

RADICAL SELF-CARE

*Inclusive Tools for Overcoming
PTSD, Heartbreak, Conflict, Anger,
Discrimination, Addiction, Anxiety,
and Other Trapped Emotions*



SAGE LISKEY

ILLUSTRATED BY TARA CHÁVEZ

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Promo Chapters 1-6

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Chapters 1 through 6 are complete and Chapters 7 through 18 are previews with illustrations. If you would like to read the complete book, please order a signed copy directly from me at etsy.com/shop/radcatpress, request it at your local bookstore, or order it on Amazon – you can also find the e-book and audiobook there. Hope you enjoy!

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About The Author, About The Artist

Feedback Please!

Feedback is welcome for corrections, clarifications, and additions, especially as it relates to fighting various forms of discrimination. The contents herein cover many sensitive subjects and I want to make sure to be releasing information that is as beneficial as possible to readers. Please reach out at radcatpress@gmail.com if you would like to share your thoughts. Thank you!

Medical Statement

While the contents of this book are thoroughly researched and I have successfully used many of the techniques discussed, I do not guarantee the accuracy of the information herein and I withhold any liability for the effects it may have in your own life. Please use this information at your own risk. If possible you should work with a therapist or other psychiatric professional while addressing your mental health. You should also always talk to your doctor before ingesting anything mentioned.

Furthermore, these techniques are meant for adults. While some are equally beneficial for children and teenagers, they may have to be learned or applied in ways specific to younger age groups that go beyond the scope of this book. For help raising a healthy child, I suggest reading John Gottman's *Raising An Emotionally Intelligent Child*. To release trapped emotions in children, read *Trauma-Proofing Your Kids* by Maggie Kline and Peter Levine, *What Happened To You* by Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey, or *The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog* by Bruce D. Perry.

This book primarily deals with trapped emotions and attachment wounds that form the roots of PTSD, complex PTSD, heartbreak, anxiety, conflict, anger, jealousy, sadness, and other states of suffering. While the techniques covered can be effective for some forms of depression and will benefit anyone wishing to become more resilient in life, it should be known that there are many more causes of depression that can be explored in *The Depression Sourcebook* by Dr. Brian Quinn. The *Huberman Lab* podcast also has some great episodes on depression. Please read other resources or see a doctor if you believe your symptoms have proliferated from more than just life events and thinking patterns. Among these include inflammation, malnutrition, diet, lifestyle choices, hormonal shifts, gut health, chemical poisoning, genes, chemical imbalances, and events that happened to your ancestors.

There are also brain wirings such as bipolar, autism, ADHD, and high sensitivity that create extra considerations for your mental health. When undiagnosed or untreated, these conditions can make self-help information ineffec-

tive or difficult to apply. Keep in mind that many doctors are not well-trained in treating mental health struggles and you may need to seek out someone who is specifically researched in trauma, psychiatry, gut health, nutrition, and traditional psychiatric medications. At the very least, if a doctor prescribes you an antidepressant, they should also prescribe you a therapist. People dealing with chronic illnesses or conditions may also benefit from finding emerging and time-tested treatments in Tony Robbins's book, *Life Force*. That said, chronic illnesses can also be caused by or worsened by trapped emotions.

The contents of this book can bring up a lot of emotions in readers, so please take care of yourself as necessary. Chapters 2 and 3 may be especially difficult for some readers learning for the first time about how certain difficult events formed their behaviors and personality. It is okay to go slow or skip over information that is too triggering to handle right now. Many coping tools can be found in Chapters 4 and 5, especially Section 4.9. If you have thoughts of killing or harming yourself, or know someone else who is, please call the National Suicide Hotline at 800-273-8255. You can also call or text 988. Remember that things will get better with time and that change can happen very quickly.

Personal Disclaimer

This information summarizes and adds important additions to titles like *Complex PTSD*, *The Body Keeps The Score*, *What Happened To You*, and *My Grandmother's Hands*. While these books are great and include compelling narratives, they neglect to mention many aspects of healing. With so much important information to include, storytelling in *Radical Self-Care* is fairly minimal. That said, I share some snippets from my personal journey and have done my best to keep information concise and easy to understand. Chapter 17 also includes specific examples of using the techniques described. I do not typically go into the science behind the techniques I talk about, however, you can read any number of the sources mentioned to learn more if this interests you. Most of the techniques I have written about I have tried myself or have friends who have successfully used them.

I do strongly believe that the skills covered throughout this book will help anyone, no matter how marginalized, depressed, or economically disadvantaged they are. However, due to various forms of discrimination, many groups lack certain privileges or inherently feel unsafe in society. It may be harder for them to utilize some of the information provided. For these groups, deep healing will be difficult until larger cultural and structural changes happen, but increasing one's resilience to stress is still attainable with these techniques. I also conclude with a guide on becoming an effective

changemaker to create a more equitable world. Beyond that chapter, readers should know that this book also illuminates how their oppressors started acting out in abuse and hatred. Understanding and dismantling trapped emotions is one of the greatest things people can do to fight against injustice socially and environmentally.

I have done my best to include the lived realities of marginalized communities and as part of the editing sought out a racially and gender-diverse group of readers to comment on this work. That said, this is not a comprehensive guide to oppression, but I hope it can act as a very solid summary for readers to uproot oppression in themselves and society. I am not perfect and acknowledge having internal biases to still work through. I had the privilege of growing up in the body of a White man without a disability in the United States of America and with a family who gave me support when in need. While I have been on the brink of suicide, have spent most of my life living well below the poverty line, was subjected to body shaming, had a speech impediment, do not fit into the mainstream norms of what a man is “supposed” to be, and was raised within a dysfunctional family, the difficulties I have experienced were made much easier because of my privileges. There are struggles I can empathize with but can never fully understand. Please contact me at <radcatpress@gmail.com> if you have thoughts on how I can improve this dialogue in healing humanity. More about how this book is being made accessible can be found at <www.sageliskey.com>.

How To Use This Book

Radical Self-Care guides readers through how to overcome any past emotional difficulty. Starting at the end of Chapter 3, there are also questions to help you reflect on the reading. A lot of information is presented here, so it is recommended to keep a journal, highlight or underline passages of interest, and use sticky notes to mark content you would like to return to later. This will help you integrate and keep track of the pieces you find valuable. Take what you need and leave the rest. Just know that simply reading may not be enough. Some of these techniques must be performed dozens or hundreds of times as a regular practice to see the most benefit.

If you are struggling with more severe trapped emotions or have been diagnosed with PTSD or complex PTSD, you may benefit most by reading this book in chronological order and trying the exercises along the way. The contents build on each other in the following order: understanding trapped emotions, learning how to regulate your nervous system, building resources to handle your emotions and memories, learning to experience the present moment and your body, tools for renegotiating stories and releasing trapped

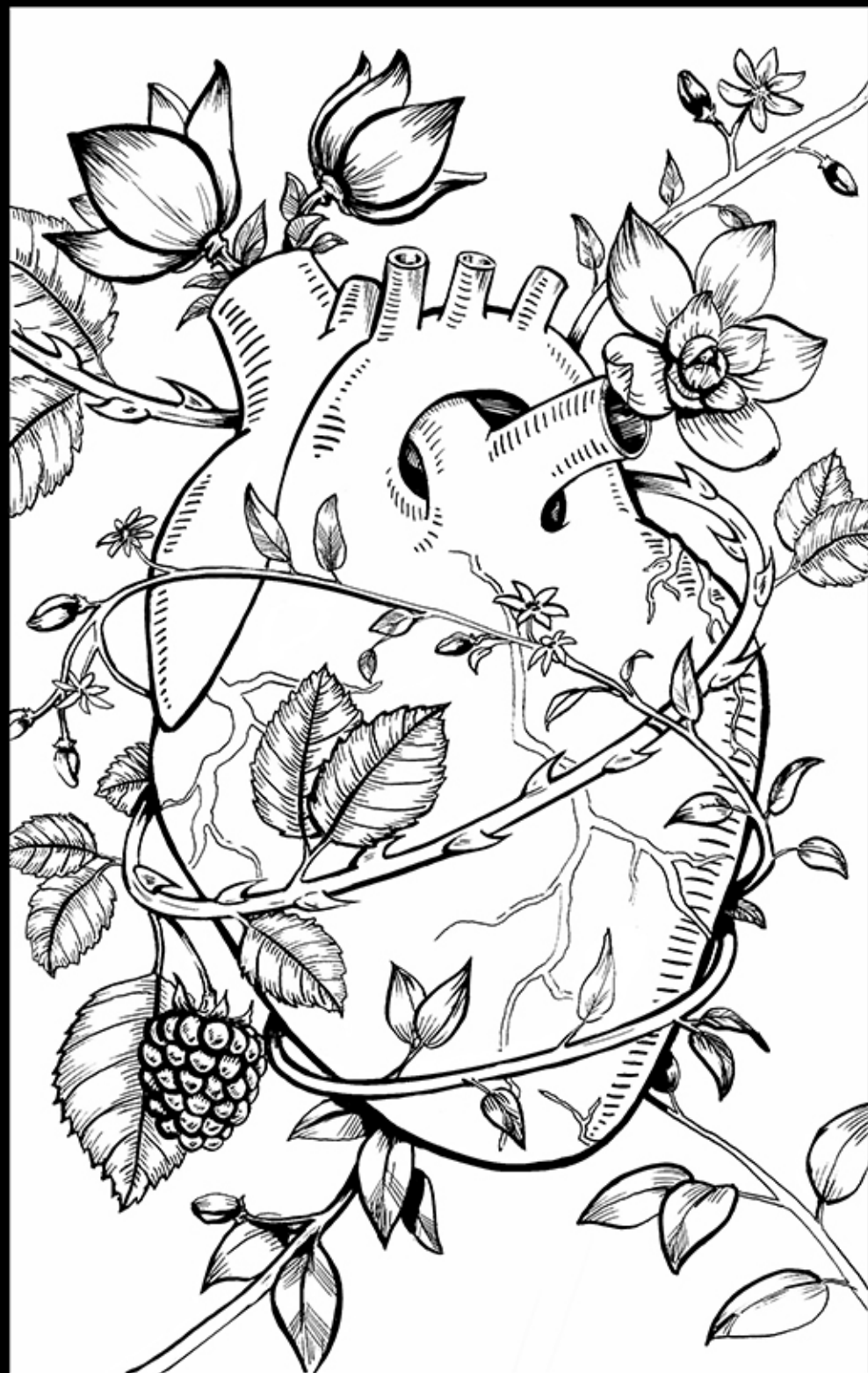
emotions, and lastly, creating changes internally and externally to improve your life.

Even sections that do not seem to pertain to you may offer unique insights. After your initial read-through, go back and focus on the techniques and exercises that felt especially relevant, or do further reading that I mention in the Works Referenced. Of course, you may have already started on your healing journey and wish to focus on whatever areas feel most beneficial to you right now. If you want some practical tools for immediate use, the basic self-care information in Section 4.9 is a great place to start.

Otherwise, many readers will want to use this book as a reference guide for things like improving their communication, dealing with anger, or transforming self-limiting beliefs. In this case, you can refer to the Table Of Contents or Chapter 17 for ways of dealing with specific trapped emotions. I do suggest beginning with reading the first two chapters though to understand some of the basic concepts used throughout the book.

Special Thanks

Many friends and acquaintances pitched in their insights to help edit this book and give feedback on the cover design. I want to thank Tessa Angelica, Heather T. Campbell, Mysti Frost, Christina Appleby, Ashley Wright, Thuy H. S. Nguyen, Autumn Hummell, Lauren Appell, Alanna Sowels, Tonya Marie, Lela Copeland, Larissa Varela, Rosalie Sermak, Savannah Rose, Sieglind Gatewood, Erika Hauptman, William C. Parham, JR Worley, Sonya Marie, Zoe Werthamer, Alex Renirie, Marcella Dean, and Madelaine Au. You made this work a million times better! I also want to give an extra big thanks to my childhood friend Tara Chávez for her amazing illustrations, dedication, and wonderful suggestions along the way.



Chapter 1

Foreword

Before the introduction, I feel that it is important to explain the inspiration for this book. I use the terms trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in this foreword, but only to describe how I find these terms problematic and confusing. In some ways, this book is all about trauma, PTSD, and complex PTSD, but through the perspective that even seemingly small difficulties can have long-term negative impacts on anyone. I believe that any event or unresolved emotion can be traumatic or cause alterations in behaviors. These include heartbreak, conflict, anger, discrimination, and many types of depression and anxiety. While the terms trauma and PTSD can be useful for many people seeking specific types of support, they won't appear much later on because of how misleading they are. Allow me to explain.

As a young child, I experienced a lot of stress surrounding my parents, my body, and society at large. These difficulties were simply the norm; I did not know anything else. Together they resulted in deep anxiety, depression, anger, and a constant sense of abandonment which prevented me from trusting others. In reaching adulthood, I was finally able to address many of these feelings, but something important was still missing from my healing. After an extremely difficult relationship ended in 2019 and at the suggestion of a therapist, I began looking more deeply into how being the child of an alcoholic impacted my brain. I quickly realized that I had *complex PTSD* and started to broaden my knowledge on the topic through my local library's free audiobooks. It blew my mind, yet also made me realize how words like PTSD and trauma are deeply misunderstood.

While I believe labels can be very useful for addressing symptoms of various mental health conditions, and I pride myself in being fairly open about my mental health struggles, I had never thought of myself as traumatized. Trauma felt too extreme to describe what I had experienced growing up, even though I now understand those events caused me many difficult symptoms correlated with PTSD. I began to realize that this stigma often holds people

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back, and it's not their fault considering that PTSD started as a word to describe the symptoms of war veterans and sexual assault survivors. Even though it is now understood to be caused by many other circumstances, this association often prevents people from getting a proper diagnosis or the help they need. Even the five therapists I had over the years never mentioned that I might have PTSD.

I did benefit greatly from the books I read about PTSD, more than what any therapist had ever done for me. However, I also found that most of this literature is not very accessible or useful to the casual reader. The writing often disregards many forms of trauma, never discusses how to change maladaptive behaviors, relies on expensive therapy practices, ignores the power of healthy communication, entirely neglects marginalized and underprivileged individuals, disregards psychedelic therapies, or misunderstands the true breadth of trauma and PTSD in society.

Just like many doctors, researchers, and therapists do when speaking about mental health, these books tended to dissect a complex issue away from its whole form.⁶² I'll share more about the limitations of the mental health and therapy industry in Section 4.7. While I had not planned on writing another mental health book for quite a while, I found it imperative to do so as I began discovering ways to heal. So what are trauma and PTSD really?

Trauma and PTSD are often used interchangeably, but they are different. *Trauma* in Greek means "wound." It is simply an event that your mind or body experiences as negative, dangerous, or deadly. It is an energetic protective mechanism, and everyone reacts differently depending on their resilience, symptoms, past, and the event itself. Traumatic experiences most often cause sadness, anxiety, depression, PTSD, or complex PTSD. An official PTSD diagnosis is given when a person has intrusive and avoidant symptoms, changes in mood and thinking, an alteration in their ability to regulate their nervous system, as well as changes in how they react to external stimuli.^{132A} These correlate to parts of the brain being shut off or greatly diminished. More generally, PTSD is a traumatic energy that remains unresolved and trapped in the body even months after happening. This causes a wide variety of pervasive symptoms meant to protect oneself from the event happening again.

Simple PTSD refers to a single difficult incident, such as an injury or deeply frightening experience. *Complex PTSD* occurs from attachment wounds, especially from caregivers, paired with repeated traumatic incidents, like growing up with an abusive, alcoholic, or neglectful parent.²¹⁸ While both types throw a person into an overly fearful and emotional state, complex

PTSD also distorts their basic sense of self, drastically altering their personality and relational behaviors. Simple and complex PTSD are most frequently triggered when confronted with a memory or stimulus similar to the initial event, but may show up in all parts of one's life in things like anxiety and depression. That is all to say that PTSD is not necessarily a disorder; it is a natural protective response to unresolved emotions and stress.

The symptoms of trauma are immense. Doctors like Bessel van der Kolk, author of *The Body Keeps The Score*, believe that if the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) was actually based in real science, the majority of the conditions described would be designated as symptoms of trauma and PTSD.^{97A} This includes many cases of anxiety, depression, narcissism, and addiction. Trauma can even result in symptoms that mimic bipolar, ADHD, and autism. The thing is, all of these symptoms can be treated with similar techniques when we understand that they are the result of trapped emotions that were left unresolved. In fact, many Indigenous groups, such as the Māori, see things like depression, trauma, sleep issues, and drug abuse all coming from the same source.^{132B}

While psychological differences do exist between different traumas, traditional healing has always involved community connection, dance, music, songs, stories, spirituality, and plant medicines.^{132C} These correlate with the *neurosequential model of therapeutics* for handling PTSD. You do not start with trying to fix a person's symptoms. Instead, you first regulate the nervous system, relate to the person, and then reason with them to fix the symptoms.^{132D} While people with severe traumatic experiences may need to go slower, deal with dissociation, integrate experiences like empathy, heal attachment wounds, and unlearn more maladaptive behaviors than others, the essential steps to healing are still similar.

Typically when we talk about traumatic events, we think of extreme situations, but behavioral and emotional changes can happen from things that seem fairly benign, especially in children. Breakups, an argument, falling on the ground, being bitten by a dog, a scary clown, failing a major test, a hospital visit, the death of a loved pet, witnessing something traumatic happen to another person, verbal abuse, an embarrassing situation, or having parents who are frequently unavailable can all be traumatic, cause maladaptive behaviors, or result in PTSD. This is especially true when no one is there to help support us through the emotions that arise or when we have already experienced past unresolved difficulties.

Some people try to distinguish between traumas with little t (small incidents), big T (really intense incidents), or not traumatic, but these designa-

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tions sometimes ignore the complexity of emotions and PTSD. Any event, even a very subtle one, can cause a difficult emotion to become trapped in the body and create painful changes in thinking and behavior. Naturally, the symptoms differ depending on the event, and some events, especially repeated ones, are likely to cause more severe trauma responses and PTSD. However, there is no way of knowing for any given individual or instance what symptoms, if any, will arise. This is because each person responds according to their unique personality and the amount of resilience they have to difficult experiences. These symptoms can also appear almost immediately or years after a traumatic event. For instance, some of the more prominent signs of complex PTSD appear only once a person has entered into a romantic relationship. This is because relationships mimic many parental and familial dynamics, thus triggering any abuse or neglect experienced as a child.

Furthermore, many symptoms that are quite detrimental to individuals are commonly accepted or even celebrated by society, such as workaholicism, perfectionism, alcoholism, aggression, or being overly giving and submissive. This often results in trauma being covered up and unaddressed no matter how much suffering it causes people and society. There are also many trauma symptoms like various forms of discrimination, sadness, depression, and anxiety that the mainstream health industry explains as cognitive or chemical problems rather than trauma. While some of it is cognitive or chemical in nature, a lot is caused by past experiences.

In other words, we may completely ignore the severe trauma someone experienced because they do not exhibit the “correct” symptoms. The thing is, any difficult experience can cause long-term negative impacts on a person’s life, and no one can know for certain if recovery will happen naturally or require intentional action. When unaddressed, even small traumas can grow into bigger and bigger problems with increasing amounts of anxiety, depression, and maladaptive behaviors.

For these reasons, I strongly dislike the words trauma and PTSD. They are confusing, intense, and prevent many people from seeking help. In their book *What Happened To You*, PTSD specialist Bruce Perry tells Oprah Winfrey, “The language [of trauma] is getting in the way of progress.”^{132E} On one hand, we could create a broad understanding that any difficult experience can create maladaptive behaviors and that most diagnoses in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* are symptoms of trauma. However, at this point, I think attempting to change the cultural understanding of trauma and PTSD would be excruciatingly difficult. In my book, *You Are A Great And Powerful Wizard*, I explore through metaphor how using the cor-

rect words and other forms of communication is essential for succeeding in life and getting your point across. To increase understanding and accessibility, I've decided to refer to PTSD, or the unresolved emotions and behaviors caused by difficult experiences, as *trapped emotions*. CPTSD is now *attachment wounds, childhood abuse, repeated highly stressful experiences, being in a long-term abusive relationship, or growing up in a dysfunctional family*. Trauma is *difficult experiences, highly stressful experiences, abusive experiences, or near-death experiences*.

Am I saying that you should change your use of PTSD and trauma? No. I'm merely trying to use words that will help more people understand the nature of their difficulties and be able to find healing from big, small, and complicated struggles. Especially with the shame that many people have after experiencing trauma, I wanted terminology that is easier for people to approach without potentially feeling even more shame. PTSD and trauma will occasionally be used throughout the book too, typically to refer to pieces of research. Above all, I want you to know that your emotions and past difficulties matter and deserve your attention. Thank you for hearing me out. I hope you enjoy.



Chapter 2

Trapped Emotions

2.1 Trapped Emotions, 2.2 Individual, Repeated, And Attachment Difficulties, 2.3 Subtle Stressful Experiences Can Be Detrimental, 2.4 Resilience, 2.5 Learned Behaviors, 2.6 Ancestral Trapped Emotions, 2.7 Recovery Increases Your Safety, 2.8 Creating A Better World, 2.9 How To Release Trapped Emotions, 2.10 The Time It Takes To Heal, 2.11 What Healing Looks Like, 2.12 Make It Work For You, 2.13 Radical Self-Care

The standard guide for living a fulfilling life given to newborns might go something like this: Welcome to the human race! You are about to be blessed with many problems no one tells you how to handle, resulting in many confusing feelings. Good luck!

For some reason, our parents, teachers, and government believe this is adequate information to succeed and be happy. It's not. Likely the reason why you are reading my book is that at some point you realized that someone messed up, things are hard, and you'd rather they be different.

Let's start again. Welcome to the human race! This guide documents the greatest tools humans have discovered in living fulfilling and happy lives. I care about you and believe you deserve the truth. The truth is not always easy, but it does come with great benefits like insurance against despair and doom.

First of all, you are a badass. You are a human being. How cool is that? You can survive in more environments than any other creature. You are capable of creating and using sophisticated tools to protect yourself and stimulate amazing sensations. With modern medicine, you can heal almost any physical or mental wound. The options for changing your life and defying fate are nearly limitless - you can grow, be a better person, become a leader, and learn to be content with what you have. However, there will be hurdles along the way.

Many of these hurdles come in the form of present or past difficult experiences such as breakups, disagreements with friends, injuries, unavailable

parents, discrimination, abuse, feeling judged, living in an unfair society, witnessing something difficult, or making a mistake. I have encountered many of these hurdles myself and want to share a few things that I discovered in my healing journey. My goal is to condense what I learned from over sixty books, a lifetime of experiences, and countless research papers into an inclusive and easy-to-understand guide exploring the many facets of recovering from emotional and traumatic events.

One of my most important discoveries was learning that what happened to you in the past often creates *trapped emotions*. Books like *The Body Keeps The Score*, *In An Unspoken Voice*, *My Grandmother's Hands*, and *Complex PTSD* explore how the severity of difficult experiences translates into a certain amount of emotional energy entering the body. This energy can immediately hinder you by taking the shape of sadness, anxiety, anger, or several other physical and emotional reactions. After a few seconds to a few months, the energy will either leave your body, or it will become trapped inside of you.

2.1 Trapped Emotions

Trapped emotions cause a wide variety of symptoms and are a large source of depression, maladaptive behaviors, addictions, discrimination, and abuse. Symptoms may appear shortly after an incident or without warning years later. These are the body's attempts to protect you from anything similar to the stressful experience happening again. However, this safety mechanism tends to be unhealthy by overgeneralizing what is dangerous or by creating a reaction that does not actually protect you. These energies show up in many ways and the same incident can make two people react entirely differently. That said, consider events and outcomes like these:

- ***Heartbreak*** - You avoid your ex and it hurts to even drive down the street you used to take to get to their house
- ***War*** - You have a panic attack when hearing loud sounds like fireworks or barking dogs
- ***Conflict*** - You are unable to forgive a friend for something they did that angered you and now frequently think about it
- ***Injury*** - You always feel distressed driving after recovering from a car accident
- ***Growing up with alcoholic or unavailable parents*** - You have trouble trusting people and constantly feel abandoned or have difficulty maintaining relationships
- ***Discriminatory media*** - You avoid certain racial groups or view

some body types as unhealthy

- ***Experiencing racism*** - You feel stressed being outside or sharing space with people of a different skin color
- ***Abuse*** - You dislike touch and struggle to trust others
- ***Regularly witnessing or hearing about atrocities*** - You feel depressed or want to quit your job

This list just scratches the surface of the long-term impacts that difficult experiences can have on your life. Trapped emotions fundamentally create a feeling of not being safe. In my research, I found three components that tie together almost every therapy modality dealing with trapped emotions:

1. ***Unexpressed emotions*** - These can include stress, grief, or anger. True anger is the innate response we use to physically defend ourselves from immediate harm. However, behind most of what we perceive as anger and stress is actually grief or the desire for a basic need to be met. All humans have needs such as sustenance, safety, love, empathy, rest, community, creativity, freedom, and purpose.¹²⁷
2. ***Distorted stories and beliefs*** - All trapped emotions perpetuate through a story that hyper-focuses on the negative aspects of an event. This story may then evolve into self-limiting beliefs you have about yourself, or beliefs that you have about objects or other people and how they relate to you. For instance, *I am unlovable, all dogs are dangerous, people who touch me are going to hurt me, they did it intentionally, or I cannot protect myself*. Trapped emotions are also often accompanied by a story of shame which may make you believe that you are alone in your experiences and cannot share what happened. You may not be consciously aware of these stories and beliefs, as they become integrated as a normal part of your reality. These beliefs may also stem from what someone said about you.
3. ***Wanting resolution*** – To the body, the initial incident never was resolved, so it continues to seek solutions to protect you from impending harm. These solutions may work temporarily but tend not to resolve the incident and actually are *maladaptive behaviors*. For instance, you may obsessively think about what you could have done differently, or start addictively consuming media, alcohol, or other substances. Many people also subconsciously recreate the incident. You may date people similar to your abusive parents hoping that they will give you the love you so desperately wanted, or put

yourself in dangerous situations after getting into a car accident. In these ways, the difficult experience or experiences that created the trapped emotion continues to persist as something happening right now or about to happen instead of a memory that occurred in the past.

In combination, these components of trapped emotions cause people to be unable to get over present or past hardships and have *flashbacks*.¹⁸⁴ Flashbacks are the various symptoms of trapped emotions that appear when stimuli similar to the original incident occur. A common example is the noise of fireworks bringing war veterans back into battle. This flashback may just involve the emotional memory, but can also include acting out the behavioral memory as well, such as hiding or lashing out in violence against others. These emotions and actions can seem like a natural part of your existence and you may struggle to understand why most other people do not respond in the same way that you do. Symptoms can also show up in all aspects of your life even without a trigger as you pick up protective behaviors, use coping mechanisms, or constantly feel distressed.

Some days are easier than others. Even with more severe trapped emotions, things like happiness, meaningful friendships, creativity, and success are still often available. However, these may be periodically interrupted by your triggers and flashbacks or cause an unhealthy obsession with them. For instance, you may find yourself too angry to effectively communicate through conflict or you hide your emotions by working too much and consuming addictive substances.

It can be exceptionally difficult to see the impact that trapped emotions have if you belong to a culture that supports unhealthy behaviors or were raised under difficult circumstances. This is especially true if you experienced painful events before forming memories, or if you have lapses in memories from dissociation (see Section 3.5). You may also attempt to logically explain the three parts above with things like *I just don't like fireworks*, or, *my coworker is inconsiderate*, when, in fact, these feelings are unconsciously formed from past hardship. However, as you learn about healthier ways of being you will start to become aware of your trapped emotions. Most importantly, working on any of these three parts will help disrupt the others and make them easier to transform. Consciously working on one part may even bring you to naturally find resolution with the others.

2.2 Individual, Repeated, And Attachment Difficulties

Any difficult experience can become trapped in the body and cause undesirable outcomes. Typically however, trapped emotions will be more severe the more intense that experience is, the closer it brings you to death, the longer it lasts, the less able you are to react to the situation, the more times it repeats, or the more it derails your sense of secure attachment. Especially with unresolved events that happened in childhood with neglectful or abusive caregivers, a grownup will have adopted a large set of protective behaviors that seem entirely natural to them. These include workaholicism, addiction, being avoidant or anxious in relationships, aggressive behaviors, codependency, a lack of self-compassion, and putting the needs of others first. Incidents that make the body believe it is going to die such as war, assault, or car accidents tend to create the strongest immediate reactions. These can include nightmares, debilitating panic attacks, severe depression, and even bodily pains or headaches.

2.3 Subtle Stressful Experiences Can Be Detrimental

Stressful energies can also become trapped very subtly. For instance, if you trip and fall in front of friends, you may feel very ashamed and not speak for some time. An experience may have also been so normalized growing up that you did not think of it as stressful. If you're raised by a parent who gives most of their praise to your sibling, you might believe you are dumb or unattractive. You might also become a perfectionistic workaholic, where nothing you do feels like enough. If you had a painful dental procedure as a child, you may avoid medical facilities now.

The media you consume will also increase your stress response to different cultures and bodies. Consider how the media has historically depicted Black people as criminals or side characters, and how the fashion industry only models one type of body while shaming others. Things like this perpetuate discrimination against people of color and the great diversity of bodies that exist in the world. In general, keep in mind that **any small or large amount of stress can create long-standing negative consequences**. That said, a person may also naturally recover or be unphased by a difficulty normally seen as severe because of their resilience to trapped emotions.

2.4 Resilience

Your *resilience* to trapped emotions is how well you can recover from emotionally stressful situations and prevent them from becoming trapped in your body. It is dependent upon many factors and is constantly changing. Having

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less resilience does not mean you are incapable of healing; it just means that trapped emotions are more likely to stick around and you have fewer resources to handle them with. At a baseline, your resilience and much of your personality are determined by:

- Your genetics, which rule a large number of traits including extroversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and various physical and mental conditions¹³⁶
- Your gut bacteria, which recent studies show have a huge impact on mental health¹¹⁵
- How you were raised, especially if it was with abuse or neglect, or with supportive empathy and stability
- How young you are - difficult experiences will impact your brain more severely the younger you are, especially in the first two years of life^{132F}
- Being an introvert or extrovert, with introverts much more likely to have their needs ignored in extrovert-driven cultures like the USA^{18A}
- Your peer group and the surrounding culture
- The trapped emotions already inside of you
- Your positive experiences in life
- How much stable support and acceptance you have or believe that you have
- The amount of difficulty you have experienced and overcome in your life - people who grew up in dysfunctional families often have an amazing capacity for putting up with stress, but not necessarily for preventing it from becoming trapped in their bodies
- Your *heart rate variability* (HRV), which is a good measure of how well parts of your nervous system are working - it is increased by things like mindful breathing and exercise and can be read with simple devices and phone apps^{97B}

During an incident, your resilience is decreased by:

- Tiredness and stress
- Low or unbalanced hormone levels
- How present you are with your surroundings, with dissociation or a drunken state decreasing the intensity of an experience, but with many drawbacks^{97Q}
- How many of your basic needs are not met

- Not having an emotional release (see Chapter 5)
- Being frozen and not moving your body with shaking, shivering, or running away (see Chapter 5)
- Lacking the tools to cope with stress (see Chapter 4)
- Delayed or nonexistent support from community, professionals, or loved ones

A person with healthy relationships tends to have more resilience than someone isolated. Someone who exercises will have more resilience than someone who sits all day. Someone who feels safe and comfortable with their appearance will have more resilience than someone who doesn't. A person who grows up with a speech impediment may have less resilience than someone who can speak a language according to mainstream standards. Someone who has grown up with a healthy family will have more resilience than someone who has been surrounded by abuse. A person who faces oppression due to things like their race or gender may have less resilience than someone who has privilege in these areas.

In the days and weeks following an incident, how stress moves through your body is dependent upon having community, securely attached relationships, self-care practices, skills to overcome distorted thinking, and various tools to release stress like communication, grieving, and calming techniques. This is why everyone's emotions are valid. Not only can the same incident drastically impact two people differently, but how one handles the trapped emotions will vary widely as well. In other words, comparing your emotional response to someone else's, or shaming someone for struggling after an incident will not help anyone get better - in fact, it will probably make them worse.

Especially for those of us highly sensitive souls out there, emotional energy will become trapped due to almost anything. According to Dr. Elaine N. Aron, about 20% of the population is born highly sensitive.⁶ Highly sensitive people are more empathetic but also more reactive to stress and external stimuli, which in turn makes them have special considerations in healing, therapy, and relationships. Most notably, high sensitivity requires a person to spend more time regulating their emotions while being careful not to take on an amount of stress or stimulation that would cause overwhelm. This group includes introverts, extroverts, and all genders. To better understand yourself and your peers, check out one of Dr. Aron's books such as *The Highly Sensitive Person's Complete Learning Program*.

People who have recently had a difficult experience or have a lot of

trapped emotions may also take on certain characteristics of highly sensitive people. A fall in front of friends might be laughed off by one person but make another hide away and cut off social contact. When one person gets into a car accident it might simply be an annoyance of insurance agents and replacing the vehicle, but for another, it might make it excruciatingly difficult to drive at all. For yourself or when considering a loved one, never assume how emotionally difficult something is. It is okay if something seemingly very small is very upsetting, it is still an emotional energy that must get moved and processed through the body.

Regardless of the incident, take good care of yourself and stay aware of how your reactions and emotions change. Whatever difficult events happened to you, you are capable of healing. This healing looks different for everyone and does not necessarily mean you will never again be triggered or have a flashback. Overall though, you will be able to live your life with an increased sense of security and joy without having to worry about what happened in the past.

2.5 Learned Behaviors

Separate from the hardships you experienced, you may mimic the maladaptive behaviors and beliefs of your parents, peers, or culture. This often comes out in unhealthy communication, being deeply critical of oneself or others, discrimination against groups of people, workaholism, and addiction to various substances. Many people believe they have successfully rejected their parents only to later realize that they actually adopted similar behaviors or date people like them. Even though there was no specific incident that hurt you, learned behaviors can still exist as trapped emotions or prevent healing from trapped emotions. Identifying and transforming them is vital for healing and is also covered throughout the book, especially in Part III.

2.6 Ancestral Trapped Emotions

While parents with unresolved trapped emotions often raise their children in problematic ways that perpetuate those same energies, trapped emotions can also be inherited between generations at the chemical level.²⁶ For instance, regardless of their upbringing or home environment, the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of people who survive atrocities like the Holocaust have a higher risk of being depressed or anxious. These *ancestral trapped emotions* are caused by *epigenetic* changes. They are changes that do not permanently alter DNA, only how the DNA is read and expressed. This means that your parents or grandparents can pass their trapped emotions

onto you, and until you weed it out of yourself, it may become passed onto your children as well. To identify this type of energy, you'll need to know the history of your parents, grandparents, or culture.

Ancestral trapped emotions help explain the greater incidence of depression in marginalized groups and people whose parents or grandparents suffered severe hardships. Epigenetics is still a relatively new field and there is much to be learned. For instance, mice studies have shown that specific stress responses such as a smell paired with an electric shock can be passed on between generations, with the mice children of the first generation exhibiting greater sensitivity to that smell, but not to others.³³ It also seems as though the epigenetic changes disappear after a few generations if the stress is removed.²³²

In his book, *The Embodied Mind*, Dr. Thomas Verny explores memory networks that exist outside the brain and has some anecdotal stories about specific memories being transferred to offspring.⁶⁷ On the other hand, researchers like Dr. Andrew Huberman believe that humans can only pass on generalized characteristics, like an increased stress response or heightened desire for dopamine.^{74,232} While there is much to learn about it, dealing with ancestral trapped emotions is relatively similar to others that we'll explore later on. It is also unlikely to be the only cause of a person's difficulties as parents with unresolved trapped emotions are likely to act in ways that cause difficulty to a child.

2.7 Recovery Increases Your Safety

Some people fear that dealing with their trapped emotions will prevent them from identifying dangerous situations, but this is not how recovery works. Decreasing your hypervigilance to stressful stimuli helps protect you by maintaining a calm and rational mind that can accurately assess a situation. For instance, just because you release the trapped emotions surrounding an abusive ex does not mean that you are going to start dating them again or ignore the healthy boundaries you established. Instead, it will mean that you stop having obsessive thoughts and no longer feel unsafe or emotionally out of control when confronted by things you associate with that ex.

