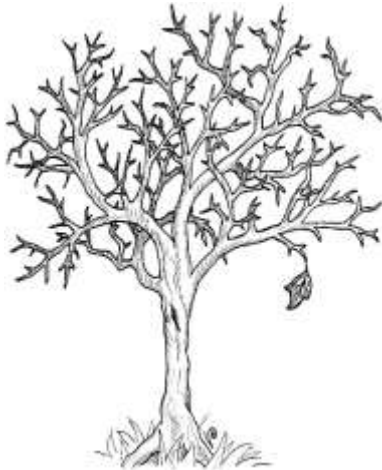


## Week #11 Letting Go

Everything  
that  
begins



**Also Ends.**



Make peace with that  
and all will be well.

The Buddah

## A Zen Story

Author unknown

Two monks were returning home in the evening to their temple. It had been raining and the road was very muddy.

They came to an intersection where a beautiful girl was standing, unable to cross the street because of the mud.

Just in the moment, the first monk picked her up in his arms and carried her across. The monks then continued on their way.

Later that night the second monk, unable to restrain himself any longer, said to the first, “How could you do that?! We monks should not even look at females, much less touch them. Especially young and beautiful ones.”

“I left the girl there,” the first monk said,  
“Are you still carrying her?”

**Not forgiving,  
is like  
drinking rat poison,  
and then  
waiting for the rat  
to die.**

Anne Lamott  
Author of  
*Traveling Mercies:  
Some Thoughts on Faith*

## Letting Go: Overview

Previous chapters in this workbook have taught you that the only way to *let go* of something is to  
**WORK THROUGH IT.**

Feelings must be **acknowledged**. Emotional pain must be **experienced** rather than denied, avoided or stuffed. Lessons must be **learned**. Coping skills replace self-defeating behaviors and negative thoughts. **Intention** aligns behavior with values. **Letting Go** is the final stage in the process of this emotional healing.

The formula for emotional healing is:



**Identify issues + experience emotions + learn coping skills = Letting Go**

This section explores how to *let go*, if you really want to.

**Your actions will reveal your intention.**

In this section you will:

### Stage 1: Acknowledge.

- Apply Dr. Kubler–Ross’s stages of grief and loss to the stages of emotional healing.
- **Identify** the "UNDERLYING" or "CORE" emotions
- **Embrace** your emotional pain. Claim and validate all of your emotions. **Identify** the self-defeating thoughts and behaviors that block your ability to work through issues.

### Stage 2: Learn

- 10 Tools For Putting The Past Behind You.
- Affirmation Tool: “Right Action Thoughts” for Letting Go. *Letting Go Takes Love.*
- Practice the Letting Go Meditation Tools.
- Apply the “Taking Care of Yourself: Tools for Letting Go.”
- Complete “10 Steps to Create a Personal Relapse Prevention Plan.”

### Stage 3: Let GO.

- *Letting go* is simply the result of completing your work in stage 1 and 2.
- If you have not *let go*, you have more work to do. You may repeat stages 1 and 2 as often as necessary. Emotional healing occurs on various levels over time.

## Letting go—Grieving the loss, accepting the life lesson and moving on



**Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross** (1926-2004) created a model to describe the emotional stages of grief and loss. Her stages of grief apply to all major life losses. Traumatic events and death create feelings of loss. Unemployment, retirement and empty nests involve losses. Changes in health and the aging process both create a sense of loss and grief. Even choosing to give up bad habits such as smoking, drinking, excessive shopping or over-eating create a sense of loss. Below, I have added my interpretation of Dr. Kubler-Ross's five stages of loss and grief to the process of emotional healing.

**Denial** This stage seems surreal. The emotional numbness and confusion feels like finding yourself trapped in a bad dream or nightmare, “*What’s real? Is this happening? I can’t believe it.*” You keep waiting to wake up, but waking up in this case means you will discover the bad dream is real.

