

# Healing Through Reflection: A Trauma Recovery Workbook


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## *Advanced Exercises for Emotional Processing and Psychological Resilience*

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### Introduction

Trauma profoundly affects cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes. This workbook is designed to facilitate self-exploration, emotional regulation, and the development of adaptive coping mechanisms. The exercises are grounded in evidence-based psychological frameworks, including cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), polyvagal theory, and trauma-informed mindfulness. Healing is a non-linear process, and it is essential to approach it with patience and self-compassion.

 **Tip:** Before starting, try a calming activity like deep breathing, listening to relaxing music, or stretching to help you feel safe and present.

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### 1. Understanding Trauma

#### Defining Trauma

Trauma is a psychological response to an adverse event or series of events that exceed an individual's capacity to cope. It may stem from acute incidents, chronic stressors, or complex developmental experiences. The neurobiological impact of trauma affects the brain and nervous system, making it harder to manage emotions and stress.

#### Common Trauma Response Patterns

- **Fight:** Heightened aggression, defensiveness, and hyperarousal (irritation).
- **Flight:** Avoidance behaviours, compulsive busyness to distract yourself, or excessive worry.
- **Freeze:** Feeling stuck, numb, dissociating, or inaction due to perceived helplessness.
- **Fawn:** Overly dependent on relationships, people-pleasing tendencies, and difficulty setting boundaries.

 **Reflective Exercise:** Think about a recent mild-moderate stressful situation. How did your body react? What thoughts ran through your mind? Write them down.

- **Example:** *“I felt my heart beating out of my chest, my hands started to shake, and my stomach felt like knots. I couldn’t stop thinking that everyone was watching me and judging my every move”*

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## 2. Identifying Triggers & Adaptive Coping Mechanisms

### Recognising Trauma Triggers

Triggers are things that remind you of past trauma and cause strong emotional reactions. These can be sights, sounds, smells, thoughts, or interactions with people. Identifying your triggers can help you prepare for them and respond in a healthier way.



**Trigger Analysis:** List three things that trigger a strong emotional response in you. How do you typically react? How would you like to respond instead?

- **Example:** *“I get triggered when someone cancels plans with me. I respond to them with anger, however I would like to respond by taking some time to breathe until my brain can believe that it has nothing to do with me”*

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## Evidence-Based Coping Strategies


- **Somatic Regulation:** Grounding exercises:
  1. The 5-4-3-2-1 sensory method:
    - List 5 things you can see
    - List 4 things you can touch
    - List 3 things you can hear
    - List 2 things you can smell
    - List 1 thing you can taste
  2. The 4-4-6 breathing technique:
    - Take a moment to breathe in through your nose of 4 seconds, hold your breathe for 4 seconds, then slowly breathe through your mouth for 6 seconds.
    - Repeat x 3-5
  3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR):
    - Find a comfortable, quiet place.
    - Start with deep breathing.
    - Tense each muscle group and then relax it as you continue to breathe.
    - Progress through muscle groups x 2.
    - End with a body scan.
    - Reflect on your experience.
- **Cognitive Restructuring:** Identifying and challenging maladaptive thought patterns.
  1. Is this thought realistic?
  2. Am I basing my thought son facts or feelings?
  3. What is the evidence for this thought?
  4. Am I having this thought out of habit, or do facts support it?
  5. What are some alternative ways of thinking about this?
- **Mindfulness Practices:** Engaging in present-moment awareness without judgment.
  1. Use guided mindfulness exercises from the Smiling Mind App.
  2. Ask yourself: “What is my intention for today? How might I feel more connected and fulfilled? During difficult moments, how might I be more compassionate to others and myself?”

- **Behavioural Activation:** Incorporating movement-based strategies:

1. Yoga
2. Pilates
3. Walking
4. Gym
5. Cycling
6. Dancing

- **Interpersonal Support:** Seeking connection with trusted individuals or professional guidance.

1. Family
2. Friends
3. Pets
4. Psychologist

 **Applied Exercise:** Write down three-five coping skills that help you feel calm and in control and one new skill you'd like to try. Keep this list somewhere easy to find.