2.8 Creating A Better World

Trapped emotions are not just an individual problem, they are an important element to understand in creating a world without greed, discrimination, toxic masculinity, White supremacy, abusive behaviors, and other social problems. People with trapped emotions tend to hurt themselves and other people. This is why we need to lift up everyone across demographics like age, gen-

der, ability, and race.

Unfortunately, most self-help, spiritual, and activist literature neglects to mention trapped emotions as a facet of the human experience. Even many therapists ignore it in their work. They instead focus on the rational mind, arguing that a person can become happier or stop being a racist simply by how they think. The rational mind can certainly help, but much of the time, a person's trapped emotions must be released before they are able or willing to change their thinking and behaviors.

Even when trapped emotions, trauma, or PTSD are discussed, it tends to be quite limited or unscientific. That is why this book is based on an immense collection of research (see the Works Referenced and Bibliography) and concludes with a psychology-informed activist guide. Addressing the cultural, societal, and individual patterns that reinforce trapped emotions will do a great deal toward uplifting humanity and all organisms we coexist with.

2.9 How To Release Trapped Emotions

Everyone's trapped emotions must be uniquely dealt with, but in general, healing involves six stages:

1. Identifying that you are regularly having undesirable behaviors or emotions.
2. Finding a place of safety away from any triggering people or things.
3. Calming down from stress or overwhelm enough so that the rational mind is available and emotions can be mindfully experienced.
4. Having an emotional release.
5. Transforming self-limiting beliefs and stories.
6. Changing your behaviors, mindsets, relationships, or environments to increase your resilience, fix maladaptive behaviors, and develop parts of the brain that never got activated growing up.

When trapped emotions are caused by conflicts with others, certain types of nonviolent communication are often the easiest tool for quickly transforming your anger, getting your needs met, and reestablishing safety. This may include:

1. Taking space to sort out your thoughts and calm down any aggressive anger or extreme emotions.
2. Figuring out your unmet needs and objectively understanding why the conflict happened, including your role in it.

3. Communicating your feelings and needs using empathetic and non-judgmental language, but only if it is safe to do so.
4. Listening to the other person and asking questions to understand the source of their feelings and needs. Even if it is frustrating, it does not mean you have to agree with them. Often a person's true needs are hidden behind an initial conflict, so be sure to explore what may be lacking in terms of attachment needs like touch or safety as well.
5. Adjusting your expectations of the other person and understanding that it is easiest to change your own behaviors rather than control those of another person. Another person's way of doing things can be equally valid to your own.
6. Figuring out a solution, whether that is to meet in the middle, ask for an apology, cut out a person altogether, make an ultimatum, or get these specific needs met by someone else.
7. Moving on with your life, creating new memories, and not ruminating on the past too much.

These communication strategies are more thoroughly explored in Chapters 8, 14, and 16. Healthy communication is often accompanied by emotional releases and a stronger sense of safety. However, conflicts frequently bring up deeper wounds that arose from an unresolved stressful experience, especially from childhood. To understand your feelings, needs, and your role in the conflict, you may have to dive deeper into your healing before you can communicate. It may also be unsafe or impossible for you to communicate with the source of your stress. That is okay. Whether or not you can interact with it, the following methods are for releasing trapped emotions caused by repeated stresses, attachment wounds, or growing up in a dysfunctional family:

1. Understanding the maladaptive behaviors you are playing out, or recognizing that something needs to change. See Chapter 3.
2. Creating a safe space by getting away from stressors and anything that acts as a trigger or associated memory to a difficult experience. See Sections 4.4 and 4.5.
3. Regulating your mood with relaxing activities, sleep, releasing present emotional energy, getting your basic needs met, and other coping strategies. See Chapters 4 and 5.
4. Reconnecting with your bodily sensations through mindfulness or a movement practice such as yoga.

5. Developing at least one supportive ally that helps you co-regulate your nervous system such as a friend, therapist, or support group member as explored in Sections 4.7 and Chapter 14.
6. Becoming triggered and inquiring, “What is this experience reminding me of from my past?” By doing so you become aware of patterns you have been repeating time and time again such as dating abusive individuals. See Chapter 3.
7. Coming out of isolation and breaking away from any shame you carry by beginning to write and speak about what happened within a safe container. This is done at your own pace, do not force it out. See Chapter 7.
8. Releasing the energy that never got to be expressed from the incident with crying, shaking, and other somatic techniques. See Chapter 5.
9. Resolving whatever was left unfinished from the incident. This may take the form of changing the story you have about the incident (see Chapter 6), using visualization to mentally prevent the incident from happening in your imagination (see Sections 4.6 and 6.4), or communicating with your inner selves (see Chapter 10). This process is sometimes known as *renegotiation*.
10. Fixing any inaccurate or distorted beliefs created from the difficult experience. See Chapters 6 and 7.
11. Remembering the bigger picture and dismantling your hyperfocus and stuck ego with things like friendship, nature, art, meditation, a higher power, love, and community. See Chapter 13.
12. Understanding how you reinforce or cause yourself and others suffering. See Chapters 3 and 4.
13. Learning healthy habits and thinking patterns you may have missed, avoided, or distorted because of a difficult experience. See Part III. This work also includes healing your avoidant or anxious attachment style that prevents secure relationships from forming as explored in Section 3.4 and 14.2.
14. Healing your attachment wounds, especially those caused by your parents during your childhood. See Section 14.2 and Section 17.6.
15. Helping change the cultural and societal norms that perpetuate suffering in the world. See Chapters 15 and 16.

While these are ideal trajectories, we do not live in an ideal world and all of the previous steps may take place in a different order or even happen simultaneously. For instance, you may not be able to escape an unhealthy relation-

ship immediately, but you could start learning the third step's coping strategies. Or, you may be unprepared to start this work until after you have at least one secure relationship, overcome an addiction, or join an exercise program. Many people reading this book will also have already started on their healing journey and be focused on areas they have yet to tackle.

Trapped emotions from a one-time incident can be handled through practices that allow the memory to be worked through in the body. This might involve:

1. Creating a safe space away from any triggers. See Section 4.5.
2. Becoming aware of your body and finding where the emotions you feel are located. See Chapter 5 and Section 7.1.
3. Exploring an emotional sensation such as the texture, voice, and story attached to it. See Section 7.1.
4. Allowing that sensation to transform into emotions and bodily movements. See Chapters 5 and 7.
5. Allowing that sensation to transform into thoughts and memories that complete the safety response you were previously unable to at the time of the incident, such as fighting or running away. See Chapters 5, 6, and 7.
6. Reframing any self-limiting beliefs you have that supported the story. See Chapters 6 and 7.

These steps may have to take place several times before the body no longer exhibits symptoms of trapped emotions. Just keep in mind that immediately opening up your most painful emotional wounds is often not suggested, so you might first connect with some new allies, develop a better sleep regimen, or find a social activity to participate in. In general, move slowly enough when opening up these trapped emotions that you do not become debilitated by an emotional flashback. You need to build up the resources you did not have when the incident occurred to handle it now. Your healing may also partly require larger cultural and societal changes to take place first, but know that you can still learn skills to substantially improve your well-being.

Care has been given to making all techniques in this book for releasing trapped emotions as accessible as possible, including both traditional therapy modalities and solo or communal equivalents. The book is outlined in four parts:

1. *Identifying and coping with trapped emotions* - In Part I, Chap-

ters 3 through 5, you will learn how to identify trapped emotions, de-stress your life, create a safe space, practice mindfulness, and healthily experience grief and anger.

2. ***Transforming stories*** - Part II, Chapters 6 through 11, dives into methods for renegotiating memories and overcoming self-limiting beliefs. This starts with learning basic ways to reframe your experiences and how to use healthy communication, then follows with techniques from somatic, prolonged exposure, EMDR, Internal Family Systems, and psychedelic-assisted therapies.
3. ***Behaviors, mindset, relationships, and environment*** - Part III, Chapters 12 through 16, details how to change your world internally and externally to learn and integrate the essential aspects of a fulfilling life you may not have been exposed to. Simultaneously, you transform problematic behaviors copied from caregivers, unhealthy relationships, and cultures. It includes things like letting go of control, making friends, building healthy relationships, healing attachment wounds, dealing with addictions, understanding guilt, fostering self-love, and forgiving others. Part III finishes with a guide on creating healthier environments and transforming the world around you by becoming a changemaker. This includes an exploration of how society, culture, the government, and big business reinforce trapped emotions and cause things like discrimination, poverty, bad parenting, individualism, and abusive law enforcement.
4. ***Healing specific trapped emotions*** - Part IV, Chapters 17 through 20, finishes this guide by showcasing ways of overcoming different trapped emotions with techniques explored throughout the book. After the conclusion, I share the many resources I used to compile this information together including books, podcasts, websites, and emergency lines.

2.10 The Time It Takes To Heal

The time it takes to heal differs widely depending on the incident that caused you distress. These factors include how young you were when it happened, how severe it was, how often it happened, how much care was received, how difficult your past was, how many sources of healthy regulation you have now, how much stress was experienced during and right after the incident, and whether the event stemmed from neglect, abuse, injury, loss, or something else. The emotional energy that becomes trapped from brief and isolated difficult events, such as an injury or argument, can mostly be dealt with

over a few days or weeks.

Trapped emotions may even release naturally without any intentional work from the individual, especially if they have a supportive community of loved ones and good self-care practices. According to the *National Institute of Mental Health*, this typically happens within 90 days after an incident.¹²⁵ Of course, certain tactics are important to use to heal faster, learn from the past, and prevent the incident from repeating, but you might find some relief in knowing that the pain experienced from things like heartbreak or bad grades will usually dissipate given time. That said, a trapped emotion may increase in severity the longer it sits in the body, especially if more stressful experiences happen before the initial energy is released. Each time you become triggered by a similar incident, the emotional energy grows. Even if someone dies, the suffering they caused you may persist until you take action to release that pain.

Difficult experiences that take place over an extended time, happen in childhood, or repeat regularly, such as growing up with an alcoholic or abusive parent, will require months or years of work. This is because events like these drastically alter one's basic understanding of reality, shut off parts of the brain, and proliferate many maladaptive behaviors. While these behaviors are an attempt to protect you from experiencing danger when triggered, they tend to make functioning in daily life and relationships very difficult and can easily lead to trapping additional emotions within the body. That said, you can still make vast improvements within a short amount of time; there are just many more steps involved in fully releasing these complex energies.

2.11 What Healing Looks Like

Releasing trapped emotions and healing the damage they caused your psyche is hard work, but absolutely worth it. You will find yourself with increasing amounts of joy, empathy, meaningful friendships, love, financial stability, and contentment. Take it slowly though; it is okay to rest. Sometimes you will find yourself overwhelmed and seemingly backtrack in your progress, but that is all part of the journey forward. Healing is messy and not a linear path, but that is why we learn to have compassion for ourselves and make allies to help us through it. I cannot begin to describe how beautiful life can be, but know that whatever you have experienced, there is ever-deepening goodness available beyond the veil of your present emotions. With action, change can occur very quickly.

So long as you dedicate yourself to an effective method for releasing trapped emotions, healing will come. You may even experience what psychol-

ogists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun call *post-traumatic growth*. These are the positive influences of a difficult experience and may include: “greater appreciation of life, greater appreciation and strengthening of close relationships, increased compassion and altruism, the identification of new possibilities or a purpose in life, greater awareness and utilization of personal strengths, enhanced spiritual development, and creative growth.”⁹¹ These can translate into things like being more empathetic, quitting an addictive substance, accepting your body, becoming better at romance and friendship, learning how to communicate through anger, finding meditation, dedicating to an activist cause, or picking up an artistic passion.

It is important to remain realistic. According to Professor Sam Vaknin, true closure promised in many self-help circles is not actually possible.¹⁷⁵ That is to say that suffering usually does not suddenly go away, but instead slowly eases and transforms. Hardship is a natural and healthy part of life that integrates into who we are. Things like expecting a quick fix or an apology may considerably slow down your healing and act as a way of avoiding difficult emotions. Pauline Boss expands on this topic in her book, *The Myth of Closure*.

You cannot forget the past, but you can make new associations that help you renegotiate what happened to you. Some things are going to hurt for a long time, and that’s okay - it is part of being human and often helps you grow. Of course, these difficulties which are dealt to us are often not fair, especially in the case of oppression, but they are a reality we must contend with nonetheless. Fortunately, healing yourself, finding a supportive community, and changing the status quo are all quite possible.

Dr. Bessel van der Kolk believes that the most important part of healing is being able to tolerate what you feel in your body and what you know in your memories.^{97C} With all incidents, this means zooming out from the difficult experience, seeing that it was something that happened in the past, and knowing that it does not define how you step through the future. It was a *part* of your life, not your *whole* life. Instead of getting triggered into an emotional flashback, you say “This reminds me of a difficult experience I once had.”

Healing can look several ways with more severe trapped emotions, especially from growing up in a dysfunctional family. This includes being able to maintain mobility and cognitive processing when confronted by something you once feared, obtaining at least one healthy social connection outside of therapy, diminishing judgmental attitudes, reducing dissociative behaviors, sharing your beautiful gifts, and developing compassion for yourself and oth-

ers.^{106D,184B} You learn how to self-soothe and co-regulate with trusted allies, which helps you recover from hard places and be more resilient from falling into them. While the past was painful and might still make you emotional thinking about it, you do not allow the incident to dictate your life. For some, this translates into developing healthy romances in which you and your partner can communicate through conflict, support each other, and feel securely attached. This also means ending the legacy of abuse and neglect that may have been passed down through your family for generations. You can make the future a better place by stopping this cycle from spreading to your children, community, friends, and culture.

It does not matter how old you are, you are capable of rewriting your story at any age. If you practice healing, you will start feeling a reduction in symptoms. Symptoms may not leave altogether, but you will be able to reduce the severity and frequency of panic attacks, addictions, anger, sadness, and other parts of trapped emotions. For some people, it is something that can be accomplished in a few days, whereas others may spend their entire life dedicated to a practice that helps manage their emotions.

How far you take your recovery is up to you. For instance, I have spent a period of no contact with a partner after an emotional breakup and then reestablished a friendly connection. I want most people to ask before touching me, but I still love physical contact. I sometimes binge on media or food when I'm stressed out, but I know how to break those cycles of addiction and return to things that regulate my nervous system in healthier ways. If I quarantine due to sickness, I can start feeling abandoned by friends, but once I'm better I still reach out to make plans and trust the connection again. I'm warier around men, but that does not stop me from working with or becoming friends with them. I also don't really care to let go of my fear of snakes having grown up with deadly ones, or to forgive and put myself around verbally abusive people. That said, I also don't become emotionally out of control and run away when confronted by these things.

Part of this work is identifying those fears that are actually protecting you and those which are holding you back. What makes you have extreme emotional reactions? Who do you judge harshly for no particular reason? What unhappy relationships are you putting up with? What is preventing your dreams from becoming true? Some triggers you will leave alone, some you will learn to manage, and others you will fully overcome and reestablish as safe. Things don't have to be good or great. Feeling "just okay" is still worthy of celebration.

You are allowed to create contentment and happiness moving forward.

That does not mean that you become perfect or continue putting up with unhealthy dynamics with friends or family. The goal is to repair *your* nervous system and put yourself around healthy people who have done the same. You might have recovered from your trapped emotions but still have bad days, not speak to your family, or be single. That is all okay because healing and the pathway there truly look different for everyone.

2.12 Make It Work For You

All of the techniques presented in this book can be modified as you see fit. For instance, drawing or writing out certain components may be very beneficial for some. Others may be able to strictly use their imagination and have meaningful internal conversations. Virtual reality is presenting a lot of amazing possibilities as well now too. When you really start diving deep, you begin to get clear on what is best for you. Follow your intuition and do not be afraid to experiment. As some Twelve Step programs say, “Take what you need and leave the rest.” Adults tend to repeat patterns rather than break out of their comfort zone, so if something is not working after a few attempts, force yourself to try something different. Make it work for you.

2.13 Radical Self-Care

The popularity of self-care practices has grown massively in recent years. Unfortunately, most of the techniques offered are ineffectual at treating the real source of one’s difficulties. At its worst, traditional self-care can act as a form of escapism that only provides temporary relief from strong emotions. Radical self-care takes a different approach by acknowledging six things:

1. Many forms of stress, distorted beliefs, and unhealthy behaviors are the result of trapped emotions that must be released in yourself or another person before change can occur.
2. Community and allies are essential for healing; you cannot do this alone.
3. While some short-term stress is a healthy part of life, most long-term stress is needless and created by cultural traditions, distorted beliefs, income inequality, and governmental laws.
4. Your behaviors, mental health, group dynamics, and culture are formed from both rational decisions and chemical processes. While humans can control their moods and behaviors with thinking to a certain extent, those behaviors and thoughts often have an evolutionary motive driven by biochemistry and animalistic instincts. Some of

these basic processes stay fairly consistent across the human race, but others vary widely between individuals and make some people have easier access than others to certain mental states, emotions, and beliefs. That all said, how your genes express themselves is greatly influenced by your upbringing.

5. Healing does not, and should not require money, but it does help.
6. Being discriminated against creates special considerations for healing.

Unlike many self-care guides, I want to affirm that, yes, your problems are caused by other people, but also by your personal life decisions. Throughout this book, I will be covering how to transform yourself, your peers, and society itself. However, because changing others is slow, hard, or sometimes impossible, we're going to be focusing primarily on what you can do yourself. After all, you have the most power over your own thoughts and actions. Healing your personal suffering first also makes changing others much easier. As *The Luckiest Club's* mission statement says so clearly:

- It is not your fault.¹¹²
- It is your responsibility.
- It is unfair that this is your thing.
- This is your thing.
- This will never stop being your thing until you face it.
- You can't do it alone.
- Only you can do it.
- You are loved.
- We will never stop reminding you of these things.

The goal of this work is to take care of yourself so that you can use that strength to better take care of your communities, the natural environment, and people less privileged than you. Remember, as you do this work for yourself, you are inherently helping your family, friends, culture, and society do it too. By rooting out your trapped emotions, you are ending a vicious cycle of suffering from spreading to others. However, nothing will change until you put knowledge to practice. Read this book and apply what you learn. I'm positive you'll thank yourself later.

PART I

IDENTIFYING AND COPING WITH TRAPPED EMOTIONS



Chapter 3

Identifying Trapped Emotions

3.1 Emotionally Stressful And Abusive People, 3.2 Emotionally Mature And Loving People, 3.3 Symptoms Of Trapped Emotions, 3.4 Attachment Styles, 3.5 Dissociation, 3.6 Separating Trapped Emotions From Your Basic Biology

Everyone has at least some trapped emotions in their bodies, even people perceived as very successful. The severity of these energies varies between completely debilitating to something that a person and society can mostly ignore. However, these energies can be quite difficult to see unless you know what you are looking for. This is because you may have experienced difficulties before you started forming memories, your trapped emotions are blocking your memories, you have been made to believe that what you experienced should not be so hard, or, you struggle to realize that your behaviors are coping mechanisms for stress. Understanding why you behave a certain way though will give you greater control and empathy with how you react to your triggers. You can also use this chapter to help choose what you want to work on in yourself. Here are four methods of identifying trapped emotions:

1. Remembering a difficult experience that caused you great stress.
2. Having a strong negative reaction to specific stimuli. Sometimes you will be able to connect this to a past event or be able to vaguely know what could have happened if your memory is foggy. What makes you defensive? What do you complain about?
3. Understanding the symptoms of trapped emotions.
4. Noticing a recurring pattern in your behavior, such as dating the same abusive personality type, and recognizing where this attraction stems from.

Please be aware however that it may be overwhelming and even dangerous to recall difficult life experiences until you have the proper skills and safe

space. Even if you rationally believe you can handle it, recalling atrocious events can throw you into a deep depression that makes the trapped emotion stronger. This is because each time you recall an emotionally difficult event, you are literally re-experiencing it in body and mind. With many techniques, it is not even necessary to fully remember the original incident, so for now just keep reading or make a small mental note until we dive into creating a *life history* in Section 7.2.

If you start feeling overwhelmed, take a break, or consider reading some of the basic self-care strategies in Chapter 4. You could also skip over parts that you feel might trigger you. Another option is reframing these contents from “These are all the reasons why I am broken” to, “These are all the reasons that I have to be angry at my family and society.” As a heads-up, this chapter in particular can be difficult for people to read. With that warning out of the way, the following sections list common experiences that may trap emotional energy. The younger and more frequently you experience these, the more likely it is that they will impact you as an adult, but they can create trapped emotions at any age and any number of occurrences.

Trapped emotions caused by general life experiences:

- Breakups and heartbreak
- Having a disagreement or conflict
- Not getting your basic needs met
- Physical injuries from accidents
- Getting a chronic or terminal illness
- Being in a romantic relationship with someone who has an avoidant or anxious attachment style and is unwilling to work toward secure bonding
- Hospital visits, especially if you needed to be strapped down or put under anesthesia as a child
- Having a bad reaction or experience with a medicine or medical procedure
- Performing poorly in school, or being forced to learn in a way that is not conducive to your personality or neurotype
- Losing a loved one, including pets
- Moving locations against your will, especially if it results in not being able to see your friends again
- Near-death experiences like car crashes and war
- Being deeply embarrassed or making a mistake

Trapped emotions caused by abuse:

- Verbal abuse such as being yelled at, bullied, lied to, manipulated, called demeaning names, or threatened
- Avoidant communication in which a person withholds information or leaves to prevent discussion
- Physical abuse such as slapping, spanking, or being hit in any other way
- Sexual abuse or harassment
- Spiritual abuse such as being raised under fear of an angry, violent, and omnipotent God whose judgment is dictated by a hierarchical system
- Scientific and medical abuse in which research is applied to you that was poorly conducted or did not include your gender, age, or race
- Toxic sarcasm and teasing
- Being shamed for your appearance, abilities, or expressing emotions

Trapped emotions caused by discrimination:

- Growing up in a culture that discriminates against a group of people
- Growing up being discriminated against including in race, culture, ability, housing, gender, jobs, schooling, religion, and relationships
- Consuming media that portrays marginalized communities in demeaning ways or does not include them at all
- Consuming media that only portrays one race, gender, or ability type being successful, especially if it does not represent you
- Being forced to uphold specific gender norms, especially when that gender norm prevents you from fully experiencing your emotions, personhood, and autonomy
- Being poor

Trapped emotions caused by primary caregivers and neglect:

- Having primary caregivers who do not showcase healthy attachment and parenting such as making you feel safe, being attuned to your needs, soothing you when you're upset, expressing delight about your life and existence, and supporting your curiosity and creativity²²⁷
- Having a primary caregiver who is an alcoholic or addicted to any other substance

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- Having a primary caregiver who is generally unavailable, gone, distracted with technology, or multitasking
- Having a primary caregiver who is arrested
- Having a primary caregiver who is overly protective or excessively controlling
- Having a primary caregiver who gives little or no physical affection
- Having a primary caregiver who is not empathetic to your feelings or physical boundaries
- Having a primary caregiver who introduces a new partner too quickly^{132G}
- Having primary caregivers who divorce, granted it is better to get children away from abusers or high-conflict environments^{132H,123}
- Having one or both parents with PTSD, but especially if the mother does^{97BZ}
- Not having reliable consistency in spaces or secure relationships, especially in the first year of life^{132I}

Trapped emotions caused by culture:

- Growing up in an economic and education system where your success depends on competition instead of cooperation as is the case in capitalism
- Growing up where individualism is celebrated
- Being observed and punished by a militant and oppressive system of law and policing
- Having a culture that discriminates against certain demographics of people
- Growing up where anger, violence, and revenge are celebrated

Trapped emotions are also caused by:

- Any other experience creating intense emotions or making the body think it might die
- Witnessing or hearing about someone else have these experiences - this is especially common in therapists, social workers, and medical staff¹¹⁰
- Being restrained or unable to move during any of these experiences will trap a much greater amount of emotional energy^{106A}
- Having genetic markers influencing DNA which are inherited from

ancestors who experienced great hardship such as genocide, war, or stolen land

- Worry about future events such as with climate change⁴¹

3.1 Emotionally Stressful And Abusive People

Our parents typically have the greatest impact on our psyches, so I want to discuss their roles in more depth. In *Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents*, Lindsay C. Gibson identifies several common problematic personality types and behaviors from guardian figures that cause trapped emotions and attachment wounds in children. These include the emotionally unstable, busy perfectionist, emotionally avoidant, and rejecting parent.^{46A} Guardian figures like these often:

- Lack emotional affection but instead provide material comforts and literal thoughts
- Are inconsistent or contradictory
- Are highly defensive
- Shame and tease
- Use coercion to get their way
- Fear feelings in themselves and others
- Fail to celebrate a child's happy moments
- Are emotionally intense and reactive
- Do not accept "no" as an answer
- Adhere to toxic religious and spiritual ideologies that instill shame and fear
- Are obsessed with intellectual reasoning
- Are silent, do not communicate, or are generally not present
- Require that a child acts and thinks the way they do
- Force adherence to traditional gender norms
- Use manipulative tactics like gaslighting
- Are constantly distracted with media, multitasking, or work

It may or may not be difficult for you to see that these are all forms of abuse that can be carried by parents, lovers, co-workers, teachers, or friends. Generally, these behaviors are insensitive and unempathetic to an individual's emotional states, wants, needs, and personal development. They are the opposite of love. However, as John Gottman points out in *Raising An Emotionally Intelligent Child*, almost all abusive parents are well-meaning and believe their actions are helping their child grow. Most people who perpetrate these

acts genuinely feel they are justified and are using healthy forms of parenting. They are unaware of how severely damaging their behaviors are, especially if the abuse is culturally ingrained in the case of things like spanking.

Physical and emotional abuse are both damaging. However, it is possible that some acts are incidental, rooted in a cultural tradition, or required by trying to survive in a capitalist society. Some people with trapped emotions may also perceive entirely normal actions as abusive. Any of the previously listed characteristics are signs of unaddressed trapped emotions in the parents that will spread to the children by creating insecurity and emotional detachment. Abuse can even negatively impact a developing fetus.¹⁵

Please note that as children we often idealize and put one or both parents on a pillar regardless of how they treated us. This may involve that parent also being abusive or enabling your other parent's abusive behaviors. As you do this work you will be better able to objectively see the role both of your parents had in developing your current stresses and take appropriate action. This does not mean you have to hate or reject these people, but perhaps you create better boundaries that advocate for your emotional safety.

Know that emotional abuse is harder to see than physical abuse, but is often just as detrimental if not more so because of the difficulty in identifying and escaping it. This is especially true if you grew up with emotionally abusive or neglectful parents and now experience emotional abuse as the norm. Furthermore, while physical abuse is generally understood as problematic, many forms of emotional and verbal abuse are still accepted parts of most cultures.

Gibson organizes the adults raised in these environments into two categories - internalizers and externalizers of problems.^{46B} Externalizers seek outside validation and comfort for their difficulties with addictions, anger, and being dominant. Internalizers have difficulty speaking up for themselves, struggle to seek help, excuse abusive behaviors, and do most of the emotional work in relationships. Generally, externalizers are more likely to inflict abuse upon others, and they are less likely to read a book like this or to identify their behaviors as problematic. Their trapped emotions will need to be dealt with by alternative methods we will explore later in this book.

Someone with a regulated nervous system will be able to step away from abusive people, but depending on your parental upbringing you may not be able to identify abuse or you may even seek it out. This is because your notion of love became associated with abuse. Furthermore, children and adults alike in toxic relationships generally believe an abusive individual's behaviors will change for the better, that "This will definitely be the last time." Victims of

these behaviors take on roles to attempt to end the emotionally immature individual's behaviors, or use these roles to attempt to receive an unmet need like love or safety.^{46B} These roles are wide-ranging but are often expressed through aggressive communication, temper tantrums, ignoring personal needs, acceptance of emotional or sexual abuse, or staying quiet and out of the way.

3.2 Emotionally Mature And Loving People

Gibson also shares the signs of emotionally mature people.^{46C} These include consistency, reliability, not taking things personally, respecting boundaries, not going to emotional extremes easily, honesty, apologizing, laughter and playfulness, supportiveness, empathy and compassion, saying nice things about others, having the willingness to change, and responsiveness when communicated with. This list is a great starting place when considering the health of your close relationships, especially lovers and guardian figures. The majority of the listed qualities should be present in the people you keep closest, otherwise, they are good candidates to create boundaries with or remove from your life. We'll discuss more about stress, abuse, boundaries, and cutting people out in Chapters 4 and 5. You may also lack some of these qualities in your own life, and we'll explore ways of implementing them throughout the book, especially in Part III.

Love shares these same qualities. Many people confuse love with obsession, sexual attraction, or codependency. However, healthy love requires vulnerability, presence, and the ability to love yourself independently of another. Being in a relationship of course helps foster self-love, and might awaken a part of ourselves we previously lacked, but we cannot rely on a single person for our happiness. Healthy relationships are further explored in Chapter 14.

3.3 Symptoms Of Trapped Emotions

Another way to identify trapped emotions is from the symptoms they inflict. While having one of these symptoms does not specifically mean it is caused by trapped emotions, it is very likely if the symptom can be attached to your past or is triggered by specific stimuli such as a loud noise, holiday, or personality type. As previously described, these symptoms are sometimes referred to as *flashbacks* because your body is subconsciously remembering the original difficult experience that instilled the trapped emotion. Flashbacks will appear entirely normal, indistinguishable from reality unless you bring awareness to your stress responses. The related symptoms are almost infinite but always form in direct correlation to protecting oneself from a specific difficult experience.

rience. These can be broken down into common feelings and actions.

Feelings and mental shifts:

- Depression, anxiety, anger, shame, blame, insecurity, greed
- Low tolerance to stress
- Developing a strong critical inner voice that judges yourself or others
- Nightmares
- Lack of purpose in life
- Overwhelm or panic attacks, especially from unexpected or spontaneous events and conditions
- Difficulty enjoying positive emotions
- Difficulty being cared about
- Mental states that mimic things such as manic depression, ADHD, or autism spectrum disorder
- Borderline personality disorder (BPD), which is highlighted by emotional instability and swings between anger, depression, and obsessiveness, especially around interpersonal relationships - may change their sense of identity very quickly
- Dissociation, or disconnection from the present moment to the extent that you do not remember doing certain things, feel foggy, or do not feel your emotions
- Short and long-term memory difficulties
- Believing that you do not deserve fair compensation or treatment for the things you do in the world
- Have friends but feel lonely or invisible
- Various bodily pains like a sore neck, migraines, and upset stomach
- Autoimmune diseases and chronic pain
- Difficulty feeling close with people, trusting others, or experiencing love
- Fear of strangers
- Inability to enjoy touch or sex from a significant other
- Lack of empathy and compassion
- Increased thoughts about violence and sex
- Inability to experience one or more emotions around things that should be sad, happy, etc.
- The belief that you are a victim whose problems are more important than others
- Hear a person's needs expressed as a personal attack

- A basic belief that others will hurt you emotionally or physically

Actions:

- Suicidal thoughts or attempts
- Self-harm through deliberately treating yourself poorly, losing sleep, or cutting
- Perfectionism in which you harshly critique your work often or are unable to show what you create
- Immobilization or limited mobility in certain body parts
- Specific body language like fidgeting, wide eyes, or collapsed posture
- Diminished tone of voice
- Excessive eating or purging
- Workaholism in which you work more than necessary and prefer work over relaxing
- Need for control over an environment or people
- Difficulty with play, spontaneity, humor, and fun
- Inability to move your body in certain ways without becoming anxious
- Using language or consuming media that reflects violence and trapped emotions
- Thrill-seeking behaviors such as sex with strangers, drugs, or risky outdoor adventures
- Sexualizing oneself for attention
- Addictive behaviors with food, media, exercise, drugs and alcohol, sex, and other avenues for escape from your emotions and the present moment
- Difficulty working with others or deep independence - granted that introversion is a valid personality trait, it does not mean you totally avoid people
- Recreating the initial difficult experience such as getting into abusive relationships or engaging in life-threatening activities

Interpersonal dynamics:

- Anxious, avoidant, or anxious and avoidant attachment behaviors when engaging in romantic or intimate relationships
- Cheating on a partner or engaging in dangerous sexual behaviors
- Trauma bonding, or forming relationships with people who use

abuse in a way that you confused for love growing up

- Seeking out or avoiding conflict
- Avoidance of touch, sex, or being close to others
- Hypersexuality, or, having sex but not enjoying it
- Codependency in which you caretake abusive or manipulative individuals, do anything possible to control a situation or person's behavior, are unable to be independent, are addicted to love, have difficulty speaking up about your feelings or needs, have a constant need for approval, or seek to fix a sense of self-hatred through the love of other people
- Becoming self-righteous and excusing your toxic behaviors or ignoring the suffering of others
- Feelings of abandonment or upset to any kind of real or perceived social inconsistency
- Forgetting about the good times and barely recognizing friends or loved ones as people you have spent years with
- Putting others' pleasures and basic needs before your own
- People-pleasing in which you change your opinion or personality to avoid a potential disagreement or conflict
- Fearing anyone with more perceived privilege or power due to race, class, or job position such as law enforcement
- Discriminating against others in which you have a blatant or subconscious dislike of a group based on their appearance or culture
- Holding negative stereotypes or judgments on others based solely on their interests or consumption patterns, such as disliking a person because they drive a truck or drink beer
- Being highly argumentative or aggressive in conversation
- Violence towards others or having the desire to harm others
- Passive aggressive behaviors
- Compulsive lying
- Inability to communicate your needs or feelings
- Oversharing thoughts, feelings, or explanations
- Sociopathy, or being manipulative, unempathetic, spontaneous, rule-breaking, violent, antisocial, a compulsive liar, and unfeeling of guilt for wrongdoings
- Narcissism, or being entitled, having a big ego, inflating the truth, belittling and taking advantage of others, and being unable to empathize

In Chapter 6 of his book, *Complex PTSD*, Pete Walker splits these symptoms into several primary personality types, although a person may express multiple types and the symptoms can belong to several categories. The types include:

- ***Fight Type*** - Aggressive, argumentative, conflict-oriented, and often verbally or physically abusive
- ***Flight Type*** - Avoids conflict, emotions, and stress, focusing instead on work or various numbing stimuli
- ***Freeze Type*** - Avoids human contact, shuts down and cannot process information, struggles to make decisions
- ***Fawn Type*** - Helps others instead of themselves, apologizes a lot for things that aren't their fault, enters into codependent relationships - Also known as the *Friend Type*
- ***Flop Type*** - This is not included in Pete Walker's original list and is similar to the freeze type, but involves complete dissociation and bodily shutdown, with the muscles becoming floppy¹⁶⁹

At the moment when activated, these five responses deactivate a person's ability to rationalize or connect with their narrative memory.^{132J} The specific science behind why these responses happen can be learned by reading *The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy* by Deb Dana, *The Body Keeps The Score* by Bessel Van Der Kolk, or *What Happened To You* by Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey. Pete Walker also explains specific familial dynamics that create the various *F-types* in *Complex PTSD*.

All of the *F-types* are healthy in the right situation. A person with a regulated nervous system will actually first use a *flocking* response to check in with the reactions of others in the area surrounding a dangerous event.^{132L} Seeing the visual cue that "I'm safe" or "you're safe with me" helps calm our nervous system.^{97D} The five *F-types* may be activated based on what is witnessed or simply with what the subconscious deems appropriate for self-preservation. When confronted by danger you can fight, run away, stay motionless in hiding, or act friendly so as not to agitate the threat further. For example, you stand up for yourself, leave abusers, avoid uncomfortable people, or casually help strangers or people who you have mixed feelings about because it makes you feel good.

However, people with trapped emotions tend to be stuck applying these behaviors at inappropriate times when they become triggered into flashbacks. This automatic reaction has likely caused you or others a great amount of suf-

fering. While emotional energy often becomes trapped from situations out of our control, we are still responsible for our actions and cannot use it as an excuse for hurting others. Poor communication, violence, breakups, getting easily upset, or an inability to adequately perform a job are all difficult side-effects of having these energies unresolved.

