



Unlearning Internalized Ableism

Reclaiming Self-Worth Beyond Survival

Reflection, Rootwork & Integration Guide

Before You Begin

This guide is not about fixing yourself.

- It is not about becoming more productive.
- It is not about forcing yourself to be more positive.
- It is not about learning how to tolerate more than your body can carry.
- It is not about becoming easier for systems that were never built with your needs in mind.

This guide is an invitation to slow down and notice what you may have learned about your needs, your body, your pace, your emotions, your support needs, your neurodivergence, your capacity, and your worth.

Internalized ableism is not just negative self-talk.

It is often a learned survival relationship with yourself.

It can develop when your needs were repeatedly misunderstood, dismissed, punished, minimized, mocked, compared, unsupported, ignored, or treated as inconvenient.

Over time, those outside messages can become an inner voice.

The voice may say:

- "I should be able to do this."
- "Why can't I just get it together?"
- "I am lazy."
- "I am too much."
- "I am falling behind."
- "I do not deserve rest yet."
- "Other people can handle this."
- "I need to try harder."
- "I need to stop making excuses."
- "I should not need this much support."

This guide is here to help you pause before believing that voice.

- Not because your responsibilities do not matter.
- Not because impact does not matter.
- Not because support removes accountability.

But because shame cannot tell the whole truth.

- ❖ There are reasons you learned to speak to yourself this way.
- ❖ There are reasons your body adapted.
- ❖ There are reasons support may feel uncomfortable.
- ❖ There are reasons rest may feel unsafe.
- ❖ There are reasons being different may have felt dangerous.

And if there are reasons, then the work is not to shame the pattern.

The work is to understand the root, name the cost, support the need, and begin practicing something more honest.

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Important Disclaimer

This guide is for psychoeducation, reflection, and personal growth.

It is not therapy, diagnosis, medical advice, crisis care, trauma treatment, or a replacement for individualized support from a licensed provider.

Using this guide, purchasing REVAM materials, or engaging with REVAM content does not create a therapist-client relationship.

This guide discusses neurodivergence, internalized ableism, shame, masking, support needs, grief, family and school messages, productivity pressure, burnout, self-trust, behavior as communication, and unlearning old survival patterns.

Some reflections may bring up sadness, grief, anger, guilt, shame, defensiveness, numbness, or memories of being misunderstood.

Please move through this guide at your own pace.

- You do not have to answer every question.
- You do not have to force insight.
- You do not have to process everything in one sitting.

If this material brings up overwhelming distress, unsafe thoughts, trauma activation, or concerns about your safety, please seek support from a licensed professional, crisis service, emergency service, or trusted support person in your area.

In the United States, you can call or text 988 for crisis support.

Your capacity matters here too.

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How to Use This Guide

You can use this guide in many ways.

- You can read without writing.
- You can write one sentence and stop.
- You can speak your answers out loud.
- You can use it with a therapist, coach, support person, or journal.
- You can skip sections that feel too tender.
- You can return later.
- You do not have to complete this guide to receive something from it.

A gentle rhythm may be:

- Read one section.
- Pause.
- Notice your body.
- Answer what feels accessible.
- Leave the rest.
- Choose one small support.
- Return later.

This work is not about doing reflection correctly.

It is about creating enough safety to notice what shame has been carrying.

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Grounding First

Before reflecting, take a moment.

Place one hand on your chest, stomach, lap, or another place that feels grounding.

Take a slow breath in.

Let the exhale be a little longer.

Gently ask:

- Am I present enough to reflect right now?
- What do I notice in my body?
- Do I feel grounded, activated, numb, overwhelmed, curious, guarded, or unsure?
- What would help me feel a little safer before I continue?

If your body says, “not right now,” listen.

This guide can wait.

You matter more than completion.

You may say:

- “I can pause.”
- “I do not have to force this.”
- “My body gets to be included.”
- “This work can happen in layers.”
- “Support is allowed here.”

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Unlearning Internalized Ableism

Part 1 of 2

1 What It Is



Learned beliefs that your needs, differences, or way of functioning are wrong.

2 How It Gets Learned



- Family expectations
- School and work systems
- Productivity pressure
- Praised for overfunctioning
- Criticized for visible struggle

3 What It Sounds Like Inside



- I should be able to do this.
- Why is this so hard for me?
- I need to try harder.
- Rest has to be earned.

4 What It Looks Like in Real Life



- Pushing through exhaustion
- Ignoring sensory needs
- Guilt when resting
- Masking distress
- Feeling behind all the time



You were not born believing your needs made you less worthy.

Section 1: Internalized Ableism

Internalized ableism is what happens when a person begins to believe that the way they think, feel, process, move, communicate, rest, need, or function is wrong because it does not match the expectations around them.

- It is not something you chose.
- It is something you learned.
- It may have been learned in places where your needs were misunderstood.
- Where your pace was judged.
- Where your emotions were too much for others.
- Where your sensory needs were dismissed.
- Where your executive functioning struggles were seen as laziness.
- Where your shutdowns were seen as attitude.
- Where your need for clarity was seen as annoying.
- Where your burnout was invisible because you were still performing.

