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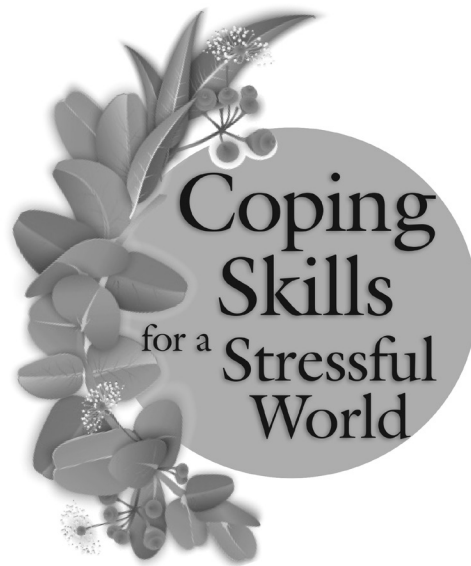
# Coping Skills for a Stressful World

## Exercise and Activity Worksheets



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## Exercise and Activity Worksheets

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# Cultivating Client Resilience



## For Clients

### Developing Resilience in One's Life

Most of us hope life will be fun, uncomplicated, predictable, and easy to navigate. In reality, life is often full of twists and turns and has high points as well as disappointments. As licensed professional counselor Cynthia Miller says, “Life is a traumatizing experience. It’s full of challenges, unexpected and uncontrollable events, and losses. I don’t think anyone of us gets through it unscathed” (as cited in Meyers, 2018, p. 21). It is critical that you develop a resilient and resourceful approach so you can cope with the stresses and crises you encounter.

What is resilience? Simply stated, resilience is your ability to cope with and bounce back from stressful and adverse events while maintaining a positive outlook. Recent studies have explored resilience as one of the key factors that help people cope in a crisis. *Optimism*, often considered an inherent trait, is a positive disposition that leads to having a hopeful outlook on life. It plays an important role in resilience. If you tend to be more pessimistic—that is, you tend to have a negative view of events and expectations for the future—don’t despair (even if that comes naturally to you). Optimism can be learned and cultivated, just like resilience.

*Posttraumatic growth* is the life-changing strength and growth that can result from your struggle to recover from a deeply traumatizing event or disaster. Exposure to traumatic events can result in a “steeling or inoculating effect,” which helps you manage future traumatic events.

#### Key Thought

Resilience is more what you do in a situation than it is who you are as a person. If you experience sadness, difficulty, and distress, but you are able to roll with the punches—to cope and bounce back—you will have a positive outcome in a crisis.

## How Does Resilience Work in Your Life?

Resilience helps you make realistic plans and develop the steps to carry out those plans to resolve a crisis. It also helps you maintain a positive expectation for the outcome of the situation and gives you confidence in your strengths and abilities. In addition, resilience can help you recover from the effects of a crisis more quickly.

What is it that makes some people so resilient when others are simply unable to cope with stressful events? Resilient individuals tend to be goal-oriented, self-directed and self-motivated, open to learning new ways to handle stress and crisis in their lives, grounded in family and community, have a sense of spirituality, bounce back from adversities that life provides, take good emotional and physical care of themselves, and have a sense of belonging, purpose, and strength. We have examples all around us of individuals reacting to life events with resilience.

### Hell in Paradise: A Case Illustration

Nichole Jolly, 34, a nurse at Feather River Hospital in Paradise, California, described what it was like trying to escape from the 2018 Camp Fire, the deadliest and most destructive fire in California history. At one point, Nichole called her husband and said, “I think I’m going to die. Tell the kids I love them. I’m not gonna make it home” (Rosenblatt, 2018). After rapidly and successfully evacuating patients from the hospital, she was fleeing from the rampage, driving her car out of the tornado-like inferno in Paradise. The line of traffic on the road came to a halt, then she was hit from behind. Her car was pushed into a ravine, smoke began to enter the car, and she could feel the heat of the flames. That’s when she called her husband and told him she thought she was about to die. He told her not to die, to fight for her life, to get out of the car and run for her life. She ran to the next car, but the door handle was melted. She found another car and got inside. By this time, Nichole’s pant leg was on fire, and it set the front seat on fire. She quickly extinguished that fire. As the heat and the flames intensified, she heard her husband’s voice telling her to fight for her life, to run out of it if she could. She got out of the hot and smoky car and began to feel her way ahead, but the smoke and flames and ash were so intense she couldn’t see a thing. Nichole said she breathed in the hottest air she has ever breathed, and she could feel her shoes melting on the hot pavement. Suddenly her hand touched the back of what turned out to be a fire truck, and the firemen took her inside and covered her with a fire rescue blanket. They all thought they were doomed, but a bulldozer suddenly appeared and cleared the road so the fire truck could escape.

After she was free of the fire area, she got a ride from the firemen back to her hospital. She spent the next several hours treating walk-in patients until they were forced once again to evacuate the hospital. When she thought she would die, her husband became the voice that motivated her and directed her through a near death experience. That voice became her voice, driving her to survive and to help save others on that horrible and deadly day. She is just an ordinary person who found the inner resources to not give up, to bounce back, and to succeed in her drive to live. That is true resilience.

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## What Are the Characteristics of Resilient Individuals?

Mark A. Stebnicki (2017) is a licensed professional counselor who works with clients who have chronic medical/physical health conditions and who have experienced traumatic stress (both civilian and military trauma). He describes resilient individuals as those who

- are positive thinkers and believe in themselves and their abilities;
- are self-directed and self-motivated and confident they will succeed in challenging situations;
- choose healthy emotions, behaviors, and thoughts;
- demonstrate a persistence with tasks;
- take self-responsibility, own their shortcomings, and strive to improve themselves;

- are willing to take risks, are realistic and flexible, and do not avoid new activities or experiences that might benefit them; and
- exhibit tolerance and a sense of openness in looking at different ways to resolve situations. (pp. 278–279)

The exercises and activities that follow will help you examine ways to develop a more resilient approach to life.

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of resilience in your life between therapy sessions. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend some time thinking about how well you cope and bounce back from tough situations in your own life. Some questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of these activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate your resilience. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

## Exercises and Activities

*The following are some exercises to help you understand resilience in your own life.*

1. Describe a situation you encountered that was stressful for you. How did you handle the situation? On a scale of 1 to 10, rate how well you rebounded or recovered from that experience.

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not at all* *Complete recovery*

Explain your response.

2. In thinking about the situation you described in question 1, what helped you get through the experience that worked especially well?

3. What would you like to learn to help you better handle those kinds of situations?

4. Overall, how well are you able to bounce back from difficult situations and events when life challenges you?

5. Describe another stressful situation you experienced. Were you able to learn and gain strength from your handling of that situation, or did the experience get you down? Did it make you doubt your ability to cope with stress or adversity?

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6. Resilience is the ability of an individual to cope with and bounce back from stressful and adverse events while maintaining a positive outlook. Do you think people are born resilient, or is it something we learn with age and experience? How about for you personally?

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7. If applicable, how would you describe your significant other/partner in terms of being a resilient individual?

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8. If applicable, how would you describe your children in terms of being resilient individuals?

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### **How Can You Become More Resilient?**

The list that follows is adapted from “The Road to Resilience” (APA, 2018b). Each item states a factor that builds resilience and suggests activities to help you build your own resilience. Review the list and consider one or two items you might try each week. See what works for you and what doesn’t, and create ways for the resilience-increasing activities to be enjoyable and specific to your needs and wishes.

1. Build connections with people. These include connections with family and friends, as well as organizations and groups that will enable you to interact with others who share your interests (e.g., faith-based groups, community groups, sports).
- a. Would you like to spend more time with one family member or friend? Think of a few ways you could spend more time with that person (or group). You could go to coffee, lunch, dinner, a movie, the gym, fishing, or some other activity. Identify the person you have chosen to initiate more contact with and what you will invite them to do.

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- b. Come back to item (a) one month from now and describe how that has worked out for you and whether you think this is a positive experience for you. Select another person with whom you would like to spend more time, and describe what you will invite that individual to do with you.

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- c. Think about a group you might like to find out more about or join: a faith-based organization, volunteer group, or another community organization. Make plans to contact that group and learn more about it, and arrange for a trial visit. Identify the group you contacted and describe how the initial inquiry went for you.

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- d. Come back to item (c) 6 weeks from now and describe what you have done with this group and whether you are encouraged to continue. Have you met some individuals you hope to get to know better?

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2. Try not to see crises as insurmountable. You can't change events, but you can change the way you perceive and respond to those events. As Jaycee Dugard stated regarding the three young women kidnapped in Cleveland and enslaved for 10 years, "This isn't who they are. It is only what happened to them. The human spirit is resilient. More than ever this reaffirms we should never give up hope" (as cited in Mather, 2013).
- a. When you encounter a crisis do you generally respond by:
- Looking to others for help and direction?
  - Hoping the situation resolves itself?
  - Looking at potential solutions?
  - Believing that you will be able to resolve the situation?
  - Thinking things will end poorly?
- b. Describe how you approach difficult/stressful situations. Do you see the glass as half empty or half full?
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- 
- c. Do you hope to become a more positive problem solver? What skills would you like to develop for resolving stressful situations?
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3. Work to accept circumstances that can't be changed and put your energy into situations that you do have control over. By acknowledging that change happens whether we like it or not, we are more empowered to accept it and embrace change.

*Select the number that most accurately describes the frequency with which you experience the following situations:*

Scale:     1       2       3       4       5  
               *Rarely/never*                                *Always*

- \_\_\_\_\_ I relish the challenges that life's various stages offer.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I spend too much time worrying about things I can't change.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel irritated at work when I see things that could be improved and function more efficiently but don't change.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am comfortable with the rapid pace of change I see happening in society and the world today.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I tend to look back in time and wish things were like they used to be.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I typically embrace changes in my personal life and get bored when things remain the same.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I often feel that others don't appreciate the changes I make in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have difficulty appreciating or accepting changes I observe in others (e.g., family members, friends).
- \_\_\_\_\_ I tend to feel helpless when I cannot control what is happening around me.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I become angry or frustrated when I cannot control what is happening around me.

- a. Please take this opportunity to write in your journal about any of the previous statements that elicited a strong reaction.
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b. List three to five words or phrases that best describe how you typically handle change in your life.

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c. List three to five words or phrases that best describe how you would ideally like to handle change in your life.

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4. Develop realistic goals, and work toward accomplishing one or more of your goals, no matter how small they might seem.

a. Ask yourself, “What is one thing I can do today to move toward accomplishing my goals?”

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b. What are three goals you would like to achieve in the next year?

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c. What will it take to reach each of those goals? What will be needed? What might get in the way? What are realistic time frames?

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d. What would your life look like if you accomplished each of these three goals?

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e. Summarize your plan for meeting each goal using the following template.

Goal:

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Resources needed:

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Potential obstacles:

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Goal accomplished:

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Time frame:

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5. Instead of hoping a crisis or stressful situation just won't happen, act on the situation and do the best you can to resolve it. Keep a log of each stressful situation that occurs in your life for the next 2 weeks. Describe each situation and your reaction to it (i.e., what you thought and felt, what you said to yourself about the situation, what actions you took to resolve the crisis, and how effective those actions were for you). Then describe what you learned from your response to the situation and what you hope to do differently next time.

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6. Learn as much as you can about yourself from every adverse situation. Tragedy and hardship can be learning experiences from which you improve self-confidence and reorder your priorities about life. What tragedies and hardships have you encountered in life? What have you learned about yourself from those experiences? In what ways have you grown as a result of these difficult experiences?

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7. Develop an ability to trust your instincts when responding to a crisis. Use what you do know and have learned to help you respond rather than focus on what you don't know about responding in the situation.

- a. As you think about how you have handled crises and what you have learned from those experiences, do you feel better prepared to handle future crises? Explain.

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- b. What remains for you to learn? How can you build on what you already know to acquire new skills and knowledge?

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- c. Do you believe you possess an inherent ability to rely on your instincts in a crisis? If so, say more about this.

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8. Maintain an optimistic outlook on life and focus on what you want to accomplish rather than on what you fear or don't have. How would you describe your basic outlook on life? Are you more inclined to be a negative or a positive thinker? Do you tend to think of life as a glass being half full or half empty?

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9. Pay attention to your self-talk. Keep a journal of your self-talk dialogue, and change the way you view and react to crisis situations. What you perceive and tell yourself about your ability to cope with crises is essential to becoming a resilient person. Resilient individuals believe in their ability to take charge of situations rather than feeling powerless, hopeless, and overwhelmed. Does your self-talk work for you or undermine your self-confidence?

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10. Successfully navigating crises and stressful situations often entails flexibility and adaptability, and paying attention to what you need in any given moment. When faced with a crisis, how often do you:

[illegible]

- \_\_\_\_\_ Allow yourself to get in touch with your deep emotions and express them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Give yourself permission to avoid delving into deep emotions when it would be counter-productive to get in touch with them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Mobilize into action and take care of tasks that need to be completed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Honor your limits and know when you need to take a break and get some rest or relaxation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Identify what you need to do to nurture yourself.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Seek support and encouragement from people who love and care about you.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Know when you need to spend time alone to recharge yourself and your energy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Know when to reach out to others and rely on them versus trying to handle everything on your own.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Know when it would be more appropriate or empowering to rely on yourself to accomplish certain tasks.

Take the opportunity now to write in your journal about any of these statements that elicited a strong reaction:

11. Resilience helps us cope with and bounce back from a crisis. Some of us seem to be born with a resilient personality, but all of us can improve our resilience with help and support from family and community. If you do not possess a certain resiliency in responding to life's crises, you can learn and develop it. You can endure horrific situations and experiences and not only survive but thrive with a new sense of hope, purpose, and optimism. That is the essence of resilience. Answer the following questions based on what you have learned about your own resilience.

- a. What three things can you begin to do right away to increase your level of resilience?

- b. What one item do you believe is the most important to you?

- c. Who can you turn to for support and encouragement as you work on strengthening your resilience

- d. To maintain your inspiration, identify three to five individuals who embody resilience and can serve as positive role models for you. They may be individuals you know personally or individuals you have read about or seen in the media. Describe what you admire most about them. In what ways would you like to emulate them?



# Anxiety and Stress



## For Clients

### Anxiety and Stress

Many of us find ourselves consumed by worries, fears, guilt, and grievances. And let's face it, stress and anxiety are a part of everyday living. A 2018 Gallup poll revealed that 55% of Americans feel stressed during much of their day, and 45% admit to feeling worried a lot (Ray, 2019). Whether you get your news on TV, your smartphone, or in a newspaper, you are bombarded with a range of serious and bothersome issues, most of which are beyond your control. The bad news may seem overwhelming and inescapable, but many reasonable and kind-hearted people are doing good things for one another, so be careful not to focus exclusively on the negative stories you hear or read about constantly. Be vigilant, and make a concerted effort to get a healthy dose of positive/happy news to offset the negative news cycle and ensure that you have some balance in your life.

#### Key Thought

Do you want to reduce your anxiety level? Look toward modifying your inner dialogue to focus less on fear and more on problem solving.

### Defining Stress and Anxiety

*Stress* is a feeling of strain or pressure that we place on ourselves, such as wanting to be the perfect parent, employee, or student; the source of stress also can come from outside ourselves, such as feeling the crunch of making financial ends meet. Stress can result from a positive event, such as starting a new job or class or moving to a new house or apartment. It also can be triggered by a negative encounter or event, such as dealing with a critical coworker or boss, evacuating from a wildfire, or dealing with the threat of deportation. Stress, like beauty, is often in the eye of the beholder. Your perception of the situation plays a large part in how you react emotionally and how you act to resolve the situation.

*Anxiety* is best described as the worry or fear we experience in anticipation of those stressful events. It is one thing to be concerned about an event that will occur today or tomorrow (e.g., a final exam at school or an important meeting at work), but it is something else to be worried about all kinds of things over an extended period. When we move from worrying about one event to the next, the worry and anxiety never seem to go away. Clark and Beck (2012) believe that fear is at the heart of all anxiety and that anxiety is complex. If you are anxious, it affects you physically, emotionally, and behaviorally. Worrying about events that are very unlikely to happen can increase your anxiety. In fact, about 85% of the things we worry about never occur (Goewey, 2017). To clarify, anxiety over real events that are likely to occur soon (e.g., a tornado warning) is productive because it reflects a real threat and may prompt you to take necessary action; however, anxiety over events that are unlikely to occur is nonproductive and a waste of your energy and emotions. Fear is more specific to a situation or object, whereas anxiety tends to be vague or diffuse and results in a general state of apprehension. That state of apprehension can range from a vague uneasiness to a full-blown panic attack in which physical symptoms develop including heart palpitations, sweating, nausea or dizziness, and perhaps even a feeling that you could die.

Anxiety that is situation-specific and comes and goes with the event is very common. More intense anxiety that lasts much longer than the event that triggered it may lead to phobias (intense unrealistic fears) or other symptoms and can become disabling and require counseling.

## What Can We Do About Our Stress and Anxiety?

If you are anxious about a work-related issue that you need to discuss with your boss, that anxiety can work in your favor and help you prepare for the discussion. Once the meeting has passed, the anxiety will subside. But if you have a vague, nonspecific worry about your standing on the job—even though you have received no negative feedback from your boss or coworkers—that anxiety will likely continue indefinitely without relief. It may even take an emotional and a physical toll on you. It is like being prepared to run from a dangerous situation all the time, with adrenaline flowing nonstop. Eventually you may wear out from that unrelieved anxiety and stress.

It is important to examine your perceptions of your life situations. Are you realistically assessing situations or are you blowing these things out of proportion? Ask yourself: Am I spending time and energy worrying about things I have no control over? What is my self-talk about these situations? Am I engaging in all-or-nothing thinking about my circumstances? Am I telling myself I can handle the situation? Or am I thinking, “I will likely fail to handle the situation? I am not good enough, bright enough, and don’t have the self-confidence to do this?” What you tell yourself about a situation and your ability to handle it has a major impact on how you feel about the situation, yourself, and how you act to ameliorate the situation. To better cope with anxiety and stress in your life, it is essential to be kind to yourself and to avoid the trap of demanding perfection. Look to others for support, and take good care of yourself emotionally and physically.

Here are some ways to reduce the amount of stress and anxiety you experience.

- Avoid stressful situations or at least identify significant sources of stress and anxiety in your life and try to minimize them.
- Focus on those things you have control over and can change, and let go of things you cannot change.
- Modify your self-talk so you have a healthy and positive outlook on life. (Your self-talk affects your perceptions, emotions, and reactions to many things in life, including stress and anxiety.)
- Assess the accuracy of your beliefs about yourself.
- Work hard to dispute any irrational or inaccurate thoughts (e.g., “I must always be perfect. Anything less is failure.”).
- Examine your automatic thinking when in stressful situations and evaluate whether your inner dialogue (self-talk) works for or against you.
- Enlist help and feedback from others you trust—perhaps friends and family members—to gain a clearer sense of how you are doing.
- Practice good self-care habits and get proper sleep, nutrition, exercise, and relaxation.
- Join a support group and surround yourself with others who are committed to become stronger and more able to handle stress and anxiety.

- Develop your social relationships. (Having a network of social relationships and a social support system can be a buffer against stress.)
- Give yourself permission to struggle with anxiety. If it were easy to fix this problem, all of us would be free of anxiety. Change is difficult and requires patience with yourself and much practice.
- Use the exercises that follow to your advantage. Try not to be overwhelmed by them, and have some fun learning how you can improve yourself. Try one or two exercises, and be prepared to discuss your responses with your counselor.

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine stress and anxiety in your life. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend some time thinking about how well you manage stress and anxiety. Some exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is to learn as much as you can about yourself outside the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate making changes in your life to reduce your stress and anxiety. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses on a computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

## Exercises and Activities

## Assessing the Situation and Your Reaction

1. Let's take a look at what causes stress and anxiety for you. How would you rate your general level of anxiety on a daily basis?

