

THE PTSD WORKBOOK



Simple, Effective
Techniques for
Overcoming
Traumatic
Stress Symptoms

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I would like to dedicate this book to the families, friends, and colleagues of the victims of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. I would also like to dedicate it to the numbers of responders and traumatologists who have provided services to those who have been traumatized by those events. This workbook is also dedicated to survivors of many other types of traumatic events as they travel their own healing paths.

feng shui and arrange the furniture in a way that seems to be healing. It is important that any energy you bring to this space is clean, new, and anger-free (Louden 1997). It is also important to bring things to your safe place that give you that kind of energy. Perhaps you have an object or picture that symbolizes who you want to be after you believe you are healed enough to continue on with a healthy life. Remember, when you create this safe place, it is important that you are able to see it, smell it, touch it, hear it, taste it, and feel it. It is a place where you can go whenever you choose, within seconds.

Exercise: Getting to My Safe Space

From now on, whenever you are in distress or feel the need to do so, you can use a symbol or phrase to return to your good and safe place and draw strength from it (Ayalon and Flasher 1993). You may use the space below to think of symbols that could stand for your safe place; for example, picture of a seashell (for a beach) or a small shell itself:

A phrase that I can use to get to my safe place quickly is _____

* * * * *

Getting to Your Safe Place through Visualization

When you created your safe place in your mind, you used *visualization*. Everyone uses this technique. Every time you daydream or create a fantasy in your mind, you visualize. If you choose, you may make a tape that helps you get to your safe place or to create any other pleasant visualization. This tape is private and is not to be shared with those you do not trust.

Checking In with Yourself

It is important that you learn how to notice how you feel in your body and mind and how you react when you remember, work on, or deal with the traumatic experiences that have happened to you. It may take practice for you to focus on your body and your emotions and become aware of how you are reacting. The following steps for checking in were developed by Rosenbloom and Williams (1999) to help you:

1. Stop whatever activity you might be doing.
2. Sit quietly for a short period of time.
3. Turn your attention inward and ask your body how it feels.
4. Notice if you feel any tension anywhere in your body (e.g., in your shoulders, stomach, jaw, or back).
5. Notice if you are holding your breath.

6. Notice if you are doing any behaviors that suggest tension (e.g., biting your nails, or picking at your skin).
7. Now notice any emotions you feel, if you are able to recognize them (are you fearful, sad, angry, lonely?).
8. Notice if you have racing thoughts or if you are able to stay focused.
9. If you've noticed any of the reactions listed above, take some time to use the deep breathing or relaxation techniques described in the next section.

Relaxation and Breathing Techniques

When you want to work in this workbook on specific areas that are problematic to you, you may want to use relaxation and breathing techniques either before you do the work, during the work, or after you have completed various exercises. But why do them? If you practice relaxation for several weeks, according to Benson (1984), you will have:

- reduced symptoms of anxiety
- fewer headaches and high blood pressure readings
- less insomnia
- a way to prevent hyperventilation
- a way to gain more control over panic attacks
- a way to reduce stress levels
- a way to feel more at peace
- more creativity

Schiraldi (2000) notes that there are important general guidelines for you to follow when you want to use relaxation techniques. It is important that you:

- practice the technique or techniques you choose regularly—at least daily
- concentrate as best you can while doing the techniques, trying to focus on the particular muscle groups and specific exercises
- combine relaxation with exercise
- trust in the power of the techniques to bring you some peace
- go to your safe place if you feel anxious while trying the technique

Before doing any relaxation techniques, it is important to have four basic elements present (Benson 1975). They are:

1. A quiet environment that has as few distractions as possible. Even background noise can be a distraction. It is also important that you will not be interrupted.
2. A mental device that is a constant, e.g., a single-syllable word or sound, repeated silently or in a low, gentle tone. The repetition frees your thoughts and is your single focus. Benson suggests using the syllable "one" because it is a simple, neutral word.
3. A passive attitude to help you rest and relax without forcing your response, preventing your relaxed response from occurring. Disregard any distracting thoughts that enter your mind.

4. A comfortable position that is as restful as possible. This reduces muscular effort. You may support your head and arms. You may remove your shoes and prop your feet up several inches, if you choose. You may also loosen tight-fitting clothes.

Exercise: Deep Breathing

This first exercise is adapted from Davis, Eshelman, and McKay (1995, 27).

1. Lie down on a blanket or rug on the floor. Bend your knees up toward you and move your feet until they are about eight inches apart, with your toes turned slightly outward. Keep your spine as straight as possible.
2. Scan your entire body and identify any places that hold tension.
3. Put one hand on your abdomen and one on your chest.
4. Inhale slowly through your nose into your abdomen so that it pushes your hand up; your chest should move only a little bit. Hold your breath while you count to five.
5. Smile slightly and then exhale through your mouth, taking as long as possible. Make a shushing sound as you exhale.
6. Repeat this at least five times, perhaps eventually increasing the amount of time you spend deep-breathing to five to ten minutes.
7. When you've finished the exercise, again scan your entire body to see if any tension remains.
8. Once you are familiar with the technique, you can also use it while you are sitting or standing, whenever you feel tenseness in your body.

* * * * *

Progressive Relaxation

You might also want to learn to relax by tensing and relaxing various muscle groups in your body. This is done using a technique called *progressive relaxation*. This technique helps you tense and then relax your four major muscle groups:

1. hands, forearms, biceps
2. head, face, throat, shoulders
3. chest, stomach, lower back
4. buttocks, thighs, calves, feet

You may practice this technique while you are lying down or sitting in a chair. The goal is to tense each muscle group for five to seven seconds and then relax that muscle group for twenty to thirty seconds, repeating the whole procedure at least twice. If the muscle group is still tense after you've done the procedure twice, you can repeat it for that group alone up to five times. You may also talk to yourself as you tense and relax, telling yourself anything that has to do with letting go of tension. There are numerous relaxation tapes you can buy that have this procedure, or you can read the following exercise into a tape recorder and play it back.

