

EMPOWERME · THE PATH OF EMPOWERMENT THERAPY

Is It Cluster B?

A guided journal for recognizing narcissistic, borderline, antisocial, or histrionic patterns in a relationship, quieting the self-doubt that comes with them, and finding your way back to yourself

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My Note to You

If you picked up this journal, chances are someone in your life has confused you in ways you cannot quite explain to the people around you. Maybe you have searched symptom lists at midnight, trying to find language for what you live with. Maybe someone finally said the word narcissist, or borderline, or sociopath, out loud, and something in you went quiet and thought, finally, someone said it.

I want to be honest with you about something before we go any further. This journal will not diagnose your partner, spouse, or family member, and it is not trying to. Only a licensed clinician can do that, and most people with these patterns never sit in that clinician's office long enough to be assessed. What this journal will do is help you trust your own eyes again. It will help you see the pattern, not just the person, and find your way out of the fog of self-doubt that these relationships create.

Whether the word that fits is narcissistic, borderline, antisocial, or histrionic, or whether you never land on a single word at all, the effect on you is often the same: confusion, self-blame, and a nagging sense that you are either too sensitive or losing your mind. You are neither. You are responding, in a very human way, to a very difficult dynamic.

You do not have to have a diagnosis in hand to begin. You only have to be honest about what you have lived through.

If You Are in Danger

This journal is a tool for reflection and self-understanding, not a substitute for professional support, medical care, or legal advice. If you are in immediate danger, please contact local emergency services.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline is available 24 hours a day at 1-800-799-7233, or online at thehotline.org, and can help you think through a safety plan no matter what stage of this journey you are in.

If your relationship involves physical violence, threats, stalking, or controlled access to money, transportation, or communication, please involve a domestic violence advocate before making decisions about leaving. Leaving is often the most dangerous point in an abusive relationship, and a safety plan matters.

How to Use This Journal

1. Move through the phases in order, but let the stages take whatever time they need. Some may take a week. Others may take a year. There is no timeline you owe anyone, including yourself.
2. Use the Tool for Recovery on each stage's overview page. These are small, concrete actions, not just ideas to sit with.
3. Practice the Three at the end of every stage. Self-trust, self-representation, and self-protection are muscles. They get stronger with repetition, not with insight alone.
4. Close every stage with the affirmations. Say them out loud if you can.
5. If a stage brings up something painful or overwhelming, pause and reach out to a therapist, a support group, or someone you trust. You were never meant to carry this alone, and you do not have to carry it alone now.

The Path

When someone begins to face the truth of a relationship with a Cluster B partner, they tend to move through a set of emotional and psychological stages. It is rarely a straight line, and it is not always the same order for everyone. This journal walks that journey using the same framework that grounds every part of the Path of Empowerment Therapy: See Yourself, Be Yourself, See Others, Be With Others.

Phase One, See Yourself. Before you can act, you have to see clearly. This is where denial gives way to recognition, and self-blame gives way to understanding.

Phase Two, Be Yourself. Seeing the truth is not the same as acting on it. This is where you reclaim your own agency, reach your breaking point, and hold a boundary.

Phase Three, See Others. Now you see the relationship, and the person in it, exactly as they were, not as you hoped they would be. This is where you grieve the illusion.

Phase Four, Be With Others. You return to yourself, and to your life, on your own terms. This is where you rebuild your worth and set a new standard.

The Three: Self-Trust, Self-Represent, Self-Protect

Underneath all four phases, three practices repeat. They are the daily, practical skills that a pattern-based relationship erodes, and they are the skills you will rebuild, one stage at a time.

SELF-TRUST Believing what you saw, heard, and felt, even when you were told repeatedly that you were too sensitive, misremembering, or making things up. Self-trust is the ability to say, "I know what I experienced," without needing anyone else's permission to know it.

SELF-REPRESENT Putting what you know into words, out loud or on paper, instead of shrinking it to keep the peace. Self-representation is your voice, used on your own behalf.

SELF-PROTECT Acting on what you know and have represented, through a boundary, a piece of distance, or a decision. Self-protection is where insight finally becomes a life.

Each stage in this journal closes with a short exercise called Practicing the Three, where you will build all three skills in miniature.

What Does Cluster B Mean?