Over time, outside messages can become an inner voice.

That voice may feel like truth because it has been repeated for so long.
But a repeated message is not the same as a true one.

Rootwork starts by asking:

- Where did this voice come from?
- What did it protect?
- What did it help me survive?
- What has it cost?

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Reflection

What does your internalized ableism voice sound like?

What does it usually say when you are struggling?

What does it say when you need rest?

What does it say when you need support?

What does it say when you make a mistake?

What does it say when your capacity changes?

Rootwork Question

What if this voice is not your identity, but something you learned in order to survive environments that did not understand you?

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Action Tool: Naming the Voice

The voice says:

It usually shows up when:

It sounds like:

- ☐ A parent/caregiver
- ☐ A teacher
- ☐ A coach
- ☐ A partner
- ☐ A boss
- ☐ A cultural expectation
- ☐ A school system
- ☐ Productivity culture
- ☐ Religious/community pressure
- ☐ Social media comparison
- ☐ My own fear
- ☐ I am not sure
- ☐ Other: _____

This voice may have been trying to protect me from:

A more accurate truth could be:

Section 2: Where It Comes From

Internalized ableism does not come from nowhere.

It is reinforced through systems.

- School systems that reward compliance over curiosity.
- Families that value behavior over understanding.
- Workplaces that reward productivity while ignoring capacity.
- Cultures that tie worth to usefulness, endurance, sacrifice, or achievement.
- Healthcare systems that miss neurodivergent people who mask well.
- Faith or community systems that may frame struggle as lack of discipline, gratitude, or effort.
- Social media systems that show performance without showing cost.

For many women and femmes, there is also the pressure to be easy, helpful, emotionally available, pleasant, attractive, successful, and low-needs.

For many neurodivergent women, this can become deeply tangled with masking.

- You may have learned to adapt before you learned to understand yourself.
- You may have learned to be acceptable before you learned to be honest.
- You may have learned to perform functioning before anyone asked what it was costing.

This is not just personal.

This is systemic conditioning that became internal.

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Reflection

Where do you think you learned to judge your needs?

Where did you learn that struggling meant failure?

Where did you learn that needing support was weakness?

Where did you learn that rest had to be earned?

Where did you learn that being different was unsafe?

Where did you learn to compare your capacity to others?

Rootwork Question

What systems taught you to see your needs as problems instead of information?

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Action Tool: Source Map

Message I learned:

Where I learned it:

- ☐ Family
- ☐ School
- ☐ Work
- ☐ Culture
- ☐ Faith/community
- ☐ Gender roles
- ☐ Medical/mental health systems
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Friend groups
- ☐ Past relationships
- ☐ Productivity culture
- ☐ Ableist expectations
- ☐ Other: _____

What it helped me avoid:

What it made me believe about myself:

What I want to question now:

Section 3: The Inner Voice

Internalized ableism often sounds like motivation.

But it is usually shame in a productivity costume.

It may say:

- “Push harder.”
- “Stop making excuses.”
- “Other people can do it.”
- “You are falling behind.”
- “You should be able to handle this.”
- “Rest when everything is done.”
- “Try harder.”
- “Be more consistent.”
- “Do not be so sensitive.”
- “Do not make it harder for people.”
- “Just be normal.”

This voice may look like discipline from the outside.

But inside the body, it often creates panic, guilt, exhaustion, resentment, shutdown, masking, and burnout.

The problem is not responsibility.

Responsibility matters.

The problem is when responsibility is built on self-attack.

Support is not the opposite of responsibility.

Support makes responsibility sustainable.

Reflection

When does shame sound like motivation in your life?

What does that voice push you to do?

What does it stop you from noticing?

What does it cost your body?

What does it cost your relationships?

What does it cost your self-trust?

Rootwork Question

What if the voice pushing you harder is not wisdom, but fear trying to keep you acceptable?

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Action Tool: Shame vs. Support

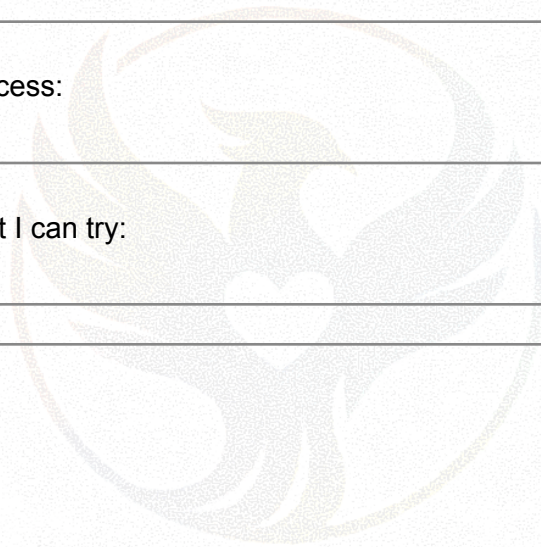
Shame says:

Support says:

Shame pushes me toward:

Support would help me access:

One supportive adjustment I can try:



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Section 4: Self-Monitoring

Many people do not begin by hating themselves.

