expressive, other people will: _____

If I am... _____

Unpacking Now

How does this all fit together to inform your present reality? What is your story of survival?

What social and political systems are in place that limit your access to healing and wellness?

What abilities do you have that you didn't have in the past?

What skills did you develop to survive? Both in your external works and your internal understanding of these events?

What makes you strong?

What resources do you have that you didn't have in the past?

What labels or descriptions best describe your experience?

How do you demonstrate your strength?

What power do you have that cannot be taken from you regardless of your circumstances?

How would you describe who and where you are at this moment in your life?

What systems changes would support that process?

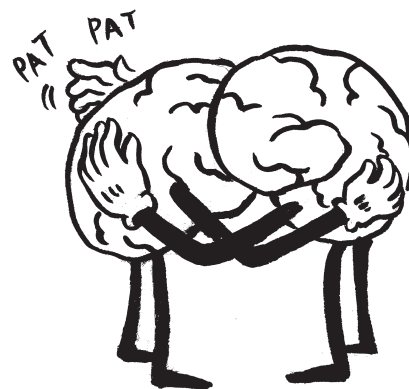
What assistance do you need from others that is in their power to provide?

What areas do you want to build strength in?

What work do you need to do for your own self growth?

What resources do you need to access?

What would your life look like if things were ideal for you?



2

TRAUMA RESPONSE MANAGEMENT SKILLS

For some people, remembering what operated as traumatic in their life seems pretty obvious. For others of us, it seemed so normal at the time, that it isn't until decades later that we realize that what we went through was actually deeply fucked up and affected us in negative ways that we have carried throughout our lives. Whether you've always known or these are new connections being made for you, we're now going to create strategies to help you stay as safe and healthy in the present as possible.

Make a Trauma-Informed Safety Plan

A trauma is anything that overwhelms our ability to cope. Some traumatic events hit us in such a way that we don't recover with time. And our brains encode that experience as an ongoing experience, and then tries to protect us by holding onto every possible sign that something might hurt us in the way we've been hurt in the past. And it doesn't take much for the switch to get flipped... places, people, smells, tones of voice, or even our thoughts.

As you've maybe already experienced, the topics in this book have the ability to bring up a lot of pain and old traumas. Especially if the reasons we've been behaving out of line with our values are themselves based in trauma. So let's look at how trauma reactivates so we can create better strategies for working through these events.

So what's the mechanism of activating that old trauma script? It's a trigger, just like smelling hot buttered popcorn is a trigger for your salivary glands. A trigger is something that facilitates reliving a traumatic event. A trigger is something in the present that activates our memories of a past trauma in such a way that we are reliving that past moment in our present experience.

For example, a car brake squealing can make the brain freak out and make you think that you are getting hit by a car again. Or someone wearing the same scent as an abusive authority figure in your childhood can make all those feelings of anger

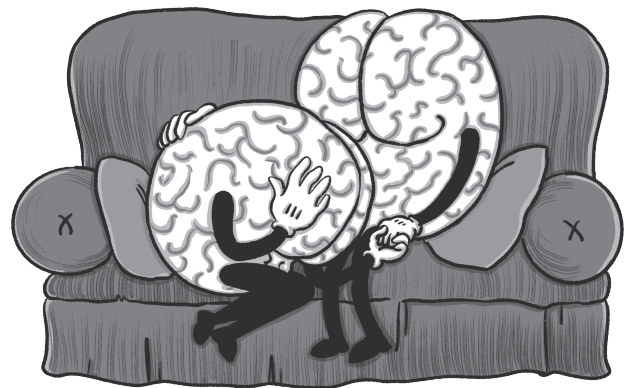
or helplessness come back. That is your brain warning you that you might be in danger. It doesn't make you crazy, it makes you a survivor.

But it also means you are no longer in the present moment, dealing with present stimuli. It means your brain is playing the tape of whatever terrible shit happened to you in the past as a mechanism of trying to protect you in the present. Your brain just doesn't understand that the present is probably not as scary or dangerous as the recording.

Sometimes we limit ourselves by avoiding all possible triggers, which makes protective sense, but then we never heal. . And it's a crappy way to live and you deserve better. Instead, let's work on figuring out what's going on and developing new ways of being so we can live the lives we want for ourselves.

Use the next three exercises to evaluate your triggers and figure out what sets them off and the most effective ways to manage them.

Once you start putting a formal plan into place to manage your triggers, you will notice some stuff works great, some stuff not at all, and new ideas may come up that you want to incorporate. You may also get feedback from the people you love and trust. Make any notes that you want to remember here, too.



When you are feeling the most healthy, happy, joyful, and well what does life look like? *How do you spend your days? How do you feel? How do you interact with others? What do you like to do?*

What are some of the situations that you have come to realize are triggers for you? *Rather than big, catastrophic things, think of things that happen on a more regular basis. E.g. "being in a crowded room" or "not doing well on a project," holidays or birthdays, smells, sounds, or voices. We don't know all of our triggers and may get triggered without any idea of what caused it but if you keep notes, you can often figure them out. Consider this list a work in progress.*

What things have you noticed help you manage your triggers more effectively in a general sense? *How much sleep do you need? How much exercise is beneficial? What should you be eating? Do you need to pray, meditate, or see certain people more/less often? What activities help?*

What are your early warning signs that you may be getting triggered? *What kinds of thoughts do you have? What emotions arise? What kind of behaviors do you engage in that you don't typically do?*

What things from this list can you commit to doing regularly to help maintain equilibrium? *List 1-5 things you aren't doing regularly right now that you know would really help.*

If you are triggered, what are the things you can do for yourself to help you manage your response to these triggers? *These are things you already do that become especially important in these situations but may also be coping skills or activities that you use when you are in especially tough situations. I wrote a whole book on the subject, Coping Skills.*

What do you need from others in terms of support?

You need help from others, especially if you are working on your intimate relationships. Who do you trust to provide that support? How will you ask them about it?

How will you know that you have been triggered past the point that you, and the individuals who traditionally support you, can handle?

What will you notice in terms of your behaviors? Your feelings? Your thoughts? What should you and the people who support you watch out for?

If you are at a point at which you are not able to manage these triggers on your own, or with the assistance of the people who traditionally support you, what is the next step for you?

Do you have treatment professionals that should be contacted? Crisis lines you prefer? A hospital you prefer, if needed? What resources are available to provide additional support?

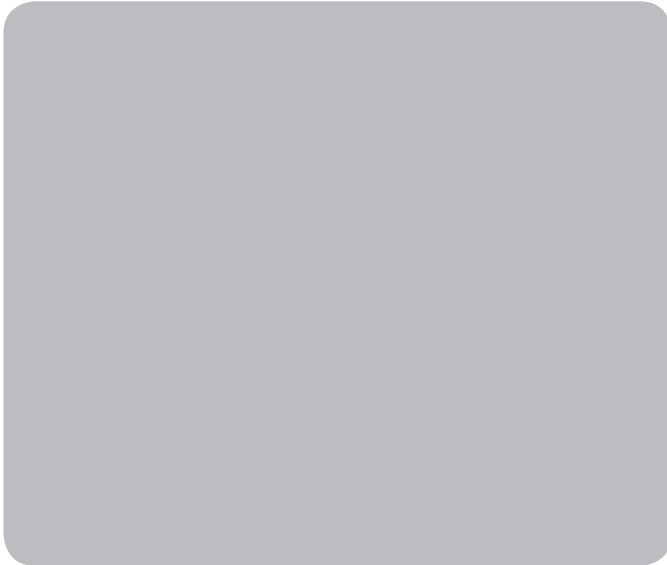
Once your crisis has been managed, how will you know when you are feeling safe and secure again? *What does restabilization look like for you? How can you communicate that to the people who may be worried about you?*



Types of Triggers

Now that we have a plan for how to manage being triggered, it can be helpful to go a bit deeper and figure out what our different types of triggers are.

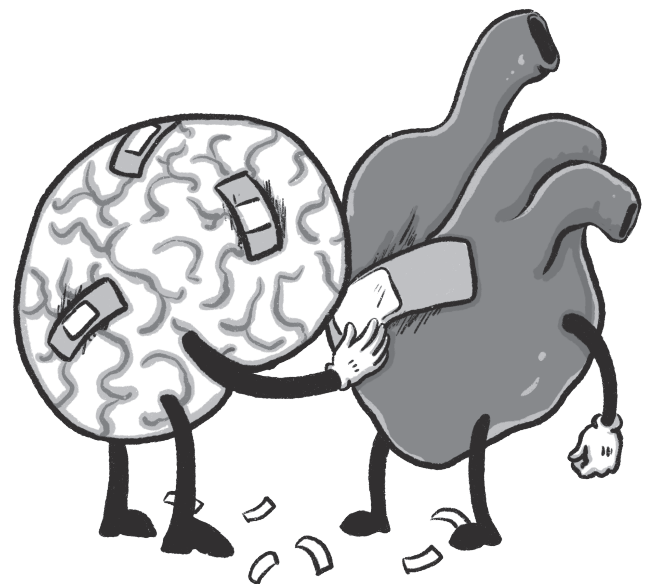
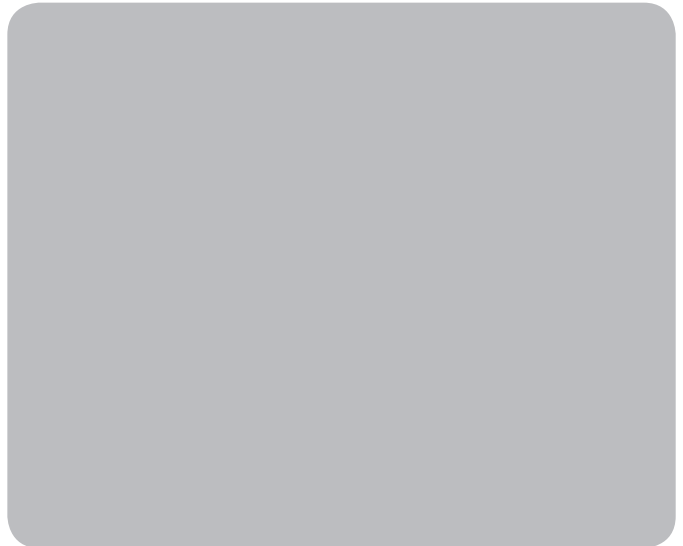
True Triggers: That pre-thought wordless terror. It's a body based, felt-sense reaction that we often don't even recognize until after the fact. The best way to handle a true trigger is to simply notice its existence and use skills to ground ourselves and bring our bodies back to safety.



Distressing Reminders: These are things that call up memories of the trauma and cause awful feelings but through which we can still think and function. A lot of times we can describe what we are feeling even if we can't explain it. The best way to handle a distressing reminder is to soothe yourself when you are experiencing it.



Uncomfortable Associations: These occur when something that would otherwise be pleasant or at least neutral has an association to our trauma. We are able to manage these associations by consciously reframing them.



Trigger Response Plan

Now that you have an idea about the different types of triggers you are experiencing, you can create a plan to manage them. Practicing coping while you are not being triggered will help you remember what works when you need to. Try using coping and grounding skills from the introduction exercises that are specific to your types of triggers and rate how they worked so you can start to develop a more specific plan of attack for dealing with them.

True Triggers

Trigger	Coping Skill	Effectiveness

Distressing Reminders

Trigger	Coping Skill	Effectiveness

Uncomfortable Associations

Trigger	Coping Skill	Effectiveness



Adaptive Strategies

While all of our behaviors are reactive, we're using this worksheet to figure out which ones are being used to help us best adapt to and manage stressors and triggers. Once down on paper, you can really see how, even if you are navigating life with some success, the emotional energy it takes just to maintain is draining you in the long term. And true recovery frees up the energy for world-changing badassery, happiness, and fulfillment.

In the first column, list adaptive strategies you've developed that you no longer want to be part of your life. These may be

behaviors, habits, relationships, or habits that no longer serve you.

You have all these strategies for a good reason, right? They were the best protection you could come up with at the time. Write that down too.

Finally, imagine what your life might look like if you're no longer relying on these strategies to navigate your life.

Adaptive strategy	How it's helped me	What life would be like without it

3

MAKE A PLAN AND TRACK YOUR PROGRESS

So much is being written and talked about in terms of trauma. It's important, but also a little dark, right? It's also not the final chapter. It's the part we figure out so we can work through it to get to the healing part. So our past can *be in the past*. A big part of that is envisioning the future. A specific, and unique future that's about what makes sense for you (not what some dumb lady who writes books thinks maybe your life should be).

What Does Better Look Like?

What does better look like?

How is that different from where you are now?

What would you be spending your time and energy on?

What kinds of things would you be enjoying that you miss out on now more than you would like?

What would the people who love you notice about you?

When "better you" was having a bad day how would you handle it? How is that different from now?

How hopeful do you feel that “getting better” could happen for you?

What signs of progress would increase your level of hope?

Sometimes people find themselves pushed into later stages when they still have work to do in earlier ones. Has that been your experience?



The Eight Domains of Wellness

We are multifaceted people. Just like not having a headache or high blood pressure doesn't necessarily mean your physical health is on point, lack of mental illness symptoms doesn't equate to full mental health. What does it mean to really be well? The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration (SAMHSA) defines wellness in eight different domains. It's the most thoughtfully inclusive definition I've seen of something that is really complex and individual because it expands beyond the traditional definition of home/work/school life domains.

EMOTIONAL: Coping effectively with life and creating satisfying relationships

Rank this area of your life at this moment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best possible:

How has this domain been impacted by trauma or other negative life events?

What would a 10 look like for you in this domain?

What do you need to recover?

The eight domains are used often for goal setting, but we are using them a little differently here.

(Though we are getting to goal setting in a minute, stick with me.)

The idea here is to see how trauma has impacted all of these life domains. What has been lost? What do we need to work on recovering?

ENVIRONMENTAL: Being in pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being

Rank this area of your life at this moment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best possible:

How has this domain been impacted by trauma or other negative life events?

What would a 10 look like for you in this domain?

What do you need to recover?

FINANCIAL: Satisfaction with current and future financial situations

Rank this area of your life at this moment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best possible:

How has this domain been impacted by trauma or other negative life events?

What would a 10 look like for you in this domain?

What do you need to recover?

INTELLECTUAL: Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills

Rank this area of your life at this moment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best possible:

How has this domain been impacted by trauma or other negative life events?

What would a 10 look like for you in this domain?

What do you need to recover?

OCCUPATIONAL: Personal satisfaction and enrichment from one's work

Rank this area of your life at this moment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best possible:

How has this domain been impacted by trauma or other negative life events?

What would a 10 look like for you in this domain?

What do you need to recover?

PHYSICAL: Enjoying physical activity, healthy foods, and sleep

Rank this area of your life at this moment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best possible:

How has this domain been impacted by trauma or other negative life events?

What would a 10 look like for you in this domain?

What do you need to recover?

SOCIAL: A sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system

Rank this area of your life at this moment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best possible:

How has this domain been impacted by trauma or other negative life events?

What would a 10 look like for you in this domain?

What do you need to recover?

SPIRITUAL: A sense of purpose and meaning in life

Rank this area of your life at this moment on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best possible:

How has this domain been impacted by trauma or other negative life events?

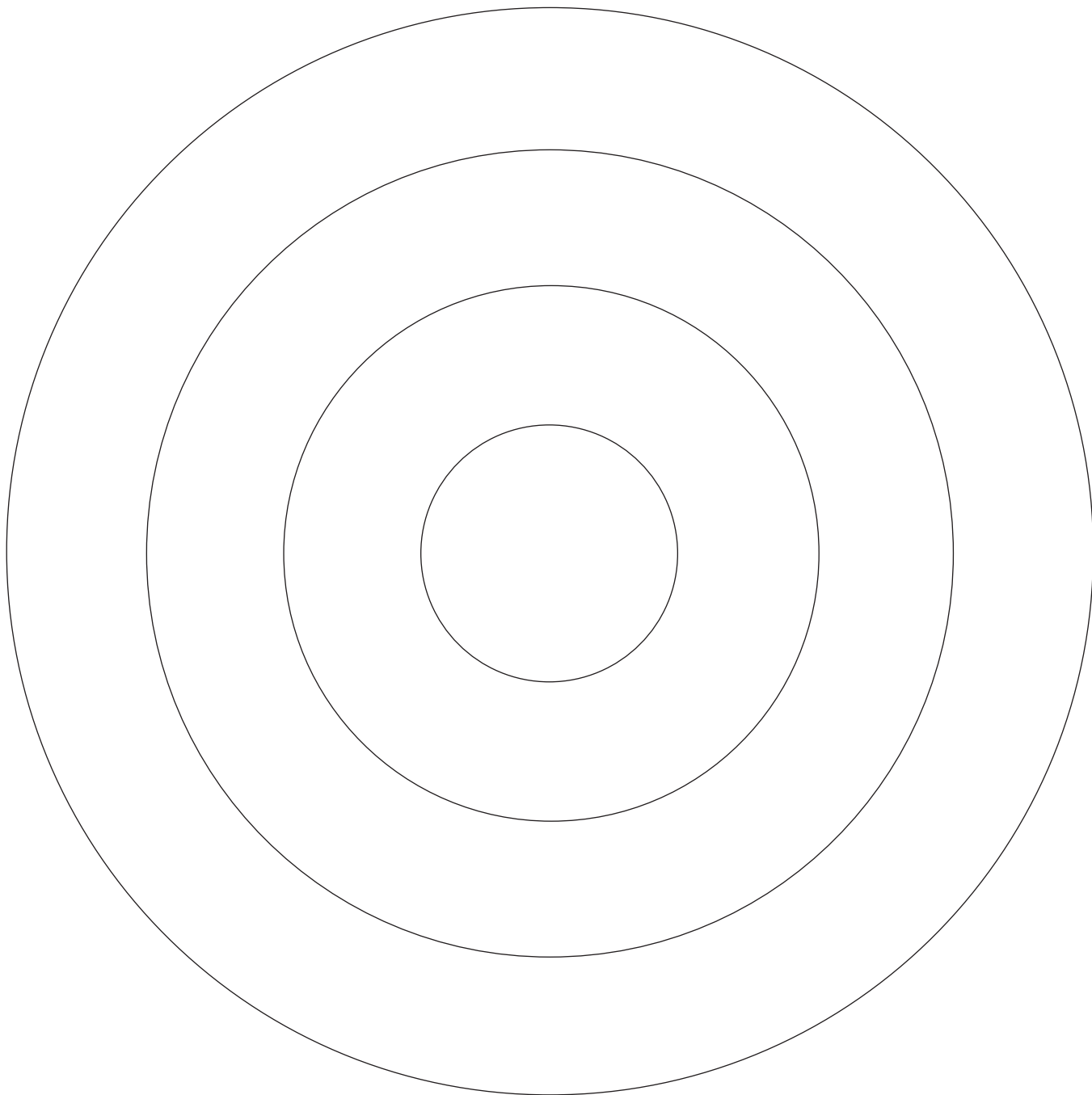
What would a 10 look like for you in this domain?