Another way to use progressive relaxation is to hold the tension in each of your muscle groups for about five seconds and then release the tension slowly while you say silently,

"relax and let go." Then, take a deep breath and, as you breathe out slowly, silently say, "relax and let go" again.

Exercise: Basic Progressive Relaxation Sequence

This sequence takes you from your head through your neck, shoulders, arms and hands, chest, back, stomach, hips, legs, and feet.

If you do make a tape of this exercise or the one that follows, allow enough time for each exercise (five to seven seconds to tense, twenty to thirty seconds to relax) on the tape so you do not rush yourself. Also, put in two repetitions for each exercise.

- Wrinkle your forehead.
- Squint your eyes tightly.
- Open your mouth wide.
- Push your tongue against the roof of your mouth.
- Clench your jaw tightly.
- Push your head back into a pillow.
- Bring your head forward to touch your chest.
- Roll your head to your right shoulder.
- Roll your head to your left shoulder.
- Shrug your shoulders up as if to touch your ears.
- Shrug your right shoulder up as if to touch your ear.
- Shrug your left shoulder up as if to touch your ear.
- Hold your arms out and make a fist with each hand.
- One side at a time, push your hands down into the surface where you are practicing.
- One side at a time, make a fist, bend your arm at the elbow, and tighten up your arm while holding the fist.
- Take a deep breath and hold.
- Tighten your chest muscles.
- Arch your back.
- Tighten your stomach area.
- Push your stomach area out.
- Pull your stomach area in.
- Tighten your hips.
- Push the heels of your feet into the surface where you are practicing.
- Tighten your leg muscles below the knee.
- Curl your toes under as if to touch the bottoms of your feet.
- Bring your toes up as if to touch your knees.

* * * * *

Exercise: Quick Relaxation

Another quick way to relax is with whole muscle groups, tensing them for five to seven seconds and then relaxing them. This exercise is also adapted from Davis, Eshelman, and McKay (1995, 35–38).

1. Curl both fists and tighten your biceps and forearms as if you were a weight lifter posing, then relax.
2. Wrinkle your forehead and, at the same time, press your head as far back as is possible and roll it in a complete circle clockwise. Then reverse the roll. Then wrinkle up the muscles of your face in a frown, with squinted eyes, pursed lips, tongue pressed on the roof of your mouth, and shoulders scrunched up. Then relax.
3. Arch your back and take a deep breath into your chest. Hold it for five seconds and then relax. Take another deep breath, pressing out your stomach. Hold it for five seconds and then relax.
4. Pull your feet and toes back toward your face, tightening your shins. Then curl your toes and tighten your calves, thighs, and buttocks at the same time. Relax.

Successful deep muscle relaxation is a matter of practice. You may talk to yourself as you try to relax and tell yourself to let go or relax deeper in order to achieve a more complete relaxation. If you have muscle weakness or a muscular condition such as fibromyalgia, these exercises may not be for you. Check with your physician first.

* * * * *

Another Relaxation Technique

This technique is best used when you have time to try to relax as fully as you possibly can. It makes a good script to record on tape.

First, find a comfortable position and close your eyes. For the next few moments, concentrate on your breathing; use deep breathing. Try to see and feel your lungs, sensing how they feel as you breath in (pause), trying to make them completely expanded (pause), and then exhaling and sensing how they feel as you release your breath. There is no right or wrong way to breathe. What is important is that you try to relax and not worry about any of the things happening in your everyday life.

Continue to concentrate on your breathing and your lungs, picturing them as you inhale, imagining them filling with strengthening oxygen, and picturing them exhaling as you relax. Now, in your mind's eye, see or hear the message that says "relax" all over, in every bone, muscle, and nerve, tissue, feeling sensations of melting into relaxation.

Next, bring your attention to your left foot and ankle and, as you inhale, gently flex your foot. As you exhale, release and relax your foot. Now bring your attention to your right foot and ankle and, as you inhale, gently flex your foot. As you exhale, release and relax your foot. Let all the cares of the day drain out through your feet. Any noise you hear will only deepen your relaxation.

Now feel the muscles of your left calf. Inhale, contracting the muscles of your left calf and exhale, letting the calf relax. Now feel the muscles of your right calf. Inhale, contracting those muscles, and exhale, letting them completely relax. Of course, adjust your breathing rhythm to what is most comfortable for you, remembering to inhale relaxation, peace, and self-love and to exhale tension, the pressures of the day, and the impacts of trauma on you. Relaxing in this way is a learning process. It is a way to learn to be at ease, to be at peace with yourself, to be at peace with your world, and to relax.

Now bring your attention to the muscles of your left thigh. Inhale and contract these muscles, then exhale and feel relaxation pour in. Next, bring your attention to the muscles of your right thigh. Inhale and contract them, then exhale, feeling release through both your legs. Now shift your focus to your buttocks, inhaling and contracting the muscles. Then exhale and let your bottom relax.

Next, shift your focus to your stomach, inhaling and contracting your stomach muscles. Then exhale, letting your stomach muscles relax, relax, relax. Now bring your attention to your chest and inhale, feeling your chest fill with oxygen and power. As you exhale, release any tightness that may be there as you release all the tensions that are bothering you. Try to feel the feeling of relaxation as a conscious process in your mind and body.