- They begin by trying to stay safe.
- Trying to stay accepted.
- Trying to avoid criticism.
- Trying to avoid being seen as difficult, lazy, dramatic, needy, rude, careless, messy, inconsistent, or too much.

When a person is repeatedly misunderstood, they may begin watching themselves from the outside.

This is self-monitoring.

Self-monitoring can sound like:

- “Am I being annoying?”
- “Am I talking too much?”
- “Do I look weird?”
- “Did I respond correctly?”
- “Do they think I am lazy?”
- “Am I making this harder?”
- “Did I ask for too much?”
- “Can they tell I am overwhelmed?”
- “Am I being dramatic?”
- “Am I doing enough to seem okay?”

Self-monitoring can become exhausting.

It may help you avoid rejection in the short term.

But over time, it can disconnect you from your body.

You may become very skilled at reading the room while losing access to your own needs.

Reflection

Where do you monitor yourself most?

- ☐ Work
- ☐ School
- ☐ Family
- ☐ Friendships
- ☐ Romantic relationships
- ☐ Parenting
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ Community spaces
- ☐ Therapy/medical spaces
- ☐ Public spaces
- ☐ Other: _____

What are you afraid people will notice?

What are you trying to prevent?

What do you lose access to when you monitor yourself this much?

What would you notice if you checked in with your body instead of only checking the room?

Rootwork Question

What if your self-monitoring is not “overthinking,” but a learned attempt to stay safe and accepted?

Action Tool: Inside / Outside Check

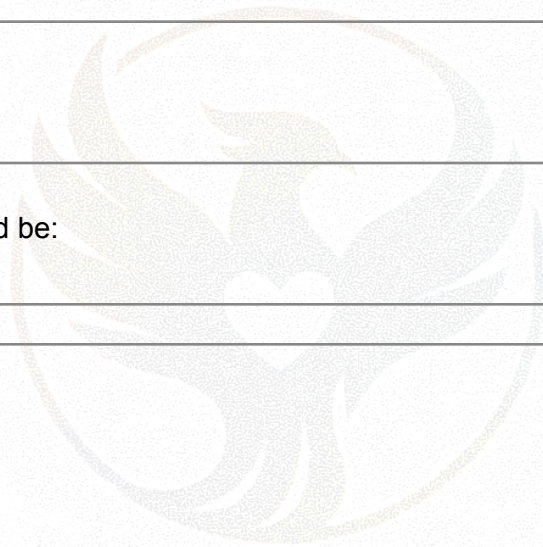
Outside monitoring asks:

Inside my body, I notice:

The room may need:

I may need:

A balanced response could be:



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Section 5: Masking and Overperformance

Masking is not just “pretending.”

It is often an attempt to survive.

- To stay connected.
- To avoid being judged.
- To avoid being misunderstood.
- To avoid being punished.
- To avoid being seen as difficult.
- To avoid losing opportunity.
- To avoid disappointing people.

For many neurodivergent women and femmes, masking may have been praised.

You may have been called mature, responsible, easy, high-achieving, helpful, articulate, calm, or strong.

People may have missed the cost because the outside looked acceptable.

But high-functioning often means high-cost functioning.

- You may have been functioning through panic.
- Performing through overload.
- Achieving through burnout.
- Smiling through sensory pain.
- Caring for others while disconnected from yourself.
- Keeping up while recovering in private.

Masking may have helped you survive.

And it may also have separated you from your own signals.

Both can be true.

Reflection

Where do you mask the most?

What version of yourself do you feel pressure to perform?

What are you afraid would happen if you stopped masking?

What does masking help you access?

What does masking cost you?

Where do people assume you are okay because you are still functioning?

Rootwork Question

What if the version of you that looks “fine” is not the whole story?

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Action Tool: Masking Cost Inventory

I mask by:

I learned to mask because:

Masking protects:

Masking costs:

One place I might reduce the mask slightly:

One support that could make that safer:

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Section 6: High-Functioning, High-Cost

Being seen as capable can be complicated.

Sometimes it reflects real strength.

- Real intelligence.
- Real creativity.
- Real commitment.
- Real skill.
- Real care.

And sometimes, being seen as capable means people stop noticing your need for support.

They may assume:

- “You are fine.”
- “You always figure it out.”
- “You do not need help.”
- “You are strong.”
- “You are independent.”
- “You can handle it.”
- “You are good at this.”

But being able to do something does not mean it costs you nothing.

- Being able to perform does not mean you are supported.
- Being able to push through does not mean pushing through is sustainable.
- Being able to meet expectations does not mean the expectations are accessible.

High-functioning often means high-cost functioning.

And a cost that no one sees can still harm you.

Reflection

Where do people assume you are fine because you perform well?

What do they not see?

What does your functioning cost you?

Where do you feel resentful because support is not offered?

Where have you mistaken “I can do it” for “I can do it sustainably”?

Rootwork Question

What if your need for support is still valid, even when you are capable?

