

Stepping Stones to Healing and Thriving

STEP 5

## THE BODY

# What's Wrong With Me?

Understanding and Managing Your Body's  
Responses to Trauma



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# WELCOME


Welcome to the workbook addressing the physical symptoms of Complex PTSD.

This guide is designed to help you understand how trauma affects your body and to provide you with tools to recognize and manage these symptoms.

I kindly invite you to keep in mind the importance of approaching this journey with self-compassion and patience.

Follow the workbook at your own pace, taking breaks as needed.

Please note that this program is designed to supplement working with a trauma-educated mental health professional.



"Healing takes  
time, and asking  
for help is a  
courageous step."

# What's Ahead

## MODULE 1 UNDERSTAND

### Reflect, Acknowledge, Understand

1. Introduction to Complex PTSD
2. Common Physical Symptoms of Complex PTSD
3. Why recognize physical symptoms
4. Activities

## MODULE 2 REBUILD

### Unpacking Common Physical Symptoms

1. Befriending Your Body
2. Self-assessments
3. Symptom Management

## MODULE 3 INTEGRATE

### Action Steps



## Module 1

# Understand

Clarifying what CPTSD is  
and isn't and how it shows  
up in the body

# Introduction to Complex PTSD

As the slide presentation says, **PTSD** usually comes from the unprocessed psychological wounding suffered from a *one-time* event. Like:

- Natural disasters
- Car crashes
- Sexual or physical assaults
- Terrorist attacks
- Combat during wartime and so on.

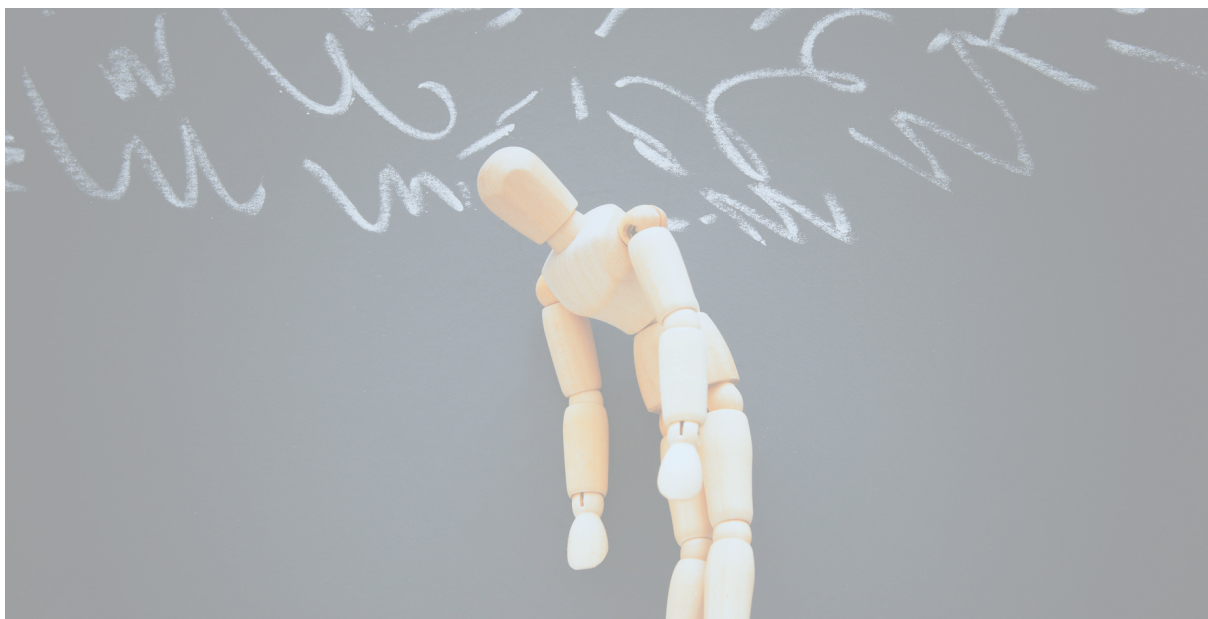
**CPTSD or Complex PTSD** results from unprocessed psychological and emotional wounding (aka mental injury) that stem from ongoing traumatic events (physical, emotional, moral or sexual) that are happening too fast, too soon, and are too much, which overwhelm the nervous system. Such as:

- Witnessing or experiencing prolonged domestic violence.
- Childhood sexual, physical, or emotional abuse
- Neglect, Torture, Genocide, Slavery, Poverty, and the like.