What do you need to recover?

Seasons of Growth

We all learn as little kids that the rings of a tree represent a year of their growth. Except that isn't exactly true. It's not that specific. Each ring represents a season of growth, and we all grow in our own time. And we all have stress points that create changes in our growth cycle. Consider your own growth rings. What are your defining moments (both great and shitty). And then finally, what growth cycle are you in right now? And where do you hope it carries you?

Are we setting the stage for future goal setting again? Yeah, baby, yeah! Without blowing smoke about how horrible things are actually good life lessons (because life does *not* work that way), we are seeing our experiences as events that shape us to where we are now. And that helps us plan for where we want to go next.



Intention Setting

Most of us are used to the idea of goal setting. Goals are about specific, measurable, and quantifiable outcomes. And goal setting is important, so we are not suggesting to give that up, in fact, we have a lot of exercises focused on those coming up. But...in day to day life there are many things that are out of our control that can affect our goal attainment.

Intention setting is about how we focus our energy on a day to day basis. It's about what we set our minds to notice. If you

are looking to purchase a new bike, you are going to notice the bikes around you in a completely different way, right?

Intentions are about how we want to interact in the world, what we want to notice, and who we want to be. This will end up supporting our goal attainment.

You can consciously pay attention to opportunities to advance your goals but successful humaning stands apart (and above) our goal achievement. So let's start with our locus of control.

Things I do not have control over

Things I have control over

In some way shape or form, your answers centered on the fact that you do not have control over the behaviors of others, but you do have control over yourself right? This is important for intention setting, because whatever you set needs to be grounded in your own locus of control. While “I don’t want to argue with anyone” is a nice goal to have, you don’t have control over their argumentative nature of someone else. An intention of “I will presume the best intent of those around me” will go a long way to prevent you from starting an argument and will go a long way in helping you manage an argument that you get invited to participate in by someone else, right?

My overall wins: In which ways was I successful with my intention?

My overall growth opportunities: Where did I most struggle?

Is this an intention that is of benefit to me? Do I want to carry it forward or make any adjustments?



A Week of Intentionality

My intention for the week:

Saturday

Friday

Thursday

Wednesday

Tuesday

Monday

Sunday

Progress

Struggles

What I noticed

A Week of Intentionality

My intention for the week:

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Progress							
Struggles							
What I noticed							

A Big Fucking Goal (Or a Small One. No Judgment.)

In-depth goal setting is essential to change your behavior. You need to know where and how you want to be. No matter what you're working on—saving up, getting a new job, ending a cycle of violence, respecting your family, or a relationship change—you probably have some sense by now of what is the biggest

thing you want to work on to get you aligned with your values and dreams.

Getting our goals down into a workable format is what makes them achievable. Breaking your ideal self into traits shows your own progress.

What, exactly, is your goal? What do you desire? State this in positive terms. Not what you don't want but what you really, really want. Choose something that is in your control. Not "I want my partner to stop drinking." You can only control yourself, after all, right?

Is this goal achievable? Is this something you can get done? You know, REASONABLY.

Now describe your goal in sensory-specific terms. What will you see, hear, and feel when you achieve this goal?

So presuming we passed the achievable test, now ask yourself if it is realistic? That is, is it worth your time and commitment. Take some time to jot down notes on the following questions. What sacrifices do I have to make in pursuit of this goal? How will this affect my life in both negative and positive ways? And while you're at it, whose goal is this really? Is it a goal that a parent or partner has encouraged you toward but it isn't really what you want for YOURSELF? If you pursue that goal, then, does it mean that your real goal is to please someone in your life by earning this achievement instead of earning the achievement itself?

Does this goal align with your value system? Think about your moral compass for a moment. Whether it be spiritual or secular. Is what you are wanting to accomplish in alignment with what you consider to be important about who you are and how you interact with the world around you?

What is the timeline for this goal? What's a reasonable amount of time to spend on this? What amount of time are you willing to spend on this?

You made a list of things you may lose or give up in the process. Are there any ways of mitigating those losses?

How will the work you need to put into achieving this goal affect the people around you? What impact will it have on the people who are important in your life. List both positive and negative impacts.

What else will achieving this goal do for you? What are your side gains? If your goal is to go back to school, what will doing so give you other than a new degree or certification?

How will you know when you've achieved this goal? If your goal is moving to a new city, that's easy. When you are in the new city, you've achieved your goal. But answering this question can be way harder than it looks, right? When people tell me, for example, that their goal is to be happy and I ask them to explain what happy looks like, I usually get feedback like "I want to have a positive relationship with my partner and enjoy my career. To me, those are goals are more about being connected and fulfilled than happy. When you start looking at your markers of achievement, you may realize that your goal wording needs to shift somewhat. Good deal. Go ahead and shift away.

What obstacles are still in your path in the present? What obstacles may come up in the future?

Why have you not achieved this goal already? What has gotten in your way in the past?

Which of these obstacles do you have control over? What is your plan for managing them?

Which obstacles are out of your control? What resources can you use to work around them?

What is your action plan and time line for taking the next step?

Who can help you or be an accountability partner for you?

After completing this step, what did you learn? Is there anything you need to shift after this point of action?

What have you done already that is moving you in the direction of achieving this goal?

What would be the next step?

Based on what you completed already, and what you learned in the process, what's the next step? (This is the place where you lather, rinse, repeat through goal completion.)

Treatment Options Planner

You don't have to unfuck alone! There are so many people out there that may be able to help! And so many ways professionals can help you feel better! This worksheet is designed to help you organize your thoughts around treatment options so you can use your resources (read: time and money) more efficiently in this regard. If you are anything like me, you have vague memories about some of these things and can't really remember what you liked or didn't like about something, which makes it harder to plan what else may be helpful.

Pro tip: Exploring different treatment options can help people who are new to therapy and people who have been in the system for a while. There are a wide variety of supports available for emotional health beyond the basic considerations. If you aren't keeping some sort of file in this regard, even just a folder full of business cards, here is your encouragement to start! It is really helpful to have a list of

referral resources along with information about price point, who they provide services to, etc. For example, in my community, acupuncture, reiki, qi gong, yoga, equine therapy, and EFT are provided as free services to all veterans. It's also worth knowing that community acupuncture clinics are often cheaper than private sessions, and there are often free or low cost classes for individuals looking to explore meditation, yoga, or other forms of exercise. Even if you have limited availability of local complementary treatments, online resources are definitely part of the list. And ask your clients to share their feedback with you. You can't know everybody and try everything (even though that kinda is my personal goal). Having your clients give you feedback in this area is good for their own self-efficacy, plus helps you grow your pool of resources. I have clients who are long-graduated from therapy that still send me cool things they find!

Treatment options	Are you in?	Experience if tried	Continue? Change?
Talk Therapy	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Allopathic Meds	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Naturopathic Meds	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Acupuncture / Acupressure	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Massage	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Chiropractic Treatment	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		

Treatment options	Are you in?	Experience if tried	Continue? Change?
Energy Healing	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Biofeedback / Neurofeedback / Alpha Stim	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Nutrition Changes	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Somatic / Movement Therapy (e.g., Yoga, Tai Chi, Qi Gong)	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Other Exercise	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Meditation	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Support Groups	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Peer Supports	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Natural Supports	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		
Other	<input type="checkbox"/> Doing it now <input type="checkbox"/> Definitely want to <input type="checkbox"/> Need more info <input type="checkbox"/> Nope		

Scribble down any specific important information that doesn't fit in the chart—like if the front desk staff was disorganized and rude which added to your anxiety, remember to bring cash for parking, etc.

Commitment to Treatment Considerations

You may have seen a ton of mental health professionals but never seen one of these before. I was in community mental health for many many many years, and would often work with people who were there either completely involuntarily or with a lot of trepidation and hesitation. You may be in any one of these categories, and that's entirely normal. But if you are veering into the trepidation/hesitation zone? This is where I encourage you to give the work you're doing your full commitment, at least for a while.

What led you to start treatment? (It's okay if it wasn't voluntary, honesty is important!)

What is going on in your life that you are most concerned with right now?

What about getting professional help with these issues worries you? (Like, maybe that you won't be believed or understood. Or you will be pushed to do something you don't want to do. Stuff like that.)

How would you like your life to be different in the future?

The *commitment to treatment* statement is a reminder that we are here to work. Therapy and other mental health services are not rent-a-friend situations. It's not a space to slag off and whine and be miserable. After all, clients can do that at home for free. The point is getting better. The commitment to treatment statement is a reiteration of what that means on the client's end.

How might treatment support that process, if all goes well?

What about you demonstrates your capacity to create that life you want for your future self?

What will be some signs that this treatment partnership is supporting you doing this work/getting yourself there?

Pro Tip: So you've had this conversation with the individuals you are serving, but they are still struggling with their commitment to this process (self-sabotage and self-doubt are so real, right?). I've found putting a commitment to treatment in writing can help solidify the plan and intent we've created together. Here is a super basic one page version that you can use as is or adapt for your office.

Commitment to Treatment Contract

I, _____, agree to make a commitment to the treatment process. I understand that this means I have agreed to be actively involved in all aspects of counseling and treatment, including:

- 1) Attending sessions (or letting my provider know when I can't make it in a sufficient amount of time in accordance with their cancellation policy)
- 2) Setting goals for my wellness
- 3) Voicing my opinions, thoughts, and feelings honestly and openly with my counselor (both positive *and* negative feelings... *especially* negative ones!)
- 4) Being actively involved during sessions
- 5) Completing or attempting to complete homework, tasks, and other behavior experiments between sessions that were agreed upon during sessions. If unable to complete these activities, I will be ready to discuss barriers to completion with my counselor and try again
- 6) Taking my medications as prescribed by my physician. Or, if I want a medication change, dosage change, or want to discontinue any of my medications I will do this under the advisement and treatment of my physician
- 7) Trying out new behaviors and new ways of doing things
- 8) Implementing my crisis response plan when needed
- 9) Providing information about other treatments and treatment providers that may impact my treatment here. This may include medication records, other diagnoses, and other counseling or case management services
- 10) I realize that no matter what my current circumstances, past experiences, and triggers are, I am ultimately responsible for my behaviors

I also understand and acknowledge that, to a large degree, a successful treatment outcome depends on the amount of energy and effort I make. I understand that as hard as my provider will work, they can't work harder than me for me. If I feel that treatment is not working, I agree to discuss it with my

counselor and attempt to come to a mutual understanding as to what the problem is and to identify any potential solutions. I understand that my counselor's primary motivation is to help me achieve my wellness goals, and it will not upset them or hurt their feelings to help me find an alternative treatment provider if doing so is what I desire and/or is in my best interest. In short, I agree to make a commitment to living.

This agreement will apply for the next three months, at which time it will be reviewed and modified. It can also be reviewed and modified at any other point in my treatment at my request or at my counselor's discretion and prompting.

Signed: _____

Dated: _____

Witness: _____



Symptom	Intensity (1-10)	How long does it last?	How many times per week?	For how many months/years?

4

UNFUCK YOUR BRAIN

O kokokokok. Here is the working time. I know, we already did *so much work*. If you have been going through the workbook in order, we figured out where the train jumped the tracks. What made it jump the tracks. How the train would work so much better if it, you know, had tracks to run on. But now, to continue with this tired metaphor, we have to scootch it bit-by-bit back onto the damn tracks. So. We are going to give you some very specific skills that you can use for your own needs, starting with general coping skills and moving on to skills that you can specifically use to help with anxiety, depression, grief, anger, addiction and out of control behaviors.

Coping Skills

“Coping skills” is one of those phrases that we use all the time and have a general idea of what it means, but maybe couldn’t define coherently if pressed to do so. For our purposes, I’m going to define it as:

A conscious effort to utilize resources to manage or mitigate stressors. The stressors are either internal (in the form of health issues, trauma flashbacks, negative self-talk wiring, etc.) or external (bad shit happening, other people’s drama, all the crazy shit going on in the world, etc.).

Coping skills are the tools we use to build up our stress management skills to prevent a freefall into distress. They also help us negotiate with our triggers and mitigate our response if we are triggered.

Y’all with me, right?

Of course, you can totally argue a broader definition here. Coping skills can be *any* way we react to our interpersonal and intrapersonal conflict to self-soothe. The Freuds (both Sigmund and Anna) called these sorts of unconscious coping strategies *defense mechanisms*. More recently, Jungian analyst James Hollis referred to them as *reflexive anxiety management systems*.



But we need to frame coping skills in a more conscious and proactive way. The history of mental health treatment is replete with warnings that if we don't cope with stressors in conscious and productive ways, our brains will create coping skills for us. And they won't be healthy. If we keep bopping along, letting our brain try to figure out its own coping skills, it takes over and starts running the damn show. You might even say this is the genesis of addiction...something we have all dealt with in some form or another. Because, we *need* coping skills. We need resources to combat stress and prevent distress. And we need mechanisms to manage our reactions to being triggered.

The COAL Trick

I don't know anyone that hasn't struggled with their self-worth at some point in their lives. Probably because I'm a therapist and they wouldn't be in therapy, so there's that. But anyway, self-doubts, self-judgements, and self-recrimination are the three musketeers of many peoples' internal dialogues. And as you work through these issues, the musketeers will have shit to say. So I have a little trick for that which can really help. Losing track of our self-worth means we end up taking judgmental stances against ourselves. We get into a negative spin of self-

recrimination and beating up on ourselves, even being hard on ourselves for being hard on ourselves.

COAL stands for:

Curiosity

Openness

Acceptance

Love

So as you read this book, if you find yourself getting anxious or upset, remember COAL and see if you can disrupt the cycle of feeling bad about feeling bad.

Noticing what you're upset about is important because that's probably where you can do the best work. When we start approaching our own minds with this level of respect, we recenter our worth. This is good shit. It takes practice. Like, a lot of practice. But it helps us keep our worth in its rightful place while we do all the heavy unfuckening work around money and all those other esteem-killers



Open Hand/Closed Hand Exercise

So often, trauma disconnects from our physical bodies. Our bodies simply don't feel like safe places to reside anymore. This exercise, adapted from Peter Levine's work on Somatic Experiencing can help you reconnect to your own sense of being in your body in a way that is less likely to be activating or triggering than working with more central parts of your body, because our hands are further from our core.

Hold out one of your hands. It doesn't matter which one, but take note of your choice. Hold it in the air, without letting it rest against another surface (like a table top or your leg).

Open up the palm of that hand, facing back toward your body, and use your eyes to observe it.

How did your awareness of the experience change once you were entirely dependent on your internal sense messages?

Was it disconcerting at any point?

Slowly make a fist with that hand, watching the whole time. Take note when your hand feels completely closed into a fist.

Without breaking eye contact, open your hand back up.

Now close your eyes, and repeat this exercise. Feel what open feels like from the inside, then the act of closing your hand into a fist, then reopening. Pay attention to all that you notice in your body that wasn't present when you were focusing on your external sight messages.

After completing the exercise, ask the following questions and take time to process the answers:

Comforting?

Did anything shift or feel different in how you connect with your self?

Grounding Techniques

Grounding techniques are one of those things I yammer on about all the damn time. Because it *works* and it's *simple* and it helps us remain in the present moment in our bodies, and be aware of our surroundings. If you are a trauma survivor (and hey there, aren't we all??) then it's really easy to start reliving a past experience when shit is getting tough in the present. Grounding techniques are one of those can-do-anywhere coping skills that cost nothing and don't make you look obviously odd if you are using them while sitting on the bus.

Mental Grounding

Mental grounding techniques are intended to keep you in the present moment by focusing on your current situation and surroundings. Anything that helps you remind yourself of where you are in the moment and that you have more control over your feeling-thoughts even though your stress reaction has been tripped.

- Use a phrase or mantra that is soothing to you. It could be "I got this" or "This is temporary" or "This may pass like a fucking kidney stone, but it WILL pass." Whatever works for you.
- Play a categories game with yourself. Name all your favorite shows, movies, books, songs, etc. The point is to draw from semantic memory instead of emotional memory.
- Describe something in great detail that is attached to the present moment. It may be all the colors you can see in front of you or an article you are holding in your hand.
- Go over your schedule in your mind, or the steps it takes to complete an activity you do well. This is accessing procedural memory, which is a declarative form of memory just like semantic memory...which helps you detach from the emotional memory being triggered.

Physical Grounding

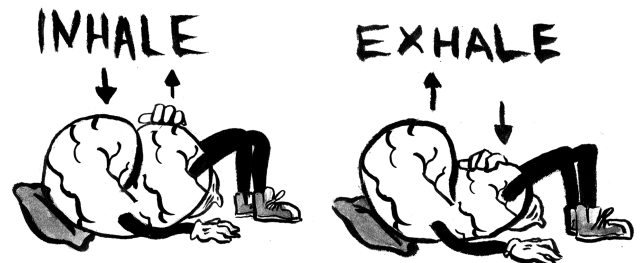
It's the most amazing magic trick ever when we first realize as children that we can check out mentally from where we are physically. Teacher droning on and on? Totally just mentally escape to the playground. Then as we get older we realize "Oh, *shit!* Now I'm doing this automatically! Even when I don't wanna! How do I get back in my body?" Physical grounding techniques do just that thing.

- Notice your breath. Just the physical in and out breathing experience. When your mind starts to wander, go back to the breath.
- Walk mindfully. Notice every step you take and the feeling when your foot connects to the earth. If your mind starts wandering away from you, you can always try holding a teaspoon of water while walking and focus on not spilling the water.
- Touch objects around you.
- Jump up and down.
- Eat something mindfully, attending to the flavors and textures.
- Make sure your feet are touching the floor. Try taking off your shoes and feeling the ground beneath you.
- If someone else touching you feels safe, have them put their hands on your shoulders and remind you to ground back in your body.

Soothing Grounding

Soothing grounding is essentially self-compassion and self-care in a difficult situation.

- Think of things that make you feel better. Visualize things you enjoy, such as the beach or a sunset. A sunset on the beach? I'm down with that.
- Remember a safe place and picture yourself surrounded by that safety.
- Plan an activity or treat you can look forward to in the near future, like a cupcake from your favorite bakery, a hot bath, a movie you've seen 100 times and still adore, a baseball game and a bowl of popcorn, or a hike in your favorite park.
- Carry pictures of people and places you care about and focus on these images.