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Low/ none* *Extremely high*

Explain your response.

2. What are the most powerful sources of stress and anxiety in your life?

3. What is toxic in your life? What would your life look like without that toxic element?

4. How would a close family member or a friend describe your level of stress and anxiety?

5. Do you have what you would consider anxiety attacks or panic attacks?

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- a. Describe what happens to you when you have those attacks.

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- b. Do you experience physical symptoms such as dizziness, shortness of breath, nausea, chest pain, sleep disturbances, or fatigue? Please describe those and rate their severity.

Scale: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not at all* *Extremely severe*

Explain your response.

- c. Do you have an experience that makes you feel detached from the situation (e.g., looking at yourself and the situation from afar)? Please describe and rate the severity.

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not detached at all* *Extremely detached*

Explain your response.

6. Are there any particular objects (e.g., spiders, clowns) or situations (e.g., social gatherings, heights) that you are particularly fearful of to the extent that you avoid them completely? What feelings do you experience when reacting to those stressful situations or objects?

7. What are some thoughts you have or tell yourself (self-talk) when you are feeling seriously anxious? Do those thoughts and inner dialogue help you or make you more anxious in those situations?

8. Describe a recent situation, object, or event that led you to become seriously anxious. What was it like for you? How did you feel? What did you say to yourself? How did you react? Were you satisfied with the way you handled the situation? If so, describe what worked well. What would you hope to do differently next time? For each situation, create a chart like Chart 3.1 to log your responses.



**Chart 3.1 Assessing the Anxiety Event and What Is Behind It**

Situation, object, or event	
What was it like for me?	
How did I feel?	
What was the fear that something bad would happen?	
What did I say to myself?	
How did I react? Was I satisfied with my action?	
What would I do differently next time?	

### Learning to Manage Your Anxiety

1. A good place to begin is to examine your inner thoughts and beliefs about yourself and your ability to cope with anxiety. For example, do you say to yourself, “I am just a mess, I can’t handle anything! What a failure I am!” That kind of self-talk is likely to be devastating for you and may lead to failure in a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. But if you say “I am anxious, but I can handle this. My response may not be perfect, but I will give this a try and see if I can improve from the last time,” you are more likely to handle the anxiety successfully. What are your inner thoughts and beliefs about anxiety?

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What could you change about those beliefs to help you better manage?

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### Key Thought

Give yourself permission to struggle with anxiety. If it were easy to fix this problem, all of us would be free of anxiety. Change is difficult and requires patience with yourself and much practice.

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2. One of the major ways to reduce your anxiety is to combat catastrophic thinking—imagining the worst outcome in a situation. Are you a catastrophic thinker? Check the statements that you find yourself thinking in a stressful situation:

- ☐ “This is the worst thing that could happen to me.”
- ☐ “I’m sure I will fail this test.”
- ☐ “I am afraid that people will finally see me for who I really am.”
- ☐ “This is just too hard, I can’t do it.”
- ☐ “Damn, I’m stupid.”
- ☐ “I just want out of here.”

What are some other catastrophic thoughts you have had in stressful situations? How could you challenge those thoughts?

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3. Cognitive therapy is a common counseling approach used for the treatment of anxiety. With this therapy, you are instructed to assess your thoughts and beliefs, your inner dialogue about these anxiety-producing situations, and begin to modify them so your thoughts can assist you in dealing with the situation. What helpful thoughts could you practice in stressful situations?
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4. Making significant change requires focus and practice. For the next week, keep track of situations that make you anxious, and log your automatic thoughts. As you log those thoughts, try to come up with other more helpful and productive thoughts that you can practice in these situations. For example, suppose you are afraid that you offended a coworker. You might log your automatic thought like this: “I am in trouble now. I am sure that everyone in the office thinks I am terrible. I don’t have a clue about how to fix this. What a disaster!” Then offer yourself some more productive thoughts: “I may not know immediately how to fix my mistake, but maybe I should ask for feedback before I assume that everyone thinks the worst of me. Even if others give me the feedback that I fear, I can choose to grow from it. It doesn’t have to be a disaster.” For each automatic thought, create a chart like Chart 3.2.

**Chart 3.2 Automatic Thoughts**

Anxiety-provoking situation	
Automatic thought	
Productive/helpful thought	

5. Can you think of ways to respond more effectively in anxiety-provoking situations? List some of the things you could say or do to have a better outcome for each situation. Try some ideas out in low-stakes situations to see what works for you and what doesn’t. When you discover what works, use that solution in less stressful situations to practice for more consequential or high-stakes situations that may eventually come along.
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6. What have you learned about yourself and about coping with anxiety in your life? Do you have a plan to become more effective in coping with anxiety? If so, describe your plan. What else would you like to learn and accomplish in this regard?
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7. Relaxation training has been proven to be essential in overcoming anxiety. Taking 15 to 20 minutes to practice relaxation several times a week can help you combat stress and instill a more relaxed approach to life in general. The basic idea is that you cannot be both stressed and relaxed at the same time. If you increase your ability to relax, especially when under stress, you should be able to reduce the intensity of your anxiety response. Relaxation involves a release of tension. It is more than the absence or minimization of stress. True relaxation requires an inward focus and a deep awareness of your body and mind. Relaxation is not simply kicking back on the sofa, putting your feet up, and watching a movie or a sporting event on TV. It is more than just doing nothing for a while. One way to practice relaxation is to focus on your breathing. As you inhale and exhale, say a phrase that relaxes you. For example, you might say something like, “I can picture being at the beach and seeing and hearing the waves crashing on the sand. As I inhale, the waves recede and the tide goes out, as I exhale the waves come crashing back in on the beach.” Set aside 15 minutes and give this a try. Describe how this attempt at relaxing was for you. Is this something you could do when feeling stressed and anxious in future situations?

8. Relaxation can be found in many forms and activities. You can focus on your breathing and relax your muscles, or you can hike, fish, garden, meditate, read a book, do yoga, or socialize with friends, to name a few. Find the form of relaxation that provides relief and restores you, and do more of that. What forms of relaxation work for you? What forms of relaxation would you like to do more of to help you combat stress and anxiety? Specify the relaxation activities that you might try. Rate how likely you are to actually put these into practice?

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*I will definitely not do this* *I will definitely do this*

Explain your response.

9. Another common form of relaxation is visualizing a relaxing scene. As a counselor in private practice, I (Bob) often used relaxation and visualization with clients who were experiencing stress and anxiety. My goal was to teach them how to de-stress through breathing techniques and visualization. I led them through the procedures with the goal that they would learn to do it on their own. I asked them to focus on their breathing, then their heart rate, then their muscles in the neck, arms, shoulders, and legs. I asked them to try to put everything out of their mind except the scene I described. I described a pleasant and peaceful scene (one they had identified as restful and serene such as the beach, a pasture of flowers, a mountain stream) and asked them to imagine the scene—the smells, the sounds, and the feelings they had in that setting. After staying with the scene and enjoying it for a few minutes, I slowly and gently brought them back to the sights and sounds in the office. Clients nearly always reported a sense of well-being and peacefulness from the experience.

You can practice this on your own, and you may find it quite refreshing. Achieving a relaxed state takes practice, and you may wish to ask your counselor to practice this with you in session. Be sure that you are not rushed, and set aside 15 to 20 minutes in a setting where you will not be disturbed. As you gain experience and skill, you will find that you can relax in various settings for short periods of time most anywhere. Set aside time to do the deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and visualization of a pleasant scene. Focus on that and enjoy that scene, then slowly bring yourself back to the present time. Reflect on this experience: How was that for you? To what extent were you able to relax? Could you see yourself doing this on a regular basis?

10. Mindfulness is another way to manage stress. Mindfulness is similar to meditation in that it involves a state of actively focusing on what you are doing. For example, if I am anxious about a presentation I have to make at work tomorrow, I can either focus on the task or on all the fears I have about how it might go, what people might think of me, and what might happen if I forget what I am talking about. By focusing on my fears, I ramp up my anxiety about the presentation and increase the likelihood that I will fail. By being mindful, I am better able to focus on the task at hand and work on preparing for the presentation, all the while telling myself (self-talk) that I can do this, that I will succeed, and that my coworkers will be supportive and forgiving if I make a mistake. With mindfulness, I focus on the task and on succeeding, and that keeps the fears about my performance at bay.

Describe a situation where you were deterred by focusing on your fears and how being mindful of what you were doing might have helped. Can you see yourself being more mindful in future situations?

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11. Engaging in physical exercise is an important way to reduce anxiety. Incorporating some physical activity into your lifestyle will help you manage stress. How often do you exercise? Do you find yourself avoiding it, or is it something you look forward to doing?

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12. Solution-focused approaches concentrate less on the problems you bring to counseling and more on solutions to those problems. Instead of spending a lot of time examining what's wrong (the origin of the problem, how it developed, etc.), solution-focused practitioners prefer to talk about what has worked well for you when the problem (e.g., anxiety) didn't exist. In this exercise, you are going to apply solution-focused strategies to your own life. Identify an issue that causes you stress and anxiety, and write it down. Then answer the following questions:

- a. Can you think of times when the anxiety-provoking issue/problem did not exist? What was different about that time, situation, or circumstance? How did you act, think, or feel differently?

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- b. Can you think of a time when the problem did exist but you didn't experience the same level of stress or anxiety as you typically do? Again, what was different about the situation and your reaction?

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- c. Solution-focused practitioners often pose the miracle question: If a miracle happened and the problem was solved overnight, how would your life be different? What can you do to move in the direction of achieving that?

- d. Another strategy is to use scaling questions. You might ask yourself each day, “On a scale of 1 to 10, how severe is the problem?”

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Problem is solved* *Worst the problem has been*



# Depression and Loneliness



**For Clients**

## **Dealing With Depression and Loneliness**

“I was so down on myself. I didn’t have any self-love and quite honestly, I just didn’t want to be alive. It was a really, really, really crazy time for me and I didn’t want to see anybody. I saw myself as letting so many people down—and myself in particular. That’s hard to carry” (as cited in Konow, 2018). The person recounting this is Michael Phelps, winner of 28 Olympic swimming medals. No one is immune from depression, not even someone who appears to have everything going right for him. Something finally clicked when Michael Phelps reached bottom. He realized he could ask for help, although he had never done that in his life. He said, “I was basically on my knees, crying for help” (cited in Alltucker, 2018).

Depression and loneliness are two major reasons individuals seek counseling and therapy. The fear of loneliness can be powerful and overwhelming. One in 5 Americans will struggle with a major depression in their lifetime. If you are experiencing depression, you may perceive it as a dark, lonely, and empty place that few understand unless they have been there. It can consume your life and alter your motivation to be involved with friends and family, a significant other, colleagues, coworkers, or the community. A loss of pleasure and enjoyment in life is common in depression, and thinking about what you need to do to overcome this unhappy and lonely state of mind may feel overwhelming. At times you may feel depressed even though it seems as if nothing in your life situation has changed for the worse. Depression is a common and serious mood disorder that may leave you feeling like you are drowning in despair. It can affect how you think and feel and can alter your actions in everyday living.

What causes depression and that painful and isolating feeling? Many factors play a role, including genetics, medical conditions and illnesses, life situation, your own physiology, specific events, and even things we see on the news and on social media. People experience and are affected by depression in different ways, and no one treatment best fits everyone. With the support of an empathic helping professional, you can find what works for you and your personal situation. Depression has a physio-

logical element, and whether the physiological changes in your brain and body cause or are a result of depression is a complex question. Some people are more prone to depression than others. If you are depressed, take it seriously and work with your counselor to do everything you can to get the depression under control so it does not continue to diminish your quality of life.

Typical symptoms of depression can include the following:

- Sadness and pessimism about the future
- Psychological numbness
- Irritability
- A sense of anxious distress
- Feelings of guilt and worthlessness
- Exhaustion and fatigue
- Loss of interest or pleasure in things you normally enjoy
- A sense of dread and doom
- Difficulty with sleep, appetite, and concentration
- Physical illnesses and conditions
- Thoughts of death or suicide

If you are in a depressed state, just getting out of bed in the morning may be difficult. People may say it is all in your mind and you just need to focus on the positive, but it is not that simple. Combating depression requires a systematic effort to analyze the causes and sources of your feelings and thoughts and devise a variety of psychological and possibly medical efforts to remedy the situation. One symptom of depression is lacking motivation or a drive to change. Do everything you can to follow your counselor's direction, and force yourself to do as much as you can in complying with the course of treatment. Sometimes the most difficult part of change is simply getting started. We hope the activities and exercises in this section will help you in this journey.

### **What Are Some Things I Can Do Today?**

Here are some things you can do to combat depression right away, as suggested by the NIMH (2018c):

- Commit to get some physical exercise and be active.
- Develop realistic goals for yourself.
- Spend time with people and confide in a relative or friend you trust.
- Avoid the temptation to isolate yourself, and allow others to help you.
- Expect your mood to improve gradually, not instantly.
- Postpone consequential decisions, such as getting married or divorced or changing jobs, until your depression lifts and you feel better.
- Consult with people who know you well and may have a more objective view of your situation before making decisions.
- Educate yourself about depression on an ongoing basis.

You are working on the exercises in this section because your counselor thinks these activities and exercises can be of value to your therapy. You have taken a bold and courageous step. Even though you may not feel up to working on these activities, doing so will help you. An important step in the healing process is putting into words what is happening within you. Then you can begin to look at ways to improve your situation.

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of depression and loneliness in your life. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend time thinking about how well you are managing your depression. Some questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of these activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside of the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore the issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate making changes in your life to decrease your loneliness and depression. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to these questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them to your next counseling session.

### Exercises and Activities

#### Depression Affects Thoughts, Attitudes, and Actions

1. Each of us has a predisposition to feeling more “cheerful and optimistic” or more “negative and pessimistic” and expecting the worst to occur. How would you describe your general outlook on life? What are you most optimistic about? Most pessimistic about?

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2. Some people find it useful to describe their emotional state using metaphors. For example, a person might liken depression to the sensation of being weighed down by a heavy gray blanket or to sinking into the depths of the ocean without anyone knowing he fell off the boat. Can you think of a metaphor that captures your experience with depression? Be sure to journal about it, and record any emotions that come up for you as you think of the metaphor.

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3. I am feeling depressed currently because of the following life situations or people in my life:

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4. When I feel depressed I also feel:

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5. When I am depressed, I typically respond by thinking \_\_\_\_\_ and doing \_\_\_\_\_. (Use as much additional space as you need to fill in these blanks.)

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6. What has worked for me in the past when I am depressed is to:

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7. What I hope to gain from counseling to help me when I am depressed is:

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8. Make a list of the things you think would make you happier.

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9. Does the current situation in our world contribute to your feelings of depression? How does the social climate of divisiveness affect you? Does it affect your relationships with family? Friends? Co-workers? If so, describe this feeling.

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### Measuring Sadness and Depression

Depression can lead from feeling “mildly down” to feeling outright “hopeless and helpless.” Sonja Lyumbomirsky (2007) suggests that 50% of our happiness is determined by genes, 10% by circumstances, and 40% by our thoughts, actions, and attitudes. As you can see, your circumstances play a relatively small role in influencing your level of happiness. If you have been the victim of a disaster, a crime, a divorce, or a death in the family, the percentage that the circumstance plays in worsening your depression and decreasing your happiness will be much higher. In normal day-to-day routines, you have control over your thoughts, actions, and attitudes, and they play a larger role than you may have assumed in how you feel. The following exercises can help you focus on your thoughts, actions, and attitudes as they pertain to depression and loneliness.

1. To get a handle on your level of sadness and depression, indicate how much each of the items in Chart 4.1 applies to you and how you feel.

**Chart 4.1 Levels of Sadness and Depression<sup>1</sup>**

<b>Scale:</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
	<i>Never/rarely</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Most of the time</i>

**Dimensions of depression:**

- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel sad or blue.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel lonely and isolated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I lack any real enjoyment or pleasure in my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am optimistic about my future.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel a sense of dread or impending doom.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am happy with my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I am happy with the person I am.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel constantly overwhelmed.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel a pervasive sense of anxiety.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have trouble sleeping at night.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have to contend with physical/medical issues.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I feel that life is no longer worth living.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I have thought about suicide as a solution.

Please expand on and describe in more detail any of the items from the chart that are of concern to you.

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<sup>1</sup>Source: Adapted from Burns, 1999, pp. 20–21.



Which items from the chart trouble you most?

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2. Review Chart 4.1 and describe in your own words where you would like to be with respect to each of the items.

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3. What would it take for you to get from where you are now to where you would like to be?

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4. What is preventing you from getting to where you would like to be?

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5. List two painful experiences in your life that have led to you feeling sad or depressed. How do your values (e.g., personal, cultural, religious) affect your feelings about those experiences?

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6. What would your life be like if you were happy? What would you be doing? Who would you be with? What would be your situation in terms of family? Children? Friends? Work? School? Leisure activities? How far are you from living that life? What would need to happen for you to make progress toward living that life? What one step are you able and willing to take now toward achieving a happier life?

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7. Loneliness is a common feeling that many people experience. When do you feel most lonely? Where and with whom do you feel the loneliest?

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8. Are you a member of a marginalized group (e.g., LGBTQ+, an ethnic or racial minority, a woman, a person with a disability)? If so, how have your experiences as a member of a marginalized population contributed to your feelings of loneliness? What is it about your situation that makes it feel so lonely?

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9. What have you tried to do to combat that loneliness? How has that worked for you?

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10. Can you think of something else you might try to reverse that feeling of loneliness? What would it take for you to do more of that?

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## 22 • Depression and Loneliness

11. If a miracle happened and your depression or loneliness suddenly disappeared, how would your life be different? In what ways might you live your life differently? Would you make different choices in any areas of your life? Describe.

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12. Examine the role of social media in your life. Keep a log of how much time you spend on social media each day, and track your mood and level of loneliness on a chart like Chart 4.2. Complete these entries each night before you go to sleep for 1 to 2 weeks. Include a “Notes/Comments” column to record any observations you’ve made.

### Chart 4.2 Social Media and Mood

*Use the scale to record your level of depressed mood or loneliness. At week's end, reflect on what you've learned about the impact of your social media use on your mood and loneliness.*

**Scale:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>None</i>									<i>Extreme</i>
depression/loneliness									

Social Media Platform	Date/Day of Week	Hours Per Day Online	Level of Depression	Level of Loneliness	Notes/Comments
Twitter					
Facebook					
Instagram					
Other platform					



# Anger



## For Clients

### Dealing With Anger in Your Life

Do you get angry or frustrated when standing in a long line at the supermarket, at a sporting event, or at the movie theater? Do you find yourself becoming increasingly frustrated when your internet or TV service fails? Do you become angry when a car pulls right in front of you and nearly forces you off the highway? Do you react with anger when someone accuses you of saying something you know you did not say? If you answered yes to any or all of these questions, don't jump to the conclusion that you have an anger problem. Feeling angry is a part of the human condition. No one is immune from feeling angry at times; however, problems arise when anger is not managed well and escalates out of control. When anger leads to aggression or violence directed toward others or toward yourself, it is fair to say that it has become problematic and is interfering in your life.

In reflecting on situations that trigger your anger, consider the following questions:

- Do you feel guilty when you get angry?
- Do you become overwhelmed and immobilized?
- Do you tend to lash out and blame others?
- How often do you become angry? On a weekly basis? A daily basis?
- What would you like to change about how you handle your anger?