Now bring your attention to your hands. As you inhale, close both of your hands tightly, making fists. As you exhale, release the fists. As you do so, consciously try to let go of everything onto which you are grasping, and to relax. You may open your palms as you relax to receive warmth and vitalizing energy from the world around you. You may also bring your palms, cupped, closer and closer together until you feel the energy that is between them. As you do this exercise, allow the sense of relaxation and energy to move upward through your hands into your forearms, elbows, and shoulders.

Next, focus your attention on your shoulders. As you inhale, contract your shoulders. Hold them for a few seconds in this position and then, as you exhale, feel the tension they have held release outward from them. Feel the point between your shoulders and the base of your neck. Allow warm energy to melt away any built-up tension and pressure that has been stuck there. Now feel the warm energy move up through your neck, allowing your neck to release and support your head as your neck completely relaxes.

Finally, turn your attention to the muscles of your face. Gently tense the muscles of your chin, your mouth, your eyes, your cheeks, and your forehead. Then let your entire face loosen and relax. Enjoy the relaxation you feel through your entire body for a few moments. If any part of your body is not completely relaxed, turn your attention to it. Inhale, and let the last bits of tension melt out of that part of your body. If your attention drifts, or if you feel drowsy, it is perfectly all right as long as you are safe, comfortable, and relaxed (adapted from Rosenbloom and Williams 1999, 28–30).

Trying Meditation for Relaxation

Some persons use meditation to relax and to calm themselves as they seek heightened concentration and awareness. If you are new at meditating, thoughts may come in to distract you as you try to calm and quiet your mind. If this happens, you may try to use some imagery to focus your awareness before doing the meditation. If you are able to create clear mental images of the following scenes or things, you might then be able to direct your focus to relaxing. Try to create a clear mental image, right now, of:

- the face of your best friend
- a turkey waiting to be carved
- your bedroom in your present home
- a glass of cold lemonade
- a field of wildflowers
- the aroma of cooking spaghetti sauce
- riding in a race car at a racetrack
- your bare feet on a sandy beach
- the touch of velvet on your skin
- a cat meowing

Use one of these images to focus your attention and then focus on meditating. If worries keep on entering, allow them to wander through your focus, noting them and allowing them to continue on without concentrating on them. It is also important to know how to deep-breathe and relax before you try to meditate. If this doesn't work, you may repeat a

- ___ When they look at me, people don't really see me.
- ___ People expect too much from me.
- ___ People take advantage of me and use me.
- ___ People want to control me.
- ___ People are always yelling at me for things I didn't do.
- ___ People don't do what I want them to do.
- ___ People manipulate me.
- ___ People bully me and are mean to me.
- ___ People say cruel things to me.
- ___ People have no respect for me.
- ___ People don't treat me fairly.
- ___ People don't hear what I say.
- ___ People don't care about me.
- ___ People don't help me when I need help.
- ___ People reject me.
- ___ People don't value me.
- ___ People take me for granted.
- ___ People think I am stupid.
- ___ People see me as unattractive.

How many of these statements did you check? _____

What do the ones you checked say about you? _____

When the statement you checked says "people," go back and write down beside the belief the names of those people; for example, who takes you for granted or bullies you?

What did you learn about the persons who hurt, abuse, or disregard you? _____

Are there few or many such people? _____

Do other persons see this abuse and disregard for you? _____

* * * * *

Where Beliefs about the Self Come From

In many instances, your beliefs have been gathered from others and are introjects, as we stated earlier in this workbook. You have a choice to accept or deny those beliefs. In this chapter we will give you strategies to challenge them.

Your *schemas* are your beliefs and expectations about yourself, others, and your world. Schemas guide and organize how you process information and how you understand your life's experience. Your schemas become your basic rules of life; if they are based on distorted information, they can lead to distorted ways to view yourself, others, and the world. Your strongest schemas are those that have been the most powerfully reinforced. You may develop new schemas to serve old functions; you may also try to apply old schemas to new situations.

Five basic psychological needs motivate behavior, according to McCann and Pearlmann (1990). We have previously discussed the basic need for safety. The other needs are trust, power, esteem, and intimacy. It is your *ego resources* that allow you to meet your psychological needs. Your ego resources are your intelligence, your sense of humor, your will power, your ability to look inside yourself (introspect), your awareness of and ability to set boundaries, and your ability to make self-protective judgments. Adequate ego resources allow you to keep yourself stable as an individual. They help you tolerate and regulate your emotions (as we discussed in chapter 8), moderate self-hate, and be alone without being lonely.

Trauma disrupts your psychological experience of the world. It distorts your schemas about safety, trust, power, esteem, and intimacy. You develop new schemas that the world is dangerous and that you are powerless. Your beliefs may become negative and disrupt your identity, your emotional life, and your ability to meet your psychological needs. Sometimes these schemas can keep you chronically anxious and hypervigilant. Continuously seeing the world as dangerous and threatening will lead to feelings of fear, anxiety, and panic. If your trauma history prevents you from trusting, you will be suspicious and guarded, and your life will involve feelings of abandonment, disappointment, reluctance to ask for help and support, self-doubt, disappointment, betrayal, and bitterness. You will be led to make bad judgments about others and will put yourself in difficult, risky positions, and you may avoid close relationships.

A basic need of life, according to McCann and Pearlmann (1990) and Rosenbloom and Williams (1999), is to have power and influence over what happens to you and over what happens to others. However, a life of traumatic experiences can lead you to believe that you are helpless to control forces outside yourself. The list of statements you checked in the preceding exercise indicates those beliefs and feelings of weakness, helplessness, and powerlessness. You may believe that you must try to dominate others to avoid being dominated yourself, or give way to others' demands rather than face the world assertively with personal power.