Besides this, further studies show that more emotional damage results from the events when there is not enough emotional support to help the individual navigate through the surfacing emotions towards the healing process.



Because the nervous system perceives itself in a constant state of threat, the body remains perpetually on edge, flooded with adrenaline and cortisol. Step 5 looks at how this impacts *physical health*. The overabundance of cortisol causes inflammation, among other things, and the body's defense system reads this as disease and begins attacking it. The body itself is thrown off balance. Therefore, being in a continuous state of heightened alertness leads to various physical symptoms associated with emotional and psychological trauma.



### **Why Recognize Physical Symptoms?**

The trauma's negative energy is stored in the body until it has been detoxed. Understanding and identifying physical symptoms helps childhood trauma survivors understand why various physical ailments exist and perhaps persist even after medical intervention. Recognizing these symptoms is the first step toward managing them and the childhood trauma effectively. This knowledge may lessen the inner critic's voice. It also helps us honour the work our bodies did to keep us alive and functioning while it was dealing with unspeakable fear and trauma.





# Common Physiological Symptoms of CPTSD

This section will help you unpack health challenges that you may be experiencing or have experienced.

Here, I've added further symptoms than what was mentioned in the slides.

**Please take your time and take a breather if needed,** to ponder on all the health challenges that are mentioned.



# What Have you Noticed?

## Chronic Pain and Muscle Tension

Chronic pain and muscle tension often arise from the body being in a constant state of stress. This can manifest as back pain, neck pain, or general muscle stiffness, or more.

Reflection:

- Do you often feel tense or stiff in certain areas of your body?  
Where?
- Are there specific times or triggers that make the pain worse?  
How long have you been suffering?

Use this space to journal

# What Have you Noticed?

## Headaches and Migraines

Stress and trauma can lead to frequent headaches and migraines. These can significantly impact your daily life and well-being.

Reflection:

- How often do you experience headaches? How long do they last? What is the intensity?
- Can you identify any patterns or triggers? ie: What has been on your mind lately? Any new or sudden changes in your life? Family dynamics?.

Use this space to journal

# What Have you Noticed?

## **Digestive & Elimination Issues**

Trauma can affect the digestive system, leading to issues like Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), nausea, GERD, stomach cramps, heartburn, bladder and UTI infections, etc.

Reflection:

- Do you notice health problems that seem to flare up, linked to stress or anxiety (anxiety can be linked to poor gut health)?
- Are there particular foods or situations or people that trigger these symptoms? Do you or can you eat when upset?

Use this space to journal

# What Have you Noticed?

## **Fatigue and Sleep Disturbances**

Trauma can disrupt sleep patterns, causing insomnia, nightmares, or restless sleep, which in turn leads to fatigue.

Reflection:

- How would you describe your sleep quality? and quantity?
- Do you often feel tired even after a full night's sleep? Is it difficult to fall or to stay asleep? What else is there?

Use this space to journal



# What Have you Noticed?

## Cardiovascular Symptoms

The stress from trauma can cause cardiovascular symptoms such as palpitations, high blood pressure, or a rapid heartbeat.

### Reflection:

- Have you experienced a racing heart or palpitations? Chest pain?
- Do these symptoms occur during specific situations? Or after eating certain foods?

Use this space to journal

# What Have you Noticed?

## **Sensitivity to Sensory Stimuli**

Trauma survivors may become more sensitive to light, sound, and touch, which can be overwhelming.

Reflection:

- Do you find certain lights, sounds, or touches particularly uncomfortable? Do you need to sleep in a very dark room, for example? How is your startle response?
- How do you typically respond to sensory overload?

Use this space to journal

# What Have you Noticed?

## Immune Suppression | Autoimmune Disorders

Trauma survivors often notice increased susceptibility to infections and illnesses. They may suffer from various autoimmune disorders such as rheumatoid arthritis, Lupus, ALS, MS, Diabetes, Psoriasis, Thyroid diseases, and more.

### Reflection:

- Do you get sick or catch a cold easily? Have you been diagnosed with an autoimmune disorder?
- Ask: How has my autoimmune disease affected my daily life and relationships? if so, how so? And how do I feel about it?

Use this space to journal

# What Have you Noticed?

## **Respiratory Illnesses**

Trauma survivors may suffer from shortness of breath or asthma-like symptoms. Some get chest infections easily or are prone to pneumonia or bronchitis.

Reflection:

- Do you find that you are susceptible to chest ailments?
- Is there a pattern of when these occur? For example, do illnesses occur during or after specific situations, especially emotional ones?

