

Reclaim Hope

*Empowering Your Life Through
Five Strategies*



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Five Strategies*

the
younique
FOUNDATION

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Each chapter begins and ends with narratives of survivors of child sexual abuse. These stories are based on common experiences that survivors may have, but do not represent the actual story of any individual(s). Any similarities to real people is simply coincidental.

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Third edition.



*Do the best you can until you know better.
Then when you know better, do better.*

MAYA ANGELOU

About The Yunique Foundation

We inspire hope in women who were sexually abused as children or adolescents by providing healing services through retreats, survivor communities, and online resources.

We empower parents and caregivers to protect children from sexual abuse through education and online resources.

We make it safe to openly discuss sexual abuse through community dialogue and social awareness.

The Yunique Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit public charity, funded through a combination of public donations and private donors. Our headquarters are in Lehi, Utah, with a sister office in Alpharetta, Georgia.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

This book is the compilation of many individuals' efforts, all of whom have a passion for and interest in empowering survivors on their healing journeys. Special thanks to the Education team of The Yunique Foundation as well as the Clinical team, whose collective knowledge and diverse experience formed the content presented in the pages that follow.

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Introduction



She would take her pieces and make them beautiful.

R.M. DRAKE

A Japanese legend tells the story of a mighty shogun warrior who broke his favorite tea bowl and sent it away for repairs. When he received it back, the bowl was held together by unsightly metal staples. Although he could still use it, the shogun was disappointed. Still hoping to restore his beloved bowl to its former beauty, he asked a craftsman to find a more elegant solution.

The craftsman wanted to try a new technique, something that would add to the beauty of the bowl as well as repair it. So, he mended every crack in the bowl with a lacquer resin mixed with gold. When the tea bowl was returned to the shogun, there were streaks of gold

running through it, telling its story, and—the warrior thought—adding to its value. This method of repair became known as *kintsugi*.

Kintsugi, which roughly translates to “golden joinery,” is the Japanese philosophy that the value of an object is not in its beauty, but in its imperfections, and that these imperfections are something to celebrate, not hide.

That’s a nice story, you may be thinking, *but what does it have to do with me?* Imagine that your life is like a ceramic bowl. When good things happen, the bowl is being polished. And when bad things happen, the bowl is cracked. Something like child sexual abuse would create significant cracks. The resulting trauma can leave you feeling that your bowl has been broken into pieces. You repair it as best you can, and, like the metal staples, maybe the ways you coped allowed you to be functional but not utilize your full potential. With *kintsugi*, every step you make toward healing is like gluing those pieces back together with gold. You feel more whole and complete.

This book is written for you, one of the many people affected by the trauma of child sexual abuse. You are not alone in your experience and The Yunique Foundation was established to help survivors *just like you*. We use that word purposefully: survivor. You are here—you survived. And, if you’re reading this book, then you’re likely ready to find the healing tools that work best for you.

“There is nothing stronger than a broken woman who has rebuilt herself.”

HANNAH GADSBY

In this book we will help you better understand the impact that sexual abuse trauma has had on your brain and introduce you to effective strategies that have helped many other survivors begin to feel, to heal, and to move forward in life.



This Is Your Experience

At the outset it's important to recognize that your experience is your experience. No one has the right to invalidate it, minimize it, or justify it away. Just as no two experiences are the same, healing is not the same for everyone either. Only you will know (or discover) what works for you and this book can help you develop skills and strengths to pursue healing in ways you may not have tried before. This book is a personal guide to help you acknowledge the truth about your past, discover your voice, and take steps toward healing.

Your healing journey may be lonely at times, but you don't have to do it alone. As you go through this book there may be times when you want to seek support, whether that is from family, friends, a therapist, or a support group. Building a healthy support system around you will contribute to progression on your healing journey, despite setbacks. Your beliefs (personal and/or religious) can enhance the meaning behind each strategy and allow you to personalize.

“ *She picked up the pieces of her life and created something beautiful. From that day forth she shone like the sun and changed the definition of broken.* ”

RANDALL M. CORE



What's in This Book

First, we'll introduce you to the **Two-Part Brain** which will help you understand how trauma can impact the brain and why you might have encountered certain symptoms or experiences. Next, you'll learn the **5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope** to help you address that trauma and tools that may be beneficial on your path to healing. The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope are not in order of importance or even in the order you should utilize them; they are all meant to work *together*. The five strategies are:

1. Awareness
2. Acknowledgement
3. Power Through Surrender
4. Mindfulness
5. Faith

Drawing on years of clinical experience and the most recent research, we are confident that these strategies, are effective and *can* make a difference. There may be things in this book that don't resonate with you right now and *that's okay*. There is no single practice that will work for every situation, and we encourage you to keep reading until you find something that feels right for you. Remember that this book is just one of many resources to *help* in your healing. The accompanying workbook is also a valuable resource to provide

“*Though no one can go back and make a brand-new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand-new ending.*”

CARL BARD

practical ways to apply what you're learning, and we strongly encourage you to use them together. We also encourage you to seek out therapeutic help from professionals who can help personalize techniques and strategies to you and your situation.



This Is a Journey

Keep in mind as you read that you are on a healing *journey*. It will be a path that you take, step by step, gaining knowledge as you go, leading you to peace and continually allowing you to reclaim hope. It takes courage to face your past, but it's critical that you do so in order for healing to take place.

Accepting responsibility for your healing can be difficult. *The abuse you experienced was not your fault.* However, no one else can heal for you; your healing is your opportunity and responsibility. That's not always easy to accept, but this is designed as a roadmap for you that will empower and inspire you to make progress on your healing journey.

“*To bring about change, you must not be afraid to take the first step. We will fail when we fail to try.*”

ROSA PARKS

Your Kintsugi Bowl

Think again about the shogun warrior. His favorite tea bowl was broken, but after it was repaired it became even more precious to him than it had been before. Celebrate the wonderful person you are and will continue to become as you embark on your healing journey, creating your real-life version of *kintsugi*.



Trauma and the Brain

*understanding how your
brain works*

—“—

You have the power to heal yourself, and you need to know that. We think so often that we are helpless, but we're not. We always have the power of our minds. Claim and consciously use your power.

LOUISE HAY

When Jenny was 11, she loved all the same things most kids her age loved—riding her bike around the neighborhood, reading books, and snuggling her dog. But after *it* started (as she always labeled her trauma in her mind), everything changed. Jenny didn't dare tell anyone about the ongoing sexual abuse because the person abusing her was a family friend. Instead she kept it secret for years and coped by disappearing when she was being abused. She described this as floating above her body, as if the abuse were happening to another girl. By pushing the abuse out of her mind, she found a way to have what she thought was a normal childhood.

“*She knew the power of her mind and so programmed it for success.*

CARRIE GREEN

As Jenny got older, she found herself feeling either completely out of control or totally shut down. She couldn't understand why she always seemed to get into the worst relationships and why it often felt like her body was working against her.

After hitting a low point and realizing her childhood trauma was impacting her more than she had thought, she finally sought professional help. Through a concept called the **Two-Part Brain Model**, she learned how early sexual trauma impacts the development of the human brain.