Journal Exercise: My Beliefs about Power and Control

If you are interested in exploring your own beliefs about power and control, you might ask yourself the following questions, and answer them in your journal or notebook.

1. What does personal power mean to me?
2. In what situations in my life right now do I have to share power with others? Who are those others?
3. In my past, when was I forced to give up my personal power?
4. When do I try to control others?
5. Where is my locus (place) of control—is it inside me or outside of me?
6. Over what aspects of my life do I have control?
7. Do I get into power struggles? With whom? How do they get resolved?
8. How do I react to maladaptive expressions of power in others—threats, manipulations, suicide gestures, etc.?
9. Where does my own sense of power come from? Is it from my job? My size? My gender? My culture? My accomplishments?
10. When my power is threatened, do I try to dominate another person or am I appropriately assertive?
11. What are my fantasies about power?
12. Do I see myself as an independent person? Where? When?
13. Can I rely on myself or must I always rely on others?

* * * * *

Exercise: Identifying My Core Beliefs

The answers you give to the questions in the preceding exercise are the first step toward identifying your beliefs about power. Now, choose one of your answers and ask yourself the following questions:

1. What does that belief say about me? _____
2. Now what does *that* statement say about me? _____
3. And what does *that* statement say about me? _____

* * * * *

This third question gives you your core belief—the deep belief that underlies the others. If you want to challenge or dispute that belief, you have several options:

1. You may look for evidence or proof that your belief is valid.
2. You may find others and debate your belief with them.
3. You may try to use imagery and visualization to change certain aspects of the belief.
4. You may also ask yourself the following challenging questions about that belief (partially adapted from Resick 1994).
 - What is the evidence for and against the belief?
 - Is the belief a habit or a fact?
 - Is my interpretation of the situation accurate or not part of reality?
 - Am I thinking in black and white or all-or-nothing ways?
 - Are the words and phrases I am using extreme and exaggerated (such as *always, forever, must, should, ought, have to*).
 - Am I making excuses?
 - Is the source of information for my belief reliable?
 - Am I thinking in terms of probabilities (shades of gray) or certainties (black and white)?
 - Are my judgments based on feelings, not facts? Do I consider a feeling to be a fact?
 - Is this belief my own, or does it come from or belong to someone else?
 - Does it fit in with my priorities, values, and judgments?
 - Does it make me feel bad?
 - Is it hurtful to me?
 - Is it hurtful to others?
 - Is it appropriate in the demands it makes on me?
 - Is it appropriate in the demands it makes on others?
 - Is it considerate of me?

Exercise: Challenge My Beliefs

Use the technique given in the “Identifying My Core Beliefs” exercise above to identify two or more of your core beliefs. (You may use your journal or notebook to identify the additional core beliefs.) Then answer the questions above for each core belief. Use your journal, as well, if you need more space to answer.

Core belief 1 _____

Answers to the questions: _____

Journal Exercise: My Story of Personal Power

If you are still unsure about your personal power, you may write a fable about your own journey as a hero. This technique is adapted from Ayalon (1992). This story is a metaphoric work that helps you identify your coping and power resources. You can write it or draw it in your journal or notebook. There are six parts to the story:

1. Imagine yourself as a hero in certain surroundings of your choice.
2. Set yourself a task.
3. Decide who will help you, the hero, get the task done if you need help (you might not—you decide).
4. Look at who or what prevents you from completing your task or trying to.
5. Look at how you cope with the obstacles put in front of you.
6. Decide what happens then and how the story ends.

Through doing this story, you can look at the ways you cope with a stressful situation.

* * * * *

Self-Esteem

If you are going to overcome at least some of the negative impacts of the traumas that happened to you, it is important for you to learn to nurture yourself and to develop a positive sense of who you are, what you like about yourself, and what you see as your strengths. Trauma can challenge your good feelings and beliefs about yourself and lead to negative thoughts and emotions of unworthiness, badness, contempt, and disillusionment. You may believe that you are flawed, bad, or damaged. You may also think that your presence contaminates others or will doom them to a life of pain just by your presence. A poor sense of self-esteem is associated with feelings of self-loathing, despair, cynicism, and general withdrawal from others.

If you see yourself as having worth as a person, you have good self-esteem. A part of good self-esteem is self-respect. If you see yourself as capable and competent, you will be more able to cope with stress and respond to crisis as a challenge. Doing something well leads to higher self-esteem. A higher sense of self-esteem and a sense of being able to do things leads to accomplishments. In other words, these three things (activity, a sense of being able to do something, and having high self-esteem) are related (Schiraldi 1999).

The major way to build self-esteem is to picture and develop high self-esteem affirmations. You worked on building affirmations in chapter 7. What affirmations did you create then? Do you believe them now? Have you been practicing them over time?

When you develop high self-esteem affirmations, it is important for you to begin the exercise with relaxation (see chapter 2). Once you have relaxed your body, visualize a success that you have had—or other problem, crisis, that you resolved, about which resolution you had good feelings. Experience those good feelings as you remember them.

Exercise: My Self-Esteem Affirmations

Choose four or five affirmations. Relax your body, then state your first self-esteem affirmation out loud or to yourself while visualizing it in detail, as if it were totally true.

Some affirmations you might use include:

- I have worth.
- I like myself for myself, without comparing myself to others.
- I can do good work at my job.
- I do my best.
- I care about others.
- I make a difference in my own life.
- I make a difference in the lives of others.
- I am worthy of love from myself.
- I am worthy of respect from myself.
- I am worthy of love from others.
- I am worthy of respect from others.
- I respect my own and others' boundaries.
- I am lovable and capable.
- I love myself unconditionally.
- I am capable of changing and growing.
- I am willing to accept love.
- I am proud of my body.
- I am no longer a helpless child.