Use this space to journal



# What Have you Noticed?

## **Hormonal Imbalances:**

Trauma survivors may have irregular menstrual cycles, develop cysts or fibroids, develop thyroid issues or adrenal fatigue, etc.

## Reflection:

- Do you find that you are dealing with a hormone-related condition or disease of some kind?
- How long has this been a challenge? How is it impacting your quality of life?

Use this space to journal

# What Have you Noticed?

## Other symptoms of Complex PTSD may include:

1. **Skin Conditions:** Eczema, psoriasis, or unexplained rashes.
2. **Appetite Changes:** Significant weight loss or gain due to changes in eating habits.
3. **Neurological Symptoms:** Numbness, tingling, or unexplained neurological symptoms, short-term memory challenges, brain fog, difficulty focusing, etc.
4. **Dizziness and Balance Issues:** Feeling lightheaded or experiencing vertigo.
5. **Pelvic Pain:** Unexplained pelvic discomfort or pain, often linked to past trauma.
6. **Speech and language:** tinnitus, psychogenetic hearing loss, stuttering, delayed speech, difficulties in articulation
7. **Chemical sensitivities:** low to high intolerance of fragrances and chemicals
8. **Low Energy:** tire easily, lack of motivation or drive
9. **TMJ:** due to teeth grinding or teetch clenching

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These symptoms (*you may have others not mentioned here*) highlight the broad impact of CPTSD on an individual's physical health, further emphasizing the need for compassion and a comprehensive approach to treatment and support.

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Take the time to reflect on all these, and notice how you feel about this information, as it is linked to your past. Remember, there is no shame or guilt about your feelings. This journaling is for your self-awareness.

The following pages are for you to journal

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Note Space

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Date \_\_\_\_\_

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# Please Note

The purpose is not to bring you down or contribute to feeling hopeless, helpless, anxious, frustrated, angry, and or disappointed in yourself or others, including your abuser(s).

This Step is designed to bring awareness to your health challenges that may link to your childhood trauma. More than your emotions and mind need healing.

We know that what is done is done. Some health challenges are reversible or repairable. Offering yourself and your body some compassion and understanding can go a long way towards living a better quality of life where you can be attuned to your body and what it needs for support.

This is all part of living authentically.

Take your time as you work through it, and proceed mindfully.



# Sensations and Emotions

Remember learning in school that Energy equals Mass times the speed of Light squared? ( $E=MC^2$ ) Our bodies are mass, so this means that they also contain energy.

Interestingly, the word “emotion” contains the word, motion. And in health modalities like acupuncture, we learn that pain is often the result of blocked or stagnated energy.

Our bodies cannot communicate in words or language, so they use physical sensations. For example, people say they feel a fluttering sensation in their belly when they are with someone they feel attracted to or falling in love with. We may label this sensation or feeling as “being in love.”

Another example is when it comes to feeling stressed, uncomfortable, or anxious, the body may provide different clues like headaches, tight shoulder muscles, upset gut, sweaty palms, or “crazy thoughts.”

When this happens, your body is *telling* you something.

The following activities are designed to help you reconnect to your body’s communication, practice sitting with sensations and feelings, and see if/what your body needs to *tell* you. Take a deep breath; take your time.

If you're feeling overwhelmed and need extra support, please know you're not alone. You're always welcome to book a 1:1 session with me—I'm here for you."

# Activities for Greater Body Awareness

## Somatic Tracking:

- Focus on the physical sensations in your body and tune into the feelings and memories they bring up. Use mindfulness to observe without judgment. Take deep breaths, sit with whatever comes up - it may be a memory, a thought, another sensation.... simply sit with it and notice.

Purpose: Physical sensations can be a gateway to uncovering past traumas. By tracking these sensations, you may identify and connect them to specific childhood experiences.



## Inner Dialogue:

- Engage in a dialogue with the part of yourself that is experiencing the physical issue. Ask questions like, "What are you trying to tell me?" or "What do you need?" or "What would you like me to know?"

Purpose: This can reveal underlying emotional wounds and traumas that are being expressed through physical symptoms.

## Body Scanning:

- Perform a body scan meditation, paying close attention to areas of discomfort or tension. Notice any emotions or memories that arise in connection with these areas.

Purpose: This practice helps you become more aware of the physical manifestations of trauma and their possible origins.