Cluster B is a grouping used in the DSM-5 for four personality disorders that tend to share a dramatic, emotional, or unpredictable style of relating to other people: Narcissistic Personality Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Antisocial Personality Disorder, and Histrionic Personality Disorder. People with these patterns are not a monolith, and most partners of someone with Cluster B traits are not living with a person who has ever received a formal diagnosis at all. Many of these individuals never enter therapy, and if they do, they often present so well that a clinician only sees the version everyone outside the home already sees.

This section is not designed to help you diagnose anyone. It is designed to help you name the pattern well enough that you can stop wondering whether you are imagining it.

The Four Patterns

Narcissistic Personality Disorder. A pervasive pattern of grandiosity, a need for admiration, and a lack of empathy. In relationships, this often looks like an early idealization phase, where you were the best thing that had ever happened to them, followed by devaluation, where you can suddenly do nothing right, and sometimes a discard, where you are replaced or dropped once you stop supplying admiration or usefulness.

Borderline Personality Disorder. A pattern of instability in relationships, self-image, and emotion, often paired with an intense fear of abandonment. In relationships, this can look like idealizing a partner very quickly, splitting between seeing them as all good or all bad, and reacting to perceived rejection with intense anger, panic, or self-harm.

Antisocial Personality Disorder. A pattern of disregard for the rights of others, deceitfulness, impulsivity, and a lack of remorse. In relationships, this can look like lying that continues even after being caught, a pattern of using people for money, status, or convenience, and little to no guilt when confronted with the harm it caused.

Histrionic Personality Disorder. A pattern of excessive emotionality and attention-seeking. In relationships, this can look like dramatic or exaggerated expressions of emotion, real discomfort when not the center of attention, and relationships that feel far more intimate to one partner than they actually are.

Patterns That Cross All Four

The idealize-devalue-discard cycle

Gaslighting: insisting that what you saw, heard, or remembered did not happen the way you remember it

Blame-shifting: turning nearly every confrontation back onto you

Triangulation: bringing in a third person, an ex, a coworker, a friend, to create jealousy or competition

Splitting: seeing people, including you, as either perfect or worthless, with no middle ground

Inconsistent accountability: apologies that are rarely followed by any real, sustained change in behavior

A public charm that outsiders see and you do not: which can make your account of events sound unbelievable to others

Is This Your Relationship? A Pattern Checklist

This is not a diagnostic tool, and checking several boxes does not mean your partner has a personality disorder. It means the pattern is familiar enough to name. Read slowly. You do not need to act on anything you find here today.

- ☐ I have felt confused about my own memory of events after a conversation with my partner.
- ☐ I have been told I am too sensitive, too dramatic, or crazy when I bring up something that hurt me.
- ☐ My partner was intensely loving and attentive early on, in a way that now feels different from how things unfolded.
- ☐ I feel like I am walking on eggshells, unsure which version of my partner I will encounter.
- ☐ My partner rarely, if ever, takes responsibility without deflecting, minimizing, or bringing up something I did.
- ☐ I have changed my behavior, appearance, or opinions to avoid a reaction from my partner.
- ☐ My partner's friends, family, or coworkers see a very different person than the one I live with.
- ☐ I have been accused of things I did not do, with a level of certainty that made me doubt myself.
- ☐ My partner has threatened to leave, harm themselves, or expose me when I have tried to set a boundary.
- ☐ I have apologized for things that were not my fault, just to end a conflict.
- ☐ My partner seems to need constant admiration, attention, or reassurance.
- ☐ My partner has lied to me about something significant and showed no visible guilt when caught.
- ☐ I have felt increasingly isolated from friends or family since this relationship began.
- ☐ My partner brings up other people, exes, potential partners, admirers, to provoke jealousy or insecurity.
- ☐ I sometimes feel like I am the only stable adult in this relationship.
- ☐ My partner's reactions to small disappointments feel disproportionately intense.
- ☐ I have stopped trusting my own sense of what is reasonable to expect from a partner.
- ☐ I feel a physical sense of relief when my partner is out of the house or unreachable.
- ☐ I have researched personality disorders, narcissism, or abuse patterns to try to understand my relationship.

☐ Somewhere in me, I already know something is wrong, even if I cannot fully say why.

If many of these feel true, you are not imagining your relationship. Consider bringing this list to a therapist experienced in personality disorders and relationship abuse, not as a diagnosis of your partner, but as a starting point for your own care.