- *You can create a coping skills cheat sheet for yourself using the above strategies.*

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### 3. Processing Emotions Through Reflection

#### Guided Journaling for Emotional Insight

Writing can help you make sense of your thoughts and feelings. Try answering these questions:

- What emotions have I been feeling lately? (*E.g. angry, sad, joy, excitable, insecure etc...*)
- How does my body feel when I'm upset? (*i.e. physiological responses*)
- What are some small steps I can take to feel more in control of my emotions?

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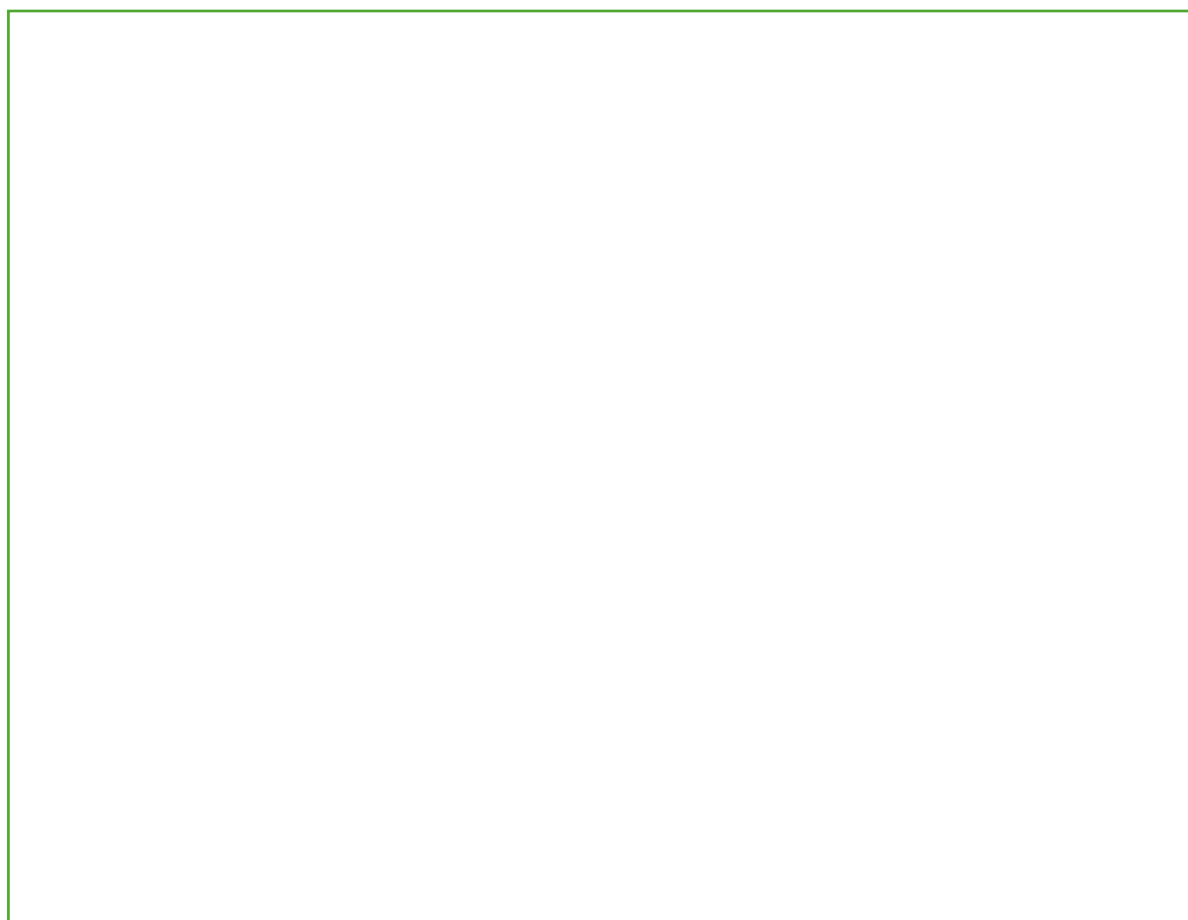
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✦ **Creative Activity:** Draw or describe what your emotions would look like if they were a picture, a symbol, or a colour.




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## 4. Reconstructing Self-Compassion & Identity

### Changing Negative Thoughts About Yourself

Trauma can make you believe things about yourself that aren't true. You might feel guilty, ashamed, or unworthy. Replacing negative thoughts with kinder ones can help you heal.

