

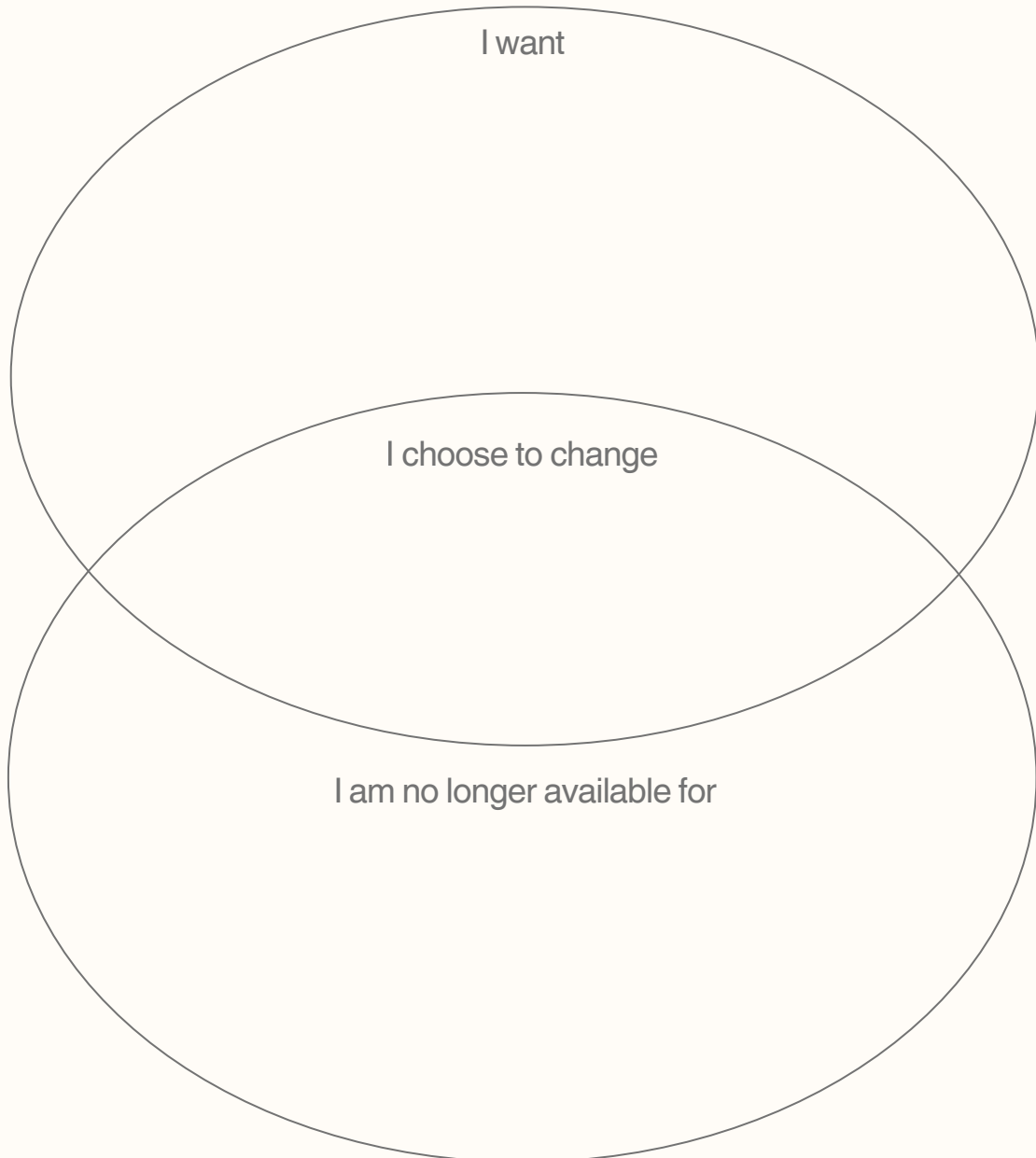
# A Guided *Journal*

Choosing yourself and breaking the trauma bond

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**A guided journey to reclaim your mind, your peace, and your power.**

*This is a resource-based workbook curated with compassion — not clinical advice. I am not an expert, but I am here to help you remember that you're not alone.*



# Welcome

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

**You're brave just for being here today.**



If you're reading this, it means a part of you — even if it's the smallest whisper — knows you deserve better.

That's not a small thing.

That's courage.

You might be scared. Confused. Numb. Angry at yourself for still caring.