### What Is Anger?

Anger is a completely normal and common human emotion. We all get angry, but some of us handle our anger more effectively than others. Some of us instantly blow up, some of us remain calm and assertively deal with the situation, and some of us “sit on the anger” and let it build until we explode or take it out on ourselves. *Anger* is a strong emotional and physiological response to a perceived provocation, threat, or hostile act. It ranges from feeling irritated to intense feelings of rage accompanied by the desire for re-

venge. You can get angry about anything, but the source is usually an external situation, person, or event, or an internal thought or memory (APA, 2018b). The body typically responds to the emotion of anger with increased blood pressure, heart rate, energy, and adrenaline.

Anger serves a survival function when it motivates us to react aggressively or fight when we encounter danger. However, in our modern world, reacting aggressively is often counterproductive and can get us in trouble. We have to learn better ways to manage our anger than by reacting aggressively and lashing out. When managed ineffectively, anger can lead to uncontrollable rage, abusiveness, violence, and destruction. Some individuals remain calm, cool, and collected in even the most aggravating situations. Others experience their anger like a pressure cooker, and the hotter it gets, the more likely they are to explode.

### Key Thought

It is a myth that a “just get it off your chest” approach to anger relieves the pressure of an upsetting situation. Instead, this can escalate rather than reduce the feelings of anger you and others involved in the situation already have.

## Early Messages About Anger and Conflict

Early in life we received messages in our family of origin about how to think, behave, and feel. Some of these messages were unspoken (or *implicit*), and others were spoken (or *explicit*). They help us understand what is acceptable and unacceptable. Most of us learned lessons in childhood and adolescence about how to handle anger and conflict. Some of us received direct messages from adults (e.g., our parents and teachers) about restraining our feelings, particularly negative ones such as anger. Our parents might have said, “Children are to be seen and not heard. Keep your feelings to yourself!” or they might have modeled that behavior themselves and never expressed anger in front of us. Others of us may have witnessed violent expressions of anger in our family, resulting in trauma. Depending on your family circumstances, you most likely learned healthy or unhealthy strategies for coping with anger and conflict.

Depending on your socialization, you also may have received messages growing up about how you should (or should not) express anger based on factors such as your gender, social class, or cultural background. In families that subscribe to traditional gender roles, it may be deemed acceptable for a boy to become angry and aggressive in a sporting activity but improper for a girl to do the same. For those from marginalized populations who have less power in society—ethnic, racial, sexual, and religious minorities; immigrants; and refugees—expressing anger can have severe and unjust consequences. Growing up, these individuals may receive explicit advice from parents and others about how to navigate difficult situations in which they might find themselves simply because of their marginalized status (e.g., how to interact if pulled over by a police officer). Unfortunately, some people who are in positions of authority and power have misused or abused that power and treated those with less power oppressively. In those cases, the combination of power and unbridled anger can lead to devastating circumstances (e.g., instances of police brutality against Black males or sexual violence against women and LGBTQ+ persons).

## How Can You Better Manage Your Anger?

Here are some suggestions for managing stressful or upsetting situations that tend to provoke an angry response:

1. *Avoid or alter the situation.* When I (Bob) encounter someone who is driving erratically, it makes me angry because I know that driver is making me and others unsafe on the road. In this case, the best thing for me to do is to slow down and get away from that driver. I might have to pull over for a few minutes to get far away from the situation, but I will do whatever it takes to get away from the source of what is making me angry.
2. *Analyze the situation and assertively express anger in a rational and caring fashion.* Learning to calm down enough to rationally look at the situation and figure out a way to express concern without further exacerbating matters takes practice. Reacting aggressively and verbally lashing out rarely helps

resolve the situation; it usually intensifies the feelings and the anger. Typically, “blowing off steam” escalates our own feelings of anger and makes those around us madder than they were. When encountering rude drivers, for instance, flashing my lights, honking the horn, and giving hand gestures may make me feel better in the moment, but it will escalate the tension.

3. *Practice calming your internal response system.* What you tell yourself about the situation as you try to make sense of it can help you calm down so your body’s physiological response is less intense. Experiment with practice, patience, and trial and error to discover what helps you calm yourself. Taking time out and getting away from the situation before you respond can help you calm down and gather your thoughts.
4. *When ready to let go of your anger and bitterness, consider forgiveness as an option for healing.* It is difficult to forgive someone if you remain angry with them. You have to decide to move on to release this anger. Forgiveness simply means that you are ready to put the situation aside and stop harboring anger that can eat away at you. Forgiveness does not mean admitting you are wrong or that another is right. It does not mean you are necessarily ready to reconcile with the person who angers you.

Unexpressed anger, if left to simmer inside, can lead to all kinds of psychological and physiological effects. It is important to find ways to express anger, avoid anger-provoking situations, and learn to calm yourself in intense situations. Identify what you have control over, and work on your reactions to those issues.

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of managing anger in your life. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend time thinking about how well you manage your anger. Some activities may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside of the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate making changes in your life to manage your anger more effectively. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to these questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

### Exercises and Activities

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We hope the following exercises will help you:

- Identify the triggers of your anger.
- Examine the thoughts, emotions, and behaviors associated with anger.
- Challenge distorted thinking in experiencing anger.
- Develop helpful techniques in coping with anger.

1. In the following scenarios, describe how you might react:

- a. You have asked a family member (partner or child) to take out the trash, and that person ignores you.

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b. You are trying to watch a good movie at the theater, and the person behind you keeps talking loudly.

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c. You are at lunch with a friend who dominates the conversation and won't give you a chance to get in a word.

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d. You are in line at the grocery store and in a hurry. The person checking out in front of you keeps asking for a price check and is taking *forever* to pay for the groceries and leave.

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e. A coworker challenges you and questions your judgment.

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f. Your partner/spouse wants to know if you want to go to dinner but never asks where you would like to go.

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g. You are on a cross-country flight, and the baby in the row behind you has been screaming for the last hour.

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h. You just learned that your partner/spouse has been cheating on you.

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2. Anger seems to happen spontaneously. Some of us become mildly irritated and others become furious when faced with the same situation. When you become angry, in general how would you describe your level of anger?

- ☐ No/minimal reaction
- ☐ Somewhat irritated
- ☐ Moderately irritated
- ☐ Angry but able to manage
- ☐ Angry and feeling like I would like to lash out
- ☐ Furious with "smoke coming out of my ears"
- ☐ Furious with rage and likely to react with a verbal or physical confrontation

3. Are you satisfied with the way you react when you are angry? How would you like your reaction to be different?

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4. What types of situations or events make you most angry? Why do you think that is the case?

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5. What types of people make you most angry? Why do you think that is the case?

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6. Describe your physical reaction when you are angry (e.g., heart racing, sweaty palms, dry mouth).

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7. Describe your emotional reaction and what you might say out loud when you are angry.

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8. What might you be saying silently to yourself?

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9. What one issue almost always gets you riled up and angry?

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10. Families handle anger in different ways. For some, emotions are “worn on their sleeve,” and anger is expressed openly and often. For other families, expressing anger may be seen as a sign of weakness or vulnerability, or even as an act of betrayal, and anger is rarely expressed. Growing up in your family, what expectations or limitations were you taught about expressing anger?

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11. How does your family currently handle anger and conflict?

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12. How does your family experience influence how you handle anger today in relationships?

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13. Social, political, and economic issues can add to your frustration and anger today. How do you experience today’s world? Have you witnessed or directly experienced more hatred, anger, and divisiveness in recent years? Do family members hold different views? How optimistic or pessimistic are you about America’s future? About your own?

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14. Recall a recent situation in which you became angry:

a. What was the situation?

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b. How did you initially react?

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- c. What was your inner monologue about the situation? What were you saying to yourself? Did that self-talk help or hinder your reaction to the situation?

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- d. What did you do to manage and de-escalate the situation? Were you satisfied with the outcome?

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- e. What would you do differently next time?

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15. You learned how to experience and express anger at least in part as a product of your culture, ethnicity, gender, religion, and socioeconomic class, and the way you were socialized growing up. How do these factors currently affect your experience and response to frustration and anger? How did they affect you when you were growing up?

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16. One good way to manage your anger is to build in a “cooling off period.” When you are furious, your rational self goes out the window, and you may do and say all kinds of hurtful and destructive things. Pick a few of these “cooling off” techniques, and try one or two the next time you are angry:

- Walk away from the situation and take a walk.
- Do deep breathing or mindfulness exercises.
- Talk to someone not involved in the situation.
- Wait to talk to the other person involved until you have had a cooling off period.
- Seek others to help remedy the situation.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

17. Managing your inner dialogue (self-talk) is another important and powerful way to manage anger. What you tell yourself about a situation can have a major impact on how you react and respond. Check the following self-statements that represent your self-talk when you are angry:

- ☐ “This makes me so mad I can’t even see straight!”
- ☐ “Is this really anger I am feeling, or am I more sad and hurt?”
- ☐ “Payback will be sweet!”
- ☐ “I wonder what the other person meant by that? Maybe I misunderstood the message and should ask for clarification.”
- ☐ “This just makes me furious. Everything makes me furious. I am out of control.”
- ☐ “This is just awful, horrible, the worst thing that could possibly happen.”
- ☐ “This is frustrating, but it isn’t the end of the world; I will work to get this resolved.”

### Key Thought

The words “always” and “never” are rarely helpful in your inner dialogue regarding anger; in fact, they can increase your level of anger.

18. Examine your inner dialogue in situations that make you angry. What could you say to yourself that would help you manage your anger and resolve the situation?

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19. Envision a person you know who handles anger well. If you cannot identify someone you know personally, identify a character in a film, TV series, or novel who manages anger effectively. How does that person react? What does the person say? What would it take for you to react more like that person when you are angry?
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### Key Thought

In developing plans to better handle anger in your life, it is important to create short-term and long-term goals. Create a plan for managing anger in situations that arise with some frequency in your life. Then consider developing a longer term “prevention plan” that redefines your relationship with anger, resentment, and forgiveness and addresses how you can modify your self-talk to achieve your anger management goals.

20. Visualize yourself reacting like the person you want to be more like when angry. Take a few moments and picture a situation where you would react like that person. How does that feel? What does that look like?
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21. If you sit on your anger or, conversely, readily express anger and alienate and anger others, it is time to look at other ways of managing your anger. Check the following options that seem like realistic ways you could better handle your anger:

- ☐ Have a built-in “cooling off period” to deter you from reacting immediately and allow you to process your thoughts and reactions.
- ☐ Make a concerted effort to improve your thinking and self-talk about people, situations, and life. Pay attention to how shifts in your thoughts and self-talk affect your feelings and emotions.
- ☐ Examine your beliefs and values about life (e.g., “Everyone should see things the way I do”), and modify those beliefs and values to work better for you.
- ☐ Work on your problem-solving skills to help you resolve situations without getting so emotional or angry.
- ☐ Develop better relaxation techniques and implement them when you become angry.
- ☐ Improve your communication skills so you can have rational and productive conversations with people when you are angry.
- ☐ Spend more time with leisure activities or hobbies or exercise to increase your level of relief and satisfaction with life.
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

22. Pick one of the options from the previous list and develop a plan for how you will use that to manage your anger: when, where, who is involved, time frame, and desired outcome.
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23. Anger can be expressed as passive aggression. Getting back at someone indirectly or talking sarcastically are indicators of hidden anger. People who harbor anger develop a lifestyle that is cynical, bitter, and hostile. Anger saturates everything they say and do. To what degree, if any, does this apply to you and your style of dealing with anger?
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24. Are you unable to let things go? Does something that someone said just eat away at you and make you even angrier? Forgiveness is a concept that we hear a lot about when learning about managing anger. We see examples of people who forgive others who have committed unspeakable acts. How do they do that? Forgiveness means that you will let go of the resentment you harbor—that pent up anger and desire for revenge—and it is a value that you can develop. Where are you in terms of your ability to forgive? Check the one statement that best reflects your thinking:

- ☐ I will never let this go. It is just too much.
- ☐ I guess with time I will get over it.
- ☐ I think I can forgive, but I know I won't forget.
- ☐ Once I get some distance from the situation, I think I can forgive and forget.
- ☐ Forgiveness is part of the human fabric and simply the right thing to do.

What steps could you take to work toward being a more forgiving person?

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25. Do you have greater difficulty forgiving yourself or others when things don't work out (e.g., relationships, jobs)? Reflect on how that affects your life. How would your life be different if you could forgive yourself or others?

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26. Now that you have a better understanding of your anger and what triggers it, how will you better manage anger in the future?

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# Self-Esteem



## For Clients

### Strengthening Your Self-Esteem

If you were totally honest and forthcoming, how much would you say you like yourself? Do you respect yourself? Do you accept your faults and shortcomings and forgive yourself for mistakes and failures in life? Or do you torture yourself with second-guessing and self-doubt about decisions made in the past? Do you feel optimistic about your future, or do you feel burdened with a sense of doom about what lies ahead for you? The answers to these questions form the essence of self-esteem.

### Beatles Wisdom

“I think people worry about things. And it doesn’t matter how elevated you get, or your reputation gets, you still worry about things” (Alfonsi, 2019). These words, spoken by Sir Paul McCartney, a 77-year-old billionaire and one of the most acclaimed musicians of all time, expressed his continuing worries and self-doubt. No one is immune from the worries, doubts, and anxieties of everyday living, not even one of the legendary Beatles! Research has shown that it is not the poor decisions and mistakes that people tend to regret most in their lives; rather, it is what people want to do or accomplish and do not that weighs on them more heavily (Bruk, 2018). Our self-esteem is tied to making the most of our lives and not being afraid to pursue those lofty goals for ourselves. As McCartney’s bandmate and iconic peace activist, the late John Lennon, was quoted as saying:

We need to learn to love ourselves first, in all our glory and our imperfections. If we cannot love ourselves, we cannot fully open to our ability to love others or our potential to create. Evolution and all hopes for a better world rest in the fearlessness and open-hearted vision of people who embrace life. (Lennon, 2017)

## What Is Self-Esteem?

*Self-esteem* can be defined simply as your opinion of yourself, the value you place in yourself as a human being, and your self-confidence and self-respect. When people have too little self-regard or self-esteem, they can become depressed, achieve less in life, and may have unsatisfactory relationships because they do not think they deserve better. Those who have an overinflated sense of self-regard may become narcissistic and feel a sense of entitlement. To get a better handle on this concept, answer the following questions:

- How would you describe yourself in five words?
- What is your evaluation of the person you are? The accomplishments in your life? Your abilities and limitations?
- Do you feel good about who you are and what you are doing, or are you dissatisfied with yourself, your accomplishments, your values, and your relationships?

Your degree of self-respect is a major part of your sense of self-esteem. Factors that tend to influence self-esteem include how others see you as well as your thoughts and perceptions of yourself; your experiences in your family, at school, in the workplace, and in social situations; and your experience with illness, adversity, injury, or trauma. In many cases, your relationships with others and their reactions to you are likely to play a major role in your development of self-esteem. Messages that you have received either explicitly or implicitly about your culture, race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education level, ability/disability, or other dimension of who you are will most likely affect your self-esteem. Promoting personal and social responsibility, along with having “other-esteem” (valuing and respecting others), is another essential element of your self-esteem. You do not choose between self-esteem or esteem for others but strike a balance between the two.

Some people find a goldmine of self-worth in work, parenting, a hobby, or volunteer work. You would expect that to be the case, but if you put all of your eggs in that one basket and that basket goes away, your self-esteem can be shaken. Some put all their stock in a career and find great joy, satisfaction, and reward from that career, but these people may feel lost and depressed and lack direction in life when their career comes to an end. The old adage to become a well-rounded person is not a bad idea. If you can find satisfaction, self-respect, and confidence in a variety of things you do in your life—parenting, family, career, education, friends, hobbies, community, religion/spirituality, volunteering—the loss of any one of them is not likely to put a huge dent in your self-esteem.

Self-esteem fluctuates depending on your life circumstances and your response to those circumstances. If you focus on your weaknesses and are unhappy with the way you are handling situations, your self-esteem may suffer. When life is going splendidly and you are managing well, your self-esteem will be higher. Ups and downs are common, but a chronically negative view of yourself or an unrealistic and overinflated view of yourself can work against you. With healthy and balanced self-esteem, you have an accurate and realistic view of yourself that is generally favorable and confident.

One of the true enemies of healthy self-esteem is *self-doubt*. Most of us experience self-doubt from time to time. In fact, it can be in our own best interest to occasionally question whether we are taking the right course of action. However, too many of us suffer from self-doubt, lacking confidence in ourselves and our abilities and choices. I (Bob) recall a recent conversation with my two teenage grandsons who are both bright, kindhearted, and concerned about others and are making productive and moral choices in life. The only thing that might get in the way of accomplishing what they desire is self-doubt. If they can overcome that and believe in themselves and their abilities, they can succeed in whatever lies ahead in their lives. I believe that is true for all of us—self-doubt is our greatest enemy, and we should do whatever we can to forge ahead with hope, persistence, and the belief that we will prevail and be successful. Of course, you can have too much confidence and be unable to realistically look at yourself and examine how you might improve. That is the essence of narcissism—believing unrealistically that you are the best, the smartest, the best looking, the best at making decisions and the most deserving in the face of facts to the contrary. All you have to do is look at politicians to see how narcissism works as a protective shield to keep them insulated from any negative feedback.

### Key Thought

One of the true enemies of healthy self-esteem is self-doubt, which is one of your greatest enemies in life. Do whatever you can to forge ahead with hope, persistence, and the belief that you will prevail and be successful.

In summary, individuals with healthy self-esteem are confident, realistic about their strengths and shortcomings, able to express themselves effectively, grounded in healthy and honest relationships, and resilient and able to bounce back from failures and setbacks (Mayo Clinic, 2017).

## Enhancing Your Self-Esteem One Choice at a Time

Robert E. Wubbolding, director of the Center for Reality Therapy, uses the metaphor of a train to describe the relationship between choice theory and reality therapy. He explains how the WDEP system of reality therapy can bolster your sense of self and satisfy essential needs that increase your life satisfaction.



### Using Reality Therapy to Bolster Your Self-Esteem

#### *Robert E. Wubbolding*

Choice theory is the train track. Reality therapy is the train. Both are needed. Each is useless without the other. The track directs the train. The train delivers the product. Choice theory directs the human mind to find ways to satisfy its inner motivations: to survive, to make connections with other people (belonging), to be in charge of self (power), to make choices (freedom), to enjoy life (fun), and most fundamentally to maintain a sense of meaning and purpose.

The failure to satisfy these needs results in feelings, thinking, and actions. Negative feelings include stress, anxiety, loneliness, malaise, and many others. Negative thinking involves “The world sucks,” “My supervisor is not fair,” “Even though what I’m doing is not working, I’ll keep doing it.” Unsatisfied needs can also result in an unlimited range of actions: complaining, doing minimal or mediocre work, and even drug abuse.

Catching fire about your job or anything you care about—the opposite of burnout—can be facilitated by employing the WDEP system of reality therapy. Each letter represents a cluster of reflections.

**W – Reflection I:** As soon as possible, write down your *wants*: a better relationship with your spouse, your friend, a promotion at work, a successful career, a new car, getting in better physical condition, more self-confidence, or a thousand other things. Keep in mind that it is not sufficient to merely think about your wants or goals. Write them down; this means you are serious about fulfilling them. Next, pick one and decide how committed you are to achieving it. There are three levels of commitment: (1) “I don’t really want it.” (2) “I’ll try to get it.” (3) “I’ll do whatever it takes.” Reflect on your level of commitment. Only one level is effective: level (3).

**W – Reflection II:** The W also represents *perception*—how you see the world. Do you see yourself as powerless, as put-upon by society, as in need of a safe space, or as stressed out by your job, your marriage and family, and other elements in your environment? Which one of these is the easiest to work on? (If you would rather choose the hardest, go for it.) Try to connect this perception with your actions, and ask yourself whether or not you indulge these perceptions and allow them to overflow into your conversations.