**Anger** Once you realize the loss or change is real, anger and indignation creep in. “*How could this happen? Who is to blame? This is not fair. This is not right.*” Anger and blame protect you from the pain of emerging out of your denial. Anger is the defensive outer layer of emotion sheltering your more painful and vulnerable feelings of sorrow, vulnerability shame and fear. In the grieving process, anger is simply sorrow and fear disguised by a loud voice, sharp tongue or clenched fist.

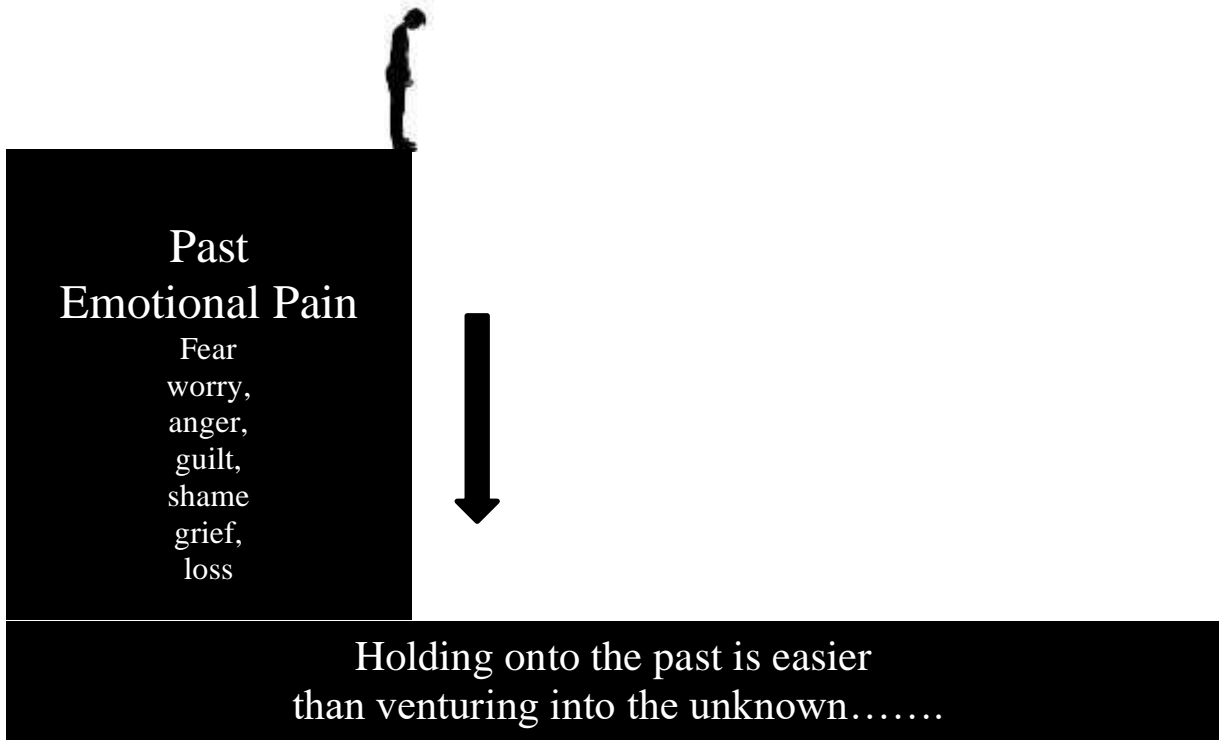
**Bargaining** is a magical thought process that creates a false sense of power or control. The bargain refers to a deal with a higher power. “If I \_\_\_\_\_, then everything will be okay again.” Bargaining is a combination of denial, wishful thinking and magical problem-solving.

**Depression** When bargaining does not bring results, depression sets in. Those deeper, more painful underlying emotions now rise to the surface, no longer bargained away, shielded by denial or disguised by anger and blame. Depression is the most emotionally painful stage-the darkness before the light. People who have not yet “let go” have not fully worked through this stage. Rather than experiencing their pain, they return to blocking it with denial, anger/blame or self-defeating behaviors.