Grounding Skills Tracking Sheet

The point of this exercise is to experiment with a bunch of different grounding techniques to figure out which work best for you. By keeping notes you can compare and contrast and then really work with a few favorites to get them down as a go-to skill!

Grounding Skill	Reaction	Favorites
Mental		<input type="checkbox"/>
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Perception Shifting

This skill is a dorky little therapist trick used to both ground us in the present *and* do a perspective shift. If you are going to do a dumb therapist trick, isn't it helpful to know you are getting two lessons out of it, at least?

Focus on, note, and list out loud the following (perfect if this can be done with literal objects in the room, otherwise just use your imagination):

- 5 objects that are the color white
- 6 objects that are the color black

Ok, great. Run through them one more time. All five white objects and all six black ones.

- Now identify and name out loud one **green** thing.

Did you pause? Did your brain misstep for a second? That's because you created a cognitive shift away from your original task. Unpack what that was like. How much effort did it take? Can you then go back to black and white or did that get lost in the process?

What did you notice about how your own processing works while doing this exercise? How might that relate to feelings, behaviors, and thinking patterns that you are aware of within yourself?

Pro tip: This is a great exercise to demonstrate how the brain is wired to attend to the negative for protective purposes. This isn't a bad thing but it is something that we have to be aware of and work with. It also serves as a reminder for them to not beat themselves up because a difficult process is difficult. They are having to work counterintuitively to evolutionary reasoning and that's really tough!

Pendulation

Along with emotions, we also experience *sensations*. Sensations are how things present in our body. Sensations language helps us recognize what's going on in our body, even when words fail. (And there's a reason words fail: the region of the brain responsible for language, known as Broca's area, goes inactive in a trauma response). Once we start to connect to the sensations we feel when our trauma response is triggered, we can better control our response.

The typical trauma response is this one:

Something acts as a trigger. Either an external event or a memory, and your trauma response is *activated*. You start noticing thoughts, feelings, sensations, and physical responses associated with the trauma. These aren't positive sensations, so you go from just fine to totally dysregulated in under a minute, right?

Pendulation work was developed by Peter Levine (who wrote *Waking The Tiger* among other books), whose work is focused on the somatic experience of trauma. That is, *how we hold trauma in our body*.

Pendulation starts with connecting to the sensations we feel in our body, especially when you are activated. But rather than staying in that place, you identify a space of calmness and safety. It's often referred to as an oasis (think of where you draw water from in the desert, when you are dying of thirst), a pool of resources, or your natural supports.

Pendulation is the action of teaching yourself to move in and out of the activated sensations into your space of calmness. The idea is that we all have a safe space inside ourselves that we can draw strength from if we remember it's there. And it



can help you gain mastery over the activation and helps you learn to tolerate the sensations and feelings associated with activation for longer periods of time.

So when you start recognizing when you are activated, you let yourself feel the negatives, and then remind yourself that you can intentionally move to your space of calmness and gather resources to manage yourself.

Once you start to find ways to tolerate your activation, it no longer owns you. It no longer hijacks the entirety of your being, which means you are able to start managing your responses, operate from your prefrontal cortex again, and the activation starts to dissipate.

Pro tip: This exercise is designed to help individuals connect to the effects of trauma, stress, and other “mental” health conditions on the body. In reality, there is no differentiation between mind and body and a huge part of managing our trauma reactions lies in connecting to what we feel in our bodies (or, as David Emerson coined it, our sense of interoception). Learning to manage our body responses helps us manage our emotional health overall.

Start by scanning your body to figure out which areas feel safe and secure for you and which tend to get activated when you are stressed. I tend to hold stress in my stomach, others

feel it in their neck and shoulders, for example. Try using the following color codes to mark where you feel the most activated (anxious, angry, upset) in your body and where you feel the most calm. This information will help you intentionally step into your calm space until the highest level sensations are able to discharge and dissipate.

You may not be really sure where your places are, especially if you have disassociated from your body sensations in order to get through life without a total breakdown. That’s entirely okay, and makes perfect sense... but here is your chance to start trying to connect to those sensations throughout the days and weeks ahead. If you have a therapist you are working with, you can incorporate this work in therapy.

Red – The places that feel high-range activated

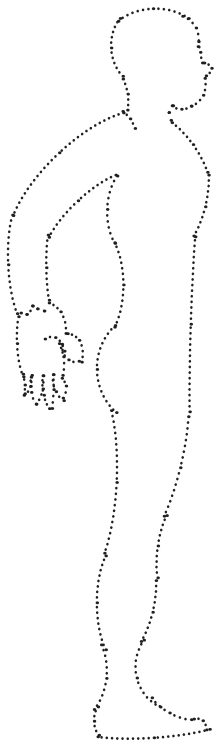
Orange – The places that feel medium-range activated

Yellow – The places that feel low-range activated

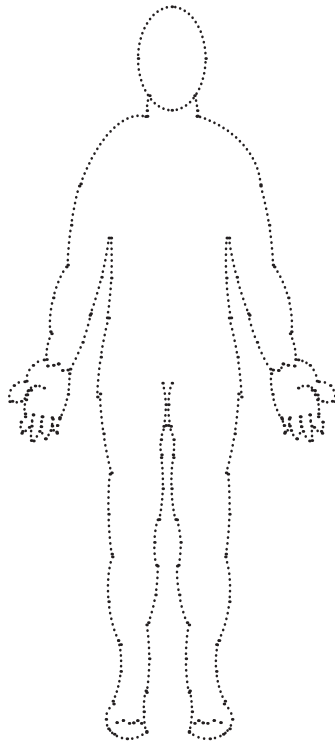
Green – The places that feel neutral

Blue – The places that feel calm

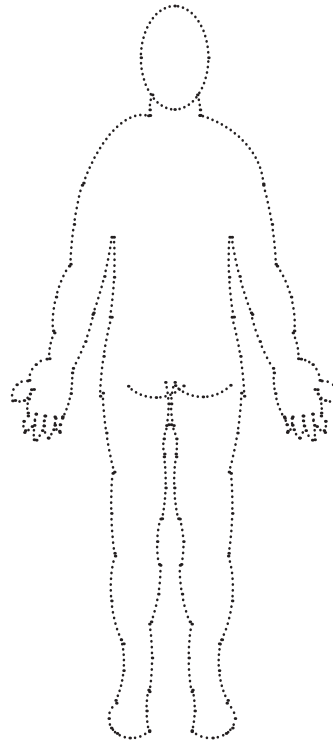
Once you have a good idea of where you feel most safe in your body and where you feel most activated, the pendulation



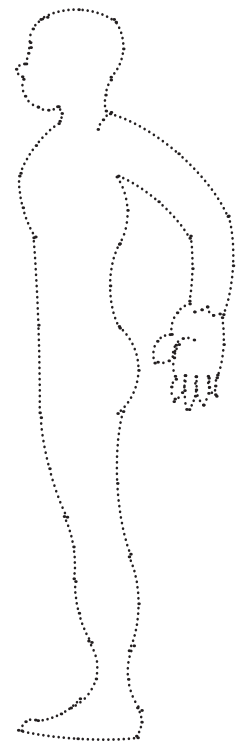
Right



Front



Back



Left

exercise is designed to help you move back and forth so you can experience feeling intense emotions without having them completely take over.

You start with the part of your body that feels safe (the oasis space). For me, that's always my chest...in my heart and in my breath.

Then you move your awareness into the activated space. For me, that would be my stomach, like I mentioned. Approach the activated space gently. With neutrality and curiosity about the experience, rather than anxiety, anger, embarrassment and shame. For example:

Hey there stomach, you're upset with me today. I can tell. I'm aware. Thank you for letting me know. I want you to feel safe, but you don't get to take over and be in charge.

Then you move back to the safe space...in your body. For me (again), it's a return to my breath.

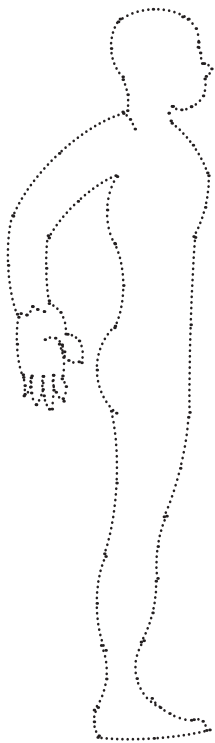
It sounds woo-woo, but really all you're doing is teaching your brain to manage the sensations in your body. To invite them into consciousness without letting them go into hostile takeover mode. And learning to experience them without a constant sense of being overwhelmed or dread of being overwhelmed.

Activated body area: _____

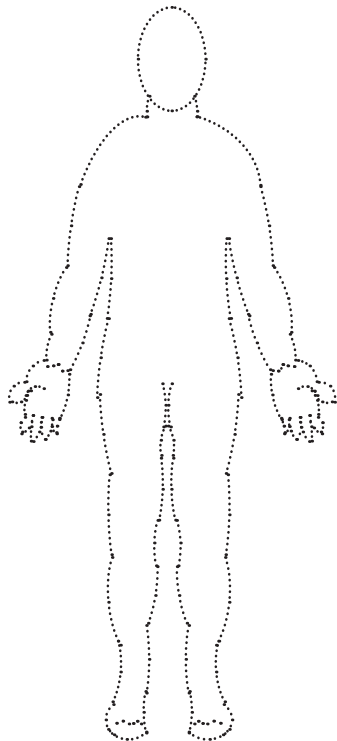
Safer (or at least less activated) body area: _____

Sensations noticed before pendulation exercise:

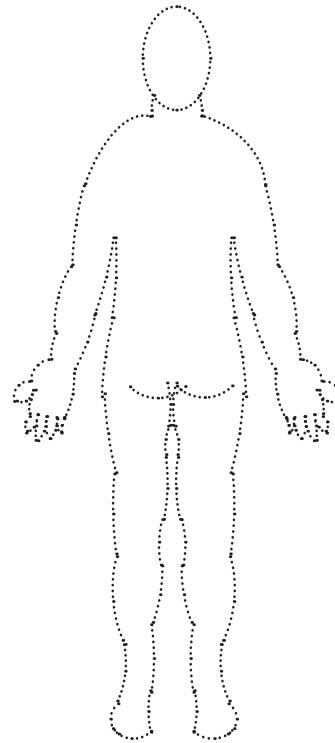
Sensations noticed after pendulation exercise:



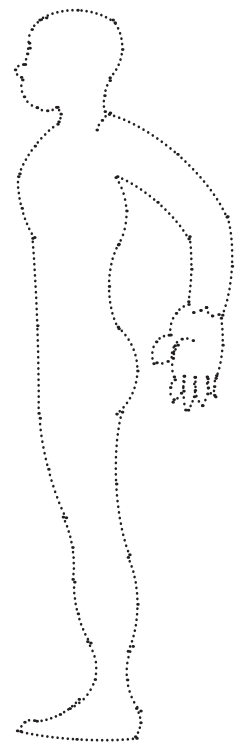
Right



Front



Back



Left

Self-Holding

The goal of this exercise is to remember that our body is a container for our sensations and feelings. Dissociation sometimes leads to us not even realizing we have edges. A holding exercise helps us recognize our container, connect to it, and ground within it. It helps us “settle” even when experiencing uncomfortable emotions and sensations.

There are several ways to do this exercise. Here is a basic version, but keep in mind it can be done laying down, sitting up, or some kind of in-between reclining.

Self-Hug

- Place one hand under the arm on the opposite side of your body, and the other hand over the upper part of the other arm.
- Give yourself a hug. The light squeezing can soothe the nervous system the same as getting under a heavy blanket.
- Now just pay attention to your body. Don't try to force any reactions but see what shifts within you.

What was your SUDS level before and after?

In what circumstances would this be of most benefit?

What did you notice in your body (much calmer, weird but helpful, just weird, etc.)

Are there any adjustments that would make it work even better for you?

Coping Statement Cards

The problem with coping statements is that chances are you can't fucking remember fuck them in the heat of the moment, at least at first. When you find mantras, facts about anxiety, or other statements or images that help you, write them down on index cards! Hole punch the ones you love best, laminate them (you can use packing tape), and put them on a snap-shut key ring and you have a set of coping cards you can flip through when panic hits. It sounds epically nerdy, I know. But I have had so many clients end up loving the shit out of their cards and using them all the time. Using them reminds the PFC to be in charge of the control stick and ground itself in reality. It's cheese with extra cheese sauce, but that's what works when we are actively rewiring brain bullshittery. I wrote a couple for you. Now start writing your own!

Pro tip: Whatever you practice in session and your clients use as homework and it helps should get added to the card deck. You have

two separate worksheets, one for coping statements (things we say to ourselves) and one for coping behaviors (things we do to better manage our reactions). I added a few to start with, but no one is committed to using them...everyone's deck will be completely individual!

Coping Statements:

- *This sucks. I don't have to like any of this to get through it.*
- *My survival rate of handling shitty things is 100%. The statistical likelihood of surviving this is pretty damn good.*
- *"No."* (See that period? No is a complete sentence.)
- *This is a "calling bullshit" card. (Feel free to flip it as needed.)*
- *This will pass. Maybe like a kidney stone, knowing my luck. BUT IT WILL PASS.*

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Coping Skills Cards

Coping skills cards are the specific healthy, positive behaviors that become your go-to when shit gets real. Keeping a deck of what helps you when the shit hits the fan will help you use those coping skills, right? Because fuck knows you can't trust your brain in those moments! These cards serve as a reminder to your tired, stressed out brain as to what helps. Because it's really hard to remember when you're in the trenches of overwhelm. The idea is to practice different ones, figure out which work best, and keep your own personal deck ready

to refer to for when you need it, either on cards or digitally! making some more cards!

- 3-7-8 Breathing
- Pendulation
- COAL Technique
- Mindfulness meditation
- Passive progressive relaxation

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Relaxation Scripts

When you are trying to relax, if you are anything like me you find yourself chanting something like “RELAX YOU IDIOT WHY WON’T YOU RELAX”...because nothing is more relaxing to me than me berating my own brain inside my head. Having a prepared script really, really helps. Like a guided exercise in an app or a video online. I use them with clients regularly as well. You can even have someone you love record the audio for you and keep it on your phone or even record it for yourself if you like the ones in this workbook!

Pro tip: Guiding individuals through a relaxation script can be of huge benefit to them. You can do these activities with individuals or in groups and it helps people figure out which works best for them while they get some prompting through the process...which lessens the voice in the back of the head saying “you’re doing it wrooooooong!” A good way to track the benefit of each skill is to have them rate their current distress level (anger, anxiety, etc) on a scale of 0-10 both before you try the exercise and after. If the number goes up, you know something about the activity (or the environment was triggering). If it stays the same, maybe not effective. A decrease, even a small one, is a really good sign. Emotional responses don’t magically go away, but reducing them just by breathing and paying attention is a pretty huge deal. Keep reinforcing that. If you are working with someone over time, ask them about their use of these activities in their daily life and changes they have noticed because of this practice.

Mindfulness Meditation

Here’s my recipe for mindfulness meditation:

Sit upright. If you can do this without back support, like on the floor on a cushion then good on you. If you need a straight back chair, do that. If you can’t sit at all, that’s OK, too. Get yourself in whatever position is most comfortable. The reason sitting is better than laying down is that the point is to fall awake, not fall asleep. But the point is also to not be in screaming fucking pain, so don’t stress it.

Soft-focus your eyes so they aren’t closed but they are seeing without actually seeing. You know what I mean. Be visually spaced out because what you are really going to be paying attention to is inside you.

And now you are going to breathe in and out. Focus on your breath. If you have never done this before it’s going to be weird and hard. But for the record, if you have done this a zillion times chances are still good that it will be weird and hard.

If you catch yourself being distracted, just label it “thinking” and go back to focusing on your breath. Thinking isn’t a failure in the least. It’s gonna happen. Noticing it and bringing the mind back to the present moment is the point. So it’s a total win.

Treat your bodily reactions like any other random thought. Itching is common. If you catch yourself itching, label it thinking three times before succumbing to the urge to scratch. You may be surprised and how often your brain is creating things for you to focus on. Of course, if you have real pain, don’t ever ignore that. Rearrange yourself for comfort and don’t be a hero.

A lot of people feel awful during meditation, thinking they suck at it because they are continuously distracted by chatting thoughts. That’s OK. Your brain is desperately seeking to story-tell. All kind of distracting stuff is going to come up. You are going to think about what you need to cook for dinner. Or a conversation you had at work. Or whether or not you should buy new sneakers or go to a movie this weekend.

I’m not even going to pretend that this shit is easy to do when you are spun up. But it’s important to at least try. Because part of a panic attack is the stories our brain starts telling us about the attack itself. And it’s generally not a pretty story. The chemicals released during an anxiety or panic attack are designed to get your breathing ramped up and your heart racing. So your brain starts insisting that you are going to have a heart attack or will stop breathing. That’s not going to happen. When you catch that thinking, remind yourself that’s a biochemical response, but not reality.

And here is the thing about mindfulness meditation... research shows that it disrupts the storytelling process of the default network. We used to think the only way to do that was a distraction by outside events and stimulus, but the opposite works, too.

So keep breathing. The continued, conscious effort to breathe and un-tense will slow the heart rate back down and help you get more oxygen flowing. It’s a literal chemical counter-balance. And it gives your brain the space it needs to tell itself new stories.

Breathing

When I work with kids, I call it belly breathing. When I work with vets, police officers, and first responders, I call it tactical breathing. The official term is diaphragmatic breathing or abdominal breathing, which are just the most ridiculous words ever...I swear to Buddha, we must make this shit up just to see if we can get people to follow along.

So if you have seen any of those terms it's totally all the same thing. And all it really means is that you are taking in your breaths by contracting your diaphragm, which is a muscle lies horizontally across your body, between your abdominal cavity and your thoracic cavity.

Sounds complicated? Not so much. You totally know how to take a deep breath. It's when your belly moves instead of your chest. You get far more oxygen in your blood when you are breathing in this manner, which will disrupt the anxiety response. Have you ever been so anxious that you felt light headed and about to pass out? Your breathing was likely totally to blame. You weren't breathing in a way that gave you the oxygen you need to manage your anxiety response.

If you want to practice this, lie down and put something on your belly. Your favorite stuffed animal, your unopened growler bottle, whatever. You should see it move while you breathe.

Yup, that's it, you got it.

Try to focus on your breathing instead of the other bullshit chatter that your brain is insisting you pay attention to. Counting helps, too. Try these counts for breathing in, holding, and breathing out.