Build a *mental map* by listing how these triggers are activated and what feelings they create in you. Starting in the next chapter, you can also include what helps you return to a calm and regulated space. Your list will help you realize that depression, anxiety, or anger are usually not random and uncontrollable feelings, but a cause and effect. Over time you can start individually working through the items on the list with a therapist or with the techniques outlined in this book. While I do not suggest doing so yet, once you begin working in a specific area, it can be beneficial to attach it to a particular cause and the times you've experienced that, especially the worst or first times. For your emotional safety, this shouldn't be detailed but just a few words. You may not know the source though, and it's okay if you never do. It can just be helpful for some of the techniques outlined later. For example, my list includes things like:

- Loud men - Anxiety - Father
- Preference for being around workaholics - Parents working
- Inconsistency or a long time apart from friends or a partner - Abandonment - Parents working
- Not getting enough physical affection from a partner - Abandonment - Lack of touch from parents

It is important to note that people with narcissistic or sociopathic tendencies (often fight types) may use the contents of this book to further bully or demean people around them. These personality types frequently overlook their role in conflict and suffering, instead placing the blame on others. While it is less likely for these personality types to be reading a book like this, I want to bring it to their attention. Other personality types may also similarly become hypervigilant in their reading and begin seeing everyone as problematic or dangerous. In both cases, I suggest slowing down and asking yourself how you are enabling certain behaviors or your own suffering. It is important to get away from abuse and triggering individuals, but it's also possible to ignore our own roles and cut out entirely healthy relationships. Know that it is very difficult to change or control others, so we primarily focus on transforming ourselves. Simultaneously, no one is perfect and we live in cultures

and societies that perpetuate harm. Everyone has healing to do, so try to find empathy for yourself and those who are still hurting.

3.4 Attachment Styles

Your *attachment style* is how you connect with others, especially as it relates to your romantic life. In general, you gravitate toward what is familiar, which can be really unhealthy. Attachment is primarily determined by how you were raised by a caregiver.⁴¹ However, it can also be impacted by things like divorce, your relationship with your siblings, gender norms, your genes, discrimination, moving, how safe and nourishing your environment is, how secure your friendships are, fears about the future, the death of a loved one, your needs not getting met, and the attachment style of your partner.²¹⁷ These experiences culminate into four types of attachment:

1. ***Anxious or preoccupied attachments*** - Usually get into relationships very quickly, caregive for their partners, do things they don't really want to, need a lot of reassurance, or generally become codependent and always believe that people will leave them. They are constantly aware of their partner's supposed emotional states but tend to make it about themselves or guess incorrectly.
2. ***Avoidant or dismissing attachments*** - Shy away from communication, intense conversation, and intimacy. They often believe they are securely attached, withdraw into work or hobbies, want to be seen as strong, tend not to share their emotional states, desire closeness but get easily overwhelmed by it, are highly independent, and struggle to meet the emotional and intimacy needs required in a healthy relationship.
3. ***Anxious-avoidant or disorganized attachments*** - Oscillate between both anxious and avoidant characteristics. They are fearful of others even though they desire closeness. They may use others for their personal benefit and have a very fragmented sense of self.
4. ***Secure attachments*** - Are not emotionally avoidant and do not feel anxious about the health of the connection when together or apart. That said, there is a normal level of dependence and independence in each relationship. It is okay if a person needs a little more space or a little more closeness, within reason. Securely attached people may still have trapped emotions and become triggered, but know how to regulate their nervous system and repair conflicts with loved ones. They are also able to identify and step away from abusive people, make big

life transitions, and are generally flexible with how they manage day-to-day.

Attachment wounding is the main cause of severe trapped emotions and primarily stems from growing up with emotionally stressful, neglectful, inconsistent, or abusive parents as explored previously in this chapter.²¹⁸ Anxious, avoidant, and disorganized attachment styles carry abusive behaviors that deeply hurt any platonic or romantic relationship, but all of them can also become securely attached or form secure relationships. On the other hand, even two securely attached people could become insecure if their basic relationship needs are not being met. A person may also initially be anxious or avoidant around a new relationship, but as a bond grows they become secure. People can quickly move between attachment patterns in reaction to specific stimuli and triggers though.

Please keep in mind that it is often difficult to determine your attachment style and the attachment styles of your relationships. This is because these behaviors are happening subconsciously. They may therefore require the help of a therapist or other outside observer to help determine the exact patterns playing out. Specifics on healing attachment wounding and building healthy relationships are covered in Sections 14.2 and 17.6.

You can also learn more about attachment styles and healthy relationships by reading *Your Brain On Love* by Stan Tatkin or *Polysecure* by Jessica Fern. Even though *Polysecure* is a book for polyamorous partnerships, at least ninety percent of the information applies to monogamous couples as well. There are also many podcasts and articles online exploring these topics in depth, such as various episodes of the *Therapist Uncensored Podcast*.

3.5 Dissociation

One of the most helpful and difficult symptoms when dealing with trapped emotions is dissociation. Dissociation is an entirely normal function in healthy people as they cycle in and out of being aware of the present moment throughout the day. In people with trapped emotions though, it can become a dominant experience that prevents them from being aware of the positive aspects of life. Dissociation helps protect people from their past and present experiences by distancing themselves from the intense feelings they would otherwise be having. This makes sense until a person can find a safe space to start healing, but dissociation may continue even in these safe spaces. A dissociated person is only partially capable of experiencing reality and cannot always access their emotions, an essential part of getting better. Dissociation

takes on several forms including:

1. Using distractions like media or people to avoid emotions.
2. Always speaking or thinking about a subject logically without experiencing the associated feelings.
3. Medications or drugs like alcohol dulling the senses.
4. Being entirely disconnected from the mind's mental processes.
5. Constantly doing and thinking.
6. Other behaviors that distract from reality like oversleeping.
7. Using certain spiritual or meditation practices to ignore the emotional self. This is especially common in the practice of calming oneself by focusing on the breath or other physical sensations. Mindfulness is a very helpful technique, but it must be used appropriately.

I know when I am dissociated because reality seems fuzzy or fake, I'm upset but not having an emotional release, I'm angry and obsessively thinking bad thoughts about a person, or I get stressed out when I take a pause in my schedule. On any given day, being tired, consuming too much media, or not interacting with enough people will exacerbate my dissociated mind. A nap, going out to nature, or socializing can help, but I often remain dissociated until I get a night of sleep. This does not just impact me, I have said really awkward things and made conflicts much worse by not being able to use my words thoughtfully.

To the extreme, dissociation prevents a person from knowing what is happening around them and can cause memory problems. After severe incidents, a person may slip in and out of this dissociated state when confronted with any kind of stress. There are cases when a person “wakes up” hours later unaware of where they are or how they got there. In this way, a person may unknowingly put themselves in dangerous situations and face more and more difficult experiences that cause even worse trapped emotions. Alongside lacking self-awareness, a person's sense of purpose may also be disrupted.^{97E} These extremes of dissociation are most common when someone experiences maternal neglect.^{97F}

When working with a therapist or tackling bigger trapped emotions, dissociated individuals will have to first learn how to come back into their bodies and stay present with what is happening. This may need to happen slowly though. Breaking down the wall of dissociation may initially be intense, bringing with it awareness of strong emotions and abuse. Dissociation is a protective mechanism that happened for a reason, so it is important to be pre-

pared with new physical, mental, emotional, and relational resources that can handle whatever is on the other side. This is essential because becoming present, aware, and open to painful sensations allows an individual to work through those feelings and create a healthier life. As we will explore in the next chapter, slow and safe is fine as you build a strong community and self-care practices to support you.

Becoming more present will be aided by establishing a safe space, managing stress, getting regular massages, starting movement exercises like yoga, and practicing forms of mindfulness meditation. *Neurofeedback* therapy will especially help. Medication or medication changes may be required as well. These are all covered in Chapters 4 and 5. For people with dissociation caused by a deep distrust in others, animal therapy will help rebuild socialization, trust, and compassion. Dissociated people also benefit from taking more control over their lives.⁶⁰ This is covered in Section 13.3 and may mean a person becomes empowered to choose their meals, schedule, or cancel plans if they are feeling overwhelmed.

Many coping mechanisms are also dissociative and prevent connection to the present moment. You may have to remove certain activities like watching television, or at least do therapy and self-work before indulging yourself in your soothing hobbies. Stepping away from dissociative activities can also simply be a choice as we become aware of our subconscious tendencies and instead choose something that will either maintain our presence or at least benefit our growth. Chapter 12 explores how to change habits and overcome addictions. Just keep in mind that it is generally easier to stay present earlier in the day since the nighttime brings tiredness and decreases hormones associated with confidence.⁸⁷ This is partially why we are more likely to succumb to depressive states and consume dissociative materials at late hours.

3.6 Separating Trapped Emotions From Your Basic Biology

While trapped emotions can mimic symptoms of various mental conditions, it is important to separate trapped emotions from your basic biology. These include personality traits like extroversion, agreeableness, openness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism.¹³⁶ They also include conditions such as high sensitivity, bipolar, autism, depression, anxiety, ADHD, and the overlap between them. These create a lot of variability in how different people function and cope in the world. Please keep in mind that there is mounting evidence that at least some of these are also influenced by your gut flora as explored in Section 4.9.

Recently figuring out that I am a highly sensitive extrovert with ADHD helped me understand that although my childhood was difficult, it impacted me much more than a person without my chemistry might otherwise experience. This gave me more empathy and availability to forgive my parents. It also made me accept that certain things will never be comfortable or safe for me to do, like being around some personalities, watching horror films, or being able to remember things well.

This does not mean I never challenge myself or cannot put up with stress, but it does allow me to celebrate my strengths, focus on healing my actual wounds, and build a life in which I do not constantly feel agitated. Accepting these labels also helps connect me with others struggling with similar problems and gives me a lot more potential support to cope in life. Through that awareness, I can then use willpower, rationality, various tools of civilization, or safe spaces to overcome my perceived limitations and work through tasks that do not otherwise come easily.

Separating your basic biology from your trapped emotions does take quite a bit of time, self-reflection, or help from doctors or psychiatrists. For me, this involved observing that some of my behaviors could not be explained through my past experiences and were not getting better through my healing work. Even medical professionals often get diagnoses wrong, so it is important to remain open-minded.

For more common personality traits, taking personality tests may help, especially the *Big Five Personality Test*, which specifically tests for the five previously mentioned genetic personality traits. You may also find insight through journaling, asking friends about your personality, trying out different activities, taking tests like the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* or *Enneagram*, and of course understanding your trapped emotions.

Again though, trapped emotions can considerably distort personality test results and it is important to remember your ability to transform and overcome challenges. For instance, as a teenager, I hated people, but am now quite extroverted, albeit also sensitive to who I spend my time with. This change required discovering people I felt safe around, dealing with my social anxiety, and overcoming my addiction to media. Proclaiming oneself an introvert may be an excuse to avoid vulnerability and emotional intimacy, when, in fact, introverts need meaningful and regular social connection as well. On the other hand, supposed extroverts may seek out stimulation to hide from their thoughts, emotions, and the reality of their life. This is, of course, not always the case, but personality can substantially evolve as we find safety and work on ourselves.

The following list is a basic description of some of the most commonly undiagnosed brain wirings. Please keep in mind that some of these are labeled as disorders but usually create some benefit as well, especially as it relates to creativity and the ability to see the world from a unique angle. Many famous individuals have these. There is also a lot of variability with how various brain wirings present themselves, especially between people assigned male or female at birth. Most importantly though, once they start, they are lifelong. A person can also have multiple of these at a time. While beyond the scope of this book, there is a lot that can be done to cope with and improve these conditions:

- **Highly Sensitive People (HSP):** More sensitive than the average person in body and mind to various stimuli and stresses – explored in Section 2.4
- **Major Depression:** Lack of interest in everyday activities and general feelings of sadness which may disrupt all aspects of life – generally, major depression is at least partly caused by or intensified by trapped emotions, but the risk is increased by genetic factors
- **Bipolar Disorder (BPD):** Switches between periods of abnormally high energy levels (happy, cleaning or rearranging frenzy, very energized without sleep, sexually motivated) and depressive episodes – typically the depression is more common than the manic episodes and is often misdiagnosed as depression
- **Hypomania:** A less severe form of bipolar disorder that may involve only low-level manic episodes which are not as self-destructive or out of control as bipolar disorder – more a happy high that can be really productive but still involve compulsive behaviors
- **Autism Spectrum Disorder:** Often struggle with reading social cues and emotions, overwhelmed by certain sensory stimuli and doing something differently, or may only understand very direct forms of communication and have obsessive behaviors
- **Generalized Anxiety Disorder:** Has an increased amount of worry and stressed overthinking around everyday situations, conversations, and events
- **Attention Deficit / Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** May struggle with paying attention, keeping plans, multitasking, remembering things, or have compulsive and hyperactive tendencies with the ability to hyper-focus that increases the risk of things like addictive behaviors and workaholism

I do want to caution against holding onto a label too strongly. For instance, if you identify as a person with a lot of social anxiety or sensitivity to stress, you may greatly limit what you think you are capable of. The goal is to be aware that this is an influence in your life but it does not have to be your main story. For instance, with work, anxiety can be reframed as general excitement and having more energy. Many brain wirings have also been traditionally considered more spiritually attuned.

Genetic personality characteristics are controlled by several factors. For instance, as we'll explore in Section 13.4, your levels of testosterone and estrogen impact your confidence and empathy. These hormones also fluctuate throughout the day, week, month, year, and over the course of your life, which then alters some of your personality along the way. Everyone also has a different baseline level of dopamine, which controls things like confidence, motivation, and pleasurable feelings.²⁵⁷ For the *Big Five Personality Test*, each characteristic is graded on a spectrum between high and low. Again, there is a lot of flexibility in how these are expressed or how you can challenge yourself on a given day. The traits include:

- **Openness:** Open to experiences and creative versus closed-off and cautious
- **Conscientiousness:** Good with scheduling and structure versus inattentive to others and struggles to complete tasks
- **Extraversion:** Gains energy socializing versus loses energy socializing, prefers fewer people, and dislikes small talk – introversion is different than social anxiety or shyness though
- **Agreeableness:** Empathetic and interested in people versus unempathetic and uninterested in others
- **Neuroticism:** Frequently anxious and stressed versus emotionally stable and calm

Many other characteristics are pushed by your biology too. For instance, people who believe in conspiracy theories often have higher levels of free dopamine in their brains, which increases the risk of false pattern recognition.²²⁴ This fictional belief is then reinforced through fear, feelings of helplessness, confirmation bias, others who believe in the conspiracy, and not taking accountability for what they can personally change. Political conservatism is also marked by a greater fear response and is partly linked to inherited genes.¹⁷⁹ It is likely that ancestral trapped emotions impact personality characteristics like these as well by increasing the base level of stress experienced as

discussed in Section 2.6.

Chapter Reflections

1. What are the behaviors you exhibit from your trapped emotions?
2. What are your learned behaviors that reinforce your trapped emotions?
3. What does healing mean to you?
4. Was there anything that your ancestors experienced that may have been passed down to you as a trapped emotion?
5. Do you tend toward exhibiting a fight, flight, fawn, freeze, flop, or flock response?
6. Do you experience any forms of abuse in your relationships today?
7. Do you experience forms of love in your relationships today?
8. In what ways do you dissociate?
9. What are your dissociative activities protecting you from?
10. Is there evidence that your brain is wired differently from a neurotypical brain? How can you know for certain? How would this brain type change the ways in which you maneuver social situations and work tasks?
11. What results do you get by taking the *Big Five Personality Test*? In what ways does this impact how you can accept yourself and cope with stress? How can you use the results to help build a life of ease and flow for yourself? In what ways do the results change how you might go about achieving your goals?



Chapter 4

Reducing Stress And Building Resilience

4.1 Motivating Yourself, 4.2 Go Slow, 4.3 You Already Have Resources, 4.4 Removing Stress And Abuse, 4.5 Establishing A Safe Space, 4.6 Visualization, 4.7 Finding A Therapist, Co-Counselor, And Other Allies, 4.8 False Self-Help, 4.9 Basic Self-Care, 4.10 Self-Care For Oppressed Communities, 4.11 Increasing Your Income, 4.12 Establishing A Higher Power, 4.13 Medicines, 4.14 Releasing Tension And Correcting Posture, 4.15 Increasing The Window Of Tolerance To Stress, 4.16 Addressing Shame And Denial

While a certain amount of stress is healthy and natural in life, too much can cause overwhelm or increase the likelihood of being triggered into a painful flashback.⁶⁶ When stressed, triggered, or experiencing a flashback of intense emotions, you are actually unable to access your rational mind and may struggle to communicate or act effectively or at all.²⁵ As Gabor Maté explores in his book, *The Myth of Normal*, chronic stress also increases inflammation and deactivates the immune system, leading to various illnesses and making healing even harder. Many of these stresses are perpetuated by society and culture, requiring that you intentionally regulate your nervous system more often. In Chapters 15 and 16, I also explore how to make a more safe and relaxing world, but until then, let's learn what you can do right now.

In states of high stress and suffering, it may not be a good time to have a difficult conversation, confront your past, or do something that requires much willpower. Instead, it is a great time to de-stress. The goal is to get your nervous system regulated, and then keep it there.

With a regulated nervous system you will be able to handle stresses and triggers, create more resilience in your life, and learn new coping strategies. Even small moments of joy can help return the nervous system to a regulated state, so whatever you do, do something.²⁵ Calming techniques are especially

important for releasing trapped emotions. The body needs to be shown that what happened in the past is no longer a threat and the present moment is safe, or at least manageable.

As you do more of this work, you will become attuned emotionally and rationally to how much you can handle on a given day or week. Everyone has a different *window of tolerance* to stress, and when you get close to or reach over your tolerance, you'll know it is time to implement one of the techniques I share in Chapters 4 and 5. That said, overwhelm can sneak up on us or daily obligations can override our self-care, so it may be important to establish a rule of intentionally checking in with and regulating your nervous system at least every three days. It is also important to note that you can handle a lot, often more than you think you can, and this information is not meant to dissuade you from challenging yourself in work, school, love, or being vulnerable to experiencing life.

4.1 Motivating Yourself

As Oprah Winfrey and Gary Zukav say, all decisions start with an intention.^{132S} Releasing trapped emotions is not easy work. Even identifying that your feelings and behaviors are causing problems can be a struggle, but so long as you develop the intention of healing, your pathway is clear. By holding onto this intention, you will know right from wrong and be able to correct your actions if you become distracted or lost. Your intention will help you face struggles you might otherwise avoid, take on activities that you find uncomfortable, or cut out people who do not align with who you are becoming. Try writing out your intention and comparing it with the life you are living.

Your healing will usually only begin when you prioritize and seek out healing. You may be waiting for the motivation first, but often motivation comes after you begin taking action. Many people already have all the resources they need to heal, it's just a matter of identifying and putting them into practice. What is the specific outcome that you want and what is getting in your way? Do you want to feel happier, have deeper friendships and intimate partnerships, be able to handle stressful situations, remove toxic people from your life, and generally feel fulfilled? Probably, so what's holding you back?

4.1.1 FOMO

We often get stuck in what we have now, fearing we will never have it again, even if it is hurtful. The fear of missing out (FOMO) sucks. For instance,

many people struggle to separate from emotionally abusive parents or unhealthy partners. This is a form of codependency. These relationships may guilt you into maintaining contact because they have created no other emotional support. You can acknowledge four things here:

1. Each individual is responsible for their own life. The fact that your parents or partner have isolated themselves to the extent that you are their only emotional support is not your fault and not your responsibility. While relationship repair, community care, and supporting those in need are important, if your assistance is being ignored or if you are unable to care for yourself, creating boundaries or entirely removing yourself from a person is the better option.
2. The world is abundant. There are more friends, more lovers, and more communities if you are willing to put yourself out there, change locations, or explore new interests.
3. Healing yourself first will give you the option to one day return to these unhealthy relationships and help them with their problems much more effectively, if you want to. Remember, it is not your responsibility to fix anyone.
4. Codependent and abusive relationships hold each person back from creating healthier patterns. Until you break this cycle, no one will get help and no one will be truly happy.

In general, know that:

- You owe nothing to abusive friends, family, or partners
- You owe nothing to people or situations that frequently stress you out
- You deserve happiness, contentment, and relaxation
- Everyone shares basic needs including sustenance, safety, love, empathy, rest, community, creativity, freedom, and purpose - lacking or being deprived of any of these causes stress
- Your needs are just as important as anyone else's
- Removing yourself from people who make you feel bad is a form of self-love
- You have a right to establish boundaries and to end relationships that do not comply with your boundaries
- You have a right to heal your suffering

4.1.2 *Rock Bottom*

Many people only choose to change their life around when hitting some version of rock bottom. Of course, this isn't a place you are likely to intentionally find, but know that some of the greatest motivation is found at our lowest points. Humans are naturally resilient, even when we've descended to a place so low that we can't even imagine staying alive, or have lost all of our friends and loved ones. In these moments we can say to ourselves "I never want to feel that way again. I know beauty and love and happiness exist in this world and dammit I deserve those things. I will do whatever it takes to heal." Then curiosity takes over, and we dedicate ourselves to finding healthier friends, quitting an addiction, seeing a therapist, getting a better job, starting to exercise, and so on. Breakdowns often lead to breakthroughs.

I've been at rock bottom several times. When I moved back to my home base after a year of being away, seven friends unrelated to one another no longer had time for me. I was devastated, but kept going and decided to do anything the world presented to me that seemed like it would help me escape that rejected and lonely misery. One acquaintance suggested a group immersion program centered around deep connection and authentic relating. Another suggested attending co-counseling classes. Both of these programs allowed me to grieve the loss of old friendships but also make new ones that still exist to this day.

When you give up hope, you let go of the control you wish you had over a situation and can move on to more practical or healthier goals. This may be especially important for oppressed people who have felt obligated into activist roles rather than taking care of themselves (see Chapter 16). Letting go of control is further explored in Section 13.3.

Breakdowns don't have to be so cataclysmic either, because every failure is an opportunity to learn and grow. Motivation often comes from a typical low point or a difficult interaction with an emotionally stressful loved one. It can also arise from moving cities, traveling abroad, or attending an event that takes you out of your comfort zone like a week-long camping or meditation retreat. This same experience may be felt when transitioning out of a depressive episode. You'll have a lot of energy to say "I don't want to feel that way anymore" and strengthen your resources in friendships, activities, support groups, therapists, reading materials, and cutting off abusive relationships.

It is unfortunate, but it is rare that anyone is going to come and save you. Sometimes there are friends or lovers who will lift you up a little bit, to give you some small glimmer of joy in the darkness, but in the end, it is you who must change. As poet June Jordan wrote, "We are the ones we have been wait-

ing for.” You may go through a period of feeling angry and bitter about this, about how your friends or family or government did not do enough, but it is the only way. However, once you start taking those steps, there will be so many people excited to celebrate and support who you are becoming, including yourself. Healing can take place at any point in your life regardless of how young or old you are. Every moment is a new chance to begin anew and change things for the better.

4.1.3 Trust Your Process

Know that it is hard to predict the future, and impossible to truly know what something is like unless you personally experience it. You cannot know the beauty at the top of a mountain through a book or video, you must climb the mountain yourself. Healing is a practice, so more than anything, trust your process. While feeling bad, you might give up hope that these techniques work. You may try them and they won’t work immediately, or you may even initially feel worse, but often you’ll suddenly realize after an hour, “Oh, I feel okay now.” Healing after using a technique might also come after sleeping or after a few weeks of integrating what you learned.

Remember that wounds take time to heal and your reality can flip upside down in a single moment. You are likely wanting to heal but also attached to your suffering and needing to rewire some old brain patterns. This is a learning process, you will discover that some of your coping mechanisms actually make you feel awful, and things you never thought of trying are actually really enjoyable. It will take believing that other ways of being could create a better life than what you have now. If you feel stuck, journal about the type of life you want and create a detailed list of steps to get there - this can help clarify your direction forward and the skills you need. Change is always possible!

4.1.4 Suffering Creates Suffering

While you may not be aware of it, your unaddressed stresses may have directly or indirectly hurt the people around you. This includes your physical and mental health. Trapped emotions make us act out in difficult or unreasonable ways, cause us physical health problems, reduce our lifespan, and are a central cause of abuse, manipulation, discrimination, toxic communication, anger, attempts at revenge, and ruined hangouts. This alone is a great reason to address your past experiences because it’s not just you being affected, it’s also your family, friends, romantic partners, co-workers, medical personnel, and all of society. Taking it a step further, you are intricately connected with the web of life and share breath with all organisms on Earth. Even if you haven’t

directly harmed people, your ability to gain greater emotional regulation and understand the nuances of healthy relationships will allow you to improve your relationships with others. Your healing will allow you to spread joy and fight to improve conditions for all beings.

4.1.5 The Easiest Person To Heal Is Yourself

While there may be factors slowing your ability to heal, recovery is still possible. It certainly helps when allies reach out, people we communicate with agree to change, or the random events of the universe support us, but more often than not, no one is going to save you unless you put in the energy. People frequently feel that they must heal their parents or society before they can heal themselves, but this is untrue. Even if you get revenge, a person dies, or someone reforms their behaviors, your trapped emotions may still be present. Sometimes these things create a safer space that allows healing to begin more easily, but you still have to do the work. Furthermore, even if you communicate with a person, they won't always change, and culture takes quite a while to transform.

The world is not always fair. You must get past this unfairness as you may be using it as an excuse to not heal at all. Keep in mind that two people in the same situation can have entirely different experiences, and much joy can still be found in dire times. You may not believe it yet, but you are capable of creating a new narrative for your life.

Even for people who experience deeply rooted discrimination, there are many ways to grow more resilient to the atrocities created by cultures, society, and the government. While in the long-term we must transform discriminatory institutions, finding moments of peace is essential. Mindfulness, grieving, healthy angering, resting, quitting addictions, creating community, and so many of the other techniques outlined here will greatly benefit the well-being of anyone. More about coping with and building resilience to discrimination is covered in Section 4.10.

4.1.6 Who Are You?

While doing this work, some people strive to discover their *true self*, but there are many versions of you that can be content or happy. Keep in mind though that it is not necessarily possible to become someone you idolize because you have been given a unique set of conditions as explored in Section 3.6. That said, you can still achieve a lot and your pathway to success may simply be different than someone else depending on your biology and upbringing.

Once you know your basics, imagine a few different ideal lives for your-

self including your job, house, emotional state, relationships, family, income, and so on. Now, add in a little bit of realism based on your basic personality. What would you have to do to reach those goals based upon where you are now? This will be a gradually changing process and one that I like to journal about every few years. Moving towards an ideal version of yourself can be challenging as it is difficult to separate your coping mechanisms, fear responses, culture, and learned behaviors from what brings you genuine fulfillment. Therefore, this is not a plan to necessarily actualize and conquer, but one that can be used to identify general roadblocks or contradictions in how you want to be.

4.1.7 Media

While media consumption can become an unhealthy addiction that I cover in Section 12.2, I've also used it to motivate myself. This is especially true with movies where I resonate with the characters. Unlike with books or TV shows, with movies I can experience a complete emotional arc in one sitting. Often I would become jealous of these characters succeeding, finding happiness, and falling in love. It reminded me that I wanted those things too and gave me the hope that I could obtain them. It also helped me distance from my intense emotions and gave me unique ideas about how to approach my own life.

Of course, movies are often not inclusive and you may find better resonance with the story and characters in other mediums such as comics, TV, books, and fanfiction. Each person will resonate with different media, but for me, I have found some inspiration in movies like *Everything Everywhere All At Once*, *The Matrix*, *Amélie*, *Everything Is Illuminated*, *The Barkley Marathons*, *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*, *JoJo Rabbit*, *Princess Mononoke*, *The Wind Rises*, *Your Name*, and *After Life* (1988). In general, try to connect with your inner world of sensations before and after consuming media, and do not allow media to take up more than a few hours of your time a day.

4.1.8 Avoiding Healing

There are many ways in which we become avoidant of healing, one of which is comparing our experiences to the difficulties of others. This minimization of ourselves often comes up in fawn type trauma responses, codependents, and people disconnected from their emotional body. It's also proliferated in toxic masculinity and US culture. If you're having a hard day, that's okay. Convincing yourself otherwise (as many abusers and spiritual practices have you do) is going to bury your feelings in unhealthy ways. Your emotions are

energies that need to be considered with compassion and released. Crying, healthy angering, communicating, and making changes to your life are much more helpful than stuffing your feelings down. Remember, the healthier you are, the more you'll be able to help others. Deeper trapped emotions do not go away on their own; you have to be proactive about them.

You may also struggle giving up certain addictive behaviors and the communities they connect you with. For instance, people giving up alcohol, tobacco, or video games often initially struggle with establishing new ways of creating friendships, participating in social activities, and being involved in family gatherings. Remind yourself that the world is abundant and there are many other enjoyable activities and friendships that are healthier for your well-being and relationships. Generally, know that you can be much happier with a different set of conditions, hobbies, lovers, and allies. We will cover the specifics of how to deal with addictions in Chapter 12.

Lastly, you may believe you are improving your life but actually are doing the same thing over and over again. For instance, you may replace one isolating behavior with another, or break things off with an abusive relationship just to establish a different one. Remember, nothing will change unless you break the cycle and go down a whole new route. As adults we became grooved into patterns, trying to reiterate solutions that we once thought worked.¹³⁴ It's a conservation of energy and makes it tough to apply novel ideas to old problems. Establishing a new direction may then take time and a willingness to try something uncomfortably new that your emotional mind severely questions.

To begin this work it is good to ask yourself, "How am I reinforcing my suffering?" Your various triggers or unhealthy behaviors may be preventing you from connecting with loved ones and caring for yourself. These include your communication, hobbies, social connections, self-limiting beliefs, and behaviors that limit your sleep. Removing trapped emotions can be hard, but it can also be really easy as we learn that immense happiness arises from simply stopping certain behaviors. We realize that many of our difficult emotions are not caused by other people, but rather by our attachment to certain outcomes. Throughout your reading you may notice yourself being resistant to some of these methods, initially thinking it is stupid or childish. However, part of your journey is opening up to possibilities rather than following what you have been led to believe your whole life.

A huge turning point for me was realizing that I expected others to save me. I was bitter and angry at people for not being better friends, reaching out, changing behaviors, or understanding my plight. I finally decided that I could

no longer rely on individuals, and instead committed myself to connecting to communities of people and finding nourishment in nature. I joined the rock climbing gym, attended meditations, devoted myself to a support group, started writing in the woods, and stepped away from stressful people, media, and nighttime computer usage. When I stopped needing people to be a certain way, I became happier and as a result was a better friend when people did show up.

4.1.9 The Regrets Of Dying

Sometimes it can be good to compare your life pathway with your elders, especially if you are struggling with finding an intention to direct you. According to Bronnie Ware, a nurse who for twelve years recorded the regrets of those soon to pass away, the top five regrets of dying are:

- I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.¹⁶³
- I wish I hadn't worked so hard.
- I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.
- I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.
- I wish I had let myself be happier.

4.2 Go Slow

Transforming your life is typically not something that happens overnight, especially when you have attachment wounds from childhood. Instead, you make incremental improvements that gradually uplift your mood and empower your resilience. It may take several years to develop new habits, remove toxic people, form healthy relationships, and discover new activities to participate in. The goal is to move slowly enough that you do not trigger an emotional flashback while re-engaging your senses and changing your stories. Even after you've removed some trapped emotions, they can sometimes return later, causing you to regress into old patterns. That is okay though, it will be easier the second time to release.

It is best to focus on one difficult experience at a time while releasing trapped emotions. Your successes will make future work much easier, so it does not necessarily matter where you begin. However, typically you will be focusing on your immediate stresses first and sometimes find them attached to some childhood incidents. After you do feel settled about a particular incident, it can be beneficial to give yourself a week or two before moving on to your next target. This gives you time to integrate what you have learned and

decreases the chance you relapse into past behaviors. Spending all your time dealing with these energies can also be hard on your relationships and yourself, so enjoy your newfound freedom a little bit. You are not a project, you are a human being with a lot of wonderful things about you already.

While doing this work, it is difficult to know that you are making progress unless you pause and self-reflect. What skills have you learned? Did you successfully implement a coping skill? Have you removed a source of stress or made progress in doing so? Are the number of days that you feel relatively okay increasing compared to a year ago? The smallest victories are big accomplishments and deserve celebration. This is especially important in realizing that instead of trying to eliminate a negative feeling altogether, you can ask yourself, “How do I relieve the stress by ten or twenty percent? How do I feel just a little bit better?” Know that even by reading books like this one, you are making progress as your awareness increases.

Some trapped emotions may initially feel quite overwhelming to take on, so it’s good to break them up into more manageable steps. Congratulate yourself after you complete each step. For instance, “Today I am going to search for therapists with open schedules, tomorrow I will contact a few to see their availability, then after an interview with each next week I’ll select one.” This greatly increases motivation and is much easier than “I have to get a therapist.”

It can also be beneficial to have small victories to prove to yourself you are capable of taking on larger tasks, even if they are unrelated. For instance, the sense of accomplishment in completing a drawing, cleaning your room, or reading through a book can be very empowering. As previously mentioned, I sometimes use digital media in this way too, especially in stories with characters that I relate to who go from an average or downtrodden person to an accomplished individual. These growth arcs can provide empowerment and instill a sense of “yes I can.” While I have to be sure to eventually step away from these activities, or at least regulate how much I am doing them, they provide a safe starting point to rebuild my ego from.

After finding a new place of contentment, it is easy to forget the great suffering we experienced even a week ago. However, the opposite is true as well. When we become triggered or stressed, it may color our entire history, friendships, and anything we recently experienced as good in a negative light. You’re going to make progress forward, and sometimes you will make progress backward - so have compassion for yourself, it is all part of the healing journey. Hard times are also a healthy and natural part of the human experience and are essential for happiness and love to exist. You’re not trying to

eliminate stress altogether, but rather address that stress which is trapped within you and holding you back from life.

Note that you may initially feel entirely fine confronting some of your past difficulties, but then suddenly find yourself triggered or depressed a few hours later or the next day. This is because people often dissociate into the rational mind when thinking of the past. Even though it is still impacting you, there is a delayed effect. De-stressing and increasing your resilience to stress helps you to cope with the symptoms of trapped emotions and release them more easily. Just go at your own pace, and take breaks to stabilize your stress levels.

4.3 You Already Have Resources

Likely, you already have many strengths, even if you don't know them yet. What allowed you to start reading this book? What got you to your job or school today? What allowed you to complete an art project or sign up for a therapist? What moments in your lifetime or healing journey are you proud of? Even the things that a person considers undesirable about themselves often directs them into really fulfilling passions such as service work, creating community, art, or research. The fact is, humans are resilient creatures and can survive or even thrive in dire situations.

Mindfully use your hobbies and memories as grounding points to empower yourself. What activities do you enjoy? What times have you laughed, felt safe, or loved something? That might include things like reading, dancing, being in nature, spending time with friends, playing sports, gardening, or gathering together for games. Even if you do not currently have one of these hobbies, you can identify things you might be interested in like making art or taking care of animals. The goal is to create stable places of joy and connection that you can go to in times of difficulty.

It is okay if you have certain hobbies typically seen as addictions or unhealthy, but know that in the process of healing from deep childhood wounds, you'll probably have to change your relationship with them or quit them altogether. Although they often depress the mind overall, compulsively consuming certain substances and media provide a quick boost to the brain's happy chemicals. Addictive behaviors are typically formed as a way to dull the immense stress and uncomfortable feelings of trapped emotions. However, that dulling often destroys our ability to exert mastery over our emotions and meaningfully deal with our stresses. We'll discuss how to better regulate or quit addictive behaviors later in Chapter 12, but keep in mind that addiction is primarily the result of stress, culture, and your peer group.

Trapped emotions can also be beneficial when moderated properly. For instance, people who have experienced deep mental wounds tend to have the capacity for greater emotional intelligence and empathy. They know when something is wrong and can act on it. Critical judgment and love for one's work lend to being a respected leader. Being emotional makes releasing trapped energies a lot easier. The goal is not to destroy your inner demons, but rather to befriend and work with them. The suffering you have weathered is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Keep in mind that humans have been dealing with trapped emotions since the beginning. Many spiritual beliefs and cultural traditions deal with releasing these energies through dance, ritual, plant medicine, storytelling, and more. Reconnecting with the practices of your ancestors may provide a powerful way of both creating community and navigating your difficult feelings.

4.4 Removing Stress And Abuse

You can only handle so much stress at a time before becoming overwhelmed. Generally, it is healthy to remove certain stresses from your life, or at least reduce them to reasonable levels. The caveat here is that people with severe trapped emotions may find almost anything stressful. It can be difficult to separate healthy stress and stress caused by triggers, intentional abuse, and unintentional abuse.

Normally people have no interest in putting up with abuse, but many people with trapped emotions do not know what abuse looks like or lack the motivation to stand up against it. In fact, they may seek it out to recreate unhealthy childhood dynamics that they confused for love. Identifying the difference between love and abuse is already covered in Chapter 3, but let's further break these behaviors down. Just keep in mind that it is possible to communicate through your problems and repair certain relationships as I explore in Chapters 8 and 14.