**D – Reflection III:** The D represents *doing*, which refers primarily to actions and secondarily to self-talk and feelings. Pause here and spend a few minutes thinking about your actions today, especially your conversation. Has it focused on complaints or criticism accompanied by “they won’t let me” or “the world is unfair”? Then ask yourself whether you have focused your conversation on the joys of life, such as your successes and those of the people around you. Which focus is better for you? More than likely it is the second set of conversations. A practical suggestion is to force a smile

rather than a frown. John Arden (2010), in his book *Rewire Your Brain*, states that “by smiling or frowning you send messages to your subcortical or cortical areas (of your brain) that resonate with happy or sad feelings. So, put on a happy face—it helps you to feel better” (p. 52). I have suggested to many people who state that they are shy to pretend they are outgoing with one person for 60 seconds. Keep in mind that it is easier to change your actions than to change your thinking and feelings. In 12-step programs, a common axiom is, “You can act your way to a new way of thinking (and feeling) easier than you can think your way to a new way of acting.”

**E – Reflection IV:** E represents the heart and soul of reality therapy. It stands for *self-evaluation*. After reflecting on the above principles, ask yourself, “Does it help me to see the world the way I’ve been interpreting it? Is what I want realistically attainable? Are my current actions effective for achieving my goals?” (Wubbolding, 2017). Writing down the self-evaluations, especially the positive ones, constitutes the most important component of your inner search for purpose and meaning.

**P – Reflection V:** These *reflections* culminate in a plan of action. Effective self-care and lessening stress require that you make a positive plan that replaces negative and limiting feelings and thoughts that we all experience at times. Reality therapy embraces the axiom, “To fail to plan is to plan to fail.” So be sure to develop a helpful, realistic, and doable plan of action.

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Although there is so much in the world that we cannot control, Wubbolding reminds us that we can make choices that will enhance our lives and help us feel more empowered and in control of our lives. As you weather life's countless stressors, it is crucial to reflect on whether your decisions are strengthening or eroding your self-esteem. How would you answer that question at this point in time? As you look to the future, what choices do you want to make?

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of increasing your self-esteem and improving your life satisfaction. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend some time thinking about your self-regard. Some questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of these activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate making changes in your life to increase your happiness and sense of self-esteem. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

## Exercises and Activities

1. First, let's revisit the questions we posed at the beginning of this section on self-esteem. We'll take them one at a time.
  - a. How well do you like yourself and respect yourself? Please rate yourself and then explain your rating.

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not at all* *A great deal*

Explain your response.

b. Which characteristics, beliefs, values, and actions do you like *most* about yourself?

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c. Which characteristics, beliefs, values, and actions do you *least* like about yourself?

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d. Which characteristics, beliefs, values, or actions would you like to be different, and how would you like them to be different?

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e. What emotions are you experiencing when you think about your beliefs, values, and actions? What disturbs or pains you the most?

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2. How would you describe yourself in five words?

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3. Do you accept your faults and shortcomings and forgive yourself for mistakes and failures in life, or do you torture yourself with second-guessing and self-doubt about decisions you have made?

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a. We all have made decisions we regret, but have you made decisions that you believe are truly unforgiveable? If so, explain.

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b. What would it take for you to be able to forgive yourself for those decisions or actions?

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4. Your own thoughts about yourself (self-talk) have a major effect on how you see yourself and the self-respect and self-esteem you have today. Examples of thoughts that can work against us are:

- “I never know the right thing to do. I am just a failure in every case.”
- “If I don’t do things perfectly, others will think that I am a failure.”
- “Nobody likes me, and no one ever will.”
- “This is too overwhelming, it’s too hard, and I just can’t do it.”
- “Why do I always screw things up? Why am I so stupid?”
- “Yes, but . . .”

Examples of thoughts that work for us and we can stand to increase are:

- “This seems overwhelming, but if I work hard, I can figure this out.”
- “Some people will like me, and others won’t. The key is to like myself more.”
- “I will do the best I can; and if people don’t like it, that’s just the way it is.”
- “I will try to make the most of my strengths and minimize my deficits while keeping a positive and hopeful outlook throughout.”



You have to train your brain to change your thinking patterns. It takes practice and effort to change those automatic messages you give yourself. Write down your negative messages, and see if you can come up with more positive messages that work for you rather than against you. Write down those positive messages and practice them, say them out loud. The more you say them, the more likely it is that they will become the new messages that guide your daily life. After writing a few of these, reflect on how this exercise was for you.

5. Self-appreciation is the respect you have for your own value in life (Leutenberg & Liptak, 2014, p. 44). Say a few words about what you appreciate in life:

Your life \_\_\_\_\_

Your family \_\_\_\_\_

Your relationships \_\_\_\_\_

Your strengths \_\_\_\_\_

Your goals \_\_\_\_\_

Your actions \_\_\_\_\_

6. In *Authentic Happiness*, Martin Seligman (2002) describes a number of positive traits that contribute to happiness and well-being. A few of these are gratitude, optimism, altruism, humor, wisdom, courage, love, humanity, justice, temperance (self-restraint), spirituality, and transcendence. In your journal, describe which of these traits are strengths of yours and how they enhance your well-being. Also, describe which traits you would like to possess (or strengthen) and how you envision your life satisfaction might improve as a result.

7. An important part of improving your quality of life is to increase happiness. The next set of questions focuses on this concept. Rate your overall happiness. Explain your rating.

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not happy* *Very happy*

Explain your response.

- a. If your subjective experience of being happy fluctuates, describe what's different between the times when you are happy and less happy.

- b. To what extent do you think you have control over your level of happiness?

**Scale:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
No control										Complete control

Explain your response.



c. I think I would be a lot happier if: (check all that apply)

- ☐ I had more money.
- ☐ I had a better relationship with my significant other.
- ☐ I was better at parenting.
- ☐ I had a job I like or was on a clear path to achieving my desired job/career goals.
- ☐ I was kinder to and more forgiving of myself.
- ☐ I could identify what will make me happier with my life.
- ☐ I had better eating and exercise habits.
- ☐ I didn't worry about the world so much (e.g., global warming, nasty politics, and so much divisiveness).
- ☐ I spent less time comparing myself to others on social media.
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

d. I think I would be a lot happier if: (check all that apply)

- ☐ The world was a kinder place to live.
- ☐ People were more supportive of me.
- ☐ People would just leave me alone.
- ☐ My friends and family were more supportive.
- ☐ My health was better.
- ☐ My faith-based community was more supportive and encouraging.
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional comments about this exercise:

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8. If a miracle happened and your self-esteem instantly became what you would like it to be, what would that look like? What would be different?

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9. Do you feel optimistic about your future, or do you feel trapped and have a sense of doom about what lies ahead for you?

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- a. If applicable, what about your life makes you feel trapped or feel a sense of doom?

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- b. What will it take for you to overcome those negative feelings and be less pessimistic?

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- c. What is your specific plan for improving your outlook on life? How long do you think it will take? Who else needs to be involved to help you actualize your plan?

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10. Describe three early childhood memories that really began to shape your self-concept and self-esteem. Include details such as what happened and how that made you feel.

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11. Relationships are an important factor in having sound self-esteem.

a. What are the messages about yourself you received from other people (family and friends) as you grew up, and how have those messages affected how you see yourself?

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b. What messages do you receive from others today, and do they have a bearing on your self-respect and self-esteem?

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c. How are those messages different from the messages you received from others when you were growing up?

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12. Locate a small cardboard box—approximately 6×6 inches—and gather some old magazines. Cut pictures from your old magazines and paste them onto your box to represent who you are. On the outside, paste pictures that represent how you think people see you. On the inside of the box, paste pictures you think represent who you really are. How different is the overall image of the person on the outside from the person on the inside of the box? How easy or difficult was it for you to do this activity? Were you surprised by your result?

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Be sure to bring your completed box to the next counseling session for discussion with your counselor.

13. What self-talk (inner dialogue) affects how you see yourself today? Is your self-talk more positive or negative?

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14. Keep track of your self-talk (your inner dialogue) for the next week, and see what you can learn about the messages you give yourself and how that affects how you feel and what you do. Keep a journal of those thoughts. When you have a good sense of the themes of your inner dialogue, begin to slowly modify it. It may not be easy because that dialogue is automatic. It takes awareness and practice trying a new dialogue and then more and more practice until you can turn those thoughts around to work for you. Describe your experience and what you learned from this activity.

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15. Create a chart with the headings in Chart 6.1. Describe an inner dialogue you typically have in the first column, and in the second column describe what it would be if you could successfully modify it to work for you rather than against you:

**Chart 6.1 Inner Dialogue**

Current Self-Talk	Desired Self-Talk
“Like my father told me years ago, I will never be good enough to go to college, so why should I even try to get decent grades.”	“My father’s discouragement and negativity don’t have to limit me. He was not always right about things. If I work hard, I will be better off and will improve my chances of going to college.”

16. Imagine you have learned that you have only one month to live.
- How would you like to live your life in that last month?  


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  - Who would you want to spend more time with? Who would you want to spend less time with? What activities would be most important for you?  


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  - What clues does that exercise give you about how you would like to live your life today? What would you like to do more of? Less of?  


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17. How would your significant others describe you today? How would you like to be described? How about in 5 years? In 10 years? How would you like to be remembered by those who care about you?  


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18. Neff and Germer (2018) describe the importance of self-compassion, which is treating yourself with the same kindness that you would treat a friend who is in trouble or having a hard time. Our culture places value on treating our friends with kindness and respect, but when it comes to treating ourselves with compassion, those ideas are not valued. Neff and Germer believe that self-compassion entails learning to treat yourself as a friend and becoming an inner ally and not an inner enemy.
- Describe a time when a friend was in need of help and support and how you helped that person.  


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b. Now think about a time when you were in need of help and support. How did you treat yourself

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c. What would it take for you to treat yourself more like you would treat a friend?

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19. Write a letter *to* your younger self and include whatever “life lessons” you would want “younger you” to know to make life easier to navigate over the years.

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20. Write a letter *from* your older self to your present self and include whatever life lessons “older you” would want you to know. In other words, write a letter from the future that expresses what you would like to be able to say about how you lived your life.

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21. Write a letter to your self-doubt as if “self-doubt” were a person. Imagine that you are writing a “breakup letter” to this part of yourself that has sabotaged your well-being and happiness. What would you most want to say to self-doubt? If self-doubt were no longer in your life, how would it be different?

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22. To challenge self-limiting assumptions, *act as if* you are the person you want to be. Catch yourself in the process of repeating old patterns that have led to ineffective or self-defeating behavior. For one week, *catch yourself* in unproductive patterns that have eroded your self-esteem. Then pause briefly to consider how you would like to respond differently. Allow yourself to assume that you have made a desired change in your behavior. Write about this experience in your journal. At your next session, discuss with your counselor how *acting as if* worked out for you.

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### Key Thought

Individuals with healthy self-esteem are confident, realistic about their strengths and shortcomings, express themselves effectively, grounded in healthy and honest relationships, and resilient and able to bounce back from failures and setbacks (Mayo Clinic, 2017).



# Grief and Loss



## For Clients

### Dealing With Grief and Loss

It often begins with a phone call. Sometimes we are at the bedside, comforting our loved ones as they take their last breath. Death is predictable even though its timing may startle us. My (Bob) first encounter with death occurred when I was 14 years old and my grandfather, Frank, died from the ravages of leukemia. I was stunned, disbelieving that such a strong and supportive hero in my life could leave this world, leave me. For some reason, I just never expected that he would die. I knew intellectually that dying happens to each of us—I just didn't think it would happen to him. I was in a fog of disbelief and confusion. I missed him, especially on holidays and special occasions when I was so accustomed to his presence. Over time I began to come out of the fog and my shock and returned to my normal routine. But I have never forgotten Frank and the wonderful times we had with him.

The experience of grief and loss following the death of a spouse, child, friend, or family member is universally difficult and challenging for each of us. Although we know that death will touch us all at some point in our lives, it seems we are rarely prepared for the experience of loss. Feelings of loss can be devastating, depressing, inconvenient, and completely unexpected. The grief that follows the loss of a loved one is one of the worst experiences we will have in our lives, and that grief can be all-consuming, especially at first. The range of emotions we experience following the death of a loved one is extensive. It can range from shock and disbelief to anger and guilt. Through this roller coaster of emotions, we have a pervasive sense of loss and sadness that we often fear will never go away.

*Grief* is a heavy emotional burden that is our reaction to the loss (S. Hayes, 2018). It is typically characterized by sadness and distress, and grieving is our way of healing from the loss (Jose, 2016). The loss of a loved one or of anything significant in our life is truly a heavy burden that we may carry with us for the rest of our lives. Loss turns our world upside down and challenges our sense of what matters most in life. After a significant loss, we often reexamine whether what we are doing with our life is, in fact, at the top of our priority list.

Grief can also follow the loss of your physical abilities or good health, loss of a job, a divorce, or loss of any significant relationship. However, nothing is quite like the pain you experience when someone close to you dies. Accept the feelings of sadness and distress, and recognize that the pain and sadness may last for some time. People do recover from the loss of a loved one, and the time it takes to recover is different for each of us. In addition, you will recover in your own way at your own pace, and it is important to give yourself permission to do so. This is not to say that you will forget the person or that you will ever stop feeling the loss, but the grief and sadness does seem to diminish with time and help from friends, family members and getting back into the activities of daily living.

Most of us remain preoccupied with the event for a period of time. We may have a vivid visual image of the deceased, and we may go over the details and the time frame of the event repeatedly. We usually talk about the event with others, and there is something healing about telling this story over and over. With time, the event begins to fade from our mind, and we move on to thinking more about routine living. My (Bob) mom died at age 97. She lived a long and productive life and was a role model for our family. She lived life to the fullest and adapted to every curve ball she encountered. She had been ill for some time, so her passing was not a surprise. Nonetheless, it was a significant loss. My wife and I visited her on Monday and Tuesday, and my brother called on Wednesday to tell us she had died that day. For several weeks, I replayed in my mind what I was doing on the Monday and Tuesday before my mom died. I talked with many people about the events surrounding her death and how we were all feeling and adapting to her loss. As the weeks passed, I relived those days and hours less and less, talked about her death less and less, until finally I stopped replaying those tapes about mom in my mind. Mondays and Tuesdays became just days in the week, no longer with a special significance. This is a normal reaction to and recovery from the crisis of loss of a loved one. Sometimes, however, that process is short-circuited or takes longer than we expect or isn't addressed at all. We know that holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries may be especially difficult because they bring with them many cherished memories.

### Key Thought

**People do recover from the loss of a loved one, and the time it takes to recover varies from one individual to the next. You will recover in your own way and at your own pace, and you may not go through a set of predictable stages of grief. Give yourself permission to feel the pain, the loss, and the sadness; allow yourself time to recover; and accept the comfort and support of others.**

Licensed psychologist Sherry Cormier (2018) shared her insights following several deaths in her family, including that of her husband. She experienced the presence and spirit of her loved ones and noted that it is common for survivors to experience the image of the deceased in a variety of forms and places, including in dreams. *Visitation dreams* are commonplace, and the deceased appears to provide guidance, reassurance, or in some cases, even a warning. Cormier had read and studied the concepts of grief and loss as a psychologist, but the actual experiences of loss were so much different and in many ways richer. She expressed surprise over how many of those experiencing loss developed new strengths as a result of this experience. In fact, Cormier recognized firsthand how these major events could lead to positive change and adaptation. Experts refer to this as *posttraumatic growth*. The basic idea is that the net result of such a loss is the development of newfound abilities, relationships, activities, and contributions to the community and even beliefs and values that were not present before the loss. These changes result from your struggle to make sense of the loss and to examine how to move forward. This doesn't mean that life will be easy or even better, but you may live life on a deeper level with new priorities and balance. Cormier's message is that through the loss, depression, and pain, we should be hopeful that things will get better and that we will adapt effectively.

You cannot make the pain and the grief disappear by not thinking about it. In fact, the more you try to squash or suppress those feelings and reactions, the more of a problem those emotions become, and you will find yourself working harder and harder to keep them in check. So what can you do about loss in your life and the grief that follows? Steven Hayes (2018) suggests that one of the best things you can do is to treat yourself with kindness and compassion throughout the grieving period. You will probably beat yourself up emotionally with guilt about what you could have or should have said or done, but accept the fact that you cannot go back and change things. The best you can do for yourself is to let go of those

ruminations of what might or should have been and refocus on the future and what you can do to ensure that your loved one's spirit and memories are not forgotten. To continue the healing process, Hayes suggests the following:

1. Acknowledge the loss and pain, and know that sometimes it feels uncomfortable and even unbearable. Don't fight it or try to suppress the feelings; give yourself permission to feel the intense sadness.
2. Embrace the feelings of loss. If you focus all of your energy on trying to eliminate the pain, it will likely get worse. Instead, open yourself up to allow these feelings to occur.
3. Expand your scope of vision. Other emotions or remembrances may come into your mind that you might think shouldn't be there—allow those in. That is perfectly normal.
4. Prepare to be overwhelmed. It is normal for the emotions to come in surges like waves. Some days seem better, and others may seem miserable. Measure your progress toward recovery over a period of weeks or months, not from hour to hour or day to day.
5. Watch out for unhelpful thoughts such as “this should be over by now” or “life isn't fair” or “I will never get over this.” These are perfectly normal thoughts and emotions to have, but look at them for what they are—normal reactions and not directions to be followed.
6. Connect with what matters with the people and activities that give your life meaning.
7. Take committed action to following what you feel in your heart—reaching out to others, getting back to work, or taking on a desired volunteer activity.

### Key Thought

One of the best things you can do is to treat yourself with kindness and compassion throughout the grieving period.

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of loss and grief in your life. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend some time thinking about how well you are healing from losses. Some questions and activities may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside of the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate making changes in your life to move forward with the grieving process. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

### Exercises and Activities

You may have experienced one or more losses that you need to process. If you are grieving multiple losses, it may be overwhelming to focus on them all at the same time, so choose the one that seems to preoccupy you most when you respond to these questions. You can repeat these exercises with a different loss in mind to explore your feelings about it too.

1. Describe the loss that has occurred in your life with as much detail as possible. What was the loss? How did it occur, and who was involved? What was your initial response? Detail your thoughts and emotional reaction at the time it occurred or when you learned about it. What has been your physical reaction; that is, how has this event affected you physically?

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2. How has this loss changed your life? How do you anticipate it will change your life in the future?

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3. Did this event cause any earlier similar memories of loss to reemerge? Did it suddenly bring back all those emotions and thoughts? If so, describe.

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4. Express your feelings of pain and sadness using words, images, drawings, or other artistic mediums. One idea is to keep an art journal as you process your grief. It is your journal, so you decide what to include: drawings, paintings, photographs, or some combination of materials and words. Let your creativity soar!

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5. Imagine that your grief process is like going on a road trip. You'll definitely need some tunes to keep you company as you make the journey. Create a playlist of songs that will provide you with an emotional outlet for your sadness and pain and accompany you through your grief process. What is it about each song you chose that led you to include it on your playlist?

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6. What have you done to try to relieve the pain the loss has caused you? How well has this worked for you?

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7. What was the last conversation you had with the person who died or who left? Was it a positive or negative conversation? What did you say? What did you wish you had said?

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8. Share your most vivid and cherished memory of the deceased. What emotions come up for you as you think about this memory?

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9. Do you find yourself being flooded with thoughts of the person or the event? What is that like for you? What seems to trigger strong and vivid emotions and thoughts? Are you ever able to shut those floodgates so you are not consumed with painful thoughts and emotions? (If not, move on to the next part of the exercise on refocusing.)