Only count as high as you can comfortably go. You aren't gonna get graded on your breathing and it isn't meant to be

<i>Breathe in and Count To</i>	<i>Hold and Count To</i>	<i>Breathe Out and Count To</i>
3	3	3
3	3	6
6	6	6
6	6	9
9	9	9
9	9	12

stressful. If you're asthmatic, have allergies, etc., anything more than 6 seconds may be literally impossible. No sweat, OK?

Passive Progressive Relaxation

Now we are going to work on relaxing each part of your body moving progressively down. This isn't one of those exercises where you tense up first so you can then relax yourself and feel the difference. That's a useful exercise on other occasions, but not when you already fucking know you are tense and don't need anything else making you more tense.

If it helps you to have prompts you can find lots of guided progressive relaxation exercises on YouTube.

Start with the deep breathing. You know how to do this part now, so you can move the teddy bear or growler. Relax, and lay your arms and hands, palms to the earth, down to your side next to you. Close your eyes if that feels safe and comfortable for you.

- Start at the top of your head. Feel it from your crown, moving slowly down your scalp. Feel your ears relax.
- Feel your temples relax, and then your brows.
- Feel your eyes relax, then your cheeks, then your nose, and then your mouth. Your lips and your tongue.
- Feel your throat relax. Then your neck.
- Feel your shoulders relax. Yes, even your shoulders.
- Focus on letting them drop everything they've been holding for you. They get to rest, too.
- Focus on your right hand. Let the calm flow from your right shoulder, down your arm. Through your wrists, then into each finger. Start with your thumb and move through each finger to your pinky.
- Focus on your left hand. Let the calm flow from your left shoulder, down your arm. Through your wrists, then into each finger. Start with your thumb and move through each finger to your pinky.
- Now focus back on your shoulders, and let the relaxation flow through your chest down into your belly. Your belly is moving gently as you continue deep breathing, but otherwise has no other work to do right now. It doesn't have to hold itself up or in with any tightness.

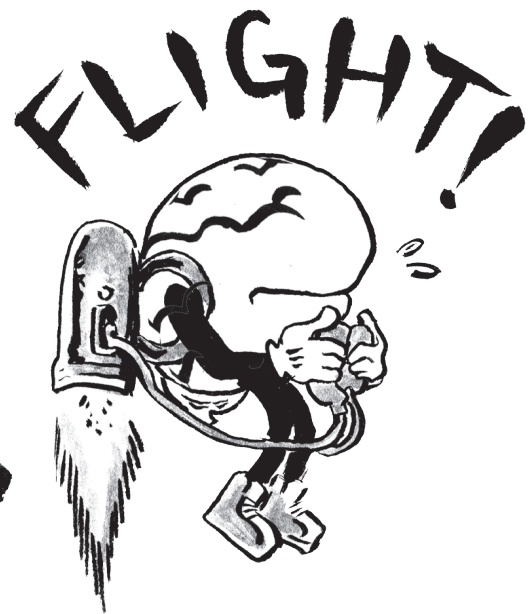
- Now go back to your shoulders, and let the relaxation flow down your upper back to your lower back. You've been holding a lot there, haven't you? Maybe the entirety of the world. You don't have to, at least for right now. Let it go for a while.

- Relax through your buttocks, through your root chakra, and down through your hips. Let the calm flow down through your thighs.

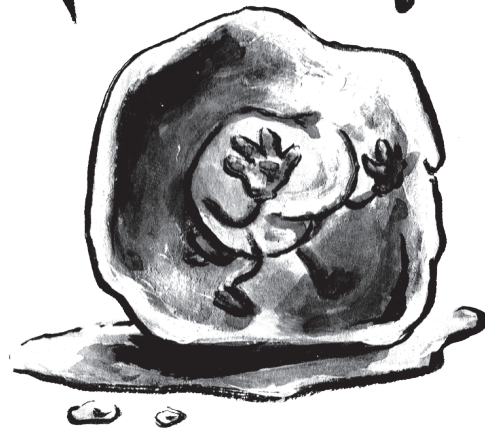
- Move down to your knees, then your calves.

- Move down to your ankles. Your feet. Let yourself relax each toe. Start with your big toe and move to your pinky toe.

Once you feel ready, you can open your eyes and slowly get back up again. You may feel a little sleepy, or woozy, or fuzzy. That's OK. Take your time rejoining the world and remember what relaxed feels like. You're allowed to feel that way!




FREEZE!



Gold Fucking Star

You know what I miss from childhood? Gold stars. People recognizing the effort I put into something. So I totally give out gold stars and everyday achievement awards in my private practice. Since I'm not around to make sure you get all the

gold stars you need, here is a form so you can give them to yourself. I also suggest you announce loudly and publicly "GOLD FUCKING STAR, MOTHERFUCKERS!" and demand applause. Or not. But it would be awesome if we all started doing that for each other.

GOLD FUCKING STAR	I TRIED THE THING And by "thing", Dr Faith means a healthy fucking coping skill	0-10 RATING ON HOW I FELT BEFORE I TRIED THE THING	0-10 RATING ON HOW I FELT AFTER I TRIED THE THING	0-10 RATING ON MY GENERAL FEELINGS ABOUT THE THING
				
				
				
				
				
				
				
				

Stress

Stress affects us all differently. Some people thrive on it and use that energy to get shit done. Others feel overwhelmed and check out. Maybe you get energized and motivated. Maybe your shoulders get tight. Maybe your whole body gets tight. Maybe you yell at people or drive recklessly. Maybe you space out. We all respond differently based on our previous experiences.

In a clinical sense, **stress** is a neutral term that refers to *any event that requires an output of resources*.

Stress can be good (output of resources to create art, run a race, or finish school) or it can be bad (coping with a car accident, an illness, or being terminated from a job). Kelly McGonigal, in her book *The Upside of Stress*, defines stress in terms of meaning. Things are stressful to us because they fucking matter to us.

Whether the situation is good or bad, we can hit a point where we run out of the resources that we need to cope with the

Clarification Exercise: What Problem Are You Trying to Solve?

Are you bumped up against an unsolvable problem? Maybe it's the problem itself, not your inability to find a solution.

When trying to manage some life bullshitery, check in to make sure you are solving the right problem before you get started on the solving part. Look at the problem with sideways eyes. Literally shift your perspective and ask others for theirs. Some super fancy tips:

Ask yourself: is your current problem unsolvable? If so, time to stop perseverating on trying to solve it!

Ask questions. Literally just ask questions. No solution offering or suggestions. Just questions associated with your situation. Write them all down.

situation. And that is what **distress** is. *The point of resource depletion*. The point where we need support. It isn't something you can do on your own. It isn't a term that identifies someone as tragically fucked up. It's a clinical term that we understand to mean *this person needs some help*.

If you have tipped into distress, maybe it's because life has been throwing you too many curveballs and *then* you also just spilled your coffee and it was the last fucking straw. Or maybe it's a lot of great stuff happening, like you're on a fun trip and you hit exhaustion/sensory overload and the ziplining event reduces you to tears even though you were the one who planned it. They are both distress, not because they're equivalently upsetting but because they're overloading your system.

These exercises are designed to help you identify and deal with intense events in your life, or just with your daily life itself, without becoming so overwhelmed by it all.

Have you tried solving a different problem yet? Something that might get you to a more manageable place, that's related to this scenario but has a different focus? If no, let's try that!

If you can, collect yourself one other person. Maybe two. Not a group. Because descent into group chaos or descent into distraction. Look for people you trust and respect but who have a different worldview than you. Different perspectives are helpful.



Review your questions. What sort of categories or themes are taking shape?

Any emerging themes again? Anything that can be distilled down into less questions or a singular question?

From the solvable list, pick a question you are ready to tackle. Dump out what you were trying to resolve and focus on this one instead. *Now* brainstorm ideas for resolution.

Can any of these categories be distilled down into fewer questions? Maybe one singular question? Do any of these questions seem approachable as possibly solvable? Mark those. Circle, highlight, whatever.

Ask for feedback from others if you can. Even if no one participated in the process up until this point. What do they notice? Do they see anything missing, question-wise?

What is your next step?

The Pomodoro Technique

The entrepreneur Francesco Cirillo created The Pomodoro Technique as a method of task management in the face of overwhelm. It's easy AF, y'all. The Pomodoro in question is the little kitchen timer that looks like a tomato. You've totally seen it before. You break down whatever bullshittery you have to tackle into chunks of time that are manageable for an adult attention span with breaks added in for relief. You set your timer for 25 minutes and work. Then you take a 5-minute break. After four Pomodoro cycles you take a longer break.

You start training yourself into better focus, concentration, and time management by working in sprints rather than marathons, with built in breaks to help you maintain motivation. It doesn't make completely impossible goals suddenly magically attainable, but it *can* help you keep from mind-fucking yourself into thinking that you won't finish something that is actually pretty doable. If nothing else, it's a really good system for giving something your best shot so you can be proud you were proactive and tried your damn ass off.

Building Structure Within Chaos: Create Your Ladder

When your ability to manage huge, incoming waves of bullshit is compromised for *whatever* reason, this is a fantastic technique for getting through days and weeks of really stressful times. Maybe you are dealing with a chronic health condition (whether physical, mental, or both). Maybe you are newly in recovery. Maybe you are just going through a truly awful period in your life with significant, shitty changes. And hell, even if you have good change going on, it can still be intensely stressful. Building a system of self-care strategies (I mean, aren't those coping skills, too?!) that help you mitigate ongoing stress can really help you get through the type of issue that is more marathon than sprint.

The ladder is designed to represent how an empowered self-care plan can operate in your life. Ladders work best when we take them step by step right? We may be able to skill-climb if we miss one, but our balance is thrown off and it is way easier to fall. For example if your ladder is

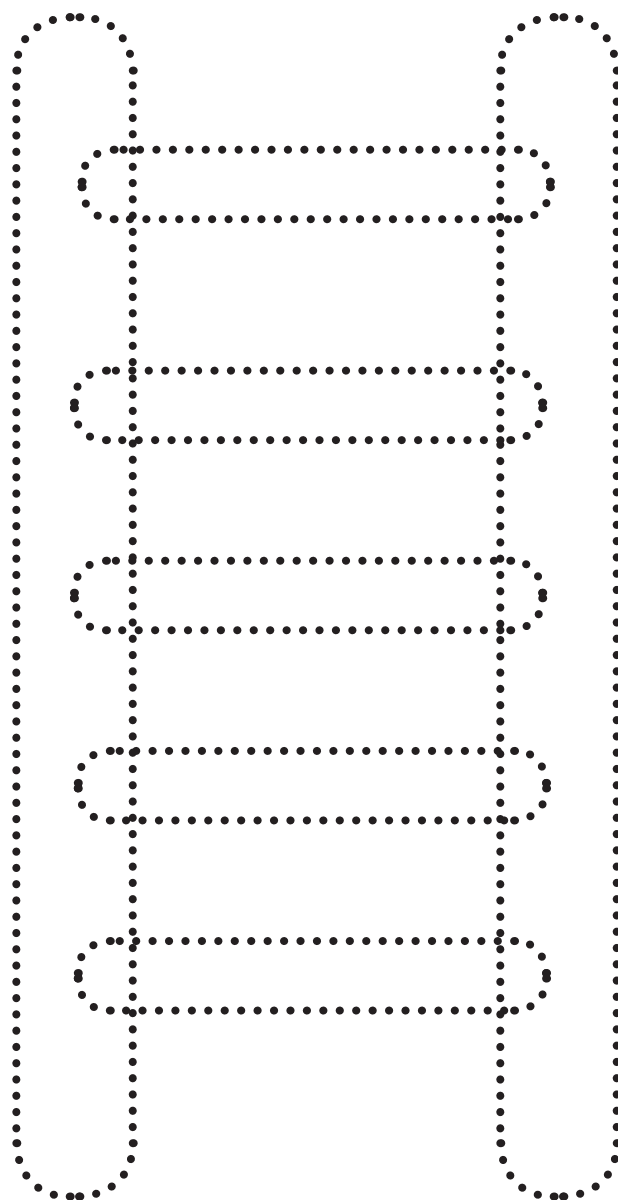
First rung: Good sleep hygiene

Second rung: Healthy breakfast

Third rung: Work out

And you miss rungs one and/or two? Working out doesn't go so great, and you get less benefit from doing so because you are tired and not properly nourished. The ladder helps us see the complexity of self-care in a way that demonstrates that our strategies aren't just interconnected, they're structural.

Write your self-care structure onto the ladder, starting with the beginning of your day at the bottom of the ladder and climbing up as you go.



A GOOD Mindset

Mindset training has a direct impact on our stress response. One study found that a stronger physical stress response was associated with higher test scores in school situations, but only for people who have had mindset training. Another study demonstrated that just by telling people “You’re the kind of person whose performance improves under pressure” increases their task performance by 33%. One of the biggest predictors of stress overwhelming us is our perception of not being up to the task, so focusing on the fact that we are, indeed, up to it shifts our thinking.

Gratitude: Focusing on gratitude is a really good part of our mental health in general and can create a perspective shift in our day. This doesn’t mean discounting what’s problematic, but focusing more on what’s good in your life.

Today I am grateful for:

Openness to Possibilities: If we are gratitude focused, we are far more likely to be aware of solutions, support, and opportunities around us. In a negative mindset, we are more likely to dismiss things that are available to us (or not notice them at all) because we are overwhelmed and frustrated with life in general.

Today I choose to be open to:

You can practice mindset training as part of your daily self-care routine. I like the GOOD acronym of mindset training since it doesn’t involve any kind of fake hype about shitty situations, it really just is about being grounded in your own self-efficacy. And clearly you are a fucking survivor—you’re reading this right now, which means your survival rate thus far is 100%, right?

This is one of those internal work exercises that might be easier to make external by journaling through it, especially at first while you get used to the process.

Opportunities in this Experience: No matter what experience we are having, we can focus on the opportunities that exist to help us grow. We can learn more about different situations and ourselves even if we don’t achieve the success we were hoping for.

Today I recognize the opportunities to:

Determine: Visualize yourself successfully embracing the challenges ahead. This is hardiness in action. If you mentally set yourself up for success, you are in the right frame of mind to tackle the project. And no, you aren’t more frustrated if things don’t go perfectly.

Today success looks like:

Problem Formation

We are the product of all of our experiences and things that we have found stressful and overwhelming in the past are far more likely to get us activated in the future for very reasonable reasons, right? This exercise helps us unpack everything that led

up to having the current reactions, including past experiences and current triggers. There is also space to list things that have been tried that didn't work and things that have been tried that did. Plus a place for other protective factors and positives!

The Problem

Background info on what made me vulnerable to the problem to begin with

Things that cause the problem to get reactivated

Things I've already tried unsuccessfully

Any positive results from my attempts to resolve it

Things I've tried that have been successful



Anger

One of the questions I get all the time is this:
“When is anger a valid emotion?”
And the answer is the easiest one ever.

Always.

That’s because anger isn’t the problem.

And if right now you are thinking something along the lines of “Yeah, I’ve had my nose broken by someone else in the past so fuck off with telling me anger isn’t a problem.” I get that. And also? Me, too. But the other person’s anger wasn’t the problem. The problem lay in how their anger was weaponized against you.

How we utilize that anger is what matters. Feeling and acknowledging anger isn’t something to be avoided. We don’t have to suppress our anger to keep from reacting in harmful ways.

At its core, **anger is an instinctive response designed to protect us from harm by pushing us into concerted action.**

Feeling some serious fucking anger is a normal part of being a human being. Losing your shit is not.

As I tell my clients...you are allowed to BE crazy, but you aren’t allowed to ACT crazy.

Being as irritated as fuck because someone jacked the parking spot you were waiting for?

Totally legit.

Going postal over it? Not so helpful.

Not so helpful to everyone around you, not so helpful to greater society, and...for purely selfish reasons...not so helpful to you.

When we lose our fucking minds on a regular basis, we are wiring our brains into a constantly heightened state that eventually fries our circuits (and pushes away everyone we love in the process). We program ourselves to always be on the alert. So we react with far greater speed than we used to, and perceive more situations as being dangerous, hostile, or threatening. We are constantly jumping at shadows.

There is no transcendence and eradication of anger. This section isn’t designed for that. We all experience it because we are humans wired to protect what’s important to us. This section is designed to help you develop a healthy relationship with a necessary and uncomfortable emotion, so you can increase your chances of making proactive decisions instead of reactive ones.



Personalizing Your Anger Experiences With AHEN

This worksheet is another way for you to observe your underlying patterns related to your experiences of anger. Recall a recent situation where you were angry, and answer these questions about it.

Anger emerges from:

- Hurt
- Expectations not met
- Needs not met

Once you figured out these underlying roots, were they legit or were they more about you and your history than about the present situation?

If the roots are legit, are they something that need to be addressed or is it one of those bullshit daily life things that just happens? Speeding ticket, fucked up drive thru order, etc.?

What are the underlying roots of your anger? If you aren't sure, reflect on when you first noticed that you were angry. What was going on around you...sights, smells, noises, people? What were you doing? What were others doing? What were you thinking about? Any particular memories coming up at that time?

If it needs to be addressed what is the best way to do so? How do you correct the situation with as little disruption as possible?

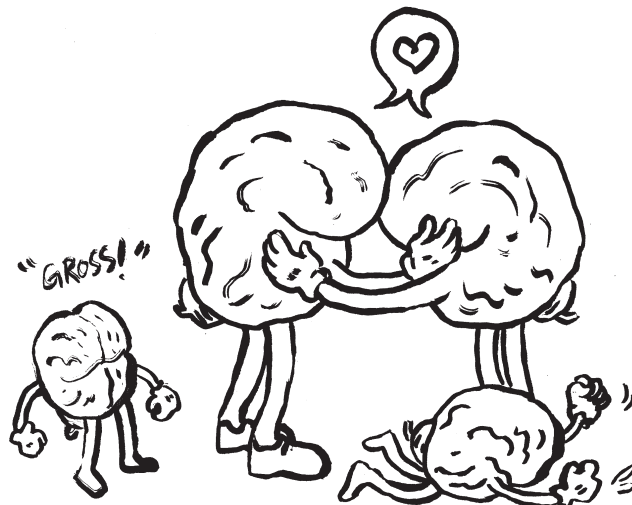
What can you do to keep from getting further hurt in the process (physically, emotionally, and mentally)?

Can you keep the hurt to others minimal (physically, mentally, and emotionally)?

Is there anyone you can talk to that is going to have a healthy, supportive perspective...a counselor, friend, mentor, family member? Someone who knows you, loves you, and will totally call you out on your shit if need be.

After you act (instead of react), then evaluate the results. Did it work? Is this a strategy that you can use again? Are you still angry or are you feeling better and safer now?

Does it need to be addressed immediately, or can it wait until you are calmer and feel safer?