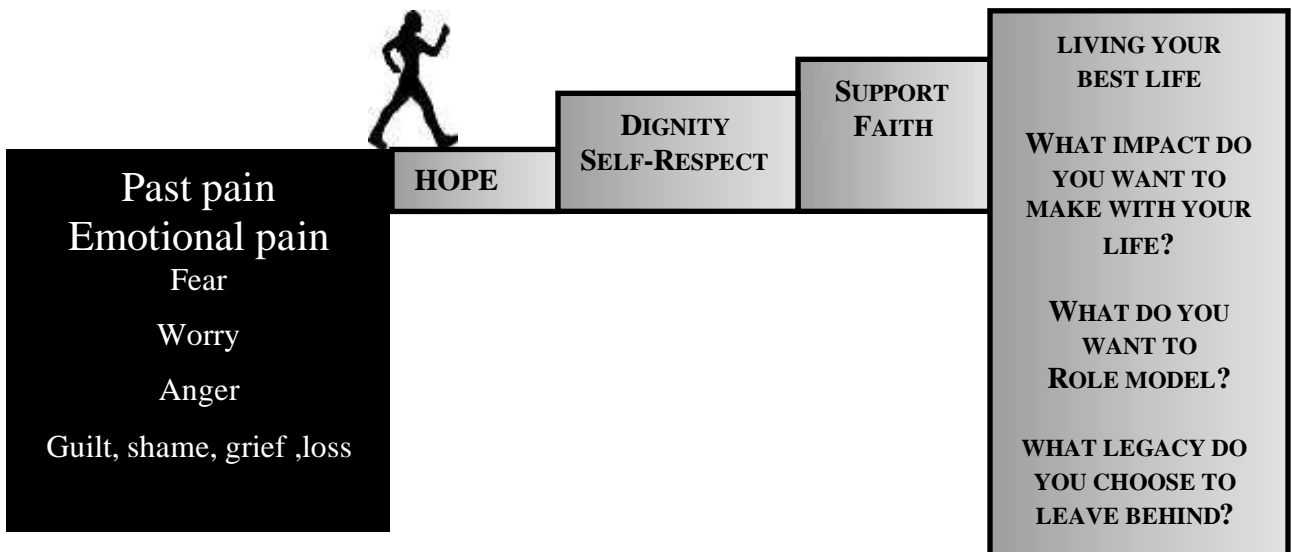
**Acceptance** With the passage of time, the practice of good coping skills and the completion of difficult emotional work, depression gradually transforms into acceptance. Just as *letting go* is the result of successful emotional healing, acceptance is the result of working through Dr. Kubler-Ross's first four stages of grief.

- ❖ Acceptance is a choice.
- ❖ Acceptance requires defining yourself as a survivor rather than as a victim.
- ❖ Acceptance of what you cannot control allows you to move forward.

Letting Go is a Process and a Choice.  
Letting go of the past can feel  
like stepping..  
off  
a cliff.

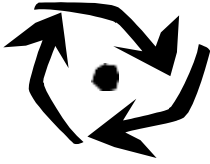


To let go of the past, you must first create a future  
that you choose to embrace.



## Letting Go: A Process And A Choice

*“The world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it.” Helen Keller*



Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross never intended her stages of grief and loss to be linear. Emotional healing unfolds in multiple directions with various intensities. Just as you begin to accept the change, loss or trauma, you find yourself detoured down yet another dead end with anger or depression. Emotional healing is a process.

Working through the process is a choice.