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Refocusing is one way to stop that flood of thoughts and change the subject in your mind. Think about or focus on something else, such as working in the garden, baking some cookies, watching a TV program, or talking to someone in person or on the phone. Come up with three thoughts or activities you could focus on or do to get your mind off the flood of thoughts about the loss. What are those?

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Refocusing will take some practice, so give yourself some time to work on this. It may not be easy, especially at first. Describe how well this activity worked for you.

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10. What were your initial emotions, and which of the emotions are you still experiencing today regarding the loss? Which emotions concern you most? Circle all of the emotions that apply to your experience right after the loss, your current emotions, and emotions you continue to experience that concern you most.

Initial Emotions	Current Emotions	Emotions That Concern Me Most
Anger	Anger	Anger
Disbelief	Disbelief	Disbelief
Fear	Fear	Fear
Sadness	Sadness	Sadness
Guilt	Guilt	Guilt
Depression	Depression	Depression
Confusion	Confusion	Confusion
Overwhelmed	Overwhelmed	Overwhelmed
Relieved	Relieved	Relieved
Motivated	Motivated	Motivated
Other _____	Other _____	Other _____

Say more about the emotions that concern you most. Why do they concern you? Describe how intense or severe these emotions are when they surface. How often do you experience them, and how long do they last?

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11. Therapeutic writing has been found to be useful and often healing for people suffering from the grief of loss (Humphrey, 2009). Begin by writing about the thoughts, feelings, and actions you associate with the loss you have experienced. Feel free to add whatever you like to express yourself about the loss and your grief. Set aside some private time, and write something every day about your reactions and recovery from the loss. Do this as often as you can, but at least once each day, and summarize how you are feeling and doing. Describe how this activity has been for you.
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12. One means of aiding the grieving process is for you to write a letter to the deceased or to the significant loss in your life. Express whatever you wish to the person or about the loss. This will give you a way to organize your thoughts and feelings about the person or situation. If the person is still alive, **do not send the letter!** The letter is for your use only; it is simply another way of expressing yourself. We want you to feel free of any judgment that might occur if you sent the letter, so we strongly encourage you to keep the letter in a secure place or destroy it when you have finished writing it and processing it with your counselor. Describe generally what you did and how that was for you.
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13. What role does religion or spirituality play in your way of dealing with loss? (Has religion been a source of strength and support for you, or has it been a source of oppression and stress in your life? Has it had any influence on you at all?) What role would you like religion or spirituality to play in your life and in this healing process?

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14. How does your culture or ethnicity affect how you view death and grief? What values and beliefs does that background and history provide in helping you understand your loss? Are symbolic rituals or practices part of your family's mourning or grieving process?

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15. Do you have the friends, family, and other support you need to help you get through this rough period in your life? Is there something missing that would be helpful and healing if you had that available?

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16. Some days will be better than others, and other days will be worse.

a. Describe those days that are better for you and what it is about those days that make them better.

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b. What are some things you could do to try to have more of those good days?

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17. Describe strengths you have discovered that you didn't realize you had as a result of this loss.

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18. If you woke up one morning and felt that you were back to normal, what would that look like? What would you be doing? What would you be feeling?

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19. Metaphors can be powerful tools in the healing process. Is there a metaphor that comes to mind that aptly captures your loss, grieving process, or posttraumatic growth? For instance, someone might say, "My grief feels like an avalanche that is burying me alive at times, but then the sunshine melts the snow and gives me hope." Feel free to draw your own metaphor if it will help you clarify your emotions.

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20. Cormier (2018) claims that it is common for survivors to experience the image of the deceased in a variety of forms and places, including in visitation dreams. Describe any dreams you have had that may be related to your loss. Keep a notebook by your bed so you can jot down notes upon awakening before you forget the details. Try to recall your emotions in the dream. Be sure to discuss your dreams with your counselor.

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# Individual Response to Trauma, Disaster, and Adversity



## For Clients

### How People React to a Disaster

We all react when faced with a crisis—a car accident, a death in the family, a divorce or separation, a report that your personal identity has been stolen, or the blow of getting fired from a job. Individuals seem to have their own ways of reacting and responding, and no two people react in the same way. In the same situation, one person might feel overwhelmed and at a loss for how to respond while the next person remains calm and collected and responds in an objective and effective manner and recovers quickly from the shock of the event. Why is it that two people can react to the same set of circumstances so differently? Many factors go into that process. We focus on helping you examine how you react in a crisis and what you can do to improve your ability to respond calmly and to recover as quickly as possible.

Take a few minutes to think about a crisis to which you were exposed and how you reacted. Then read the following description of factors that tend to influence an individual's response to a disaster. This may give you insights into why we all react so differently. These concepts are adapted from *Becoming a Helper* (Corey & Corey, 2021) and *Take Control of Life's Crises Today! A Practical Guide* (Haynes, 2014).

- Human-caused events generally elicit a stronger emotional response than a natural disaster such as a hurricane. You may feel helpless and angry at the circumstances of a hurricane, but a mass shooting may lead to feelings of anger, hopelessness, a desire to assign blame, and a need for answers as well as for justice and revenge.
- An unexpected event brings about the most emotional and mental disruption.

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- In general, the closer you are to the event, the stronger the reaction.
- Events that involve injury and death have a greater impact than ones that do not.
- Your current life situation and personal level of stress can affect how well you respond in a crisis. The greater the level of distress in your life, the less effective you will be in handling a current crisis.
- The more accurately you are able to identify what is occurring during a crisis, the more likely it is that you can respond effectively. However, humans have a tendency to “normalize” situations, even if that involves distorting reality and believing nothing bad is happening despite evidence to the contrary (e.g., witnessing a robbery). Our minds try to tell us that everything is OK. We do this for self-preservation.
- The first reaction to a crisis situation may be a sense of disbelief and a feeling of disorientation. The sooner you can overcome those reactions and attempt to objectively assess the circumstances, the more quickly and effectively you can respond.
- The bottom line is that crisis situations such as natural and human-caused disasters often result in cognitive disruption and impairment, which can cause you to become immobilized and “frozen.” It is as though an earthquake has occurred in your brain, and it can take considerable time to get things back in place and functioning properly.
- The better you are prepared cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally for a disaster, the more likely it is that you will respond effectively. Learning from previous situations and practicing for future disasters is key to your success.
- The stress reaction, or fight-or-flight reaction, is a common element in a crisis. Typically, individuals experience an increase in the flow of epinephrine resulting in increases in heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, and muscle tension, all of which prepare the body for responding to threats. The downside of the fight-or-flight response is that it may impair your ability to objectively and rationally resolve the situation (Wagner & Ivey, 2018).
- Genetic makeup very likely plays a role in your response to crisis. For example, serotonin, a chemical that occurs in the synapse between nerve cells in the brain, helps regulate mood and sleep patterns. Individuals with the gene for the long-form serotonin transporter between nerve cells may be able to remain calm and to objectively assess a crisis situation, whereas those with the gene for the short-form serotonin transporter react more impulsively (Touchette, 2003). Although you cannot do anything to change your genetic makeup, it can be useful to be aware of possible genetic factors that affect your reaction and response.
- The neurochemistry of the individual stress response involves neurotransmitters, hormones, and cortical areas of the brain (James & Gilliland, 2017). Continual exposure to stressful situations—such as the work of first responders or military personnel in a war zone—can cause permanent changes in the brain and may play a role in the development of PTSD.
- Physical symptoms and ailments are not uncommon for an individual who has experienced a stressful crisis and may intensify as additional crises are experienced over time.
- Time distortion also can occur. An event that lasted a minute can feel like an hour to a participant in the situation. Events often feel as though they are happening in slow motion, and you may feel as though you are removed from the event, as if watching from outside.
- You can expect to react to a crisis situation cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally and that you will recover with time. These are normal reactions to abnormal events.
- The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. Successfully managing a crisis situation makes it more likely that you will be successful in future situations. The same is generally the case for those who handle the situation poorly. However, new skills can be taught and learned, and that should be your overriding goal in counseling.

### Key Thought

If you have experienced some sort of a disaster, your response is a normal reaction to an abnormal event. Most people experiencing what you have would have a reaction as well.

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of reacting to crisis situations in your life. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend some time thinking about how well you react to adverse events in your own life. Some questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value in the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate making changes in your life with regard to dealing with crises. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

### Exercises and Activities

1. Consider how you might handle this situation. You are driving along a city street and a pedestrian suddenly darts out in front of your car. It takes you a fraction of a second to realize what is happening and then slam on the brakes to avoid the pedestrian who did not see your car coming when he entered the crosswalk. As your car comes to a halt, you feel a slight bump as you seem to tap the pedestrian. At the same time, you hear the screech of brakes as the driver behind you was not paying attention and slams into the rear of your car. You get out of your car and see that the pedestrian appears more shocked than injured, but then you also see that your car is seriously damaged in the rear.
    - a. What are you feelings about the situation? Anger toward the person who slammed into you? Shock or a state of disbelief? Defensive about the situation and feeling upset that the pedestrian wasn't more careful? Feeling guilty or concerned about the well-being of the pedestrian? What do you think your most prominent emotion would be?

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  - b. What do you believe your initial reaction would be? What action would you take in this situation? How would you decide on that course of action?

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  - c. Have you faced a similar situation in the past? Describe what happened. How well do you think you handled it? If you could do it over again, would you handle the situation differently? If so, in what ways?

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  - d. What do you need to learn to be better prepared to handle such situations in the future?

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2. Describe a crisis situation in your life that you think you reacted to *effectively*.
    - a. What was the event that triggered the crisis?

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b. How did you react? What were your initial thoughts and feelings? How did you act or behave?

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c. How did you first learn or become aware of the situation? How long did it take until you were able to respond to the situation?

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d. What did you like about the way you reacted? What enabled you to draw upon your internal and external resources to react the way you did?

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3. Describe a crisis situation in your life in which you feel your reaction and response was *unacceptable*, then answer the following questions.

a. What was the crisis situation? How did you react?

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b. What were the thoughts running through your mind during the crisis?

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c. What do you wish you had done differently in the way you reacted?

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d. How would you like to be able to react in future crisis situations?

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e. What will it take for you to be able to react that way?

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f. What is it that might get in your way of being able to react that way?

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4. Select a recent crisis or trauma you experienced. Gather colored pencils, pens, chalk, or watercolors and draw or paint a picture of what that experience looked and felt like to you. As an alternative, you could create a picture of what you look and feel like as a result of that trauma. This activity is *not* a test of your artistic ability. The goal is to use nonverbal means to help process your trauma. Your picture might include objects, people, places, and so on, or it might include a more abstract image using colors and shapes and designs to depict what you are trying to represent. You might turn on some relaxing music in the background as you draw or paint your picture. Upon finishing your artwork, describe what this creative experience was like for you. We encourage you to bring the drawing or painting to your next counseling session to discuss with your counselor.

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5. When you were growing up, think about how your family generally reacted to a crisis.
- Were they calm? Were they upset or overwhelmed? Were they in denial? Were they slow or quick in reacting?

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- Who in your family handled crises most effectively? Least effectively?

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- Which family member(s) had the greatest influence on you in terms of modeling how to handle crises?

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6. Who in your present-day immediate family is the role model in reacting to crisis? How does that person handle crisis?

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7. In your mind's eye, think about characters in movies or TV shows who handle crises well. In other words, which characters could be your positive role models? What is it that enables them to react so effectively to stressful situations?

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8. One characteristic of effective leaders is their ability to respond well in times of crisis. Identify leaders that you look up to who handle crises effectively. They might be leaders you personally know, or they might be nationally recognized leaders in politics, education, sports, or other career fields. Describe what makes them such great leaders and, in particular, what you admire in how they approach crisis situations.

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9. In thinking about a particular crisis that you experienced, reflect on whether you have any “unfinished business” to work through that weighs heavily on you. Did you say or do anything during the crisis that you regret? Did others say or do anything during the crisis that you find difficult to let go of and forgive? Forgiveness of ourselves and of others can go a long way in helping us heal and can bring us great relief.

- Who, if anyone, do you need or want to forgive in order to move on with your life? This could be yourself or someone else.

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- Describe why it is important for you to forgive yourself or the other person? How do you hope your life will be enhanced by taking this step?

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- What, if anything, makes it challenging for you to forgive yourself or the other person?

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- d. If a miracle happened or you magically were able to offer forgiveness, how do you imagine it would feel? How would your life be different?

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- e. How motivated are you at this time to offer forgiveness?

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not in a million years!* *Ready and extremely motivated*

Explain your response.

10. Write a letter of forgiveness to yourself or the other person for how you or they mishandled the crisis. The goal of this exercise is *not* for you to write a letter that you will actually send. (You may or may not ultimately decide to do so, but this exercise is designed to let you express your thoughts and feelings on paper unfiltered. If you feel ready to send a letter in the future, you may want to revise it after stepping back and gaining perspective.) Bring the letter to counseling and process your reaction to doing this exercise with your counselor.

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11. What skills or practical knowledge do you need to learn to improve your response to specific crises you may encounter in the future?

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12. People's personalities and temperaments can play a role in the manner in which they respond to difficult situations, including crises. For instance, some individuals may not be rattled by stressors easily whereas others are quickly triggered by stress. How would you describe your personality and temperament? How have they affected the way you react during crisis situations?

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13. The stress reaction (fight-or-flight reaction) is a common element in a crisis. When you are in distressing situations, are you more inclined to fight or escape? How does this help or hurt you?

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14. Tragedies such as mass shootings and acts of violence have become all too common in society.

- a. What is your reaction when you hear of a mass shooting or tragedy?

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- b. Do you fear that kind of tragedy could happen to you or to someone you care about?

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- c. If you have children, how concerned are you for their safety in school or in public areas such as concerts?

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d. What do you do to manage these concerns?

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15. How could you best react in a shooting incident?

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a. What do you anticipate you would do and think?

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For tips on how to respond in such crises, visit the website of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and review their booklet “Active Shooter: How to Respond” ([https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active\\_shooter\\_booklet.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/active_shooter_booklet.pdf)).





# Trauma Recovery and Posttraumatic Growth



## For Clients

### Recovering From a Disaster or Trauma

Recovery from a disaster is an individualized process much like one's reaction to a crisis. Some people bounce back quickly, and others require considerably more time to recover. Those traumatized by a disaster may develop depression, generalized anxiety, simmering anger, and sleep disturbances as well as physical symptoms and disorders such as headaches, digestive problems, or dizziness. Some people may develop PTSD.

When stress exceeds your ability to cope with it, it is natural that symptoms may emerge. If you experience a disaster or trauma, you should expect to have an emotional reaction, and you should expect to recover in time. What you are experiencing is a normal reaction to an abnormal event. Anyone experiencing what you have would have a reaction as well. Give yourself permission to take the time and to seek the support you need. If you have experienced a highly traumatizing event, you may need an extended period to recover, and you may need assistance in that recovery process. Reaching out for support when you need it is one important way of taking care of yourself. Although it may not seem possible, you may experience a positive change in your life even though you have been through a negative event. Above all, resilience, support, and healthy self-care are essential in the recovery process.

## Key Steps in Recovering From a Crisis Event

To help yourself recover from a crisis in a timely and effective manner, consider taking some of the following steps.

1. Examine the crisis and your reaction to it. What was involved, and how did you react, respond, and recover? Were you able to recover in a timely manner given the severity of the event? Do you believe you are a resilient person who is able to bounce back in a reasonable amount of time?
2. Identify and accept the feelings you are experiencing about the event. Being able to assess your true feelings about the event will help you recover more quickly.
3. Talk about your feelings regarding the event. One of the best ways to recover from a crisis is to talk with supportive individuals about the event and your reactions, your thoughts, and your feelings about it. Suppressing your feelings will only prolong your recovery.
4. Examine your self-talk about the crisis and your response to it. What you tell yourself about the situation can have a major impact on how you feel, respond, and recover. Be kind to yourself in your self-talk, and try not to berate yourself for what you did or did not do in the situation. Watch out for those “shoulds” and “oughts” that can make you feel worse.
5. Get back to your daily routine as quickly as possible with regard to work, school, eating, sleeping, exercise, and the like.
6. Practice healthy self-care. One of the best means of recovering from a crisis is to give yourself permission and time to do things you enjoy, but possibly have not been doing often enough, and to eat well, get adequate rest and exercise, and do those things that are good for your body and the soul.

## The New Stress of Climate Change

Scientists agree that our climate is changing and that it is beginning to have a major impact on us (Rice, 2017). We look around us and see more severe hurricanes, prolonged droughts and wildfires, record high temperatures, melting ice caps, and rising sea levels. The seas are rising as greenhouse gases from burning fossil fuels cause glaciers and ice sheets to melt, and 311,000 coastal homes are at risk of flooding in the next 30 years (Rice, 2018). Whitmore-Williams et al. (2017) state that climate change is and will continue to be an additional source of significant stress in our everyday lives, adding to the other stresses we encounter daily. That can lead to anxiety, worry, depression, and health impacts as the world warms and sea levels rise. In addition to taking actions to counter the effects of climate change, individuals must prepare themselves for adversity, develop resilience and optimism, and work with their community, family, and social support systems.

Develop a family emergency response and communication plan in preparation for a disaster. Your plan should include what to take, where to go, and who to contact in case of an emergency such as a wildfire, hurricane, earthquake, flood, or other disaster, whether human-caused or natural. All members of your family should be aware of the plan and the emergency meeting locations. Without a plan, people often grab meaningless articles such as pots and pans, a football, or a scarf just to have something to take. Be prepared with a *go-bag* that contains key items in case you must leave immediately, a list of items to gather if you have just a few minutes, and another list of items to gather if you have an hour or two to evacuate. Place key documents such as insurance policies, estate papers, financial statements, and so forth on a flash drive in your go-bag. We encourage you to visit the Department of Homeland Security website ([www.ready.gov/plan](http://www.ready.gov/plan)) for more information regarding developing an emergency response plan.

## Workbook Material for Clients

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of recovering from crisis situations in your life. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend some time thinking about how well you bounce back from adverse events in your own life. Some of the

questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate how you can improve your approach to recovering from crises. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

## Exercises and Activities

1. Think about the crisis situation you are most concerned about. What was the situation? Who was involved? How did you react?  


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2. Fear, shock, disbelief, guilt, confusion, sadness, panic, anger, and frustration are common emotional reactions in response to a crisis.
  - a. Did you initially experience any of these emotions during or immediately after the crisis? If so, which ones were most prominent?  


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  - b. As you recover from the crisis, have these emotions diminished in strength?  


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  - c. Have any become more intense? Have any new emotions surfaced?  


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3. How are you feeling now about the event? How is the recovery process going for you? How has the past crisis changed your life situation today?  


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4. As you reflect on your recovery, consider whether there is anything you would like to do or approach differently.
  - a. How satisfied are you with your recovery?  


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  - b. What aspects of it are within your control, and what aspects are beyond your control to change?  


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5. We silently talk to ourselves about almost everything we do. That *self-talk* (internal dialogue) can influence how we react emotionally and how we respond in a crisis.
  - a. What is your self-talk about the incident or crisis, your initial response, and your ongoing recovery?  


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b. Is your self-talk working for you or against your recovery?

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c. If it is not working for you, what would you like to do to change that?

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d. How could your self-talk be more positive and constructive?

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6. Keep a log of your self-talk for one week. At the end of the week, describe some of the key patterns you can identify.

a. Are you a catastrophizer or a problem solver?

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b. A perfectionist or a realist?

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c. Are you kind to yourself, or are you judgmental and critical of yourself?

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7. Reflect on your self-talk patterns and learn to replace negative self-statements (e.g., “I will never succeed!”) with more constructive and positive self-statements (e.g., “With effort and preparation, I can succeed!”). Now it is time to get some practice. Apply your newfound self-talk and thinking patterns in everyday life situations. The more you practice in lower stakes situations, the more automatic this new approach is likely to be when the stakes are higher in consequential situations. Describe how you are doing in modifying your self-talk for everyday situations.