The Two-Part Brain Model

Survivors of childhood sexual abuse trauma sometimes feel frustrated because of symptoms or feelings they experience—like becoming physically or emotionally reactive to certain sights, sounds, or smells (referred to as being “triggered”), or having difficulty with day-to-day tasks or relationships. These symptoms and feelings don't define *who you are* or *who you can become*; they are part of your brain's natural response to unsafe experiences from the past. Like Jenny, learning more about how trauma impacts your brain can help you understand why you might have these symptoms and steps you can take to heal.

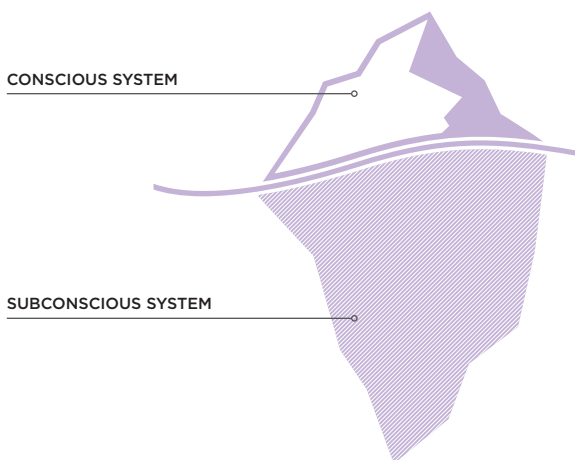
Although trauma's impact on the brain is complex, it's easier to understand by using the Two-Part Brain Model. This model focuses on two systems:

1. The **subconscious system**: what you **can't** directly observe or control, like your *reflexes*.
2. The **conscious system**: what you **can** observe or influence, like your *thoughts*.

“*In the midst of winter, I found there was within me an invincible summer.*”

ALBERT CAMUS

Just like 90% of an iceberg's bulk lies beneath the ocean's surface, the majority of what happens in your brain is automatic, reflexive, and part of your subconscious system. On the other hand, your conscious system is like the tiny bit of the iceberg you can see above the water. Both of these systems work together to help you survive and stay safe as efficiently as possible.



THE SUBCONSCIOUS LIMBIC SYSTEM

One of the elements of your subconscious system that is highly skilled at helping you survive is called the limbic system. This system tries to help by pursuing what feels good while avoiding what feels bad. When the limbic system perceives danger, it responds with automatic fight, flight, or freeze reactions as a first defense against the potential threat.

As a hypothetical example of your limbic system in action, imagine you're quietly sitting in a room, and, out of nowhere, a massive bear comes roaring in at full speed, ready to attack. How would your body and mind react to this unexpected threat?

For some, their body would deal with the bear by

Subconscious System

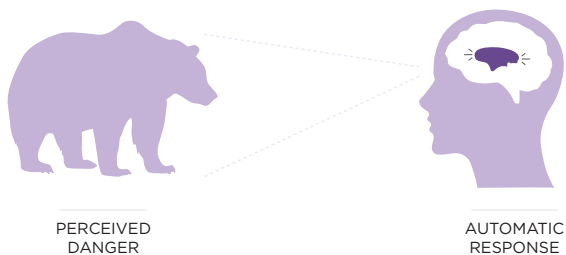
The parts of your brain that make up your subconscious system were the first to grow when you developed (in the womb and through childhood).

Your subconscious system:

- Monitors information and sensations around you.
- Filters and processes the information using your past experiences.
- Automatically responds to your environment to help you survive.

As an example of your subconscious system in action, think of the last time you felt hungry. You didn't have to calculate your exact nutrient levels, time since you last ate, or how much food you had left in your stomach. Your brain subconsciously does all the calculations for you and, in the end, just makes you feel hungry. When you think of your subconscious system, think **automatic**.

instinctively freezing so the bear won't see them or so it would lose interest quickly. For others, their instinct might be to run from the bear to try to get to safety. And for those who experience the fight instinct, they might attempt to stay and fight off the bear directly.



There may be additional types of automatic responses that people use to protect themselves against the bear, but in each kind of response, your limbic system sends messages to your body so it can support the reaction you have: *increase heart rate to run faster, cue shallow breathing to hold more still, tense muscles to fight better, change posture to look more submissive, turn off digestion to conserve energy, etc.* These changes in your mind and body ultimately serve the same purpose: to keep you safe from the threat.

While it's unlikely a bear is going to enter the room, your subconscious limbic system will jump into survival mode when your body perceives danger—whether it's physical danger, emotional danger, or even stress-related thoughts or memories.

THE CONSCIOUS FRONTAL LOBE

One of the most important elements of your conscious system is called the frontal lobe. Your frontal lobe helps you solve complex problems, make judgments, resist impulses, and manage emotions that come from the automatic limbic system.

When it comes to responding to danger, the frontal lobe is slow and deliberate. While your limbic system is already automatically freezing, fleeing, or fighting off the bear, your frontal lobe is still deciding whether or not the bear is dangerous and how to best respond. While it may take longer than your limbic system to analyze a dangerous situation, your frontal lobe's ability to slow down, focus on important details, and deliberately choose the best action can help you better survive dangerous situations in the long run.

Conscious System

The conscious system of your brain developed after your subconscious system and continues to develop into adulthood. Although it's impacted by your subconscious system (e.g., feeling hungry may lead to irritability), you can use your conscious system to deliberately step back and observe your experience.

Having a conscious system allows you to:

- Set intentions.
- Solve complex problems.
- Plan for the future.
- Take deliberate actions.

To see your conscious system in action, take a moment to think about the sensations you are experiencing in your feet right now. As you direct your thoughts to your feet, and as you observe the sensations, you are able to do so deliberately and consciously. When you think of your conscious system, think **choice**.

During a response to danger, the frontal lobe communicates with the limbic system to either support your fight, flight, or freeze response. It may even calm the limbic system if the frontal lobe decides you are safe. In our bear example, if the frontal lobe reaffirms that yes, this is a bear, and yes, this is dangerous, then it will allow the limbic system to continue reacting. On the other hand, if your frontal lobe realizes the bear is fake and part of a practical joke, it will work to calm the limbic system's reaction.

The frontal lobe and limbic system are essential to managing survival; if one isn't working properly, it affects how the other does its job. Without your quick limbic system, your frontal lobe would react too slowly to escape danger. And without your deliberate frontal lobe, you'd be at the continuous mercy of the limbic system's snap judgments—whether they are accurate or not. Just as both sides of a hinge work together to open a door, you need both your conscious and subconscious systems to work together for you to effectively navigate life.

The Frontal Lobe in Action

- What are three things you'd like to accomplish tomorrow?
- Which task is most important to you?
- Imagine yourself completing it and observe how you might feel after it's done.

By using conscious, deliberate, and observational thinking to answer these questions, you are activating your frontal lobe.

Following through on your plans also activates your frontal lobe.

Trauma and the Two-Part Brain

The American Psychological Association defines trauma as *an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape, or natural disaster*. For survivors of child sexual abuse trauma, these emotional responses can also result from frightening or premature sexual experiences, feelings of powerlessness, betrayal, stigma, and chronic childhood stress.

Everyone experiences trauma differently, so there's no "one size fits all" trauma response. Your brain's reaction to trauma may be different than another survivor's depending on your genes, the environment you were in, and the timing, duration, and context of the abuse. However, there are many common changes that happen in the limbic system and the frontal lobe.