**“Problems do not go away. They must be worked through or else they remain, forever a barrier to the growth and development of the spirit.”**

*M. Scott Peck*

**Are you ready to LET GO?** Circle “Yes” or “No” to the questions below.

- Yes No** 1. I have identified the thoughts, behaviors, memories or events that I wish to “let go.” (*Example: anger, worry, fear, low self-esteem, relationship, bad habit, loss, death*).
- Yes No** 2. I have identified and experienced my full range of emotions surrounding the issues I wish to release. (*Example: “I raged, cried, meditated and prayed until a sense of peace washed over me”*).
- Yes No** 3 I spent time journaling and expressing my emotions related to “letting go.” (*Example: “ I practiced each tool and completed every exercise in this workbook”*).
- Yes No** 4. I have envisioned my future. I have created a plan for how I will move forward. (*Example: “I feel ready to release the past. I am not afraid to live my new life. I am able to picture my new future in great detail*).
- Yes No** 5. I have forgiven myself. (*Example: “I forgive myself for feeling broken, helpless, stuck, guilty, self-destructive, angry, and afraid. I realize now that my reaction was human”*).
- Yes No** 6. I have created coping skills to replace my self-defeating thoughts and bad habits.
- Yes No** 7. I have aligned my vision of my future with my intention to let go and release the past.

**Scoring:** “No” answers indicate a need to continue working. You cannot release what you have not *worked through*. Use the tools on the next few pages to help continue your work.

## 10 Tools for Putting the Past Behind You Feeling stuck? Unable to let go?

Have you *worked through* the issues that block your ability to *let go*?  
NOW is the turning point in your life. Today you have choices.

### 1. Meditate Through Healthy Grieving. Use your flashlight.

**Envision yourself holding a flashlight as you mentally travel into your unresolved, painful, dark emotions.** Your flashlight shines insight onto whatever pain you encounter. Your healthy, loving thoughts empower your flashlight to illuminate the darkness. As you practice this meditation, you may notice an urge to go have a snack, drink, smoke, or do a household chore. This urge distracts you from mindfulness and insight. Continue to re-focus your attention within. Shine your light of attention on unresolved emotions. Embrace them. Allow a good healthy cry if needed. Use your flashlight to shine your way back up out of the painful emotional darkness when you are ready.



### 2. Accept the fact that you cannot *change* the past.

But you may change what you *tell yourself* about the past. Tell yourself that you did the best you could. You may change how you *remember* the past. Remember the life lessons. You may choose your *response* to the past. Choose dignity.

### 3. Understand that bad things do happen to good people.

Emotional healing is difficult for those who believe God, the Universe or a Higher Power abandoned them. Seek spiritual counsel to address feeling guilty, blamed or punished because something bad happened. Consider reading Harold Kushner's book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*.

### 4. Seek support from other survivors or role models.

Find a circle of people who have successfully healed and released similar pain. Learn how they worked through their pain. Let yourself feel loved, inspired and supported by people you respect.

### 5. Love heals.

Loving thoughts and actions heal from the inside out. Generate love through providing service to others. Service work requires feeling passionate about a cause, a charity or community organization. Give your time and energy to something greater than yourself. According to *The Course in Miracles*, "*Whatever you send out, comes back multiplied.*"

### 6. Visualize the life you desire.

Creating the life you seek today helps release your hold on the past. Imagine yourself free. Believe that you deserve a new life. Begin today. Do not give time or attention to the issues you wish to release. Stephen R. Covey said it this way:

*"The one thing more powerful than your past, is your vision of the future." S. Covey*



## 7. Risk making mistakes.

Consider mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow. Give yourself permission to be human. Abraham Lincoln lost several political races prior to becoming president. Release the need to be perfect. Let yourself explore future possibilities without the fear of failure or fear of success.

## 8. Create closure.

Use a symbolic gesture to finalize your “letting go” process. Ideas you might try include:

- A. **Burning Bowl:** Write a list of the past events or feelings you wish to release. Place the written list in a safely contained fire or flame. Watch the flames transform the past into smoke.
- B. **Plant** a memorial tree, bush or flower.
- C. **Release** a balloon with a message in it.
- D. **Donate** or recycle objects that trigger unwanted memories.
- E. **Reorganize**, rearrange, de-clutter, cleanse and simplify your living space.
- F. **Begin** a new tradition to symbolize your fresh start.
- G. **Treat yourself** to a massage, new hairstyle, manicure, makeover, gym membership or vacation to symbolize letting go and moving on.
- H. **Plan your future.** Schedule your next few days, months or even years by using a calendar or journal to navigate exactly how you will move forward from here.