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Action Tool: Cost of Functioning

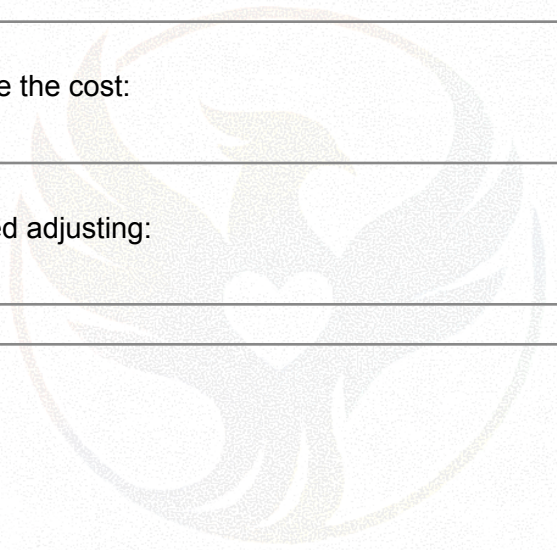
Task / role / expectation:

What others see:

What it costs internally:

What support would reduce the cost:

What expectation may need adjusting:



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Part 2 of 2

5. The Cost

- Burnout
- Chronic guilt
- Shutdown
- Perfectionism
- Disconnection from self



6. Behavior Is Communication

- Overwhelm
- Fear
- Sensory overload
- Low capacity
- Need for support



7. Rootwork Questions

- Where did I learn this?
- Whose voice does this sound like?
- What am I afraid it means about me if I need support?



8. Reframing With Compassion



I'm lazy → I may be overloaded
I'm inconsistent → my capacity changes
I should do more → support makes effort sustainable

9. Gentle Next Steps

- Notice shame language
- Name unmet needs
- Honor access needs
- Practice support instead of self-punishment



You are not failing because you have needs.
*You are learning how to stop
measuring yourself by harm.*



Section 7: The Body Learned

Internalized ableism lives in the body.

The body may learn:

- Mistakes are not safe.
- Slowing down leads to consequences.
- Being different risks rejection.
- Needs make me a burden.
- Support means I failed.
- Rest is lazy.
- Overwhelm is weakness.
- Shutdown is unacceptable.
- Sensory needs are inconvenient.
- Asking for clarity is annoying.
- Changing plans is irresponsible.

These may not be beliefs you consciously choose.

They may be body rules.

Body rules are learned through repetition.

- If mistakes were punished, your body may panic when you mess up.
- If rest was mocked, your body may feel guilt when you stop.
- If sensory needs were dismissed, your body may hide discomfort until it becomes shutdown.
- If support was unavailable, your body may not know how to receive help without shame.

This is why unlearning cannot be only intellectual.

The body needs repeated experiences of something different.

- ❖ Mistakes without humiliation.
- ❖ Rest without punishment.
- ❖ Support without shame.
- ❖ Needs without rejection.
- ❖ Different pacing without loss of worth.

Reflection

What has your body learned?

- ☐ Mistakes are unsafe
- ☐ Rest is risky
- ☐ Support means failure
- ☐ Needs are too much
- ☐ Difference risks rejection
- ☐ Emotions are inconvenient
- ☐ Sensory needs should be hidden
- ☐ Slowness is laziness
- ☐ Shutdown is unacceptable
- ☐ I must perform to belong
- ☐ Other: _____

Where did your body learn this?

How does your body react when this rule gets activated?

What would your body need in order to learn something new?

Rootwork Question

What if your body is not resisting healing, but protecting you based on what it learned?

Action Tool: Body Rule Reframe

Old body rule:

Where it came from:

How it protects me:

How it limits me now:

New experience my body may need:

A small way to practice that:

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Section 8: Needs Are Not Failure

Internalized ableism may have taught you to see needs as failure.

But needs are not failure.

Needs are information.

A need may point to:

- Support.
- Rest.
- Clarity.
- Food.
- Water.
- Movement.
- Sensory care.
- Connection.
- Space.
- Predictability.
- Recovery.
- Accommodation.
- Repair.
- Transition time.
- Reduced demand.
- Body doubling.
- A clearer next step.

**A need is not proof that you are broken.
It is communication from your system.**

The problem is not that you have needs.

The problem is that you may have been taught your needs were inconvenient unless they were small, hidden, or easy for others.

Unlearning internalized ableism means asking:

- What is this need communicating?
- What support would create access?
- What am I judging that actually deserves care?

Reflection

What needs do you judge most?

What needs do you hide?

What needs do you apologize for?

What needs do you delay until burnout?

What needs are hardest to explain to others?

What needs have you been calling “too much”?

Rootwork Question

What if the need is not the problem, but the lack of support around the need?