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8. Is something preventing you from getting back to your daily routine? What will it take to get things back to normal for you?

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9. Those practicing *narrative therapy* suggest that we live our lives by the stories we tell about ourselves and that others tell about us. According to this approach, “reality” is shaped by these stories because they construct and constitute what we think, feel, and do. As you recover from your traumatic experience, reflect on the problem-saturated story you often tell yourself about the crisis event and about how you and others handled it. Write it down with as much specificity as possible. Then rewrite or revise your story in a more empowering way. By viewing your story through a different lens, you may discover alternative meanings for events. (For example, instead of replaying the narrative in your mind that your family deserted you because they were ashamed of you, you might reauthor your story and replace that narrative with a more constructive one—that your family distanced themselves from you because they were absorbed in their own pain and that, even without their support, you handled the crisis well.)

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10. Taking good care of yourself by practicing healthy self-care is one of the best ways to help yourself recover from a crisis. Most of us know what we need to do in these areas but resist doing it.
  - a. How well do you take care of yourself in terms of diet, exercise, sleep/rest, and relaxation?

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b. In what areas could you improve?

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c. In what areas are you most motivated to make changes at this time?

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11. How much of a crisis is climate change for you personally? For your family and people you care about? For the future?

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12. What fears or concerns related to climate change do you have about living conditions for the future? List strategies you can use to manage your fears or reduce your anxiety.

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13. Some consider climate change to be the defining issue of our time. It is expected to have dire consequences, especially if left unaddressed. What role can you play in the plan to mitigate climate change? What are some concrete actions you can take?

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14. Describe the contents of a go-bag that you can assemble in case of an emergency. Write a list of items to gather if you have just a few minutes and another list of items to gather if you have an hour or two to evacuate. Where would you keep this go-bag? After writing these lists, reflect on how it was to do this exercise.

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15. This chapter emphasizes the importance of developing an action plan and then practicing it so you can activate it in the event of a disaster. Reflect on your experience of doing this. How was it to practice your emergency action plan? Does any part of your plan need to be modified to improve it?

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16. What are some ways you could become involved in social activism as a route to healing? Which non-profit organizations address issues or causes that are important to you? List them below.

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17. If becoming more active in social issues interests you, reflect on the skills, qualities, and strengths you have that may help you in this role.

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18. What do you anticipate would be most challenging for you if you become involved in social activism? How could you address these challenges?

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# Coping With Chronic Illness and Health Issues



**For Clients**

## **The Crisis of Chronic Illness and Other Health Issues**

Being diagnosed with a serious medical condition or chronic illness is one of the most frightening and life-changing events you can experience. In many cases, it turns your life upside down, like having a rug pulled out from under you. A few years ago, I (Bob) was diagnosed with cancer, and that event was the catalyst for much soul-searching! Not only did I think about the impact of having cancer, but I also did some intense self-exploration about life, death, family, courage, rational decision-making, and my priorities in life.

If you are reading this section because you are in counseling to discuss or process your medical situation, you have already taken a huge first step toward managing the situation. Emotions seem more intense when you are dealing with a chronic condition or another serious illness. Shock and disbelief are common reactions when you first learn of your diagnosis, treatment options, and prognosis. Anger and frustration commonly go along with adapting to this new reality, and longer term effects may include sadness and depression as you consider what this all means for you and your family, work/career, and life plans. Dealing with the diagnosis of a serious medical condition is like learning that your house is on an eroding cliff. Try your best to focus on shoring up the house to prevent it from slipping, and do not allow yourself to become preoccupied, overwhelmed, or immobilized by the fact that the house could slip down the cliff in the end.

Chronic illness adds to the daily stressors and challenges of life and may include managing your physical situation, coping with pain and discomfort, and dealing with family members, friends, doctors, nurses, therapists, clinic and hospital staff, insurance companies, and others in the health care system. Stress may result from the added financial burden associated with medical bills, the cost of prescription drugs, and being out of work. Of course, the painful emotions that often accompany a medical diagnosis also intensify stress considerably.

In addition to counseling, here are some things you can do to help you cope with your medical situation (Madell, 2015):

- Do as much as you can to fully understand your medical situation and various treatment options. Ask questions of your doctor, research your illness, and learn as much as you can. Keeping a journal recording your course of treatment and changes to your condition can help you monitor your progress in treatment.
- Manage your treatment and your medications to help you gain a sense of control.
- Monitor your emotions, and discuss what you observe in counseling. Try out different ways of managing stress, and see what works for you and what doesn't.
- Focus on key relationships. You may have less time and energy than you are used to having, so focus on the relationships that are most meaningful to you.
- Adapt to your situation the best you can. Fighting it probably will not help. Your attitude and outlook of hope will go a long way toward helping you manage your medical situation.

My (Bob) brother Gary, who passed away in 2019, had prostate cancer and colon cancer, and chemotherapy and hormonal treatments continued over the entire 11 years of the course of these illnesses. Originally, doctors gave him a few months to a few years to live—yet he lived another 11 years. For most of those years, he had chemotherapy infusions for colon cancer every 4 weeks. In addition, he had many other related medical crises, including a broken hip and atrial fibrillation, for a total of seven surgeries. The side effects of the treatments, the pain, and the emotional toll were enormous. Not long before he died, I asked Gary how he did it, how he persevered and did not give up in the face of overwhelming odds. The story that follows tells of Gary's resilience and how hope enriches a life.



## The Role of Hope in Living With Chronic Illness and Health Issues

*Gary Haynes (as told to Robert Haynes)*

Gary said several factors kept him going over the 11-year course of his illness. One factor was his family, especially his children and grandchildren. He wanted to be around to enjoy them and their accomplishments as long as possible. He also volunteered for years as an aide at a local hospital. In that capacity, he directed patients to relevant services, comforted patients and family members who were having a tough time, and spent time with gravely ill patients who seemed lonely and depressed. His personal experience with long-term life-threatening illness and chronic pain had given him a new appreciation for patients in the hospital and, in fact, for anyone with a serious medical condition. He liked to bring love and kindness to these patients because that is what was (and is) missing in our world. He tried to give them hope by sharing his journey and giving them a dose of joy in a sterile hospital environment that often felt impersonal and frightening.

Gary's sense of purpose and will to keep battling his illness was enhanced through his work supporting, loving, and encouraging others who were enduring similar conditions. When he felt down, lonely, and discouraged, the prospect of *hope* that he could help and support others kept him going. He occasionally stopped to honor the battle that he had taken in his fight against cancer. Near the end of his life, I asked Gary what advice he would give to anyone up against chronic pain or serious medical issues. Gary's spirit of loving support is easy to see in his response to my question, and we now pass his advice along to you.

- Give yourself time to digest all the information. When you first hear the diagnosis and treatment options, it can be overwhelming, and a thousand thoughts will be running through your mind. Take a breath, step back, and carefully consider your options.
- Don't listen to the statistics and percentages the medical professionals give you. They are averages and say nothing about your individual journey or the battles you may fight and win. I have defied all the odds and statistics, and I am still going strong.
- Try to focus on what you can do about your situation rather than on any limitations that your condition may create for you.

- Negative experiences can have positive by-products. As a result of my fight with cancer, surgeries, and chemotherapy, I have been able to offer support and encouragement to hundreds of patients in the hospital where I volunteer. This would not have occurred had I not experienced these medical issues.
- You must have hope. It may take time to build that hope for a positive outcome and a resilient outlook, but it can be done. When you give up hope, you surrender your will to live.

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## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of coping with chronic illness in your life, whether it is your own health crisis or that of someone you care about. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend time thinking about how well you are managing your own health/medical issues or coping with the serious illness of a family member or friend. Some questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can about yourself outside the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate how you can reduce your stress as you navigate these difficult circumstances. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

## Exercises and Activities

### Questions for Clients With Health Issues

The following activities are designed to help you and your counselor examine your health issues and learn how they are affecting you and your significant others.

1. Are you dealing with a disease, disorder, or chronic health issue? Explain:

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2. What is the severity/seriousness of your situation?

☐ Minor      ☐ Serious, but temporary      ☐ Long-term and serious      ☐ Life-threatening

3. To get a better picture of the occurrence of your symptoms, track them in a log book and summarize the symptoms you experience in the morning, the afternoon, and in the evening. Describe any differences in the severity or painfulness throughout the day.

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4. Describe your illness over your life span, including childhood, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late/older adulthood. Describe the symptoms that were present during each of these life stages, the treatments you received, and how well they worked for you. (If the onset of your illness was at a later stage, begin there.)

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5. To what extent do your family members understand and accept your illness?

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a. Are they embarrassed by your illness? If so, how do they communicate this?

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b. Do you think your family members resent your illness?

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c. Do they try to control your decisions related to managing your illness?

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d. Describe how the following questions apply in general to your family and also to individual family members (Fennell, 2012).

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6. How has your illness affected your primary relationship with your significant other/spouse in terms of communication? Mutual support? Sex and intimacy? Roles and responsibilities? Finances? (Fennell, 2012).

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7. How has this illness affected you physically and emotionally in the short term? In the long term?

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8. How has the illness affected your self-confidence and self-image/self-concept in the following domains of life: work or school, recreation, sex and intimacy, parenting?

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a. Are there other areas in which your self-confidence and self-concept have been affected by your illness or condition? Describe.

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9. How has this affected those close to you?

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a. Do you feel a need to take care of those people in regard to this illness? If so, explain.

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<input type="checkbox"/> Anger	<input type="checkbox"/> Confusion	<input type="checkbox"/> Rage
<input type="checkbox"/> Shock	<input type="checkbox"/> Fear	<input type="checkbox"/> Hopelessness
<input type="checkbox"/> Disbelief	<input type="checkbox"/> Grief	<input type="checkbox"/> Helplessness
<input type="checkbox"/> Sadness	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/> Determination
<input type="checkbox"/> Depression	<input type="checkbox"/> Hopefulness	<input type="checkbox"/> Optimism

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not at all depressed* *Extremely depressed*

Have you ever had thoughts of ending your life due to feelings resulting from your medical condition?

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18. What would you like to do more of in the future to help you cope with depression?

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19. Do you have a plan of action for coping with this health issue? If so, describe your plan. If not, create a positive plan that replaces negative and limiting feelings and thoughts with more constructive ones.

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20. Refer to the case example of Gary waging a decade-long battle with life-threatening cancers, and answer the following questions:

a. What was your general reaction to the case example? Could you identify with what Gary experienced? Would you concur with his words of advice? Are there any additional words of advice that you would add to the list based on your own experiences?

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b. What is the driving force that keeps you motivated and continuing with your treatment? If you could capture it in a bottle, what would you label it?

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c. Do you have hope for the future? What instills you with hope?

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d. How lonely is the place where you are in terms of your health issues? What helps you cope with and counter that loneliness?

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21. How has this illness changed your thinking about life's priorities?

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a. If you ordered your priorities, which ones would be at the top of your list?

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22. Write a letter to your illness or health condition as if it was a person. Consider what you would most want to convey about how it has impacted your life. After writing the letter, reflect on the experience and be prepared to talk about it with your counselor.

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23. How are you feeling about your future and the outcome of this health issue?

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## Questions for Caregivers

1. If you are a caregiver of a family member who has a chronic illness or serious medical condition, what do you do for self-care or respite?

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- a. To what degree does this relieve your stress?

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- b. How often do you engage in this activity?

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2. As the primary caregiver, how has this role changed your life and your outlook on life? These may include both positive and negative changes. What feelings and thoughts come up for you as you think about this?

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3. What is most challenging about being a caregiver? Are there any abilities, skills, or strengths you have developed as a result of taking on this role?

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4. As a caregiver, you are constantly giving your time, effort, and care to another person. Who supports you?

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- a. Are you satisfied with your support system, or do you need to develop a stronger one?

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- b. Who would you like to add to your support system?

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5. To what extent has being a caregiver shaped or affected your identity and self-concept?

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- a. If your loved one is facing a terminal illness, how do you think your identity and self-concept will be affected when this person eventually dies?

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- b. What feelings, fears, and thoughts come up for you?

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# Political Differences, Value Conflicts, and Tribalism



For Clients

## Dealing With Political Differences, Value Conflicts, and Tribalism

After her older brother posted comments on Facebook minimizing the pain of survivors of gun violence, Stephanie decided to confront Keith on social media. She thought she could be more candid online than in person, and she wrote a scathing post, which offended her brother deeply. Keith felt personally attacked and thought Stephanie was overreacting. Although they had a close relationship growing up and were respectful of each other despite value differences, tensions escalated after the 2016 election. Stephanie and Keith could hardly be civil toward each other and became estranged. This is just one of many stories describing the toll the current political climate is having on family relationships. If you feel stressed about today's climate of divisiveness, hatred, and bullying, and are concerned about its impact on relationships, you are not alone!

Although there is much to disagree about in today's polarized world, few would disagree that the United States of America has become a deeply divided nation. (At least most of us can agree on that!) Whether you lean to the left or the right in your political views or regard yourself as middle of the road or as an independent, it is hard to ignore the fact that tribalism is flourishing in our society. Rather than working in a bipartisan manner, those affiliated with the major political parties (or tribes) seem to be approaching politics as a zero-sum game, in which one party's victory signifies the other party's loss. Political differences have long generated lively debate and created tension, if not outright hostility, among those who feel passionately about their beliefs, but the divisiveness and hatred we are witnessing today is more widespread and more deeply entrenched. To make matters worse, a dislike of the "other tribe" has created a context in which the phenomenon of *fake news* has gained traction and attracted a mass audience (Lazer et al., 2018). We often think about fake news in a political context, but false information is also spread about a

range of topics, including vaccination scares, nutritional advice, and stock market values. Undermining the credibility of legitimate news outlets that we count on to provide accurate information is dangerous to our democracy, and sometimes false information claims lives.

## **The Stress of Living in Polarizing Times**

If you have wondered whether the divisions in society have become wider and deeper, you are not alone. The current state of our democracy, which some argue is in peril as are other democracies around the world (e.g., Fukuyama, 2018), is a source of stress for many Americans. The recent Stress in America survey (APA, 2017b) found that “nearly six in 10 adults (59 percent) report that the current social divisiveness causes them stress” (p. 1). A majority of adults from both political parties say the future of the nation is a source of stress.

You may well be wondering, “What the heck is going on? What is driving all of this divisiveness and tribalism?” The answer to these questions is complex, in fact, far more complex than we can address in this workbook. However, some developments that have led us to our current state “relate in some way to the economic and technological shifts of globalization. But they are also rooted in a different phenomenon: the rise of identity politics” (Fukuyama, 2018, p. 91). According to Brand (2017), “The crisis in our politics is fed in no small part by a widespread crisis in identity felt by millions of people [and] brought on by social change” (p. 215). We all need to know that we have a secure place in society. When people believe that their social status and sense of belonging and identity are threatened, they may experience fear, resentment, and anger. At its extreme, troubled individuals commit hate crimes, targeting innocent people. Their actions are fueled by ugly forces such as racism, xenophobia, homophobia, religious intolerance, and other forms of bigotry and oppression. At the risk of oversimplifying a very complex matter, these perpetrators seem to believe that others (often people from marginalized groups) are to blame for their lot in life and for that of others like them. Fortunately, the vast majority of people do not act out violently.

A more common occurrence in these polarizing times is the ruptures people experience in their personal relationships over political differences. Many people regard these schisms in their relationships as a source of stress. Reports of people choosing to purge their friend groups of anyone outside their political tribe are all too common today (Allott, 2018). It may be helpful for you to reflect on the important relationships in your life and assess the extent to which politics at the local, state, national, or international level have negatively affected your interactions with or attitudes toward people you care about.

### **Key Thought**

Abraham Lincoln once stated, “A house divided against itself, cannot stand.” Thus all Americans stand to gain by healing the ruptures that have damaged us as a nation. A good place to start is with our relationships with family, friends, and coworkers.

## **Suggestions for Coping With Political Differences, Value Conflicts, and Tribalism**

Allott (2018) claims that our political tribalism is damaging our relationships, and in his view, “the remedy is not only to engage our political opponents but to do so with humility, patience and a real desire to understand” (p. 10). Here are some of his suggestions for improving political discussions with others and increasing civility:

1. Consider spending less time on social media discussing politics. You may find it much easier to have respectful and civil conversations in person rather than through the anonymity of social media.
2. Be sure you are engaging in political discussions for the right reasons. If you are challenging a friend because you are trying to understand his or her perspective, ask fair questions and listen, and then listen some more. Also, be aware if your intention is merely to prove that your friend’s viewpoint is wrong.

3. Embrace the struggle between what may initially seem to be competing truths. In referring to competing truths, Allott is not referring to “alternative facts.” He suggests looking a bit deeper when assessing the merits of ideas that you may not agree with on the surface. We must remember that we are capable of holding two opposing ideas in mind at the same time.

In this era of fake news, it is also important to be vigilant about your patterns of consuming information. Analyze your consumption of news and information, and consider doing the following:

1. Do a self-inventory and assess how you are obtaining your news, the frequency with which you are consuming it, and how likely it is to be real or valid versus fabricated. Consider taking some reasonable steps to determine the validity or credibility of the news source.
2. Evaluate the impact the information or news you are consuming is having on your stress level, mental health and well-being, relationships, and worldview. If it feels burdensome or is detracting from your quality of life, consult with your therapist and devise an effective strategy for setting boundaries on it.
3. Be mindful of the biases that people commonly have. Research by Lazer and colleagues (2018) found that people favor information that confirms their preexisting attitudes and find this information to be persuasive (confirmation bias). People are also prone to accept information that pleases them (desirability bias). None of us is immune from developing these biases, so try to be honest with yourself and monitor your biases.
4. Be aware of websites that may be publishing fake news. Internet platforms are “the most important enablers and primary conduits of fake news” (Lazer et al., 2018, p. 1095). Websites that have the appearance of legitimate news organizations are inexpensive to launch, and the content on these sites is monetized through online ads and social media dissemination.

Unquestionably, the technology industry faces a Herculean task to fix this real problem of fake news. They owe it to the public (and to democracy itself!). These internet platforms operate like robber barons of times past, accepting little responsibility for what they do and monetizing your personal information to increase their profits. Today the responsibility falls on each of us to regulate how we consume information. You can set boundaries on your consumption of fake news by becoming a more informed consumer, and you can empower yourself by limiting your consumption of real news that triggers you in unhealthy ways. Your personal relationships are worth protecting from false or even malicious information. Wouldn't it be a shame to sacrifice meaningful relationships over disputes that stem from toxic social media posts and information that may not be accurate?

## **Workbook Material for the Client**

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of coping with political differences and value conflicts with others. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend time thinking about how well you cope in your own life. Some questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate changing the way you interact with others who hold differing political viewpoints or with whom you might have value conflicts. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

## Exercises and Activities

1. People are experiencing varying amounts of stress, anxiety, anger, frustration, exhaustion, and more in the divisiveness and political infighting in the United States today. How would you describe your feelings and reactions to all that is going on?

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2. How stressed are you over the state of divisiveness, political infighting, hatred, and tribalism (people taking sides on issues)?

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not at all stressed* *Extremely stressed*

Explain your response.

XX	11	1	1	1	16	1	1	3	\$ TEL	\$ F
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3. How would you have rated yourself on the same scale 1 year ago? Three years ago? Five years ago?

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not at all stressed* *Extremely stressed*

Explain your response.

To what extent do you think things will change for better or for worse as we go through future election cycles? Do you think basic values are changing in society? If so, how do you anticipate that will affect U.S. politics? Explain.

4. To what extent do you think things will change for better or for worse as we go through future election cycles? Do you think basic values are changing in society? If so, how do you anticipate that will affect U.S. politics? Explain.