## 9. Start NOW.

No more putting off “letting go” until..... . Take the first step now. Choose one small thing you could do right NOW to move forward. Be a Nike person. Just do it.



## 10. Remember that your power is in the present.

Today is all you have. You are in this moment. Take a breath. Hold it. Release it. Feel your muscles gently relax with each exhale. Look at the time. Say the time and the date aloud. You are in this moment right NOW. Yesterday has no hold on you. Today brings new choices and new possibilities. With every new breath, you have a new opportunity. Accept that the

only time you own is NOW. Right NOW, what do you choose? Breathe.

*“I’m having trouble letting go. I’m afraid that if I let go, it means I don’t care.”*

Kathryn, age 48

### **Affirmation Tool: “Right Action Thoughts” for Letting Go**

“Letting go” may require a mind-shift into the thoughts that allow you to detach without feeling heartless, selfish or unloving. Use the following below to affirm the “right action” thoughts of letting go.

#### **To “Let Go” Takes Love**

To “let go” does not mean to stop caring. It means I cannot do it for someone else.

To “let go” is not to cut myself off. It is the realization that I cannot control another.

To “let go” is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.

To “let go” is not to try to change or blame another. It is to make the most of myself.

To “let go” is not to care for, but to care about.

To “let go” is not to fix, but to be supportive.

To “let go” is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being.

To “let go” is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes, but to allow others to effect their own destinies.

To “let go” is not to be protective. It is to permit another to face reality.

To “let go” is not to deny, but to accept.

To “let go” is not to nag, scold or argue, but instead to discover my own shortcomings and to correct them.

To “let go” is not to adjust everything to my desires, but to take each day as it comes and to cherish myself in it.

To “let go” is not to criticize and regulate anybody, but to try to become what I dream I can be.

To “let go” is not to regret the past, but to grow and live to the future.

To “let go” is to fear less and to love more.

*Author Unknown*

## Continue your journey toward releasing and letting go



*“Backward, turn backward,  
oh time, in your flight,  
make me a child again just for tonight”*  
Jim Brandenburg

**Further reflection heals unresolved issues that interfere with releasing the past.  
Use the questions and examples below as a guide.  
Then reflect on your own questions and answers.**

### **1. How are your thoughts and actions today connected to your past?**

Jennifer: *“Remember that shy kid in school, the one at the playground with no friends? That was me. I’m 30 years old now but I still have trouble speaking up at work. I haven’t really made friends with my co-workers.”*

Debbie: *“I remember as a child I always had to take care of my younger siblings. When I complained about it, my mother called me a selfish brat. Now I’m a 52 year old nurse and I feel guilty taking care of myself or spending time developing my own interests.”*

### **2. What current thoughts or actions stem from your attempt to correct the past?**

Jennifer: *“It’s easier to be alone because it’s familiar but I am tired of the loneliness. I joined a therapy group because I need to learn to trust and enjoy people.”*

Debbie: *“My becoming a nurse was my attempt to correct the past. I found a profession that pays me to take care of other people. Now I need to learn how to take care of myself.”*

### **3. How would you be different RIGHT NOW if you were not focused on past pain?**

Jennifer: *“I’d be confident at work. I’d invite a co-worker to lunch. I’d volunteer to help at the community center sporting events. I think I might even join a team.”*