*Learning to connect to our bodies is really important in childhood trauma recovery. I struggled with this - the awakening of my self-awareness. It takes lots of practice to notice and listen to what the body communicates. It is not something Woo Woo at all. It is a sad reality that childhood trauma survivors learned to disconnect from their bodies when young, and now it takes intentional work to rebuild that connection lovingly and compassionately and learn to listen to its communication.*

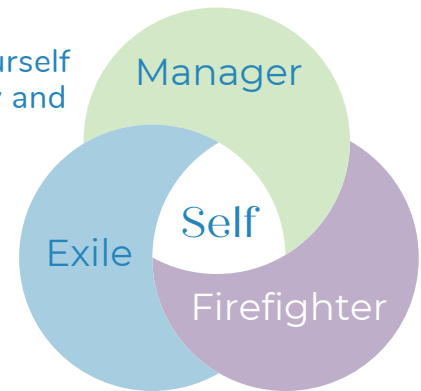


# Activities with an Internal Family Systems Lens

## Parts Mapping:

- Activity: Create a visual map of the different parts of yourself that are connected to your physical health issue. Identify and label each part (e.g., Protector, Exile) and note their roles and feelings.

**Purpose:** This helps in understanding how different parts of you might be holding onto trauma and manifesting it as physical symptoms.



**Exiles** are the wounds themselves (the feelings / memories)

**Managers** are proactive parts who want to protect and prevent problems (these may be overthinkers, solutionists, etc.)

**Firefighters** are reactive parts and can behave in extreme ways to protect the Exiles (these may be various tricks used to avoid the challenge, etc.)



## Therapeutic Journaling:

- Activity: Keep a journal where you document physical symptoms, emotional states, and any insights or memories that come up during the day.

**Purpose:** Journaling can help track patterns and connections between physical health issues and emotional or traumatic experiences.

## Guided Imagery:

- Activity: Use guided imagery to visit your younger self and explore any significant events or feelings related to the time when your physical symptoms began.

**Purpose:** This can help identify specific childhood traumas that may be contributing to current physical health issues.



*Incorporating these activities into your routine can help you develop a deeper, more compassionate relationship with your body, fostering both physical and emotional healing through the IFS framework.*

*Feel free to make an appointment with me if you want further support.*

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Module 2

# Rebuild

Creating a Healthy Relationship  
with Your Body while  
Managing Physical Symptoms

Gentle reminder to join in the group discussions



# Body Gratitude Practice

Spend a few minutes each day expressing gratitude to different parts of your body.

For example, thank your feet for supporting you, your hands for their dexterity, and your heart for beating.

This can help shift your perspective towards a more appreciative and loving view of your body.



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# Checklist

*Noticing what You Experience most Often*

<input type="checkbox"/>	Headaches and migraines	<input type="checkbox"/>	Digestive issues
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cardiovascular symptoms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Fatigue and sleep disturbances
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sensitivity to sensory stimuli	<input type="checkbox"/>	Immune System Suppression
<input type="checkbox"/>	Autoimmune Disorders	<input type="checkbox"/>	Respiratory Issues
<input type="checkbox"/>	Skin Conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	Neurological Symptoms
<input type="checkbox"/>	Dizziness and Balance Issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chest Pain
<input type="checkbox"/>	Pelvic Pain	<input type="checkbox"/>	Appetite Changes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Medically unexplained symptoms	<input type="checkbox"/>	Behaviour Changes
<input type="checkbox"/>	Postural Changes	<input type="checkbox"/>	Chemical/Fragrance sensitivities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other

# Noting what You Experience most Frequently


Symptoms from above

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understanding these patterns  
can help in recognizing the  
impact of childhood trauma on  
the body and in seeking  
appropriate therapeutic  
interventions to address and  
hopefully heal these  
manifestations.



# Managing Physical Symptoms



# Coping Strategies



## Lifestyle Adjustments:

- Maintain a balanced diet and stay hydrated.
- Engage in regular physical activity.
- Establish a consistent sleep routine.

## Mind-Body Practices:

- Practice gentle stretching or Trauma-Informed somatic exercises
- Use mindfulness and meditation techniques.
- Try breathing exercises to promote relaxation.



## Medical and Therapeutic Interventions:

- Consult healthcare providers for personalized advice.
- Consider physical therapy and massage.
- Discuss medication options for symptom management.

# Coping Strategies with Internal Family Systems

Managing physical symptoms of Complex PTSD (CPTSD) through the lens of Internal Family Systems (IFS) involves recognizing and working with different parts of the self (aka childhood wounds). Here are some IFS coping strategies to help manage physical symptoms of CPTSD.