How does this exercise work for you? _____

* * * * *

Ways to Raise Your Self-Esteem

There are other ways you can raise your self-esteem. You may want to: improve your communication skills, find a hobby that you can do, or do something for others. You may also want to look at the beliefs you have about self-esteem. (One way to do this is to do the next two exercises.) It is important that the beliefs you hold about yourself are realistic, accurate, and honest (Schiraldi 1999). Self-esteem is built on feelings of unconditional worth and unconditional love for yourself, which is really self-acceptance.

Journal Exercise: My Questions about My Self-Esteem

In your journal or notebook, answer the following questions as fully as you like.

- What do I like or value about myself?
- What do I do to take care of my physical self (my body)?
- How do I take care of myself emotionally?
- What do I do (if anything) to reward myself, and when and how do I do it?
- When and how do I devalue myself or cut myself down?
- What are my hopes and dreams?
- What are my realistic expectations for myself?
- What are my unrealistic expectations for myself?
- In what situations do I have a sense of humor?
- When and how do I show love and affection?
- Where do I find hope?
- Under what circumstances am I open and honest about my feelings?
- Do I help others feel good about themselves even when I feel bad about myself?

* * * * *

Journal Exercise: Identifying My Core Beliefs about Self-Esteem

Turn back a few pages and complete the exercises called "Identifying My Core Beliefs" and "Challenging My Beliefs." Do them in your journal, using the question about your self-esteem you just answered.

What does completing this exercise teach you about yourself? _____

* * * * *

By recognizing which of your beliefs you want to challenge (and perhaps even change), you begin to improve self-esteem. Other ways to improve your self-esteem include the ability to:

- Be aware of your negative thoughts.
- Stop your negative thoughts by using the thought-stopping technique (chapter 6).
- Practice your affirmations.
- Set realistic goals you can achieve.
- Develop a variety of interests and participate in related activities.

- Maintain a high level of energy while pacing yourself.
- Take appropriate risks.
- Trust in yourself and the decisions you make.
- Stay who you are rather than changing to fit a situation or another person's ideas of you.
- Live in the present while being aware of your past history, and having realistic future goals.
- Turn any mistakes into lessons.

Exercise: Life Lessons

Write down what you believe are the two main lessons you are to learn in this life.

1. _____
2. _____

* * * * *

Coping with and Solving a Problem

You may be faced with situations that need you to make a decision or solve a problem. In the past, if you felt helpless and out of control, you may not have tried to solve problems or make decisions on your own. Instead, you may have just let things happen around you, or continued to keep a victim role. Solving problems by *doing something*—by taking deliberate action—is a functional way of coping with a situation and eliminating some sources of stress for you. Developing realistic goals for solving a problem can make a crisis more manageable. Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) describe the functions of coping with a problem as follows:

- a way to work through trauma
- a way to make a crisis manageable
- a way to reverse negative changes
- a way to appraise the degree of threat of a situation
- a way to use spiritual beliefs positively
- a way to learn through the experience of others
- a way to vent emotions
- a way to seek support when you need it
- a way to look at the impact of coping on your schemas

If you are able to cope successfully, you probably have:

- persistence, determination, confidence, flexibility, and tenacity
- the ability to connect emotionally with others
- the ability to accept your limitations when necessary
- an internal locus of control

- the perception you can do what you need to do (self-efficacy)
- optimism
- a problem-focused style
- hardiness (which involves commitments, a belief in your ability to influence life events, and the ability to respond to challenge brought by the normal changes of life)

Exercise: How I Cope

How do you generally cope with a challenging situation, whether or not it involves a crisis? Check which of these apply to you, and give an example of when you use it:

- ___ I deal with my feelings. I name them, accept them, express them. An example of when I cope in this way is: _____
- ___ I adjust my attitude. An example of how I cope in this way is: _____
- ___ I make choices using a decision-making plan (like the one described just below). An example of when I cope by problem-solving is: _____
- ___ I accept my own imperfection and the mistakes I have made (and do make) (Schab 1996). An example of when I cope in this way is: _____
- ___ I take action. An example of when I cope in this way is: _____
- ___ I use language to build rapport and then translate the language spoken to an action plan. An example of when I cope in this way is: _____
- ___ I set realistic limits. An example of when I cope in this way is: _____
- ___ I remain calm and empathize with others. An example of when I cope in this way is: _____
- ___ I negotiate and compromise. An example of when I cope in this way is: _____
- ___ I distance myself from a situation without dissociating. An example of when I cope this way is: _____
- ___ I seek social support. An example of when I cope this way is: _____
- ___ I educate myself and get information. An example of when I cope this way is: _____

___ I use another method: _____

___ An example of when I cope this way is: _____

* * * * *

Facing a Difficult Situation

Suppose you are going to go to your cousin's wedding and know that your father, who molested you, will be there. You have told your cousin you do not want to sit next to your father at the wedding. In fact, you really don't even want to go, but you and your cousin are very close emotionally. She does not know about the abuse (yet) and just wouldn't understand if you didn't come. You have not spoken to your father in three years—not since you wrote him a letter of confrontation. He wrote a simple letter back that said, "Let's be a family again." You need to develop a plan about how you'll react when you see him. How can you plan how you will react?

First, you might consider which emotions you think you will have and what you will do as they arise. What triggers will hit you upside your head? What can you do to calm yourself ahead of time? Then you could visualize yourself going to the wedding and then to the reception. Imagine that at the reception you have assigned seats and your father is across the table from you. What would you do? In short, imagine what might happen in the difficult situation and decide what resources you will need to cope with what might happen. This strategy is adapted from McKay and Rogers (2000). It is adaptable to any situation that resembles your prior trauma, when you have unexpected or even expected contact with your perpetrator, or if you have to deal with unsupportive others. Another way to prepare yourself in advance for a difficult situation is to refer to the story of the hero that is found just above in the section "Journal Exercise: My Story of Personal Power" and do that exercise using the situation, writing yourself in as the hero.