Phase I

See Yourself

Before you can act, you have to see clearly. This phase is where denial gives way to recognition, and self-blame gives way to understanding.

Stage One · Denial and Cognitive Dissonance

Stage Two · Awareness and Self-Blame

1 Denial and Cognitive Dissonance

In the beginning, most people in a relationship with a Cluster B partner experience denial. The evidence may already be visible in the contradictions, the intensity, and the confusion after every conflict, but naming it can feel disloyal, dramatic, or premature. Cognitive dissonance occurs when your hope for who your partner could be conflicts with the reality of who they consistently are. You may find yourself oscillating between "maybe I am overreacting" and "I know something is wrong."

TOOL FOR RECOVERY

Begin journaling specific incidents in as much detail as you can remember, including what was said and how you felt afterward. Patterns are much harder to deny once they are written down side by side.

SOURCE

Dr. Ramani Durvasula, a psychologist and leading voice on narcissistic abuse, describes how cognitive dissonance is precisely what keeps people in these relationships long after their instincts have told them something is wrong.

Journaling Guide

01 Recognizing the Conflict

What makes you hesitate to name this relationship, or your partner, as unhealthy or harmful?

What evidence already exists that contradicts that hesitation?

02 Exploring the Dissonance

What good qualities or memories do you hold onto that make it hard to see the relationship clearly?

.....

How do those memories sit alongside the harder, more painful patterns you have lived through?

.....

03 Naming a Pattern, Not Just an Incident

Describe one recent incident where you felt confused, hurt, or dismissed, in as much detail as you can.

.....

Has something like this happened before? What repeats, almost word for word?

.....

04 Validating Your Own Perception

What do you tell yourself when you think, "maybe I am the problem"?

.....

What would you tell a close friend who described this exact situation to you?

.....

05 Building Clarity

What would genuinely need to change for you to feel safe here, and is that realistic given the pattern you just described?

.....

What is one small action you can take this week to protect your own clarity, such as writing things down as they happen?

.....

.....

PRACTICING THE THREE

SELF-TRUST

Write one sentence that begins with, "I know what I experienced when...", and finish it with something you have been told did not happen or did not matter.

.....

SELF-REPRESENT

Say that sentence out loud, to yourself, in the mirror if you are willing.

.....

SELF-PROTECT

Choose one place, physical or digital, to keep a private, ongoing record of incidents going forward.

.....

AFFIRMATIONS FOR THIS STAGE

"My perception of my own life is valid."

"I do not need anyone else's permission to know what I know."

"I am allowed to see this clearly, even before I know what I will do about it."

Final Note. Remember, journaling is one tool among many. A therapist, a support group, or a trusted friend can offer something a page cannot: another set of eyes that already believes you.



When Your Faith Says Stay

AN ADDITION TO THIS JOURNAL

For many readers, the cognitive dissonance of Stage One carries an extra layer that most recovery models never address: a belief system, a church, or a verse that has been used to say that leaving is itself a sin. If this is not part of your experience, feel free to turn ahead to Stage Two. If it is, you are not alone, and this dissonance deserves its own space.

Christian counselor Leslie Vernick has spent decades working with people in destructive marriages, and much of her writing addresses this exact tension. In her books, including *The Emotionally Destructive Marriage* and *The Emotionally Destructive Relationship*, she draws an important distinction between a disappointing marriage, where a spouse is imperfect or simply not who you hoped they would be, and a destructive marriage, where a pattern of abuse, deception, addiction, or cruelty continues without any real repentance or change. The first calls for patience and growth. The second calls for safety.

Much of the fear around leaving traces back to Malachi 2:16, often summarized simply as "God hates divorce." Vernick points out that this passage, read in its full context, shows God rebuking husbands who were treacherously breaking covenant with the wives of their youth, not condemning a spouse who leaves someone who has already broken that covenant through betrayal, abuse, or abandonment. The same passage that names God's hatred of divorce also names God's hatred of a person who covers themselves, and their spouse, with violence. Scripture is not silent about cruelty. It simply is not quoted as often.

Vernick also points to a broader pattern in scripture of the behaviors God is described as hating, including a lying tongue, a heart that devises wicked schemes, and one who sows discord among people, patterns that tend to describe the very dynamics found in a Cluster B relationship. Her point is not that divorce should ever be sought casually, but that a spouse who is being harmed is not the one breaking covenant. The person who is unfaithful, deceitful, or abusive has already done that.