TRAUMA AND THE LIMBIC SYSTEM

In survivors of childhood sexual abuse, the subconscious limbic system can become extra sensitive to sights, sounds, smells, or feelings that remind the limbic system of the trauma or past danger. Even though a current situation may not be threatening, the limbic system may still reflexively tell your body it's time to fight, flee, freeze, or use other familiar strategies to guard against what it sees as possibly dangerous. For example, as Jenny walks through a grocery store, she passes an older man who is wearing cologne. The smell of his cologne reminds her limbic system of her childhood trauma. Reflexively, Jenny's limbic system believes she's in danger. Jenny feels her heart race, her thoughts swirl, and she has the desire to run. This

is her body's natural reaction to a potential threat, even though she wasn't in danger.

Because the limbic system is part of your subconscious system, you may not recognize what is triggering you. Your limbic system isn't good or bad for having these automatic reactions; your brain has simply adapted to do what it thinks it needs to do in order to help you survive.

TRAUMA AND THE FRONTAL LOBE

In childhood and teen years, the conscious frontal lobe is developing. Being under a lot of stress as a child or teen can impact that development. During childhood trauma, the body often prioritizes dealing with immediate concerns rather than long-term growth. For example, when Jenny was in middle school, she struggled to focus and had a hard time resisting the impulse to ditch class. Her body was busy coping with the high stress at home (limbic system duties), that it couldn't prioritize focusing enough to learn complex math problems (frontal lobe duties).

The Limbic System and Responses To Trauma

Not everyone's limbic system is affected by trauma in the same way. Some people experience flashbacks (feeling like they are back in a traumatic situation), others have intrusive memories that won't go away, many may experience emotional numbness, and still others may dissociate (disconnect from reality). In order to cope, the limbic system may prompt you to pursue what it associates with feeling good, even if what feels good isn't the healthiest strategy, like heavy alcohol use, drugs, unhealthy food habits, out of control sexual activity, risky adrenaline rushes, or isolation.

While it may have been necessary for your frontal lobe to develop differently as a child in order to survive, sometimes the effects can last into adulthood, making it more difficult to focus, to make conscious decisions, and to resist the impulses. Even though Jenny is an adult now, she still experiences difficulty staying on task at work and resisting the impulse to cope in less helpful ways when she gets home.

Just like limbic system responses, not everyone's frontal lobe responds to trauma the same way. Some people may struggle to start or finish a project, while others may keep excessively busy in order to avoid difficult thoughts or memories. One survivor may have difficulty putting words to her feelings, but another may struggle to control the words she uses with others.

HOW TRAUMA AFFECTS BRAIN COMMUNICATION

Trauma can interrupt how the frontal lobe and limbic system interact. Instead of smoothly working together when threatened, the alarmed limbic system may overreact and overwhelm the frontal lobe. The frontal lobe may then, in turn, undercompensate or overcompensate in response to the limbic system. The result is feeling either out of control or numb—unable to know how to move forward and stay safe at the same time. When Jenny sees pictures of herself when she was young, she tends to shut down. She loses all her energy, time goes missing, and she feels emotionally numb and empty. This is an example of the frontal lobe overcompensating for the limbic system, which was triggered when it perceived something threatening, in this case memories of her childhood.

However, it is possible to help your frontal lobe and limbic system heal and work together better. You can teach your frontal lobe to resist impulses and make deliberate decisions. You can give your limbic system new, safe experiences to help relearn what is safe as an adult and change your relationship with your memories. And finally, you can learn to consciously recognize when to soothe your limbic system and when to support its impulse to act.

“ *Getting over a painful experience is much like crossing monkey bars. You have to let go at some point in order to move forward.* ”

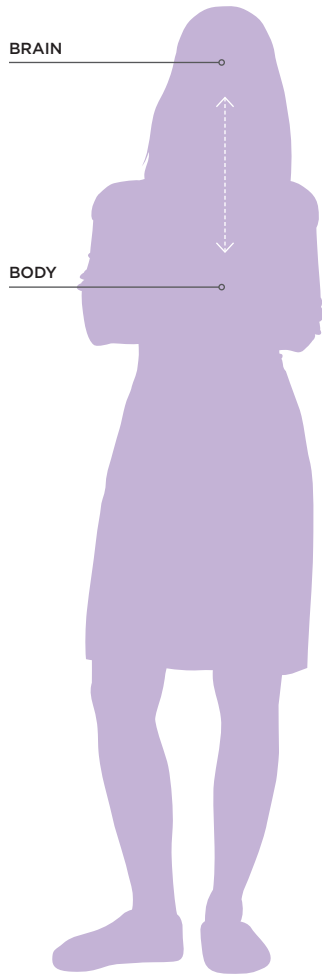
C.S. LEWIS



Trauma and the Body

Childhood sexual trauma is both a physical and an emotional event, which means trauma will impact your body as well as your mind. Even though it's easy to think of the brain and body as separate parts, they are deeply interconnected through an amazing network of chemical and electrical signals. The chemical signals work primarily through your hormone system (you might have already heard of one of the stress hormones called *cortisol*), and the electrical signals work primarily through your nervous system.

Your brain and your body send messages to each other through these networks that can make changes on the other end. For example, being hungry can make you grumpy (body affecting mind) or thinking about an upcoming interview can make your stomach churn (mind affecting body). As another example, the limbic system can send signals to the body to spark a fight, flight, or freeze reaction. On



the other hand, physical exercise can help calm or release your limbic system's danger response.

HOW TRAUMA IMPACTS BRAIN-BODY CONNECTIONS

When you are stuck in trauma over a long time period, it can begin to affect both your physical and mental health. In a groundbreaking study of people who were mistreated as children, researchers found that the more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) someone had, the higher the chances were that they would experience physical and mental issues in adulthood. These issues include things such as liver disease, depression, risk for intimate partner violence, immune system disruptions, drug use, chronic illness, financial stress, and more. The reverse can be true as well—attending to your body's basic needs of sleep, exercise, nutrition, and connection with others has a strong positive impact on both your physical and mental health.

It's important to know that experiencing childhood maltreatment doesn't mean you are doomed to a predetermined future. You have the power to help both your body and mind heal. Because your

ACE Score

As a child, did you experience:

1. Emotional abuse.
2. Physical abuse.
3. Sexual abuse.
4. Physical neglect.
5. Emotional neglect.
6. Witnessed intimate-partner violence.
7. Substance abuse in the household.
8. Mental illness in the household.
9. Parental separation or divorce.
10. Incarcerated household member.

brain and your body are so interconnected, when you heal your brain, you also help heal your body. Likewise, when you heal your body, you help heal your brain.

We honor your mind and body for doing what needed to be done to survive as a child. Now that you are an adult, you can re-teach your mind and body how to work more effectively together using the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope that you'll find in the rest of this book.



Jenny and the Two-Part Brain

After Jenny understood she wasn't to blame for how her mind and body reflexively reacted to her traumatic experiences, she felt empowered to take steps toward healing. Now when she realizes she feels out of control or about to shut down, she can consciously say, "Oh, that's just my limbic system reacting to my past and trying to keep me safe. I have the power to choose what I do next."