You might have left already... or maybe you haven't yet, but you're thinking about it.

Wherever you are — this space is for you.

This isn't a course that tells you what to do or how to feel. It's a hand on your shoulder saying,

“You can get through this. One day at a time.”

Over the next 7 days, you'll learn about trauma bonding — not from pop psychology, but from real research and experts in the field of trauma recovery.

You'll explore why breaking free feels so hard, and how to start rebuilding a sense of safety, identity, and peace.

You'll also find:

- Professional directories and resources for affordable, trauma-informed therapy
- Crisis and domestic violence support lines
- Reading and podcast recommendations from licensed professionals
- 7 days of journal prompts, CBT-style reframes, and gentle daily exercises

You don't have to rush your healing. You just have to take the next right step.

So, take a deep breath.

You've already done the hardest part — deciding to begin.

# About

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This workbook was created to connect you with evidence-based tools and professionals — not replace them.

It's part education, part reflection, part empowerment.

You don't need to finish it perfectly.

There is no right or wrong pace.

You just need to stay with yourself as you do.

As mentioned, this journal is not comprehensive, nor a replacement for expert opinions and support, but a supplement from someone who's been here before on some level.



# *Finding the Right Support*

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## **Finding the Right Support**

If you're in immediate danger, please reach out now:

National Domestic Violence Hotline (U.S.): 1-800-799-7233 or [thehotline.org](http://thehotline.org)

Love is Respect (for dating violence): Text LOVEIS to 22522

Crisis Text Line: Text HELLO to 741741 (U.S. & Canada)

If you're outside the U.S., visit [findahelpline.com](http://findahelpline.com) for international options.



# *Finding a Therapist*

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## **Finding a Therapist Who Fits You**

You deserve care that feels safe, informed, and collaborative.

When looking for a therapist, search for words like:

Trauma-informed  
CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)  
DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy)  
Somatic therapy  
Attachment-based  
EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)  
IFS (Internal Family Systems)

## **Helpful directories**

Psychology Today – Therapist Finder  
Open Path Collective – Affordable sessions (\$40–\$70)  
BetterHelp – Online therapy platform  
TherapyDen – Inclusive directory  
Pacific Wellness and Family Therapy  
Search through your insurance portal if available

***Tips:*** You are allowed to “interview” therapists. Ask questions like:

*What’s your experience with trauma recovery or relationship abuse?*

*How do you define “healing” in your practice?*

*What happens if I feel triggered during a session?*

*If it doesn’t feel safe or collaborative, you can leave. You’re not being “difficult” — you’re advocating for yourself.*

*Read their cancellation policies to make sure the charges for missing an appointment aren’t too steep for your budget, if that were to occur.*

# *Readings & Experts*

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## **Books & Experts**

*The Betrayal Bond* — Dr. Patrick Carnes

*Should I Stay or Should I Go?* — Dr. Ramani Durvasula

*Facing Codependence* — Pia Mellody

*The Body Keeps the Score* — Dr. Bessel van der Kolk

*Attached* — Amir Levine, M.D. & Rachel Heller, M.A.

*What Happened to You?* — Dr. Bruce Perry & Oprah Winfrey

## **Podcasts & Talks**

Navigating Narcissism (Dr. Ramani)

Therapy Chat with Laura Reagan, LCSW-C

The Trauma Therapist Podcast by Guy Macpherson, Ph.D.

TED Talk: “How childhood trauma affects health across a lifetime” — Dr. Nadine Burke Harris

***Tips:*** Check out your local library or the Libby app (free) for cheap or free copies of these books.

*Many podcasts are available to listen to for free on apps like Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Pocket Casts, Podcast Addict, or on web-based players like PlayPodcast.net and GetPodcast.*

*Many services like YouTube and Amazon Music also offer free access to podcasts within their apps.*

# How Do I Know if I'm in a Trauma Bond?

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A trauma bond is a powerful attachment formed when love and fear intertwine.

It happens when affection, attention, and pain cycle in unpredictable ways — teaching your brain to mistake instability for connection.

You may be in a trauma bond if several of these feel familiar:

## **The Emotional Rollercoaster**

The relationship swings between intense closeness and painful distance. You feel euphoric during good moments and deeply anxious during conflict.

*“They can make me feel adored one day and invisible the next.”*

## **The Confusion Loop**

You know the relationship hurts you, but you keep trying to make sense of it.

You rationalize or minimize their behavior, even when it clearly crosses lines.