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Action Tool: Need Translation

The need I notice is:

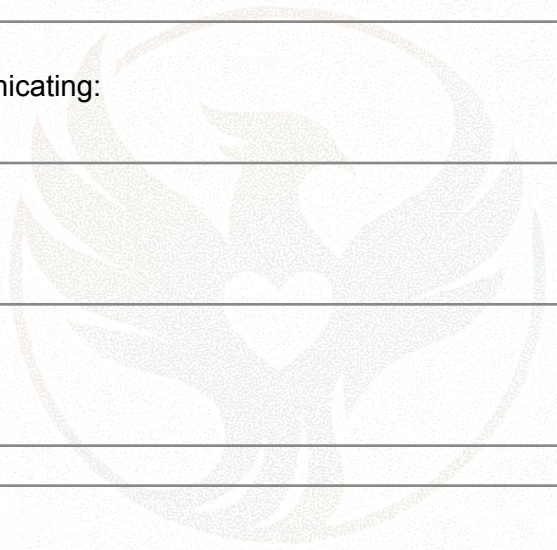
Shame calls it:

A more accurate name is:

This need may be communicating:

Support could look like:

One small way to honor it:

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Section 9: Support Is Access

- ❖ Support is not cheating.
- ❖ Support is not weakness.
- ❖ Support is not special treatment.
- ❖ Support is not proof that you are broken.
- ❖ Support is access.
- ❖ Support helps a person do what matters in a way that does not require unnecessary harm.

Support may look like:

- Asking for clarity.
- Using reminders.
- Writing things down.
- Body doubling.
- Reducing sensory input.
- Taking breaks.
- Using scripts.
- Using visual cues.
- Changing the environment.
- Adjusting expectations.
- Using accommodations.
- Resting before collapse.
- Getting help with transitions.
- Setting timers.
- Lowering demand.
- Breaking a task into smaller steps.
- Using medication, therapy, coaching, community, or tools when appropriate.

Support does not remove responsibility.

Support makes responsibility more sustainable.

The question is not:

→ **“Why can’t I do this without help?”**

The question is:

→ **“What support would make this accessible?”**

Reflection

What support do you judge yourself for needing?

What support do you allow others to have but deny yourself?

Where do you confuse support with failure?

What support actually helps you function with less shame?

Where could support reduce harm, burnout, conflict, or avoidance?

Rootwork Question

What if support is not the opposite of independence, but part of sustainable responsibility?

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Action Tool: Support Menu

One task or area that feels inaccessible:

What makes it hard:

- ☐ Too many steps
- ☐ Unclear beginning
- ☐ Sensory overload
- ☐ Emotional overwhelm
- ☐ No structure
- ☐ Too much pressure
- ☐ Fear of failure
- ☐ Time blindness
- ☐ Transition difficulty
- ☐ Social demand
- ☐ Low energy
- ☐ Shame
- ☐ Other: _____

Support that might help:

- ☐ Body doubling
- ☐ Clearer instructions
- ☐ Smaller first step
- ☐ Timer
- ☐ Visual reminder
- ☐ Break
- ☐ Reduced sensory input
- ☐ Script
- ☐ Accountability without shame
- ☐ Accommodation
- ☐ Rest first
- ☐ Help from another person
- ☐ Other: _____

One support I am willing to try:

Section 10: Behavior Is Communication

Behavior is communication.

- This does not mean every behavior is okay.
- It does not mean impact does not matter.
- It does not mean responsibility disappears.

It means behavior often carries information.

- Avoiding may communicate overwhelm.
- Procrastination may communicate unclear access.
- Shutdown may communicate nervous system overload.
- Irritability may communicate unmet needs.
- Overexplaining may communicate fear.
- People-pleasing may communicate a need for safety or belonging.
- Perfectionism may communicate fear of consequences.
- Messiness may communicate executive functioning load.
- Silence may communicate processing, fear, or shutdown.

Internalized ableism judges the behavior and stops there.

Rootwork asks:

- What is this communicating?
- What need is underneath?
- What support is missing?
- What repair may be needed?
- What would reduce harm next time?

Understanding creates room for care and repair.

Reflection

What behavior do you judge most in yourself?

What do you usually call it?

Lazy? Dramatic? Too much? Avoidant? Messy? Inconsistent? Sensitive? Difficult? Other?

What might this behavior be communicating?

What need may be underneath?

What support may be missing?

What impact may need care or repair?

Rootwork Question

What if the behavior is not proof that you are bad, but information that something needs support?

Action Tool: Behavior Communication Map

Behavior:

My judgment of it:

What it may communicate:

Need underneath:

Support needed:

Impact to repair, if any:

Next supportive step:

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Section 11: Shame and Productivity

Internalized ableism often partners with productivity culture.

Together, they say:

- “You are only valuable when you are useful.”
- “You are only okay when you are producing.”
- “You can rest after everything is done.”
- “You need to earn care.”
- “You need to keep up.”
- “You need to prove you are not lazy.”
- “You need to compensate for your needs.”

This is especially painful for neurodivergent people.

Because productivity culture rewards consistency, speed, urgency, independence, and visible output.

But many neurodivergent systems need variability, pacing, recovery, clarity, interest, stimulation, rest cycles, sensory care, transition support, and external structure.

When those needs are ignored, the person may blame themselves.