***Read over the suggestions, choose three, and then add more to your routine.***

## **Identify and Acknowledge Parts**

- Regularly check in with yourself to identify different parts of you or areas activated by physical symptoms. For instance, you might notice an anxious part when you experience a racing heart.
- To facilitate communication and understanding, give names to different parts (e.g., "the anxious part," "the protector," etc.).

## **Develop Compassionate Self-Dialogue**

- Engage in compassionate inner dialogue with your parts. For example, if you have a part that causes tension headaches, ask it what it needs and listen to its concerns. Act on its suggestions when possible. This builds trust.
- Practice self-compassion by reassuring your parts that their feelings and sensations are valid.



### **Creative Expression**

- Use drawing, painting, or sculpting to express the feelings and experiences of different parts. This can be particularly helpful for parts that find it hard to express themselves verbally.
- Keep a journal where you let different parts write their thoughts and feelings. This can help in understanding and integrating their experiences

### **Safe Space Visualization**

- Create an imaginary safe place where your parts can go when they feel overwhelmed. Visualize this place in detail and visit it during stressful times to provide comfort to your parts.
- Use guided imagery exercises to help parts feel safe and supported. Imagine providing comfort to the parts of your body that are experiencing pain or tension.

### **Develop a Self-Care Routine**

- Set aside time each day to check in with your parts, acknowledging their presence and needs. (I have an alarm on my phone to remind me)
- Engage in activities that nurture your body and mind, such as taking warm baths, practicing gentle stretching, or enjoying a hobby - doing so mindfully, with intention, and invite your inner littles along with you.

### **Mindfulness and Grounding Techniques**

- Use a mindful body scan to bring awareness to different parts of your body, noticing any sensations without judgment. This can help identify where different parts hold tension or pain.
- Practice grounding techniques, such as focusing on your breath, feeling your feet on the ground, or using sensory objects to stay present in your body.

### **Somatic Awareness Practices**

- Engage in gentle movement practices like shoulder circles, slow stretches, or slow dances to help parts of your body release stored tension and trauma.
- Use deep, diaphragmatic breathing to calm the nervous system and provide a sense of safety to anxious parts.
- Place your hand on an area that is tight or sore. Let your hand provide comfort and warmth.

### **Part-Specific Interventions**

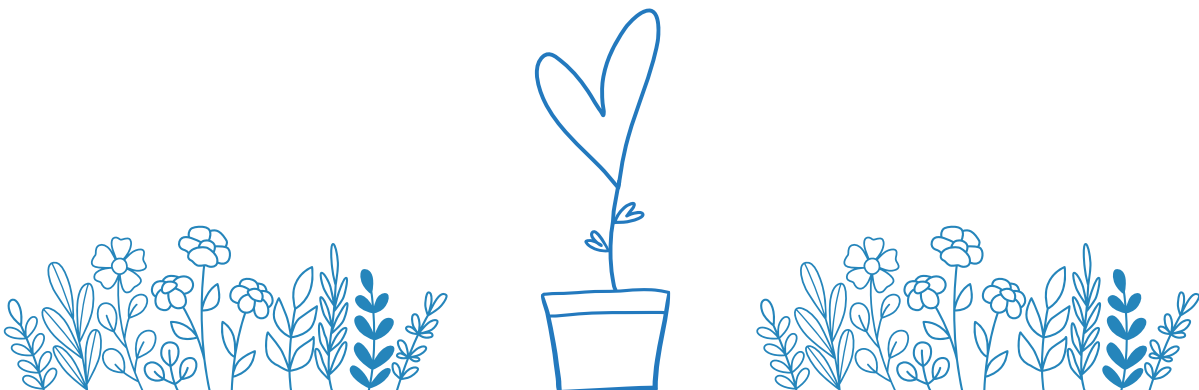
- For parts that hold physical tension, use progressive muscle relaxation or gentle massage to release the tension.
- Engage in regular physical activity that feels good to your body and helps release stored energy in that specific area.

### **Self-Leadership**

- Embrace Self-Leadership: Cultivate some qualities of the Self (compassion, curiosity, calmness, confidence) to lead and reassure your parts. This helps in creating an internal environment where all parts feel heard and respected.
- Boundaries and Safety: Set clear boundaries to ensure that all of you feel safe, helping parts that may feel vulnerable or exposed.

### **External Support**

- Work with an IFS-informed coach or therapist who can guide you in navigating the complex landscape of your parts and their physical manifestations.
- Join support groups where you can share your experiences and learn from others who are managing CPTSD.