Healthy stress involves things that provide a long or short-term benefit. This includes things like going to school, working out, processing with a partner, having your opinions challenged (to a point), earning money, completing a project, socializing, or traveling abroad. Since your stress tolerance is limited, these things may still sometimes need to get removed or at least paused to allow you to recover. For instance, if you're feeling overwhelmed or tired, your ability to handle additional stress will be limited. That said, according to psychologist Alia Crum, stress will impact you differently depending on your mindset.¹⁸⁰ Stress that you reframe as something beneficial to your growth or education actually increases your ability to handle it. This power of mindset is

covered in Chapter 6.

Triggers are anything that activates your trapped emotions and can include loud sounds, certain types of people, or physical touch. Discovering your triggers can be a very important part of healing as things you once thought were entirely normal are actually the causes of your anger, anxiety, or depression. In general, your goal is to reduce the reaction you experience when confronted by triggers that are otherwise healthy. However, healing may require totally removing specific types of triggers for a time.

Intentional abuse includes name-calling, violence, racism, sexism, threats, and actions that are repeated over time to manipulate a person. Intentional abusers do not show empathy and do not attempt to change their behavior when asked. If they do, it is temporary and used as a means of gaining power over you again.

Unintentional abuse falls into two categories. One is when a person does something abusive but is willing to shift that behavior and is empathetic that they hurt you. It may take them quite a while and many reminders to shift this behavior, but they are willing to try and seemingly make progress. This is common in people still learning about love who repeat patterns from their parents.

Unintentional abuse secondly appears when a person fails to do something, such as communicating, frequently flaking out on social engagements, or never doing any relationship work like making plans or initiating conversations to process issues. These people will not necessarily change their behavior. There are also cultural norms that could be considered abusive such as abrasive or passive-aggressive communication styles (think communication on the East Coast versus communication on the West Coast of the USA). A person who is different from you or was raised with different cultural norms doesn't necessarily mean they are abusive, but it can mean that you're incompatible, and that's okay too.

Rather than figuring out if something is abusive or not, get used to asking yourself, *is this stress worth my time and energy? Is this person willing to learn?* No? Well, it's time to move on or create some strong boundaries. Let go of trying to get approval, understanding, or love from people who are incapable of providing that for you. Keep in mind that abusers are full of trapped emotions themselves, and often will not change until shocked out of their routines - you are doing them a service by leaving or taking back control over your time. Their well-being is not your responsibility and the world is abundant with people who you will enjoy more. Of course, how quickly you leave is up to you. Consider establishing a boundary, whether secretly or shared

aloud, such as:

- After communicating a want or need (if it's safe to), I expect change to happen within a month
- Three strikes and they're out
- If it is stressful more than 20% of the time then I'm leaving
- If _____ ever happens again, we're through

Boundaries can be difficult to uphold, especially if the threat of physical violence, moving homes, or a child's health are in question. Just remember, this is for your well-being and happiness. Each person is responsible for their own needs and you alone cannot fill in the void this person is experiencing. If you are a caretaker, codependent type, or have strong family values, you may struggle with this concept, but you deserve to be treated with love and respect. Being someone's savior is not love. Constantly having to take care of a person's emotional and physical needs is not love. Having a one-sided relationship is not love. Abuse is not love. Your being miserable is not love. Being deprived of your basic needs is not love. If you find yourself constantly forgiving a person for repetitive misdeeds, start keeping a list as a reminder of how much you put up with. How to assert needs and boundaries are detailed in Chapter 8.

It is an unfortunate reality that we often stay in abusive and unhealthy relationships much longer than necessary. We make all kinds of excuses as to why, hoping that the behaviors will change or things will start feeling okay. They rarely do. Yet, many people need inexplicable proof. It might take dozens or hundreds of times of getting hurt by someone before finally we can see that the relationship is not serving us. This is the same for any addiction. Even if friends tell us "You need to take space" or "That's really unhealthy," we find it hard to believe - our friends may have an objective point of view, but our emotional world is wrapped up in fear, love (or what we mistake for it), empathy, and desire.

While people are capable of increasing their resilience to stress, it often becomes more difficult to tolerate many behaviors as you become mindful of abuse. You frequently see this in people who start reading literature on feminism, racism, and love. Unfortunately, this may substantially limit romantic and platonic relationships as you more easily discern who is healthy to be around. Even for people who are willing to learn, you will likely have to spend a decent amount of time educating them. Just remember that everyone has to start somewhere and you were not always so aware yourself. In a society built

on toxicity and abuse, awareness can be a privilege most have never had access to. Many types of abuse deserve zero tolerance, but if you otherwise like a person, you might at least try communicating the problem to see if transformation is possible.

Abusive situations may be dangerous to leave. In this case, it is important to do so quickly and preferably with the assistance of allies to protect you. The *Joyful Heart Foundation* website or *National Domestic Violence Hotline* may be able to help give guidance at 1-800-799-7233. Teenagers at least 16 years of age can file for emancipation. School counselors may also guide youth to important resources for securing safety.

There are situations where you have done everything you can and know that the source of your stress is leaving, but they're still there for a few weeks or months. Maybe this is with sharing space with an ex, putting in your 30 days notice for a job, or waiting for a toxic housemate to move out. I wish time machines existed, but I'll try to offer some alternatives:

- While you may feel like you are submerged in negativity, try remembering the positive and regularly creating gratitude lists
- Try to reframe negative statements towards your stresses into an empathetic understanding of why they act the way they do
- Create temporary safe spaces as explored in Section 4.5
- Communicate some boundaries as explored in Chapter 8
- Spend as much time outside of your house as possible
- Avoid complaining too much about the source of your stress, do not let it consume your energy any more than it has to

4.5 Establishing A Safe Space

It is extremely difficult to release trapped emotions unless you first establish a safe space. This space should not trigger any stressful memories or feelings, at least for the difficult experience you are currently working with. When we remove stressful triggers from our lives, our minds and bodies will naturally begin healing. Some people may therefore only need the steps covered in this chapter to make profound shifts in life, especially if their mental wounds are too painful to confront more directly right now.

Some healing modalities and therapists push you to process things you are not ready for yet but know that resting in a feeling of “safely okay” is a great place to be for as long as you want. After all, the goal is to improve your life, not to be perfect. Just know that the trapped emotions may continue to impact you in unforeseen ways until the emotions, self-limiting beliefs, and

maladaptive behaviors are transformed. Healing often requires some discomfort and vulnerability, but it is typically small compared to the suffering experienced by not addressing the hurt at all. A safe space may involve:

- Staying somewhere other than your house
- Putting yourself around people who you trust, will hold you, or can speak empathetic words to you
- Breaking up with a partner or friend
- Cutting contact and phone calls with a family member, or at least creating specific boundaries with them
- Blocking a person and their friends on social media
- Removing, deleting, or destroying objects from your house and social media that remind you of a difficult experience (give them to a friend for safekeeping if you'd rather not destroy them)
- Quitting a job
- Practicing mindfulness and returning to the present moment rather than thoughts of the past or future
- Moving to a house where you are surrounded by more nature and enjoy your neighbors or housemates⁶²
- Stopping the consumption of all news media
- Logging out of all of your social media accounts and turning your phone off
- Giving your mind a break with a nap, going to sleep, or watching a movie
- Stepping away from any additional stress once you begin feeling overwhelmed and releasing the emotions as explored in Chapter 5
- Growing old enough to move away from a difficult parent or guardian figure or obtaining a legal right to emancipate early
- Learning some basic skills to cope with anxiety and depression
- Using an antidepressant or anti-anxiety medication
- Cutting out anything or anyone that is causing you anger, stress, or sadness more than 20% of the time or more than once or twice a month - adjust these numbers to whatever level seems reasonable for you
- Communicating your needs and creating boundaries about what you want and do not want as covered in Chapter 8

Creating a safe space may be difficult if you live with stressful or generally unlikable people, or if you are financially insecure and scared of losing a

job. In these situations, it will be important to find other ways of relieving stress such as by taking on less responsibility or asserting boundaries. For instance, if you caregive for a family member or friend, assert times that you are reserving for yourself or establish that you cannot be their only friend. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Safe spaces may initially be experienced as unsafe because of how unfamiliar environments can be stressful, or you still feel triggered by a recent experience. Safe spaces may also be considered boring. People who grew up in stressful environments can become addicted to excitement, dissociating into drugs, sex, work, games, parties, and other activities to push away their emotions. It can therefore take a few hours to a few days to adapt to and appreciate being in a new environment, so allow enough time for this transition to take place even if it is an emotional one.

Establishing a completely safe space may also be almost impossible for people who face discrimination based on their gender, race, or other factors. If you can move, there are locations where certain forms of discrimination are not as bad or that have more supportive allies. Even in difficult areas though, or when you are impacted by systemic forms of discrimination, you can still make progress; it is just going to be harder. Self-care and building resilience for oppressed communities are discussed more later in this chapter in Section 4.9.

4.6 Visualization

Visualization is a powerful imagination technique that may be used to practice skills, calm the nervous system, renegotiate painful memories, and heal wounded parts of ourselves. For instance, you could conjure your favorite superhero to speak empowering words to you, imagine a golden light to protect your heart from pain, or enter into a difficult memory and overcome what happened. Each visualization is unique to the individual. You can create a desired outcome beforehand, or allow the outcome to unfold as you progress through your thoughts and mental images. This allows you to create a resilient mental landscape. Try using visualization practices for 5 to 10 minutes daily. Just make sure you are emotionally resourced and feeling relatively safe. For visualizations you create beforehand:

1. Choose a desired outcome such as winning a competition or protecting yourself from evil energies. Try to keep it positive rather than negative - “I will...” instead of “I don’t want to...”
2. Find a calm space free of distractions and close your eyes. Alterna-

tively, wear headphones and play music or white noise to mask out the rest of the world.

3. Use mindfulness and deep breathing while releasing the tension in your body as explored later in this chapter and Chapter 5. This helps the body enter into a state of self-hypnosis in which it is more able to handle stress and rewrite narratives.¹⁴⁰
4. Imagine yourself performing all of the actions involved in reaching your desired outcome.
5. As you imagine this, make sure you are also imagining all of the associated sensations. Writing the visualization out or making a vision board with images will help create the world surrounding your goal. What emotions will finishing that goal create? What do you do about the obstacles that might obstruct your way? What will the weather and lighting be like? Imagine these things in vivid detail.
6. Repeat the visualization multiple times to increase the likelihood of success. This is mental practice. Of course, a reasonable goal will also increase your chances of success. What are you capable of now? And with a little more practice, what could you be capable of?
7. Consider using a mirror to help. Mirrors give you direct feedback for your movements, emotions, and appearance. Dressing up, making silly faces, and doing other visual experiments will expand your self-awareness and allow you to practice who you want to be seen as while acting out a visualization.

Here are a few visualization exercises you can use:

1. ***Positive thoughts*** - Many therapists use Peter Levine's *oscillation* technique in which you move between focusing on the intense emotions created by your trapped emotions and grounding in a positive memory or positive sensation in your body.¹⁰⁵ With memories you want to viscerally experience them so that you can feel the energies they previously created. Perhaps it is a time you felt loved, happy, or safe. Perhaps it is a stuffed animal or hat that you cherished. Remember as many of the associated sensory details as possible (sounds, smells, sights, textures, tastes, and emotions). Perhaps there are also words such as "I love you" or "You are appreciated." These memories can exist prior to our difficult experience or from more recent times.
2. ***Loving-kindness meditation*** - In Buddhism there is *loving-kindness meditation* which promotes positive emotions towards oneself

and others.¹⁹⁷ This is a practice in which different people are thought of with loving-kindness and given words such as “may you be happy and well.” Many guided versions of this practice may be found online, but I’ll share a quick summary. You start by relaxing and finding a sense of peace, kindness, and love within yourself. If this is difficult you can recall a time in which you have felt or witnessed this from another person, and apply those sensations to yourself. You then bring your awareness to a person who you care about and love, followed by a person you are struggling with emotionally. Lastly, you bring your awareness to each of these people in loving-kindness, including yourself, and expand it to your community, your city, nature, the Earth, and the Universe. You can end with, “May we be happy and well,” while sitting with the warm glow of positive regard for all beings.

3. ***The memory vault*** - If certain thoughts or memories are tormenting you or endlessly reiterating, you may need to give yourself some distance from them. Instead of just distracting yourself, you can create a memory safe. Imagine a container that not even sound can escape from. Perhaps it is guarded by strong creatures whose immense love for you makes you confident they will keep that memory locked away until you are ready to confront it. Imagine yourself placing the memory into the container and sealing it away. Repeat this visualization as needed. When the memory tries to intrude, you can recall that it is in your memory vault.
4. ***The safe space*** - Imagine or think about a space you feel safe within. I’ve used thoughts of my room as a container of safety, complete with warmth, cleanliness, my blankets, and the click made when locking the door. I can then instruct certain emotions and memories that they’re not allowed in. Alternatively, visit a happy and magical world. I once conjured the image of jumping between giant colorful Skittles. Even though I don’t eat Skittles, I found this strangely soothing.
5. ***The guardians*** - Think of compassionate and powerful beings who will keep you safe and guard against unwanted energies. These are preferably non-human entities or fictional characters and are great for guarding your safe place.
6. ***The remote*** - Visualize a remote control that has power over your memories. With it you can mute, slow down, speed up, pause, take out the color, zoom in, or zoom out any thought or image that comes to mind. This can be especially useful when confronting difficult

memories.

If you have trouble visualizing anything, you can also illustrate your imagination on paper or in a sandbox, write out the story in a journal, look at a photo of a finished product, edit yourself into a photo scene, or create a physical manifestation of the visualization by performing a ritual. Emerging digital tools like drawing software combined with virtual reality can also help you experience a powerfully immersive version of your creation. There are also more advanced visualization techniques we will discuss starting in Chapter 6.

4.7 Finding A Therapist, Co-Counselor, And Other Allies

There are many allies who can help you regulate your nervous system and deal with your trapped emotions. While it may initially be difficult to find your perfect match, you are simply looking for someone “good enough.” You will discover better allies along your journey. Any healthy friend, therapist, pet, motivational speaker, author, community, or spiritual guide will naturally empower you and help bolster your ability to regulate and co-regulate your nervous system. Whoever it is, establish at least one non-judgmental ally who you enjoy and can speak with openly about your struggles. That is, someone who you feel safe around and is capable of actively listening to and empathizing with your difficulties.

For actually dealing with trapped emotions, it is useful to have a mental health professional trained in Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Somatic, Psychedelic-Assisted, Internal Family Systems (IFS), Neurofeedback, Hypno, Attachment-Focused, or Narrative Exposure therapy. Websites like *GoodTherapy* and *PsychologyToday* have directories of locally available therapists who are easily searchable. Online therapy is also available through *BetterHelp Online Counseling* and *Talkspace*.

People who reflect on our words and actions tend to be better at seeing and naming our patterns than we are, so you may find some great insights from therapy.⁶⁸ However, it can require quite a lot of privilege to get a good therapist. They may be too expensive, not readily available in your area, or don’t take your insurance. It can also be quite stressful and time-consuming finding a skilled therapist. This is part of the reason why I felt it important to write this book, to help decentralize the mental health industry and make therapy techniques more accessible to underprivileged individuals and the general public. It can still be helpful simply having a therapist who can empathetically listen, but their usefulness will vary for dealing with trapped emo-

tions.

I’ve worked with five different therapists practicing various modalities over the years, and while each has given me certain skills or relieved some day-to-day difficulties, none have felt truly safe or capable enough to deal with my suffering, even ones specially trained in the previously mentioned modalities. As mentioned in Chapter 1, none of them ever even mentioned that I might have PTSD. Thus, my healing did not begin until I stopped relying on the therapy industry as the only road to feeling better. As therapist Omar Hill says, there are many issues within the institution of therapy, and most therapy actually happens outside of the therapy room.⁶⁵

Great therapists do exist and can be important for people with severe trapped emotions, extreme dissociation, or difficulty managing their time. I’ll discuss finding one later in this section, but I do want to note how problematic mainstream therapy can be, especially for oppressed communities. This starts with there being little to no oversight in therapy work. Some therapists enter into the field for entirely the wrong reason, are emotionally struggling themselves, or take on clients they are unable to help simply to fill their schedule. Most sessions are less than an hour long each week, making it take a long time to form a trusting relationship or find the roots of a person’s struggles.

Many therapists lack the cultural intelligence to understand the oppression faced by groups like people of color, the LGBTQ+ community, Native Americans, or Black people. Very few even identify in these groups, which may be essential for certain people seeking services. In combination with this, the research and training behind therapy techniques often call for specific modalities that lack the cultural nuance to work for many groups of people.

Typically therapy is also not holistic in its approach, neglecting the many aspects of basic self-care found in the next section. Furthermore, insurance companies and doctors often refer clients to therapists who use techniques that are relatively ineffective for many types of trapped emotions. Clients may rely on therapists to act as a healthy relationship, but this will always be limited by the existence of money as the basic entry point to the connection and with therapists being trained not to share their emotions and experiences.⁶⁵

As a result of these problems, you may need additional allies who are more accessible and helpful. These may come in the form of:

- Authors and artists
- Books and other literature that dive deeply into your difficulties
- Your inner selves
- Support groups or a sponsor through a Twelve Step program

- Personal growth seminars
- An accountability buddy, or a friend or partner who is doing similar work
- A co-counseling relationship
- A life coach
- Animal companions
- A doctor or doctors who specialize in nutrition, gut health, hormone regulation, inflammation, and psychiatry

4.7.1 Authors And Artists

Authors and artists like myself can act as allies and mentors - you can begin doing a great amount of work on your own simply by reading books, listening to podcasts, or following creators online. While media can be an addiction that fosters avoidance of your problems, the arts can also help you tap into your emotions and put your life into perspective. Consider reading poetry, listening to lyrical music, or visiting an art museum. The only thing is that you have to practice what you learn or feel inspired by as it is rare for any change to take place by simply consuming knowledge.

Please see the end of this guide for the literature I read to write this book. Much of my education about trapped emotions came from the local library. With a library card, I gained access to the digital catalog of *Hoopla* and was able to listen to many audiobooks for free as I worked jobs or drove. Educating yourself will also help you choose a good enough ally and know what to expect from certain therapeutic techniques.

4.7.2 Your Parts

As we will explore in Chapter 10, your greatest ally may be versions of yourself including your past, present, and future selves. Similarly, a character from a fictional story, a famous actor, or a historical figure may also empower your ability to deal with life's difficulties.

4.7.3 Support Groups And Adult Children Of Alcoholics And Dysfunctional Families

Many types of support groups meet regularly to deal with every form of mental suffering and addiction. You can search online for ones happening locally, on the phone, through chat, or over video conferencing. Twelve Step programs are the most well-known, though are often criticized for being demoralizing and shaming, not based on current science, too religious or spiritual, and kind of cultish. They are, however, the most broadly available support group

happening all hours of the day. At the very least, these groups can be a great starting point, allowing you to hear from people who have gone through similar difficulties, get free one-on-one support through a sponsor or fellow member, and make friends. They also give you something to occupy your time with when you might otherwise seek out a toxic behavior or have no one to get help from.

I want to note that many people misunderstand the use of a higher power in Twelve Step programs - this higher power can be anything such as a community, nature, a Christian god, or a deity of your choosing. You might even think of it as a mentor instead. It does not require you to be religious or believe in a god in the traditional sense. You also do not have to fully commit yourself to a program to benefit from it, although often the more you do, the better the results.

Of Twelve Step programs, joining an *Adult Children of Alcoholics and Dysfunctional Families* (ACA) group will be greatly beneficial for anyone who grew up with stressful, abusive, controlling, or unavailable parents. Many of the criticisms garnered by Twelve Step programs are remedied in ACA, especially when using Tony A's version of the Twelve Steps or doing *inner child work* (see Chapter 10). It is still not perfect, but ACA holds strongly to the ethos of "take what you need and leave the rest." It also provides community and structure to find healing through, and each meeting is a little different so you can find ones that feel best for you. The goal of ACA is to come out of isolation and obtain *emotional sobriety*.

After a year of regularly attending online and in-person ACA meetings, I realized that it was the first time in my adult life I had unconditionally felt cared for and loved. Knowing that I could attend a meeting at any time created a stable trust as if a friend were always there. Simultaneously, knowing that the founders had created this program purely for the loving benefit of others without any monetary gain made me feel very safe. Honestly, I do not attend meetings regularly anymore, in part because I found that constantly hearing people talking about the negative sides of their families made it harder to find forgiveness for my own. I do think hearing this dialogue is initially a really important part of healing, but it needs to be balanced with doing the practices and a lot of self-care. I am happy to know ACA is there when I need it though and am sure I will revisit the workbooks at some point.

Harm reduction is also a valuable model that meets a person where they're at in their drug usage and establishes healthy goals that do not necessarily equate to abstinence. Finding a therapist or support group that practices harm reduction may be a better fit for some people. We'll discuss this model

in Section 12.2.

Aside from Twelve Step programs and harm reduction, there are also day-long to week-long personal growth seminars and authentic relating groups. These can be expensive, are less regular, and can be based around ineffective techniques, but sometimes do provide a space to practice skills and develop deep connections. You might also find a lot of healing in attending open mics for musicians or poets. While this may be a less direct form of personal growth work, it is a space to share your story and hear others.

Another option is meditation and yoga groups. Please keep in mind that Western versions of these both are derived from Eastern traditions and most often Indian people. Western versions are very different and lack much of the supporting spirituality, mindset, awareness, and practices true to the original.¹³⁹ That said, both Eastern and Western versions of these practices are effective for a variety of purposes, and people with lots of trapped emotions may need a trauma-informed version of yoga or meditation to be able to handle the emotions that arise. For everyone else though, consider supporting the creators of these practices - that is, seeking out teachers who are not White, are trained from minds familiar with more traditional forms of the practices, or at least give credit to the history of practices now taught. Meditation is explored more deeply in the next chapter.

4.7.4 Friends

Friends who are doing similar work are great to have around. People healing often congregate in personal growth communities such as spiritual groups, addiction support groups, meditation circles, yoga, art or music festivals, and the like - establishing a friendship with one of these people may be easiest by going to special day-long or weekend retreats. You might also find them by creating a self-help book club that reads empowering literature and discusses it weekly in person or through video chat. Surround yourself with encouraging people who love what you love and are supportive of your passions. More about making friends is covered in Section 14.1.

You can also ask for support on social media. Just be sure that this is not a passive-aggressive swing at friends you felt have wronged you. That means no belittling others and being careful about sharing inaccurate stories created in your suffering. Remember that you are not the center of the universe and that everyone has their own struggles and distractions they are facing. State specifically what you are feeling and wanting. While this can be a very serious, vulnerable, and authentic share, it may sometimes be more productive if you can make it funny and playful, or just neutral. Each direction will attract a dif-

ferent response and group of people. I’ve personally noticed that being vulnerable can be quite cathartic and start some really sincere conversations. Then again, the more fun and playful posts tend to attract more connections. Just try to steer clear of anything along the lines of “everyone has abandoned me” or “no one likes me.”

4.7.5 Co-Counseling

There is also the option of establishing a co-counseling relationship. Co-counseling is a form of DIY therapy in which two people switch between being the *client* and the *counselor*. The client primarily directs the session and can ask for anything within reason including touch or simply being witnessed. The counselor mostly provides a safe space for the client with active listening, reflecting in summary what the client said, and asking open-ended questions. Sessions typically last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour, with a short break before switching roles. There can even be three or four people in a group taking turns in the role of client. You can learn co-counseling through books and online or in-person classes. Co-counseling has several great benefits including learning how to empathetically support others and allowing you to receive as much therapy as you want for free. You can establish co-counseling relationships with friends, through your co-counseling classes, or by asking in mental health forums and support groups. Make sure that you create a consistent schedule for these appointments, as otherwise, it is unlikely that you’ll utilize this resource.

4.7.6 Life Coaches

Some people benefit from having a life coach for learning skills to succeed in life and keep on track with their goals. Typically a life coach helps you achieve various personal and professional goals, whereas a therapist works on your mental health and past, but the roles can get blurry. Life coaches tend to be more direct and open than therapists are, but there is also quite a lot more variability between how different life coaches operate compared to therapists. This is because while some life coaches become certified through a training program, no formal education is required. Life coaches do sometimes benefit people more than therapists do, but they may charge considerably more than therapists and do not accept insurance.

4.7.7 Animal Companions

Animals can help you rebuild socialization, regulate your nervous system, and experience love. For animals, I think that dogs are the most beneficial because

they closely emulate human relationships. They bond deeply with their caregiver and protest if they are not feeling safe, nourished, or taken on walks. Not only are they lovely companions, they also force you to go outside and get exercise. Even more, they give purpose to your existence and provide a great excuse to be in spaces that might otherwise cause you anxiety. That said, dogs can require a lot of responsibility. Cats are probably the next best option, but people also enjoy rabbits, hamsters, snakes, birds, and so on. There are also horse therapy programs and many volunteer opportunities in animal shelters.

4.7.8 A Good Therapist

For all the reasons that I think the therapy industry is problematic, it is possible to find a good therapist and is an important step for many people attempting to address their trapped emotions. This is especially true for people who grew up in a dysfunctional family or have attachment wounds. A therapist can showcase what a stable and trusting relationship looks like and help identify healthier friends and romantic partners. They can also reflect the way your body moves as information for your trapped emotions. Their regularity and support provide a certain level of unconditional love and emotional regulation for the client. Over time through self-reflection and relational support, a therapist helps rebuild basic interpersonal and self-regulation skills that may have been missed growing up. Many therapists accept insurance or sliding scale payments if you ask. Beyond finding a therapy modality that fits your personal healing needs, you can determine to stick with or leave based on three factors:

1. Even before meeting up, interview your potential therapist and ask them specific questions related to your recovery. If they do not have experience in an area like addiction or PTSD, it's time to move on. It is also ideal if they understand or share your lived experiences in race or gender, or have personally recovered from the thing you are dealing with.
2. After six weeks, does the therapist feel like a trusted friend that you are comfortable with and glad to see? Or is there the potential for this to develop? Feeling safe is one of the most important factors in a beneficial therapeutic relationship. This includes the therapist's personality as well as the physical space that they meet you in.
3. Has the therapist been meaningfully helpful or insightful? If not, it's probably time to try someone else.

Naturally, each person will form a relationship with their therapist differently, and it may take some people ten to twenty sessions, if not longer, to form a trusting connection.^{132L} I even had a therapist I didn't like at all because of how emotionally rigid she was, but that ended up being my friend's favorite therapist. Some people will find single-session therapists beneficial as well, as they may give you helpful resources, tools, and advice much faster than a traditional therapist would. Follow your feelings and know that there are many options out there if one person does not work out.

If you are a therapist reading this, consider upgrading your practice by reading *The Wounded Healer* by Omar Reda, *Trauma Stewardship* by Laura van Dernoot Lipsky, and *The Practitioner's Guide to the Science of Psychotherapy* by Richard Hill and Matthew Dahlitz. Episode 170 of the *Therapist Uncensored Podcast* with Dr. Laurel Parnell also has a great commentary on adapting therapy techniques to the cultures of various groups.

4.8 False Self-Help

The world has become inundated with self-help information, but not all of it is very useful. Even when it is, if a technique is not taught or used correctly, then the benefits won't be experienced beyond temporary relief or a placebo effect. At its worst, self-help and pseudoscience can reinforce your suffering and promote escapism. Some people use self-care as an excuse to never challenge themselves in being vulnerable. Meditation practices can be used to dissociate and ignore dealing with your problems and the suffering in the world. Astrology can be used to discriminate against others and limit what you think you are capable of. Toxic positivity and spiritual bypassing can be used to blame others for your hurtful words and actions.

Most spiritual and religious practices like Christianity promise to alleviate suffering in one form or another but may do so through guilt, shame, intolerance, or escapism. Furthermore, spirituality and religion tend to be best at helping a person change their story, but may not be the best at helping a person create a safe space, release their emotions, or alter unhealthy behaviors. Any of these modalities can aid in a person's healing, but whether or not they will help address your specific problems is fairly random and you have to be careful with how you are using them.

For example, a popular tool people use is *manifesting reality*, even though manifestations can increase anxiety and depression.⁸⁴ This might involve repeating "I will be rich" while visualizing that event. According to the mental health treatment center, *Newport Institute*, manifestations may make you neglect difficult feelings, believe that you should have complete

control over your thoughts, that negative thoughts will always come true, blame yourself for the outcome of a situation, and avoid taking practical action to improve your life. Done properly though, parts of manifestation can be healthy such as visualizing what success looks like, embodying an empowered mindset, and setting the intention of what you want to focus on.

Even science-based methods can be problematic. For instance, when research does not include certain demographics of people, a study is too small, or the methodology is poorly conducted. As previously stated, people also often just focus on a single research study that ignores the whole person. In this way, the application of science can often forget the importance of empathy, compassion, morals, spirituality, and interpersonal connection.

In reading this book you will hopefully be able to distinguish between effective and ineffective strategies for addressing your emotions. Generally, look for research-based approaches that integrate multiple methodologies and treat you as a human being. Be wary of quick fixes or huge upfront costs. Know that many therapists are unskilled or incompatible with your specific problems. There are lots of options though with any type of self-help, so keep trying until you find something that feels safe and uplifting. If you do not start seeing results, try something else.

4.9 Basic Self-Care

Stress, anxiety, depression, and other feelings take over your life in ways that prevent you from regulating your mood and energy. While these forms of suffering may control your life from a subconscious place, you can consciously apply certain techniques to regain some of your power. Calming your emotions also has the added benefit of calming those around you.

Most often these skills will help decrease the intensity of stress, anxiety, sadness, and anger. While they may be highly beneficial for dealing with depression as well, please keep in mind the many dietary, chemical, hormonal, and nutrient sources of depression as mentioned in this book's medical disclaimer. Some forms of trapped emotions also make it difficult to be aware of stress, so it can be important to establish a basic self-care routine that regularly calms your nervous system at specific times of the day or week. Self-care is a dedicated practice that creates resilience to difficulty and helps regulate your nervous system after an emotion arises or you have a stressful experience.

This self-care list is quite long, but of these, getting enough sleep, nutrients, social time, safety, exercise, time in nature, and mindfulness meditation with breathing are often the most impactful. You can abbreviate this list with the acronym **MENDSSS** (**M**indfulness, **E**xercise, **N**ature, **D**iet, **S**afety, **S**ocial-

ize, Sleep). These are covered below, but if nothing else, you should figure out how to regularly get better sleep. To help you decide which strategies to utilize, you can rate your current emotional intensity from 1-10 and then ask yourself, “How can I decrease this number?” When one thing works a little, you might then try another strategy to get your score down even more. This will become easier or even intuitive as you see what is effective for a given situation. You can add these to your *mental map* as discussed in Section 3.3.

Not all of the larger list will be relevant to you and you may learn them before, during, or after your healing process. Just devote yourself to a few that resonate with your needs or interests. Trying to control too many aspects of your life can increase your stress or prevent you from connecting with people, so make sure your routine is actually beneficial! See Chapter 12 if you need help forming new habits or cutting out old ones. Also please remember that not everyone will respond well to some of these protocols and you should talk to your doctor before incorporating them, especially if you have any known health concerns.

4.9.1 Skills

1. **Schedule** - Schedule out your week in advance, filling it with a balance of work, play, socializing, healing work, and relaxation. If you have too much open space in your life, start a project or join a group. Prioritize a minimum of 15 minutes a day to the techniques discussed in this book, especially in the morning or before going to sleep. Participate in at least one activity around other people outside your house. If you are struggling to start a project or healthy behavior, split it into smaller tasks and get specific about each part. I personally love my weekly paper planner and crossing things off along the way, but some people benefit from an electronic calendar.
2. **Create systems** – Set up systems for your success. Make your self-care options visible and know your *mental map* for coping with triggers as they arise. Find online groups, friends, or therapists who you can reach out to any time for support instead of engaging in addictive behaviors. Have healthy meals ready to eat. Join activity groups that make you feel obligated to get out of your house.
3. **NVC** - Learn how to use Nonviolent Communication (NVC) to settle conflicts and identify your needs. This is covered in Chapter 8.
4. **Journal** - Start journaling regularly, especially to sort out your problems and emotions. Unlike thoughts that easily repeat over and over again, written words are concrete and can be built upon to explore an

idea rather than flounder in it.

5. **Science** - Understand the science behind why something is healthy or not healthy to help get past the flavor, discomfort, or general desire for a thing.
6. **Habits** - Learn how to form and deform habits as covered in Section 12.1.
7. **Useful information** - Ask yourself if you are simply consuming new knowledge that you will quickly forget or that will stress you out. If so, how could you transform that time into space for practicing healing? For instance, instead of listening to an informational podcast or the news, listen to a meditation.

4.9.2 Body

1. **Breathing** – Use calming breathing techniques. Breathe in as much air as you can, deep and slow, through the nose, into the belly, then release it outward at equal timing.¹⁹⁸ Breathing is one of the few things that allow us to consciously control the part of the nervous system tied to our emotions.^{97R} It also lowers your heart rate, which improves resilience to depression.²¹⁶ This is especially powerful when we intentionally focus on the full sensation of the breath as explored in Chapter 5. Since the breath is always with us, I often use controlled breathing as my first tactic for dealing with overwhelming emotions and stress.
2. **Sleep** - Get enough sleep by limiting screen exposure at night, eating your final meal several hours before bed, sleeping on a decent mattress, blocking out all light with a sleep mask or curtains, reducing your stress, and burning off excess energy by exercising during the day at least 6 hours before bed. Avoid caffeine, THC, and alcohol, at least anytime after the morning. Create a quiet space by using earplugs, white noise, or a fan. Keep your room at 60 to 67° Fahrenheit.¹⁹² 7 to 9 hours of sleep a day is ideal, but you can also incorporate napping into your routine. Lost sleep negatively impacts the body in ways that you cannot make up for later on in the week. Sleep apnea is also a common condition that interrupts sleep, so consider getting tested if these suggestions do not improve your wakefulness. If your thoughts are loud, do a small activity in dim lighting like reading instead of fighting them. Exposing yourself directly to 10 to 30 minutes of natural light shortly after you wake up will help set your sleep rhythm for the rest of the day.⁸² Sleeping and getting quality

sleep are two different things as many substances can disrupt the different components of sleep.⁷² Many sleep supplements such as melatonin and valerian have very little evidence showing that they work. Consider getting a sleep tracker that can record your sleep cycles. Read *Why We Sleep* by Dr. Matthew Walker.

3. **Exercise** - Exercise for at least 30 minutes each day, preferably with something that gets your heart pumping and makes you break a sweat.³⁶ Team exercise is especially potent as it helps motivate you to be consistent and acts as a social outlet. Even a 5-minute walk is quite beneficial though, so start where you can. Generally, the more you exercise, the more you decrease your risk of diseases later in life, and the more you increase your lifespan and mood. We evolved with exercise as a natural part of our day, so it is a vital aspect of the human body fully functioning. I've even benefited from just doing 30 seconds of jumping up and down swinging my arms when in an emotionally tumultuous space. Transform your feelings into motion!
4. **Inflammatory foods** - Avoid or limit foods and medications that inflame your body. These include bread, dairy, sugar, alcohol, excessive salt, and fried foods. Overeating or eating foods you are allergic to can also cause inflammation.
5. **Anti-inflammatory foods** - Eat nutritious and anti-inflammatory foods. Fish oil (omega-3 fatty acid with DHA and EPA), zinc, and vitamin B12 are common deficiencies great for helping treat depression. Two to four grams of omega-3 fatty acid a day seems ideal for optimizing health.⁷³
6. **Gut health** - Eat foods that support good gut bacteria such as fiber, fish, nuts, fruit, colorful vegetables, prebiotics, and fermented foods which are refrigerated and not made with vinegar.¹⁸⁹ Address conditions like irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) that interrupt digestion and increase the risk of depression.^{20,96}
7. **Chemical tests** - See a naturopath and get a nutrient and hormone test. Most doctors do not order tests that are extensive enough to show deficiencies or absorption problems caused by poor gut health or genetic abnormalities.¹¹⁷ For instance, some people have a genetic error that prevents them from breaking *folic acid* down into *L-methylfolate*, which then results in treatment-resistant depression.
8. **Nutrient deficiencies** - According to naturopathic doctor Maria Shaflander, all mental health conditions have a nutrient deficiency attached to them - while it may not be the main cause, addressing the

deficiency may help other conditions which are causing you stress. For instance, depression is frequently associated with several deficiencies, such as Vitamin D, that do not help treat the depressive symptoms but are still good to supplement for the functions they do benefit.¹²⁹

9. **Nutrient sources** - Ideally get your nutrients directly from whole foods, but supplement if necessary. Keep in mind that supplement absorption varies widely depending on what the vitamin or mineral is compounded with, so do your research. Multivitamins often use the cheapest and least absorptive compounds. Note also that even whole foods may be lacking in nutrients if the soil they were grown in is deficient. Check out <<https://examine.com/>> for comparisons and research on different nutrients and supplements.
10. **Cannabis dangers** - Avoid consuming cannabis regularly, especially before the age of 25 when your brain is developing the most.²¹² While used by some people to treat anxiety and depression, regular cannabis use (two or more times per week) is actually associated with increases in anxiety and depression as well as some cognitive decline. It is still uncertain if this is true only for THC-heavy strains or all strains.
11. **Touch** - Get healthy consensual touch with hugs, cuddling, sex, or petting animals - platonic touch is often most easily found in dance, acroyoga, and spiritual communities. As family therapist Virginia Satir says, "We need four hugs a day for survival. We need eight hugs a day for maintenance. We need 12 hugs a day for growth." This is why normalizing platonic touch with friends and family is so important. I find that longer and tighter hugs are most beneficial for me. Hugging yourself or a pillow may also be comforting, especially when paired with affirmations.²³¹ Alternatively, try using a weighted blanket or large stuffed animal.
12. **Blocking sounds** - Use white noise, a fan, earbuds, or bone conduction headphones if you are stressed by sounds in your home or out and about.
13. **Chronic illness** - Find ways to alleviate or cure your chronic illnesses and conditions. As many doctors are not aware of effective protocols for certain people, Tony Robbins collected a vast trove of emerging and time-tested treatments in his book, *Life Force*. In general though, changing your exercise, diet, mindset, and sleep routines can have a huge impact. Healing trapped emotions also often helps and may be at the root of some chronic illnesses.