Trauma and the Brain

key concepts

- The Two-Part Brain Model helps you understand your trauma by focusing on conscious and subconscious systems in your brain: the frontal lobe (think *choice*) and the limbic system (think *automatic*).
- Childhood trauma can disrupt the ability of your limbic system and frontal lobe to work together, causing you to go into overdrive or go numb.
- Childhood trauma can affect your body and the way it communicates with your brain, often leading to chronic physical and mental health issues.
- The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope give you the tools to strengthen your mind, your body, and the connections within them.
- By understanding how the brain and body respond to trauma, Jenny no longer blames herself for how her brain and body reacted to her abuse. She is empowered to consciously choose healing.

THOUGHTS ABOUT TRAUMA AND THE BRAIN



*You must learn a new way to think before you can
master a new way to be.*

MARIANNE WILLIAMSON



STRATEGY 1

Awareness

be present



Living in the present is one of the most, if not the most, important mental skills an individual can learn.

CRAIG MANNING

While getting ready for bed, Ashley suddenly felt like she was back in her childhood room, experiencing her trauma all over again. Uninvited memories and flashbacks like these caused her to lose chunks of time and made it impossible to get any sleep. Ashley spent most of her days dreading bedtime and wishing she had something to help her manage these episodes.

Awareness, the first of the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope, is a tool to manage the overwhelming, triggering moments like those Ashley experienced.

What Is Awareness?

Awareness is being physically and emotionally present in the moment.

It means learning how to develop a healthy relationship with time. Those who struggle with sexual abuse trauma may spend a significant amount of time in either the past or the future rather than staying focused in the present moment.

Why It Works

Because much of Ashley's abuse occurred during the nighttime, her limbic system will warn her that the nighttime can be unsafe. When a traumatic experience happens, the brain takes in all the environmental cues associated with the experience. When any of these environmental cues occur later in life, long past the traumatic experience, the limbic system often sends warning signals that the environment is unsafe. These warning signals are experienced as triggering thoughts, emotions, or feelings in the body.

It is normal for you to use coping tools to deal with these triggering thoughts, emotions, or feelings. You should not beat yourself up for using various coping methods to survive, even if some of your survival methods are not healthy in the long term. But learning and practicing healthy strategies is critical to long-term healing, satisfaction, and well-being.

With increased Awareness, you can help your limbic system recognize the difference between then and now. Knowing what you feel is the first step to connect with the present. As you become more

aware of what you are feeling in the moment, you can learn how to manage those feelings as they arise.

DISSOCIATION

One of the coping tools your brain may use is something called *dissociation*. Dissociating occurs when you mentally transport yourself somewhere else because being where you are is too painful.

Clinical therapist Jim LaPierre had this to say:

The human brain has a safety switch that gets engaged by traumatic exposure and experiences. It's similar to being in shock but we remain there until it's long over. We detach. We create degrees of separation between ourselves and what we feel, think, perceive, and ultimately, this impacts not only our worldview but also our perception of self. Clinically, this is called "dissociation."

While dissociation can help avoid pain at the time of the abuse, this coping tool can create problems in the present. One of the drawbacks of being so checked out is the absence of emotion or feelings in the body. While this may be helpful in reducing the negative feelings you have, it also means you miss out on feeling positive things. The amazing thing about the brain and body is that it can be repaired and re-taught. You can learn to increase your connection to the present, strengthening your ability to feel and experience things around you.

LIVING IN THE PRESENT

Recently there has been a movement towards learning how to live more fully in the *now*. Learning to live in the present doesn't dismiss the importance of the past or the future, but it does put both in perspective.

All three components of time—the past, present, and future—are necessary for you to understand your experience. Learning to have a healthy relationship with each of these components of time is important. If neither the past nor the future existed, then nothing would make sense in your life because it wouldn't be connected to anything to provide context. Also, with no future to be concerned about, there would be no motivation.



Practicing Awareness, allows you to understand that no matter where you are in the process of recovery, today is the most important day you'll ever have. In fact, if you slow down and think about it, the present moment is the only thing you ever have.

“ Many of us have numbed out our body sensations for so long we need a few opportunities for communication channels to reopen.

TINA WELLING

The accompanying workbook gives several exercises to help you practice Awareness. Grounding techniques are especially powerful because they anchor you in the present and strengthen the conversation between your limbic system and your frontal lobe.

A GROUNDING SUCCESS STORY

A group of friends was on an extended camping trip at a lake resort. During the trip, the group decided to swim across the lake. One member of the group, who wasn't a particularly strong swimmer, began to panic. He was quickly growing tired, and he realized that he had reached the point in the swim where he had as far to go as he had already come. As his body physically struggled, his mind began to fear that he would drown. His limbic system took over and panic set in.

As the rest of the group realized what was happening, they tried to offer him assistance. One friend wisely suggested that he would swim along next to his exhausted friend, and as they swam together he encouraged them both to focus only on one

stroke at a time. The tired swimmer was able to concentrate on the sound of his reassuring friend's voice, reminding him to focus on the movement of his arm, to take one more stroke, then another, then another.

The group of friends was able to swim to the other shore, and while they were mentally and emotionally tired, they all made it safely. The wisdom of focusing on the exact moment and movement in the present made all of the difference in helping the struggling swimmer manage his feelings of overwhelming panic.

It is easy to be overwhelmed by focusing too much on the future and realizing how far away you are from your ultimate goal of healing. But no matter what the task is, it becomes manageable when you focus what you can do now. The task you are doing now becomes your current destination.

Ashley and Awareness

Think back to Ashley getting ready for bed. When she uses the strategy of Awareness, she begins to feel empowered to handle her trauma memories as they arise. As her limbic system instinctively screams that she is in danger, she pauses to anchor herself in the present. She takes a deep breath and starts noticing her senses: the pressure of her feet on the floor, the sound of a fan, and the temperature of her room. She consciously recognizes that her limbic system is reacting to the past as if it is happening right now. Using her frontal lobe, she helps her limbic system understand

the difference between the bed she has now and the one from her childhood. She is not in danger.

Through Awareness, Ashley was able to refocus her thoughts and sensations in the present and, over time, became an expert at being able to manage triggers as they arise.



Awareness

key concepts

- Awareness is being physically and emotionally present in the moment.
- Awareness allows you to become more attentive to what you are feeling from moment to moment so you can learn how to manage those feelings.
- Awareness can help combat *dissociation*—when you mentally transport yourself to somewhere else because where you are feels too painful.
- Awareness utilizes grounding techniques to make sure that you are living more fully in the now.
- Ashley is able to use the strategy of Awareness to manage triggers she has when getting ready for bed.

THOUGHTS ABOUT AWARENESS

—“—

*You have all you need, right now, right here—now go
make life beautiful.*

TESS GUINERY



Acknowledgement

accept your truth

—“—

*Who I will become tomorrow is so unforeseeable
and specific that I'll need every bit of today's lessons
to become her.*

GLENNON DOYLE

To cope with her past, Fiona turned to addictive behaviors. One day a friend approached her and, in confidence, told her about another individual struggling with addiction. As Fiona's friend was describing the individual's behavior, fear and anxiety raced through Fiona as she realized her friend might as well be talking about her. It finally hit her that she too was an addict. As she examined the behaviors of her life, there was just too much behavioral evidence to ignore. She was using her addiction to avoid dealing with the trauma of her past.