*“I know it’s unhealthy, but I can’t seem to stop caring.”*

## **The False Hope Cycle**

Their apologies or brief kindnesses reignite your hope — even after repeated harm.

You find yourself waiting for the next good moment to prove things can still work.

*“Maybe this time it’ll be different.”*

# How Do I Know if I'm in a Trauma Bond?

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## **The Dependence Trap**

You feel responsible for their emotions or healing.

You worry that leaving will break them — or that no one else will love you the same way.

*“They need me. And honestly, I still need them.”*

## **The Identity Erosion**

Your self-esteem has weakened.

You've stopped voicing opinions, setting boundaries, or recognizing your own needs.

*“I barely recognize myself anymore.”*



If these patterns sound familiar, you're not weak — you're human.

Trauma bonding isn't a character flaw; it's a conditioned survival response.

And with awareness, support, and steady practice, it can be undone.

This 7-day journey is here to help you begin that process — one day, one truth, one act of self-respect at a time.

# *Week 1*

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## The Decision

Week of: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Theme: Getting Honest with Yourself**

You can't heal what you're still convincing yourself isn't hurting you.

This week is about clarity. No more talking yourself out of what you already know.

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## Make Your Decision

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There's a moment in every healing journey where you stop analyzing why things happen, and start choosing what comes next.

That moment is a decision — and it's not just symbolic.

It's neurological.

Your brain has likely been spinning in loops:

“Maybe it wasn't that bad.”

“Maybe they'll change.”

“Maybe I misunderstood.”

That cycle keeps you emotionally tethered. It's what psychologists call **cognitive dissonance** — when your mind tries to hold two conflicting truths at once: “They hurt me,” and “I love them.”

Making a decision — even privately, just to yourself — is the first step to resolving that dissonance.

It gives your mind permission to stop arguing with itself.

This is where a tool called a **thought-truncating declaration** comes in.

It's a short, definitive statement that ends the mental debate before it drains you.

Not by denial — but by deciding that the conversation is over.

Think of it as your mental stop sign.

Go to the next page for some examples.

# Day 1

## Make Your Decision

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### Examples of Thought-Truncating Declarations

“I already know the answer.”

“This thought doesn’t serve my healing.”

“We’ve had this argument before — I know where this ends up.”

“I can love someone and still walk away.”

“The cycle ends here.”

“Peace is my priority.”

Every time your brain tries to reopen the case — every “but what if...”

You use your declaration to close it.

Not out of anger. Out of self-protection.

This is what “making a decision” really means in trauma recovery:

You’re not just deciding to leave a person — you’re deciding to leave the mental courtroom where you’ve been defending this cycle.

# Day 1

## Make Your Decision

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**Read:** Excerpts from Dr. Patrick Carnes, *The Betrayal Bond: Breaking Free of Exploitative Relationships*

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“Trauma bonds occur when the person or institution that is supposed to care for you is also the source of your pain.”



“People stay in destructive relationships because they are trying to resolve the pain of the past through the person who’s hurting them now.”



“The first step in breaking a betrayal bond is to face the reality of it. We cannot heal what we refuse to name.”

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**These words are a reminder: nothing “wrong” with you.**

**And you’re in the right place.**

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# Day 1

## Make Your Decision

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### Journal Prompt

What has staying in this situation cost me — emotionally, physically, or spiritually?



### 3 Affirmations

I choose peace, even if it feels unfamiliar.

I choose truth, even when it hurts.

I choose myself, even when I'm afraid.



### 1 Commitment

Make 1 promise that you can keep to yourself today.

Examples:

I will not contact them tonight.

I will speak kindly to myself for 24 hours.

I will stop checking their social media.

I will do 1 kind thing for myself.

I will reach out to a trusted friend, even just for surface-level connection if that's all I can bear.

## What Trauma Bonding Is

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You might still be wondering, “Why is this so hard to leave?”

You’re not weak — you’re wired.

A trauma bond isn’t ordinary attachment. It’s a powerful psychological loop created when love and fear become intertwined.

When someone alternates affection with cruelty, your brain learns to chase the “good moments” for relief.

That chase releases dopamine (the reward chemical), oxytocin (the bonding hormone), and cortisol (the stress hormone).

Over time, those chemical spikes feel like love.

But they’re really the body’s way of managing danger.

This is why even when you “know better,” part of you still misses them.

Your brain associates chaos with connection.

So today isn’t about judgment — it’s about learning the science behind your attachment.

You’re not addicted to the person.