14. **Calming sounds** - Listen to calming music and sounds such as lo-fi, classical, nature clips, or a voice you find soothing. Alternatively, listen to music or motivational speakers you find uplifting or cathartic.
15. **Dance** - Connecting with a dance group can be a great community to create friendships, get platonic touch, and reconnect with your body. I especially like ecstatic dance spaces for being improvisational, sober, and silent.
16. **Singing** - Find a space away from others or in your car and sing loudly whatever comes to mind.
17. **SAD** - Especially for people who experience *seasonal affective disorder* (SAD) during the Winter months, socialize and get outside more or purchase a light therapy lamp or an ultraviolet B (UVB) light. Listen to podcast episode 68 of the Huberman Lab for specifics.⁸²
18. **Health** - Discover a healthy lifestyle, whatever that means for you personally. Avoid the stress of becoming militant about only eating “healthy” food though - continue enjoying your treats, sweets, and comfort foods within the range of what feels good.
19. **Massage** - Get a massage. For people with trapped emotions causing sensitivity to touch, finding someone trained in trauma-informed massage may help re-introduce touch more safely.
20. **Hormones** - Remember that everyone, regardless of their sex, has hormonal fluctuations that decrease their tolerance to stress. Testosterone is lowest each evening and estrogen’s most pronounced shift is monthly - sometimes you just need to sleep or give it a few days for the hormones to rebalance themselves, or seek hormone therapies.
21. **Sauna** - Sauna four or more times a week for at least 20 minutes at 170°F or hotter.⁷³
22. **Intentional stress** - Intentionally expose your body to short periods of stress as explored later in this chapter.

4.9.3 Mind

1. **Mindfulness** - Learn a form of meditation or exercise that incorporates mindfulness such as yoga, tai chi, or qigong. If these feel intense, seek out a group that is trauma-informed and understands that some people need to go very slowly when exploring movement and breathing so as not to become triggered by past abuses. If you choose an activity, try committing to doing it at least two to four times a week. The best benefits of meditation are seen by doing it for at least 13 minutes daily for 8 weeks.¹¹ That said, you may have to build up to

these numbers, so start with whatever feels manageable to you, even if that is just a couple minutes once a week. More about meditation is covered in Chapter 5.

2. **Socialize** - Go socialize or put yourself in a social environment. This can be in a gym, dance, open mic, support group, or through a sponsor or fellow member found in a Twelve Step program. You can also ask for affirmations about yourself or hugs.
3. **Nature** - Get into nature or at least outside into natural light. The fewer signs of humanity there are though, the better. Even just laying under a tree and staring up into the canopy of leaves is calming.²⁴⁸ In one study, veterans with PTSD taken out camping in nature for a week experienced a 30% reduction in symptoms.²⁴⁸ If nature is limited around where you live, decorate your space with house plants, hang up art of plants, and watch nature documentaries. Learn how to propagate houseplants with cuttings from a branch. Growing a garden can also be quite therapeutic.
4. **Calming environments** - Beyond nature, place yourself in environments that calm you down. Some ideas include having good lighting, warmth, quiet, loved ones, and no stressful people.
5. **Do nothing** - Especially for people who are constantly busy, it is important to periodically stop and do nothing. Stare out the window. Look at some trees. Let your mind wander. Give yourself space to enjoy your alone time and not be productive. Practice JOMO, the *joy of missing out*. Connect your success to your well-being instead of what you accomplish. Keeping too rigid of a self-care routine can become exhausting and counter-productive. Check in with what you need right now. The Dutch practice this concept in what they refer to as *Niksen*.²⁵⁸
6. **Self-affirmation** - Use self-affirmation by reminding yourself of what your strengths are and what core personality traits you pride yourself in upholding, such as courage or dedication.²³³
7. **Secure attachment** - Establish at least one securely attached connection that you are not anxious around or avoidant of. This may start off being an animal or plant but ideally can be a human connection (see Chapter 14).
8. **Give** - Volunteer for a cause or give a gift to a person you care about for a burst of joy that will last longer than just giving to yourself.^{34,8} That is, so long as you already have your basic needs met. Gifts can include things like funny memes, money, food, or an expression of

gratitude. More tips for creating happiness are covered in Section 13.12.

9. ***Calm spaces*** - Seek out a calming environment or just take a break.
10. ***Curiosity*** - Approach everything with curiosity – why is this thought appearing? Why do I get into these kinds of relationships? Why is this so distressing? Why did this argument come up? Curiosity leads to developing a growth mindset that allows for change to happen.
11. ***Novelty*** - Have novel experiences.¹⁰⁷ Keep life interesting by traveling, visiting new places, or trying new activities. Experiencing nature is also great because it is never quite the same.
12. ***Beyond you*** - Believe in something other than or greater than yourself such as a community, religious or spiritual pathway, activist cause, or animal companion.
13. ***Good memories*** - Recall the positive and beautiful moments of your life. You can assist your memory by writing down your good memories and storing them in a box, or keeping a file folder of photographs with faces of friends and good times.
14. ***Pause your media consumption*** - Do a digital detox as explored in Section 12.2.
15. ***Mindfully consume empowering media*** – Music, movies, TV, art, informational guides, and fiction can be empowering and fun if they are balanced with building a healthy life. I love fantasy, cartoons, comics, and video games, but consuming more than an hour or two of them a day goes from nourishing fun to escapism.
16. ***No news*** - Stop consuming all news media, or at least only consuming news that you are going to do something about.
17. ***No social media*** - Limit your social media usage, delete it altogether, or only use it for events and messaging friends.
18. ***Laughter*** - Laugh by watching something funny, creating a joke, making faces in the mirror, or drawing something silly.
19. ***Journal*** - Journal to sort out your thoughts and emotions.
20. ***Gratitude*** - Write three things you are grateful for each day, or even just three things that are going right, even mundane things like air existing.
21. ***Creativity*** - Express yourself creatively - draw, paint, dance, garden, build a house, or write a story.
22. ***Relax*** - Relax and enjoy one of your hobbies. If life is especially overwhelming, consume media to dissociate from the intense feelings

until you can stabilize or reach out to an ally. Just be careful not to allow this to become an addiction and know that there are often more effective ways to regulate your nervous system.

23. ***Suicidal ideations*** - If you start having suicidal ideations, know that these intense feelings will pass with time and can be remedied with some of the techniques throughout this book. If you need support call the National Suicide Hotline at 800-273-8255. You can also call or text 988.

4.10 Self-Care For Oppressed Communities

People who face discrimination have some special considerations for bolstering their self-care and resilience. This is because experiences of discrimination and the witnessing of discrimination are built into the very fabric of society and are a daily occurrence for certain demographics of people. These may create trapped emotions in individuals, or just make life more difficult.

Discrimination is the act of treating two groups of people differently in a way that causes harm to one of those groups. This may include violence, verbal attacks, leaving people out, unbalanced hiring practices, harmful stereotypes, or viewing people as less than another group. Oppression then is similar, but specifically is acted out by those with more power or privilege upon those with less power or privilege. While there is a difference in that everyone can discriminate but not everyone can oppress, this book uses these words interchangeably with the play of power in mind.

The oppression that many groups face is part of a system intentionally created to treat certain people as less than human. It makes life harder, increasing the risk of emotions becoming trapped in the body with devastating results to mental and physical health. People who have historically faced discrimination may also be more sensitive to certain triggers due to ancestral trapped emotions as previously mentioned in Section 2.6. Dealing with these epigenetic changes is explored in Section 17.19.

4.10.1 Disclaimers

This is a very sensitive topic, and as a White man, I want to acknowledge that I can never fully understand the lived experiences of many oppressed communities and am no expert on these topics. However, as I have a diverse readership and the topic of oppression is completely ignored in most mental health literature, I felt it important to include. Research was conducted through books written by authors belonging to several races, genders, and sexualities. This includes *My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menakem, *Black Fatigue*

by Mary-Frances Winters, *Native* by Kaitlin B. Curtice, *Healing Racial Trauma* by Sheila Wise Rowe, *How To Be An Antiracist* by Ibram X. Kendi, *Patriarchy Blues* by Frederick Joseph, *Trans Like Me* by CN Lester, and *The Unapologetic Guide To Black Mental Health* by Rheedea Walker.

Please keep in mind that this section summarizes information that requires many books to fully explore, so see the materials I reference for a deeper exploration of these topics. Considering the diversity of ideas on how to tackle oppression in society, every resource also has at least some criticisms, so read reviews to get a more complete perspective of the content. There do however seem to be some generally agreed-upon ideas. Debate exists around whether or not “White people” should be capitalized, but following that it refers to a specific demographic of people who have benefited from racism, it will be capitalized within this book.

Methods of creating social change and uprooting oppressive patterns in oneself are explored in Chapters 15 and 16. If you feel like something is missing, it may be further elaborated on later, but again, this is an introductory guide. I also cover most of the specific tactics explored in this section in more depth elsewhere in the book such as on mindfulness, identifying what you can control, accepting your body, and changing your internal story.

4.10.2 Forms Of Discrimination

Many forms of discrimination exist, but some people are impacted by it more than others. In the United States, discrimination most negatively impacts people along the lines of race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, and income. This includes Black people, Indigenous people, people of color, people living with a disability, women, poor people, non-binary people, and the LGBTQ+ community, especially trans people. When a person belongs to more than one of these identities, it increases the likelihood they will experience discrimination. When combined with a person’s privileges, Kimberlé Crenshaw calls this *intersectionality*.^{195,89}

A White homosexual woman is oppressed along the lines of gender and sexuality but is privileged along the lines of race. A rich Black man with a disability is oppressed along the lines of race and ability, but privileged with income and gender. Someone who grows up with a healthy family has more privilege than someone who has trapped emotions from growing up with an unavailable, abusive, or dysfunctional family.

Discrimination is maintained at the individual and societal level through things like culture, law enforcement, government, capitalism, media, and ignorance. White, cisgender, able-bodied, rich, and heterosexual men benefit

the most from the oppression of others and also have the most power to change it.^{120A} *Cisgender* means that a person identifies with the gender they were assigned at birth. In contrast, *transgender* applies to people who identify with a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth. Non-binary people are those who do not identify with any gender.

We'll discuss ways in which people with more power and privilege, particularly those who are White, can help take a stand against discrimination later, especially in Chapters 15 and 16. In his book, *Patriarchy Blues*, Frederick Joseph makes the case that even if you are oppressed in one way, it is your moral duty to stand up for those who lack the privileges that you have.⁸⁹ While discrimination needs to be tackled with the help of many hands, there are many tactics people facing oppression can use to improve their situation.

4.10.3 Community

Find a community of people that shares your identity, culture, and history, and also celebrates your existence. This is by far the most important factor for improving mental health conditions for people facing discrimination.^{186,147,24,118,103} Come out of isolation; you need allies. This might come from, for example, support groups, elders, reservations, *Historically Black Colleges and Universities*, drag shows, queer bars, or spiritual and religious communities. In *Trans Like Me*, CN Lester shares that at least during childhood, family support of trans identity is more important than community support for positive mental health outcomes.¹⁰³ If there is only a small number of people sharing your identity where you live, connect with people online, with other people who face oppression, or with people who treat you well and listen to your needs. You can also create your own support or interest group that shares your identity, such as in addiction recovery or a book club.

To expedite your healing, finding community may also involve, at least temporarily, removing yourself from commonly oppressive forces such as White people and men. Ideally, as you create more resilience and heal some of your trapped emotions, you can engage with allies from these groups who have educated themselves on your oppression and do their work to repair any triggering behaviors they might act out. Please see Section 2.4 for how this book defines *resilience* in relation to trapped emotions.

It is not your responsibility to educate people ignorant of your history and the discrimination you face.¹⁹⁵ However, as Dr. Anton Treuer says with his work teaching people about Native Americans, it is helpful when you can, but it should not come at the cost of your well-being.¹¹⁸ You could also ask

people to act as allies by educating themselves or supporting you in becoming more financially or emotionally secure. As we will explore later in the book, part of fighting discrimination requires healing the relationship between cultures that are often oppressed and those that oppress.¹²⁰ You are not required to take on that role though, heal and open up at your own pace.

4.10.4 Spirituality And Religion

For those like Black and Indigenous people who have a history of belonging to a spiritual or religious community, health outcomes seem to further improve by engaging with those spaces.^{147,186,24} Rheeda Walker explains that having a higher power helps a person no longer feel responsible for everything that happens to them. As previously mentioned, it also creates a strong sense of community. The faith usually has to represent a person's cultural heritage or predominantly be attended and led by people with a shared identity.

Frederick Joseph does point out in his book, *Patriarchy Blues*, that many religious and spiritual groups reinforce forms of discrimination such as sexism, homophobia, and racism. It is important to either find a more inclusive faith or work to uproot these practices in your place of worship. The book *Native* by Kaitlin B. Curtice explores ways of transforming some of these problematic power structures, connecting with your people's traditional spiritual beliefs, and discovering your identity.

4.10.5 Establish Identity

Become secure and proud of your identity by developing a positive sense of who you are. Come out to your friends and family if they are supportive of LGBTQ+ identities.¹⁴⁹ Transition genders.^{103,193} Label yourself with your race such as Native American or Black. As a Black person, connect with your African roots.¹⁸⁶ As an Indigenous person, learn about your Native American history and traditions during and before the colonization of the United States.¹⁷³ Your heritage is not just slavery or colonization.¹⁸⁶

It is complicated who is accepted into a gender or racial identity. If some people do not accept you into a particular group, find others who do based around a shared sense of culture, interest, or oppression. That, or fight for the rules to change, such as what percentage of blood a person is required to have to be officially accepted into certain Native American tribes. Anton Treuer explores this in his book, *Everything You Wanted To Know About Indians But Were Afraid To Ask*.^{118,173}

More and more people are accepting that racial and gender identity do not have to be defined by your hobbies, clothing, or having a high percentage

of blood from a particular race.⁸⁸ For example, it could instead be defined by growing up in a particular culture and facing discrimination along the lines of race. Someone saying “That isn’t something that Black people do” or “That’s a White person thing” may hurt a person’s mental health by barring them from certain activities while simultaneously reinforcing White power. Being forced to comply with the language, beliefs, or interests of a more privileged group will negatively impact mental health.¹⁸⁶ On the other hand, it is perfectly fine to enjoy whatever hobbies and interests will benefit you or you feel drawn toward like going on hikes, seeing a therapist, or watching cartoons.

4.10.6 Celebrate Identity

Celebrate your identity.²⁴ Know your history before your people faced oppression, but also know the figures who have fought valiantly for your freedom or taken on significant roles in the arts and sciences. Learn about how to cook the foods your people historically have eaten, play their music, sing their songs, dance their dances, and dress up with their clothing and hairstyles. Speak their language or accent as something equal to any other language or accent.¹⁸⁶ Rename yourself or be given a name that connects more deeply with your gender or racial identity. Read books and watch shows created by and featuring characters that you identify with. Explore your cultural identity further with new iterations of music, food, and dress that incorporate the modern world. This does not mean you deny your personal interests, or the advancement of culture, but perhaps this celebration of identity is something that helps you connect with your community and ancestors a few times a year.

4.10.7 Self-Care

Practice the self-care skills that I share in this chapter and the next.^{120,186,147} Self-care can be a radical act, especially when you have felt obligated to participate in activist spaces or constantly speak up against oppression. Find the belief that you deserve rest and relaxation, that it is an ethical obligation to yourself. Break the idea that you always have to present as “strong” or unmoved by upsetting things. The discrimination you face is hurtful and it may be necessary to take time off to recover from triggering news or oppressive actions from others. If you need support, Rheedra Walker points out that going to the doctor or seeing a therapist is not just a White person thing, but it is important to find health professionals who either share your identity or at least are culturally competent. Stop consuming media that constantly portray your identity in a negative light. Get off of social media and news sources that

feed you constant reminders about your oppression. Stop using language and consuming music that preaches anger, violence, and self-hatred.¹²⁰

Resmaa Menakem distinguishes between “clean pain” and “dirty pain.” Dirty pain harms others or yourself with anger and violence, while clean pain supports your growth and healing through things like grieving and quitting addictions. Learn breathing techniques and choose self-care over hypervigilance. Take some time in the bathroom, under headphones, or on a walk to create a temporary safe space to decompress intense feelings. Understand your triggers and plan or practice how you will or will not respond before being confronted by them.¹⁴⁷ Identify how some of your coping mechanisms like media consumption or revenge fantasies may be holding you back from healing and being happy. One study showed that, at least for Black women, avoidant coping strategies like using addictive substances increased depressive symptoms associated with perceived racial discrimination, whereas solution-oriented coping like journaling or seeking support helped to relieve those symptoms.¹⁹¹

4.10.8 Talk About It

Black children who are *racially socialized* by their parents tend to have better mental health and academic outcomes.⁴ Racial socialization involves promoting cultural pride, celebrating history, creating awareness about discrimination and how to cope with it, as well as instilling the belief that even though racism exists, the child can still find success and happiness in the world. On the other hand, convincing your children to mistrust people from other races leads to worse mental health outcomes. Regardless of what messaging you received as a child, you can still practice forms of self-talk to integrate these healthier lessons into your reality. You might also consider talking to your *inner child* about them as discussed in Chapter 10.

4.10.9 Renegotiating Stories

Change your story.¹⁸⁶ Are you trying to control something you cannot control? Identify what you can control. *Microaggressions*, or unconsciously acted out oppressive acts, do happen, but it is important to consider your mood. The more depressed or negative your mood is, the more likely it is that you will perceive something as a microaggression.¹⁰⁸ Was it a racially charged microaggression, or was it someone having a bad day, being introverted, or feeling depressed? Take a break or use some self-care before reacting in a regrettable way.

Identify any ways in which you believe that you are less than another

group of people and establish how that simply is not true. Find the story of how resilient your people are, or of the great accomplishments and wisdom within your ancestral roots. Trust that your ancestors are proud of you for relaxing and enjoying yourself. Write out your strengths and ways in which you have overcome obstacles. Know that being discriminated against has given you empathy and awareness to what a healthier society could look like. Understand how White supremacy and privilege harm both privileged and White people as explored in Chapters 15 and 16.

If experiences of discrimination cause you to believe you are worthless or less than others, can you instead focus on the objective truth, such as that someone ignorant or hateful said something that you and your peers do not acknowledge as truth? When seeking support or attempting to change institutionalized oppression, keep in mind what a person can and cannot do; an impoverished White person and a White corporate CEO have entirely different types of power to enact change.^{147,195} Use the tips in Chapter 6 to renegotiate self-limiting beliefs, and Section 13.3 to understand what you can and cannot control.

4.10.10 Internalized Oppression

People who are oppressed may still discriminate against others or reinforce their own suffering. For example, women can uphold the power held by men, and Black people can judge other Black people based on their hobbies and how light or dark their skin is. Ibram X. Kendi says that calling all White people bad does not help dismantle oppressive institutions.⁹³ That said, White people, and especially men, are historically the root of racism and have the most power to change discriminatory institutions. These topics and methods of uprooting discriminatory patterns in oneself are explored further in Chapters 15 and 16.

4.11 Increasing Your Income

The notion that money does not equate to well-being is an absolute lie.⁹⁵ A lot of people are unable to leave stressful situations due to a lack of money. Money is time, health, social activities, travel, rest, stability, political power, and so much more. Unless an addiction to money prevents you from having meaningful relationships, or you are unhappy in your job, then earning more money is generally a good thing. Unfortunately, systems of greed, discrimination, and capitalism prevent many people from climbing any kind of income ladder. We'll talk about dismantling capitalism later, but I want to provide some basic advice for becoming more economically resourced, whether or not

you have the privilege to switch careers.

4.11.1 Start A Side Hustle Or Solo Business

Independent, local, and solo businesses are becoming really popular and don't have to require a lot of money to start. You might even already have the supplies needed to do basic yard maintenance or house cleaning, or maybe your city has a Saturday Market to sell products at. Open-air markets are a great place to gather ideas about the types and qualities of products that sell well. If one doesn't exist yet, starting an artisan's or farmer's market can help bolster your local economy and create a great community hub. Etsy, Shopify, and eBay have helped start millions of successful online businesses too.

Many cities have a *Small Business Development Center* (SBDC) through the *U.S. Small Business Administration* (SBA). This group provides free business counseling. There are often similar groups for aspiring women, Black, and other marginalized business owners too. For instance, Shopify teamed up with Operation Hope to help start a million new Black-owned businesses by 2030. Search online for these programs. Similarly, the UpFlip podcast and Youtube channel provide practical strategies for turning minuscule startup investments into big earnings. If you know what you want to start, there are also free business plans online that will help guide you through the process.

There is also Creative Live, which makes business or art school for many people entirely unnecessary. For less than the cost of a single college class, you can get a year's subscription which has immensely more practical advice for aspiring creatives and business owners. I strongly suggest listening to the founder's podcast as well - Chase Jarvis interviews successful creatives from many fields, providing great insights and inspiration. His book, *Creative Calling*, is helpful for people wanting to get started in a creative profession. More than anything when starting a business, remember that failure is just a form of learning that will help you succeed better in the future and that most "successful" people have failed a lot.

4.11.2 Connect With Community

Living in a community or with friends can save a lot of money. You can share expenses on food, toiletries, gadgets, and utilities. Some places like certain farms even let you work trade for rent. I'll discuss how to create communities in Section 14.5. You can find communities through the *Foundation For Intentional Communities* website <www.ic.org>, farm work trades at the *Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms* (WWOOF) website <<https://wwwoof.net/>>, and other international work opportunities at the

Work Away website <www.workaway.info>. The community you choose to live in can also alter your monetary outcome. The number one factor for breaking out of your parent's income class is making friends and allies who are in higher economic classes.²¹⁴

4.11.3 Learn Skilled Trades

While college is not for everyone, may be off-limits due to time or money, and is sometimes a complete scam, there are many one-year or two-year degrees available through community colleges that can lead to immediate jobs on the other end. Apprenticeship positions also exist that may pay for your education and earn you a wage while you learn. Check out <www.coolworks.com> for paid positions with certification training and affordable or free housing. Quite a few scholarships and loans exist as well to help fund your education, especially if you are poor, a person of color, a single parent, or returning as an older student.

4.11.4 Cook At Home

Learn how to cook for yourself and create your own fancy beverages. While many people eat out to save time, you can actually save a lot more time by cooking for yourself. Just cook large batches of food and freeze a portion of it. I boil a whole chicken with sweet potatoes, onion, kale, broccoli, and cauliflower which is good for 3 weeks of lunches. Seasoned with hot sauce and salt before eating with a side of tortilla chips, it's a great combination of health, affordability, tastiness, and laziness. If a proper grocery store is not readily available nearby, there are lots of emerging food delivery options for groceries and meal kits.

4.11.5 Control Your Purchasing And Find Free Things

There are many things people can do without or regulate by creating a monthly "fun budget." For instance, consider cutting out alcohol from your life, buying from a thrift shop instead of new, or putting off purchasing an item for several days to avoid spontaneous money spending. There is also a lot of opportunity for obtaining things for free through online groups, Craigslist, government welfare, and asking friends. You can host clothing swaps, create a communal tool library, or build a culture of borrowing items rather than buying them new.

4.11.6 Vote, Strike, And Unionize

Sometimes your income has to be increased or protected by more radical

means. Getting your co-workers to formally unionize or strike for better working conditions may be essential. Introducing laws or voting for politicians who support rental protections and increasing the minimum wage can help too. Part IV of the book covers tactics for being an effective change-maker.

4.11.7 Read Money Management Books

There are many more strategies for saving money that go beyond the scope of this brief guide. For a deeper look at your finances, I suggest reading alternative money management books like *I Will Teach You To Be Rich* by Ramit Sethi or *A Cat's Guide To Money* by Lillian Karabaic.

4.12 Establishing A Higher Power

Many Twelve Step programs strongly encourage a person to establish a connection to a higher power, whatever that means for them. As previously mentioned, if you dislike this term, you could use *mentor* instead. This relationship is very valuable as it creates a permanent ally to speak with, reminds you that the world is bigger than pain and struggle, and interrupts the hyperfocus often placed on ourselves and our peers. Atheists and people who have suffered religious abuse may struggle in separating this concept from a religious god but know that it does not have to involve any kind of religion or unscientific belief. It also does not mean that you are giving up your power as an individual, but it will help you recognize the things that you need support with or cannot control.

More than anything, a higher power is something you believe can help with your struggles. Your higher power should probably not be any individual living organism like your friend or dog though. Consider things like nature, a community gathering, a support group, the ocean, trees, the universe, a species of animal, or your inner loving parent that we explore in Chapter 10. You can also of course use more traditional monotheistic Gods, polytheistic gods, and spirits.

The truth is that life is unpredictable and people will sometimes let you down. Many of us with trapped emotions have high expectations of others and want to control situations so that we do not become triggered. However, due to the nature of reality, those expectations and desire to control are bound to fail, leading to sadness and anger. Connecting with a higher power will help soften these energies because you are reminded that it is more than your will that determines the events of the world. Your higher power is an anchor you can rely on, even when people disappoint you or things don't

quite go your way.

When you are needing direction or company, you can pray to or visit your higher power if it has a physical manifestation in nature or a church. The only necessary thing on your part is to believe that this “entity” has power and is capable of helping you. This may first involve hitting a rock bottom in which you realize you are individually powerless over the circumstances in your life you are attempting to control. That could be a pervasive sense of abandonment, an addiction, dysfunctional parents, or anger. Many people also experience a higher power after using psychedelics, which are discussed in Chapter 11. When first establishing this connection, it is important to regularly make contact to develop a relationship you trust. For me, this meant prioritizing time in nature with trees and attending my support group over making plans with friends or getting lost on the internet.

For those who grew up with family dysfunction, the *Twelve Steps of Adult Children Steps Workbook* can help with connecting to a higher power. However, much of the content is outdated so I recommend using Tony A’s Twelve Steps in conjunction with the workbook, especially for anything past the third step. You can find a breakdown of Tony A’s Twelve Steps by searching online. The concept of a higher power may also make more sense later in Part II as we cover “imaginary” friends and the inner selves. While connecting to a higher power is not necessary, it will make many parts of your recovery easier.

People dedicated to a religious or spiritual community are typically happier largely because of the social connections they create.¹⁰⁹ That said, you do need to be careful in regard to certain spiritual and religious traditions which are unhealthy or based on power, shaming, and control. Many groups also preach hateful messages to spread their distorted agendas. Your higher power should be a loving one who cares about you and knows forgiveness.

4.13 Medicines

Many medicines exist that can help relieve the intense emotions that difficult life experiences or brain chemistries create. Medications can treat things such as anxiety, depression, bipolar, and ADHD, especially when combined with other lifestyle changes and therapy. It is nothing to be ashamed of if you use medication to regulate your mental health, especially as it may be the easiest or only way to feel stable or focused enough to deal with your trapped emotions. Sometimes medication alone can relieve a person’s emotional struggles as well, so long as they can find a good dosage or regimen when taking it.

Medications can help with trapped emotions, but there are some impor-

tant things to keep in mind. First, I want to remind readers that this book and the following information is not about a person's natural biochemistry, but instead the suffering caused by difficult past experiences. According to Dr. Bessel Van Der Kolk, "Drugs cannot 'cure' trauma; they can only dampen the expression of a disturbed physiology."^{97G} Some medicines can interfere with being fully in touch with your emotions, which is important for releasing trapped emotions. You want the medication to take you out of emotional extremes, but not so far that you become unable to experience your emotions. The benefits of most medicines are also temporary, ending soon after you stop taking them.

Since doctors may prescribe medication without therapy or knowing the source of a person's suffering, people become reliant on the medication and never treat the root cause of their behaviors and emotions. This is even more problematic as doctors frequently misdiagnose bipolar as depression, even though antidepressants are ineffective or even dangerous for people with bipolar.⁶¹ Medications also may cause possible side-effects with energy levels and sex, and sometimes make feelings of anxiety and depression worse. Furthermore, it can take upwards of six weeks to have a positive effect, and that initial positive effect may dissipate within a few months.

Unfortunately, your primary doctor may be ignorant of effective strategies for treating the roots of mental health struggles. For instance, regular exercise is at least as effective as medication for treating most cases of depression.²⁰⁷ While a doctor can help connect you to some resources, it is up to you to ensure that you receive a proper healing regimen. Medication can help and may be essential for some people, but it is often only needed temporarily or should be paired with many of the other self-care strategies outlined throughout this chapter. On the chemical level, you may actually need to alter your hormone levels or boost up a certain nutrient. If you can, obtain the relevant tests to know what is going on inside of you. If you want to understand different chemical processes in an accessible way, I suggest listening to the *Huberman Lab Podcast* or reading *Tools of Titans* by Tim Ferriss.

Some alternatives to antidepressants exist too. There are fast-acting anti-anxiety medications like *beta blockers* that can be a great middle-ground with a lower risk of addiction or withdrawal symptoms. Emerging medicines like the Stellate Ganglion Block give temporary relief from emotional extremes long enough to allow focus on creating healthy change as well.¹³⁸ In the near future, neural implants may be a viable option as well for easily curing treatment-resistant depression.¹⁵⁰ Talk to your doctor about what might work for you.

Herbal alternatives to traditional Western medicine, often with fewer side effects, also exist. These include kava, L-theanine (the active calming component of tea), saffron, ashwagandha, chaga, lion's mane, and St. John's Wort.^{78,35,57,165,213} You should still check in with your doctor and review side effects before taking any of these though.

Recent research has shown that improving gut bacteria can help alleviate many mental conditions including anxiety, depression, and even autism.¹¹⁵ The fastest way to alter this microbiome is through a fecal transplant, but this procedure, while highly promising, is still in development and can be dangerous. Diet impacts the gut as well, although there is still much that is unknown. Current studies show that increased fiber consumption will bolster the numbers of certain gut flora, but eating several servings of low-sugar live fermented foods per day will actually decrease inflammation in the body.^{124,76} Both fiber and fermented foods are important for people who have taken antibiotics which destroy all healthy and unhealthy organisms in the gut. While not yet available everywhere in 2023, companies like *Microba* in Australia have begun offering testing for important bacterial strains alongside guidelines on how to correct your balance.

Another option is with substances that are still illegal in many parts of the world and potentially dangerous to use but are shown to be quite effective in studies for addressing trapped emotions. Ketamine may be able to help a person put a difficult experience into context as something that happened in the past rather than continuing to happen today.^{148,162} Microdosing small quantities of psychoactive substances such as psilocybin mushrooms and LSD may help with anxiety and depression.³⁷ When taken in larger doses in a psychedelic-assisted therapy session or properly done in a more casual setting, these substances become one of the most powerful tools to fight against trapped emotions. We will explore psychoactive substances and their risks in Chapter 11.

While technically not medicines, some electrotherapies are showing promise and usually carry few side effects. At least one study has shown that electroconvulsive therapy is more effective than antidepressants for reducing depression and PTSD symptoms.¹ A much lighter electrotherapy known as *transcranial direct current stimulation* (tDCS) is also effective for a wide variety of brain conditions, including reducing symptoms of depression and PTSD.² These devices are compact, affordable, and can be used at home. It is unclear how long-lasting these therapies are, and just like medication may be better for managing symptoms while utilizing other strategies. Neurofeedback has also been making a lot of exciting headway as a non-invasive therapy

and is discussed in the next chapter.

4.14 Releasing Tension And Correcting Posture

As you learn how to sense your body better throughout this book, you may notice a great amount of tension in your face, shoulders, stomach, and other parts. Often this tension is accompanied by stress, negative emotions, and difficult thoughts.^{106C} While emotions often alter our facial expressions, the reverse is also true as facial expressions can dictate emotions.⁹⁸ This means that releasing your tension can relieve stress, emotions, and thoughts. Using this technique relies on your personal awareness though, which might not always be present. That's why regular massage, meditation, and various body-focused activities are good to practice.

When I begin feeling overwhelmed, I'll lie down on my bed, close my eyes, and focus into my body. Starting with my face I attempt to release any tension, letting go and melting into my mattress and pillows. Scan your body while checking in with your scalp, brain, forehead, eyes, mouth, jaw, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, fingers, stomach, pelvis, thighs, knees, calves, and feet. You can repeat this scan several times as you become more relaxed. Deep and slow breathing during this exercise will also help.

Researchers have additionally found that slouching your body can increase negative thoughts and the amount of time it takes to recover from the feelings associated with those thoughts.¹⁸² Conversely, a straight posture seems to increase mood recovery beyond what a normal posture can. If I find myself ruminating on negative thoughts after laying down for a period of time, getting up and moving around or going on a walk outside often helps.

4.15 Increasing The Window Of Tolerance To Stress

Your window of tolerance to stress can be bolstered by creating brief periods of self-induced stress while in a safe environment. The body has important chemical reactions which only occur when it is under stress such as working out, fasting, intensely breathing, and exposing oneself to temperature extremes.⁷³ According to Dr. Andrew Huberman, this helps release stress as well as increases our stress tolerance.⁷⁴ When you deliberately expose yourself to safe stress for short periods, you stop overgeneralizing all stress as dangerous. This rewiring is assisted when a trusted ally is present who helps co-regulate your nervous system and makes you know that you're safe.²⁴⁵ It also helps to talk about your failures and how you learned from them.²³⁴

Huberman suggests five minutes a day of *cyclic hyperventilation*, which is intensive breathing, in and out for about a second each, for 25 breaths before

exhaling fully and holding for at least 25 seconds, and then repeating. People who experience anxiety or panic attacks, or have heart problems, should not do this. Intense exercises, cold water showers, and ice baths can also help induce a healthy stress response. While cold exposure is normally done for minutes at a time, even 20 seconds in a shower at 49°F can have great therapeutic results.⁷³ For specifics, check out the Huberman Lab podcast episodes, *Using Deliberate Cold Exposure for Health and Performance* and *Dr. Rhonda Patrick: Micronutrients for Health & Longevity*. Again, cold exposure can be hazardous to your health if done incorrectly so be sure you are checking in with a doctor beforehand.

You can also use mindfulness as explored in Chapter 5 to increase your stress tolerance. With mindfulness, you begin to separate healthy stress from being in danger. You note that you feel uncomfortable but can keep going with your present awareness.²⁴⁵ You keep in mind that pushing away distress creates distress. Maybe you self-regulate by breathing deeply or taking a little break. In this way, you learn how to stay within your window of tolerance while also challenging yourself. This is the practice of accepting that hard things happen and knowing that even though you might temporarily feel difficult emotions, you can handle them.

4.16 Addressing Shame And Denial

Shame and denial often accompany trapped emotions and prevent you from speaking up about your past experiences. You may believe it is too embarrassing to share, feel as though sharing would break your family's trust, or you blame yourself for not being able to get over something you believe should be insignificant. Being able to acknowledge and talk about your past is often essential for healing though. Breaking out of shame and denial may involve first hearing others sharing similar stories in a support group such as *Adult Children of Alcoholics and Dysfunctional Families*. It could also involve reading accounts in books, educating yourself on the roots of trauma and PTSD, discovering your anger at the people who hurt you, or meeting an ally who is safe enough to share with.