What Is Acknowledgement?

Acknowledgement is recognizing the reality and impact of your past trauma. Those who have experienced child sexual abuse often have a difficult time seeing the way that their childhood trauma still affects them in the present. It can be easier to blame negative coping mechanisms on something else rather than face what it will take to fully heal.

Why It Works

Practicing Acknowledgement can be empowering because it helps you accept where you are on your healing journey. Repressing the truth of your situation may end up creating a battle within yourself, which is both mentally and physically exhausting.

We know that for many survivors of sexual abuse Acknowledgement can be challenging, but in order to change and grow it's necessary to acknowledge what happened, and to recognize the truth of where you've been and where you currently are. In acknowledging where you're at now, you can better determine the next steps you want to take and where you want to go from here.

SELF-DEFEATING BEHAVIORS

Many survivors engage in self-defeating behaviors like addiction, unhealthy relationships, unsafe sexual encounters, excessive eating, and other harmful activities to cope with their traumatic experiences. These behaviors and their natural consequences can pile

up until you finally break down. The limbic system can make it easy for you to dismiss the extent and impact of self-defeating behaviors since denial is the safest and easiest response. Because your limbic system acts subconsciously, Acknowledgement is crucial to bringing these impulsive behaviors into the light so you can make conscious, empowered choices.

Feeling shame is common when facing these impulsive behaviors, and you may be embarrassed to seek help. As you complete the exercises in the accompanying workbook and work with a trained therapist, you may be able to identify the self-defeating behaviors that are holding you back. Only after you've acknowledged them can you then work to change.



Other people can help you apply the tool of Acknowledgement. When a survivor can tell her deepest feelings and secrets in a safe environment with someone who can be trusted, the burdens of the past can be lightened. It may be helpful to acknowledge the reality and impact of your abuse with someone who is safe and not afraid to hear your story, someone who can accept the truth as it unfolds and is spoken. Some survivors have never had the experience of trusting or feeling safe with another person. Trust is something that requires effort—it doesn't come easily. But once you share your story with someone else who shows understanding, relief may follow.



A place to start may be with a licensed therapist who specializes in treating trauma survivors. Therapy can be powerful as it creates a confidential environment where past trauma can be explored without fear of criticism or judgment. One of the purposes of therapy is to create experiences where missed developmental needs can be re-established. Survivors of trauma have learned to be resilient and, with proper help, can take that power of resilience to move beyond the trauma and pursue a life with power and direction. Verbalizing traumatic experiences to a trusted therapist or someone else takes courage, and it's normal to feel a little uncomfortable about it during the early stages of healing.

“ In order to move on, you must understand why you felt what you did and why you no longer need to feel it.

MITCH ALBOM

Practicing Acknowledgement by sharing your story can be helpful in the healing process, but it can be challenging. Many who enter “talk therapy” or try to explain their trauma to trusted people immediately notice that using verbal language can be difficult. Some of our deepest emotions are impossible to put into words, and some trauma, including the trauma stored in your body, may be best addressed nonverbally. This can be done through expressive writing, art journaling, or a physical activity like yoga. (Look in the *Reclaim Hope Workbook* for more ideas.)

Many survivors also have the feeling that no matter how well-intentioned another person might be, they can never know the

absolute truth about traumatic experiences. That's true, but research has shown that it's also not necessary for another person to have a full understanding of your specific trauma in order for your experience with that person to be beneficial.

“*Instead of saying, 'I'm damaged, I'm broken, I have trust issues,' say 'I'm healing, I'm rediscovering myself, I'm starting over.'*

HORACIO JONES

Making peace with *yourself* is the overall goal of healing. When you feel empowered and at peace in your own body and mind, the goal has been achieved. A trained professional and other trusting, safe relationships can help you do this.

Fiona and Acknowledgement

Fiona recognized that she wasn't living her truth. She acknowledged her addiction was an unhealthy way of coping with her past and she needed to move past her denial and seek help. The first thing Fiona tried was journaling. It was liberating for her to write down all of the things going on in her mind. At a certain point she realized that she needed to go to the next level to continue on her healing journey. She sought out a trauma-informed therapist and committed to be honest with her feelings.

Acknowledgement is an ongoing process. Fiona learned that as she worked with a therapist, she had to keep getting back in touch with herself, acknowledging where she was making progress, and where she still needed help.

Fiona took responsibility for her healing journey and knew she had to move forward while being compassionate toward herself on the setbacks, triggers, and weaknesses she had.



Acknowledgement

key concepts

- Acknowledgement is recognizing the reality and impact of your past trauma.
- Acknowledgement allows you to accurately see where you currently are so you can determine the next steps to take on your healing journey.
- Acknowledgement helps you temper limbic system responses by turning automatic responses into conscious action and bringing your truth into the light.
- It might be beneficial to practice Acknowledgement with the help of another person like a trusted friend, family member, or therapist.
- Fiona is able to use Acknowledgement to recognize that she was not in control and needed help to overcome her addiction and move forward.

THOUGHTS ABOUT ACKNOWLEDGEMENT



Although difficult, change is always possible. What holds us back from making the changes we desire are our own limiting thoughts and actions.

SATSUKI



Power Through Surrender

let it be

— “ —

*Attempting to control everything actually
increases anxiety.*

ALLISON COHEN

Lyla struggled for years with anxiety, and she was losing hope of ever overcoming it. In her desperation, she sought professional help. She had gotten herself into a vicious cycle, to the point where even *thinking* about her anxiety could give her a panic attack. Lyla began feeling defeated and out of control.

After she understood the two parts of her brain, Lyla recognized that these constant anxious thoughts came from her limbic system and weren't always in her conscious control. Lyla needed to learn about her trauma voice and find Power Through Surrender.

What Is Power Through Surrender?

Power Through Surrender is **coexisting in a positive way with intrusive trauma responses**. If your goal is to be empowered and strengthened, you might wonder how the concept of surrendering can possibly be helpful. However, Power Through Surrender increases your power by allowing, accepting, and moving through experiences with your limbic system instead of against them.

Why It Works

All of us want to feel like we're in control. However, much of the suffering you experience in life can be directly related to your need for control, especially when trying to tightly hold onto things that are out of your hands. So, naturally, when you realize there are things outside your control, you may feel anxious and uncertain. But until you surrender, you'll continue to battle with memories or self-defeating behaviors, thinking you're strong enough to manage them through sheer control or willpower.

It may seem surprising, but the struggle for control over thoughts and emotions can actually intensify the experience. George H. Eifert wrote, "Several independent lines of research suggest that attempts to suppress and control unwanted thoughts and feelings can result in more (not fewer) unwanted thoughts and emotions." With Power Through Surrender, you are neither suppressing nor controlling unwanted thoughts. You take away their power by *letting them be* rather than fighting them.



Learning a New Response

Unwanted thoughts, emotions, past memories, and triggers will come up from time to time. It's the nature of your brain, the limbic system, and how your body has learned to cope. You are neither good nor bad for experiencing these. But simply *having* these experiences doesn't automatically have to lead to suffering. It's often the endless struggle with them that creates additional pain if you try to fight an impossible battle with the involuntary responses your brain and body naturally produce.