They may think:

- “I am not disciplined enough.”
- “I am inconsistent.”
- “I cannot be trusted.”
- “I am failing adulthood.”

But the deeper issue may be mismatch.

Not moral failure.

Mismatch.

Reflection

Where do you tie your worth to productivity?

What makes you feel like you “earned” rest?

What makes you feel behind?

Who do you compare your capacity to?

What do you ignore in order to keep producing?

Rootwork Question

What if your worth was never supposed to be measured by output?

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Action Tool: Worth Separation

I feel worthy when:

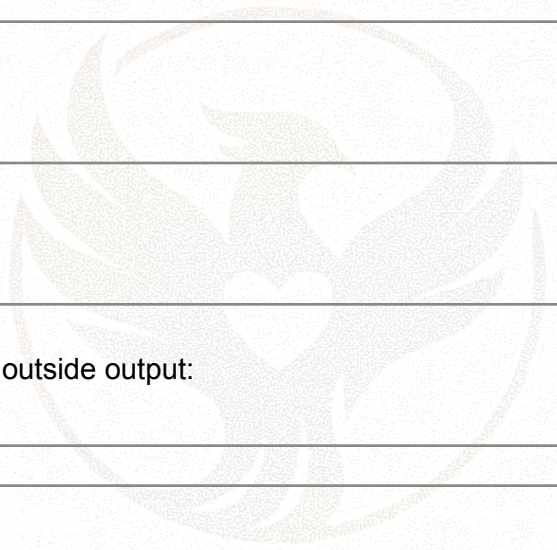
I feel worthless when:

This may have taught me:

A more honest truth is:

My body is asking for:

One way to practice worth outside output:

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Section 12: Comparison and Capacity

Internalized ableism feeds on comparison.

It says:

- “Other people can do this.”
- “Why can’t you?”
- “Everyone else is managing.”
- “You are behind.”
- “You are making excuses.”

But comparison often ignores context.

- Different nervous systems. Different trauma histories.
- Different sensory loads.
- Different responsibilities.
- Different support systems.
- Different health needs.
- Different financial realities.
- Different caregiving roles.
- Different masking costs.
- Different environments.
- Different access.

Capacity is not a character test.

Capacity is what your system can access right now.

And capacity changes.

It changes with sleep, stress, hormones, sensory input, grief, workload, emotional demand, transitions, conflict, uncertainty, support, and recovery.

You are not inconsistent.

Your capacity is responsive.

Reflection

Who do you compare your capacity to?

What context does that comparison ignore?

What factors impact your capacity?

- ☐ Sleep
- ☐ Stress
- ☐ Sensory input
- ☐ Hormones
- ☐ Grief
- ☐ Workload
- ☐ Caregiving
- ☐ Conflict
- ☐ Social demand
- ☐ Executive functioning load
- ☐ Transitions
- ☐ Trauma activation
- ☐ Physical health
- ☐ Support
- ☐ Recovery time
- ☐ Other: _____

Where do you call yourself inconsistent when your capacity may actually be changing?

Rootwork Question

What if your changing capacity is not failure, but information?

Action Tool: Capacity Check

Today my capacity feels:

- ☐ High
- ☐ Medium
- ☐ Low
- ☐ Unclear
- ☐ Fluctuating
- ☐ Already spent

What my system is holding:

What would support access today:

What expectation needs adjusting:

What can wait:

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Section 13: Grief and Anger

As you begin naming internalized ableism, grief may show up.

Anger may show up too.

- You may grieve the younger version of you who was misunderstood.
- The child who needed support but received labels.
- The teen who masked without language.
- The adult who kept pushing because they thought exhaustion was a personal failure.

You may feel anger about being dismissed.

- About being compared.
- About being unsupported.
- About needing to become your own translator.
- About how long you blamed yourself.

This grief and anger do not mean you are stuck.

They may mean you are telling the truth.

Unlearning internalized ableism is not only about changing self-talk.

It is also about grieving what the old voice cost you.

- The years of self-blame.
- The burnout.
- The fear of being seen.
- The lost rest.
- The hidden needs.
- The parts of you that learned to disappear.

This grief deserves compassion.

Not because you are fragile.

Because something real happened.

Reflection

What are you grieving as you name internalized ableism?

What are you angry about?

What did self-blame cost you?

What did masking cost you?

What support do you wish you had received earlier?

What part of you needed more understanding?

Rootwork Question

What if grief is not a sign that you are going backward, but a sign that you are finally making room for what hurt?