If a pastor, a church, or a family member has told you that leaving means God is against you, the next few prompts may be some of the most important pages in this entire journal.

Journaling Guide

01 Examining the Teaching

What have you been taught, explicitly or implicitly, about divorce, and where did that teaching come from?

Read Malachi 2:13–16 in full, in your own Bible if you have one. Who is God addressing in this passage, and what are they being confronted for?

02 Naming Disappointment vs. Destruction

What is the difference, in your own relationship, between a disappointment and a pattern of destruction? Write specific examples of each.

Has anyone in your faith community pressured you to reconcile without any real evidence of change? What did that feel like?

03 Reclaiming Your Theology

What would it mean to believe that God is grieved by what has been done to you, rather than by your decision to be safe?

If you removed the fear of what leaving would mean spiritually, what would you actually want to do?

PRACTICING THE THREE

SELF-TRUST

Write down one scripture or teaching that has been used to keep you silent or staying, and sit with whether it was ever meant to apply to your situation.

SELF-REPRESENT

Say out loud, even just to yourself, "I am allowed to want safety and still love God."

SELF-PROTECT

Identify one person, a counselor, a different pastor, or a trusted friend of faith, who could talk through this specific tension with you.

AFFIRMATIONS FOR THIS STAGE

"God is not asking me to stay in harm to prove my faith."

"Safety and faithfulness are not opposites."

"I can hold my beliefs and still protect myself."

Final Note. This is a heavy topic, and one honest conversation with a counselor who understands both faith and abuse dynamics will do more than any journal page. Leslie Vernick's books and her website offer much deeper material if this section resonated with you.

2 Awareness and Self-Blame

Once denial loosens its grip, awareness sharpens, and so, often, does self-blame. You may begin to recognize the tactics, gaslighting, blame-shifting, subtle or not-so-subtle devaluation, but still believe you provoked them. People with Cluster B traits are often skilled, whether consciously or not, at redirecting responsibility, which leaves their partner holding blame that was never theirs to carry.

TOOL FOR RECOVERY

Seek out a therapist or support group with real experience in personality disorders and relationship abuse. Understanding the mechanics of the cycle is often what finally interrupts the self-blame.

SOURCE

Judith Herman's work on trauma and recovery describes how people who endure ongoing psychological harm often internalize blame as a way of maintaining some sense of control over an uncontrollable situation.

Journaling Guide

01 Naming the Tactics

What specific behaviors have felt manipulative: gaslighting, blame-shifting, the silent treatment, sudden rage, guilt trips?

.....

When did you first suspect these were tactics rather than isolated, unrelated moments?

.....

.....

02 Releasing Self-Blame

In what ways have you believed you caused your partner's behavior?

What evidence contradicts that belief?

03 Understanding the Dynamic

How does your partner respond when confronted with something they did wrong?

What do you think that response is actually protecting in them?

04 Reframing

If a friend described this exact dynamic to you, would you blame them? Why not?

What would you say to yourself a year ago, knowing what you know now?

05 Building Empowerment

What is within your control right now, regardless of what your partner does or does not change?

Who is one person you can be honest with about what is really happening?

PRACTICING THE THREE

SELF-TRUST

List three things you have been blamed for that, on reflection, were not your fault.

SELF-REPRESENT

Write one sentence you could say the next time you are blamed unfairly, even if you are not ready to say it out loud yet.

SELF-PROTECT

Identify one support person or professional you will reach out to this month.

AFFIRMATIONS FOR THIS STAGE

"I am not responsible for someone else's behavior."

"Understanding the pattern does not mean I have to fix it."

"I deserve relationships where accountability goes both ways."

Final Note. Breaking free from self-blame is a critical step, and it rarely happens alone. Therapy or a support group can offer validation that is hard to generate entirely on your own.

Phase II

Be Yourself

Seeing the truth is not the same as acting on it. This phase is where you reclaim your own agency, reach your breaking point, and hold the boundary you set.

Stage Three · The Breaking Point

Stage Four · Boundaries, Detachment, and Contact Decisions

3 The Breaking Point

After enduring the cycle for months or years, most people reach a breaking point, a single moment or an accumulation of moments, after which staying quiet no longer feels possible. This is often when the idealize-devalue-discard cycle becomes undeniable, and the emotional cost finally outweighs the fear of leaving.