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Note Space

You can use these pages to write about your experiences applying the various coping strategies mentioned above.

Which ones did you choose? What shifts are you noticing?  
How do you feel about them?

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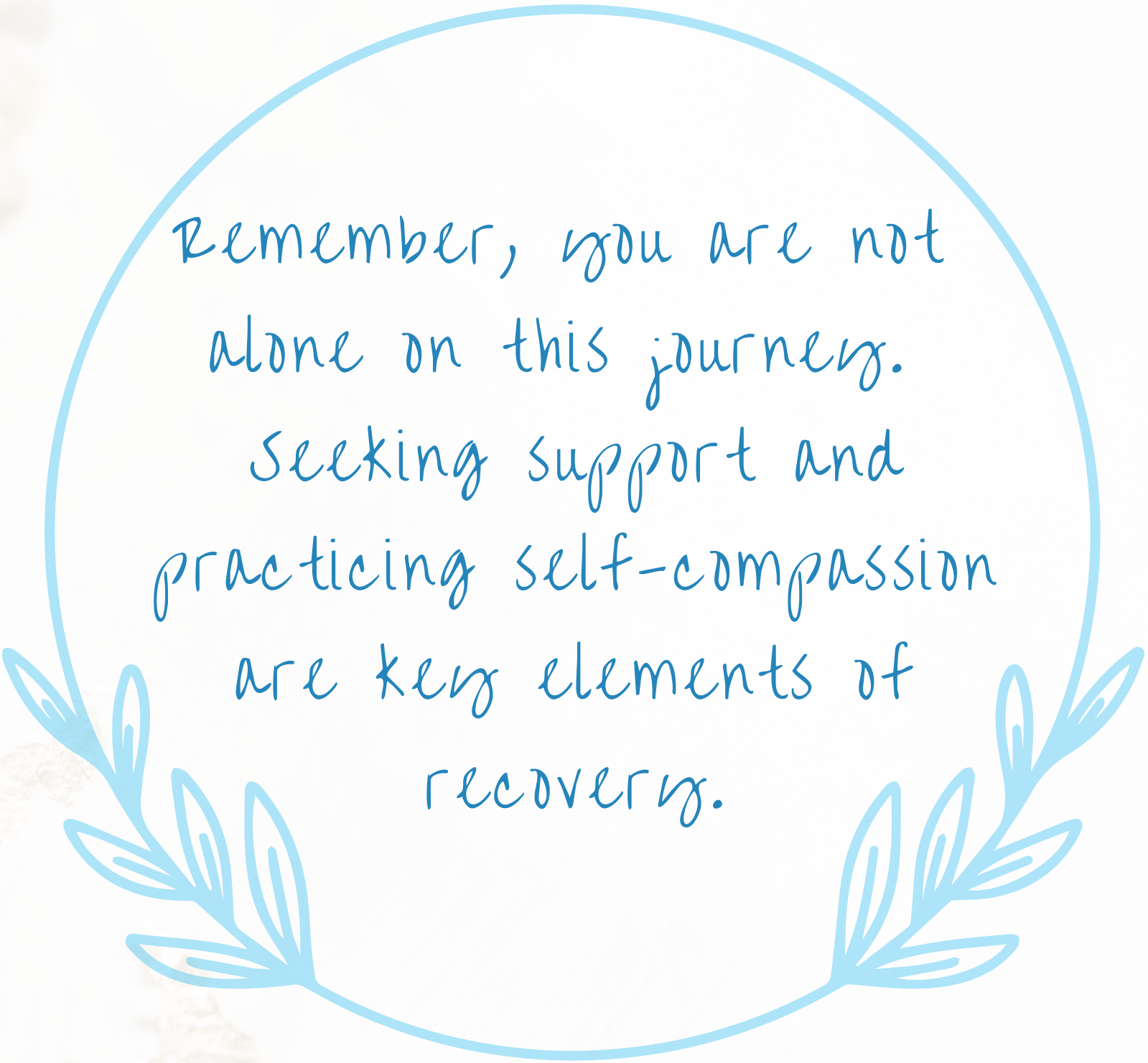
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Module 3

# Integrate

Next Steps



Remember, you are not  
alone on this journey.  
Seeking support and  
practicing self-compassion  
are key elements of  
recovery.



Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Note Space

What are you noticing as you have regular conversations with your aches and pains? What support do they need from you?