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5. Have you encountered differences of opinions and values with friends that are related to politics? With family members? With your partner/spouse? With coworkers? Describe those encounters. What are your feelings and reactions as you write about them?

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6. In attempting to resolve these differences, what has worked for you and what has not?

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7. Have you cut off communication with some people as a result of sharp political differences or value conflicts? What was it like to take this action, and how has this affected your daily life? Do you envision this as a temporary break in communication, or are you prepared to sever ties permanently with these individuals? How do you feel about this?

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8. Have some people cut off communication with you as a result of sharp political differences or value conflicts? How has this affected your life on a daily basis? What would you most like to say to the person(s) who cut off contact with you?

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9. You can take action to reduce your level of stress and frustration. Which of the following actions would you like to do? Pick one and try that for a period of time.

- ☐ Reduce your exposure to the news.
- ☐ Reduce your exposure to social media.
- ☐ Volunteer with people and groups that do more of what you believe in.
- ☐ Get involved in a political campaign effort.
- ☐ Spend time each day in meditation and mindfulness.
- ☐ Develop a daily program of relaxation.
- ☐ Exercise on a regular basis.
- ☐ Try to eat a more balanced and healthy diet.
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

10. It is possible that you are projecting some of your feelings regarding political differences onto another person. Keep a log of your reactions to others in your daily life. Pay attention to reactions that seem especially strong. Write down your assumptions about that person. Who or what do they remind you of?

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11. The goal of this exercise is to help you find *common ground* with others toward whom you sense division. If you harbor intense negative feelings toward someone who holds a different viewpoint, take time to reflect on this series of questions:

- a. How are the person's views different from yours? What does it tap into for you? What assumptions do you have about the person who holds the different viewpoint?

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- b. If the person was here right now and was not behaving defensively, what do you suppose that person would say to you?

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- c. What would you most want to say to that person if you knew she or he would hear you?

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- d. What bothers you most about the person or that point of view?

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- e. How do you suppose the person might perceive you as a result of holding a different view?

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- f. What is at risk if you become further polarized or divided? While maintaining your values and views, how could you move toward more unity?

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- g. On what topics or issues could you find common ground with this individual? Do you think that is even possible? If so, is this something you would want to do?

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12. Some people who harbor strong negative feelings toward others on the basis of their membership with a particular group (based on gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, and so forth) are afraid underneath it all that the “other” is responsible for taking something of value from them (e.g., jobs, status).

- a. What do you think about this idea?

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- b. Have you experienced or witnessed this? If so, say more about that.

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13. If you do harbor strong negative feelings toward others on the basis of their membership with a particular group (e.g., their gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, etc.), where did these views originate? How did/do your family members influence your views about people who were/are different from you?

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14. People tend to favor information that confirms their preexisting attitudes and find this information to be persuasive (confirmation bias). People are also prone to accept information that pleases them (desirability bias). None of us is immune to these forms of bias. Reflect on how you have been influenced to accept certain information.

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15. When you engage in conversations about social and political issues that you feel passionate about, how would you rate your level of open-mindedness and willingness to listen to others' views?

[illegible]

Explain your response.

If you become defensive when discussing “hot button” topics (e.g., current events, politics), answer

16. If you become defensive when discussing “hot button” topics (e.g., current events, politics), answer the following questions:

- a. How would you rate the severity of your defensiveness? Then rate how you think others would rate your defensiveness.

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Extremely low* *Extremely high*

Explain your response.

- b. How would you describe your internal experience of being defensive or protective of yourself? Feel free to use a metaphor if that works for you (for example, “My defenses are like a steel armor or a bullet-proof vest—nothing will penetrate them!” or “My defenses are like a light jacket that I rarely need to wear.”). What does your defensive behavior or attitude do for you? Does it serve your best interests or get in your way?

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- c. How does your defensiveness affect your relationships with others? Is this something you would like to change or improve?

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# Social Injustice Against Marginalized Groups



## For Clients

### Social Injustice Against Marginalized Groups

In an ideal and fair society, those in positions of power would commit to distributing resources more evenly. Everyone would have equal access to safe and affordable housing; healthy food; quality education, health care, and legal representation; well-paying jobs; reliable transportation; and ample opportunity to develop their interests and talents. People would not have to work three jobs to barely make ends meet, while others, though few in number, enjoy most of society's wealth and opportunities. The gap between society's richest and poorest would be shrinking instead of getting wider and deeper. People would not be discriminated against or oppressed based on their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, ability status, or any other dimension of their identity. Diversity would be embraced and viewed as one of society's greatest strengths—not as a weakness or as a threat to overcome.

The issues that have brought you into counseling may be exacerbated by, if not directly related to, instances of social injustice that you have directly encountered or witnessed in your own life. We all have complex *multiple identities* that are shaped by our affiliations with certain groups. Our identities may be related to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, socioeconomic status/social class, political leanings, education level, gender identity, sexual orientation, and so forth. None of us is just one thing. For instance, you might be a Black, well-educated, heterosexual, Muslim male; a biracial, gender fluid, well-educated atheist; or a White, Christian, blue-collar, middle-class, conservative female; or some other assortment entirely. You may give more weight or importance to certain dimensions of yourself than to others. As you think about your own multiple identities and which aspects of your identity have more prominence in your life, we hope you will also reflect on the extent to which these identities interact with each other and how they affect your life.

## Suggestions for Coping With Social Injustice

If you are the victim of human rights abuses or have been subjected to oppression or discrimination in any of its forms, keep the following guidelines in mind.

1. Know your rights. You will find a lot of credible information about your rights at the American Civil Liberties Union website (<https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights>), which contains information pertaining to criminal law reform and prisoners' rights, disability rights, LGBTQ+ rights, voters' rights, and more.
2. Consult with your counselor or therapist for support and guidance. If you have been traumatized and are slow to trust, talking about your reluctance to trust may be a great place to start. Trauma-informed counseling approaches have been developed and may help you process your experiences and move forward with your life.
3. It may be important for you to work with an advocate or to seek legal guidance. Some communities have agencies or organizations to assist clients in finding the resources they need. For instance, in Baltimore, Maryland, the Intercultural Counseling Connection is a resource for refugees who have settled in the area.
4. If you have difficulty asking for support, examine the underlying belief that prevents you from reaching out and challenge that belief. Ask yourself: "Although people in my life have disappointed me, does it mean that everyone will disappoint me in the future if I ask for their assistance?" Be sure to credit yourself for taking steps to challenge beliefs that may be getting in your way.
5. Get involved in social activism. It is empowering to connect with others who share your passion for changing oppressive systems. Whether you have a lot of energy and time to devote to a cause or little to none, there are ways to become involved. It may take a village to effect change, but you can play a role and be part of those efforts.
6. Take care of yourself. Be sure to "check in" with yourself every day to ensure that your essential needs are met. Monitor your stress level, and take steps to keep your stress under control.

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of coping with social injustice. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend time thinking about social justice issues that affect your life and strategies for feeling more empowered. Some questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more thought on your part or may evoke some emotions. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside of the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you contemplate social injustice issues. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

## Exercises and Activities

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These terms frame the discussion around rights and privileges. Consider them as you complete the exercises and activities that follow.

*Cultural Empowerment:* Your ability to connect with your own power to overcome cultural barriers and advocate for yourself.

*Marginalization:* Individuals or groups of people are afforded less importance in society and feel cast aside to the margins with no voice or power. Marginalized groups may be made to feel as if they are of little value and may be relegated to a subordinate or inferior position.

*Microaggressions:* Commonplace verbal, nonverbal, and environmental insults and slights that communicate disparaging, hostile, or negative messages.

*Privilege:* Benefiting from unearned assets, such as being White, being born into affluence, or being male or heterosexual. Privilege advantages and confers dominance and power on those who possess it, even as they deny it but remain protected by it (McIntosh, 1989).

*Social Justice:* All people have equal access to opportunities, wealth, and privileges within a society.

*Social Injustice:* Individuals are denied access and subjected to unfair practices such as ageism, racism, and sexism and are denied basic human rights.

1. We all have multiple identities that are shaped by our associations with various groups. Some aspects of your identity may have more importance to you than others. You may regard gender identity and ethnicity as playing prominent roles in your life, whereas another person may place more emphasis on racial identity and educational status.

- a. Make a list of the parts of your identity that you cherish the most, and describe why each one is so important.

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- b. If you had to rank order them, which of your identities would be at the top of your list?

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- c. Which would be next on your list?

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- d. If you prefer, represent your identities on a pie chart. Which identities would constitute the largest pieces of the pie?

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2. If you were forced to give up an aspect of your identity, which one(s) would be the easiest to let go, and which would be the hardest to part with? Explain. How is it to even imagine giving up an aspect of your identity?

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3. Think about your multiple identities. Are there ways in which you are *privileged* as a result of your affiliation with the dominant group (those who hold more power) in society? For instance, if you are White, male, or heterosexual in this society, you would enjoy privileges (i.e., unearned assets) that people of color, females, or individuals in the LGBTQ+ community simply don't have. What is your reaction to answering this question?

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4. Again, think about your multiple identities. Are there ways in which you are *marginalized* due to your affiliation with one or more minority or underrepresented groups in society? For instance, if you identify as a person of color, an immigrant or refugee, or a member of the LGBTQ+ community, you may be deprived of privileges (i.e., unearned assets) that people from the dominant group (those who hold more power) are afforded simply based on their group affiliation. What is your reaction to answering this question?

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5. How do your unique identities and experiences with being privileged or marginalized (based on these identities) affect your mental health and well-being?

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6. If you identify as belonging to a marginalized group, what are your greatest concerns about interacting with people from the dominant culture?

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- a. What are your greatest concerns about interacting with people from other marginalized groups?

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- b. Describe the context in which these interactions are likely to happen (e.g., at work, school, home, other places).

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7. If you are part of the dominant culture, what are your greatest concerns about interacting with people from marginalized groups? Describe the context in which these interactions are likely to happen (e.g., at work, school, home, other places).

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8. Describe a social injustice that has been a source of stress for you.

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- a. Has this situation affected you or those you care about (either directly or indirectly)? Explain.

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- b. What aspects of the situation have caused you the greatest stress?

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9. How severe is your stress related to the injustice you have described?

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
Not stressed Extremely stressed

What do you think needs to happen for your stress to become manageable?

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10. What strategies have you used to cope with the stress resulting from the injustice you described?

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a. How well have they worked for you?

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b. How empowering have these strategies been?

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11. Microaggressions, which can be conscious or unconscious, come in many forms and may be directed at a person based on race, sexual orientation, or other marginalized status.

a. What messages have you received related to your status as a minority group member that have been invalidating or offensive?

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b. How did/do you internalize these hurtful remarks?

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12. Some people of color experience internalized racism, and some members of the LGBTQ+ community experience internalized homophobia or transphobia. Have you internalized any negative stereotypes about your culture (as you define it) from the dominant culture? If so, describe your experience.

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13. Past and present discrimination against certain groups is the basis for distrust of the majority society. People from the dominant culture may be perceived by those who hold less power in society as potential oppressors unless proven otherwise.

a. If you are part of the dominant culture and your trustworthiness is tested by a person from a marginalized group who feels hostility, resentment, suspicion, or apprehension, how are you likely to react?

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b. Do you tend to become defensive, or are you able to respond with empathy and compassion?

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14. Fighting injustice can be demanding and stressful. It is crucial to engage in self-care to maintain your stamina.

a. What are some ways you take care of yourself that are consistent with your culture and values?

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b. In what ways could you improve your self-care?

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15. One way to empower yourself is to become active in organizations and causes that combat injustice.

a. How do you feel about getting involved in social activism?

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b. In which issues would you be most inclined to invest your resources (e.g., time, money, energy, passion)?

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c. What tasks would you envision yourself doing as an activist?

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16. Consider writing a letter or making a call to your congressperson.

a. If you contacted a local, state, or federal elected official, what message would you most want to convey?

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b. Which social justice issues would be at the top of your list?

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c. If you had to “pick your battles,” which points would you most want to emphasize?

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17. Courage is often required to challenge oppression and stand up for what you believe in. Part of your healing process may entail such action.

a. Do you see yourself as a courageous person? Identify times in your life when you have shown courage.

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b. What was that like for you?

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c. How did others react to your courageous actions?

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d. What strengths did you draw on to get through that difficult time?

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# Forces of Social Media and Technology



## For Clients

### Forces of Social Media and Technology

If you are a *digital native* and have grown up using information technology, advancements in the rapidly evolving technology fields may not seem extraordinary. However, if you are a *digital immigrant* (like both of us) and were not introduced to personal computers and smartphones until young adulthood or later, your reaction may be vastly different. You may struggle with how dramatically technological advances have changed the world and the ways people interact today. Surely you have noticed how common it is to see people on their phones and how infrequent it has become for people to make eye contact with each other. We certainly have! Recently, I (Michelle) was in a grocery store and was reaching for a pint of ice cream in the freezer section when another customer—looking intently at her phone—reached in and grabbed it without ever acknowledging that a person (me) was standing right there. I was invisible to her, and she was so absorbed in whatever she was looking at on her phone that she lost sight of her surroundings. How often, I wonder, does this happen? Are people so transfixed by the virtual world that they have little concern for interacting with others in the real world?

### Technology: For Better or For Worse

Technology is a wonderful tool, and it has revolutionized many aspects of life, ranging from the way we communicate with others to the type of medical care we receive. Advances in technology help people live longer lives and make life convenient in ways that were never possible before. Our voice-activated devices from Apple, Amazon, or Google have become our helpmates. Technology

gives us the opportunity to know what is happening around the world as it is unfolding, and it has equipped us with the tools to do many remarkable things. We can get detailed information about our DNA by simply spitting in a tube and sending it away—something we never could have imagined even a few years ago!

Despite these marvels, technology has also become a major source of stress for people. Those who are active on social media sites may look at other users' photos and postings, which often capture happy moments and successes, and compare themselves unfavorably. Researchers have found a connection between social media use and a risk for depression and anxiety through these *social comparison effects*. These platforms are meant to help us connect with others, but ironically they are leaving us with feelings of isolation, loneliness, and depression. Four out of 5 adults in the United States state that they frequently check their email, text messages, and social media connections (APA, 2017a). Those who identify themselves as “constant checkers” report a higher level of stress than those who do not constantly check. It is worth taking a look to see if dialing back your technology use helps your physical and mental health. Online platforms have also become sources of addiction or problematic use for many people. Some have developed addictions or compulsive behaviors related to online gambling, shopping, gaming, or pornography. Others have been targets or perpetrators of cybercrimes such as identity theft or *cyberbullying*. Because technological forces are so pervasive in all of our lives today, they may be a source of your stress.

### Key Thought

**You are inundated with technology and social media on your phones, computers, and tablets. It is important to take a step back and look at the impact that is having on your life, your relationships, and your children's lives.**

## Suggestions for Coping With Forces of Social Media and Technology

The use of technology and the role of social media in our lives is a relatively new field of study and investigation; however, some suggestions for better coping strategies have been identified:

- Track your time on social media.
- Think about your use of social media and what need it fulfills.
- Resist the temptation to compare yourself and your life with that of others on social media platforms.
- Develop a time limit for online use and how often you check in.
- Limit your accounts to those with whom it is essential to stay in touch.
- Assess where social media fits on your priority list in life.
- Identify areas of your life you would like to be spending more time on if you limit your time on social media.
- Drop people from your accounts who harass or bully you online.
- Place smartphones, tablets, and other electronic devices outside of your bedroom while you are sleeping so your sleep is not disrupted.
- Stop using your devices at least an hour before bedtime to reduce psychological stimulation and blue light exposure, which can disturb your sleep.

## Workbook Material for the Client

The following questions and exercises are designed to help you examine the topic of coping with technology and social media in your life. There are no right or wrong answers. This is an opportunity for you to spend time thinking about how well you deal with this technology. Some questions and exercises may be easy for you, and others may require more time and thought on your part. We hope you will take plenty of time to consider each topic or question that your counselor has asked you to complete. The value of the activities and questions comes from your careful consideration about your position on the topic. The goal is for you to learn as much as you can outside the counseling setting. If you are better prepared to explore these issues, your session time will be more productive. We suggest that you keep a journal as you



contemplate making changes related to your social media and technology use. Purchase a notebook or journal or record your responses to selected questions and activities on your computer. Remember to print your responses and bring them with you to your next counseling session.

## Exercises and Activities

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1. Track your time to determine how much time you are spending online in that activity. How many hours/minutes per day on average do you spend
  - \_\_\_\_\_ on your smartphone?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ using a tablet/laptop/PC?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ surfing the internet?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ accessing your social media accounts?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ playing video or computer games?
  
2. Describe how your use of technology, the internet, and social media helps or hinders you in your life. Which aspects/domains of your life are most affected by this use, either positively or negatively?
 

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3. Take a break from social media for a few hours and see how you feel. Do you feel anxious and stressed? Do you feel an uncontrollable urge to log on? If you do, you might have a social media addiction. Do you think you may have an addiction to social media?
 

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4. If you think you use social media excessively or may even be “addicted” to it, why do you think that
 

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5. When you receive a notification for something online, do you feel a need to check it immediately? How stressful is it for you if you do not check it right away?
 

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6. A common experience in the use of social media is the *fear of missing out* (FOMO).
  - a. To what extent do you experience FOMO?
 

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  - b. What do you think you might be missing out on?
 

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  - c. What do you fear would happen if you weren’t in the know or kept in the loop?
 

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  - d. Do you always feel the need to know what’s going on?
 

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7. Describe any feelings of stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, or anger associated with your use of social media or technology. How mild or severe are these feelings?

[illegible]

Describe your feelings:

8. What is your reaction when you read online that a friend of yours is having a “perfect life,” is always happy and successful, and has a ton of friends?

9. Have you ever been harassed or bullied online?

a. What was that like for you? How did you cope with it?

b Was there anyone in particular who offered you support during that time?

c. What would you have most wanted to convey to the person who perpetrated this act?

10. Have you ever posted defamatory comments online about a person?

a. If so, what prompted you to do this?

b. How did you feel afterward?

c. Would you have been as inclined to make the same comments if you addressed the person face to face? Explain your response.

11. What impact do you hope your words and online posts will have on others?

a. What does it mean to you when others respond to your posts in the way you desire?

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b. Conversely, what does it mean to you when others do not respond to your posts in the way that you had hoped, or if others do not respond at all?

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12. Take a pause from social media and think about what need it fills in your life. Is it something you do for fun, or do you seem to be checking and comparing yourself to what others post and say online?

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13. In general, how would you say the use of social media has affected your self-esteem and self-concept?

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14. What would your life be like without using any online technology or accounts?

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15. With what people, activities, or hobbies would you like to spend more time if you were to limit your time online?

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16. Jessica Bliss (2018), a counselor in Tennessee, often recommends a 30-day blackout from technology when families come to counseling for problems with technology use and online connectivity. That means no cell phones, no computer use, and no television (for the entire family)! The only exception is for school-related or work-related issues. Bliss tells her clients that the first week will be “hell on earth,” but the net result is typically restored family relationships and a realization that online is not real life.

a. What do you think about that idea? Could you do that?

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b. Think about having your family take a technology break for a week (or a month if you think the family can manage), and describe how that is for everyone.

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c. What did you learn?

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17. Where does technology fit on your list of priorities for life for you and your family? What are some things you can do to make family time and relationships more of a priority?

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18. Some people were not introduced to personal computers and smartphones until young adulthood or later and are referred to as *digital immigrants*. If you consider yourself a digital immigrant, how is it to navigate a world that seems increasingly wedded to technology?

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19. To what degree does your presence on social media help you to feel connected to others?