TOOL FOR RECOVERY

Build a concrete safety plan: the people you can call, a place you can go, and the documents or finances you may need access to. A plan turns fear into readiness.

SOURCE

Lundy Bancroft's *Why Does He Do That?* describes the moment many partners reach when they recognize a relationship is not simply difficult, but fundamentally unrepairable as it currently stands.

Journaling Guide

01 Reflecting on the Breaking Point

What event, or accumulation of events, led you to think, "I cannot keep living like this"?

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What emotions came up for you in that moment?

.....

.....

02 Understanding the Toll

How has this relationship affected your physical health, sleep, work, or sense of self?

.....

What are you no longer willing to accept, going forward?

.....

.....

03 Recognizing Your Strength

What has kept you going, even on the hardest days?

.....

What other hard things have you survived that prove you can survive this too?

.....

.....

04 Building a Safety Plan

Who can you trust to help you during this transition, practically and emotionally?

.....

What documents, funds, or resources do you need to gather, and what is your plan if your partner reacts with anger or retaliation?

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.....

05 Visualizing What Comes Next

What does a life without this level of chaos look like to you?

.....

.....

What is one small step you can take this week toward that life?

.....

.....

PRACTICING THE THREE

SELF-TRUST

Write down the exact moment you knew, even if you were not ready to act on it yet.

.....

SELF-REPRESENT

Tell one trusted person, in your own words, what you told yourself in Step One.

.....

SELF-PROTECT

Write out the first three calls or steps of your safety plan.

.....

AFFIRMATIONS FOR THIS STAGE

"I have the right to stop enduring what is hurting me."

"Reaching this point is not weakness. It is clarity."

"My safety and well-being come first."

Final Note. Reaching the breaking point is a sign of strength and self-awareness, not failure. You do not have to plan your exit alone. Lean on trusted people and professionals as you move forward.

4 Boundaries, Detachment, and Contact Decisions

Detachment is one of the hardest parts of this work, largely because it usually happens while the other person is actively trying to prevent it. People with Cluster B traits, especially narcissistic and borderline patterns, often respond to distance with hoovering: sudden warmth, promises of change, guilt, or even threats. Deciding on no contact, or low contact if you share children or other obligations, is an act of protection, not punishment.

TOOL FOR RECOVERY

Decide in advance, on a calm day, exactly what no contact or low contact will look like for you, and write it down so you have something to return to when hoovering attempts begin.

SOURCE

Dr. Les Carter's work on narcissism and manipulation describes no contact as a boundary tool, not an emotional overreaction, that gives the nervous system room to heal.

Journaling Guide

01 Understanding Why Distance Matters

Why do you believe distance, whether full no contact or structured low contact, is necessary for you right now?

.....

How has staying in contact affected your clarity or mental health so far?

.....

.....

02 Preparing for Hoovering

What tactics has your partner used before to pull you back in: love bombing, guilt, threats, a sudden crisis?

.....

What can you remind yourself of in the moment it happens again?

.....

.....

03 Setting the Terms

If no contact is possible, what does that look like in practice: blocking, unfollowing, avoiding shared spaces?

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.....

If low contact is required, such as co-parenting or a shared family, how will you keep interactions strictly necessary and unemotional?

.....

.....

04 Reclaiming Your Identity

Who were you before this relationship reshaped how you see yourself?

.....

.....

What boundary will you carry into every future relationship, romantic or otherwise?

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.....

05 Support and Self-Care

Who is in your corner as you hold this boundary?

.....

.....

What will you do the next time you feel the pull to reach out or respond?

.....

.....

PRACTICING THE THREE

SELF-TRUST

Write the reason you are choosing distance in one sentence you can reread when you doubt yourself.

.....

SELF-REPRESENT

Draft the exact wording you will use for necessary, low-contact communication, such as a co-parenting message.

.....

SELF-PROTECT

Take one concrete action this week: block a number, unfollow an account, or tell one person to hold you accountable to the boundary.

.....

AFFIRMATIONS FOR THIS STAGE

"Distance is not abandonment. It is self-preservation."

"I do not owe anyone access to me."

"I am allowed to protect my peace, even if it disappoints someone else."