Figuring Out Your LIFEMORTS

LIFEMORTS are the nine rage circuits in our brain identified by neuroscientist and fancy National Institute for Health researcher R. Douglas Fields. Short explanation? There are certain categories of situations that we have adapted an evolutionary response to keep us safe and alive. And anger is an activating response to help us with that staying-alive thing.

This worksheet helps you recognize your emotional labels around anger, the effect they have on your thinking patterns and physical reactions, AND gives you space to recognize your LIFEMORTS triggers. So if you have certain triggers that are particularly apparent, you can plan to deal with them more proactively, right?

Life or Limb: This is where the brain perceives a situation as a literal life-or-death attack and responds defensively.

Insult: This is where the brain perceives an emotional attack rather than a physical one, like a dominance challenge. Dr. Fields calls it the human version of head-butting.

Family: This is where the brain perceives an attack on someone we love, our family as self-defined.

Environment: This is where the brain perceives an attack on our territory, our physical space (home, car, etc.)

Mate: This is where our brain perceives an attack against our romantic partner.

Order in Society: This is where the brain perceives an attack to our place in society. This can be a social justice fueled anger, but is also what often causes mob violence at protests.

Resources: This is where the brain perceives an attack on our resources, like money or possessions.

Tribe: This is where the brain perceives an attack on our identified community, whether our extended family, group of friends, neighborhood, etc.

Stopped: This is where the brain perceives that we are being imprisoned or our progress is being held up by someone else in some way.

ANGRY EMOTION FELT <i>(Irritation, Frustration, Rage, etc)</i>	ASSOCIATED THOUGHTS	ASSOCIATED BODY SENSATIONS	LIFEMORTS TRIGGERS

Something Pissed You Off? Let's SOLVE Your Problem

This tool (adapted from *Dr. Weisinger's Anger Workout Book*) is an even more structured way of mapping out and creating solutions. It helps get your thinking brain back online when your emotional (angry) brain is trying to take over the show.

State Your Problem: Identify and define the problematic situation.

Outline Your Response: After describing the details of your problem as specifically and expansively as you can, then detail your usual response. Researchers who studied expert problem solvers found that they didn't look at the problems in abstract terms, but instead focused very concretely on the "who, what, where, when, why, and how" facts.

List Your Alternatives: Brainstorm all your possible solutions. Yes, even "magical thinking" type solutions or "go back to bed and let it figure itself out" solutions. They bubble up, and that's ok. Don't worry about quality, the important thing is quantity. Come up with as many different possibilities as possible.

Visualize Your Consequences: Consider the possible outcomes of all of the alternatives you listed. What might happen in both the short and long term? Are these consequences you can deal with? Cross out anything that is clearly a non-starter. Consider combining alternatives and visualizing how that would work.

Evaluate Your Results: Now you gotta act. Use the same strategy in more than one scenario (you know, on multiple occasions when people piss you off). What are the actual consequences? Is this an improvement over the old ways you responded? Do you need to go back to the drawing board, or do you have a good handle on things now?

The Continuous You

This is a super-simple version of a classic exercise from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. It works well for all kinds of strong feelings. I'm including it here because anger is near the top of the list of emotions that are considered something we "are" instead of something we "have."

This week when you find yourself feeling angry (or even the more mild forms of anger like frustration or irritability), try the following:

Notice what you're feeling. Give the emotion a label (agitated, pissed off, livid)

What did you notice frequently through this past week?

What feelings words are attached to that?

How have your feelings changed for noticing them?

Now remind yourself that you are noticing this feeling.

And if you are noticing it, it means it's something that you are experiencing, not something that you are.

Remind yourself that what you are noticing changes frequently throughout the day, week, month, and year, but the you who is doing the noticing remains the same. Which means your moods do not define you, right?



Meditation on the Soles of the Feet

This may be a “well, duh” thing to say but the more calm and relaxing the atmosphere, the better. Even if you can just dim the lighting a bit it can really help.

1. If you are standing, stand in a natural—rather than an aggressive—posture.
2. If you are sitting, sit comfortably with the soles of your feet flat on the floor.
3. Breathe naturally and do nothing.
4. Cast your mind back to an incident that made you very angry. Stay with the anger.
5. You are feeling angry, and angry thoughts are flowing through your mind. Let them flow naturally, without restriction. Stay with the anger. Your body may show signs of anger (e.g., rapid breathing).
6. Now, shift all your attention to the soles of your feet.
7. Slowly, move your toes, feel your shoes covering your feet, feel the texture of your socks or hose, the curve of your arch, and the heels of your feet against the back of your shoes. If

you do not have shoes on, feel the floor or carpet with the soles of your feet. Keep breathing naturally and focus on the soles of your feet until you feel calm.

9. Meditate on the soles of your feet for about 10 to 15 min.
10. Slowly come out of your meditation, sit quietly for a few moments, and then resume your daily activities.

Pro tip: This is an attention-setting exercise that creates a meditative state. Use the following prompts or adapt to your client’s needs and venue limitations. The meditation is designed to last 10-15 minutes. If that is too long of a time period for the individuals you are working with, 5 minutes is a good start. You can do this exercise in a group or with individuals.

This was originally designed to use with youth with anger issues but is now also being taught to individuals with IDD diagnoses. Studies have shown that learning this skill is associated with a significant decrease in aggression and other problematic behaviors. There is a growing body of literature and training on how individuals with IDD can benefit from trauma therapy and skills training like mindfulness, not just behavior modification services. This specific meditation is a great starting point when working with a wide variety of people.

SOLE MEDITATION PRE AND POST RATING SCALE

SELF ASSESSMENT	RATING BEFORE MEDITATION (1-5)	RATING AFTER MEDITATION (1-5)
How Calm I Feel		
How Angry I Feel		
How Happy I Feel		
How Excited I Feel		
How Annoyed I Feel		
How Tired I Feel		
How _____ I Feel		

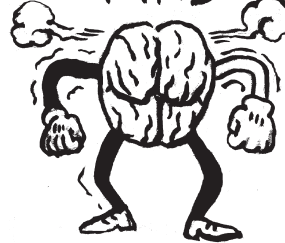
IRRITATION



FRUSTRATION



MAD



FURIOUS EXPLOSIVE RAGE



Cognitive Defusion

A lot of our negative thoughts and feelings can come from internal judgments of ourselves that we may not even notice ourselves believing. One of the best tools from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy reframes our emotional responses

My mind tells me I am too much of

My mind tells me I am not enough of

My mind tells me I do too much of

My mind tells me I do not do enough of

My mind tells me I lack

Now take this list and sit with it for a half a minute or so as something you are. Write it down, and even say out loud to yourself:

I am too awkward.

I am too lazy.

I don't move fast enough.

I am not

I am too

I lack

I can't

through a technique called defusion. Defusion is the process of recognizing our thoughts and feelings as something we have rather than something that we are. Let's try it with some of the main critical meta-messages you have held about yourself:

I shouldn't

Check in with yourself. How do you feel in your body after just half a minute of taking ownership of these thoughts?

Now try a shift out of judgement, by labeling it as a thought that exists, not something that you are.

I'm noticing that I'm having a thought about being too awkward.

I'm noticing that I am having a thought about being lazy.

I'm noticing that I am having a thought that I do not move fast enough.

I'm noticing that I am having a thought about being

I'm noticing that I am having a thought about not being

I'm noticing that I am having a thought about being too

I'm noticing that I am having a thought about not being able to

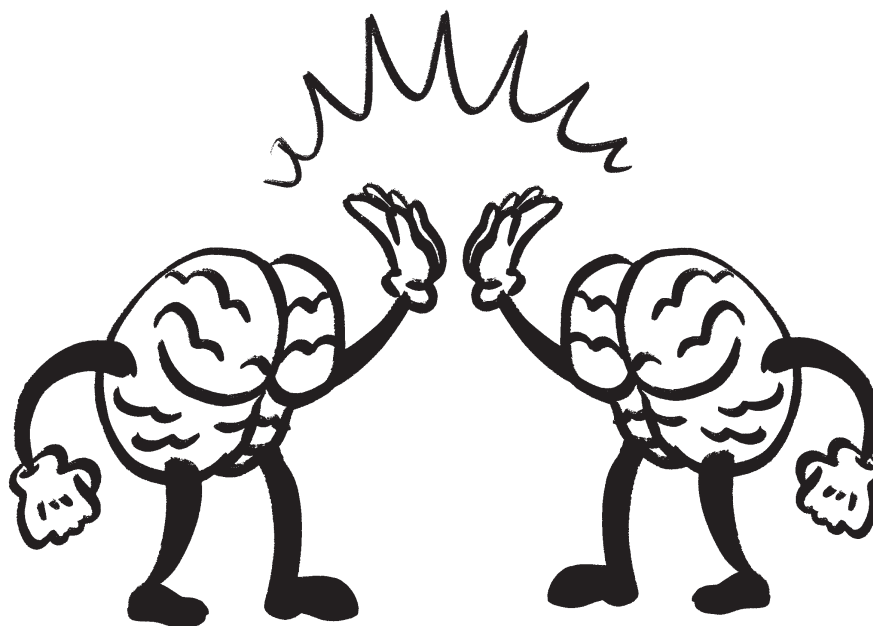
I'm noticing that I am having a thought about

I'm noticing that I am having a thought about

I'm noticing that I am having a thought about

All defusion means (and yeah, sorry for the term . . . we like to create words for concepts to confuse as many people as possible) is that you are separating your self-ness out of your thoughts and noticing them as something that exists rather than something you are.

Check in with yourself again. How does your body feel when you are no longer fused with these thoughts as indicative of your self-hood?



Anxiety

Anxiety covers a lot of ground: It can be the experience of unease at its most chill. Distress at medium heat. Straight up panic at a full boil. And as those ancient Italians well knew, it's a hugely somatic experience. That is, it's something you feel in your body as much as it's something that controls your thoughts.

And it's always the most uncomfortable feeling ever. Your body is intentionally making you feel off balance so you have to attend to shit. There's a fancy term for that: Disequilibrium.

So here is our working definition: Anxiety is a state of full body disequilibrium at a level of intensity that demands immediate attention and corrective action on your part. It can be in the face of a real or perceived threat, either present or anticipated.

That right there is why anxiety is so hard to ignore. The whole point of the body producing that feeling is to demand your full attention like a naked, raging toddler running through the street in a snowstorm with a fist full of gummy bears in one hand and a bloody machete in the other.

Quite a visual right? Sure as hell not something you can readily disregard in the course of your day.

Anxiety demands every ounce of attention we have to give it, no matter how inconvenient the time or how unnecessary the anxiety actually was to begin with. So you can see how this relates to trauma reactions, right? It's really easy for anxiety to be our default setting if you have the kind of history that tells you to constantly be on guard.

When you struggle with anxiety, the most empowering thing in the world is realizing that you aren't weak, broken, or batshit crazy.

I'm not just saying that to placate you. It's scientifically true. Anxiety makes perfect sense because it's how our brains are wired to protect us. Certain mental health issues, anxiety being one of them, are the direct result of how we have evolved for survival. Certain memories are stored in certain ways in order to protect you. When those memories are triggered, rational thought gets bypassed and your body goes into *do something to fix this* mode. Whether you struggle with anxiety occasionally, or it's way worse than that, these exercises are designed to help you pull your brain out of that spinning void as much as possible.



Symptoms of Anxiety

Anxiety is an emotional response that shows itself in mental and very physical ways. Here are some of the things that might look like. Some people might have all these experiences, other people might have a few, or different ones at different times.

You are probably reading the physical body checklist and thinking . . . this is the same list for everything from anxiety to Ebola. Which is why so many people end up in emergency rooms thinking they are having a heart attack when they are having an anxiety attack. It's also the same reason many people

have missed the fact that they were having a heart attack because they were also having an anxiety attack. It's important to have any possible medical conditions ruled out because so many physical health issues can look like mental health issues.

For each of these symptoms, put down the SUDs level, 1-10, for how much you experience this symptom in general. You can also record the highest SUDs level you can remember experiencing for this symptom in the last year.

SUDs generally	SUDs recently	Thoughts and Feelings Symptoms
		Excessive worry
		Rumination (hamster wheel thinking patterns)
		Irritability/anger (Weird, right? Anger is the culturally allowed emotion so we substitute that one a lot for what we are really feeling)
		Irrational fears/specific phobias
		Stage fright/social phobias
		Hyper self-awareness/self-consciousness
		Feelings of fear
		A sense of helplessness
		Flashbacks
		Obsessive behaviors, pickiness
		Compulsive behaviors
		Self doubt
		A sense that you are "losing it" or "going crazy"

SUDs generally	SUDs recently	Physical Body Symptoms
		Trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
		Inability to rest
		Muscle tension
		Neck tension
		Chronic indigestion
		Stomach pain and/or nausea
		Racing heart
		Pulsing in the ear (feeling your heartbeat)
		Coldness, numbness or tingling in toes, feet, hands, or fingers
		Sweating
		Weakness
		Shortness of breath
		Dizziness
		Lightheadedness
		Chest pain

SUDs generally	SUDs recently
	Feeling hot and cold (feeling like having chills and fever without running a temperature)
	Shooting pains/feeling like you have had an electric shock
	Other symptoms
	Perfectionism
	Indecisiveness
	Brain fog
	Depersonalization
	Avoidance
	Fatigue
	Low tolerance

Is It Anxiety or OCD?

While they're both anxiety disorders, generalized anxiety (GAD) and OCD are distinct in some pretty important ways. My book *Unfuck Your Anxiety* goes into some of the science of why OCD is not considered an anxiety disorder. While OCD can also cause significant anxiety, OCD involves different parts of the brain and requires different treatment strategies. There are a few big differences that may help you parse out if OCD is a possible diagnosis for you and your treatment provider to consider. The OCD Center of Los Angeles has a bunch of free online assessments related to OCD and other obsessive disorders, as well!

OCD and anxiety diverge in these three areas. Use the space below each to write out notes to share with your treatment provider:

How extreme are the things that you worry about?

Anxiety, while irrational, tends to be relatively related to life stressors. Like if you have to speak in front of a group, anxiety may tell you that you may pass out or forget how to communicate verbally, while OCD may tell you that you will jump out the window to your death.

What are your five most frequent (or strongest or most disruptive) anxiety symptoms? Even if you are thinking, "Hah, all the things!," chances are a few stand out. That way you know what to look for and measure when you try different anxiety management techniques.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

How dug-in are the things you worry about?

Anxiety tends to bounce around quite a bit, with a whole host of “what-ifs” to offer you throughout the day. OCD tends to dig in and be present all the time. Like if you are afraid you are going to catch a horrible disease and die or accidentally kill someone while riding your bike. These are fears that are not only dug-in, they are often related to your deepest fears as a human being. se of your available funds, debts, and spending?

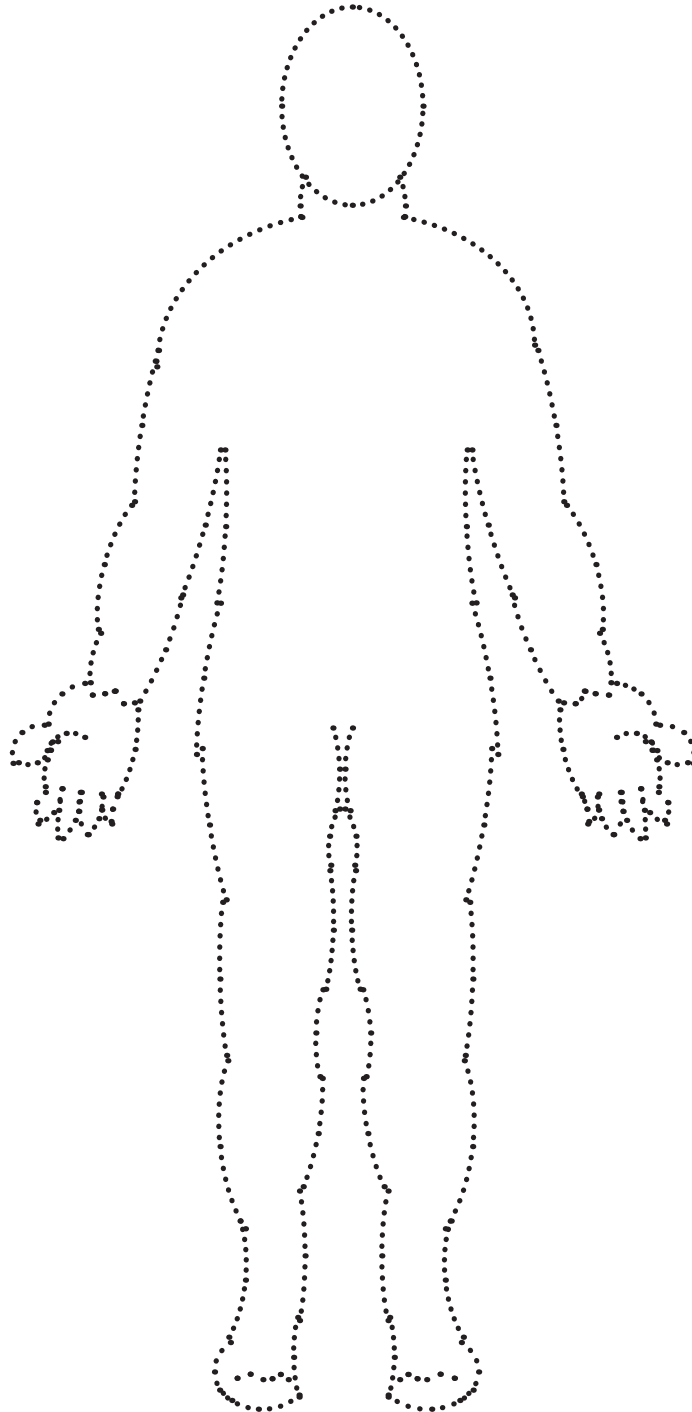
Are there any ritual behaviors that you have developed to help soothe these things you are worried about (compulsions)?

Not everyone with OCD has compulsive behaviors. You can have OCD that just involves the first two items in this list, which is often referred to as “pure O” OCD. But if you do have compulsive behaviors, they may be incredibly time consuming and increasingly irrational. For example, worrying about germs during a pandemic turns into so much handwashing that your hands are chapped and increasingly susceptible to germs and bacteria. Or checking the lock on the door 23 times, which makes you consistently late to work. Compulsions don’t have to be behavioral, they can also be mental, like saying certain prayers over and over and over to “protect” you from hurting someone, or counting steps so you always end on a certain lucky number, etc.