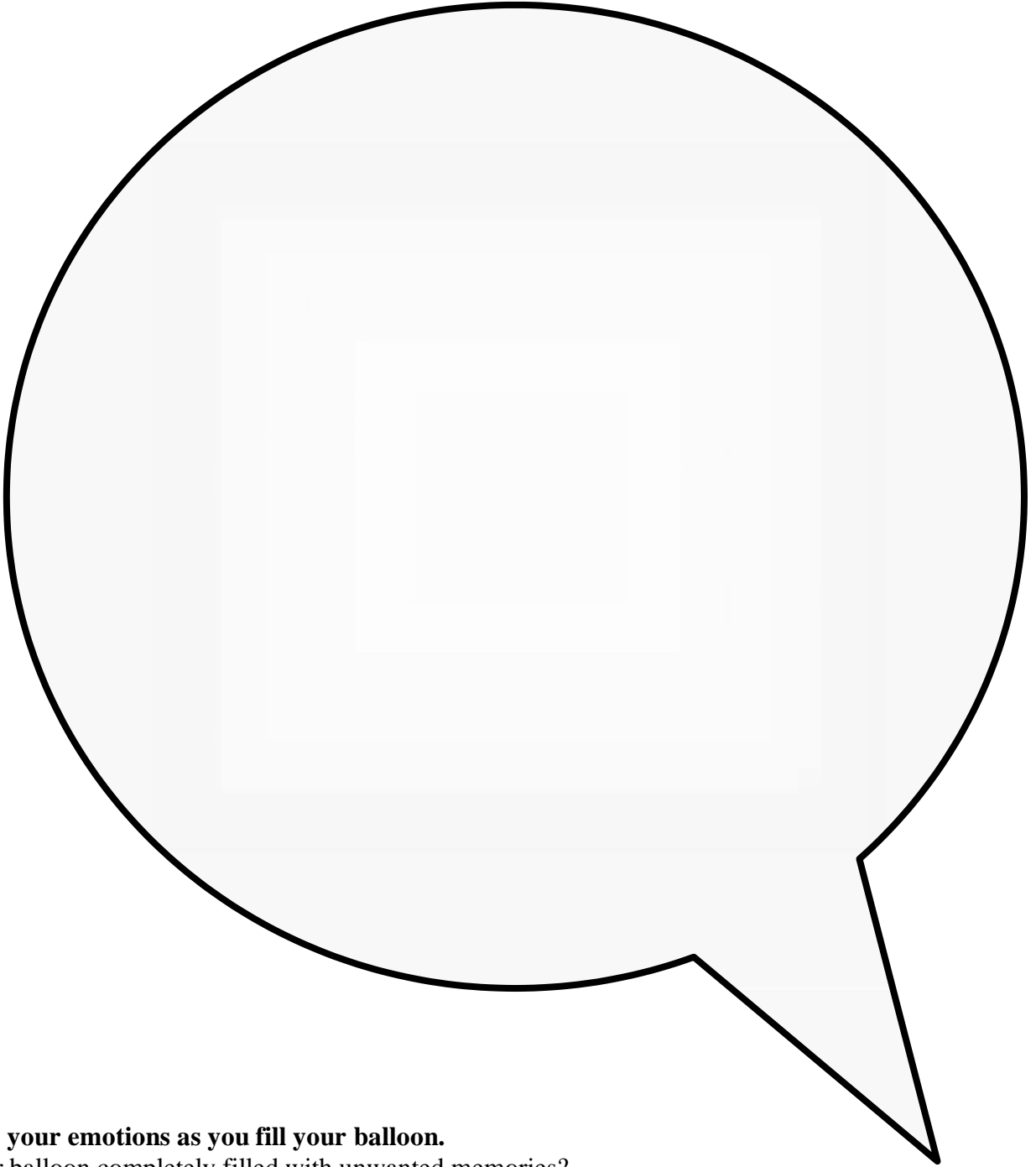
Debbie: *“I would stop feeling so guilty for my success. I’d quit loaning my family money. I think I could even buy myself something nice and not feel selfish.”*

## Letting Go Meditation Tool

**Part 1. Choose something you would like to release.** Place that thought, event, emotion or person in the center of a large imaginary balloon. That balloon will magically transport all that you wish to release, straight up to the outermost reaches of the universe. You may put everything in this balloon that you would like to release. Use the example below as a guide, then create your own balloon on the next page.



**Part 2. Your turn. Write everything you wish to release in your balloon.**



**Notice your emotions as you fill your balloon.**

Is your balloon completely filled with unwanted memories?

Unwanted emotions?

What shade would you like your balloon to be? Color it now.