Final Note. Detachment is a powerful act of self-love and protection. It is not easy, but it is essential. Lean on trusted people, practice self-compassion, and remember that each boundary held brings you closer to freedom.

Phase III

See Others

Now you see the relationship, and the person in it, exactly as they were, not as you hoped they would be. This is where you grieve the illusion so you can trust your own perception again.

Stage Five · Grief and Emotional Release

5 Grief and Emotional Release

Leaving, or even just seeing clearly, does not erase the loss. You may grieve the relationship you hoped for, the person you thought your partner could become, and the version of yourself that existed before this relationship reshaped you. This grief is not a sign that leaving was wrong. It is a sign that you are human.

TOOL FOR RECOVERY

Give yourself permission to mourn, on purpose, through writing, movement, or ritual, rather than rushing past it toward being fine.

SOURCE

Dr. Susan Anderson's work on abandonment recovery describes grieving the loss of the relationship you hoped for as a necessary, not optional, part of healing.

Journaling Guide

01 Naming the Losses

What are you grieving most: the relationship, the person you thought they were, or the version of yourself that existed before?

How did the reality differ from what you once hoped for?

02 Mourning the Lost Self

What parts of your identity feel like they were suppressed or lost during this relationship?

What do you miss most about who you were before?

03 Processing the Emotions

What feelings have surfaced since you started seeing this clearly: sadness, anger, relief, sometimes all at once?

How have you been coping, and is that coping helping you or hurting you?

04 Rediscovering Yourself

What activities, people, or parts of your personality do you want to reconnect with?

What is one small, concrete step toward that this month?

05 Honoring the Process

What ritual or practice could help you mark this loss and this growth at the same time?

How will you acknowledge the courage it took to get here?

PRACTICING THE THREE

SELF-TRUST

Write down one grief you have not let yourself fully feel yet, and why.

SELF-REPRESENT

Tell someone you trust one true thing about how this loss actually feels, without minimizing it.

SELF-PROTECT

Schedule one specific block of time this week just for grieving, so it does not leak into every hour of your day uninvited.

AFFIRMATIONS FOR THIS STAGE

"I am allowed to grieve and move forward at the same time."

"My grief is proof of how much I gave, not proof that I was foolish."

"I am rediscovering who I was always meant to be."

Final Note. Grieving is an essential part of healing. By giving yourself permission to mourn and to rediscover your true self, you are taking meaningful steps toward a healthier, more fulfilling future.

Phase IV

Be With Others

You return to yourself, and to your life, on your own terms. This phase is where you rebuild your worth and step into the independence and connection that come next.

Stage Six · Rebuilding Self-Trust

Stage Seven · Empowerment, Self-Representation, and a New Standard

6 Rebuilding Self-Trust

After detaching from a Cluster B relationship, many people are surprised by how much they doubt their own judgment, in everything from small decisions to major ones. This is a direct, predictable result of a relationship where your reality was regularly contradicted. Rebuilding self-trust happens slowly, through small decisions honored and small commitments to yourself kept.

TOOL FOR RECOVERY

Make one small promise to yourself each day, something entirely within your control, and keep it. Trust is rebuilt through repetition, not through a single insight.

SOURCE

Research on complex trauma, including the work of Pete Walker on C-PTSD, describes rebuilding a stable sense of self as a gradual, practice-based process rather than a single moment of realization.

Journaling Guide

01 Naming the Damage

In what areas of life do you now second-guess yourself the most: relationships, work, parenting, your own memory?

.....

Where do you think that self-doubt actually came from?

.....

.....

02 Small Evidence of Trust

Describe one recent decision you made and stuck with, even a small one.

What did it feel like to trust yourself in that moment?

03 Rewriting the Inner Voice

What did your partner's voice sound like when it doubted you? Write a line or two.

What is a truer, kinder line to replace it with?

04 Reconnecting to Values

What did you believe about yourself, or want for your life, before this relationship?

How can you begin living in line with that again, even in a small way?

05 Practicing Daily Trust

What is one decision you can make this week and commit to keeping, no matter how small?

How will you acknowledge yourself when you follow through?

PRACTICING THE THREE

SELF-TRUST

Keep a running list this week of every time your instinct turned out to be right, no matter how small.

SELF-REPRESENT

Say one opinion out loud today that you would normally have kept to yourself to avoid conflict.