With an increased understanding of how the Two-Part Brain works, as well as understanding the strategies of Awareness and Acknowledgement, you now have the foundation to make an

informed choice on how to respond more effectively. When unwanted thoughts, emotions, and sensations crash upon you, you can receive them with acceptance. Reclaim your power by allowing yourself to move through the feelings without having to indulge them, control them, or fight them. This is what Power Through Surrender is all about.

You may be asking yourself, “What exactly am I supposed to surrender to?” Surrender to those things you can’t change and have no power to do anything about. Surrender to the fact that you cannot control what thoughts and triggers enter your mind or the response from the limbic system.



SURRENDERING IS A PROCESS

Everybody experiences surrender differently. Some people may have a powerful, enlightening experience when they practice Power Through Surrender. But for most, it is an ongoing process, not an event. It's normal for feelings to fluctuate from day to day as you learn when to wrestle with something and when to let it be. Thoughts and emotions will still automatically happen from time to time because these are a natural part of human experience, but through practicing Power Through Surrender over time, these thoughts and emotions will become less intense.

You may wonder, "How am I supposed to surrender to thoughts without letting them take over?" Imagine you are standing in an ocean and you see a large wave coming towards you. If you were to try to control the wave, you'd probably end up being overpowered and struggle to keep afloat. But what if instead of controlling the wave, you learned to move with it, allowing yourself to bob in the water? The wave will still be there, but learning to ride it out can keep your head above water. When you can recognize and let troubling thoughts and emotions simply be there, they tend to actually lose their power to take over just like a wave loses the power to wash you ashore.

Beginning the move toward surrender starts with a bit of courage and the desire to change. You can begin to change at any moment, and over time, that change can become lasting.

“*Whatever we plant in our subconscious mind and nourish with repetition and emotion will one day become a reality.*”

EARL NIGHTINGALE

MANAGING REMINDERS OF TRAUMA

It is natural to become frustrated when uncomfortable feelings or memories related to your past abuse seem to surface again and again. However, you may inadvertently reinforce or feed into these feelings and thoughts by attempting to forcefully resist them. For example, you may have been so overwhelmed at a recurring memory that you yelled, “Stop it!” or “Go away!” While yelling gives you a sense of control in the moment, your limbic system response deepens and strengthens because it perceives a threat and responds to it. The more practice you have at responding to these threats, the stronger your limbic response gets.

With Power Through Surrender, you manage the limbic system not by arguing with it but by consciously recognizing when something about the experience you are having now is reminding you of your trauma or surfacing unwanted emotions. Instead of engaging with them, strengthening your frontal lobe to better guide your response will help you slowly gain true power over the reminders of trauma that arise again and again.

Lyla and Power Through Surrender

When Lyla learned about Power Through Surrender, she was better equipped with her anxiety. Every time Lyla started to feel anxious, she began to consciously recognize this as a reminder of her past trauma. She would pause, ground herself, acknowledge the anxious thoughts, and then let them be until they dissipated. Through

her efforts and lots of practice, she was able to strengthen the relationship between her frontal lobe and limbic system and find Power Through Surrender.



Power Through Surrender

key concepts

- Power Through Surrender is coexisting in a positive way with intrusive trauma responses.
- Power Through Surrender allows you to learn a new way to respond to reflexive thoughts, emotions, and triggers rather than fighting a losing battle with the limbic system.
- Power Through Surrender helps you determine what you can and can't control and is a process practiced over time.
- Power Through Surrender enables you to identify reminders of past trauma and strengthen the frontal lobe to manage your limbic system's responses.
- Lyla is able to use Power Through Surrender by recognizing how her body is experiencing reminders of past trauma and letting those thoughts be.

THOUGHTS ABOUT POWER THROUGH SURRENDER

— “ —

*In order to heal we must first forgive... and sometimes
the person we must forgive is ourselves.*

MILA BRON



STRATEGY 4

Mindfulness

I choose

—“—

It is the ability to choose which makes us human.

MADELEINE L'ENGLE

Mia felt like she had made progress in her healing journey, but she often found herself thinking negative thoughts about her body. She disliked the way she looked and was dissatisfied with her weight. Mia's insecurities about her appearance meant that she didn't do things she enjoyed, like swimming or going to the beach, because she didn't want to be seen in a bathing suit. She had an upcoming vacation with her nieces, and she didn't want to miss out on the fun of the beach, but she felt anxious about others seeing her body. She imagined that other beachgoers would be disgusted by her, and that she would become the topic of their conversations and jokes.

Mia shared her fears and insecurities about her body with her therapist, and together they developed a plan: anytime Mia noticed she had a negative thought about her body, she would acknowledge the thought, smile to herself, then choose to tell herself one thing she liked about her body. While she didn't think she had a pretty face, she did like the color of her eyes, so that would be where she would start—she could appreciate the color of her eyes.

What Is Mindfulness?

Jon Kabat-Zinn, creator of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, describes Mindfulness as “pay[ing] attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally. Mindfulness invites you to become more familiar with your own body, mind, and heart as well as the world around you, thus allowing you to discover important dimensions of your own life and being.” We love this definition because of the words used to describe this practice: purpose, present, non-judgmental, discover.

Because of our focus on healing and empowerment, we emphasize those aspects; for our purposes, we define Mindfulness as **focusing on empowering thoughts and choosing healing actions**. Through Mindfulness, you can harness the power of choice. You can choose your actions regardless of what is happening around you.

Why It Works

Mindfulness helps your frontal lobe and limbic system communicate better by teaching your frontal lobe to consciously recognize the

signals from your limbic system. It focuses on your *response*. Over time, practicing mindfulness can help your frontal lobe and limbic system work together better.

“*The soul always knows what to do to heal itself. The challenge is to silence the mind.*”

CAROLINE MYSS

Mindfulness training is not some mystical process, but a very practical, everyday method to respond in a helpful way to your thoughts. When negative thoughts, cravings, or triggers come into your mind, the frontal lobe has a chance to do something with them. This is where your individual choice comes into play. You can't change the past, but you can learn to limit the impact it has on you in the present.

Mindfulness and the Brain

How exactly do you practice Mindfulness to get your frontal lobe and limbic system to work together in a more functional way? Neuroscientists have discovered that the brain and body react similarly to a thought that is vividly imagined in the “mind’s eye” and to something that is seen by the physical eyes. A single thought creates a flow of chemical reactions in the brain, which are then carried throughout the body.

The good news is the brain is capable of rewiring itself through the practice of Mindfulness and self-directed physical activities. When you choose to pay attention to one thought over another, especially if the focus of your attention is on thoughts that are empowering and healing, the brain (including the limbic system) can learn to respond in a more productive way. You have the ability to not only

manage your thoughts and behaviors but to *redirect* them towards thoughts and actions that help you heal.

Your brain, however, may not be used to this process, and you'll need repeated practice to create the pathways that will help your brain respond to stressful situations mindfully. Think of your Mindfulness practice like this: Imagine walking through a field of tall grass. The first time you walk through, you'll have to push the grass out of the way, and it can be tiresome work. As you continue to take that same path, the grass will flatten and, over time, your steps will eliminate the grass altogether. The process of rewiring your brain is a lot like walking through the field. You are blazing a trail in your neuropathways. The first few times you practice Mindfulness, or other self-directed activities, it may be challenging; you may not feel like you're making much progress. However, over time your brain will get more comfortable with what you're guiding it to do and this process will become more natural.