Envision this balloon in your mind as you practice the following meditation.

## Letting Go Meditation

Take a deep breath.

Notice the cooling sensation around your nostrils as you inhale.

Hold it.

Slowly release your breath. Notice the warmth around your nostrils as you exhale.

Repeat this breathing exercise until your body feels relaxed and calm.



Now picture your balloon filled with emotions and memories. You have filled your balloon with everything you wish to release. You are at peace with your decision to release the past. You are at peace with your choice to live in today.

Imagine that your balloon has a very long string. Feel that string in your hands. Does it feel rough or smooth in your grip? Are you holding tight? Or is your grip loose? This string is your only connection to those unwanted emotions and memories. This connection is a choice.

When you are ready, slowly release the string.

Feel your grip release and relax.

Watch your balloon drift up and away.

Higher.....Higher.

How did it feel to let go? Now that your balloon has been released, you no longer need to use your energy to hold on to your past. What do you choose to do with your time and energy now?

If you resisted letting go, what are you still holding on to?

What purpose is served by maintaining your connection?

What will help you choose to let go?

Give yourself the permission you need.

You may let go when you are ready.



## TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF TOOLS

*As a therapist, it's my job to witness the emotional pain, suffering and heartache of my clients. I am frequently asked how I am able to "let go" of the stress I encounter on a daily basis. My answer lies in the advice I received at the end of graduate school. I no longer recall the source, but I want share this advice with you. It has worked for me:*

1. Know that you are knowledgeable, competent and trust your skills.
2. Have reasonable expectations for yourself.
3. Understand the dynamics of grief. Accept your own losses-resolve your own grief.
4. Think about what your spiritual purpose is and feed your soul.
5. Understand where you are most vulnerable, identify your own needs and keep checking to see if you are meeting them.



6. Live "life" as you must-not as others would have you. You are not here to meet the expectations of others.
7. Know how to ask for help when you need it-you have that right. Have capable friends.
8. Have a support system that you can trust: friends, professionals, ministers and community resources.
9. Don't make someone else your whole life. Be careful not to lose yourself.
10. Give yourself permission to make mistakes and try again.
11. Understand stress: its causes, prevention and management.
12. Accept the fact that you will die; you must think about it, talk about it, and let it go. Only when you accept death will you truly begin to appreciate life and people in it.



# Relapse Prevention

## 10 Steps to Create a Personal Relapse Prevention Plan

Life is not traveled in perfectly straight lines. Stress happens. Bad habits create detours. Self-defeating thoughts and behaviors cause people to lose alignment with their values and intention. I use “relapse” to refer to falling back into old patterns of self-destructive thoughts or actions.

**“Relapse Prevention” refers to getting back on track once the inevitable detour has occurred.**

Complete this aftercare plan by filling in the blanks below.

### 1. Incorporate a healthy lifestyle into your daily routine.

*Example: “I will create a routine bed time. I will pack my lunch. I will plan vacation days.”*

My healthy lifestyle plan is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### 2. Practice time management daily.

*Example: “I will keep a calendar and use a planner. I will schedule time each day for getting projects completed. I will schedule relaxation time. I will limit how many nights and weekends are busy.”*

My time management plan is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

### 3. Prioritize emotional needs in a daily routine.

*Example: “I will meditate, journal and practice mindfulness regarding my emotions.”*

My plan to address my emotional needs is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.



### 4. Schedule social and recreational needs into a monthly routine.

*Example: “I will walk with a friend for 20 minutes each day, attend my club meetings and plan recreation once per week. I will spend time on hobbies three times a week.”*

My social and recreational plan is: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.