[illegible]

# Action Steps

You know you best. Reflect on what you've learned and consider one or a few small changes you can make to improve your well-being. Write it down and commit to trying it out.

This is an exercise in curiosity, compassion, and empowerment.

1



2



# Action Steps

You know you best. Reflect on what you've learned and consider one or a few small changes you can make to improve your well-being. Which ones do you want to add to your daily and or weekly routines? This is an exercise in curiosity, compassion, and empowerment.

(Print off duplicates of this page if it helps.)

1



2



Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Note Space

## What are you noticing about your health?

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# Forgiving yourself



My hope is that you've been able to grasp the connection between your trauma and your physical health. That trauma is held in the body, which surfaces later, often in the way of physiological symptoms, and is part of the long-term impact. Until the trauma is detoxed, it remains in the nervous system and the cells themselves.

In the first Step of the program, we explored how childhood trauma survivors often carry deep-seated shame, blame, unwarranted guilt, and a sense of powerlessness. The thought of self-forgiveness—whether for not resisting the abuser enough, not escaping, not preventing the abuse, or even for natural bodily responses to sexual touching that were beyond their control—can feel impossible, even absurd. Yet, embracing self-forgiveness is an essential part of the healing journey.

Understandably, all this takes time to process. Intentional exercise involves forgiving yourself in your heart. Doing this more than once is necessary, for the body needs time to rewire the brain and adopt new and healthier activities that align with healthier beliefs and mindsets.

Forgiving yourself for something that wasn't your fault, especially during childhood events, involves acknowledging your innocence, releasing misplaced guilt, and embracing self-compassion.



# Steps to Self-Forgiveness



## Inner Child Visualilzation:

**Visualize Your Younger Self:** Imagine yourself as a young child. Picture the child vividly, including their appearance, emotions, and surroundings.

## Engage in a Compassionate Dialogue:

**Greet Your Younger Self:** Approach your younger self with warmth and kindness. Imagine kneeling down to their level and looking into their eyes.

**Acknowledge Their Pain:** Speak to your younger self, acknowledging the pain and confusion they experienced. Say something like, "I know you went through something very difficult, and it wasn't your fault."

**Offer Reassurance:** Reassure your younger self that they are loved and blameless. Say, "You were just a child, and you didn't deserve what happened. You are innocent and worthy of love."

## Comfort and Embrace:

Visualize giving your younger self a gentle, comforting hug.

Feel the connection and warmth between your current self and your younger self.

## Release the Guilt:

Imagine dissolving any feelings of guilt or blame.

## Bring Back to Present:

Slowly bring your awareness back to the present, carrying with you the sense of love and forgiveness for your younger self.



# Evidence of Integration

## THEN

VS

## NOW

Fatigue, low energy, and frequent illnesses

High levels of anxiety and stress, difficulty managing emotions, and frequent mood swings.

Persistent physical tension, chronic pain, and a disconnection from bodily sensations.

Unmanaged symptoms, lack of personalized medical advice, and ineffective pain management.

Internal conflict, feeling disconnected from the body, lack of understanding of internal parts, and feelings of overwhelm.

Name what else you struggled with below

Improved energy, better immune function, and overall improved health due to maintaining a balanced diet and staying hydrated.