You’re addicted to the cycle.

Understanding that truth doesn’t instantly undo the bond, but it takes away its power.

Because now you can name what’s really happening:

“This isn’t love — this is conditioning.”

# Day 2

## What Trauma Bonding Is

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**Read:** Excerpts from Dr. Ramani Durvasula, *Should I Stay or Should I Go?*

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“The inconsistency in narcissistic relationships is what keeps people stuck. You never know which version of them you’re going to get — and that uncertainty becomes addictive.”



“You are not crazy. You are having a normal reaction to a disordered situation.”



“It’s hard to walk away from someone who keeps promising to become the person you fell in love with.”

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When you’re caught in a trauma bond, the chaos becomes familiar.

That familiarity can trick your brain into believing the relationship must have meaning — because it feels intense.

**But intensity isn’t intimacy.**

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# Day 2

## What Trauma Bonding Is

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### Journal Prompt

When I think of the moments that made me feel closest to this person, what emotions were present? Were they calm and safe, or intense and unpredictable?



### 3 Affirmations

I am learning to separate love from survival.

My body's reactions make sense — and they can be re-trained.

I don't need chaos to feel alive.



### 1 Commitment

Today, I will remind myself: Missing someone doesn't mean they were good for me.

## Understanding The “Highs:” Intermittent Reinforcement

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You’ve probably had moments where you thought, “I know they’re bad for me... so why do I miss them so much?”

This question haunts almost everyone trying to break a trauma bond.

But it isn’t about weakness — it’s about wiring.

When your body lives in chaos long enough, peace can feel unnatural.

And when love is mixed with fear, your brain starts to confuse the two.

Each time your partner shifted from cold to loving, cruel to kind, distant to intimate — your brain released **dopamine** (the same neurotransmitter involved in gambling or substance addiction).

That hit of relief after tension became your “reward.”

Over time, you stopped craving the person — and started craving the relief from the pain they caused.

That’s **intermittent reinforcement**: a psychological slot machine. You pull the lever (text them, apologize, hope they’ll change), and once in a while — jackpot.

A kind word. An apology. Affection.

And your brain lights up, convincing you it’s love.

But what you’re chasing isn’t love.

It’s regulation.

Today’s goal: to recognize that pattern, without shame.

Once you understand it, you can **stop trying to win a game that was rigged from the start.**

# Day 3

## Understanding The “Highs:” Intermittent Reinforcement

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**Read:** Excerpts from Dr. Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps Score*

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“Traumatized people chronically feel unsafe inside their bodies.”



“What we call ‘love’ is often a survival response — our body’s attempt to recreate familiarity, even when that familiarity is toxic.”



“Once you start approaching your body with curiosity rather than fear, everything shifts.”

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These insights remind us that the craving to reconnect isn’t moral failure — it’s a biological reflex.

Your body learned that intensity equals connection.

Healing begins when you teach it a new equation:

**Calm equals safety.**

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# Day 3

## Understanding The “Highs:” Intermittent Reinforcement

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### Journal Prompt

“When I think about the moments I’ve felt ‘relief’ in this relationship — what came right before that feeling? What was I escaping from?”



### 3 Affirmations

I can crave someone and still know they’re not good for me.

My body is learning the difference between peace and emptiness.

I am not addicted to them — I was conditioned to seek safety in chaos.



### 1 Commitment

Today, I will notice when I feel the urge to reach out — and pause before I act. I will ask: Is this love, or is this part of the pattern?

## Grieving the Illusion

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You might be feeling heavy today. Sad. Angry. Maybe even tempted to go back.

That's okay. You're not "backsliding." You're grieving.

When you leave a trauma bond, you're not just walking away from a person —  
you're mourning a dream.

The dream of who you thought they were.

The dream of who you thought you could be together.

The dream that if you were patient, kind, or forgiving enough, they would finally  
see your worth.

It's a cruel emotional math: you gave your heart to someone who kept promising  
to change — and every time they didn't, you blamed yourself.

That false hope created what psychologist Pia Mellody calls "the illusion of love."

It felt real because your longing was real.

But longing isn't love — it's deprivation dressed as devotion.

So today, let yourself grieve.

Cry. Rage. Write.

Mourn not only what happened — but what never did.

Because letting go of the fantasy is how you start living in reality again.

And reality, though painful at first, is where peace lives.

# Day 4

## Grieving the Illusion

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**Read:** Excerpts from Pia Mellody's *Facing Codependence*

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“We confuse intensity with intimacy. The emotional highs and lows become proof of love, when in truth they are symptoms of our wounds.”