You are not alone, many other people have experienced what you have. Know that your suffering matters, and that when you break the silence, it helps others understand that their pain is deserving of healing too. Of course, this may be upsetting to family or loved ones, and you need to consider the repercussions it may cause. Perhaps you only share your story with people you know are safe, or you feel prepared to talk with and create boundaries with the people who caused you suffering.

Chapter Reflections

1. How do you know when you are outside of your window of tolerance? What are the warning signs that you are starting to feel dysregulated or dissociated?
2. How do you stay motivated with intentions, media, and passions?
3. How do you reinforce your suffering?
4. What is your personality like and what do you want to change about it?
5. What activities and spaces make you feel safer?
6. What are some sources of stress you can reduce or cut out of your life?
7. What visualization practices would benefit your healing?
8. Who are some allies or support groups that can help you do this work?
9. What activities help regulate your nervous system, and are there any you would like to try out?
10. How can you incorporate meditation, exercise, nature, healthy eating, socializing, and sleep (MENDSSS) into your daily routine?
11. Have you talked to your doctor about medication options or explored alternatives like improving your gut health and taking plant medicines?
12. Is there a higher power, mentor, or something you can passionately devote yourself to that would help you with your struggles?
13. In what ways do you incorporate healthy stress and vulnerability into your life?
14. How can you increase your window of tolerance to stress?
15. In what ways are you discriminated against or underprivileged?
16. How has oppression hurt your ability to heal from trapped emotions?
17. As someone who experiences oppression, what stories do you tell yourself about what you are capable of, what you are allowed to do, and what you cannot do?
18. What are some communities you can connect with or create that understand your culture and the oppression you face?
19. What is the story of resilience, strength, and hope of your ancestors?



Chapter 5

Learning How To Experience Emotions

5.1 Mindfulness And Reconnecting To The Present, 5.2 Neurofeedback, 5.3 Identifying Emotions, 5.4 Experiencing Emotions, 5.5 Fake It Till You Release It, 5.6 Emotional Mastery, 5.7 Emotional Dysregulation, 5.8 Healthy Angering And Asserting Yourself, 5.9 Awareness Of Thoughts And The Critics

Humans are emotional creatures and the full spectrum of emotions allows us to healthfully experience life. If you avoid difficult emotions like sadness, anger, or fear, it is much harder to experience happiness or love. This requires vulnerability. Emotional energy most often becomes trapped within us when we do not adequately feel the difficult emotions that arise from stressful experiences. This may include things that have happened to us, but also things that have not happened to us, such as not having an available parent or not getting enough quality social time with others. Trapped emotions perpetuate our avoidance of emotions in a self-protective feedback loop.

Expressing emotions releases energy. Without that release, the energy becomes trapped and festers within us. Even just a few seconds of releasing our emotions can move us out of overwhelm and back into a space where stress is manageable. Learning how to mindfully experience emotions is therefore the foundation of healing from many painful experiences. The contents of this chapter explore some of the techniques used in somatic therapy with research partly derived from Peter Levine's books and my experiences with various Buddhist meditation communities. With these, you can learn to fully experience your body and emotions.

There are several reasons why you may have difficulty releasing your emotions:

1. As a child, you were shamed for crying or otherwise told not to. This

can be quite subtle, such as not being consoled or your parents expressing stress whenever you emoted.

2. You do not feel safe enough around your housemates, spouse, co-workers, or friends to express difficult emotions.
3. Culturally you have been told that your gender is not supposed to cry, which is most common for men, or not express anger and assertiveness, which is most common for women.
4. You use various things to dissociate from your feelings including food, media, sex, drugs, medications, or thinking and explaining. Granted, these can also sometimes help a person connect with their emotions when used right.
5. You have been taught to feel your emotions in your body without an emotional release such as with certain mindfulness practices, or you have been taught to have an emotional release without focusing on your emotions.
6. You express emotions in ways that do not actually help you release your internal energy, such as violence or complaining. There are healthy ways to release these that we will cover later.
7. Spiritual teachings, therapy, and cultural ideas have wrongly taught you that you can heal simply by changing how you think. Informational solutions often won't solve your problems, you can only change how you think by first releasing the trapped emotions keeping you stuck.

For people with severe emotional blockages, you may have to use other techniques for releasing trapped emotions before your body will allow you to experience things like happiness, sadness, or anger. A therapist would be very useful for helping determine this. Many people can reconnect with their emotional body first, but others with severe blockages may require using some of the techniques explored in the later chapters. For instance, you may have to share your story with an empathetic listener, remember more of your past, or hear other people telling a story similar to your own in a support group. Peter Levine, the founder of *Somatic Experiencing* therapy, also believes that re-engaging an empowered posture and movement first through activities like stretching, massage, yoga, tai chi, or the suggestions mentioned in Section 4.14 may be essential to accessing emotions and transforming thoughts.^{106C}

Some people will also find becoming aware of their bodily sensations too overwhelming. Mindfulness practices can even unlock dormant trapped emotions when a person has experienced life-or-death incidents or abuse in child-

hood.²²⁵ Be gentle with yourself. If you start feeling overwhelmed with painful emotions or feelings of self-hatred, try oscillating your focus back to a part of your body that feels good or take a break doing something nourishing. You may need to breathe deeply, release some emotions, try again in a few days, or use other techniques throughout the book to tackle your bodily sensations.

As stated in Section 3.5, dissociation happened for a reason. You first need the emotional, physical, mental, and relational resources to handle whatever you could not in the past. That doesn't mean you need to recall in detail what happened, because the memories are already activated in your body and can be worked through with somatic techniques as explored here and in Section 7.1. The goal is to be present with your physical, emotional, and mental worlds.

According to Bessel van der Kolk, yoga is a good alternative to mindfulness meditation and is more effective than medication for people who have PTSD.²⁴¹ As a movement practice, yoga provides a release that simply sitting and observing your sensations does not. While difficult, it shows a person that they are capable of overcoming challenges and teaches that sensations come and go. Ideally, this yoga practice is trauma-informed to help guide you through any difficult emotions that may arise.

Otherwise, you may just be too activated and need a little space from your thoughts before you can handle a sensation. Emphasis on little. A few minutes to an hour of distracting yourself with your favorite show or game can help calm you down a lot. With practice though, you learn to instead meditate, go to a support group meeting, journal, explore nature, visualize uplifting memories or thoughts, release your emotions, or call a friend. If you are ready, you need to attend to the feelings you are experiencing rather than distancing yourself from them.

I am also very easily distracted and staying present requires really specific spaces. Even in spaces that feel safe, I can have some parts of my guard up. Often my focus dissipates if I feel any sense of obligation, hear certain sounds, think I need to act a certain way, am tired, or feel uncomfortable with someone around me. What distracts you?

If you have been avoiding or dissociating from difficult emotions for a long time, take it slow and be sure to regulate your feelings as necessary. Unlocking this aspect of your humanity may initially be overwhelming, but quickly becomes healing. The release of tension, anger, sadness, debilitating anxiety, and the like, into tears or other outlets is very nourishing. Yes, I'm going to teach you how to cry and be angry, and you're going to love it. Let's

begin.

5.1 Mindfulness And Reconnecting To The Present

Reconnecting with your emotional self is a practice that can be learned through forms of meditation, including mindfulness. Mindfulness is simply a non-judgmental awareness of what is happening in the present moment. In the mind preoccupied with thoughts of the past or future, these sensations may be muted or quite dull, so you'll need to learn how to see them. Mindfulness practice can also help you celebrate things as mundane as washing the dishes. Most beginning meditation methods focus on the mindfulness of physical sensations, especially the breath. Instead of maintaining continuous focus, the goal is to be able to refocus as you become distracted.²¹¹ Unlike emotions, physical sensations are easily accessed and so are good training for experiencing deeper layers of yourself.

With even just a small amount of mindfulness practice, all of your senses will be heightened, creating a more vivid world. Further training will help you find acceptance for difficult events and diminish the need to judge everything. The world and its wild fluctuation will simply be. No need to worry or criticize, life just is. That is not to say you become tolerant or ignorant of abusive behaviors, you merely maintain awareness of your body when confronted by stress and can react in a healthy manner.

The intention of physical mindfulness is to become aware of your five senses. Thoughts and judgments will arise but know that you always have a choice to not think and instead experience. This is the true practice of mindfulness, learning to refocus after being distracted. You are not your thoughts, but you are this present moment, so gently return to your sensory focus. You can kindly thank your thoughts or let them float on like clouds. Your ability to remain focused will increase from brief moments to seconds or even minutes. In many ways, mindfulness is like watching a movie, except that you are also performing as one of the characters, fully immersed in the small details, conversations, and relationships.

Exercise: Find a quiet space you can be uninterrupted in for five minutes. If quiet is difficult to find, play some white noise on headphones or turn on a fan. Set a timer. Close your eyes and focus on the sensations made by your breathing, following the air as it enters your nose, reaches into your belly, and travels back out. Using a simple word with each in and out breath may also be helpful, such as “in” and “out.”

Try to repeat this exercise every day, gradually increasing the time from three minutes to fifteen or twenty. As previously stated, the best therapeutic

benefits begin after eight weeks of daily thirteen-minute or longer sessions.¹¹ You can use any point of focus or sensation such as your big toe, the smells of your house, or the flickering of a candle. I do find that mindfulness practices that change focal points are easiest because it is harder for thoughts to take over and become judgmental. For instance, when going on a walk practicing visual mindfulness, or focusing on deep breathing which moves through the entire body. I also find that if I keep getting lost in an emotion or thought, slow and intentional breathing is the fastest way to return to the present.

Focusing internally versus externally actually trains different parts of the brain, and for some people who struggle to control their thoughts, focusing inward may actually increase anxiety.²¹¹ For instance, using the breath versus some visual cues. It can therefore be beneficial to note if your focus is more internal or external and practice the opposite.

As you develop the skill of mindfulness, start trying it out during random parts of your day, checking in with the present moment while walking, driving, or showering. One practice that Dr. Andrew Huberman suggests is to spread out your focus as wide as possible, trying to be aware of an entire scene rather than just a single point.⁴⁰ This has been shown to decrease stress and anxiety. Deep breathing also has the added benefit of creating calming chemicals in your body, and stepping away from thoughts of the past or future can relieve a great amount of stress.¹³¹ You can even create *mindfulness bells*, associating everyday sounds like sirens or barking dogs as a reminder to check in with your present moment.

If you're really struggling to keep out of your thoughts, you can start naming off items in your vicinity or hold an ice cube. Another option is listing off all five sensations, plus feelings and thoughts you are presently experiencing - I see, I hear, I taste, I smell, I think, I feel physically, I feel emotionally. Mindfulness is a great technique for relaxing or falling asleep too - scan your body and release any tension you find, especially in your jaw and forehead as previously described.

Mindfulness can be difficult if your life is something you always are trying to escape from. Being present will be much easier if your surroundings are enjoyable. Just think about how captivating a sunset or pleasant aroma is. You want the physical spaces you inhabit to hold your attention to a similar level. Consider the lighting, art, cleanliness, smells, sounds, and so forth.

Being in nature or a calm and quiet environment generally helps our ability to be mindful. On the other hand, I've found that things like sleepiness and staring at a screen for too many hours prevent me from being mindful, sometimes for the remainder of the day. Many practitioners also use mindful-

ness to avoid reality and their emotions. This can help de-escalate an overwhelming emotion but also can bury an emotion deeper in the mind.

If you're anything like me, practices like mindfulness are hard to remember to do regularly. That's why I highly suggest joining an online or in-person meditation group or other exercises that incorporates mindfulness such as tai chi, qigong, or yoga. The *Clubhouse* app offers a lot of free meditation communities, and the *Liberate Meditation* app is specifically made for people of color. There are also many great meditation teachers online such as Tara Brach, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Jack Kornfield that give free guided meditations. Buddhism is another option.

Buddhism is one of the birthplaces of mindfulness. It should be known that when mindfulness is divorced from the teachings of Buddhism, it loses some of its original intentions. Try expanding your education in mindfulness by reading Buddhist texts. Also, if possible, find teachers who are not White, and give credit to the source of these ancient traditions from the Buddha and Indian minds.

In his book, *The Trauma of Everyday Life*, Mark Epstein explores how the Buddha likely developed his meditation practice to heal from traumatic experiences. In other words, Buddhism and mindfulness meditation are all about dealing with trapped emotions. To be clear, I am not Buddhist, but I have learned meditation through Buddhist communities, also known as *sanghas*. Learning in sanghas helped me commit to the practice of reconnecting with my body, especially with the discussions, reading, and safe container it created. These are donation-based spaces and so are accessible to people of a low income. I especially appreciated sanghas based upon the teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh, which I find more accessible for non-Buddhists than other traditions. Many Buddhist sanghas teach more out of secular philosophy too, so your religious or spiritual beliefs are not being questioned.

Experiencing physical sensations in Buddhism is known as the first of four *Foundations of Mindfulness*. While this level of mindfulness is very powerful and life-changing, most practices, including many Buddhist sanghas, stop here. To start releasing trapped emotions though, we need to fully experience our emotions. This second *Foundation of Mindfulness* is the real focus of this chapter.

5.2 Neurofeedback

If mindfulness is particularly difficult or you'd like to learn it faster, one more option is *neurofeedback*. This is a type of therapy that essentially gamifies the practice of mindfulness. Neurofeedback is great because it is a noninvasive

therapy and does not require the client to recall difficult memories. Also, unlike medications, the results last. You do need to hit a certain threshold of sessions for the changes to stick though - the more, the better, but powerful results are often found with anywhere from 10 to 30 sessions.

In neurofeedback electrodes are attached to the client's head, which provide direct feedback from their mental states as they watch a screen or listen to sounds. The electrodes are moved around depending on what cognitive ability is being worked on. A focused or calm mentality creates a different visual or auditory effect than a dissociated or upset mentality. In this way clients gain mastery over their focus and emotions, witnessing in real-time the power to step away from ruminating thoughts, distraction, and upset. When paired with other modalities it becomes quite effective for releasing trapped emotions as well as greatly improving symptoms of things like dissociation, ADHD, and autism.⁶³

Neurofeedback is best done with a trained professional, but several home systems are now available that can, to a limited extent, assist in a person's brain training. These are probably best for focus training and should not be used for severe trapped emotions. You can research home systems online or talk to your therapist for suggestions. Some neurofeedback therapists can also set you up with a complete system to take home and still work with you remotely.

5.3 Identifying Emotions

If you don't have emotional releases such as crying over things typically considered sad or upsetting, you likely have emotional blockages. Even if you sometimes or often have these releases, there are some important distinctions to make between healthy and unhealthy releases. Begin by reminding yourself that all emotions are a natural part of being human. Whatever people have told you about expressing your feelings being wrong or a sign of weakness, know that these words were informed by their own trapped emotions and fears of vulnerability.

The most important part of reconnecting with your emotional body is giving it enough space. Do not escape from your feelings in food, media, sex, drugs, or other distractions, but rather confront and work through the pain you are experiencing. Step away from dissociative activities and instead be mindful of the present moment. Knowing when you are practicing escapism can take time because you have associated feelings of pain with using these coping mechanisms. Check in with your body. Are you genuinely hungry, horny, or wanting to enjoy a TV show? Or is there a painful or stressful emo-

tion there that you hope will go away? Typically a coping mechanism will only make you temporarily feel better before the difficult emotion returns.

Start practicing emotional mindfulness by focusing on positive emotions. After watching or reading something funny, or spending time with a friend, check in with your body. What qualities do you notice? Compare this with when you are feeling fairly neutral, or are experiencing stress around a deadline. Recognize that these emotions typically have a location and can move. Naming a subtle emotion can also help bring it out into the open. Even if this is a strong emotion, naming it can give you greater awareness and control over the sensation as well. You can also journal with tracking your mood daily or exploring the associated feelings that might be attached to various events. Here is a small list of emotions, but know there are many more! Say to yourself, *I feel*:

- *Happy emotions*: joyful, beaming, bright, content, fulfilled, grateful, loving
- *Sad emotions*: depressed, rejected, heavy, mournful, lonely, isolated, desperate, hurt
- *Angry emotions*: annoyed, irked, upset, violent, enraged, jealous
- *Anxious emotions*: confused, startled, insecure, frozen, flighty, shy, uncertain
- *Energetic emotions*: energized, stimulated, motivated, overwhelmed, tired, sleepy, focused, strong, powerful, successful, relaxed, peaceful, determined

None of these emotions are positive or negative, they are simply reactions your body is having to stimuli, attempting to help the brain make informed decisions. Each of these emotions has unique qualities to them. Know that one emotion may take on characteristics of multiple emotions. You can feel joyful, but that joy also feels overwhelming and stressful. These emotions also exist in different parts of the body at the same time. You can feel motivated in your brain, sad in your heart, and energized in your legs. Often one emotion will take center stage, but know that others can still exist, even contradictory ones.

As you develop the ability to identify emotions, you'll also begin seeing stresses that once appeared invisible throughout your day. They still impacted you, but you were unaware of their source. You do not need to avoid these subtle energies, and in fact, avoiding some of them would be problematic such as in the case of racial stresses. An awareness of them is important as you

find ways of releasing the associated stress. Common invisible stresses include:

- Feeling unable to fully celebrate your culture in public
- People with different clothing, body types, or languages than you
- Dislike of people you perceive as more or less attractive than you
- Barking dogs and other loud and abrupt sounds
- General city sounds

Your awareness of a feeling like anger or fear allows you to separate from it in such a way that you can stop it from controlling you. When you feel overwhelmed or stressed out, a simple acronym that can help identify the specific feeling is *HALT*. Used by PTSD therapist Pete Walker and many others, HALT stands for hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. This is useful for meeting your unmet needs and resolving difficult emotions. It is also a good reminder to pause and check in with yourself before reacting to a trigger response - are you actually in danger? Or are you having a flashback to a time your body experienced as dangerous? Naturally, get out of danger if necessary, but if your body is simply remembering danger, you'll use the techniques we discuss next.

5.4 Experiencing Emotions

Experiencing your emotions is somewhat similar to experiencing your physical sensations, but instead of fully focusing on something like your breathing, you are checking in with your current emotional state. Emotions can be quite subtle or entirely overwhelming. To clarify, **feeling an emotion is very different from obsessing over what caused an emotion**. We fuel emotions with our thoughts, memories, external stimuli, and trapped emotions. According to brain scientist Jill Bolte Taylor, author of *My Stroke Of Insight*, without that fuel, emotions only last for 90 seconds.¹⁴³ That is why it is important to recognize that emotions are not facts, but rather temporary energies moving through our bodies; they can dissipate or change very quickly.

5.4.1 Creating Safety

As emotional releases can carry a lot of self-judgment, you must create a safe space to experience them. Perhaps that is your room, car, alone in nature, or at a support group. Using a pillow to mute your angry or sad sounds can also create a nice buffer between you and concerned ears.

5.4.2 Emotional Awareness

Once you identify a difficult emotion in your body as described in the previous section, check in with it. Your exercise is to stay present with the emotion, fully experiencing its shape, temperature, texture, location, movement, desires, and whatever other qualities it might have. The thoughts that arise in this case may deepen the emotion or give it new qualities. You still want to return to focusing on the emotion as much as possible, but you can sometimes use those thoughts to your benefit.

You'll notice that most intense emotions have a need attached to them - perhaps you are feeling overwhelmed and your body wants quiet alone time or sleep. Perhaps you are feeling sad and your body wants to cry. Perhaps you just got really scared and need to shiver and yell. In the same way that you eat when you are hungry, this is a natural and healthy biological urge that all animals use. In the case of emotions, performing the associated need helps prevent that energy from becoming trapped within the body.

Not all expressions are releasing emotions in a healing way. For instance, physical and verbal violence do not typically release anger, but instead amplify it by putting the body in danger. Even if you remove or scare off the source of your anger, that energy will still be contained within your body. Things might get substantially better and it will be easier to deal with your difficult energies as you no longer become actively triggered, but even the death of an abuser will not fully take care of the trapped emotions. To truly release this trapped energy, you will have to first discover its source. For instance, anger tends to be a misrepresentation of fear, sadness, or an unmet need you have. This is discussed later in this chapter in Section 5.8.

5.4.3 Using Art And Media

One helpful tool I used while learning how to reconnect with my own emotions was art media, especially movies and music. Using media that resonates with your current emotional state can help heighten the experience and immerse you deeper into the emotion. Your goal is to have an emotional release while staying focused on the emotion. For me, music videos like *It's Called: Freefall* by Rainbow Kitten Surprise act as a quick way to deepen my emotional state. Most people also seem to tear up to Studio Ghibli's *Grave of the Fireflies*. Forewarning though, both of these deal with very intense subjects like death and starvation. Works like these taught me how the body cries - tensed stomach and shoulders, pushing through the throat almost like a growl, squeezing of the eyes shut, and deep and intense breaths. This series of bodily actions is something I now use to more easily access that emotional

release.

Creating art can also reconnect you to your emotional body. This is especially the case with music, but any medium that allows for a fast and free flow of expressions like drawing, painting, and poetry is good. It is often important that you learn to explore this medium on your own rather than copying images or playing the songs of others. Improvisationally singing songs is especially powerful.

5.4.4 Emotional Expressions

You'll notice that when given enough attention, most difficult emotions will eventually transform into tears. There may be other states you experience as well such as shaking, laughing, screaming, growling, roaring, singing, running, clenching your fists, or hugging yourself. This may require following the emotion as the energy transforms in different parts of your body. Mindfully stay present and see what it becomes.

5.4.5 Shame

Shame may arise, especially if you were belittled for expressing emotions while growing up. This can require some healthy angering about how you were treated before you can grieve properly. The shame will force you into being quiet or keep you tense. Breathe deeply and allow your body to move and release as loudly as it wants to. This is your human right. Once you have a release, you'll likely feel a little to a lot better, but check in with your body - where is the sensation now? How do you experience it? Does it feel settled for now or is it asking for another type of release?

5.4.6 Allies

This process can be much easier with a trusted ally such as a therapist trained in somatic therapy or grief work. Part of somatic therapy notes small movements in your body, changes in your vocal tone, and word choice. They will also periodically ask you, "What do you feel in your body now?" You can also have a friend do this inquiry as you process through a difficult experience with them. Having someone else mirror how you are feeling can be powerful in helping unlock these vulnerable releases. Therapists and friends may also not feel safe enough or be too distracting for you to access these emotional states, so find what works for you.

An ally can alternatively show empathy or express the emotions that you might want to be feeling. After sharing your story or stating your emotions without actually feeling them, your ally might reflect that what you went

through sounds really hard, that they would be pissed off, or that what your partner, parents, or abuser did was absolutely awful. This kind of confirmation will help you break past the story that you were somehow responsible, wrong, or it wasn't such a big deal. It was a big deal, and no one should have to go through what you did. Hearing about others' stories and their related emotions can also be a huge help, such as in support groups.

5.4.7 Communal Grieving

Communal grieving can further strengthen your emotional releases and is quite common in many cultures throughout the world. This can involve an entire group of people getting together to emote around a tragedy through crying, yelling, screaming, dancing, playing music, and various rituals like burning trinkets or writing letters. It may also involve a single person being witnessed by the group as they move and speak without restraint for whatever is coming up for them. *ZEGG Forum* is one of the largest cross-cultural practices of this method.

ZEGG is a German acronym that translates into *Center For Experimental Cultural And Social Design*. As the person speaks, often surrounded by dozens of onlookers, one or more facilitators help them access what is authentic at that moment. Afterwards, individuals from the audience mirror what they witnessed - simplifying it into a body position and phrase such as "I'm scared" while curled up into a ball. To learn more you can visit <www.zegg.de/en/> or <www.zegg-forum.org/en/>. Many other groups incorporate aspects of communal grieving too such as the sharing period in Twelve Step programs and co-counseling sessions. However, this tends to be quite limited in comparison to what is practiced in ZEGG Forum or certain cultural traditions.

Connecting with your emotions can also be facilitated through some music and dance such as that found in an *ecstatic dance* group, or by simply witnessing other people cry. You can seek out therapists, spiritual forums, and personal growth groups who put on grief workshops as well. In Japan, there are rui-katsu, or grieving festivals. Or, maybe you feel emboldened to start a local group? Experiment and see what works for you. Can you access a tearful release right now?

5.5 Fake It Till You Release It

Similar to crying, you may have to learn other emotional expressions. You could start taking self-defense classes to learn how to protect yourself and express anger in healthy ways. Perhaps you enroll in an acting class to break

down the basic facial and bodily movements that create an emotion. You could do this on your own as well, attempting to mimic actors in movies or animals in the wild.

If you watch animals that have near-death experiences closely, you will sometimes notice them have a freeze response and drop to the ground.¹⁰⁶ Consider a deer caught in the headlights. If the danger is still present when they come to, they may react with sudden aggressiveness, protecting themselves and startling their adversary. If the danger has cleared when they regain control over their body, they may start shaking for a time before rejoining their companions. All of these actions are releasing energy and ensure that energy does not become trapped in the body.

In general, mimicking the bodily expression you think might be appropriate for a given feeling will help deepen that emotion and assist you in releasing it. It is okay if it feels unfamiliar or forced, just give it a try - you've likely been conditioned your whole life away from having a natural response to releasing emotions. Practice by faking it till you make it. Emotional releases feel great and you will likely feel lighter, happier, and less burden on the other side of one.

The following is a list of normal reactions to common experiences. Know that this is by no means a definitive list, especially as these emotional reactions could arise in any situation you find difficult. It is simply meant to illuminate how an unblocked emotional system might work.

- ***Shaking***: Something frightening happens, your life is threatened, or you have a fall
- ***Crying***: You go through a breakup, a loved one passes away, or you feel overwhelmed
- ***Anger***: Your boss or friend mistreats you, you are lied to, or you have an argument
- ***Empathy and compassion***: Your friend or lover is emotionally or physically hurt

While emotional releases like shaking and crying are ideal, energy can still come out in other ways such as running, chopping wood, dancing, having sex, and so on. However, remember that many activities used to regulate emotions do not actually release the emotions. Generally, you need an intense physical action rather than a calming technique like meditation or yoga. You also need to stay present with the emotion while you are doing this activity. It needs to be activated.

Many people use media or certain thinking patterns to numb, dissociate from, or otherwise bury their difficult emotions. This is also very common in spiritual communities that use “spiritual bypassing” to explain difficult circumstances. Common bypasses include “Mercury is in retrograde,” “The universe meant it to be,” and “I don’t see skin color because there’s only the human race.” Saying these to someone in distress is cruel and not helpful. For those that have survived on numbing techniques, you may have to unlearn some behaviors or distance yourself from certain communities to become fully present with your emotional world.

5.6 Emotional Mastery

In an ideal world, having emotional releases would be celebrated at any time, but in many cultures, they are not. Perhaps you are in a public space, releasing the emotion would make a difficult situation worse, or you simply do not feel safe. While it is ideal to release an emotion as quickly as possible so it does not become trapped in the body, you can withhold experiencing it until you are in a safe place. Stay in your thoughts, focus on your bodily sensations, practice calming techniques like breathing deeply, or distract yourself with media. This also involves learning to ask a person for consent before forcing your difficult emotions on them or launching into a stressful conversation.

Once you’re in a safe space, even if the emotion has seemingly dissipated, check in with your body. If there are residual difficult feelings, give space to and experience them as quickly as you feel prepared. Even just excusing yourself to use the restroom can provide enough time to release emotions and calm your nervous system.

If the difficult emotion has increased in intensity after attempting a release, you may need to regulate your nervous system, seek out a friend or therapist, or somehow dissociate from the emotion and return to it at another time. Sometimes you can only experience an emotion once properly prepared. This may be much easier given enough time and space from a triggering situation. You’re learning how to listen to your body.

Remember that you may not be able to resolve certain emotions until you are fully separated from the source of the difficult situation. You may have too many associations with the person who hurt your feelings, or they may be unwilling to alter their triggering behaviors. Establish a life separated from them, or find a way to communicate boundaries or otherwise meet your needs in another way. Healing is easier if the difficult experience came from someone who you love and trust, and who is willing to prove that they are a source of support and safety again.

In general, the body wants to heal if it is allowed to. There are many subtle ways that your body already releases emotions. For instance, you might feel angry and decide to go on a jog, you talk to your friends or parents about an incident, or loving individuals show you empathy and compassion. Even your dreams may assist with healing strong emotions. As such, a lot of emotional energy is resolved given time. As previously said, a trapped emotion may even slowly leave the body over three months as you overcome thinking patterns and form new behaviors. For instance, after an argument, you and a friend rebuild trust through apologies or just proving that you still care about each other. Alternatively, you quit a job with a difficult employer and can now see your boss for qualities other than your basic survival. Resolutions like these can of course be problematic in the case of lovers that break up, forget why it wasn't working out, then get back together and repeat this cycle again and again.

There is a gray area in this process of experiencing emotions. Just because you are crying, angrily jogging, or hitting a pillow, does not mean you are having a beneficial emotional release. First of all, you must be in a safe environment. Secondly, you cannot be fueling your feelings with self-deprecating thoughts around the incident. This is often a form of whining and is not helpful. For instance, your boss fires you and your mind insists you are worthless or incompetent. This is a catastrophized story you are telling yourself and should be reframed. “This job wasn’t the right fit for my skill set,” or “I didn’t meet my boss’s difficult expectations, but I am capable of learning and succeeding if I try again at a different job.” Verbally and physically violent thoughts are generally detrimental unless used in a very particular way. Remember, stay with your emotions and bodily sensations, not your thoughts.

5.7 Emotional Dysregulation

Emotions can also become dysregulated in which you fall into intense emotional spaces without any particular reason, or you may have a fresh difficult experience that you mentally cannot escape from. These might be caused by a form of chemical depression like fluctuations in your hormones. In these cases, no emotional release is happening. It may be important to give yourself some space from your emotions so that you can function in life and find more effective ways of coping. You can either practice calming the emotion or dissociating from it. Review the contents of Chapter 4 for some ideas.

Emotional dysregulation can also come in the form of being addicted to instability and painful emotions. As you establish healthier behaviors and

friends, you may experience a kind of withdrawal effect. You might feel this life is boring or question if you deserve happiness. This form of hypervigilance is a likely indication that you need to continue to work through some of the trapped emotions that persist in your body. Embracing your new life will become easier and easier as you let go of the past and find joy in health and stability.

5.8 Healthy Angering And Asserting Yourself

Anger is a protective mechanism. As previously mentioned, most animals have an aggressive fight response when they come out of a freeze response or are otherwise in danger.^{106B} This greatly increases their chance of survival by scaring a predator and giving them a little extra time to escape. Anger plays other important functions too, like motivation, determining what is important to us, and helping us get what we want or need.

People opening up their trapped emotions often find anger as they finally identify a parent or other individual responsible for their suffering. This anger acts as a guard against the self-blame we may have experienced for years. It helps us differentiate between what we are responsible for and what is dangerous and abusive. This anger process can be necessary before grieving is possible.

Anger can of course come out in unhealthy ways. When we get angry at someone, we tend to start overgeneralizing what they are responsible for. We look for any evidence we can find that they are unlikable. We blame them for entirely unrelated things, or even how our lives are going. Through our anger, we also tend to ignore doing the things that would most readily get our needs met.

Anger is one of the most misunderstood emotions, likely because it arises from so many different factors and can deceptively feel good. Beyond its biological implications, anger also is learned from our culture. For instance, one study found that people from the United States tend to express anger and respond to anger more strongly than people from Japan do, but that response can be decreased or increased quite easily.^{7,14}

Unfortunately, trapped emotions can cause a person to either shut down their healthy anger responses or become hypervigilant with anger and constantly respond to stressful situations with a fight response. A diminished anger response can mean you struggle to express frustration, never speak up for your needs and wants, or cannot defend yourself when verbally or physically attacked. These characteristics are common in people who grew up in situations that actively ignored their voice, especially in women who have

been culturally taught to be submissive. You may even turn your anger inward upon yourself, believing that you were somehow the one to do wrong.

For people who struggle to stand up for themselves, reconnecting with your anger may require empowering your voice with the techniques in Chapter 8 and learning about how unfairly you or your peer group were treated in the past. Many people find this in becoming educated about discrimination, corporate and governmental abuses, and environmental destruction. Learning about your ability to defend yourself or fight adversaries can awaken you to your powerful strength as well. You may start by feeling powerless, but then remember how unfair or terrible someone's actions were, and in that anger discover the ability to take rational action toward change. Take a class in martial arts, or bolster your ego and sense of control as explored in Chapter 13.

Aggressive hypervigilance may then make a person react automatically to stressful situations with name-calling, yelling, aggressive arguing, road rage, revenge fantasies, or physical acts of harm to attempt to get one's way. These are common with people who grew up experiencing or witnessing physical violence, especially if they were surrounded by a culture that promotes aggression like in the United States. These people are experiencing a flashback in which anger is the only tool they have to protect themselves. Both a shutdown and hypervigilant anger response are unhealthy except in rare situations of self-defense. We will therefore explore how to cultivate a healthy balance of anger.

According to the authors of *When Anger Hurts*, expressing traditional forms of anger like yelling, revenge, or violence only offers temporary relief, and actually reinforces aggressive feelings.¹¹⁶ Even just punching a pillow or yelling to let off steam habituates aggressive reactions to anger because it is still dissociated from your body.²⁴¹ Some people believe that anger must be expressed as a biological force of nature, but we can actually transform our relationship to it with other techniques. The authors point out that behind anger are typically basic unmet needs and feelings of stress, fear, or grief. Healthy angering therefore may involve:

1. Creating a habit of stepping away from situations in which you start feeling overwhelmed. It's okay to say, "I'm feeling angry and need a little time and space to calm down." All aggression starts with stress, and you always have the choice to release stress instead of anger with the techniques in Chapter 4.
2. Lowering the total amount of stress you experience daily and choosing to maintain a regulated nervous system.

3. Journaling to understand where your stress is coming from or why a person took the actions that they did.
4. Identifying your unmet needs and voicing or acting on them in a constructive manner. This might involve asserting boundaries, breaking off a relationship, or simply not responding to words that aggravate you. You cannot expect anyone to know why you are angry at them unless you ask for specifically what you are needing. It is important to be focusing on the correct need with non-blaming language. Harriet Lerner's *The Dance of Anger* covers this quite well, but I also summarize it later in Chapter 8. Isolation also greatly aggravates anger, so healthy relationships and community are essential for diminishing feelings of anger.⁷⁰
5. Identifying which of your values are being contradicted, and either communicating that or aligning your life in a way that better represents your values. For instance, supporting an activist cause as explored in Part III.
6. Addressing your trapped emotions with the techniques outlined in Part II. This may involve mentally realizing you are now capable of using violence if necessary to protect yourself, but typically there are much healthier tools at your disposal.
7. Understanding how unhealthy aggressive anger is. Chronic feelings of anger translate into a decrease in lifespan and an increase in feelings of loneliness.¹¹⁶ Holding onto anger prevents you from forgiving others, repairing relationships, or being listened to. Aggressive anger also often stems from a belief that you can control the behaviors of other people, when in fact you can usually only control your own response to other people. You can read more about this in Section 13.3. Ask yourself who benefits from your being angry.
8. Stepping away from the culture of anger. Especially consider the anger that is expressed in your music, movies, news, television, masculinity, revenge fantasies, language, and communication patterns. Consume things, put yourself around people, and repeat patterns that do not reflect anger or violence. Seek out games, movies, activities, and work that promotes cooperation, kindness, and forgiveness.
9. Having a neutral or positive experience with the person you are in conflict with. Often when I'm passive-aggressively avoiding a person, or cannot stand having them in my space, it can help a lot to ask them a question. Asking them how they are, what their new project is, or about their latest adventure can help prove to my instinctual body

- that they are not a monster. Get curious when you're angry.
10. Understanding that the actions of others are usually not intentionally harmful or directed at you. Instead, the actions of others represent their personal needs, wants, culture, and reality. No one can read your mind. Frequently anger arises from misunderstandings. Breaking away from an automatic judgment may require asking yourself, "What is this other person experiencing?"
 11. Detaching from the idea that you are required to help people who choose not to help themselves. For the most part, every adult is personally responsible for getting their own needs met. That means that you are not responsible for putting up with an abusive situation for the sake of someone else. For instance, you can free yourself from the stress of being your mother's only friend when she refuses to step away from an abusive relationship or seek help. That said, within reason, you should allow people to make mistakes and learn from them without ending the relationship. You can be supportive of the struggles others go through, especially oppressed communities and the elderly, but you should not ruin your own life in the process.
 12. Setting a time limit for your rumination before putting a stop to it. This can help make space for you to correct damaging thoughts or use calming techniques like deep breathing.