**5. Address spiritual needs in a daily or weekly routine.**

*Example: "I will meditate every morning. I will listen to inspirational materials."*

My spiritual plan is: \_\_\_\_\_

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**6. Seek role models and mentors.**

*Example: "I will befriend people I respect. I will read inspirational biographies."*

My plan for role models and mentors is: \_\_\_\_\_

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**7. Detach from people who sabotage your progress.**

*Example: "I will end unproductive phone conversations. I'll take my own car when I visit difficult people so I can leave when I need to. I'll respect my own privacy. I won't tell everyone my personal business."*

My detachment plan is: \_\_\_\_\_

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**8. Make decisions based on VALUES.**

*Example: "I won't participate in family or office gossip anymore. I will stop yelling at my kids."*

My plan for making decisions based on my values is: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**9. Review your progress regularly.**

*Examples: "I'll keep track of what I eat, how much I spend and I'll review this book with friends once a month to monitor progress."*

My plan to track progress is: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**10. When you relapse, you can resume *positive intention* anytime that you wish.**

*Example: "I stopped working on my goals then I resumed where I left off and started charting my progress again. I did not let my relapse become an excuse to give up completely. I treated myself as I treat my friends when they fall. I helped myself back up using the 80/20 rule."*

My plan to resume right action following relapse is: \_\_\_\_\_

---



## **Tips to Compliment Your Personal Relapse Prevention Plan**

**Use these additional ideas to compliment your personal plan:**

**L**isten to your loving inner voice. Let it guide you in all areas of your life.

**I**dentify your personal dreams and goals.

**F**ocus on mindfulness and intention. Set aside a few minutes each morning and evening for self-reflection.

**E**nvision yourself as the person you wish to become.

**S**implify your life. Minimize noise, clutter and chaos.

**O**bserve yourself. Become a witness to your own life.

**L**et your healed inner-loving voice calm your fears and self-defeating thoughts.

**U**nwind at the end of each day. “Clock out” 30 to 90 minutes prior to sleep. No more chores, no more work. Create balance by maintaining a regular bedtime routine-even on weekends.

**T**ake advantage of the free community resources available in your area. Use the library, internet, newspaper or yellow pages to explore options for relaxation, learning and support.

**I**magine your life free from negative thoughts and self-defeating actions.

**O**rganize a small discussion group to practice the material in this workbook.

**N**ever give up on yourself. You are worth your hard work.

**S**uccess stems from believing in yourself. *You* are that wise person you have been waiting for your whole life. All of your answers lie inside of you. Take a deep breath. Release. When you are ready, believe.



*“Home is knowing.*

*Knowing your mind, knowing your heart, knowing your courage.*

*If we know ourselves, we're always home, anywhere.” Glinda the Good Witch*

## Closure Exercise: Positive Feedback Tool

Bring closure to a shared experience, event or gathering with the Positive Feedback Tool. **Closure in this context refers to a sense of peace about the fact that something has come to an end, been released or *let go*.**

For readers working with a small group of people, this tool is a nice way to bid farewell as you end your journey together. The Positive Feedback Tool also serves as closure to a family reunion, birthday celebration, retirement party or other intimate gatherings.

### Group Instructions for Positive Feedback Tool:

1. Give each member a piece of paper or greeting card.
2. Instruct each person to write his or her own name on the front of the paper or card.
3. Each person then passes his or her paper to the person on the left.
4. Instruct each person to write three positive descriptive words about the person whose paper he or she is now holding. Example: Jane Doe: *Wise, compassionate, fun*.

Below is a list of descriptive words to help find just the right description for each group member. Use this list or use ideas of your own.

**Describe each group member with your own words or three from the list below.**

achiever	determined	intuitive	attractive
balanced	brave	calm	centered
charming	compassionate	confident	fun
energetic	friendly	gentle	leader
goal-directed	honest	inner-directed	creative
insightful	loyal	natural	seeker
intelligent	motivated	nonjudgmental	wise
pathfinder	optimistic	peaceful	sensitive
happy	relaxed	role model	sincere
self-actualized	strong	talented	trustworthy

5. Continue passing the papers to the left. Each member adds three positive feedback words to each member's paper until all members have received the paper with their own name.

6. Group discussion:

- ★ How does your body feel as you read the positive feedback?
- ★ Which feedback feels like a fit? Notice any resistance.
- ★ How did you feel sharing feedback with others?
- ★ What has this experience meant to you?