“When we are codependent, we assign others the job of making us feel whole. This sets up a cycle of need, disappointment, and blame.”



“Recovery begins when we stop negotiating with reality and start feeling the feelings we’ve avoided.”

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These words are an invitation to stop waiting for closure from someone who never gave you clarity.

Your healing won't come from their apology — it will come from your acceptance.

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# Day 4

## Grieving the Illusion

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### Journal Prompt

“What version of this person — or this relationship — am I still holding onto? What would it mean to accept that version never truly existed?”



### 3 Affirmations

Grieving what never was is still grief.

My sadness is not weakness — it's release.

I am learning to love reality more than potential.



### 1 Commitment

Today, I will let myself feel what I feel — without trying to explain it away or make it pretty. I will honor my grief as proof that I cared deeply.

# Your Body Remembers, and It Can Heal

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You've done brave work already — naming, understanding, grieving.

Now it's time to reconnect with the part of you that never got to rest: your body.

When you've lived in fight-or-flight for too long, calm can feel suspicious.

Stillness can even feel unsafe — because your nervous system has learned that danger is normal.

This is why people in trauma bonds often say things like:

“My heart races when I get a text from them.”

“I feel sick when they're angry.”

“Even silence makes me anxious.”

Your body has been in survival mode, scanning for the next emotional “hit.”

But survival isn't the same as living.

Today, you'll learn to start befriending your body again — not by forcing it to relax, but by listening.

You're not broken.

You're a nervous system that's been working overtime.

# Day 5

## Your Body Remembers, and It Can Heal

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**Read:** Excerpts from Dr. Peter Levine's *Walking the Tiger*

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“Trauma is not what happens to us, but what we hold inside in the absence of an empathetic witness.”



“The body has been designed to heal itself, if we can only listen to the messages it sends.”



“Our bodies respond to threat with survival energy. Healing happens when that energy is allowed to move through and complete its cycle.”

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These words remind us: you don't have to think your way out of trauma — you can feel your way out.

Each tremor, deep breath, or release is your body saying, “I'm finally safe enough to let go.”

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# Day 5

## Your Body Remembers, and It Can Heal

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### Journal Prompt

What sensations show up in my body when I think about this relationship — and what might those sensations be trying to tell me?



### 3 Affirmations

My body is not my enemy — it's my messenger.

Calm is not danger; calm is safety.

Every deep breath I take is proof that I am still here, still healing.



### 1 Commitment

Today, I will pause for one minute — just to breathe, notice my body, and thank it for keeping me alive this long.

## Grief vs. Withdrawal

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If you're feeling sad, restless, or tempted to reach out — that doesn't mean you're back at square one.

It means your body is detoxing.

When you break a trauma bond, your nervous system goes into withdrawal — much like someone coming off a chemical dependency.

You've removed the source of your adrenaline, dopamine, and cortisol spikes...

But your brain still expects them.

So when the silence comes, it can feel unbearable.

You start to crave anything that feels familiar — even pain.

That's not you being weak.

That's your body searching for equilibrium after chaos.

This stage often feels worse before it feels better, because your system is learning to live without the constant high-low rollercoaster.

But this is where real healing begins.

This feeling isn't emptiness — it's space being cleared for peace.  
You are not missing them.

You are missing the chemical pattern that surrounded them.

And you're strong enough to outlast it.

In the words of *Kaskade's Room for Happiness*, "Don't be fooled by your emptiness — there's so much more room for happiness."

# Day 6

## Grief vs. Withdrawal

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**Read:** Excerpts from Dr. Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery*

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“The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. The healing process requires remembrance and mourning.”



“Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation.”



“The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.”

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These insights remind us: grief is not regression — it's remembrance.

Withdrawal is not failure — it's the body releasing its addiction and attachment to pain.

And reaching out for help during this phase is strength, not weakness.

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# Day 6

## Grief vs. Withdrawal

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### Journal Prompt

When I feel the urge to contact them, what emotion is underneath that urge — fear, loneliness, sadness, boredom, or hope? What does that emotion actually need from me?



### 3 Affirmations

My grief is proof of my humanity.

Missing them doesn't mean I was wrong to leave.

Silence is not emptiness; it's recovery.



### 1 Commitment

Today, I will treat my withdrawal symptoms with the same compassion I'd offer anyone healing from addiction. I will rest, hydrate, and remind myself that this discomfort is temporary.