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Action Tool: Witnessing the Cost

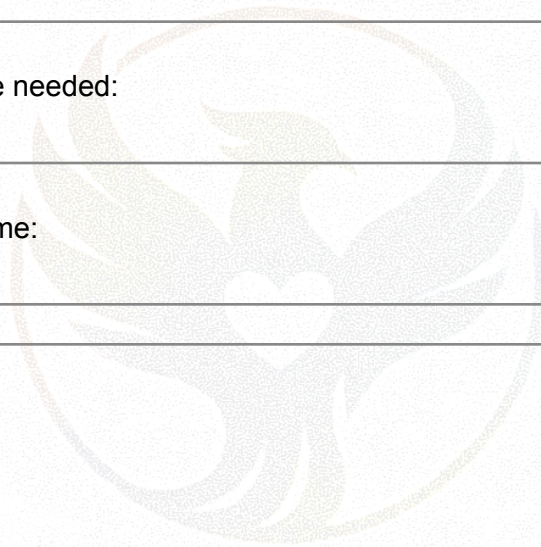
I am grieving:

I am angry that:

I wish someone had understood:

The younger version of me needed:

I want to offer that part of me:



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Section 14: Repair Without Self-Destruction

Unlearning internalized ableism does not mean pretending impact does not happen.

- Your needs matter.
- Your behavior also has impact.
- Your overwhelm may be understandable, and repair may still be needed.
- Your shutdown may make sense, and someone may still need communication.
- Your irritability may have context, and someone may still have been hurt.
- Your avoidance may be protective, and trust may still need repair.

This is where REVAM holds both truths.

The behavior makes sense.

The impact still matters.

Shame says:

→ **“I am bad.”**

Defensiveness says:

→ **“I had reasons, so it should not matter.”**

Rootwork says:

→ **“There are reasons, and there may still be repair.”**

Accountability does not have to be self-destruction.

Repair is not punishment.

Repair is reconnection.

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Reflection

Where do you collapse into shame when impact is named?

Where do you defend because shame feels too big?

What pattern may need repair?

What context matters?

What impact matters?

What support would help you respond without attacking yourself?

Rootwork Question

What if accountability can include context, compassion, and repair?

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Action Tool: Repair With Context

What happened?

What was I holding?

What pattern showed up?

What impact occurred?

What repair may be needed?

What support could reduce harm next time?

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Section 15: Unlearning the Voice

Unlearning internalized ableism is not one decision.

It is a repeated practice.

- A moment of noticing the voice.
- A moment of questioning the story.
- A moment of naming the need.
- A moment of choosing support.
- A moment of repairing without self-destruction.
- A moment of resting before burnout.
- A moment of asking for clarity.
- A moment of letting your body matter.
- A moment of remembering:

The voice is learned.

My worth is not.

You may not stop believing the old voice immediately.

That makes sense.

It had years of repetition.

The new voice will need repetition too.

Unlearning does not mean the old voice never returns.

It means you do not have to obey it every time.

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Reflection

What old message are you ready to question?

What makes that message hard to release?

What did that message protect?

What does it cost now?

What new message do you want to practice?

Rootwork Question

What if unlearning does not require you to erase the old voice, only to stop treating it as the only truth?

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Action Tool: Question the Voice

Old message:

Where it came from:

What it protected:

What it cost:

New message:

One way to practice the new message:

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Section 16: Building a Supportive Inner Voice

A supportive inner voice is not fake positivity.

It does not say:

- “Everything is fine.”
- “It does not matter.”
- “Just love yourself.”
- “Never take responsibility.”

A supportive inner voice tells the truth with care.

It sounds like:

- “This is hard, and I can slow down.”
- “I am overwhelmed, not lazy.”
- “I need support, not shame.”
- “My capacity changed.”
- “I can repair without attacking myself.”
- “I can ask for clarity.”
- “I can rest before collapse.”
- “I can be responsible without being cruel to myself.”
- “I can try again with support.”

The goal is not to become perfectly kind to yourself overnight.

The goal is to interrupt the automatic cruelty long enough to offer something more accurate.

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Reflection

What would a supportive inner voice sound like for you?

What words feel believable?

What words feel too far away right now?

What tone does your body respond to best?

- ☐ Gentle
- ☐ Direct
- ☐ Grounded
- ☐ Practical
- ☐ Warm
- ☐ Firm
- ☐ Simple
- ☐ Reassuring
- ☐ Other: _____

What phrase do you want to practice?

Rootwork Question

What if the voice you need is not perfect positivity, but honest support?

Action Tool: Supportive Language Practice

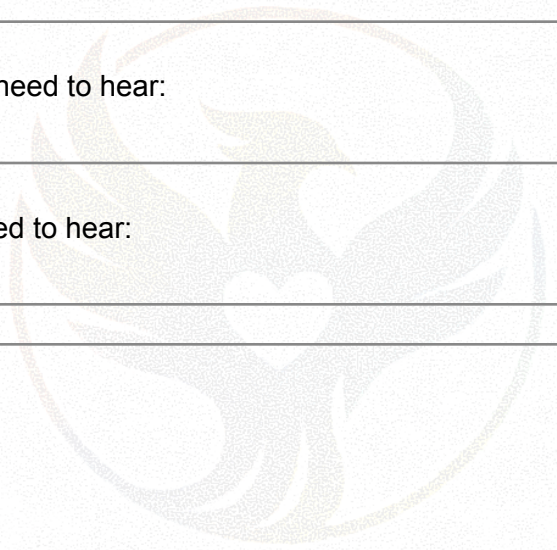
When shame says:

I can respond with:

When I am overwhelmed, I need to hear:

When I make a mistake, I need to hear:

When I need support, I need to hear:



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Section 17: Support Plan

Insight matters.