 **Self-Talk Exercise:** Think of a negative belief you have about yourself. Rewrite it into a more positive, supportive statement. Example:


- *"I am broken." → "I have been through hard times, but I am strong and capable of healing."*

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 **Activity:** Write a letter to your younger self. What would you say to comfort and encourage them?

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## 5. Future-Oriented Growth & Narrative Reconstruction

### Establishing Boundaries for Emotional Well-Being

Psychological resilience is strengthened by the ability to establish and maintain boundaries. Think about what behaviours and relationships help you feel safe and respected.

#### Reflective Closing Exercise:

- What does healing mean to me?
- What are three key insights I will carry forward from this process?
- What are three things I can do to take care of myself moving forward?
- What boundaries with myself and others, do I need to set to feel safer and more in control? (e.g. *learning to say no*)

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### Additional Resources & Continued Support

- **Lifeline** provides 24-hour crisis counselling, support groups and suicide prevention services. Call 13 11 14, text 0477 13 11 14 or chat online.
- **Suicide Call Back Service** provides 24/7 support if you or someone you know is feeling suicidal. Call 1300 659 467.
- **Beyond Blue** aims to increase awareness of depression and anxiety and reduce stigma. If you or a loved one need help, you can call 1300 22 4636, 24 hours/7 days a week or chat online.
- **MindSpot** is a free telephone and online service for people with anxiety, stress, low mood or depression. It provides online assessment and treatment for anxiety



and depression. MindSpot is not an emergency or instant response service. Call 1800 61 44 34.

- **Head to Health** gives advice and will connect you to local mental health services. Call 1800 595 212.
- **MensLine Australia** is a professional telephone and online counselling service offering support to Australian men. Call 1300 78 99 78, 24 hours/7 or chat online.

**If you're feeling lonely:**

- **FriendLine** supports anyone who's feeling lonely, needs to reconnect or just wants a chat. You can call them 7 days a week on 1800 424 287, or chat online with one of their trained volunteers. All conversations with FriendLine are anonymous.

**For young people who need mental health support, and their parents or carers:**

- **Kids Helpline** is Australia's only free 24/7 confidential and private counselling service specifically for children and young people aged 5 – 25. Call 1800 55 1800.
- **headspace** provides free online and telephone support and counselling to young people 12 – 25 and their families and friends. Call 1800 650 890, or chat online.

**For people with complex mental health issues:**

- **SANE Australia** provides support to anyone in Australia affected by complex mental health issues, as well as their friends, family members and health professionals. Call 1800 187 263 or chat online.
- **Blue Knot Foundation Helpline** is the National Centre of Excellence for Complex Trauma. It provides support, education and resources for the families and communities of adult survivors of childhood trauma and abuse. Call 1300 657 380.

**For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:**

- **13YARN** provides 24/7 free and confidential crisis support. Call 13 92 76.
- **Thirrili** provides support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the aftermath of suicide or other fatal critical incidents. Call 1800 805 801, 24 hours/7 days a week.

**For LGBTIQ+ people:**

- **QLife** provides nationwide telephone and web-based services for peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about a range of issues including sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships. Call 1800 184 527.

**For pregnant people and new parents:**


- **PANDA** (Perinatal Anxiety & Depression Australia) supports families across Australia affected by anxiety and depression during pregnancy and in the first year of parenthood. Call 1300 726 306.
- **ForWhen** connects new and expecting parents or carers to perinatal and infant mental health services and supports in their local area. Call 1300 24 23 22.
- **Gidget Foundation** provides mental health support for expectant and new parents. Call 1300 851 758.

**For veterans and their loved ones:**

- **Open Arms** provides 24/7 free and confidential counselling to anyone who has served at least one day in the ADF, their partners and families. Call 1800 011 046.

**For people needing support with eating disorders, and body image related issues:**

- **Butterfly National Helpline** is available for anyone in Australia concerned about eating disorders or body image issues, either for themselves or someone they care about. Call 1800 33 4673.

 *Recovery is a dynamic process requiring patience and self-compassion. Engage in this journey with curiosity and gentleness.*