# Meeting the You Who Survived

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You've made it through the first week — and that's no small thing.

For many people, these first few days are the hardest part. You've faced confusion, grief, and silence — and still, you kept going.

Today isn't about learning or analyzing.

It's about acknowledging the version of you who kept showing up, even when things were unbearable.

You may look back and judge yourself for what you tolerated — the red flags you ignored, the excuses you made, the love you kept trying to earn. But that version of you wasn't foolish.

They were surviving.

You did what you needed to do to feel safe, loved, and connected.

And now you're doing what you need to do to heal.

The goal today is simple: to stop punishing your past self for not knowing what your present self is just now learning.

You are not broken.

You were doing your best with the tools and the information you had at the time.

And today, you're learning and building new ones.

# Day 7

## Meeting the You Who Survived

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**Read:** Excerpts from Dr. Kristin Neff's *Self-Compassion*

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“With self-compassion, we give ourselves the same kindness and care we’d give to a good friend.”



“When we give ourselves compassion, we are opening our hearts in a way that transforms our lives.”



“Self-compassion is not self-pity. It is a healthy way of relating to ourselves when we suffer.”

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These words are a reminder: shame keeps us stuck in the story, but compassion lets us rewrite it.

Healing begins the moment you stop treating your pain as proof that you failed — and start seeing it as proof that you felt deeply.

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# Day 7

## Meeting the You Who Survived

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### Journal Prompt

Write a letter to the version of you who accepted less. Thank them for surviving. Tell them what you know now that they didn't. What do you wish someone told you back then?



### 3 Affirmations

I forgive myself for what I didn't know then.

The version of me who stayed was brave, not broken.

My healing is an act of love toward every version of me that's ever existed.



### 1 Commitment

Today, I will speak to myself with gentleness. When shame appears, I'll meet it with empathy instead of judgment.

# *Week 1 Recap*

## The Power of Awareness

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This week, you made your decision.

You faced hard truths. You started grieving illusions. You learned how trauma lives in your body — and how peace might not feel natural yet.

You also began something most people never do:

You stopped asking why they did it, or how you can fix it, and started asking “what’s next for me?”

This is your checkpoint. Congratulations on making it this far.

# *Week 1 Reflection*

## Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Exercise

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CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) helps you notice the link between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

When you're healing from a trauma bond, your **thoughts** can trigger emotions that drive **automatic reactions** — like reaching out, blaming yourself, or reliving moments that hurt.

These are the neural pathways you've taken before, and they can almost feel comforting, but only because they feel familiar.

Becoming aware of that sequence gives you power to interrupt it.

Go to the next page for an exercise to identify your triggers, the processes that follow, and how to interrupt that flow.

# Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Exercise

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## Step 1: Identify One Trigger This Week

Think of a moment you felt tempted to go back, or overwhelmed with emotion.

Trigger situation:

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## Step 2: Identify the Thought That Appeared

What story did your mind tell you in that moment?

(e.g., “Maybe they really did love me,” “I’ll never find anyone else,” “I can’t do this alone.”)

Automatic thought:

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## Step 3: Identify the Emotion That Followed

(e.g., sadness, panic, guilt, longing, loneliness)

Emotion: \_\_\_\_\_

Intensity (1–10): \_\_\_\_\_

## Step 4: Identify the Behavior or Urge

What did you do — or want to do — next?

(e.g., texted them, cried, blamed yourself, numbed out, isolated, journaled, reached out for help)

Reaction: \_\_\_\_\_

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# Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Exercise

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## Step 5: Challenge the Thought

Ask yourself:

What evidence supports this thought?

What evidence contradicts it?

**What would I tell a friend who felt this way?**

Then, rewrite it in a way that's more true than the original story.

Balanced or healing thought:

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Example:

*"Missing someone doesn't mean they were good for me. It means my brain is adjusting to peace."*

## Step 6: Create Your New Response

Now that you see the pattern, what could you do differently next time this trigger appears?

(e.g., breathe, repeat my declaration, take a walk, call a friend, read my affirmations)

New response:

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# *Week 1 Reflection*

## Closing Reflection

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### **Journal Prompts**

What surprised me most about my reactions this week?

When did I feel most proud of myself?

What's one thing I handled differently than I would have before?

What emotion came up the most — and what might it be asking for?



### **3 Affirmations**

I can observe my thoughts without obeying them

Every urge I resist rewires my brain toward peace.

Awareness is my superpower — not my weakness.