But insight alone is not support.

You may understand your internalized ableism and still need actual access tools.

You may need:

- Reminders.
- Scripts.
- Rest.
- Sensory supports.
- Body doubling.
- Visual cues.
- Reduced demand.
- Clearer expectations.
- Transition time.
- Movement.
- Food.
- Water.
- A quieter environment.
- A different schedule.
- A smaller first step.
- Help from another person.
- Professional support.
- Community support.
- Medication or treatment when appropriate.
- Accommodations.
- Recovery time.

Unlearning internalized ableism means allowing support to become part of the plan, not proof that the plan failed.

Reflection

What areas of your life need more support?

- ☐ Work
- ☐ School
- ☐ Home
- ☐ Parenting
- ☐ Relationships
- ☐ Self-care
- ☐ Rest
- ☐ Transitions
- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Sensory regulation
- ☐ Food / hydration
- ☐ Emotional regulation
- ☐ Task initiation
- ☐ Planning
- ☐ Recovery
- ☐ Other: _____

Where are you trying to function without enough access?

What support have you resisted because of shame?

What support would make a real difference?

Rootwork Question

What if the support you keep judging is the access your system has been asking for?

Action Tool: My Support Plan

One area I want to support:

What makes it hard:

What I usually do:

What support could help:

Who or what can help:

When I will try it:

How I will respond if shame shows up:

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Section 18: Integration

You do not have to rebuild your relationship with yourself all at once.

Unlearning internalized ableism is not a final destination.

It is a practice.

- A return.
- A noticing.
- A questioning.
- A softening.
- A repair.
- A choice.
- A support.
- A boundary.
- A rest.
- A moment where you do not call yourself lazy.
- A moment where you ask what your body needs.
- A moment where you let support count.
- A moment where you stop comparing your capacity to someone else's.
- A moment where you name the impact without attacking your whole self.
- A moment where you remember:

There are reasons.

And reasons are not excuses.

Reasons are maps.

A map helps you see where shame entered.

- Where support was missing.
- Where the body adapted.
- Where the cost became too high.
- Where repair is needed.
- Where choice can begin.

Reflection

What are you taking from this guide?

What old message are you questioning?

What need are you beginning to respect?

What support are you willing to try?

What behavior are you beginning to understand differently?

What repair may be needed?

What part of you needs more compassion?

Rootwork Question

What if unlearning internalized ableism begins with one moment of not abandoning yourself?

Action Tool: One Honest Shift

One old message I am questioning:

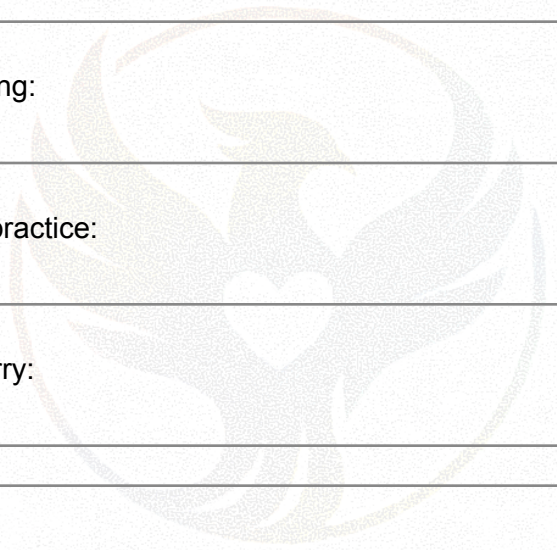
One need I am honoring:

One support I am allowing:

One behavior I am reframing:

One repair I am willing to practice:

One reminder I want to carry:



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Closing Reflection

Complete the sentences below.

Internalized ableism taught me:

It tried to protect me from:

It cost me:

I am beginning to understand:

My needs are not:

My support is:

My body is asking for:

A new truth I want to practice is:

Closing Anchor

That voice is not who you are.

It is what you learned.

- You learned to judge your needs in environments that did not know how to support them.
- You learned to hide overwhelm where being overwhelmed was misunderstood.
- You learned to perform where being different was unsafe.
- You learned to push where rest was not protected.
- You learned to compare yourself to systems that did not include your access needs.

That learning made sense.

And it does not have to be the only voice you carry forward.

- Your needs are not failure.
- Your body is not the enemy.
- Your pace is not a character flaw.
- Your support is not cheating.
- Your behavior is communication.
- Your worth is not measured by how well you mask, push, produce, or disappear.
- You are allowed to need support before collapse.
- You are allowed to rest before burnout.
- You are allowed to ask for clarity.
- You are allowed to move differently.
- You are allowed to repair without self-destruction.
- You are allowed to practice a voice that tells the truth with care.

Unlearning does not have to happen all at once.

- A moment of noticing is still movement.
- A moment of support is still change.
- A moment of compassion is still rootwork.

— Phoenix Within REVAM Healing