Personify That Asshole

Give your anxiety an actual persona to inhabit. Name it after a heinous ex, a shitty grade school teacher, or Kim Jong-un. Create a whole character for your anxiety. Anxiety feels so nebulous that giving yourself someone or something to battle really helps. Then when anxiety comes calling, you can focus

on that entity the way you would an actual person that was threatening you in a real-world situation. You can negotiate, you can yell back, you can lock it in a box. Whatever works. Here's an outline for you to start with, but if your anxiety comes in a non-human shape, don't let this limit you!



The Bigger Picture

Think about a current or upcoming event or decision that your anxiety likes to hook into. The brain likes to rehearse for the worst case outcome so it isn't taken by surprise if it happens. It doesn't quite work that way, but it's still going to be our first line of thought. So in order to keep a more balanced perspective, you can use this tool to balance your approach and recognize that there are not only negative outcomes all the time. This gives you a chance to widen out from the worst possible scenario to other more positive and more probable outcomes. To gain this perspective, ask yourself: What is the best outcome? What is the absolute worst thing that could happen? What is the most likely thing to happen?

For example, say you're getting bored with your job and are trying to decide whether or not to look for a new one. Best outcome: the first one you apply for will be your dream job and you'll be immediately hired, have supportive bosses, colleagues, and mentors, and eventually become the best CEO the company has ever had. Worst case: your boss finds out you're looking for a new job, fires you, and you lose your apartment, and one day your ex walks by as you're panhandling and mocks you while an atomic bomb speeds towards your city. Most likely scenario? You'll put out some feelers, have an awkward talk with your boss, and suffer a few rejections before you eventually either move into a better role in your current job or find another job that better suits you.

Decision or event I'm struggling with:

What is the best possible outcome?

What is the absolute worst possible outcome?

What is most likely to happen?

You may be thinking “yeah, but....” And, okay. What if the worst thing ever happens? Sometimes it does, I recognize. But you have a 100% survival rate thus far. What strategies would you use to manage a shitty outcome?

Ride the Wave

Avoidance always makes anxiety worse. Instead of fighting back when you start to get anxious, try setting aside 5 minutes to sit with it. It won't last forever, I swear on my Roomba it won't. If you attend to what you are feeling, you get over it way more quickly than if you avoid it. I've noticed I'm bored with myself about 3 minutes into committing to sitting with my anxiety for 5. I'm ready to go make a cup of coffee, read a book, find the cookies I hid from myself, or do anything other than perseverate.

As you sit with your anxiety, you'll notice it often comes in waves (this is different from panic attacks, which come on very suddenly). After your next bout of anxiety, use the worksheet below to describe the wave—what ongoing situation led up to it, what triggered the anxiety, what happened when it peaked, how you came out of it, and what state you went back to when you felt more in control again. Add your SUDs level for every stage.

Stressors: (Eg, my relationship with my father)

Triggers: (Eg, he didn't follow through with something he promised)

Peak: (Name your emotions at the peak of the anxiety wave. Eg, I felt angry at everyone around me, totally out of control. My heart was racing and my stomach hurt)

Recovery: (Eg, Once my anxiety went down, so did my anger. I felt totally exhausted and guilty, and cried)

Control: (Eg, the situation hasn't changed, but I don't feel as upset about it.)

Now that you're past the wave and feeling more in control of your emotions, look back and examine it further:

Factors that increased the anxiety: (Eg, my stepmother calling)

Coping skills I could have used to prevent the wave: (Eg, taking a time out or finding a distraction)

Factors that supported me: (Eg, I called a friend)

Coping skills that helped me come down from the peak: (Eg, going for a fast walk)

Pro tip: Emotions last 90 seconds. In session, when a strong emotion comes up, encourage the client to simply sit with the emotion without dialogue for 90 seconds. Use a timer. You can scale a level of distress before and after even. Discuss what it was like to sit with the feeling and then watch it dissipate.

Attentional Training Technique

Metacognitive therapy focuses on how we are thinking instead of what we are thinking. Just like the term meta implies, we are going one step up to look at the bigger picture. The idea is that the “how” becomes sticky, making persistent issues with anxiety almost inevitable. That is, we focus on the anxiety because it pops up and our brains start yelling “this is super important...drop everything!”

This technique is designed to be something you practice until it becomes your new cognitive habit, just like going to the gym and working out until you have strength and lung capacity to go hiking without exhausting or injuring yourself. It’s adapted from an exercise used by The Metacognitive Therapy Institute, which suggests practicing the technique twice a day for four weeks to build a solid neural pathway for this process. I know this seems like a big time hog of a project, but in reality, you are really only looking at spending 10-15 minutes each practice session.

To do the exercise, take a seat wherever you like, and:

- 1) Identify two sounds in your area that are different in loudness and not close to each other. This can be the clock on the wall ticking while you listen to music on your phone or tap on a table.
- 2) Spend a few minutes changing your focus of attention between the two, both the sound and the placement of the sound.
- 3) Once you feel comfortable shifting your focus slowly, spend some time shifting back and forth rapidly, again on both the sounds and the placement of the sound.
- 4) Once you have the shifting down, spend a few minutes practicing noticing both at the same time. If there are other sounds going on in your environment and you’re feeling sassy, go ahead and add them to the mix.

The point of this process is to help you notice what’s going on in your mind and body, without trying to suppress it or become consumed by it. That it’s just something brains do that you can recognize, focus more attention on if it’s a legitimate worry, or let it hum in the background if your brain is just spinning.

Pro tip: This is a super easy thing to practice in session so clients get the hang of the process. I generally start by pointing out that there is always ambient noise in the room (the air purifier, the sound machine right out the door, the clock on the wall, etc. but we are focusing on our conversation and shifting attention away from ambient sounds. Then I use one of those sounds (usually the clock), to demonstrate shifting from the clock to a different sound in a different place (I usually just tap on a side table). Make sure to reiterate that this isn’t a coping-in-the-moment skill that helps distress tolerance, but a new neural pathway skill that really does require practice and commitment.

The following worksheet helps you track your practice and what you notice over time.



	Time spent practicing	Difficulty rating (0-10)	WHAT I NOTICED
Week 1			
Week 2			
Week 3			
Week 4			

Depression

Just like anxiety, depression is related to the biochemistry of stress.

Anxiety is the body trying to go into survival mode to protect itself, based on what it thinks to be true. *Anxiety is a biochemical over-response to stress.*

Depression is the body's way of saying "nothing I do is going to help anyway, it all sucks ass no matter what." *Depression is a biochemical learned helplessness response to stress.*

Robert Sapolsky defines depression as "a genetic-neurochemical disorder requiring a strong environmental trigger whose characteristic manifestation is an inability to appreciate sunsets."

If anger is preparing you to fight, then depression is your brain's way of turtling up...to not get noticed, to not be too active, to not do the things that might put you in more danger. I know it seems counter-intuitive to the whole idea that we are wired to protect ourselves from injury and death, but as we learn more and more about inflammation in the body, we are realizing that depression is a protection response. Upregulated inflammation signals to the brain that the body has been injured and rest is needed for recovery. Like being exhausted when you have a virus. The problem is the inflammation has become chronic and the brain's way of managing the disease becomes a whole new disease.

Depression is not the same thing as sadness, grief, coping with trauma, or coping with loss. Depression is the complete shutdown of all the things that make being human a joyful experience. The biggest, most consistent symptom of depression is *anhedonia*, which is a tongue-twister way of saying *an inability to feel pleasure*. If you look at that word, you can see it essentially means not-hedonistic. If you struggle with depression, you have all kinds of feels. Guilt, shame, anger, irritability, hopelessness, overwhelming grief. But you rarely have experiences of pleasure, gratitude, connectedness, and joy. And if you do reach out for them, you feel them snatched away more often than not. Depression is the thief of all the wonderful things that make human-ing worth it.

Depression Symptoms

Depression is far more than just *big sad*. It's a loss of most everything joyful and any real sense of self. There are a bunch of different facets of depression, and I'm including checklists

for three of the big ones here so that if you suspect you're depressed you can have a better idea of what you might need to talk to your doctor about. Diagnostically, having a couple of symptoms doesn't automatically mean clinical depression. A clinician is usually looking for five or more over a period of time causing significant disruption in multiple areas of your life. But if you're really fucking miserable, don't wait until you check "enough" boxes....make sure you bring it up to your doc/therapist/treatment peeps.

Dysthymia (Persistent Depressive Disorder)

The big depression diagnosis we always think of is major depressive disorder (MDD), but there is an insidious little gremlin of a diagnosis called dysthymia (also known as persistent depressive disorder) that many people who don't qualify for the MDD diagnosis still experience. Instead of being mired in the black gunk, it's like perpetually wearing gloom-covered glasses. People with dysthymia are more likely to function better in daily life and seem more okay to outside observers than people with MDD. But they aren't really humaning at a fundamental level. They can zip on their human skin and get through their day, but their insides feel jacked most of the time. Dysthymia can show up and couch surf on your ass for years at a time, with an intensity that can fluctuate quite a bit. If you have dysthymia, you may have periods of okay-ness, but those periods generally don't last for more than a month or two before the motherfucker is back on your couch, eating all your chips again.

Symptoms of dysthymia can include:

- Less interest, or no interest, in daily activities (anhedonia, as mentioned above)
- Feeling sad, or down, or just kind of empty
- Feeling pretty hopeless about life
- Low energy, feeling low-level tired all the time (whether getting sleep or not)
- Feeling like you can't do shit right, having lots of negative self-talk or low self-esteem that isn't really related to reality
- Trouble paying attention, concentrating, or making decisions

- Anger or irritability
- Serious decrease in productivity or effective task completion
- Avoiding social situations and activities (the ones you would actually like to do in theory, or used to like to do)
- Worry, guilt, or shame
- Changes in eating (either overeating or not wanting to eat at all)
- Changes in sleep patterns (sleeping too much, not sleeping enough, sleeping badly)
- Stuck in the past and negative experiences that happened

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD)

An actual diagnosis of major depressive disorder requires that anhedonia be present every day for at least two weeks. Other symptoms that are also really, really common are:

- Loss of interest in all the things fun, excellent, and the point of being human (anhedonia)
- Low energy/fatigue
- Low-level chronic pain
- Headaches, stomach pain, or chest pain
- Jacked up concentration, difficulty making decisions
- Feeling guilty and/or worthless
- Sleeping a ton or sleeping for shit (not sleeping at all, or sleeping badly)
- Feeling either super restless or really slowed down (like moving underwater or brain wrapped in cotton)
- Intrusive thoughts of death (morbid ideation) or suicide (suicidal ideation)
- Change in eating habits (and 5% or more change in weight, either up or down, because of it)
- Irritability, anger, low distress tolerance

Pro Tip: I know, this feels like exactly the same list as dysthymia. And it essentially is, but it's really a matter of degree and the number of symptoms present at that degree. The essential question is: How well are you functioning and how much effort is it taking for you to do so? This doesn't necessarily mean that if you have dysthymia you make it through your day okay and with depression you don't. Everyone's experience is unique, and their symptom constellation is unique. Dysthymia may resolve without medication (research demonstrates that exercise, meditation, etc. are equally effective as medication for more mild forms of depression), so if your client does not want to start with medications and seems to have milder symptoms y'all may agree to begin with a more holistic treatment approach.

Bipolar Disorder

Then there is bipolar disorder (which used to be called manic-depression).

People who have bipolar disorder cycle through highs and lows. It's not depression and non-depression, but depression and mania, an intensely elevated mood. It's not necessarily fun and happy—it can also be high agitation, irritability, and anger. Unlike normal levels of elevated emotions, mania takes us over completely. Someone in a manic state really struggles to control their actions because their brains are in over-fire—no passing go, no collecting two hundred dollars.

Mania can cause other symptoms as well, but some of the key signs of this phase of bipolar disorder are:

- Racing thoughts
- Talking really fast
- Not needing much sleep to function
- Being easily distracted
- Feeling really restless
- Acting impulsively
- Being confident in your abilities far beyond your actual skills
- Elevated mood (either super high and happy or super angry and irritable)
- Making poor decisions or engaging in risky behaviors (like with sex or money)
- Break from reality (psychosis)

What I Want Back

Depression's fundamental difference from sadness is how much it steals from us when it strikes. It's like a police state where not just behaviors are punished, but crimes of thought as well. Depression takes away our lives and our *will* for life.

Have you ever been in this place? Are you in this place now?

I would love for this to be the time that you pick up the phone and start asking for help. Help from families and friends, help from professionals. But I know how hard it is to make that call...and how hard it is to actually get the help you are begging for. It feels overwhelming.

I also know that if you are reading this book and have gotten this far, that's where you are headed. You are starting to get a glimmer of a thought of "Fuck this shit, I want my life back."

And if I am right? What do you most want back? Of all the things that make life worth living that depression has robbed you of, what are you missing the most right now? It may not be the biggest thing, and that's okay. In fact, it's great because it may be easier to wrestle it away.

You don't have to do anything about this yet, unless you want to. But the intent of this exercise is to start with the *thought crime* that depression has forbidden you from having. The thought that you can do better and deserve to do better. The thought that there is a world out there that you have the right to participate in and maybe even enjoy.

Let's start right there. Write those thoughts down. Remember that world. That's the beginning of your new story.

Depression Funnel

Depression isn't usually like a light switch that's either off or on—often when we are sliding into depression it's gradual and there are points along the way where we can come out of it or go deeper in. Marie Asberg from the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm, Sweden, specializes in burnout and created a way to conceptualize the burnout experience as an *exhaustion funnel*. Her essential idea is that we sort of slide down this funnel into a level of exhaustion that we know as burnout. It's a bone-tired, over everything, no joy in the things that matter level of exhaustion that a nap can't cure. The slide down happens when we get busy and we give up the things we deem nonessential, like healthy food and body movement, even though those are the things that nourish us the most.

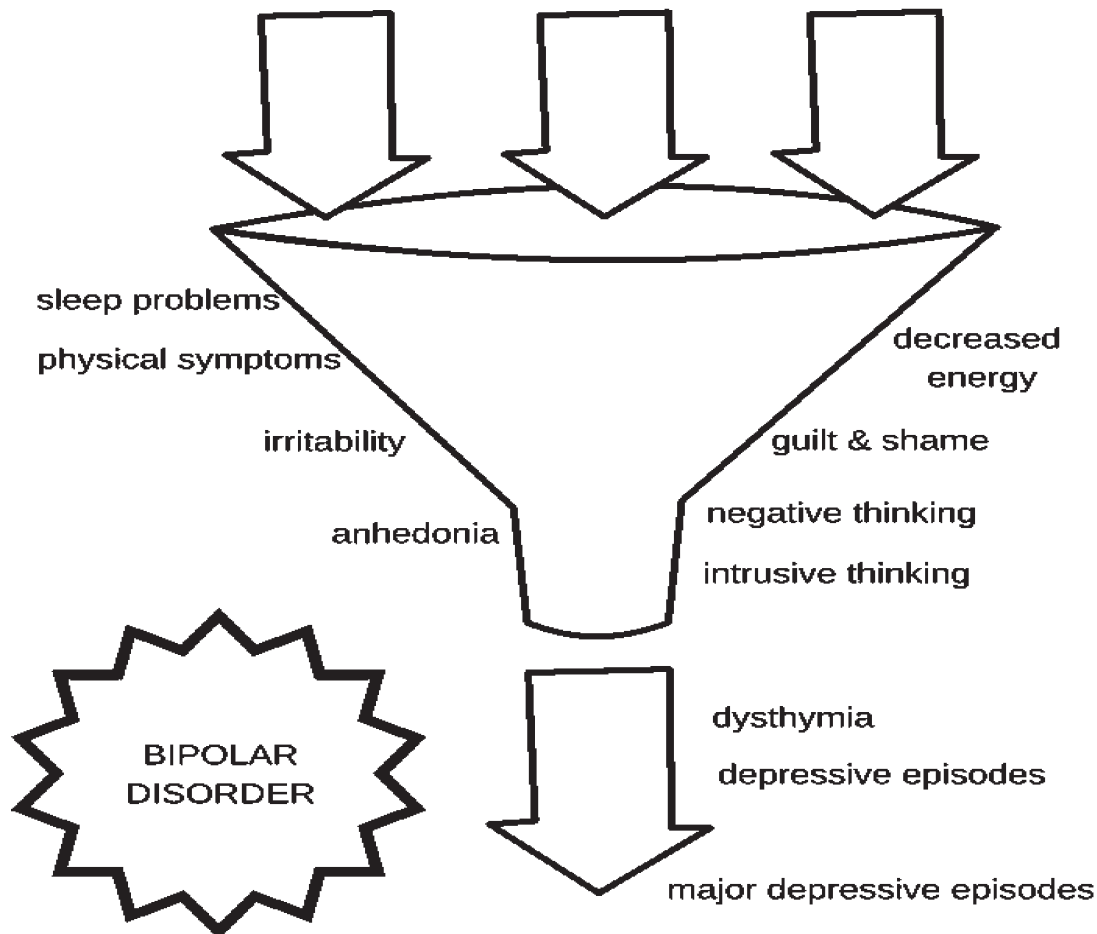
In the arrows at the top, write in all the things that make you predisposed to depression from day zero and all the factors that make recurrences of depressive episodes more likely. They're all the life bullshit that gets dumped in every day. There is a ton of stuff that we have zero control over here: family history,

trauma history, major life events, the age of initial onset of depression, or other diseases (either mental or physical) that can invoke *more* depression.

When we are at our healthiest, we have a larger experience of life and manage stressors and overwhelm and have room for them to exist without spillover.

But then once we get into the funnel, depressive symptoms, like sleep problems or decreased energy, can start to kick in, causing the funnel to narrow. It narrows further when we start letting go of self-care, sleep, movement, nutrition, and socializing. *Because sometimes trying to manage depression leads us to do the exact things that reinforce the depression instead.*

Write down the earliest symptoms and the things that you know are first to go for you at the top of the funnel, and then your later symptoms and whatever makes them worse as the funnel narrows to its point.



Funnel Disruptors

Do you see any places where you can pull yourself out of the funnel next time it hits, or at least keep from sliding further down?

Self-care Flags

List your green yellow and red self-care flags. Green for when you are doing the helpful things, yellow as the danger signs, and red for "I'm in a depressive episode now."

Green:

Yellow:

Red:

Thinking Errors

Just like cognitive biases, we each tend to make mistakes in our thinking that can cause no end of problems in our approaches and relationships, and can become barriers to our accountability. The list below is only partial—you can find many more online.

Filtering: Filtering happens when you pick out the one damn negative and don't look at anything else from the situation that is either positive or just neutral. Faith is a professional trainer. You better believe Faith can teach 50 people and get 49 superlative reviews but perseverate on the one review that bitches about her potty mouth (fuck yeah!). With filtering, you are not including any context, because you are isolating what you are focusing on from the circumstances around it. Which means it becomes the entirety of your focus rather than just a percentage of your information.