CHOOSE HEALING ACTIONS

At every moment of our lives we have a choice as to which thoughts or sensations we'll give our attention to and which ones we'll let slip away. Most people are not accustomed to the focus this requires. Choosing to focus and refocus your attention on helpful thoughts, actions, or sensations takes patience and time; the good news is that you have the capacity to build that skill. Even if you feel frozen and helpless because of past trauma, the process of change and empowerment can begin in an instant with a choice.

One of the things we love about practicing Mindfulness is that it creates an opportunity for you to really apply the Awareness and Acknowledgement strategies by first focusing on the here-and-now, paying attention to feelings and sensations (in a non-judgmental way), and then choosing where you'd like to focus your attention. As you practice Mindfulness, it may help to think of something to which you can “anchor” your thoughts. Consider the role an anchor plays for a boat; the anchor keeps the boat secure and prevents it from floating away. The boat is still moved by the wind and the waves, but the anchor keeps the boat from drifting out too far. Mindfulness is similar. You will still experience challenging emotions and situations, but you can return to those empowering thoughts and healing actions to keep you closer to the space in which you wish to be.

There are many ways that you can practice Mindfulness that may bring mental and physical health benefits. Yoga is an example of an empowering, healing action, and an easy anchor to focus on while doing it is your breath. You could also choose to practice matching the rhythm of your breathing to the movements of your body. Anytime you become distracted, you can choose to return to your breath—your anchor—to keep your mind from carrying you away from this moment. In this way, Awareness and Mindfulness are tightly linked in a beautiful, symbiotic process of living in the moment and choosing how you will use your mental and physical energy. The key to Mindfulness is *practice*. Be patient with yourself as you learn to redirect your thoughts and retrain your brain. Much like the repetition required when walking through a field to make a path, allow yourself time to blaze a new trail.

MANAGING THE SHAME VOICE

Mindfulness is a great strategy to manage feelings of shame. It is easy to feel defined by your past, by your struggles, or by the trauma you experienced. This tendency to define yourself, to identify with the negatives and to tell yourself you are bad, is what we call the *shame voice*. You can learn to recognize when the shame voice is echoing inside your mind. Anytime you have thoughts that make you feel as though you aren't good enough, you have the opportunity to recognize (without judgment) that your shame voice is talking, and you can redirect your thoughts away from what the shame voice is telling you. If you can't think of loving things to say to yourself, imagine what you would say to a friend. What would your response be if your best friend came up to you and said one of the negative things that you say to yourself? You would probably respond with something you appreciate about them. Practice, a little at a time, on giving yourself that same level of respect.

As you learn to redirect your thoughts, you'll find that shifting your perspective can prevent the shame voice from controlling your sense of self. Remember that Mindfulness isn't about *battling* with the shame voice. Instead, *observe* what the shame voice is telling you and then gently redirect your thoughts to the kind things you need to hear. Shame doesn't get to define who you are; *you* do.

“ You teach people how to treat you by what you allow, what you stop, and what you reinforce.

TONY GASKINS

CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Practicing Mindfulness can help change your perspective when you

experience negative emotions and discomfort. It will open up new possibilities as you switch from passive to intentional living.

Have you ever heard the story of the three blind men who come across an elephant? One man touches the trunk and says, “This is a hose.” One man feels the tail and says, “No, this is a rope.” The third man wraps his arm around one of the legs and says, “You’re both wrong. This is a tree.” They each had a different perspective, but none of them were seeing the whole picture. Similarly, one thought or action doesn’t tell your entire story.



In addition to helping you see the bigger picture, empowering thoughts often lead to healing actions. As you practice seeing your value and saying kind things to yourself, you may find yourself more interested in mindful eating, more able to believe positive affirmations, and more willing to invest in yourself and your future. Mindfulness helps you focus on the thoughts that can help you grow.

Mia and Mindfulness

Mia practiced being more aware of her negative self-talk, and when she found herself being critical of the image she saw in the mirror, she noticed the thought, paused to smile, and focused on her eyes.



She would remind herself that she liked the color of her eyes, and sometimes she would even lean close to the mirror so she could see the hints of gold mixed in the dark brown.

One day, she caught a glimpse of her reflection in the window as she was playing with her niece. She realized that she liked the way her eyes looked when she smiled, how the corners turned upwards and her eyebrows lifted. She realized that there were probably more things that she liked about herself and her body, and that Mindfulness was helping her to identify those things. She knew it would still take practice, but she felt empowered to think thoughts that would lead to healing actions. She felt less anxiety about her upcoming vacation and looked forward to spending more time with the two little girls who helped her feel so much joy.

Mindfulness

key concepts

- Mindfulness is focusing on empowering thoughts and choosing healing actions.
- Mindfulness may help your frontal lobe and limbic system work together in a more functional way.
- Mindfulness requires practice that can be done in a number of ways (i.e., yoga, mindful breathing, mindful eating, etc.).
- Mindfulness may help you manage feelings of shame.
- Mia practiced Mindfulness by noticing negative self-talk, pausing, and then choosing to refocus on the things she liked about her body.

THOUGHTS ABOUT MINDFULNESS



*You have all you need, right now, right here—now go
make life beautiful.*

TESS GUINERY



STRATEGY 5

Faith

I believe in me

—“—

I am learning every day to allow the space between where I am and where I want to be to inspire me and not terrify me.

TRACEE ELLIS-ROSS

Elena was in a rut. So much of her past was a blur. When she reflected back on her experiences, she didn't feel like she had lived the life she wanted, and she was desperate to make some changes. A nagging fear kept telling Elena that this was her reality; it had always been this way, and it would never change. She wondered if she would ever overcome that fear. Was there anything she could do to keep her hope alive?

What Is Faith?

Life can be so difficult. You know this already, and you've had your own life experiences that prove how much courage it takes to keep going, to keep believing that the sun will rise and the new day will bring potential and opportunity. This courage is the root of Faith, and it already exists within each of us. **We define Faith as acting**

on the belief that you can heal. Practicing Faith doesn't mean having blind optimism or ignoring the pain you've experienced, but rather exercising confidence that the actions you take will help you move forward on your healing journey. This kind of Faith can be cultivated, grown, and practiced over time. It is believing in your power, believing in your strength, believing that healing is possible and that your efforts are worthwhile.

Why It Works

Dr. Carol Dweck studied *resilience* (people's ability to push forward despite setbacks) and discovered that what you believe about yourself and your abilities (what she refers to as *mindset*) has a strong tie to accomplishment. When you embrace a *growth mindset*—meaning you believe in your ability to grow and learn new things—you are nourishing your Faith. It will likely be Faith that helps you recognize and embrace the potential inside you. In some cases, Faith may be the thing that keeps you going during times when it's difficult

“ People become really quite remarkable when they start thinking that they can do things. When they believe in themselves they have the first secret of success.

**NORMAN VINCENT
PEALE**

to believe that change is even possible and may help you to keep working toward that goal despite the uncertainty you feel. And, because healing and growth are a gradual process, feeding your Faith during times when you feel hopeful may help you endure those times when it's harder to see the progress that you've made.



PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

As you read in the chapter about Awareness, being overly preoccupied with the past (or the future) can create challenges that will not serve you well as you heal. Doubt due to past trauma can

threaten to stifle the power of Faith. It can be so easy to feel trapped in the past, or even defined by it. Sometimes it may feel like things are stuck forever the way they are or how they have been in the past, which may make you dread the future. Sometimes you may find that all you can do is hope to hope. Nurture that feeling. Allow those hopeful thoughts and feelings to take root in your mind, to gradually overcrowd the doubt. We believe that hope is a driver of change. Hope may very well be the beginning of a Faith that propels you to plan for a brighter future and to act on those plans.



Ancient mariners used the stars in the night sky to navigate their course. Because the stars are constant, they proved to be a timeless and reliable way to safely arrive at a destination. With this in mind, imagine you are sailing a vast ocean on a dark night. The waves are tossing your ship, the wind is blowing you in another direction, and the current is pushing against you and slowing your progress. But as you look to the guiding constellations in the sky, you can see where you need to go. You find that fixing your sights on a constant point helps you to steer your ship and provides a way for you to course correct when you drift from where you want to be. Much like the stars, Faith is a navigational tool to keep your efforts in sight and to help you stay on course.

“Close your eyes and imagine the best version of you possible. That’s who you really are, let go of any part of you that doesn’t believe it.

C. ASSAAD

While Faith is a strategy for designing a future that brings you more joy, the practice of Faith happens in the present. There are things you can do—*today*—to continue your journey of healing. Sometimes we’re so busy that we don’t take the time to think about where we hope to be in a month, a year, five years, or ten years from now. As you reconnect with yourself through this healing process (and find ways to celebrate yourself), you may feel inspired with ways to lead a more proactive, intentional life. If, however, you aren’t sure what direction you’d like your life to go, you can start by identifying what is important to you, what your moral values are, and what you would like to do more of. With these in mind, you can choose to do small acts each day to work toward those goals

and invest in your hopes. And, as you reach these milestones you can celebrate your ability to learn new things, develop new habits, and work toward something you want to accomplish.

“ We cannot become what we want by remaining what we are.

MAX DEPREE

CHANGE, PROGRESS, AND GROWTH

Change is a process that is ongoing and, thankfully, never-ending. Sometimes things change quickly, other times slowly. Keep in mind that healing is different for everyone. The most important thing is the direction in which you're moving. Healing from child sexual abuse is not something that happens overnight, and you may work on it your entire life. It is also not a destination, which is why we so often refer to healing as a journey—a process of change and growth—one that may inspire you to continually look to the stars of your Faith.

Oftentimes, the way we change, progress, and grow is through struggle. While most of us don't celebrate our challenges, nor would we ask for our worst experiences, there can be beauty in the growth that comes from the struggle; this is sometimes referred to as *post-traumatic growth*. We love this concept because it's a reminder that what we go through, what we survive, can teach us things about ourselves and help us identify what is important to us. Empathy is often developed through struggle, and you may have already noticed this empathy in yourself as others share their challenges with you.

Empathy and growth inspired one survivor in her work as an advocate for youth who are learning to manage their own mental health. Like many of the youth she works with, she knows from personal experience how lonely mental health challenges can be. As she has learned—and continues to learn—how to deal with her own loneliness through understanding her trauma and practicing self-care, she is able to share her education and experiences with others. She is embracing the beautiful strength—the *growth*—she has experienced over the years as she navigates her journey of healing.



Unfortunately, we are often unaware of our own growth. This may cause some people to give up on the process of change and recovery because they don't see improvement. We're here to remind you

that sometimes the winds and storms will blow you temporarily off-course. Don't be discouraged. Every sailor encounters weather that makes it difficult to steer their ship. Wait for a break in the gray clouds and when you see the bright stars, get your bearings back by reminding yourself of your destination. Repeat the positive affirmations that remind you of who you are and what you're working toward: "I am worthy of good things. I am grateful for another day, and I will keep working toward what I want to achieve."

Practicing Faith is more than just wishful thinking; it is using your belief to buoy you up to take any action—great or small—to move from the place you are toward the place you hope to be. Faith reminds you to recognize those things about you that are beautiful and strong *because* you've kept going. That *is strength*. That *is growth*. That *is* something to celebrate, and that something is *you*.

Elena and Faith

Elena worked with her therapist to identify a few things that were important to her and prioritized them, helping her to be more intentional in the life she was choosing to live. She realized that some of those things, like safety and honesty, were likely important to her because she hadn't felt those things as a child. She could see how these priorities could help her to stay focused, to help her create and maintain important boundaries and to practice self-care; she believed that she was worth the effort she was putting into her healing. Because Elena knew she would need some time to make the progress she wanted, she set small, attainable goals for herself

to work on day by day. Her therapist reminded her that, over time, those small acts would accumulate and create the path toward the type of life she hoped to live.

She still had days where she felt overwhelmed, and the people in her support system reassured her that this was a normal part of life and growth. Elena practiced reminding herself that, while she wasn't where she wanted to be yet, she had made progress. This thought sustained her and nurtured her hope, which led to *more* Faith in herself; she believed, really believed, that she would heal her heart and soul one small act at a time.



Faith

key concepts

- Faith is acting on the belief that you can heal.
- Faith is practiced in the present to influence what happens in the future.
- Healing is a journey, and struggle may be a catalyst for growth.
- Progress and growth take patience, time, and effort.
- Elena uses the strategy of Faith to set small goals to act on every day because she believes she can find healing.

THOUGHTS ABOUT FAITH



The only person you are destined to become is the person you decide to be.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON



Conclusion



Instead of saying, 'I'm damaged, I'm broken, I have trust issues,' say 'I'm healing, I'm rediscovering myself, I'm starting over.'

HORACIO JONES

Remember at the beginning of the book when you learned about the art of *kintsugi*? Although you may have felt broken in certain ways, you can reclaim hope and continue your journey of healing. Every step you take will lead you to a greater sense of wholeness, even if it reveals places where you still need to heal.

The 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope

In this book you learned how trauma can impact your brain and received introductions to the 5 Strategies to Reclaim Hope. You'll find more opportunities to apply these strategies in the

accompanying workbook. As a reminder, here are the strategies and their definitions:

AWARENESS

is being physically and emotionally present in the moment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

is recognizing the reality and impact of your past trauma.

POWER THROUGH SURRENDER

is coexisting in a positive way with intrusive trauma responses.

MINDFULNESS

is focusing on empowering thoughts and choosing healing actions.

FAITH

is acting on the belief that you can heal.

As you continue to learn, grow, and heal, these strategies will take on different layers of meaning and importance for you. Depending on where you are on your healing journey, one strategy may resonate more than another, which is why it's beneficial to continue trying out different strategies during different periods of your life.

This Is Your Experience and Your Journey

No one else can heal for you; only you can do that. Everything you try, every step of progress you make, and any setbacks are all a part of *your* experience. Although you are responsible for your own healing, it doesn't mean you have to do it alone. We encourage you

to develop (or continue to develop) a support system, whether that is made up from family, friends, a therapist, or a support group.

At the end of the day what matters the most is that you continue to make healing a priority in your life. Don't compare your healing journey to anyone else's. **You're a survivor, and this is your story.**



*Within each of us lies
not only the potential, but the power
to make a difference.*

SHELAINA MAXFIELD