**Scale:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Disconnected</i>									<i>Connected</i>

Explain:

20. To what degree does your activity on social media help you feel productive?

**Scale:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Nonproductive										Extremely productive

Explain:

21. To what degree does your presence on social media make you feel happy?

[illegible]

Explain:



# Compassion Fatigue, Vicarious Traumatization, and Burnout



For Counselors

## Exercises and Activities

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### Counselor Self-Care, Vicarious Traumatization, and Fatigue Syndrome

1. Think about how you felt about your work when you first entered the field (or started your professional training) and how you feel about it now. Write a letter from your past professional self (PPS) to your current professional self (CPS). Write about what your hopes were when you first became a counselor and whether your career has unfolded as planned. How does your PPS feel toward your CPS? For example, have you lived up to your initial expectations or exceeded them? Include anything in the letter your PPS would like to say to your CPS. Pay attention to feelings that come up for you as you write.

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2. Write a letter from your CPS to your past professional self. Describe some of the greatest challenges you have faced as a counselor. If your career path took an unexpected turn at any point, describe how that was for you. What messages would you most like to convey to your PPS?

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3. Write a letter from your CPS to your future professional self (FPS). What are you hoping your FPS will accomplish? If you currently are not satisfied in your career, how would you like your FPS to feel or behave differently than you do now? What will it require for you to achieve this?

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4. Jude T. Austin II describes having a realistic relationship with his self-care program. Describe the relationship you currently have with self-care.

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- a. How satisfied are you with it?

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- b. In what ways would you like to improve or change your relationship with it?

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- c. List three to five steps you could take to move in this direction. How likely are you to take each of these steps?

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5. We know good self-care is a desired state, but why is it so difficult to attain?

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- a. Describe your greatest barriers to achieving your self-care goals.

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- b. If you were your own client, how would you work therapeutically to change your self-care patterns?

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6. An important aspect of self-care is the ability to establish and maintain healthy boundaries, both within and between the personal and professional realms of your life.

- a. How would you describe your boundaries?

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- b. Is there anything you would like to change about them?

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c. If so, how do you think this would improve your personal or professional life?

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7. What role does social media and technology use play in your personal and professional life?

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a. In what ways does it positively and negatively affect your quality of life?

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b. How has it affected your relationships with others?

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c. How has it affected your mood and self-esteem?

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d. Would you like to make any changes with regard to your use of social media or other electronic technologies?

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8. One hazard of being a counselor and seeing clients all day long is insufficient movement.

a. How much movement or physical activity do you get each day or week?

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b. If you are not getting enough exercise, how motivated are you to make changes in this area?

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c. In what forms of activity are you most inclined or least likely to engage?

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9. Review the phases (zealot/idealist, irritable, withdrawal, zombie) described in the chapter.

a. Have you developed compassion fatigue from your work with trauma survivors?

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b. Which phase most closely captures where you see yourself?

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c. What could you do to relieve your symptoms of compassion fatigue and regain your energy?

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10. Do particular clients trigger your countertransference (including political countertransference)?

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a. Describe how you are triggered and what comes up for you when interacting with these clients.

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b. List some strategies you could use to address your reactions.

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11. Stebnicki describes empathy fatigue as an acute and cumulative type of emotional, physical, and spiritual stressor in reaction to clients' life stories of chronic illness, disability, trauma, grief, and loss.

a. Have you experienced empathy fatigue? If so, describe what the experience was like for you.

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b. What toll has it taken on you and on your relationships?

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12. Stebnicki says that "cultivating meaningful social and interpersonal relationships with coworkers, friends, mentors, supervisors, and other colleagues provides a natural support system."

a. How would you describe your support system?

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b. Are your social and interpersonal relationships with coworkers, friends, and colleagues satisfying to you?

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c. If not, what could you do to change this?

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13. Stebnicki emphasizes the importance of creating a sacred environment (or physical space) where you practice counseling that is aligned with your mind, body, and spirit.

a. How would you describe your office? Is it inviting, or does it lack warmth and aesthetic appeal?

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b. If you are not satisfied with it, what could you do to make it a more inviting space?

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14. The prevalence rate of vicarious traumatization is rather steep. This phenomenon is becoming all too common as greater demands are being placed on mental health professionals who work in highly stressful settings such as disaster zones.



a. Have you experienced vicarious traumatization?

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b. If so, what has that been like, and how has it adversely affected you personally and professionally?

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15. To improve your happiness, try maintaining a gratitude journal, and list a few things you are grateful for each day. In stressful times, that may seem like a difficult task to accomplish, but even identifying life's small pleasures (e.g., eating a delicious meal or listening to inspiring music) can make a world of difference.

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# Preparing Clients for Life After Counseling



For Counselors

## Exercises and Activities

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1. What do you know about your own attachment patterns that may influence the way you handle termination with your clients?

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- a. As a child and later as a teenager, how did you cope with endings?

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- b. Have any of these patterns persisted into adulthood?

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2. Do you anticipate having greater difficulty terminating counseling with particular clients? If so, explain.

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- a. What is it about these clients or your relationship with them that will make the process more difficult for you?

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3. Do you anticipate feeling a sense of relief when particular clients (e.g., those exhibiting difficult or dangerous behaviors) terminate counseling? Say more about this.

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4. Particular clients may have a vulnerability to loss or a history of dependency on others and may struggle with termination. How will you help these clients deal with ending counseling sessions with you?

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5. You have listened empathically to your clients' stories and have been invested in their therapeutic journeys. How do you suppose it will be for you to not know what happens to them in the future?

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6. If you run into clients 1, 5, or even 10 years after termination, what would you most want to know about their lives and the choices they've made?

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- a. As you think about this question in relation to specific clients, what feelings surface for you?

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7. Are there some clients with whom you feel you did your best work?

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- a. How was it or how will it be to terminate with them?

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- b. What messages would you most like to convey to them about the work you did together?

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8. Do you fear you may not have served some clients as effectively as you had hoped before they terminated? If so, describe.

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- a. What would you do differently if you could do it over again?

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9. A symbolic gesture, such as a sports trophy or a graduation certificate, is often provided to mark the end of a successful endeavor. How would you collaborate with your client to celebrate the termination of your work together in counseling with an appropriate symbol?

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10. Write a message to your client who is terminating counseling. Tailor it to the specific client, and send your client away with a message of hope and encouragement.

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## For Clients

As you approach the termination phase in counseling, it is important to reflect on all of the hard work you have done to progress to this point. As you consolidate what you have learned, be sure to give yourself credit for making changes that have resulted in your growth. Ending counseling is likely to stir up a range of emotions, and we encourage you to allow yourself to embrace those feelings and not avoid them. The following exercises and activities are designed to help you process your experience and to acknowledge the work you have done. In addition, some activities may assist you in examining your reactions to the end of this relationship.

### Exercises and Activities

1. Counseling is a unique relationship in which your counselor gets to know you on an emotionally deep level. In preparing to end your counseling sessions, reflect on what you will miss the most about this special relationship. Put into words what this therapeutic relationship has meant to you.

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2. As you approach the ending of your counseling sessions, think about what you have accomplished over the course of counseling.

- a. What has changed in your life that pleases you?

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- b. What has changed that does not please you?

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- c. What were your goals for counseling, and did you accomplish them?

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- d. What work remains to be done?

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- e. What were the major lessons you learned over the course of counseling?

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3. Where do you see your life headed from here? Where do you think you will be in 1 year? In 5 years? What will it take for you to accomplish these goals?

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4. Did you accomplish everything you had hoped for in counseling? How would you rate the success of your counseling experience?

**Scale:**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
<i>Accomplished nothing</i>										<i>Accomplished everything</i>

Explain:

5. What, if anything, could have made counseling more useful or productive for you?

6. Counseling is designed to help you get your life moving in the direction you would like to go.
- a. Do you feel that has been accomplished?

- b. Do you feel you can now move ahead with your life without the aid of counseling?

7. What are some actions you hope to be taking in your life? Your work? Your relationships? Your family? Your community? Be as specific as possible.

8. Do you believe counseling was effective? What did you do to improve your situation? (Be sure to give yourself credit for your growth!)

9. Take a few minutes to relax, close your eyes, and think about the useful ideas, lessons, and messages you have taken from counseling. What are those ideas, lessons, and messages, and how will they help you in the future?

10. Even though counseling is coming to an end, you can return as needed. Some people like to return every 6 or 12 months for a refresher (similar to having your car serviced to be sure everything is running efficiently).

- a. Can you see yourself returning for such a refresher? Why or why not?

- b. What might prevent you from doing that?

11. Is there anything or any topic that you would like to discuss with your counselor before you conclude counseling? Is there anything left undone?
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12. Think of a symbolic gesture that celebrates the termination of your work in counseling. For instance, you could attach a slip of paper (with keywords written on it about burdens you addressed in counseling) to a balloon and send it off into the sky! Or choose a small rock that symbolizes the burdens you worked through with your counselor. You might carry it with you for a short time (e.g., in your purse or jacket) to get a sense of how it has weighed you down. When you are ready to let it go, toss it into the ocean, a lake, or a river. If you prefer, keep it as a reminder of the issues that you were successfully able to resolve in counseling (but remove it from your purse or jacket so you don't end up with a new problem—back pain!). These are just two examples; use your imagination and creativity to think of a symbolic gesture that is meaningful for you.
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## Recommended Resources for Clients

The following websites contain valuable information about topics covered in this workbook: mental health issues and treatment, suicide prevention, social justice, and human rights. We encourage you to continue to grow in your journey through life.

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU): <https://www.aclu.org/>
- American Counseling Association (ACA): <https://www.counseling.org/>
- American Psychological Association (APA): <https://www.apa.org/>
- Human Rights Watch: <https://www.hrw.org/>
- National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH): <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>
- National Suicide Prevention Hotline: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
- Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>
- Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC): <https://www.splcenter.org/>
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA): <https://www.samhsa.gov/>
- SuicideHotlines.com: <http://www.suicidehotlines.com/>





# Additional Exercises for Common Mental Health Issues

1. **Self-Care.** Practice good self-care by eating right, exercising, getting adequate sleep, and relaxing so you will have the physical and mental energy and stamina to deal with crisis situations. Avoid using alcohol, drugs, food, and smoking as stress reducers. Those harmful coping mechanisms may provide short-term relief but result in your body being less able to cope physically with the stress of the crisis. Some people find that they trigger or intensify feelings of guilt and low self-esteem. Check the response that most closely describes your self-care habits regarding the following topics.

a. How would you describe your eating habits generally?

☐ Unhealthy   ☐ Often Unhealthy   ☐ Sometimes Healthy   ☐ Mostly Healthy   ☐ Healthy

b. How many times per week do you exercise?

☐ Never   ☐ 1–2   ☐ 3–4   ☐ 5+

c. How many hours of sleep do you get a night on average?

☐ 1–3   ☐ 4–6   ☐ 7–8   ☐ 9+

d. How often do you find time to relax?

☐ Never   ☐ Rarely   ☐ Sometimes   ☐ Often   ☐ Frequently

e. How often do you enjoy your hobbies?

☐ Never   ☐ Annually   ☐ Monthly   ☐ Weekly   ☐ Daily

Overall, how would you describe your self-care habits?

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- a. What one thing are you willing to commit to *today* for better self-care? It does not have to be a major commitment, but taking even one step forward often serves as a motivator for you to continue in a positive direction.

- b. Walsh (2011) outlines a comprehensive review of therapeutic lifestyle changes (TLCs) that promote wellness: exercise, nutrition and diet, time in nature, relationships, recreation, relaxation, stress management, religious or spiritual involvement, and service to others. Ample research and clinical evidence supports these therapeutic lifestyle changes. Create a chart like Chart A.1 to assess where you are now and where you would like to be in terms of incorporating these TLCs into your life. For each TLC, rate yourself, and then create a plan to describe how you will achieve your goal in each domain.

**Scale:** 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
*Not achieved at all* *Completely achieved*

### Chart A.1 Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes

Therapeutic Lifestyle Changes (TLCs)	How well do you currently take care of yourself in this domain?	Rate where you would like to be in this domain.	Your plan for achieving TLCs. Be specific and include measureable actions.
Exercise			
Nutrition and diet			
Time in nature			
Relationships			
Recreation			
Relaxation			
Stress management			
Religious/spiritual involvement			
Service to others			

3. **Snapshots of Your Life.** Pictures (and images) speak a thousand words. Using your smartphone or camera, take photos of things you care about, and write about the meaning of the images and the feelings they evoke. In your journal, describe how these feelings and thoughts evoked by the images relate to your concerns. Bring your thoughts and reactions to this exercise to counseling to process with your therapist.

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4. **A Dose of Laughter.** Make time to see the humor in stressful circumstances. We are not suggesting that you minimize the seriousness of the situation, but we all need to “come up for air” from time to time. Humor has therapeutic value as long as you are not using it to express masked hostility. Humor, when used appropriately, can help you reframe events and gain a fresh perspective and help you refuel. Whether you are into late night comedy shows on TV, enjoy live stand-up comedy acts, or burst into laughter over funny YouTube videos, seek out some laughter. It is good medicine! What makes you laugh?

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5. **Bridging the Grand Canyon.** Do you feel immobilized and unable to take action toward a goal you want to achieve? Take a moment to imagine the spectacular Grand Canyon in Arizona. (We are using a metaphor, so why not choose an image that is breathtaking, right?) Does it feel like there is a Grand Canyon between where you stand and a particular goal you want to achieve? You may feel frozen with anxiety over pursuing a relationship (or even ending a toxic one). You may be plagued with fear about pursuing an advanced degree because you couldn’t bear to be rejected by admissions, so you sabotage your chances by not applying to programs. Whatever that elusive goal is for you, the energy it takes to wrestle with your fear and anxiety is palpable. So here is an opportunity to explore what keeps you from working toward your goal and bridging that chasm.

- a. What is your goal? Be specific.

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- b. What are the *realistic* constraints that prevent you from reaching or attaining your goal? Differentiate between *perceived* constraints and *actual* constraints, and ask yourself, “How can I be sure that a perceived constraint is an actual constraint? What is the evidence of that?”

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- c. Describe your feelings and emotions about achieving versus not achieving your goal. How would your quality of life be affected either way? Is it worth it to you to achieve your goal? What are you willing to risk to achieve your goal: slight discomfort, moderate discomfort, or extreme discomfort?

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- d. What are some challenges you might expect to encounter in working toward your goal? What could you do if you encountered these challenges? Whose support could you seek if you ran into these difficulties?

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- e. If your stated goal proves to be unrealistic or unachievable (like getting to the other side of the Grand Canyon), how could you modify it so it is within the realm of possibility?

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By answering these questions, you have taken the major first step in building the infrastructure you need (a bridge that is sturdy and safe) to cross the canyon to achieve your goal. Be sure to give yourself credit for any progress you make toward attaining your goal. Even steps in the right direction should be acknowledged and celebrated!

6. **Using Expressive Arts.** You do not need to be a talented artist to complete this exercise. The only requirement is that you are willing to exercise your creativity. Think about the core issue you are struggling with, and name it. It might be depression, anger, grief, or anxiety, for example. Then describe this problem or burdensome issue by creating a collage about it; drawing a picture or creating a painting about it; choreographing a dance about it; writing a story, a poem, or cartoon about it; composing a song about it; or identifying someone else's creative product that captures your issue or your feelings about it. What did you learn about yourself and your struggle through this exercise?

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7. **Identity Issues.** Sometimes our symptoms and mental health issues can become entangled with our identities. How has \_\_\_\_\_ become a part of your identity? What would it be like to lose this part of your identity? Are there certain aspects of it that you would miss? Explain.

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8. **Dominant Issue.** If \_\_\_\_\_ were not such a dominant part of your life, what would replace it? How do you suppose your life would be different?

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9. **Control of Your Recovery.** Which aspects of your recovery from \_\_\_\_\_ do you have the most control over?

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- a. How satisfied are you with how you are managing these aspects of your recovery?

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- b. Is there anything you would want to change about how you are approaching these parts of your recovery? If so, explain.

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10. **Reconciling Different Parts of Yourself.** If you had the opportunity to talk to the part of you that thwarts your progress in recovering from \_\_\_\_\_, what would you most want to say? What would this part want to say back to you in response? Carry on a dialogue between these two parts (the part that wants to move forward in your recovery and the part that seems to get in your way and impede progress). After doing this exercise, write in your journal about the experience and any insights you gained about yourself.

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11. **Compromising with Yourself.** If you could work out a compromise between polar opposite parts of yourself (e.g., the part that wants to take the risk to go on a date, pursue a new career path, or move to a new place, and the part of you that's afraid), what would that compromise look like?

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12. **Bibliotherapy.** If you are an avid reader, search the internet for books that address an issue with which you are struggling. You may choose to read nonfiction, biographies, autobiographies, fiction, short stories, or collections of poetry. If you prefer books on tape, that may be a productive way to spend your time driving to and from work. Use your journal to record your reactions to these books.

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13. **Your Crisis as a Movie or Play.** If the crisis or problem you experienced was a movie or play and you were the director, which aspects of the story line would you want to highlight? Which genre would capture your perspective best? Would it be presented as a comedy, a drama, or a horror film?

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14. **The Story of Your Life.** If your life were a movie, a television series, or a book, what would the title be? What would the scenes, episodes, or chapters be? How is it to think about your life in this manner?

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15. **Is Change Worth It?** If you choose *not* to change with regard to an issue that is bothering you, would that be OK?

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a. Describe how you think your life would be if you chose not to change anything.

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b. Is it worth it to change? Reflect on this in your journal.

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16. **Managing Your Emotions.** Managing or regulating emotions can be difficult at times. A number of factors may contribute to this: You may lack the skills to regulate your emotions; your emotional outbursts (or your inability to reveal emotions) may be reinforced by others; you may succumb to myths about showing emotions and believe they are signs of weakness; or you may be biologically predisposed to struggle with regulating emotions. What do you think makes it difficult for you to manage your emotions?
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17. **Worst Case Scenario.** Sometimes it helps to think of the worst case scenario and develop a plan to address a stressful situation should it occur (even if it seems unlikely). If you can address the fear directly, it may lose some of its power over you. Describe the worst case scenario for a problem or issue you are facing. Pay attention to your feelings and thoughts as you consider this, and write about them in your journal. Then develop a plan for navigating or resolving this problem/issue. After completing your plan, reflect on how you feel about it. Do you feel a bit more liberated and empowered to tackle this problem or issue if it occurs?
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18. **Medication Fears.** If a part of your treatment plan is to take medication to manage symptoms (e.g., anti-anxiety or antidepressant medicines), but you remain hesitant about taking them, write the pros and cons in your journal.
- a. If your helping professionals believe you would benefit greatly by taking medication, what is their argument?
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- b. Identify your greatest concerns about taking medication, and explore things you could do to address the “cons” on your list? For instance, if you are concerned about weight gain, perhaps you could devise an exercise or weight management program.
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19. **Gender Role Analysis.** How have gender role expectations affected your well-being and self-concept? In what ways did your family of origin shape your views on gender roles? Which family members were most influential in this regard? Were there others outside of your family who influenced your views on gender? If so, describe.
- a. Have your gender role expectations changed over time? If so, how have they changed?
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- b. Are there any changes you would like to make in terms of your gender role identity?
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- c. What would be the consequences of making these changes?
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d. What kind of support or lack of support would you expect if you went against your socialization?

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20. **Conduct a Power Analysis.** What messages did you internalize at a young age about power dynamics?

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a. How was power distributed in your family of origin?

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b. Did certain members hold more power than others, or was it about equal?

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c. How did family members express or use their power?

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d. In your view, was power used in a healthy or unhealthy way?

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e. Was power used to control others?

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f. How do you use power in your relationships today?

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21. **Impact of Gender and Power Dynamics.** To what extent do gender and power dynamics compound any problems that are a source of stress for you today?

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