SELF-PROTECT

Choose one boundary to practice this week with someone other than your former partner, to build the muscle in a lower-stakes relationship.

AFFIRMATIONS FOR THIS STAGE

"My instincts are worth listening to again."

"I am allowed to trust myself, even while I am still healing."

"Every small kept promise is proof I can rely on myself."

Final Note. Rediscovering yourself is a deeply personal process. Celebrate every step forward, and do not hesitate to seek support from a trusted friend, family member, or therapist along the way.

7

Empowerment, Self-Representation, and a New Standard

This final stage is less about finishing and more about integration. You now have language for the pattern, practice trusting your own perception, and a clearer sense of what you will and will not accept going forward. This is where survivors become people who recognize red flags earlier, set boundaries sooner, and no longer mistake intensity for love.

TOOL FOR RECOVERY

Write your own relationship standard in plain language, and revisit it before entering any new relationship, romantic or otherwise.

SOURCE

Pete Walker's writing on post-traumatic growth describes how survivors eventually move from simply surviving toward a stable, self-directed sense of empowerment.

Journaling Guide

01 Reflecting on the Journey

What has changed in how you see yourself since you began this journal?

What has been the hardest part of this process, and what got you through it?

02 Naming Your New Standard

What behaviors will you no longer accept in any relationship, based on what you now know?

What does healthy accountability actually look like, in practice, to you now?

03 Recognizing Red Flags Earlier

What early signs do you now recognize that you missed or minimized before?

How will you respond differently the next time you notice one?

04 Representing Yourself Going Forward

What is one thing you want to be able to say clearly and calmly in your next important relationship, whatever kind it is?

Practice writing it here, exactly as you would want to say it.

05 Giving Back, If and When You Are Ready

Has this experience given you anything you would want to offer someone else walking this same path?

What would you tell someone who just started Stage One of this journal?

PRACTICING THE THREE

SELF-TRUST

Write one paragraph, addressed to yourself, that you can return to any time you start to doubt your own perception again.

SELF-REPRESENT

Write your relationship standard in full: the behaviors you require and the behaviors that are immediately disqualifying.

SELF-PROTECT

Decide on one action that turns this standard into practice, whether that is a conversation, a boundary, a therapy appointment, or simply rereading this page monthly.

AFFIRMATIONS FOR THIS STAGE

"I know the pattern now, and I will not unsee it."

"My standard for how I am treated is not negotiable."

"I am building a life where I do not have to doubt myself to keep the peace."

Final Note. Reaching empowerment after a Cluster B relationship is a complex but transformative process. By honoring your journey, recognizing your growth, and embracing the life you are building, you embody resilience and strength.

Where You Go from Here

Recognizing a Cluster B pattern in a relationship you love, or once loved, is one of the hardest kinds of clarity to reach. It asks you to grieve a version of the story you hoped for, trust a version of reality you were once told was wrong, and build a standard for yourself that some people in your life may not fully understand. By moving through denial, awareness, the breaking point, detachment, grief, and rebuilding, you are doing exactly what recovery from this kind of relationship requires.

Some Good Reads

Each stage in this journal draws on the work of the writers below. If a particular stage resonated with you, consider going deeper with the book that shaped it.

Leslie Vernick · The Emotionally Destructive Marriage

Leslie Vernick · The Emotionally Destructive Relationship

Dr. Ramani Durvasula · Don't You Know Who I Am?

Judith Herman · Trauma and Recovery

Lundy Bancroft · Why Does He Do That?

Dr. Les Carter · The Narcissist's Playbook

Dr. Susan Anderson · The Journey from Abandonment to Healing

Pete Walker · Complex PTSD: From Surviving to Thriving

Bill Eddy · Splitting: Protecting Yourself While Divorcing Someone with Borderline or Narcissistic Personality Disorder

Randi Kreger · Stop Walking on Eggshells

You Do Not Need Their Name for What Happened to Be Real

Whether the word that fits is narcissistic, borderline, antisocial, histrionic, or a combination you never fully label, what you lived through was real, and what you are building now is also real. What you wrote in these pages does not end here. It goes with you into the next boundary, the next relationship, the next conversation with yourself in a hard moment.

You already know more than you are giving yourself credit for. You get to keep building from here.

Is It Cluster B?

The Path of Empowerment Therapy

Monica Michael Smith, MA, CPLC

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