Naturally, anytime that you need to defend yourself from immediate harm, anger is essential for acting quickly in physical or verbal defense. Angry rebuttals may also be appropriate when standing up for yourself or calling out a heinous act in public. Even asserting your right to say "no" or saying, "I don't like that, please stop" are healthy expressions of anger. Just know that more direct expressions of anger may activate a person's defenses in such a way that they are likely to anger back at you or simply not listen to your words at all. This is especially problematic with activists hoping to create change through angry conversations.

Just like other releases, anger is not something you dwell on forever. The hope is that the energy is released and potentially allows you to move on from, forgive, or even happily spend time with a previous source of stress. Naturally, this won't be possible unless your expectations about a person have changed, you never have to see them again, you have strong boundaries about how you interact, or they have changed their behaviors.

If you already have a healthy relationship with a person who wronged you in the past, you can separate them into their current and past selves so as

not to harm your current relationship. It is even suggested while doing this work to visualize placing the good memories of a person into a safe container so that you can freely work on the ones that caused you suffering. Not all things need to be forgiven either, although carrying around hatred in your body can be quite taxing. I discuss more on how to establish boundaries with a person in Chapter 8, and how to forgive someone in Section 13.13.

Anger can also be stimulated or reduced through our biochemistry.⁸¹ Contradicting popular belief, testosterone increases competitiveness and motivation, not aggression. That said, more testosterone will make already aggressive people more likely to act out. Anger is primarily stimulated by stress. It has been shown that things like caffeine and alcohol can increase the likelihood of expressing anger. On the other hand, omega-3 fatty acids, tryptophan, ashwagandha (used at most 2 weeks at a time), and getting more light earlier in the day can reduce aggression. You can listen to *Episode 71* of the Huberman Lab podcast to learn more.

If you want to dive deeper into the subject of anger, I suggest a few resources. For people who express anger too strongly, read *When Anger Hurts* by Matthew and Judith McKay. For people who need help expressing anger, read *The Dance Of Anger* by Harriet Lerner. This book is intended for people who identify as women, but anyone who struggles to speak up about their needs can benefit from it. Lastly, Black men dealing with anger, victimhood, or self-righteousness may be interested in reading *Tough* by Terry Crews. Crews has an excellent podcast interview on episode #587 of *The Tim Ferriss Show* as well. In it, he says, “You can have revenge or success, but not both.”

There is one instance outside of physical defense in which violence towards others is acceptable, and that is in your imagination. Now, obsessively imagining violent acts probably isn’t healthy or helpful. However, while renegotiating a past difficult experience, you can have yourself or a powerful ally step in to stop a horrible act from occurring. Perhaps the evildoer is killed or imprisoned and guarded by an army of your mental companions, or maybe you are angry enough to talk back to your nemesis or break free from a frozen state and run away - whatever you need to feel safe again. We will talk more about this imaginative renegotiation in Part II of the book. Next, we’ll explore how anger shows up in your thoughts.

5.9 Awareness Of Thoughts And The Critics

Emotions and thoughts work hand in hand, but just like our emotions, we can use techniques to change our thoughts. You can use mindfulness for

identifying thoughts as well. Instead of letting them control your emotions and actions, you can just let thoughts pass on through like clouds in the sky. Say, “I am aware that I am having this thought, but it does not define me or how I have to act or feel.” Alternatively, I find it is easiest to slow my thoughts down and acknowledge that they are happening through journaling. Especially when my thoughts are reiterating over and over again, I can instead get curious about them, reflect on their truthfulness, and consider other possibilities.

Pete Walker, author of *Complex PTSD*, refers to the intrusive negative thoughts that arise in our minds as the inner and outer critics.¹⁸⁴ People with trapped emotions typically have especially strong critics that start speaking when triggered. These voices say painful things about you and others. The inner critic is often based on the voices and negative sentiments of your parents, while the outer critic stems from the anger you withheld towards them.^{184E,184F}

The inner critic might proclaim, *I'm so stupid, there's no way I could succeed*, or, *no one likes me*. It can be a major cause of anxiety and depression by constantly repeating self-critical attacks. The outer critic says things like *you're not doing it right, everyone is dumb, the world is unfair*, or, *it's your fault this happened*. Your outer critic often judges people for things you are insecure about in yourself such as your appearance or quality of work. It can show up as doing activities that scare people away or being overly honest and perfectionistic. Passive-aggressiveness is common too such as avoiding contact, intentionally doing things that make people feel upset, or withholding kind words.

Both critics can also show up subconsciously as reactionary emotions and behaviors. There are still thoughts behind these emotions, but they may be buried deeply. For instance, you might not even think of asking for a raise because the inner critic does not believe you are worthy of one. Or, you might exclude certain people because the outer critic thinks poorly of them. There may also just be a pervasive feeling of anxiety or dislike present. Getting curious and reflecting on your emotions and behaviors may help reveal the thinking behind them. You can also take free online tests such as the *Implicit Assessment Test* or *Primal World Beliefs Survey* as explored in Sections 6.3 and 15.4. In this way, you go from being controlled by an emotional flashback to re-engaging your rational mind. What emotion is coming up? Why was the event hurtful? What need are you having? Naming your thoughts may require having an emotional release first as well, or at least calming down with self-care practices.

Walker believes that these critical voices prevent self-compassion and healthfully connecting with others, which are both essential aspects of recovery.^{184B} The first step to diminishing your inner and outer critics is knowing that they are speaking for you. Use mindfulness or journaling. Ask what you have missed out on or given up due to these commanding judgments. Identify that this is not your true self, but rather a frightened part of you. As we will explore later discussing *the inner family* in Chapter 10, you can talk with the critics. Pete Walker does warn that as you become aware of them, the critics may initially speak even louder, but this is part of breaking out of dissociation.^{184G} Move forward at a pace that feels safe.

Walker says that people who were traumatized by their parents need to first practice their healthy anger by denouncing the critics.^{184A} You can say things like, *You've had enough time speaking, STOP, I don't believe what you are saying, or, Sorry, but your opinion is no longer needed.* Pete Walker calls this *thought-stopping of the inner critic*. This is essentially standing up for yourself against the voices of your parents or other abusers. Just know that this can be a very intense process and require many iterations as you reprogram your judging mind. Often grief will arise in the form of healing tears as you mourn the loss of your childhood and the thousands of times you have attacked yourself and others needlessly. Grieving for the way you were treated in the past that led to these voices taking over may also be essential before you have the emotional strength to use thought-stopping.

However, thought-stopping can become a form of avoiding your emotions and intuition. You never fully get rid of the critics because they are an important part of keeping you safe and moving you along in life. Thus, some therapists alternatively suggest asking the voices questions from a place of compassion. You can get curious about what the inner critic is scared about behind its words, or hear when the outer critic is genuinely protesting something dangerous or abusive. For instance: *So you feel alone? Where is that coming from? What are you worried about? I am not going to outright agree that this is true, but I am here to listen. How can we improve this situation?* I will discuss these inner dialogues more in Chapter 10.

Many other techniques are explored throughout the following chapters to help correct and replace damaging thoughts with ones that are neutral or positive. For instance, quieting the outer critic can be aided by practicing gratitude, making daily lists that highlight the good qualities in others, noting the things that bring you pleasure while walking around, and telling people directly what you appreciate about them.^{184G} You can also shut off the judgmental part of your brain by using mindfulness, being present, and experienc-

ing awe. People with a strong inner critic will want to bolster their ego and create secure relationships. These topics are explored throughout the book such as the previous healthy angering section, Sections 8.8 and 8.13 on judgments and complaining, Chapter 13 on building a healthier mindset, and Sections 14.2 and 17.6 on healing your attachment wounds. Pete Walker also offers several free resources on his website exploring the critics in more depth at <www.pete-walker.com>.

Chapter Reflections

1. What options do you have for practicing mindfulness or activities that incorporate it - online or in your city?
2. What is the best time and place for you to stay present?
3. What things make mindfulness harder for you?
4. If you cannot currently connect with your emotions easily, how did that come to be?
5. How can you start a practice to identify your emotions at least once each day?
6. How do you access big emotional releases such as crying, growling into a pillow, or movement activities?
7. How do you express anger?
8. Has your expression of anger in the past hurt people, and if so, how could you have communicated your needs in a more nonviolent manner?
9. Do you experience any forms of emotional dysregulation? How do you know you are in one of these states?
10. When you check in with yourself, what is it that you're feeling, needing, or avoiding?
11. What does mastering your emotions look like for you?
12. How do your inner and outer critics show up in your life? What do they say? Is one more dominant than the other in your life? What works for you to diminish their voices?

PART II

TRANSFORMING STORIES



Chapter 6

Stories And Self-Limiting Beliefs

6.1 Memory And The Imagination, 6.2 Placebos And Nocebos, 6.3 Self-Limiting Beliefs And Stories, 6.4 Renegotiating Memories

Now that we've explored how to reduce stress and release emotions, the third part of handling trapped emotions is changing your story and self-limiting beliefs. The goal is to recognize that you do not have to believe your thoughts, and in fact, can transform them into more empowering mental messages. Just remember that these stories can be hidden deep inside your subconscious or physical body rather than your rational mind.

Even when a story is accessible to your rational mind, your cognitive abilities can be limited while triggered in an emotional flashback. Finding a safe space, moving your body, breathing deeply, and having an emotional release may be necessary before you can change your thoughts. This chapter introduces these concepts and the more rational side of transforming stories, while Chapters 7 through 11 discuss the subconscious and bodily workings of your inner narratives.

6.1 Memory And The Imagination

One way that our bodies hold onto trapped emotions is through memories. Even though a person may not be able to remember their past or the details of a difficult experience, some memories may return as the techniques in this book are used. These memories may be very troubling, and it is important to take care of yourself as you reclaim your past.

Memories are also quite complicated. Two people can remember the same moment entirely differently, and memories can be created that never happened. This is why history is such a problematic field - cultural lenses, emotional states, what we are focusing on, and what details we remember can color a retelling of events quite differently. This said, according to PTSD specialist Dr. Daniel Brown, traumatized individuals are actually much less likely

to create false memories because adverse experiences make people less trusting of external influences.²¹⁸

At the same time, trapped emotions do complicate memory difficulties, as focusing on positive stimuli is almost impossible when being triggered or feeling unsafe. Often there is a hyperfocus on the difficult memory and everything else is muted. Many people also experience dissociative memory blockages surrounding an adverse experience, especially sexual assault survivors. Even after the initial event, this forgetfulness or unawareness may become a regular occurrence, blocking out portions of the day and leading to questionable or dangerous decisions as explored in Section 3.5.

Even though memories can be unreliable, they are still part of our identities and can help us feel healthy and fulfilled. In fact, the unreliable nature of memory is quite useful for releasing trapped emotions. Not only does forgetfulness protect us from fully re-experiencing the pain of a triggering memory until properly prepared, but it also allows us to *renegotiate* a difficult memory into something safer and more positive. This is possible because our bodies react quite similarly to the stimuli found between our waking life, dreams, and imagination. As a result, our emotional world can be influenced heavily by dreams, our greatest ally may be a fictional character, and memories from each of these states may mix together to become our reality.

6.2 Placebos And Nocebos

The power of your mindset is immense. Consider the *placebo effect*. Researchers have found that simply believing something is good for you will impart small to significant healing benefits in the mind or body.^{176,42} This effect is amplified the more intense the treatment is. For instance, an invasive surgery will impart stronger benefits than a massage. This is also why many unscientific treatments are accepted by the masses - even though they may not cure the long-term symptoms, the person's belief in the healing modality still makes them feel better. Mindset can decrease the amount of stress you experience, increase the success rate of medications and medical procedures, change how hungry you feel, lower pain perception, and drastically improve the health benefits of even small amounts of exercise.^{180,126} In fact, health outcomes improve simply by being told by a doctor that the food you are eating is good for you or that you are getting enough exercise.

The opposite is true as well with the *nocebo effect* when a person does not believe in a treatment. Things like chronic stress can hurt your performance and immune system functioning.¹⁵² People can come to believe that they are being bitten by insects or that their coworkers are glaring at them. As Mal-

colm Gladwell describes in *The Tipping Point*, a person can even experience very real nausea after being convinced their food is poisoned. Many times I have quickly pulled back the shower curtain in fear there was a monster hiding behind it after watching a scary film. This effect is especially worrisome when groups of people collectively believe something that ripples out in detrimental ways like discrimination and stereotypes. Imagining negative outcomes will naturally make you feel much worse about that thing. The brain is amazing, and sometimes terrifying. Be careful about what you focus on.

In another example spanning two studies, Asian American women's test scores in English and math either increased or decreased simply by announcing their gender or ethnicity before the test.^{156,114} This activated the stereotypes these women held regarding how they were “supposed” to perform in English and math. Similarly, children raised with positive reinforcement consistently do better in life than those not given this affirmation.¹⁷⁸ This also plays out at the neighborhood, city, and cultural levels. Do your surroundings inspire creativity, beauty, and inclusion, or are they a concrete jungle steeped in oppression and individualism? Your thoughts are very powerful and create significant changes to your biology and self-confidence. Find the people and places that make your mind flourish in positive self-regard.

Knowing about the nocebo effect makes it even more important to deal with your trapped emotions, as your past difficulties may be informing a negative mindset with things like medicines, exercise, or your ability to learn certain subjects in school. This is why going at your own pace and accepting your healing process is so important. You stressing too much about getting better, feeling guilt over what you eat, or never enjoying your personal time may be hurting your ability to recover. While change may require a certain amount of healthy stress, you have to balance this with knowing when that stress is holding you back and simply creating additional stress.

6.3 Self-Limiting Beliefs And Stories

Depression, anxiety, anger, and other difficult emotions are often characterized by self-limiting thinking patterns.⁵² Known as *cognitive distortions* or *self-limiting beliefs*, they fuel a distorted sense of reality. These beliefs can be wedged into you very deeply because they are often developed in childhood and have been repeated through your inner and outer critics as explored in Section 5.9. Identifying and changing how you think can be an essential step to stopping trapped emotions from controlling your life.

6.3.1 *Self-Limiting Beliefs*

Self-limiting beliefs include:

1. Minimizing how bad it actually was. Any stress or suffering can negatively impact a person and everyone is worthy of healing. Never compare your pain to anyone else's.
2. All-or-nothing thinking by making an event all good or all bad, even if there was a mixture of feelings or the possibility of misunderstandings.
3. Making conclusions without any direct proof. Ask people directly what is going on before believing your assumptions.
4. Taking everything personally, even if it has nothing to do with you. This often arises either when you are in a depressive episode or when friends are struggling with their own difficulties.
5. Thinking about what *should* be done rather than what you *can* or *want* to do.
6. Assuming the worst or catastrophizing the future without actually knowing what will happen or how you will feel.
7. Comparing yourself to others, especially people who have been doing something for years longer than you or have had many more privileges than you. Everyone is uniquely capable and intelligent.
8. Thinking that your feelings are facts, or, that you can rationally predict how you will feel about something. Feelings are ever-changing, and there is no way to know for sure how you will feel in the future.
9. Believing that you have or had control over a situation that you are actually powerless over.

It is especially important to be on the lookout for self-limiting beliefs when you are feeling depressed or are otherwise upset at someone. Write about what you're feeling and the possible cognitive distortions that are getting in your way. Rewrite your thoughts with the distortions corrected. You might also use logic to clarify reality. Can you zoom out from your limited perspective to look at the wider world and discover that things are actually just fine? Is there any tangible proof that something is true? Or are you making assumptions? It is easy to misread facial expressions and make unrelated things be about ourselves. Ask a person directly what their words meant. If they do match what you thought, it opens a great opportunity to resolve whatever conflict existed. Paranoia and silence get us nowhere.

As previously mentioned, emotions only last for about 90 seconds if they

are not refueled with thoughts, memories, or external triggers. That is why it is important to transform self-limiting beliefs because it gives you a more positive aspect of an experience to focus on. This is also why taking some space from an experience and gaining control over intrusive thoughts can be good so you can regulate your emotions and consider the positive aspects of the experience.

This does not mean you are avoiding what happened though, you still need to spend a reasonable amount of time releasing those feelings and integrating them into the larger context of your life. Simultaneously, it is a balance, and some amount of rumination can be expected after a difficult experience. Thoughts fuel our emotions, and emotions fuel our thoughts. Addressing either will help your body quiet both intense feelings and painful mind chatter.

What is actually true? Is the story you've been telling yourself a fact or are you protecting a frightened part of yourself? During any given moment many truths can exist. Truth is also layered. You might be angry or depressed, but with a slight change in thinking, that can become happiness or love. In one frame of mind you might believe that your friend does not care about you, but with a slight change in understanding come to realize that they have been immensely stressed and busy themselves. What are you hyperfocusing on and what are you ignoring?

6.3.2 Choice Of Words

Even if it is not a self-limiting belief, your choice of words and how you define them have a huge impact on things like your gender, mental health, and reality.^{201,202} For instance, certain cultures do not have a concept of the individual. In his book *IntraConnected*, Dr. Dan Siegel writes about how we have deluded ourselves into believing that the self only exists within us. He instead argues that the self exists within our relationships, environment, and the whole universe. Switching to this broader sense of self gives us more compassion for how we treat our neighbors and the environment.

The book, *Lost In Translation* by Ella Frances Sanders illustrates and describes words that do not directly translate into English. One of my favorites is the Japanese word, wabi-sabi, or the ability to find beauty in imperfection. This is why preserving languages is so important because they each hold unique ways of seeing the world around us and transforming our stories. My book, *You Are A Great And Powerful Wizard* invites readers to explore the power of words by reimagining every thought, word, movement, and emotion, or lack thereof, as a magic spell creating change in the world.

According to psychologist Alia Crum, even just giving healthy vegetable dishes more exciting names greatly increases how often people order them.¹⁸⁰ Language is not static; you and your culture can change how you relate to, define, and use words in very impactful ways.

Jonah Berger, the author of *Magic Words*, further illuminates the power of language. He shares that when speaking to yourself or others, action is much more likely when there is an identity to live up to.²⁵⁵ For instance, people will vote more often if you ask them “Will you be a voter?” instead of “Will you vote?” The opposite is true as well. If you identify as a smoker, then quitting is much harder. You have the choice to identify as a failure or recognize that you failed once. Start identifying as the person you would like to become in the world.

Berger has also found that speaking to yourself in the third person is more effective than using “I” statements. For example, instead of saying “I love myself” say “You love yourself.” This may be the reason why speaking to the inner selves explored in Chapter 10 is so effective.

6.3.3 *Focus And Attention*

Humans can only keep their focus on one thing at a time, so where do you want that to be? Your attention is a precious resource, so use it wisely. This means that just because you are participating in an activity, it does not mean that you are learning the lessons it provides. For instance, in martial arts, you might learn how to punch and kick, but if you look deeper, there are lessons of mindfulness, mental discipline, resolve to overcome adversity, and believing in yourself. You have all the hardware you need to succeed, but it is a matter of discovering the software, technique, word, or mindset that will help you use that hardware effectively. You can be focused on a moment but still distracted from its true depth and meaning, because you filter out anything you are not aware of. This is part of why the meaning of a book can change so much across the span of your life. Where is your attention and focus? Is it on the trees or is it on the trash? What else could you be learning or experiencing from a moment? What lessons or affirmations do you want to be scanning for? You have the capability to see the world as a more beautiful, righteous, kind, artistic, and interesting place.

6.3.4 *Stories And Reframing*

Self-limiting beliefs also commonly show up as *stories* that we tell ourselves. Stories are how we construct our reality and how we feel about it. The objective reality of what happened cannot change, but our feelings and the mean-

ing of that experience can. For instance, a person dying is the objective reality, but then cultures have various traditions to change what emotions arise and what it means through reincarnation, the afterlife, spirits, karma, celebration, and mourning. Multiple stories can also simultaneously be true. You can both be perfect the way you are and still need to do work to create the life you desire. I was once upset for being too sensitive to maintain a relationship but remembered that our belief systems were also incompatible.

What do you believe about yourself or other people that is a story? Has someone actually confirmed that this story is true? Even if one or two people have said something that has hinted at it, does that mean the whole world believes it? These stories may be subconscious, and so the first step to changing them is simply naming the story and acknowledging it is there. Then, can you:

- Reframe that story to be positive instead
- Imagine the opposite of the story being true
- Find acceptance of a situation and believe that *everything is actually okay and I am going to make it*
- Replace *I will never* ____ with *I have not yet* ____
- Get curious and replace *I will have a bad experience* with *I've never experienced this before so want to try it out*
- Reframe your anxiety as energy and excitement to complete the task at hand
- Saying “Wow, you’re really good at this” instead of “I’m bad at this”
- Ask yourself, “Is this thought representative of something that has always been true or is it just a temporary experience?”
- Challenge the thought or allow the thought to complete itself in acceptance, like, “What if I am all alone” or “What if no one likes me right now” - can you still find joy or find ways that these are not true forever?
- Identify the beliefs you have and find the strength to look at the bigger picture surrounding an incident
- Believe that your boss is just having a bad day instead of believing that you are a bad person or focusing on how much you wish they would change
- Believe that even through your hardships you still have some beautiful gifts to offer the world
- Replace *I am a bad person* with *I am having the thought that I am a bad person*

- Expand your focus to be about more than just you, for instance by buying a gift for your friend or writing them a letter about how much you appreciate them
- Find the belief that you have more to learn and that your past does not define your future
- Believe that a person who is different from you is an opportunity to learn
- Believe that your losses are actually wins

Reframing stories may be used with your appearance, physical and mental abilities, social activities, or relationships. For instance, I've always been sensitive about my face - I have blemishes and scarring from growing up with acne. Over time though, I've been able to see that people are still attracted to me, and I've begun thinking that I kind of look like a wizard which is pretty cool. In another case, telling myself that I was born for a reason was probably the only thing that kept me alive through the years of suffering that I endured growing up. The anger I felt toward the system I had been born into gave me plenty of reason to fight on so that I could help others. Stories almost always have a positive and negative way of being told. I could have easily believed that I was being punished, the world was against me, and that I had no purpose. Instead, I found a story that allowed me to have a beautiful gift to offer.

A father you remember as showing disapproval may be renegotiated in your memories as showing concern and worry. An embarrassing experience might instead become something you learned a lot from. A friend who you felt betrayed by may become someone who was reacting from their own suffering. A time you publicly cried could be realized as an act of strength and vulnerability.

There are many ways to transform stories. Sometimes the easiest is by having a profound experience like becoming a parent, having a spiritual breakthrough, taking a psychedelic, or falling in love. Understanding the cultural, historical, or political forces that have caused you or others to be a certain way can also provide a lot of motivation to change your stories. Creating a family history as explored in Section 7.2 may be essential to finding empathy, forgiveness, or understanding for your parents. It can also assist you in identifying where a story first arose or continues to be reinforced such as a community group, news source, or family member.

Separating what you are personally responsible for from the burdens of others can help you make big transitions toward the life you want. Maybe you need to write a message for yourself you read every morning, or research the

science behind why some gross-tasting food is good for you. You could also test out a belief as a visualization. Ask yourself, “I wonder what it would feel like if I wholly believed that I am inherently a lovable person worthy of kindness and success?” Framing it like this can help get past the inner critic too.

What do you want to believe? Rewrite your story so that it benefits your growth and healing. For some incredible examples of reframing, read *Man’s Search For Meaning* by Viktor E. Frankl as well as *The Gift* and *The Choice* by Edith Egar. These Holocaust survivors share how stories can be transformed and help a person survive even through the most horrific of situations.

6.3.5 Integrating Stories

Finding an alternative story is not too difficult, but integrating it as something you actually believe can be challenging. Often your emotions may be blocking you from letting go of an old narrative or believing in a new one. Therefore, you may have to employ various methods of extinguishing the emotions you have to an old story. The goal is to be able to bring up the story and say, “Oh, this isn’t actually scary or dangerous, and I can handle the challenges that may arise.” Ketamine therapy, as mentioned in Section 4.13, is especially effective at this by allowing the user to experience a memory or thought without their usual trigger responses arising, but the techniques throughout the next few chapters are all helpful. I often have to journal using logic to rationally compare the new story to what I have experienced before or know factually. Generally, the more you study and experience the unknown, the more stories you will have to draw upon for your reality. Then, the more times you experience something like love, friendship, or success, the more easily accessed stories attached to those things will become, like, *I am lovable*, or, *I have meaningful friendships*.

What do you do when you have not yet personally experienced something? You can still draw upon facts, science, and observations from the world around you to integrate a story as a possibility for yourself. For instance, maybe you haven’t made any friends in a long time, or have not yet experienced love, but you can still see that other people, when they act a certain way, have. Then you find the story that obtaining these things is a skill you can learn with effort. Alternatively, many people can first believe something when it is talked about by a person they respect with a level of power behind their name. For instance, an author, spiritual figure, doctor, or politician.

You may also change the scope of the story to be smaller. In the past I changed *I have friends* into *I have people I enjoy being around*, which was a

much easier positive reframing to integrate at the time. Maybe instead of being loved, it's being appreciated for what you do, or maybe instead of human friends, it's animal and plant ones. Find the story that you can believe. Even the smallest shift in the direction of empowerment, taking action, or learning can disrupt a depressed or stuck mental state.

That's not to say that all stories that make you feel upset are untrue. You may have to change things about yourself to believe your stories. If you want to believe something different about your appearance, you can dress up in ways that feel empowering. If you want to bolster the trust in your skills, practice and take classes in a particular area like art, or use the skills in Section 12.1 to form new habits. Maybe you need to volunteer or care for an animal to start feeling important. You may have to communicate your needs to a person if you want to change your story about them being incompetent or unloving. Many people believe that math or writing is hard because they had a bad or mean teacher growing up - is there a different method or a more compassionate teacher who can help alter this story? Section 13.4 also discusses how to bolster your confidence.

6.3.6 Your Core Story And Internal Working Models

Most of your preferences, mindset, behaviors, and the way you respond to emotional situations were developed in childhood. Beyond genetic factors that we discussed previously, these are typically based on what you witnessed or experienced from your caregivers. Think of things like your cleaning preferences, touch needs, communication style, mindset, walking speed, and what relationships you engage in. Psychologists refer to these as *internal working models*.²³⁷ Alternatively, I like thinking of them as your *core story*, because they heavily influence all your other perceptions and self-limiting beliefs.

Healing attachment wounds and many interpersonal conflicts requires transforming some of these core stories. That, or at least becoming aware of them and communicating that they are the source of your behavior or feeling. Completing the narrative of why you behave a certain way allows you to, for instance, stop blaming people for being slow, and instead remember that your mom walked fast and dragged you along while growing up.²³⁸

What is your first memory attached to adopting a core story? Who said the words? What incident made you decide? Knowing this isn't always easy though, since these behaviors may seem entirely normal to you, inseparable from your basic personality and how people should act. These adaptive behaviors can develop even before conscious memory forms. As such, you may get defensive when someone calls out the behavior as difficult. With abu-

sive or neglectful parents, you may also shut down certain parts of your memory. The first goal may then be to simply acknowledge, “I have a stronger reaction to this thing than others do.” This alone can help open up compassion and understanding in conflicts with others.

Core stories are responsible for a lot of upset feelings. This is especially the case when the stories of two separate people contradict each other. For instance, someone who is messy and someone who is clean, or a romantic couple with one person having anxious attachment and the other having avoidant attachment. Many parts of the following chapters are dedicated to transforming your core story.

6.3.7 *Primal World Beliefs*

Psychologist Jer Clifton identified 26 *primal world beliefs* that everyone operates from.^{247,250} These determine your main primal world belief of whether the world is a fundamentally good or bad place. They can also be split into three main primal world beliefs. Do you see the world as:

1. ***Safe or dangerous*** – These include pleasurable vs. miserable, regenerative vs. degenerative, progressing vs. declining, harmless vs. threatening, cooperative vs. competitive, stable vs. fragile, and just vs. unjust.
2. ***Enticing or dull*** – These include interesting vs. boring, beautiful vs. ugly, abundant vs. barren, worth exploring vs. not worth exploring, meaningful vs. meaningless, improvable vs. too hard to improve, and funny vs. not funny.
3. ***Alive or mechanistic*** – These include intentional vs. unintentional, needs me vs. doesn't need me, and interactive vs. indifferent.

There are also five neutral primal world beliefs that do not influence your view of good or bad. These include interconnected vs. separable, changing vs. static, hierarchical vs. non-hierarchical, understandable vs. too hard to understand, and acceptable vs. unacceptable. Primal world beliefs greatly alter your personality. For instance, a person who believes that the world is a just place tends to be happier and work harder but also blames victims more for the suffering they experience. Children who are raised to believe that the world is a dangerous place tend to have worse outcomes in life.

Clifton's research does not yet show where many of these primal world beliefs arise from or how alterable they are, but I believe that they share many of the same qualities as the core stories I previously discussed. They are likely

changeable through dedicated effort working with trapped emotions and speaking to the inner selves. Even if you don't change your primal world beliefs at all, understanding your own and loved ones' beliefs can help you have more empathy and work through hard conversations. You can take the test for free at <<https://myprimals.com>>.

6.3.8 The Story Of Our Objects And Environment

We also relate to our surrounding environment and the objects in our lives with stories. For better or worse, some objects and environments hold stronger stories than others. These might include objects that are gifted to us, that are handmade, have a family history, or that we create ourselves. Or for environments, places that we grew up, had ancestors previously living, have spent a lot of time in, had significant experiences in, or have heard a lot about as being beautiful, historical, or spiritual.

While you can change the story about an object or environment with similar techniques to those previously explored, I believe that it is more important to be mindful of what objects and environments you are surrounding yourself with. Do these environments fill you with joy, neutrality, or feelings of discontent? How can you start replacing or transforming these objects and environments to empower you? Consider the color, artwork, view of nature, architecture, lighting, and how your surroundings make you feel. Could you craft it yourself or make it a collaborative experience with friends? I cover this topic in more detail in Chapter 15.

6.3.9 The Story Of Our Emotions

According to Dr. Lisa Feldman Barrett, author of *How Emotions Are Made*, emotions are largely cultural.²⁵⁴ While energetic states exist such as pleasant, unpleasant, calm, or aroused, how we relate to these states can be changed. This is why sometimes people suggest transforming anxiety into excitement, or why behind anger can be grief or stress. None of these states are bad, they're just energy moving through you. What reframing would help a difficult emotion become easier to process?

6.4 Renegotiating Memories

Memories can also be directly altered by using your imagination and visualization techniques. Remember how there is little difference between the imagination and real life? Each time you recall a memory or tell your story, your body is literally reliving it and experiencing the stress over again. Thus, if you can alter the events of a memory with your imagination, your body will expe-

rience it differently. Perhaps you stop a car that was about to hit you, create a force field around your loved ones, or call the cops on someone who hurt you. What would have to change in the past for you to believe something different? Which trustworthy person could tell you a healthier perspective and reassure you?

Part of the reason why the brain hyperfocuses on difficult memories is to know it can handle the incident in the future. Therefore, changing those memories is not lying to ourselves, it is letting the brain know that we have conquered our fear and are now safe from the threat we once experienced. Luise Reddermann explores this in her book, *Who You Were Before Trauma: The Healing Power of Imagination for Trauma Survivors*.

One option is to apply the opposite reaction you normally have in a situation. Perhaps you froze when a dog was barking at you and got bitten - in your renegotiated imagination you might now either run from the dog, fight it, or do both in separate imaginations instead. Using Pete Walker's four F-types, either through visualization or in real life:

- ***Fight types*** - Can you pause and listen, run from, or help?
- ***Freeze types*** - Can you flee from the situation, defend yourself, or tell a person to stop?
- ***Flight types*** - Can you stand your ground, breathe deeply, or assert your needs?
- ***Fawn types*** - Can you put your needs first and say what you want?

You can also make more subtle alterations to a difficult memory. For instance, playing it backward, muting it, giving everyone a different voice, or changing the colors.²⁴¹ This helps stop the constant replaying of the same events in your imagination. Instead, the memory becomes something that happened in the past. It may also reveal new details surrounding the incident.

Renegotiating memories will be easier if you have a stable source of positivity to draw resilience from. This could be from any positive source of energy such as a good memory, but Peter Levine has his clients empower themselves by connecting to their bodily sensations.¹⁰⁵ When in a triggered state a person often becomes tense. Perhaps their stomach is tight, or they have their arms crossed. This sensation can be explored with curiosity. What are you protecting? Where is the sensation and what are its attributes? As previously described, you can oscillate to other parts of the body which feel okay or strong. Feel into those parts and know they always are there for you to access and power through difficulty.

Levine also has clients create visual resources using a positive memory associated around the time of an incident. These can include a favorite article of clothing, an animal companion, or a skill. These resources often arise out of probing around the felt sense. The client instills this visualization by imagining its textures, smells, sounds, tastes, and how it made them feel emotionally. The resource is then brought along in the difficult memory and can be accessed anytime things become troubling. Perhaps you touch your jacket, eat some of your favorite food, are cheered on by characters from Sesame Street, or feel how powerful you were defeating the main boss in a video game.

Chapter Reflections

1. What are some self-limiting beliefs and stories that you hold?
2. What are some alternative stories you could tell yourself about the things currently upsetting you?
3. What emotions are holding you back from being able to believe a different story?
4. Where is your attention focused and how is it limiting the reality you have access to?
5. Who do you identify as? What identities would help you become the person you want to be?
6. How does your story change when you take a step back and look at the bigger picture?
7. How can you access more possible mindsets and beliefs? How can you come to discover more of the unknown?
8. Who are your fictional, imaginary, or media allies?
9. How could you reimagine your memories to change your core stories?
10. What are your positive anchors you can recall, touch, or visually see to oscillate back to a positive space?

Thanks for reading! The rest of the chapters are a preview of content with illustrations. If you would like to read the rest of the book, please order a signed copy directly from me at etsy.com/shop/radcatpress, request it at your local bookstore, or order it on Amazon – you can also find the e-book and audiobook there.



Chapter 7

Basic Story Reframing

7.1 Somatic Therapy, 7.2 Your Life History And Reclaiming Memories, 7.3 Ritual, 7.4 “Imaginary” Friends, 7.5 Dreams And Nightmares, 7.6 Role-Playing And Theater, 7.7 Hypnotherapy, 7.8 Exposure Therapy, 7.9 Prolonged Exposure Therapy, 7.10 Narrative Exposure Therapy, 7.11 Journaling

Many specific techniques can help you reframe stories and overcome self-limiting beliefs. This chapter will introduce a few, with the next few chapters then diving into communication, EMDR, inner family work, and psychedelics.

7.1 Somatic Therapy

As previously stated with more severe trapped emotions, your story and what is preventing it from changing is often not available to your rational mind. However, even though you may not remember, your body language, posture, breathing patterns, skin temperature, and vocal tone are access routes into the difficulty you once experienced.²⁴¹ Somatic therapy involves becoming aware of your body with mindfulness, identifying the story it is holding onto, and expressing your emotions through movement and sound. In this way, you work on the *current* pain rather than the memory of it. Dr. Peter Levine, the author of *In An Unspoken Voice*, combines body scanning techniques with creating imagined resources to help oscillate you between overwhelming feelings and a place of safety. As discussed in Section 6.4, these could be good memories or visualized allies.

Somatic therapy is most easily accomplished with the help of a therapist to witness the small changes in your body and voice. They also act as a healthy relationship to help regulate you. Somatic therapy by itself is most effective for treating single incidents like injuries, car accidents, and witnessing deeply troubling events. That said, learning somatic releases is also often essential for healing repeated trapped emotions and attachment wounds as it allows...



Chapter 8

Communication

8.1 Nonviolent Communication (NVC), 8.2 Making NVC Sound Natural, 8.3 Apologizing With NVC And Making Amends, 8.4 Handling Conflict With Conversational Receptiveness And Curiosity, 8.5 Supporting Others, 8.6 Repairing Relationships With Clarification And Imago, 8.7 Effective Communication, 8.8 Non-Judgmental Language, 8.9 Knowing The Source Of Your Need, 8.10 If Your Request Is Rejected, 8.11 Not Communicating, 8.12 Delaying Communication, 8.13 Misdirected Communication And Complaining, 8.14 Incompatibility, 8.15 Unavailable People, 8.16 More About Communication

Learning some general guidelines for communicating with the source of your stress can do a lot for dissolving difficult emotions. Communication is one of the easiest and most effective ways to create or reestablish a safe space and change a story you have about another person and your relationship with them. Clarifying a situation, apologizing for misdeeds, or asking for your needs to be met can be deeply soothing and heal damaged relationships. It can also help open up the true expression of your pain such as turning anger into grief and allowing the release of trapped emotions.