A time I have done this:

Polarized Thinking: This is as black and white as a yin-yang symbol. Everything gets categorized as either good or bad. Then there is no middle ground. Which means if you aren't completely perfect, you must be a total failure.

A time I have done this:

We all do all of these at some point. It's how our brains are wired to work. For each one, note a situation where you believe you may have been operating from a thinking error. And check the box next to the ones you struggle with on the regular.

Overgeneralization: This takes the polarized thinking to a whole new level. It's your brain taking one example of something that happened one time and deciding this is how things are going to roll forever. So if you failed at something, you are a failure and will continue to be so for time eternal. So why even bother trying?

A time I have done this:

Mind Reading: This is where you decide you know without a doubt why people are acting the way they act, saying what they say, and what they are thinking and feeling. Huge-ass leaps to conclusions. This is a lot of times based on projection. We know how we are thinking and feeling and presume that others would think and feel the same. Or we feel so shitty about ourselves that we presume others must have the same opinion of us. Someone didn't notice you? They totally must hate you, according to your brain. When, in reality, they are focused on why George R.R. Martin won't finish the damn Game of Thrones series or something that has nothing to do with you in that moment.

A time I have done this:

Personalization: So we all have the tendency to be the star of our own personal movie, right? And if we are the star, then everything going on around us must relate to us, right? So we are mind reading other people's intent as being about us instead of about them and presume that the ways they respond are due to something negative about us.

A time I have done this:

Control Fallacies: Fallacies of control fuck you up in either direction. If you feel totally controlled by everything around you, then you are totally a helpless victim. If you feel that you have to be in control of everything all the time, you feel responsible for everything all of the time. Neither is an empirical truth. Both extremes set you up for failure and exhaustion.

A time I have done this:

Fallacy of Fairness: I was pretty damn young when my mom told me, in essence, that life wasn't fair and I was exhausting myself by expecting it to be. If you are keeping a running fairness tally, you are going to be resentful to pissed off all the time.

A time I have done this:

Blaming: This is where you blame other people for the pain you feel and the problems you have. Now, people may fuck you over big time, but blaming them for everything that comes after means making them responsible for all of your choices and decisions for time eternal. That's far too much power to give over to some motherfucker. In reality, you have every right to be your own self-advocate, to make your own choices and be responsible for your own decisions from here on out.

A time I have done this:

Shoulds: Dude. If people would just do what I say, the world would be a brilliant place. We all have a list of shoulds for the rest of the world. How people should behave. How they should treat us. When they don't follow those rules, we get all kinds of legit butthurt. Then we put on our judgy-pants about what they are doing, even when it's shit that we seriously don't even need to be worrying about.

A time I have done this:

Emotional Reasoning: This is where we presume that whatever emotion we are feeling is an indicator of something fucked up about ourselves. That if we feel something, it must be a fundamental truth. Like, if you feel guilty, you clearly are guilty. And while feelings are real, they don't always correspond to reality. If our thinking is distorted, then our emotional reactions go along for the ride and it becomes a mobius strip of mind-fuckery.

A time I have done this:

Fallacy of Change: This is the expectation that people should change to make life better for you. And that their changing is what is going to make you happy. Of course you can always ask people to change. But the only person you can really control is your own damn self. And the choices you make will have far more of an impact on your happiness, because then you can take credit for successes.

A time I have done this:

Global Labeling: This is the shitty political extremist category of distorted thinking styles. It's all about stereotyping and one-dimensionality, as if knowing one thing allows you to know everything. It's what leads to prejudice, relationship issues, and the tendency to make snap judgments. For example, there is some dude in front of you in line at the store wearing a camo ball cap. Global labeling might mean automatically presuming he's a racist redneck just because you noticed the hat, but without having any other information about the dude.

A time I have done this:

Being Right: You feel like you have something to prove in every interaction . . . and what you need to prove is your inherent rightness. You are lawyer, judge, and jury . . . and you aren't hearing anything from the opposition. A different opinion or perspective? INADMISSIBLE! Being right can really fuck up your ability to have caring and reciprocal relationships with others.

A time I have done this:

Heaven's Reward Fallacy: Heaven's Reward folks totally went to church with grandma. They are the people who have some kind of sense that if they deny themselves and sacrifice constantly, they are somehow working toward some magical reward because there is a scorecard being kept. This isn't about people who are trying to be better human beings, because that's what we should all do, but a sort of false piety that speaks to paying into the system like it's an investment. Then, of course, when the reward doesn't come (because it doesn't have to be a literal storing of your treasures in heaven; maybe you are expecting public recognition of your moral superiority) it sucks pretty bad and creates serious bitterness. What was all the sacrifice for, then? If you aren't doing the right thing with your heart truly in it, you're just depleting yourself without real payoff.

A time I have done this:

Reframing Toxic Self-Talk

Sometimes our past experiences can result in a really negative view of ourselves. It could be a trauma history, it could be messages that we received in childhood. It could be our own frustrations with ourselves. No matter the source, these messages start to become our inner dialogue, and the best way to combat it is to notice when it comes up and consciously reframe the messages until those new messages become our inner dialogue.

Use this worksheet to start tracking the toxic things you tell yourself. Then consider either a more accurate or at least a more balanced, helpful message. A more accurate message challenges the original toxic message entirely. A more balanced, helpful message acknowledges a fundamental truth, while focusing on managing it in a more empowering way.

TOXIC MESSAGE	ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE	BALANCED, HELPFUL RESPONSE
<p>Being pansexual means that I am a sinner and an affront to God.</p>	<p>I am a beloved child of God, made in Their image. There are many theological discussions that embrace both me and my identity and I can choose them over a message of hate.</p>	<p>X</p>

Learned Optimism

Some people are naturally optimistic. Others are hardwired for negativity, which probably kept us alive in the past. Moving on, retraining ourselves for optimism, is good for our emotional health. This worksheet is inspired by Martin Seligman's positive psychology, which is discussed in more depth on chapter 6 of *Unfuck Your Brain*. The idea is to catch your negative thinking habits and retrain your brain.

You can do this as often as you want, but try to do it at least once a week.

Learned Optimism Log Directions:

Your first time, just fill out the first three categories (A-B-C). At the end of that period go back and look for examples of pessimism and negativity. Highlight those instances. Did you beat yourself up way more than you expected?

For the second go round, add the last categories (A-B-C-D-E). This is gonna be harder—this is active work to challenge that pessimism and teach yourself optimism instead. But you got this, rock star. It takes practice, stick with it!

1. Adversity: Just the facts, baby. Describe what happened (who, what, where, when) being as precise and detailed as you can.

2. Beliefs: What were you thinking? Like, exactly. What was your self-talk? Don't care if it was crude, ugly, or weird. Write it down. If it sparked a memory or flashback, that counts, too!

3. Consequences: How did these thoughts effect how you felt? How you behaved? What went on in your body? What emotions did you experience? How did you react?

4. Dispute: There are four different ways you can dispute these negative beliefs

a. Evidence? Is there evidence that your belief was based in reality? If someone says "I hate you," then the belief that they

hate you has some evidence behind it, right? But most beliefs really don't.

b. Alternatives? Is there another way you can look at this situation? What were the non-static circumstances (for instance, do you really always bomb tests, or were you tired this time from being sick)? What are the specifics (for instance, maybe you lost a basketball game, but does that make you a bad human being or even a bad athlete)? What did others contribute to the situation (is whatever happened really ALL your fault)?

c. Implications? Is the situation really a total catastrophe? What's some perspective you can add to this (ok, so you didn't get that job...does that really mean no one will hire you from now to infinity)?

d. Usefulness? Just because something is true doesn't make it useful. How can you frame the experience as one that gives meaning to your life? Do you have a better respect for those things or people you value? Can you better demonstrate that respect now?

5. Energization: How do you feel post-disputation? Did your behavior change? Your feelings? Did you notice anything within the problem that you didn't notice before? Maybe even created a solution?

Now go celebrate your success here, hot stuff!

Here's a place to practice your learned optimism by keeping track of how you responded to bad or stressful things that happened. These "adverse events" could be anything from big, like losing your job, to relatively minor, like getting frustrated by a confusing bill.

Adverse Event:

Adversity

Belief

Consequences

Disputation

- Evidence?
- Alternatives?
- Implications?
- Usefulness?

Energization

Adverse Event:

Adversity

Belief

Consequences

Disputation

- Evidence?
- Alternatives?
- Implications?
- Usefulness?

Energization

Adverse Event:

Adversity

Belief

Consequences

Disputation

- Evidence?
- Alternatives?
- Implications?
- Usefulness?

Energization

Adverse Event:

Adversity

Belief

Consequences

Disputation

- Evidence?
- Alternatives?
- Implications?
- Usefulness?

Energization

Addiction

Let's start with one universal truth right off the bat. Practically everyone engages in some behavior in an unhealthy way. It could be something we recognize as biochemically addictive, but not necessarily. We generally think of substances we ingest, but gambling is also considered a true addiction because it changes the brain in the same way.

Then there are a lot of other things that we may do that society labels as addiction, like sex, porn, food, shopping, cell phones, and more that can be very problematic for some people but aren't classified as addictions because what is going on in the brain is different, which means the treatment is also different. The one big differing point (at the time I am writing this) is around gaming (specifically video and digital games, not tabletop gaming). One diagnostic manual does list gaming as a true addiction (the ICD) and one says there isn't enough research yet (the DSM).

It may seem like a "whatever" kind of debate, but it does matter in a treatment sense. Helping someone with an addiction to opioids is way, way different than helping someone who spends hours and hours scrolling social media. But this chapter is focusing on the similarities between addictions and out-of-control behaviors, rather than the differences. Because this is a book about working through the underlying issues, and that part doesn't change.

The science-y part of addiction and out-of-control behavior and how they are different is epically complicated, though new research is starting to give us different insights than we

have had in the past. We know that substance addictions set off the pleasure pathways in the brain like *whoa . . .* although at different levels for different people. Which helps explain why some people are more prone to substance addiction while others find that the same substances make them feel awful. Addictions are clear, especially as they progress and ramp up through time.

Problematic and out-of-control behaviors are less obvious in how they affect our lives and our brains. Those of us who take out a bag of chips or a tray of muffins after a tough day. Or go shoe shopping for our eighth pair of black sandals that we are never going to wear.

There are addictions and behaviors that excuse us from society altogether, those that keep us barely afloat within it, and those that become a barrier between us and the rest of the world. It's only a matter of degree, in the end.

How do we define when we cross over into addiction territory? As a relationally-trained therapist, my answer is a simple one. *We have an addiction or an out-of-control behavior when this thing we are doing becomes our primary relationship.* Maybe not in our hearts and heads. But in our actions, definitely. When we don't have control over our addictions, we are spending time, resources, and energy on the addiction instead of the people we love. And instead of, let's face it, ourselves.

So these exercises are designed to help you unpack how different habits, behaviors, and substances impact your life, both great and ungreat, so you can make a plan about any that you want to change.



Understand Your Substance Use or Problematic Behavior

If you are reading this it's because something in your life feels like it may be getting out of control. Most people don't engage in any behavior in a problematic or addictive way from the

Some people find that if they continue with this use or behavior, the nature of those reasons changes or their amount of use changes. Have you experienced any changes in how/when/why you use from when you first started? If yes, how so?

Have your usage or behaviors influenced your thoughts, feelings, or judgements in any way? How so? Have you noticed that you only act in certain ways when using/engaging in this particular behavior? What is different? What outcomes have those differences caused?

get-go. Maybe you used something for acute pain (physical or emotional). Or to relax. Or to have fun. What initially got you interested? What do you enjoy about it?

Some people are able to engage in a lot of behaviors or substance use with seemingly no ill effects on the rest of their lives. They still make it to work or school. They don't appear to have any family problems. And maybe you fall into this category. If that is the case, have you noticed any small changes in your functioning? Maybe stuff no one else has even noticed but you are aware of. Also, do you think that not using or engaging in these behaviors may increase your functioning? In measurable ways (time, money, sleep) or immeasurable ways (energy, stress)? How so?

If you stopped using/engaging in a particular behavior what would you miss most? What else would need to change in your life to make it possible? What would you gain? What new things would be possible? Is the trade-off worth it?

Defining and Creating Recovery

Recovery is a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential.

Health: *Learning to overcome, manage, or more successfully live with the symptoms of existing illness(es) and making healthy choices that support one's physical and emotional wellbeing*

What would you like to achieve in this domain of recovery?

Purpose: *Meaningful daily activities, such as a job, school, volunteer work, or creative endeavors; and, increased ability to lead a self-directed life; and meaningful engagement in society*

What would you like to achieve in this domain of recovery?

Home: *A stable and safe place to live*

What would you like to achieve in this domain of recovery?

Community: *Relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship, love, and hope*

What would you like to achieve in this domain of recovery?

Identifying Activators

Anyone trying to change their behavior patterns, whether avoiding relapse or avoiding reactivation of problematic behaviors, knows that certain things activate the desire to use or to engage in these behaviors.

Generally, the word *triggers* is used to describe what makes you want to throw fuck-all to the wind and soothe yourself with what helped most in the past. The word *triggers* is also used to

describe situations in which the brain relives a past traumatic event, so I'm using the term *activators* to describe the situations in which all of our progress in recovery gets threatened and the desire for all our previous behaviors comes rushing back.

So for our purposes here, let's talk about *activators* as any stimulus that contributes to emotional and behavioral responses that you are working to change. Below, you can list your specific activators for the following categories:

Activities

People

Situations

Places

Things

Emotional States

Thoughts

If you are activated, what is the worst-case scenario? What substances or behaviors are you concerned you will engage in? What tend to be the typical consequences when that happens?

Looking at all the ways you may find yourself activated listed above, which are your three biggest? That is, which ones most worry you as being ones you will struggle to manage? Explain in detail:

1

2

3

Which ways (if any) are you able to avoid those situations or mitigate your amount of exposure?

1

2

3

What strategy do you want to try for dealing with the situation head-on if it can't be avoided?

1

2

3

How can you increase your chances of these strategies being effective? (E.g., practice beforehand, keep a reply stored in my notes app on my phone that I can look at before answering people, ask a friend to be my "stay out of trouble" wingman, etc.)

Strategy Review

Here is your "report card" space. Because nothing sucks more than using coping skills that don't actually help you cope, right? This is where you can take down notes so you can remember which ones were the most helpful, so you can return to them when the stress goblins roll up.

Which strategies were generally unhelpful and need to get sent to the recycling bin?

Which were helpful and you want to keep using?

Are there any ways these strategies can be adapted to other situations? Where else might they be useful?

Are there any tweaks or modifications that increase their effectiveness?



Building Healthy Habits

We don't really think enough about habits. We think we do, but what we are really focusing on are our goals, which are the outcomes we are hoping to achieve. Healthy habits, in comparison, are our *everyday actions that are in service of our goals* (not to mention helping life generally be as manageable as possible). Healthy habits are our building blocks to a healthier life and are often in service of multiple goals.

Building a new habit is hard. We're having to build a new neural pathway which requires some heavy trench work for a while. Even then, the old pathways don't go away. They get weeded over a bit, and we become more and more cognizant that we are heading in the wrong direction. But we always have to keep in mind that the old path is still there in our brains and can be reactivated.

That may be more-than-slightly frustrating news but it's also good news, because that means it's true for *all* our neural pathways. If you have been working on your new healthy habit trenches and you fall off for a while? The work you did hasn't disappeared. It's waiting for you to get back on the right path and keep digging. The progress isn't lost entirely. If it's physical exercise, you will be sore again for awhile while your body gets back on track, but your brain didn't lose that progress and remembers what to do.

So let's start with small habits. What are three incremental changes you can make that are in support of your long-term goals and a healthier life? Be as specific as possible, while trying to allow some flexibility. For example, going walking once a week for 20 minutes is awesome. And Tuesdays may seem like the best day right now, but allow yourself the space to make it Thursday if Tuesday gets totally biffed.

Habit 1: _____

Habit 2: _____

Habit 3: _____

Now, how can you make each new habit frictionless? "Frictionless" is the term used to describe making new habits as easy as possible to engage in to give them a fighting chance over the old, established neural pathways. This usually means making environmental changes so you aren't exhausted by the mental energy these changes require. For example, I keep healthier but still delicious snacks at my office and in my car. If they are right there and they are things I like (like cocoa dusted almonds) I will grab those rather than stopping at a gas station and getting something that spikes my blood sugar too much and leaves me nauseous within an hour.

Habit 1 Support Plan:

Habit 2 Support Plan:

Habit 3 Support Plan:

Now, how can you tie each habit to something else you already do that you plan on continuing to do? For example, if your favorite podcast drops every Monday, can you listen to it while you work on organizing your home office? Or even if you can't do things at the same time, you can still plan doing one right before or after the other. For example "After I get home, I will turn off the car and meditate for 5 minutes before I go into the house."

Habit 1 Connection Plan:

Habit 2 Connection Plan:

Habit 3 Connection Plan:

Some other habit-keeping tips:

- 1) Get an accountability buddy. Tell someone what you are working on and invite them to check in on you and your progress. You'll want to be able to give them a positive report when they do!
- 2) Don't beat yourself up for not doing it exactly right. If you planned on walking for 30 minutes and were only able to handle 20? That's still 20 more minutes than before, right?
- 3) Celebrate your successes, as long as the rewards aren't contradictory to your new habits. If you are working to eat mindfully and recognize your own full signals, rewarding yourself with a binge is a contradictory habit, right? But there are many other things you can do to treat yourself...and they can even still include something really delicious to eat... as long as you are able to hold onto your new habit in the process.
- 4) Keep a habit tracking log. You get to see your progress on paper and sometimes being able to give ourselves gold stars feels so positive that becomes a reward in and of itself. There are tons of habit tracker apps that you can download, or you can create a spreadsheet, but there is also one included in this book if you are an old-fashioned paper person like I am!

Habit Tracker

You may remember the “21 days to change a habit” meme that was going around awhile back. Unfortunately, brains are way more stubborn than that. Research shows, getting new habits to stick takes a good 3-6 months, not 21 days. (This was a relief for me to find out, I thought I was an epic failure as a human being.) Start off by tracking one or two things that are really

important to you and will be fundamental to other things you want to achieve. And keep it manageable. If you have been living on ramen noodles, cold pizza, and bong water, only kale salads and acai bowls may be a stretch...but decreasing your ultra processed food intake by 30% is a great start, right?