Exercise: Coping with a Difficult Situation

1. Fill in the blanks using the wedding situation described above.

The triggers that I will have to deal with are: _____

I need cues around me to help me to cope. These might include my list of affirmations, a crystal, a stuffed toy, a small angel, or a miniature of my power shield. My cues are: _____

Aspects of timing I need to be able to cope are (e.g., some time alone, a time to go out of the room and throw things): _____

The coping strategy (from those listed in the section above, "Coping with and Solving a Problem") that will help me best is: _____

5. Is this belief hurtful to me in any way? _____

6. Does this belief put appropriate demands on me (at home, work, or play)?

* * * * *

Intimacy and Connectedness

Intimacy is the capacity to feel connected to yourself and others. Enduring trauma may lead to disconnects between you and others or within yourself, as we have noted. The aim of this chapter is to help you learn ways to set boundaries, communicate with others, and build healthy attachments that do not make you feel vulnerable, that do not repeat trauma-related patterns of interaction, and that are based on new or modified belief systems. These beliefs include beliefs of empowerment and self-acceptance. The following questions may help you identify a belief or beliefs about intimacy that you might want to examine or challenge.

Exercise: My Beliefs about Intimacy

1. Answer the following questions or complete the following thoughts (use your journal or notebook if you need more room).

Do I feel connected to others? If so, to whom? _____

To me, an intimate relationship means I _____

At this moment in time, I have an intimate relationship with _____

I believe that the word "love" means _____

I am able to express love safely with _____

From whom and where do I get support? _____

From whom and where do I get love? _____

Do I feel more distant from others now, after the trauma (or after I have begun to work on the trauma)? _____

How do I express love and caring to others? To myself? _____

Am I able to have an intimate sexual relationship with another? _____

2. Which of the following statements describes you? Check all that apply.

- I stay away from people.
- I avoid certain social activities (such as _____).
- I want to spend my time alone.
- I am afraid to talk to others.
- I am afraid to be physically close to another.
- I try to force others to have physical contact with me.
- I say "no" to any suggestion of sexual contact with someone I love or for whom I have loving feelings.
- I overdo taking care of others.
- I have no one to take care of me.
- I am generally hostile toward others.
- I feel afraid to depend on others.
- I believe others will always let me down.
- I fear touch of any kind.
- I am unable to play.
- I am unable to make friends.
- I am unable to keep friends.
- I have no friends.
- I am unable to disclose my real self to others.
- I am unable to go out to meet others.
- I do not trust that I am okay.
- I am unlovable and undeserving of love.
- I don't believe anything nice that others say about me.
- I cannot make decisions.
- I continue to get in disastrous relationships (modified from Leehan and Wilson 1985).

The more statements you checked, the more you need to look at ways to challenge and change your beliefs about intimacy and trust. You also need to look at your boundaries and communication skills.

* * * * *

Matsakis writes that "it has been established that the single most important predictor of who develops long-term PTSD or other traumatic reactions is the ability to derive comfort from another human being" (1998, 110). Van der Kolk (1988) agrees, and notes that two primary factors can lessen the negative effects of trauma: the presence of a support system and a strong belief system that is positive and allows you to trust, set boundaries, and be intimate.

According to the Brussats, "many people . . . define spirituality as the search for meaning and purpose . . . (that) involves both seeking and making" (2000, 172). Think of a time when you suddenly changed what you were going to do and as a result met someone you needed to meet or were presented with a new opportunity. There are many possible paths open to you at all times. Is finding a purpose a difficult task for you? How do you show yourself that your life really does matter—to yourself, if not to others? _____

You alone know whether you view your God or Higher Power as anthropomorphic (having human qualities) or beyond human in attributes, and where you see God. You alone know if your connection to that Higher Power or God is personal or distant. Bourne (1998) notes that you may see God in:

- natural beauty
- creative inspiration
- premonitions
- synchronicities (coincidences that are not coincidences)
- deep insights or truth
- love given or received
- miracles
- other visionary experiences

Exercise: Ways to Improve Your Spirituality

Bourne (1998) suggests a variety of ways to improve your spirituality. If you answer these questions, try not to do so merely with "yes" or "no," but write about when you use each way to improve your spirituality, if you do.

1. Do you pray as a way to communicate with your Higher Power or to request something from him or her? _____

2. Do you turn over problems to that Higher Power for solutions? _____

3. Do you meditate in order to get in touch with deeper parts of your self through quieting your mind? _____

4. Do you read literature that is spiritual in nature? This might include the Bible or other works. _____

5. Do you meet with others in a "spiritual fellowship" whether through church attendance, vision quests, workshops, or other activities? _____

6. Do you do some type of compassionate service for others? _____

* * * * *

If you are seeking what Bourne describes as "a more optimistic and tolerant view of life" (1998, 282), you may use some of the following suggestions and revelations to guide your quest.