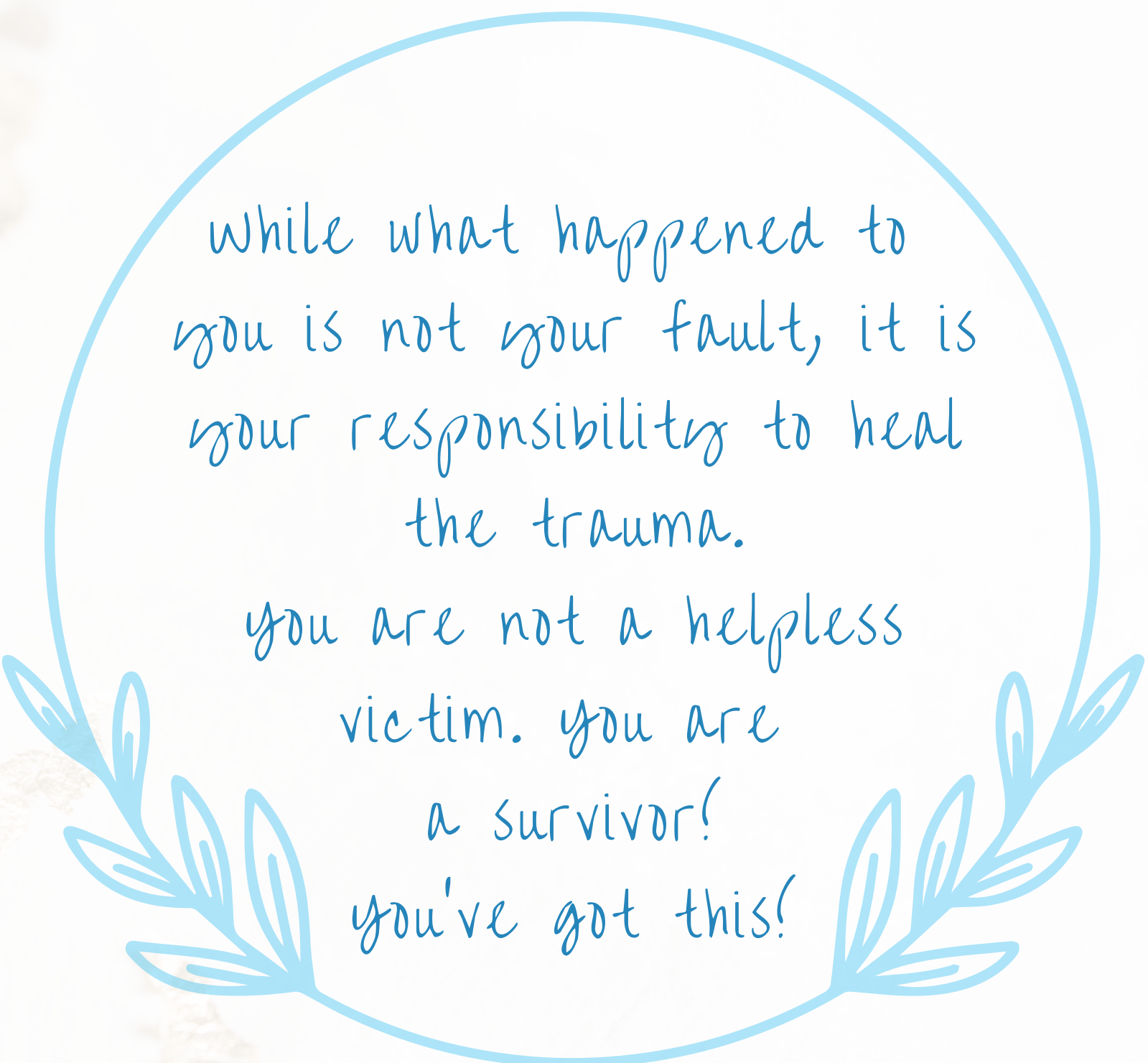
Enhanced emotional regulation, reduced anxiety, and improved mood stability due to regular physical activity and consistent sleep routines

Improved body awareness and it's emotional connection, reduced chronic pain, greater physical relaxation

Better symptom management, personalized healthcare plans, and effective pain relief through various healthcare professionals

Greater internal harmony, more inner peace, feeling more connected to yourself





while what happened to  
you is not your fault, it is  
your responsibility to heal  
the trauma.

you are not a helpless  
victim. you are  
a survivor!  
you've got this!

# Resources

Be sure to join in the group sessions.

If more support is needed, please book a 1:1 coaching session with me.

If you purchased the highest membership tier, 1 session/month is included.

I recommend taking advantage of this extra support as you work through the program.



## The Eight Steps to Deal with Chronic Pain

Tom Hoppe speaks with Dr. Andrea Furlan, identifying the three different types of pain

## Watsu

A form of water therapy (hydrotherapy) involving stretches, massages and acupressure.



## Release ANXIETY, STRESS | 10-Minute Qigong Daily Routine

This exercise can help you to let go of all anxieties, stress, fear, and also help make your body feel calm and at ease.

## Vagus Nerve Massage For Stress And Anxiety Relief

Vagus nerve massage is a great way to increase vagal tone for stress and anxiety relief anytime you need it.



## Suggested Reading

The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel van der Kolk

Complex PTSD - From Surviving to Thriving by Pete Walker

The Invisible Key: Unlocking the Mystery of My Chronic Pain by Maria Sokolof



Thank you for taking the time to  
work through this guide. Your  
journey toward understanding and  
managing your symptoms is a  
courageous step. Remember to be  
kind to yourself and seek support  
when needed.

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Please, always consult a trained professional before making any decisions regarding treatment for yourself and others.



# you did it!!!

It's an honour to work with you; please reach out for extra support along your healing journey.

Remember that YOU matter.



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