Unfortunately, communication is not always easy to accomplish. Even though speaking and writing well are paramount to obtaining what we want in life, most people simply emulate how their peers use words and nonverbal cues. While this might impress your parents and first crush, cultural language norms typically instill many antagonistic patterns toward yourself and others. In fact, I believe that most suffering is caused by poor communication. It is common to feel hurt by how others communicate or we do not get our needs met because we cannot adequately communicate what we want. While communication can be uncomfortable, not communicating is often very hurtful to you and any other parties involved. Learning these skills is also very powerful for learning how to lovingly talk to yourself, especially with the...



Chapter 9

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization And Reprocessing)

*9.1 EMDR With A Therapist, 9.2 Solo EMDR,
9.3 Accelerated Resolution Therapy*

EMDR has gained a huge amount of popularity in recent years as an effective treatment for a wide variety of conditions including PTSD, addiction, phobias, anxiety, and depression. While why it works is not entirely understood, some researchers have found that horizontal back-and-forth eye movement deactivates the fear and stress response while simultaneously increasing the brain's memory connections.^{74,226} In REM sleep this function hypothetically allows us to face difficult images and memories more easily in our dreams, but we can use it in our waking life as well.

EMDR is most effective for simple trapped emotions. It can also be used for more complex difficulties like abuse or neglect, but may just take many more sessions to be effective or require other techniques infused into the method.^{97M} EMDR seems to continue working even after sessions have finished, so further recovery is often reported days or months later as experiences are fully able to integrate.

The mechanisms of EMDR may even be activated when playing certain video games. One study found that recalling distressing memories within 24 hours of a difficult event and playing a few minutes of Tetris shortly afterward helped to decrease the frequency of intrusive and painful memories.⁸⁵ Tetris requires focus, cognitive processing, and eye movement. It also creates some positive feelings by activating a person's reward centers. Even though the memories are uncomfortable, Tetris provides a person with evidence that joy and safety can still be found right now. This may be another explanation for why EMDR works, as it distracts parts of the brain that are holding onto a memory and forces a person back into their rational and present mind.



Chapter 10

Inner Family

10.1 Externalizing The Inner Family With Sandbox Therapy, 10.2 Parental, Adult, Child, Future, Ancestral, and Cultural Selves, 10.3 Right And Left Brains, 10.4 Initiating Contact With Your Inner Selves, 10.5 Inner Child And Playfulness, 10.6 Inner Loving Parents And Reparenting To Ideal Guardians, 10.7 Future Self, 10.8 Ancestral Self, 10.9 Cultural Self, 10.10 Birth And Death, 10.11 Creating Inner Selves

Building upon what we learned in Section 7.4 about “imaginary” friends, each experience and emotion of our past, present, and even future can be visualized as a unique individual to learn from, support, and speak with. This can include people like your 3-year-old, teenage, critical, fulfilled, older, addicted, and fearful selves. Each of these selves have their own personalities, fears, and hopes that are acting out in your current life. For instance, your adult self might get along well with your parents, but your child self might be scared and avoid them from something that happened in the past.

These parts of ourselves can be spoken with, hugged, and offended. We can inquire into which of these selves is acting out or needing support when we are struggling. When a part is acting out, we can say “This part in me believes ____.” In this way, we separate what is a part and what is our true self. We can also work on these parts when we feel good and nourished. Most often when people talk about this work, they refer to *inner child work*, *parts work*, or *Inner Family Systems (IFS) therapy*.

Working with the inner selves is also helpful because it puts a little extra distance between you and a difficult experience. As Luise Reddermann, author of *Who You Were Before Trauma*, explains, retelling a triggering story is much easier when it is done through the third person.¹⁴² In this way, you are acknowledging that who you were and your current self are separate individuals. It helps your body know what happened in the past is no longer a threat and that the present moment is safe. For really difficult memories, an...

LYSERIC
ACID
AMIDE



PSILOCYBIN



SONORA
DESERT
TOAD



PEYOTE



LYSERIC
ACID
DIETYLAMIDE



AYAHUASCA

Chapter 11

Psychedelic Therapy And Integration

*11.1 Legality, 11.2 Risks, 11.3 Possible Effects, 11.4 Tripping With Others,
11.5 My Trips, 11.6 LSD, 11.7 Psilocybin Mushrooms, 11.8 MDMA, 11.9
Preparing For And Going On A Safe Psychedelic Journey, 11.10 Navigating A
Bad Trip, 11.11 Trip Sitting And Guiding, 11.12 Integration,
11.13 Microdosing*

Psychedelic-assisted therapy has been shown to have incredible results with addiction, depression, trapped emotions, creativity, problem-solving, healing relationships, acceptance of death, and more.³⁷ It does so by creating an expedited pathway into many of the healing modalities we have already discussed - mindfulness, lessening hyperfocus, broadening perspective, considering different possibilities to stuck stories, and breaking self-limiting beliefs. Larger doses allow the brain to rewire itself and create a new reality. While recent science is illuminating the amazing powers of psychedelic therapy in releasing trapped emotions, humans have been using mind-altering substances for thousands of years for personal growth, spiritual connection, and creative insights.

Psychedelic-assisted therapy is very different from doing mushrooms or MDMA alone or at a festival. A therapist not only filters out people who might react poorly to the treatment, but also mentally prepares a client, is present throughout the entire trip, and follows up with at least one integration session in the week following the trip. For the sake of ease, I will be including MDMA as a psychedelic even though it works quite differently than substances like LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, DMT, peyote, and ayahuasca. There is also ketamine that I mentioned briefly in Section 4.13, but do not cover here, since using it therapeutically for pain, depression, anxiety, or PTSD requires fairly controlled amounts that are best administered...

PART III

**BEHAVIORS, MINDSET,
RELATIONSHIPS,
AND ENVIRONMENT**



Chapter 12

Habits And Addictions

12.1 Habits, 12.2 Addictions, 12.3 The Big No List

Now that you have some tools for releasing your trapped emotions, we need to discuss the maladaptive behaviors you may have formed and the skills you never learned. While it is great if you can reconcile with your past suffering, that may mean nothing if you keep putting yourself into emotionally tumultuous situations, practice unhealthy behaviors, or continue to have self-limiting beliefs. These patterns may have arisen from your culture, family, or self-protective defenses. They may also exist because things like childhood neglect or abuse prevent the development of certain brain areas, and extreme difficulties can also shut off parts of the brain. Thus, changing certain behaviors may coincide with releasing some of your trapped emotions or healing your attachment wounds. The latter is explored in Section 14.2 and 17.6.

While changing aspects of your life may initially feel awkward and unnatural, you eventually go from practicing something to integrating it into your identity. You can reinvent yourself. This chapter deals primarily with techniques for transforming unhealthy behaviors, while the following ones involve changing your mindset, relationships, and surrounding environment.

12.1 Habits

Habits are unconsciously performed actions or things we regularly do without thinking about them. You can have a habit of brushing your teeth or panicking when you see someone. According to James Clear, author of *Atomic Habits*, a habit has four parts to it: the “habit cue”, the craving for the habit, the habit itself, and a reward for performing the habit.²⁰⁸ An example would be the sight of cookies (the habit cue) leading you to desire cookies (the craving), which prompts you to purchase and eat cookies (the habit), which in turn triggers your taste receptors and happy chemicals (the reward). Habit cues include anything from sights and sounds to smells and feelings. They...



Chapter 13

Reforming Mental States

13.1 Healthy And Regulated Nervous System, 13.2 Ego, Awe, And Developing Or Diminishing The Self, 13.3 Control, 13.4 Confidence Through Intelligence, Hormones, And Dopamine, 13.5 Guilt, Shame, And Resentment, 13.6 Blame And Identifying How You Reinforce Your Suffering, 13.7 Developing Compassion And Empathy, 13.8 Self-Compassion, 13.9 Self-Love, 13.10 Positive Self-Talk And Affirmations, 13.11 Positive Energy And Creating Defining Moments, 13.12 Happiness, 13.13 Forgiving Yourself And Others

In Chapter 6 you learned several techniques for overcoming self-limiting beliefs. In this chapter, we explore this in more detail by covering things like letting go of control, developing self-love, and forgiving yourself and others.

13.1 Healthy And Regulated Nervous System

Let's first learn what a healthy and regulated nervous system looks like. As explored in Chapter 3, people with these systems can:

- Use a *flock response* to first read the emotions and cues of others in a potentially dangerous situation before responding with fight, flight, freeze, or fawning behaviors^{132P}
- Feel empathy or compassion for others' hardships
- Forgive others (within reason) or move on from difficulty without too much rumination
- Cut out toxic or non-mutual relationships
- Communicate about feelings, needs, stress, and conflict without resorting to physical or verbal violence
- React to and protect oneself from physical or verbal violence
- Regulate one's intake of food, drugs, media, and adrenaline-boosting activities
- Identify and avoid relationships with red flags



Chapter 14

Healthy Relationships

14.1 Friendships, 14.2 Romantic Relationships And Secure Attachment, 14.3 Breaking Up With Someone, 14.4 Being Broken Up With, 14.5 Community And Individualism

In their book *What Happened To You*, Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey explore how a lot of healing from trauma can take place in the thousands of tiny social interactions we have with safe, consistent, and comforting friends, family, and other loved ones.^{132M,132N} Perry explains that having access to a number of these connections creates better recovery outcomes than only having a therapist does.^{132O} The emotional co-regulation that a trusted ally offers shortly after an incident greatly reduces the likelihood of it becoming a trapped emotion in the body.²⁴⁵ As has been confirmed in many studies, Dr. Bessel van der Kolk states that having safe and reciprocal relationships is the most important factor for good mental health as well.^{97H}

Relationships with calm or nourishing people or animals help regulate our nervous system when we begin to feel overwhelmed. They make us know the past is behind us and right now is okay. These relationships also greatly influence our personalities, interests, and behaviors, and so we may assist our healing by being surrounded with people living the type of life we desire.¹⁷ Especially consider the five people you spend the most time with and their communities. How are these people influencing you, and do they represent who you want to become?

Humans are social creatures, but if you grew up with abusive parents or were indoctrinated by a culture that reinforces toxic relationships, you may either find yourself gravitating towards unhealthy connections or avoiding people altogether. Even if you're an introvert, having a network of allies will greatly help you enjoy life and gain access to important resources. This includes friendships and romantic partnerships, but also animals, therapists, support groups, co-workers, or dance partners. It can also just involve being...



Chapter 15

Changing Your Environment

15.1 Personal Environment, 15.2 Businesses And Community Groups, 15.3 Creating A Less Stressful Culture And Society, 15.4 Discrimination, 15.5 Stopping Discrimination In Yourself, 15.6 Law Enforcement And Restorative Justice, 15.7 Media, 15.8 Capitalism And Mutual Aid, 15.9 Gender, 15.10 Good Parenting, 15.11 Healing The Natural World, 15.12 Culture

Changing your behaviors, mindset, and relationships is all easier in the right environment. It can assist in your feeling safe, regulating your emotions, having resources to heal from trapped emotions, finding healthy people, and generally enjoying life. Your environment includes the surrounding cultures, biodiversity, access to nature, businesses, support services, arts, community activities, architecture, laws, and political climate. Some ideas for healthier environments were introduced in Chapters 4 and 14, but then what are some methods for you to actualize these changes?

15.1 Personal Environment

Changing your immediate environment is fairly straight forward and can be accomplished with many of the tools already discussed throughout the book. You buy some potted plants, decorate your space, get a nice sound system, clean, apply for a new job, hang artwork, communicate through strife, or move to a new location. Temporarily changing your environment can also have benefits. For instance, you could hike weekly, do computer work at a cafe, wear headphones, or go out of town once a month. What would nourish your life? What would give you greater access to healthy relationships and space which feels safe and relaxing?

15.2 Businesses And Community Groups

At the next level, you may have identified something that your neighborhood or city needs, or that you're interested in, but it does not exist yet. Maybe it's...



Chapter 16

Becoming A Changemaker

16.1 Effective Change In Grassroots And Mass Movements, 16.2 Reminders For Activists, 16.3 Communication For Activists, 16.4 Persuasion, 16.5 Beyond Blame, Victimhood, And Cancel Culture

Changing your environment for the better may require creating, destroying, or reimagining certain cultures, laws, economic systems, corporations, or governments. I don't care if you're five or a hundred years old, you can impact the world for the better. Chapter 15 introduced many aspects of a healthier society, but then what are strategies for demanding and implementing those changes?

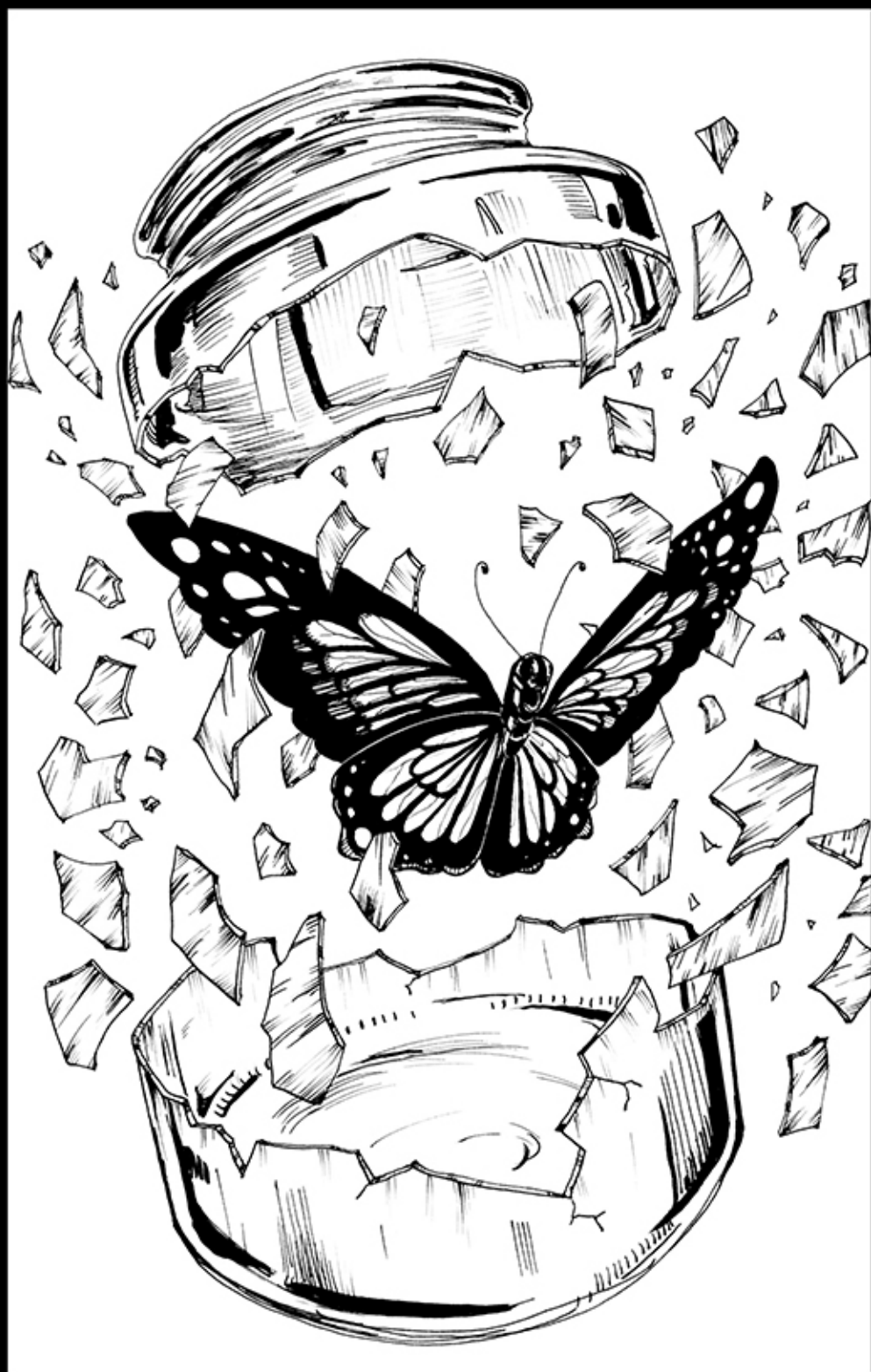
Changemakers can take on many forms including volunteers, voters, or rebels against cultural norms. These are examples of *activists* and can provide a lot of meaning and community in life. The following sections introduce many reminders for creating effective change with language and psychology. This is an introductory guide and other books will give more specifics to activist tactics such as *Healing Resistance* by Kazu Haga, *Emergent Strategy* by Adrienne Maree Brown, *My Grandmother's Hands* by Resmaa Menakem, *The Body Is Not An Apology* by Sonya Renee Taylor, and *Coming Back To Life* by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown.

It is important to acknowledge that many marginalized and oppressed people feel forced into activism, especially if they are one of the few people belonging to a particular demographic in an area. Even though this can create strong feelings of anger and unfairness, living a normal life may feel impossible or, at least, unethical. However, it should be known that self-care and being your authentic self is also a radical form of activism.

You might be surprised how taking care of yourself can uplift others and make you more effective in creating change. Knowing when you are overwhelmed, taking on too much, or just needing a break is powerful. Systemic forms of discrimination and environmental destruction are huge problems...

PART IV

**RELEASING
TRAPPED EMOTIONS**



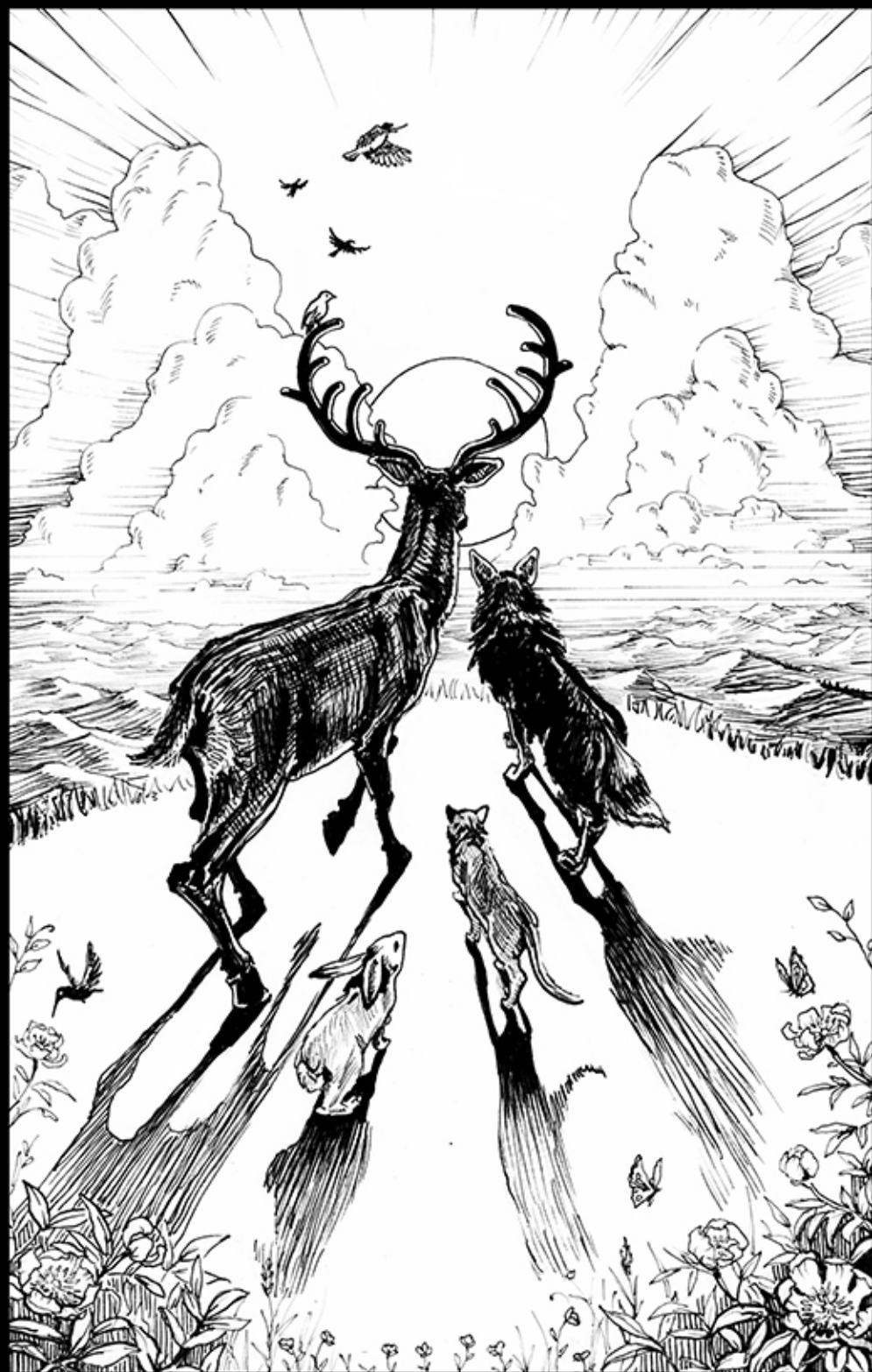
Chapter 17

How To Release Specific Trapped Emotions

17.1 Where To Start, 17.2 Major Parts To My Healing, 17.3 Pulling Yourself Out Of A Triggered Space, 17.4 Right After You Have A Life-Or-Death Experience, 17.5 Unaddressed Single Past Incidents And PTSD, 17.6 Attachment Wounds And Complex PTSD, 17.7 Stress, Overwhelm, And Anxiety, 17.8 Anger, Judgments, And The Outer Critic, 17.9 Zooming Out And Disrupting Hyperfocus, 17.10 Workaholism, 17.11 Health And Fearing Death, 17.12 Self-Blame And Self-Hatred, 17.13 Loss And Grief, 17.14 Rejection, 17.15 Insecurity And Jealousy, 17.16 Feeling Empty Or Numb, 17.17 Sounds, 17.18 Religious And Spiritual Abuse, 17.19 Ancestral Trapped Emotions, 17.20 Appearance, 17.21 Touch

Now that you have the tools for releasing trapped emotions, we can explore some specific types of suffering in more detail. As a reminder, all trapped emotions share three things in common - unexpressed emotions, self-limiting stories, and wanting resolution. Healing can be accomplished by regulating your nervous system (Part I), releasing emotions (Part I), reframing a story (Part II), and correcting anything reinforcing the trapped emotion such as behaviors, mindsets, relationships, or environments (Part III). Some trapped emotions are also accompanied by attachment wounds which must be healed by building secure attachment as explored in Sections 14.2 and 17.6. Working on any of these will aid you in transforming the others.

The pathway to healing looks different for everyone, but the end result shares some common threads as explored in Section 2.11. Keep in mind that the examples in this chapter are how I personally might go about healing, but you may need to use a different method depending on your unique experiences and circumstances. Adapt the skills shared throughout the book to meet your needs. There are hundreds of ways to relieve suffering, and it is rarely...



Chapter 18

Moving Forward With Radical Self-Care

Humans are truly amazing. We are capable of surviving through great difficulty, healing from years of turmoil, and still experiencing amazing joy. Unfortunately, there are not enough quality mental health professionals for everyone wanting support in this healing process. Even if there were, many people do not have access to these supports due to location, income, or lacking representation in race, language, and lived experience. What's more, these professionals typically cannot fix an inequitable society, help a person who lacks basic needs, or repair the natural world. As such, we must decentralize the mental health industry by creating a culture of freely available radical self-care. This might include:

1. Organizing support groups in which members collectively focus on specific trapped emotions, read literature, integrate psychedelic experiences, develop the inner child and loving parent relationship, practice mindfulness, interpret dreams, or learn about self-care. This might also involve teaching people tools like self-hypnosis, solo EMDR, somatic therapy, or co-counseling.
2. Dismantling systems of oppression such as racism, transphobia, sexism, law enforcement, and capitalism.
3. Creating social activities that help people build community such as potlucks, games, and art events.
4. Knowing how to identify dysregulation and how to help a person regulate their nervous system.
5. Co-creating securely attached relationships with lovers, friends, and communities.
6. Destigmatizing psychedelics and creating safe containers for their use.

Chapter 19

Works Referenced

19.1 Trauma And PTSD, 19.2 The Inner Child And Parts Of Ourselves, 19.3 Psychedelics, 19.4 Meditation, Spirituality, And Buddhism, 19.5 Addiction, Alcohol, And Dysfunctional Families, 19.6 Relationships, 19.7 Money, Business, Creativity, And Finances, 19.8 Gender, Race, And Social Justice, 19.9 Social And Communication, 19.10 Miscellaneous

Beyond my experiences growing up in a dysfunctional family, living in alternative communities, and participating in activist groups, I learned about the contents of these pages by reading many books. This list may appear overwhelming at first, but just read about whatever you are currently focusing on in your healing. For broad overviews, I highly suggest reading in order: *Complex PTSD, My Grandmother's Hands, The Body Keeps The Score*, and *In An Unspoken Voice*. Know that most of these are available through your local library and as audiobooks. I listened to these for free while working odd jobs (at two to four times speed) through my local library's partnership with the Hoopla phone app. There's also the Libby app.

I placed the books that I benefited most from at the top of each section. That does not mean the books at the bottom are bad because I usually did not include the books that I found lacking in quality. This said, some of these books have perspectives I disagree with or find stigmatizing, and it is important to read commentary on each, especially in the ever-changing world of gender, race, social justice, and science. Use your critical thinking, apply what you've learned in this book, know that each topic is actively developing, and check out the reviews online. Starting a self-care book club could be a great way to stay accountable to your education, have meaningful discussions, and get support as well.

19.1 Trauma And PTSD

- Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving - Pete Walker

- The Body Keeps The Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma - Bessel van der Kolk
- In An Unspoken Voice: How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness - Peter A. Levine
- My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies - Resmaa Menakem
- Who You Were Before Trauma: The Healing Power of Imagination for Trauma Survivors - Luise Reddermann
- The Polyvagal Theory in Therapy: Engaging the Rhythm of Regulation - Deb Dana
- Adult Children Of Emotionally Immature Parents: How to Heal from Distant, Rejecting, or Self-Involved Parents - Lindsay C. Gibson
- Raising An Emotionally Intelligent Child - John Gottman
- The Heart and Mind of Hypnotherapy: Inviting Connection, Inventing Change – Douglas Flemons
- The Tao Of Fully Feeling: Harvesting Forgiveness Out of Blame - Pete Walker
- A Therapist's Guide To EMDR: Tools and Techniques for Successful Treatment - Laurel Parnell
- Adult Children Of Alcoholics: Alcoholic / Dysfunctional Families (ACA Big Red Book) - ACAWSO
- Twelve Steps Of Adult Children: Steps Workbook - ACAWSO
- What Happened To You? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience, and Healing. Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey
- The Clinician's Guide to Exposure Therapies for Anxiety Spectrum Disorders - Timothy A. Sisemore
- Prolonged Exposure Therapy for Adolescents with PTSD Emotional Processing of Traumatic Experiences, Therapist Guide - by Edna B. Foa, Kelly R. Chrestman, and Eva Gilboa-Schechtman
- Healing Trauma: Restoring the Wisdom of Your Body (Sounds True audiobook version) - Peter Levine
- Waking The Tiger: Healing Trauma - Peter Levine
- Trauma Stewardship: An Everyday Guide to Caring for Self While Caring for Others - Laura van Dernoot Lipsky with Connie Burk

19.2 The Inner Child And Parts Of Ourselves

- Recovery Of Your Inner Child: The highly acclaimed method for liberating your inner self - Lucia Capacchione
- Reconciliation: Healing The Inner Child - Thich Nhat Hanh

- Greater Than The Sum Of Our Parts: Discovering Your True Self Through Internal Family Systems Therapy - Richard C. Schwartz
- Internal Family Systems: Skills Training Manual - Frank G. Anderson, Martha Sweezy, and Richard C. Schartz

19.3 Psychedelics

- How To Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence - Michael Pollan
- The Psychedelic Explorer's Guide - Safe, Therapeutic, and Sacred Journeys - James Fadiman
- Food Of The Gods: The Search for the Original Tree of Knowledge - Terrence McKenna

19.4 Meditation, Spirituality, And Buddhism

- Meditations For Emotional Healing: Finding Freedom in the Face of Difficulty - Tara Brach
- Radical Acceptance: Awakening the Love that Heals Fear and Shame - Tara Brach
- The Untethered Soul: The Journey Beyond Yourself - Michael A. Singer
- That Which You Are Seeking Is Causing You To Seek - Cheri Huber
- The Heart Of The Buddha's Teachings: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation - Thich Nhat Hanh
- Just So: Money, Materialism, and the Ineffable, Intelligent Universe - Alan Watts
- The Trauma Of Everyday Life - Mark Epstein
- Pronoia Is The Antidote For Paranoia: How the Whole World is Conspiring to Shower You with Blessings.
- Be Here Now - Ram Dass
- The Four Agreements – Don Miguel Ruiz

19.5 Addiction, Alcohol, And Dysfunctional Families

- The Easy Way To Control Alcohol - Allen Carr
- Quit Like A Woman: The Radical Choice to Not Drink in a Culture Obsessed with Alcohol - Holly Whitaker
- Recovery: A Guide for Adult Children of Alcoholics - Herbert L. Gravitz and Julie D. Bowden

19.6 Relationships

- Polysecure: Attachment, Trauma, and Consensual Nonmonogamy - Jessica Fern
- Fierce Intimacy: Standing UP to One Another with Love – Terry Real
- Your Brain On Love: The Neurobiology of Healthy Relationships - Stan Tatkin
- The New Codependency: Help and Guidance for Today's Generation - Melody Beattie
- More Than Two: A Practical Guide to Ethical Polyamory - Eve Rickert and Tatiana Gill
- Mating In Captivity: In Search of Erotic Intelligence – Esther Perel
- All About Love: New Visions - bell hooks

19.7 Money, Business, Creativity, And Finances

- Tools of Titans: The Tactics, Routines, and Habits of Billionaires, Icons, and World-Class Performers - Tim Ferriss
- Creative Calling: Establish a Daily Practice, Infuse Your World with Meaning, and Succeed in Work + Life - Chase Jarvis
- I Will Teach You To Be Rich: No Guilt. No Excuses. No BS. Just a 6-Week Program That Works - Ramit Sethi
- A Cat's Guide To Money: Everything you need to know to master your purrrsonal finances, explained by cats - Lillian Karabaic

19.8 Gender, Race, And Social Justice

- My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies - Resmaa Menakem
- Healing Resistance: A Radically Different Response to Harm - Kazu Haga
- My Body Is Not An Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love - Sonya Renee Taylor
- Native: Identity, Belonging, and Rediscovering God - Kaitlin B. Curtice
- Patriarchy Blues: reflections on manhood - Frederick Joseph
- The Unapologetic Guide To Black Mental Health - Rheedra Walker
- Black Fatigue: How Racism Erodes the Mind, Body, and Spirit - Mary-Frances Winters
- Healing Racial Trauma: The Road To Resilience - Sheila Wise Rowe
- So You Want to Talk about Race - Ijeoma Oluo

- Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds - Adrienne Maree Brown
- Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During This Crisis (and the Next) - Dean Spade
- Pleasure Activism: The Politics of Feeling Good - Adrienne Maree Brown
- The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration In The Age Of Colorblindness - Michelle Alexander
- Leading with Cultural Intelligence: The Real Secret to Success, Second Edition - David Livermore
- We Will Not Cancel Us: And Other Dreams of Transformative Justice - Adrienne Maree Brown
- White Fragility: Why it's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism - Robin DiAngelo
- Gender Outlaws: The Next Generation - Kate Bornstein
- Trans Like Me: conversations for all of us - CN Lester
- The Antiracist: How To Start the Conversation about Race and Take Action - Kondwani Fidel
- Racism Without Racists - 5th Edition: color-blind racism and the persistence of racial inequality in america - Eduardo Bonilla-Silva
- How To Be An Antiracist - Ibram X. Kendi
- The Autobiography of Malcolm X - Malcolm X
- A People's History of the United States - Howard Zinn
- The Racial Healing Handbook: Practical Activities To Help You Challenge Privilege, Confront Systemic Racism & Engage In Collective Healing - Anneliese A. Singh

19.9 Social And Communication

- Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Compassion - Marshall B. Rosenberg
- Social Empathy: The Art of Understanding Others – Elizabeth Segal
- The Highly Sensitive Person's Complete Learning Program: Essential Insights & Tools for Navigating Your Work, Relationships, & Life - Elaine Aron
- The Power Of Vulnerability: Teachings of Authenticity, Connections and Courage - Brene Brown
- The Dance of Anger: A Woman's Guide to Changing the Patterns of Intimate Relationships - Harriet Lerner
- When Anger Hurts: Quieting The Storm Within Second Edition -

Matthew McKay, Peter D. Rogers, Judith McKay

- Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking - Susan Cain
- TED TALKS: The Official TED Guide to Public Speaking - Chris Anderson

19.10 Miscellaneous

- The Power Of Moments: Why Certain Experiences Have Extraordinary Impact - Chip Heath & Dan Heath
- Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones - James Clear
- The Subtle Art of Not Giving A F*ck: A Counterintuitive Approach To Living A Good Life - Mark Manson
- The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference - Malcolm Gladwell
- The Brain That Changes Itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science - Norman Doidge
- Braving The Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone - Brené Brown
- Connected: The Surprising Power of Our Social Networks and How They Shape Our Lives - Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler

Chapter 20

Further Resources

20.1 Finding A Therapist, 20.2 Addiction And Dysfunctional Family Resources, 20.3 Podcasts, 20.4 Meditations, 20.5 Confidential Emergency Hotlines

Beyond books, here are some additional resources for your healing journey. Especially for clinicians, the *National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine* (NICABM) has some great resources which can earn them continuing education credits. For instance, the *Treating Trauma Master Series: A 5 Module-Series on the Treatment of Trauma*.

20.1 Finding A Therapist

Therapists can be found online. GoodTherapy and PsychologyToday have directories of locally available therapists who are easily searchable. Online therapy is also available through BetterHelp Online Counseling and Talkspace.

20.2 Addiction And Dysfunctional Family Resources

There is a Twelve Step program for almost any addiction or dysfunctional relationship. This includes for alcohol, narcotics, codependency, and dysfunctional families. However, many of these programs have some problematic aspects to them as documented in *Quit Like A Woman* by Holly Whitaker. This said, many of these issues have been resolved in the group *Adult Children of Alcoholics And Dysfunctional Families* (ACA), especially when using Tony A's Twelve Steps. Most people dealing with trapped emotions from youth will benefit from joining online or in-person ACA groups at <<https://adultchildren.org>>.

You can check out <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_twelve-step_groups> for a fairly comprehensive list of Twelve Step programs. Please keep in mind that the use of God, higher power, and spirituality in these pro-

grams is quite flexible in definition - it could be nature, a community, the totality of your life, or even the group you attend. There are also alternatives to programs like *Alcoholics Anonymous* such as *Refuge Recovery* and *The Luckiest Club*, just search online for recovery options.

20.3 Podcasts

Beyond books, a lot of information contained in *Radical Self-Care* was also inspired by several podcasts. These include *Therapist Uncensored*, *Hidden Brain*, *The Science of Psychotherapy*, *Huberman Lab*, and the amazing interviews hosted on *The Chase Jarvis Live Show* and *The Tim Ferriss Show*. Hearing about the journeys of others through struggle to success has been deeply nourishing for me and I cannot thank Tim and Chase enough for their work.

20.4 Meditations

Several apps provide great meditations and reminders. I suggest the free Insight Timer app, but there are many others. There are also thousands of free meditations online. Tara Brach, Jack Kornfield, and Thich Nhat Hanh are some of the most famous. If you're interested in joining a meditation community, search or ask online about sanghas. There are also several figures like Ram Dass and Alan Watts who give phenomenal talks on the ego, love, and materialism.

20.5 Confidential Emergency Hotlines

Domestic Abuse - 800-281-2800

Addiction Treatment - 1-800-662-4357

Suicide Prevention – 800-273-8255

Fireside Psychedelic Peer-Support - Call or text 62-FIRESIDE

Chapter 21

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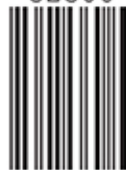
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