1. Life is a school with the primary purpose of growth in consciousness and wisdom and the capacity to love.
 2. Adversity and difficult situations are lessons designed for growth rather than random, capricious acts of fate. In the larger scheme of things, everything happens for a purpose. This may be difficult to accept but, if you have used your experiences to find your life purpose, you may have helped many others in many ways. Through your experiences, you have hopefully learned compassion and empathy.
 3. Your personal limitations (including disabilities and illnesses) can point up the lessons you have to learn in life and can be challenges to be used for growth.
 4. Your life has a creative purpose and mission, something that you must do in order to feel complete.
 5. You have a higher source of support and guidance available to you in your Higher Power if you ask.
 6. You can contact your Higher Power directly through your personal experience.
 7. The power of intention can promote what Bourne calls "miraculous consequences" if your intention is for the highest good.
 8. Evil is the misuse of your creative power.
 9. Love is stronger than fear and can overcome fear.
 10. Death is a transition. Some part of your being transcends and survives beyond death.
- Do you believe any of these principles? If so, which ones: _____

Are there other statements or principles you can turn to that will help you on your healing path? _____

What did you learn about yourself by completing these exercises about developing spirituality? _____

Connecting with Nature

Another way to seek meaning and purpose is to connect with nature. Eitner (2001), president of the Masters Group (a group focused on developing expanded consciousness) and a Reiki master, has used and taught various methods to achieve advanced states of consciousness that shift and change old trauma-bound patterns, fears, and defenses. She has found that healing of trauma and related negative addictive behavior patterns can be done effectively in nature. Project Nature Connect, also called "the natural systems thinking process or reconnecting with nature," provides safe, easy, and supportive experiences to restore the senses wounded by traumatic experiences. Through the use of these exercises, persons who have been traumatized can become part of and build connections to the "web of life" or supportive natural community. Project Nature Connect, in a series of interactions experienced in nature, restores these connections and senses to their natural state. The exercises she uses in her work emphasize natural attractions, positive feelings, and appreciation, building a framework for you, as a survivor, to become connected to what is specifically positive and supportive for you. You can obtain more information about Project Nature Connect from the Web site, www.ecopsych.com, or from Project Nature Connect, P.O. Box 1605, Friday Harbor, WA 98250.

The first two of the three exercises below for connecting with nature were designed by Dr. Michael Cohen, an educator and environmental psychologist. The third of these was initially designed by Christina Brittain and has been modified by Eitner.

Exercise: Gaining Permission

This exercise begins to set the pattern to help you ask for and receive permission to interact with nature. You will also be able to begin distinguishing between what is naturally attractive and welcoming and what is not. As you complete this exercise, you will begin to notice differences in your interactions with other people as well as with nature.

1. Go to an attractive natural place like a wood, park or backyard, or even to an indoor plant. The key factors are that the area should be natural, attractive, and safe.

2. You will find that something in this natural place will stand out and look very attractive, and you will be drawn to it.
3. Ask permission of that plant, tree, bush, or whatever to interact with it. This is generally done nonverbally and always respectfully.
4. Obtain its permission in some way. If you receive that permission, you will find yourself feeling acknowledged and connected. This will be a positive experience.
5. If you don't receive this permission, identify another attractive something, and obtain permission to interact with it.
6. Sense the connection; feel what gift this natural attraction has for you.
7. When you are finished with the experience, thank the natural attraction for interacting with you.

I tried this exercise when I: _____

The results of my trying this exercise in nature were: _____

* * * * *

Exercise: Establishing Trust

This closed-eye experience begins to establish your trust in the person you choose to lead you and in nature itself through using your senses.

1. Ask someone you like and trust and with whom you feel comfortable to be your nature guide. Go with that nature guide to an attractive natural place like a backyard, wood, or park.
2. Ask the area for permission to interact, as described above.
3. Take your guide's hand, close your eyes, and explore the area. Be open and receptive to gathering information through your other senses. Walk along and ask your guide to place your hand on natural things, like a tree, rock, or leaf. As you touch it, be receptive, noticing what you feel, smell, sense, or hear. Do you notice changes in temperature, hear more sensitively, feel more distinctly? Are you comfortable with the connections?
4. After interacting with each leaf, tree, rock, etc., thank it for sharing itself with you. Thank your guide for leading you.

Resilience

As you have done the work in this workbook, you have learned a great deal about yourself, what happened to you, and what can help you heal. One major characteristic of persons who heal most is their ability to be resilient. Just what does it mean to be resilient?

The following checklist contains numerous characteristics that combine to form resilience. Check off which of them you believe now describe you. The more you check, the more resilient you may be.

- I have a good self-concept.
- I have good self-esteem.
- I am sensitive to others' needs.
- I am generally cooperative with others.
- I am socially responsive.
- I have a good sense of humor.
- I am able to postpone getting my needs met (I can delay gratification).
- I am generally flexible.
- I can control my impulses when I need to do so.
- I believe in the future and plan for it.
- I have a good support system.
- I recognize that I have many opportunities in life available to me.
- I respect individual human beings.
- I respect appropriate authority.
- I am able to look for more than one solution to a problem.
- I am able to plan ahead.
- I have hobbies and interests beyond my traumas.
- I have a positive view of life and see life's joys (as well as its sorrows).
- I can problem-solve and have a strategy which I use.
- I have a sense of spirituality.
- I celebrate myself regularly.
- I celebrate others regularly.
- I believe that I have some level of control over myself and others.
- I would rather take action than wait for something to happen to me.
- I am able to find meaning even in bad things.
- I am someone others like and love.
- I am able to find someone to help me when I need it.
- I can ask questions in a creative way.
- I have a conscience that allows me to see my own goodness.

- I have a "knowing" about things that happen to and around me.
- I can disengage and separate from others if they are not good for me.
- I can attach to others and connect.

How many of these traits were you able to check? If you find that you still can check only a few, you may want to redo some of the exercises in this book. If you want to build your resilience, you need to monitor and observe how you interact in the world. See just when and how (or if) you use humor. When you are presented with a problem, try to come up with at least two solutions, and then weigh the pros and cons until you can make an appropriate choice between the solutions. You may want to try new hobbies or activities to broaden yourself. You also may want to seek out your spiritual side to a greater degree or become more connected with nature.