Habit	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
Month																																

Habit : _____

Month : _____

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31

Social Supports

Social support refers to any of the people, groups, and communities that you can access to provide either tangible or intangible assistance to buffer your resilience in times of stress. Resilience means our ability to adapt to adversity without having our whole life go sideways because of it.

There are three types of social support:

- **Information Support:** Information support is when someone has the knowledge or the hook-up on the resources you need to resolve a particular problem. A friend recently needed therapy but didn't have health insurance or a ton of money because he's in school. I gave him the info on where to go, who to ask for when he got there, and what to say to access a particular therapy grant. He just needed some resources, then he did all the work.
- **Material Support:** Material support are the tangibles. Like covering part of someone's rent for them because they didn't get enough hours at their job, or helping them fix something they couldn't afford to have fixed, or giving them a ride to a job interview because the site is off the bus line. This is the kind of support that can be measured in some way.
- **Emotional Support:** This is the type of support that provides you space for your stress, anxiety, anger, depression or general overwhelm. These are the people to whom you have a sense of connectedness, of being seen and understood. They are empathic and supportive without letting you off the hook if you are heading toward a bad decision (or already made one), but provide compassion and encouragement while you work to stay or get back on track.

How could social support be of benefit to you with your current struggles?

List three people, groups, or communities you could access for social support

1.

2.

3.

Which type of supports are offered by these individuals or groups? How do each of these supports help you? Or how could they if you reached out?

1.

2.

3.

What gets in the way of you accessing these supports?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In what specific ways could you work around these access issues? How else could you better utilize these supports?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Finding Social Support in a Hopeless Place

Many people have little to no social support in their lives. I hear this regularly and it breaks my heart. So let's talk about ways of building social supports.

- 1) Make an effort to reconnect with family and friends that you have lost touch with over time (unless, of course, they've asked you not to). This doesn't mean

five minutes into a conversation hitting them up for a ride to the airport, just relationship building for its own sake. Start prioritizing the good people in your life, and being social supports to them.

- 2) Join a support group. Find people who are working through issues the same or similar to yours and find space in their meetings.

- 3) Get more active in your community in general. Do things you are interested in trying or used to do and really miss. This could be joining a gaming group, a running club, or a cooking class. Whatever. Even if you don't make any new friends right away, activities like these won't feel like wasted time because you had fun and pushed yourself out of your comfort zone. Which is a healthy coping skill in and of itself.

- 4) Professional supports are also supports. Doctors, therapists, case managers, etc. It's our literal job to help you problem-solve these issues that are chipping away at your resilience. Let us know!

What are three strategies that you can use this month to build more social supports?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Grief

Grief means, most simply, *deep sorrow*. The word grief comes from the old French *grever*, which means “to burden.” Grief becomes a literal burden we carry.

Gabor Mate, in his book *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, discusses how emotional pain lights up the brain the same way physical pain does. When we hurt, we *literally* hurt. It is just as much a bodily burden as a broken bone or serious physical illness.

Grief is the fundamental process of letting go. In her book *How Can I Help?* June Cerza Kolf notes the statistic that the number one fear experienced by human beings is the fear of abandonment. C. S. Lewis, in his book *A Grief Observed* stated:

“No one ever told me that grief is so much like fear.”

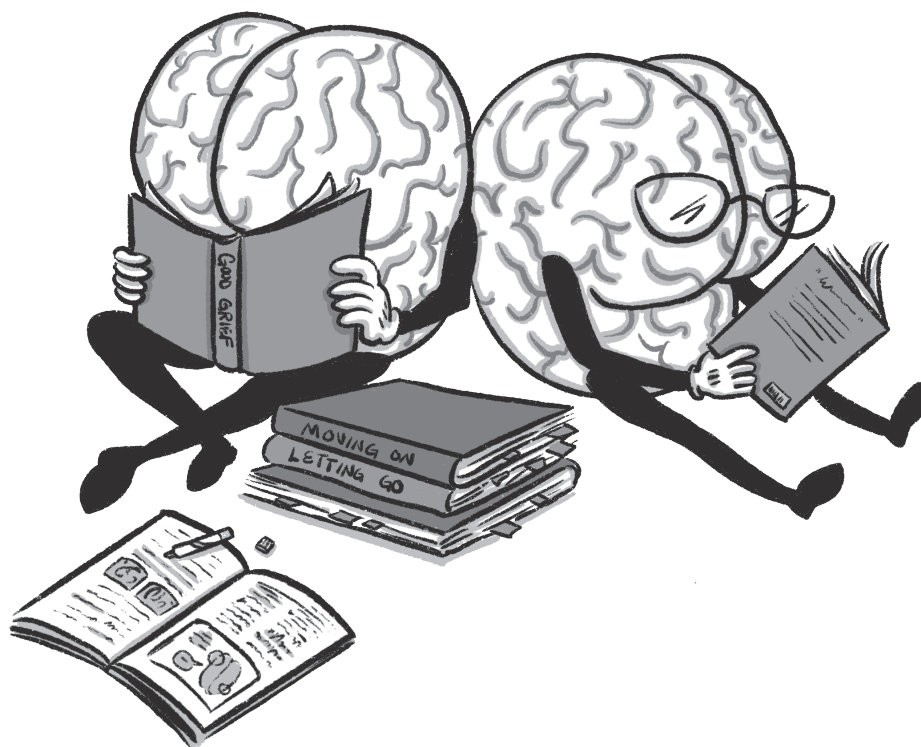
Grief is a realization of the certainty of abandonment. It is our worst fear made reality.

It makes sense, then, that we don’t really talk much about grief. It scares us shitless. We fear that discussing it will somehow invoke it. While we know at an intellectual level that

abandonment is unavoidable throughout our human existence on the planet, it still knocks us sideways when it happens.

When we discuss grief, our first thought is always of death. But grief is the experience of any kind of loss, any type of abandonment in our lives. Grief can come with the loss of a job, the loss of a relationship (through any means, not just death), or the loss of a way of life we have come to know and expect. We can grieve changes even if they are happy ones. Getting married can be an amazing thing, but we may still grieve the loss of our single days. Becoming an adult is something we all looked forward to, until that moment we had to grieve the freedom of childhood and the ability to hand over decisions to someone else.

Our cultural expectation is to possess rather than release. Loss (abandonment) is a forced release for which we have few mechanisms to heal ourselves or support healing in others. We don’t talk about the inevitable *letting go* of that which we think we possess.



Grief Checklist: Types of Loss Both Tangible and Intangible

There isn't any way to capture *all* the losses that cause grief without being deeply vague, so this is not even close to an exhaustive list. But this is a good starting point for recognizing losses that are both tangible and intangible. Take a look at this list and mark down losses that have hit you in the past, ones you are coping with right now, and ones that you foresee in your future.

Examples of Tangible Loss

Past Present Future

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Death |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | End of relationship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Moving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Starting, ending, or changing jobs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Starting, ending, or changing school |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Changes in Health/Illness (Physical or Mental, Visible or Invisible) for self or loved one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Financial issues/financial status changes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Legal issues |

Examples of Intangible Loss

- | | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Trust |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Safety |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Control |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Power |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Privacy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Connection |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Respect |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Faith |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Loss of Independence |

Questions For Reflection

What type of loss or losses are you currently grappling with?

Did anything on this list lead to a recognition that you are struggling with more than you realized?

Did you recognize an intangible component to a tangible loss?

Prolonged Grief Questionnaire

You will see many terms bandied about regarding prolonged grief, including unresolved grief or traumatic grief. I'm using the Columbia University School of Social Work term here because it's less pathologizing and more accurate. Prolonged just means "hey this one is taking awhile....maybe with some

guidance and support I can create some breathing room for myself" instead of "you are being sad wrong and too long."

These questions aren't designed to determine if you are grieving properly or are really fucked up, but to help you identify where you may benefit from support.

What are you grieving?

Are you struggling to accept your new reality? In what ways?

How long ago did this event take place?

Is your grief interfering with your daily life? In what ways?

Are you experiencing intrusive and distressing thoughts/ images surrounding what happened? If so, how often and what impact are they having on your day to day life?

Do you feel disconnected from those around you? In what ways? Is it everyone or certain people?

What have you avoided because of your grief? Such as going places, enjoying certain things?

Are you unable or unwilling to discuss what/who you are grieving or your feelings around your grief?

Do you catch yourself discussing it only in binaries, only positive aspects or only negative ones? How so?

Do you feel guilty if you forget for a moment?

What concerns do you have around the idea of healing grief/moving forward?

Are all memories painful, even the positive ones? Any in particular?

Do you fear losing your connection to who or what you lost if you don't hold on to the pain you are currently feeling?

Are the people who care about you worried about you? What are they expressing? Do you find any of their concerns valid? How so?

The Four Tasks of Grief

The recognition of the complexity of the grieving process in humans comes from Sigmund Freud, who was a weirdo in some (many) respects but also a hell of a bright observer of human nature. In his 1917 book, *Mourning and Melancholia*, he wrote that we are story-telling, meaning-making creatures who don't just get sad and then move on. Grief, he told us, is something we must find ways to carry with us in order to prevent being buried by it.

Though as is typical in the psychology field (and probably every other field) we have a tendency to forget what we knew and that was true of grief work for some time. This wasn't Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' fault, however. She is widely given credit (and sometimes vilified for identifying "the five stages of grief," but what she actually formulated was "the five stages of dying." This is a hugely important distinction, because dying has an end point and grief does not. So many of us have gaslit ourselves into thinking, "Okay, we go through this process, hit acceptance, and we're done." But like Freud said 100+ years ago, it doesn't work like that.

Psychology professor James Worden revisited Freud's understanding of grief as being a task-oriented process instead of a stage-wise one. In 1996 he published the article: "Tasks and Mediators of Mourning: A Guideline for the Mental Health Practitioner," in which he outlined the following four tasks (which I have adapted to encompass all forms of grief, not just mourning the death of a loved one). These tasks don't have to be done in a specific order or all at once. They're just work that we all have to do at some point:

1. *To accept the reality of the loss*
2. *To process the pain of grief*
3. *To adjust to the world as it is now, after the loss.*
4. *To reinvest in the future by finding connections between what life was before and the life you are creating in the present*

I love the idea that our relationship with grief is a proactive one.. This helps us remember how deeply individual every grief process is. There is no one right way to visit (and revisit) these tasks, just as there is no one right way to complete any other work in your life...whether it be practical tasks like

household chores or emotional health tasks like identifying and communicating boundaries.

Additionally, all of these tasks involve a process of adaptation to what is with an eye to possibility for the future. The first two are loss-oriented activities (connecting the pain of what happened) and the last are restoration-oriented activities (finding ways of being connected to the present and future while carrying that loss as part of us).

If you originally were taught that grief is passive and stage-wise, what is different for you by considering it proactive and task-oriented? How does it change your relationship with grief?

What tasks do you most feel drawn to in the present? Are you visiting this task for the first time or are you revisiting it? Did anything in particular make this task more relevant for you in the present?

What would be most helpful as you visit these tasks? What support would serve you in the present and near future?

Healing Milestones and Derailers

The concept of milestones and derailers was developed at The Center for Prolonged Grief at Columbia University's School of Social Work, which was founded in 2013 to provide resources and tools for grief that has been unrelenting in the long term (yes, hence the word prolonged). But I think anyone currently journeying with grief can benefit from a check-in on where they are and how they might get stuck.

Mnemonics are helpful organizational tools, but they don't imply this is a linear, stepwise process. It's only a way of understanding all the moving parts associated with something big and nebulous and complex and practically incomprehensible. And even a milestone that is "done" may need to be re-done on the regular.

Milestones of HEALING

Honor both yourself and others involved in this grief process, including the relationship itself. I think of this as akin to self-compassionate awareness, meaning letting yourself really recognize where you are at and the complexity of the emotional experience you are having. If your grief involves the loss of a relationship (through death or any other means) this honoring extends to the other person and the relationship itself.

Ease your emotional pain. Think of ease, in this instance, as *being easy with*—an openness to the reality of your emotional experience, both good and bad. It's giving yourself permission to feel what you feel, knowing that those huge, breath-stealing spikes of grief will settle somewhat over time. And the times where there is some measure of relief, and you're enjoying yourself somewhere, you don't have to feel guilty for finding joy in the present moment.

Accept grief and its place in your life. Accepting doesn't mean liking or agreeing with anything, just the recognition of reality.

Learn to live in a world full of reminders of your grief. We can't hide from the world forever, so we look to find ways to recognize and hold these reminders without losing our ability to navigate our daily lives.

Integrate these memories and reminders. This is part of you and part of your story. Every part of you and your story molds, and shapes, and influences who you are and where you are going.

Narrate the stories of your loss to share as appropriate. Humans are wired for story, and you don't have to hide yours because there are painful aspects of it. Communicating our loss helps us honor it.

Gather the people who matter to you around you. It's far more difficult to receive help than to give it, which means this is your opportunity to do another difficult and vulnerable thing. Let people love you, support you, and hold space for you.

Which task are you currently working with?

Is it the first time you have opened to this task or is it one that re-presented itself?

What activated you to connect to this task?

What support would help with this process?

Is there any task you are most avoidant or fearful of working with?



DERAILERS to Our Healing Process

Doubt that you did enough, said enough, were enough.

Embracing ideas about grief that lead you to try to shape it in some way. That you are “doing grief wrong” and need to change or control your current experience.

Repeatedly fantasizing about things turning out differently than they did. Or somehow could be undone or reversed in the present moment.

Anger, bitterness, and resentment that become stuck. This doesn't mean that it isn't a justified emotion (nor do you need to justify any emotion anyway...whatever you are feeling is whatever you are feeling). But these strong emotions that we tend to deem negative are meant to serve a specific purpose. They don't serve when they hang around and impede to live fully or get in the way of making change effectively.

Insistence that reality be something other than what it is. Something may have been unfair, or wrong, or even entirely

avoidable but that doesn't change what happened. Which means we have to cope with the reality of the situation instead of staying trapped in what we want it to be.

Lack of faith that we can adapt to the world the way it is now. Lack of faith means you are not only hopeless about the future, you can't even muster any curiosity about what it might look like if you keep moving forward.

Excessive avoidance of reminders of the loss. At some point, our world gets very very small if we try to protect ourselves from the reality of our pain. And, let's be honest, it doesn't really actually protect us, does it?

Rejecting support and help from others. There is no doing this by yourself, we heal in connection.

Survivor guilt. Which refers to any notion that you deserve pain and suffering after your loss.

Where do you tend to find yourself derailed?

What consequences of derailment have you noticed in yourself and those around you?

What strategies may help you grapple with these tendencies in order to change your relationship with this loss?

Taking Action: Honoring Grief Through Ceremony

We've talked about how the human brain is wired for story. And music. And connection. Is it any wonder, then, that we crave ceremony?

Cornell anthropologist Meredith Small calls ceremonies the punctuation marks of life. This makes sense, right? If our operating memory can only hold seven (yes, plus or minus two) items of knowledge at a time, so it makes total sense that we think in symbols and navigate the world within that reality? That we make meaning through creative expression?

We have certain cultural ceremonies for grief. Funerals being the obvious example. But funerals are often soulless. A box to be checked off, rather than an opportunity to grieve. And so

many grief-filled events do not get a closure ceremony. Not because we don't need it, but because there is no language for that need.

And this is where we fill in the gap.

What are you grieving that you don't even have words for? What symbolizes your experience? How can you use these symbols to create meaning? What would your ceremony entail?

Tonglen for Interconnection

Tonglen is a meditation practice from the Tibetan Buddhism tradition. I came to tonglen as a way to sit with individuals who were in the process of dying. The practice involves breathing in their pain and breathing out a release of that pain.

After many years of practice, I realized that the practice strengthened my own practice of self-compassion. I am not the first person to notice this (again, I'm slow). Pema Chodron and Christopher Germer both say “Yes, dumbass. Use tonglen for your own pain.”

Tonglen is a Tibetan word that means *take-give*. Breathe IN the pain of others and breath out healing energy on their behalf. Wouldn't breathing in our own pain just mean we are mucking around in our shit again? Not if we do it right. Instead of holding it, we are recognizing it and giving it an opportunity to release.

Give it a try. Breathe in a mindfulness of your experience as a fundamentally human one, and breathe out a relief for both yourself and others feeling similar pain. What shifts inside you? How do you feel in relation to the rest of the world?

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This Is Your Brain on Depression
Unfuck Your Adulting
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Unfuck Your Blow Jobs
Unfuck Your Body
Unfuck Your Boundaries
Unfuck Your Brain
Unfuck Your Cunnilingus
Unfuck Your Grief
Unfuck Your Friendships
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Unfuck Your Boundaries Workbook
Unfuck Your Intimacy Workbook
Unfuck Your Worth Workbook
Unfuck Your Year

Other

Boundaries Conversation Deck
How Do You Feel Today? (poster)

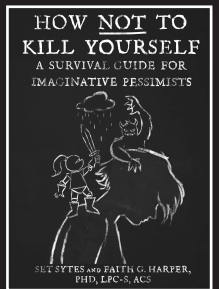
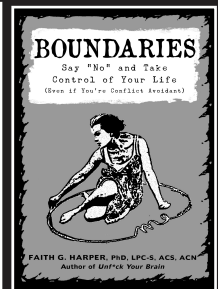
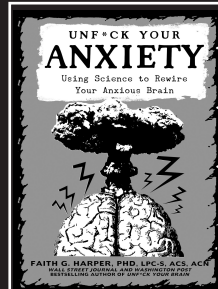
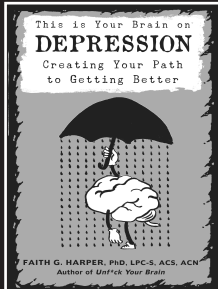
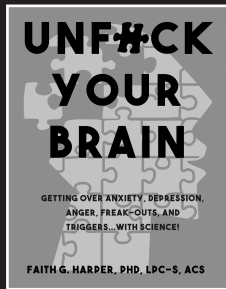
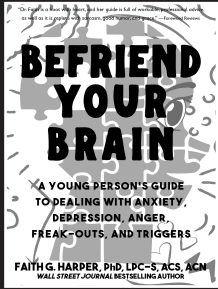
Zines

The Autism Handbook (with Joe Biel)
The Autism Partner Handbook (with Joe Biel)
BDSM FAQ
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Detox Your Masculinity (with Aaron Sapp)
Emotional Freedom Technique
The Five Emotional Hungers

Getting Over It
How to Find a Therapist
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The Revolution Won't Forget the Holidays
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Sex Tools
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STI FAQ (with Aaron Sapp)
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This Is Your Brain on Grief
This Is Your Brain on PTSD
Unfuck Your Consent
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