Looking at the Purpose of Your Life

Do you now have a purpose in life? Bourne defines life purpose as "something you need to do in order to feel whole, complete, and fulfilled in your life . . . that expresses a particular talent, gift, skill, or desire that you hold most dear . . . something that reaches beyond the limited needs and concerns of your own ego [and is] 'other-directed' . . . an important activity or service you could have come into this world to accomplish" (1998, 246).

Exercise: My Life Purpose

If you are sure of your life purpose, then write it here: _____

If you are not sure, you may ask yourself the following questions and see where the answers lead you.

How do you feel about the work you are doing? Is it fulfilling? _____

Do you want to continue your education and, if so, in what area or areas? _____

Do you have hobbies or interests you want to learn or follow? If so, what are they? _____

If you were to write a motto for your life right now, what would it be? _____

The motto of my life is: _____

If you could accomplish anything in your life, what would you hope to accomplish within the next year? _____

The next five years? _____

The next ten years? _____

What values are most important to you and give you the most meaning? Do you value wealth? Material possessions? Good health? Close relationships? Family? Friends? Closeness with a supreme being? _____

If you were to make a commitment to change one thing in your life that would make it easier for you to achieve your life purpose, what would it be? _____

As Bourne (1998) notes, it is important to counter negative belief systems that might interfere with your trying to reach your dreams and goals. If you truly are on a path to achieve your life purpose, it is important to stick to the task and look for opportunities to achieve it whenever possible.

What are your reactions to completing this exercise? _____

* * * * *

Journal Exercise

Earlier in this book (chapter 1), you did an exercise that asked you to respond to a series of five suggestions for drawing. Now that you have completed the exercises in this workbook, has your view of yourself and your world changed?

In your journal, you may again draw these five pictures: of yourself, your space, your road, your family, and, again, of yourself. How do your new drawings, when compared to your first drawings, show you have changed?

Psychological Wellness

The goal of working in this workbook has been to help you build psychological wellness. If you are psychologically well, you are able to maintain a healthy lifestyle that has balance in its physical (fitness, nutrition), social (relationships, support systems), emotional (self-worth, hardiness), vocational and educational (productivity), and spiritual (purpose, meaning, ethics, values) aspects. In which of the five areas do you feel balanced? Unbalanced? Why? _____

How comfortable are you with yourself and your life? _____

Do you like your present standard of living? _____

Do you like your home? _____

Do you like the pace of your life? _____

Are you satisfied with your employment? Your education? _____

Are you clear with yourself as to who you are and what you are? _____

Do you have an inner sense of purpose for your life? _____

Do you keep the balance in all five areas of your life that we listed above? _____

How do you balance between private and social time? Between personal and professional time? Between exercise and relaxation? _____

* * * * *

Resourcefulness

A healthy person has learned to be resourceful and has a sense of coherence. Antonovsky (1987) defined coherence as personal beliefs that life (including stressor situations) is comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful as well as structured and predictable. You know that bad things happen. In all likelihood, the rest of your life will not be trauma-free. However, the way you approach traumatic experiences may be changed by the work you have done in this workbook. You now may be able to approach new stressors and potential traumas (unless they are so incredibly overwhelming that there is no way to make sense of them) as challenges for which meaning is to be sought. If this is the case, you will be willing to invest your (depleted) energy to work through those experiences, even if your energy is depleted. If so, hopefully you will be able to maintain some sense of balance, use action-oriented coping skills, realistically adapt the way you approach or avoid the new situation, and thrive as you become stronger than before.

Dunning (1997) has developed a list of thirteen characteristics that she calls the "Thirteen C's of Salutogenesis." *Salutogenesis* means learned resourcefulness, or the ability to use stressful situations for self-direction and growth. This wellness model focuses on retaining control, even through traumatic events, and finding the benefits and meaning in what has happened to you. How many of these "C's" are you able to apply in stressful situations?

1. control: a sense of autonomy and an ability to influence what happens around you in your environment
2. cohesion: connecting or belonging with concerned others who care about you, your feelings, and your experiences
3. communication: expressing positive self-discovery and growth with others through words and writings
4. challenge: using stressor events as opportunities for growth and development and seeing hardships as something to overcome or change in some way (however small)
5. commitment: remaining active in the pursuit of meaning
6. connection: forming a bond of trust with others to help healing
7. clarification: accepting that the event and its reasons for occurring go beyond your influence while still looking at what you can change or control
8. coherence: making your trauma story logical and consistent with your past, present, and future
9. congruence: seeing the event through the eyes of others, looking at external forces, accepting that every trauma you (or others) have experienced can lead to feelings of self-blame, responsibility, and failure, and doing the appropriate exercises to combat these feelings
10. commemoration: developing ritualistic closures to events in order to memorialize them and to put them in the context of history
11. comfort or consolation: developing feelings of relief and encouragement while accepting how things have changed
12. culture: understanding how your cultural context and history impacts your healing
13. closure: achieving a sense that the traumatic event has truly ended, even though you will probably never be the same; understanding the differences between your "before" and "now" selves

Are you a salutogenic person? Which of the C's apply to you? _____

In spite of it all, no matter how hard you work to deal with your trauma-based memories or how much you try to avoid the traumas that have befallen you, you remain a human being who has been through traumatic events. If you are fortunate enough to be a thriver who has walked through trauma toward healing, or who has become an educator to help others on their healing paths, you have possibly found meaning in your life and have new goals.

Exercise: My Healing Alphabet

Take a few moments, based on all the work you have done, and develop your own healing alphabet. This exercise asks you to take each letter of the alphabet and come up with one to three words that describe you and your healing. For example: