



ACEs, Trauma, and Neurodivergence Reflection, Rootwork & Nervous System Integration Guide

REVAM: There Are Reasons

Start Here

This guide is for understanding, not fixing.

You are not expected to:

- **Figure everything out**
- **Revisit painful memories**
- **Push beyond your capacity**
- **Explain your entire story**
- **Make every connection today**
- **Prove that what happened was “bad enough”**

You can:

- **Pause**
- **Skip sections**
- **Come back later**
- **Write only a few words**
- **Sit with the questions without answering**
- **Use this with a therapist or trusted support person**

You set the pace.

The goal of this guide is not to make you relive everything.

The goal is to help you understand how your nervous system learned to respond, adapt, protect, and survive.

Because there are reasons.

- For your reactions.
- For your patterns.
- For the way you learned to cope.
- For what feels hard now.
- For what your body still remembers.

And those reasons deserve compassion, not judgment.

Important Disclaimer

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

It is not psychotherapy, trauma treatment, crisis care, diagnosis, medical advice, or a replacement for individualized mental health care.

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

This guide includes reflection around childhood adversity, protective experiences, trauma responses, nervous system patterns, and neurodivergence. Some sections may feel emotionally activating. You are encouraged to move slowly, pause when needed, and seek support from a licensed mental health provider if deeper emotions, trauma responses, distress, or safety concerns arise.

If you are in immediate danger, contact emergency services in your area.

In the United States, the **988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline** offers 24/7 support by call, text, or chat for mental health crisis or emotional distress. The **Crisis Text Line** provides free, confidential 24/7 text support by texting **HOME** to **741741**.

If your relationship or environment includes coercion, threats, stalking, physical violence, sexual coercion, intimidation, isolation, or fear of retaliation, prioritize safety planning and individualized support. The **National Domestic Violence Hotline** provides confidential 24/7 support, and **RAINN** provides support for survivors of sexual violence through the National Sexual Assault Hotline.

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What This Is and What It Isn't

This is:

- Education
- Reflection
- Awareness
- Nervous system understanding
- Context
- Pattern recognition
- Rootwork

This is not:

- **Trauma processing**
- **Diagnosis**
- **Therapy**
- **A replacement for support**
- **A requirement to revisit painful memories**
- **A comparison of who had it worse**
- **A score that defines you**

If deeper emotions arise, that deserves supported space.

You do not have to process everything alone.

Pause Before You Begin

Take a moment.

- Notice your body.
- Notice your breath.
- Notice your surroundings.

Ask:

“Am I steady enough to reflect right now?”

If the answer is no, pause.

Come back later.

You do not need to push through this guide to prove strength.

Pausing is not avoidance.

Sometimes pausing is your nervous system choosing care.

Grounding Practice

Try this before you begin:

- Place both feet on the floor.
- Look around and name five things you can see.
- Unclench your jaw if you can.
- Relax your shoulders if possible.
- Place one hand on your chest or stomach.
- Take one slower breath than the last.

Say:

- **“I am reflecting. I am not reliving.”**
 - **“I can pause when needed.”**
 - **“My pace matters.”**
 - **“Understanding can happen in layers.”**
-

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Section 1: There Is Nothing Wrong With You

Psychoeducation

Before anything else, let this be named clearly:

There is nothing wrong with you.

If you have ever thought:

- **“Why am I like this?”**
- **“Why does this feel so hard?”**
- **“Why do I react this way?”**
- **“Why can’t I just move on?”**
- **“Why does my body respond before I understand what is happening?”**

You are not broken.

There are reasons.

Many people were taught to judge themselves before they were taught to understand themselves.

You may have learned to say:

- **“I’m too much.”**
- **“I’m not enough.”**
- **“I should be better than this.”**
- **“I should be able to handle this.”**
- **“I should be over this by now.”**

But your behavior did not come from nowhere.

- Snapping and then feeling guilty is not random.
- Saying yes when you meant no is not random.
- Shutting down mid-conversation is not random.
- Overthinking something for hours is not random.
- Feeling responsible for everyone’s mood is not random.
- Reacting strongly to tone, conflict, silence, or uncertainty is not random.

Your body is communicating something.

Usually, a need that did not feel met.

Sometimes, a need that was not safe to have.

Reflection

When do you most often think, “What is wrong with me?”

What behavior or reaction do you judge yourself for?

What do you usually call that behavior?

Example: dramatic, lazy, too much, sensitive, weak, reactive, avoidant.

What might your body be trying to communicate through that behavior?

What need might be underneath it?

Rootwork Question

If this behavior was not a flaw, but a message, what might it be saying?

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Action Tool: Behavior Translation

Use this when you notice self-judgment.

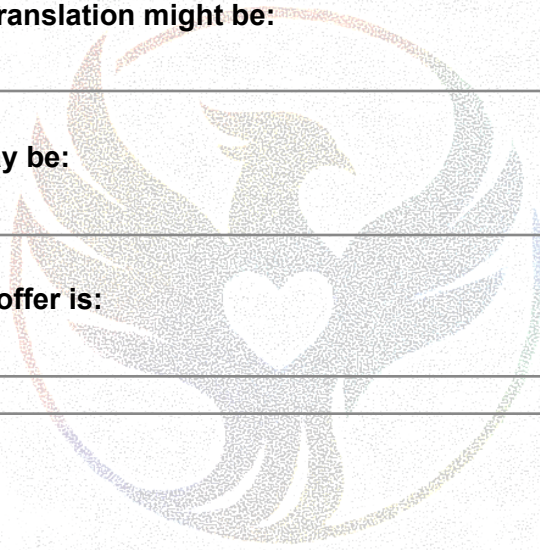
The behavior I notice is:

The shame story says:

A more compassionate translation might be:

The need underneath may be:

One small support I can offer is:



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Section 2: You Do Not Have to Go Digging

Psychoeducation

- You do not have to go digging today.
- You do not have to remember everything.
- You do not have to explain your story.
- You do not have to force yourself into painful memories.

You can simply notice:

- “That sounds like me.”
- “That part does not fit.”
- “That feels tender.”
- “I may need to pause here.”
- “I want to come back to this later.”

Understanding does not require overwhelm.

Sometimes people think trauma work means going directly into the hardest memories.

But reflection can begin with the present.

- What happens in your body now?
- What situations overwhelm you now?
- What patterns repeat now?
- What do you need now?

You can understand without reliving.

You can notice without forcing.

You can move slowly and still be doing meaningful work.

Reflection

What feels safe enough to notice today?

What feels too heavy to explore right now?

What would help you stay within your capacity while reflecting?

What signs tell you that you need to pause?

Action Tool: Capacity Check

Before each section, ask:

Am I curious, or am I overwhelmed?

Do I feel present enough to continue?

Do I need grounding, water, movement, rest, or support?

Would it be kinder to pause and return later?

Section 3: What Are ACEs?

Psychoeducation

ACEs stands for **Adverse Childhood Experiences**.

ACEs are a way of naming difficult or harmful experiences that may happen during childhood.

But when we talk about ACEs through a REVAM lens, we are not only talking about a score.

We are talking about what your nervous system had to adapt to.

ACEs can include experiences that were clearly unsafe, frightening, or harmful.

They can also exist alongside quieter forms of unmet need.

Things like:

- **Walking into your house and immediately checking the mood**
- **Not knowing if it was going to be a “good day” or “bad day”**
- **Feeling like you had to stay quiet to keep things calm**
- **Crying and being told you were overreacting**
- **Needing comfort and being ignored**
- **Taking care of others when you needed care**
- **Being expected to act older than you were**
- **Having no one notice when you were struggling**
- **Having emotions treated like a problem**
- **Not feeling protected or emotionally held**

Your body did not say:

“This is unfair.”

Your body said:

“What do I need to do to get through this?”

That is adaptation.

Reflection

Without going into specific memories, what kind of environment did your nervous system learn in?

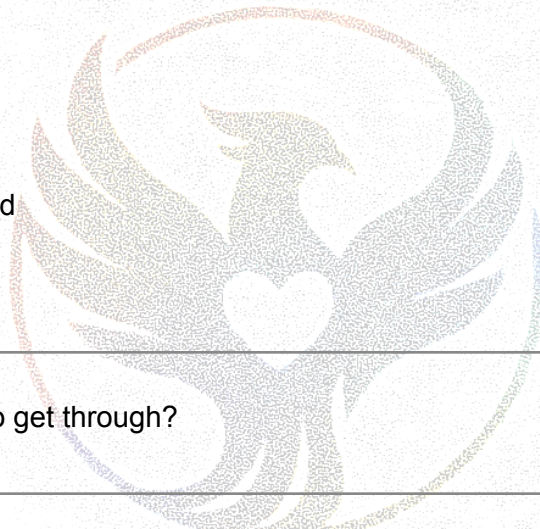
- Unpredictable
- Emotionally intense
- Quiet but disconnected
- Chaotic
- Controlling
- Dismissive
- High-pressure
- Unsafe
- Lonely
- Inconsistent
- Parentified
- Emotionally unsupported

Other:

What did you learn to do to get through?

What did you learn not to show?

What did you need more of?



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Action Tool: Environment-to-Adaptation Map

My environment often felt:

My body learned to:

This helped me survive by:

Now it may show up as:

What I may need now is:



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Section 4: ACE Questionnaire

Before Completing the ACE Questionnaire

This questionnaire is not a diagnosis.

It is not a comparison.

It is not your identity.

It is context.

Your score does not tell your whole story.

- *A lower score does not mean you were not impacted.*
- *A higher score does not mean you are broken.*

The score is one lens.

Not the whole picture.

You get to decide whether completing it feels supportive today.

You can also skip it and still benefit from this guide.

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Adverse Childhood Experience Questionnaire for Adults
 California Surgeon General's Clinical Advisory Committee



Our relationships and experiences—even those in childhood—can affect our health and well-being. Difficult childhood experiences are very common. Please tell us whether you have had any of the experiences listed below, as they may be affecting your health today or may affect your health in the future. This information will help you and your provider better understand how to work together to support your health and well-being.

Instructions: Below is a list of 10 categories of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). From the list below, please place a checkmark next to each ACE category that you experienced prior to your 18 th birthday. Then, please add up the number of categories of ACEs you experienced and put the <i>total number</i> at the bottom.	
1. Did you feel that you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, or had no one to protect or take care of you?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Did you lose a parent through divorce, abandonment, death, or other reason?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Did you live with anyone who was depressed, mentally ill, or attempted suicide?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Did you live with anyone who had a problem with drinking or using drugs, including prescription drugs?	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Did your parents or adults in your home ever hit, punch, beat, or threaten to harm each other?	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Did you live with anyone who went to jail or prison?	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Did a parent or adult in your home ever swear at you, insult you, or put you down?	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Did a parent or adult in your home ever hit, beat, kick, or physically hurt you in any way?	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. Did you feel that no one in your family loved you or thought you were special?	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. Did you experience unwanted sexual contact (such as fondling or oral/anal/vaginal intercourse/penetration)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Your ACE score is the total number of checked responses	

Do you believe that these experiences have affected your health? Not Much Some A Lot

Experiences in childhood are just one part of a person's life story.
 There are many ways to heal throughout one's life.

Please let us know if you have questions about privacy or confidentiality.

5/5/20

Section 5: ACE Scoring Reflection

ACE Scoring

Each “Yes” = 1
Total range: 0–10

0–1

Lower exposure
→ **does not mean no difficulty**

2–3

Some exposure
→ **may impact stress and coping**

4+

Higher exposure
→ **increased likelihood of stress sensitivity, regulation challenges, and long-term impact**

The odds were stacked.

ACE Context

Your ACE score is not:

- **A diagnosis**
- **A comparison**
- **Your identity**
- **A measure of your worth**
- **A complete picture of your childhood**
- **A prediction that you cannot heal**

It is context.

It can help explain why your nervous system may have adapted the way it did.

This does not define you.

It is a testament to your resiliency.

Reflection

What came up for you while looking at your ACE score?

Did anything feel validating?

Did anything feel minimizing or incomplete?

What does your score not capture?

What do you want to remember about yourself after seeing this number?

Rootwork Question

If your ACE score could speak without shame, what might it say about what your younger self had to survive?

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Section 6: How ACEs Can Show Up Now

Psychoeducation

ACEs and early adversity do not always show up later as clear memories.

Sometimes they show up as reactions.

- *You may get overwhelmed quickly in situations others seem fine in.*
- *You may replay conversations after they happen.*
- *You may feel responsible for how other people feel.*
- *You may shut down when conflict starts.*
- *You may react quickly and then feel regret after.*
- *You may over-explain to prevent being misunderstood.*
- *You may avoid asking for help because needing support once felt unsafe.*
- *You may push yourself past capacity because slowing down once had consequences.*

You may think:

“Why can’t I just handle this?”

But your body may have learned early:

- **“I have to be ready.”**
- **“I have to stay alert.”**
- **“I have to protect myself.”**
- **“I have to read the room.”**
- **“I have to stay ahead.”**
- **“I have to not need too much.”**

That does not mean the reaction is always helpful now.

It means the reaction has roots.

Reflection

How do early adaptations show up in your adult life?

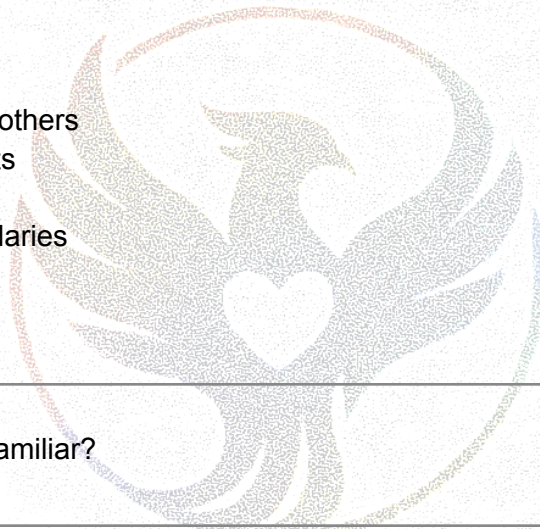
- Overwhelm
- People-pleasing
- Overthinking
- Shutdown
- Emotional flooding
- Conflict avoidance
- Control
- Hyper-independence
- Overworking
- Difficulty trusting calm
- Feeling responsible for others
- Scanning for mood shifts
- Difficulty resting
- Guilt after setting boundaries

Other:

Which pattern feels most familiar?

What did that pattern once protect you from?

What does it cost you now?



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Action Tool: Then vs Now

Then, this response helped me:

Now, this response may be costing me:

The current need underneath may be:

A small shift I can try is:



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Section 7: Your Body Keeps Score

Psychoeducation

Your body keeps score.

Not always as clear memories.

Often as reactions.

- **Your chest tightens.**
- **Your stomach drops.**
- **Your mind races.**
- **Your body goes numb.**
- **Your jaw clenches.**
- **Your throat feels tight.**
- **Your hands shake.**
- **You feel like you need to leave.**
- **You feel like you need to fix everything.**
- **You feel like you disappear.**

Sometimes your body reacts before your thinking brain can explain why.

That does not mean you are making it up.

It means your body learned from experience.

The body remembers patterns of safety and danger.

It may react to:

- Tone
- Silence
- Facial expression
- Conflict
- Uncertainty
- Rejection
- Pressure because those cues once mattered.

Sometimes just realizing this can feel like relief.

Because it is not “just in your head.”

It is in your nervous system.

Reflection

What body signals show up when you are activated?

- Chest tightness
- Stomach drop
- Racing thoughts
- Numbness
- Jaw clenching
- Nausea
- Shaking
- Heat
- Heaviness
- Wanting to run
- Wanting to freeze
- Needing to fix
- Feeling small
- Feeling angry quickly

Other:

What situations bring those body responses up?

What does your body seem to be preparing you for?

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Action Tool: Body Response Translation

My body does:

This usually happens when:

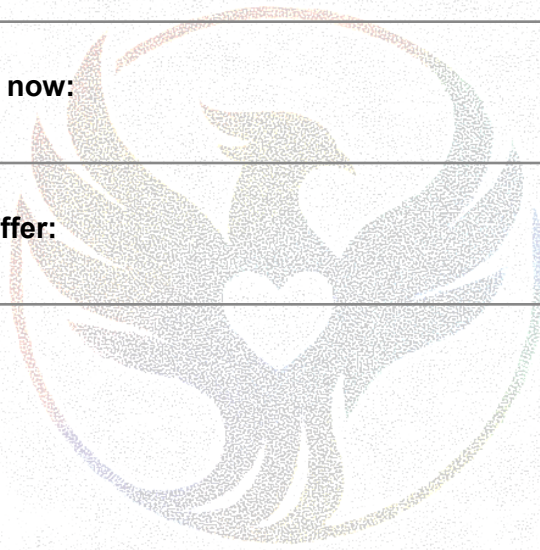
My body may be remembering:

What my body may need now:

One cue of safety I can offer:

Examples:

- Slow exhale
- Feet on floor
- Lower stimulation
- Step away briefly
- Ask for time
- Drink water
- Name what is happening
- Text someone safe
- Wrap in a blanket
- Dim lights



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Section 8: BCEs — What Held You Also Matters

Psychoeducation

BCEs stands for **Benevolent Childhood Experiences**.

These are protective experiences, supports, relationships, routines, or moments that helped create safety, connection, or resilience.

And this part matters just as much.

Because you are not only shaped by what hurt you.

You are also shaped by what held you.

It may not have been everything you needed.

It may have been small.

- **A teacher who noticed you.**
- **A friend who made you feel normal.**
- **A grandparent who felt calmer.**
- **A neighbor who was kind.**
- **A pet who felt safe.**
- **A routine that helped you know what to expect.**
- **A book, belief, hobby, or place where you could breathe.**
- **A moment where someone looked at you with warmth.**

Those moments matter.

They may show up now as:

- **Your ability to connect deeply**
- **Your hope that things can be different**
- **Your care for others**
- **Your desire to break patterns**
- **Your ability to notice harm**
- **Your longing for safety**
- **Your capacity to keep reaching for healing**

Even small moments of care can matter.

Reflection

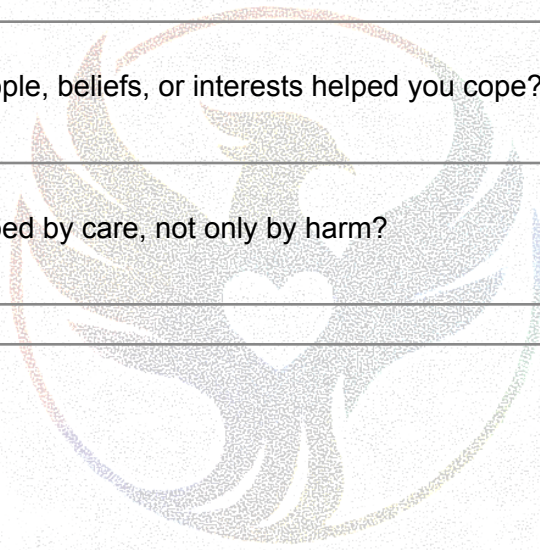
What helped you get through?

Who or what helped you feel even a little safer?

Where did you experience moments of connection?

What routines, places, people, beliefs, or interests helped you cope?

What part of you was shaped by care, not only by harm?



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Section 9: BCE

Before Completing the BCE Scale

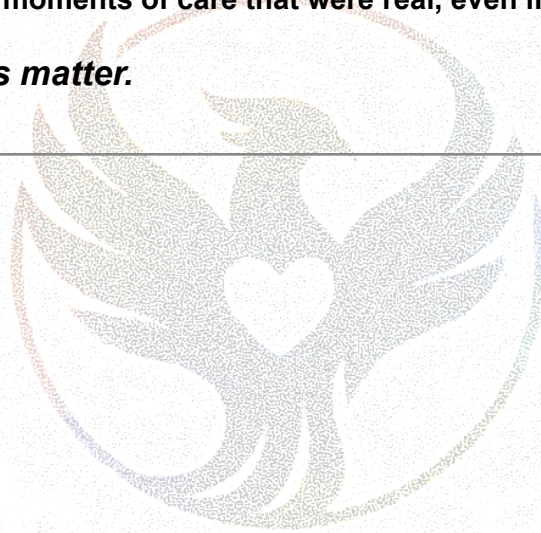
The BCE score is not a measure of whether you had a “good childhood.”

- **It is not a comparison.**
- **It is not meant to minimize adversity.**

It reflects access to support.

- **Some people had adversity and support.**
- **Some people had very little support.**
- **Some people had moments of care that were real, even if they were not enough.**

Both ACEs and BCEs matter.



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ID _____ Respondent _____
Date / / Time Period _____
Interviewer Initials: _____
Notes: _____

Benevolent Childhood Experiences (BCEs) Scale
 © Narayan, Rivera, Ghosh Ippen, & Lieberman, 2015

When you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did you have at least one caregiver with whom you felt safe?	YES NO
2. Did you have at least one good friend?	YES NO
3. Did you have beliefs that gave you comfort?	YES NO
4. Did you like school?	YES NO
5. Did you have at least one teacher who cared about you?	YES NO
6. Did you have good neighbors?	YES NO
7. Was there an adult (not a parent/caregiver or the person from #1) who could provide you with support or advice?	YES NO
8. Did you have opportunities to have a good time?	YES NO
9. Did you like yourself or feel comfortable with yourself?	YES NO
10. Did you have a predictable home routine, like regular meals and a regular bedtime?	YES NO

Please cite the following paper when using the BCEs:

Narayan, A. J., Rivera, L. M., Bernstein, R. E., Harris, W. W., & Lieberman, A. F. (2018). Positive childhood experiences predict less psychopathology and stress in pregnant women with childhood adversity: A pilot study of the benevolent childhood experiences (BCEs) scale. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 78, 19-30. doi: 10.1016/j.chiabu.2017.09.022

Section 10: BCE Scoring Reflection

BCE Scoring

Each “Yes” = 1
Total range: 0–10

0–3

Less consistent support
→ **fewer experiences of safety or connection**

4–6

Mixed experiences
→ **both support and stress present**

7–10

More consistent support
→ **stronger access to safety, connection, and regulation**

BCE Context

Your BCE score is not:

- **A measure of “good childhood”**
- **A comparison**
- **Proof that adversity did not matter**
- **A reason to minimize pain**
- **Your identity**

It reflects access to support.

Support matters.

Even small moments matter.

Reflection

What came up when you looked at your BCE score?

Did it feel comforting, complicated, sad, validating, or confusing?

What support did you have?

What support did you need more of?

What moments of care still matter to you?

Rootwork Question

What held you, even if it did not hold everything?

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Section 11: ACEs + BCEs Rootwork Integration

Psychoeducation

Your system was shaped by both:

ACEs: adversity, adaptation, survival

BCEs: support, connection, protection

Both matter.

Your nervous system was shaped not only by what was hard, but also by what helped.

This is the integration.

- You may have learned survival patterns from adversity.
- You may have also learned hope, connection, or resilience from moments of care.
- You may carry stress sensitivity and deep empathy.
- You may carry hypervigilance and a strong desire to protect others.
- You may carry shutdown and the ability to notice when something feels unsafe.
- You may carry pain and strength.

Not because pain was good.

But because your system adapted with whatever it had.

The rootwork is not to romanticize what hurt you.

The rootwork is to understand how your system adapted and what support it still needs now.

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ACEs & BCEs

UNDERSTANDING YOUR NERVOUS SYSTEM



ACEs (Adversity)

What your system adapted to

Impact May Include:

- heightened stress response
- emotional sensitivity
- survival patterns

Score Meaning:

0~1 Lower exposure
2~3 Some exposure

4 + Higher adaptation required

"The odds were stacked."



BCEs (Support)

What helped you cope

Impact May Include:

- resilience
- regulation
- internal safety

Score Meaning:

0~3 Less consistent support
4~6 Mixed experiences

7~10 Stronger support

"Even small moments matter."

ACEs & BCEs



Your nervous system was shaped by **both**:

Not just what was hard—but also what helped.

There are reasons for how you respond.
Understanding creates choice.

Reflection

What adversity shaped your system?

What support shaped your system?

What survival patterns came from adversity?

What strengths or capacities came from support?

Where do both exist at the same time?

Action Tool: Both Matter Map

What was hard:

How I adapted:

What helped:

How that support still lives in me:

What I need now to create more safety:

Section 12: Important Truth — Context Is Not Blame

Psychoeducation

This is not about blaming everyone.

And it is also not about minimizing your experience.

Both can exist.

Someone may have done their best.

- And it still may not have been what you needed.

Someone may have loved you.

- And still not known how to support your nervous system.

Someone may have been overwhelmed themselves.

- And you still may have been impacted.

Someone may not have meant harm.

- And your body may still have learned protection.

Context does not require denial.

Compassion does not require self-abandonment.

You are allowed to hold truth without turning it into shame.

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Reflection

Where do you minimize your experience because “they did their best”?

Where do you feel pressure to excuse impact because you understand context?

What truth are you allowed to hold more honestly?

What would it mean to say, “It mattered,” without needing to prove blame?

Rootwork Question

What happened that your body still remembers, even if your mind has tried to minimize it?



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Section 13: The Nervous System Is Always Asking, “Am I Safe?”

Psychoeducation

Your body is always asking:

Am I safe?

If the answer feels like no, your body reacts.

Not because you are dramatic.

Because you are human.

The nervous system is built to protect.

If your system has experienced repeated stress, unpredictability, misunderstanding, emotional neglect, criticism, or lack of support, it may become quicker to detect danger.

This can look like:

- **Being easily startled**
- **Reading tone quickly**
- **Noticing mood shifts**
- **Feeling anxious when someone is quiet**
- **Needing control when things feel uncertain**
- **Getting overwhelmed in normal environments**
- **Shutting down when conflict begins**
- **Feeling like calm is suspicious**
- **Feeling exhausted after social interaction**

Your body may be trying to keep you safe using old information.

The work is not to shame the response.

The work is to update the system slowly with new experiences of safety.

Reflection

What cues make your body feel unsafe?

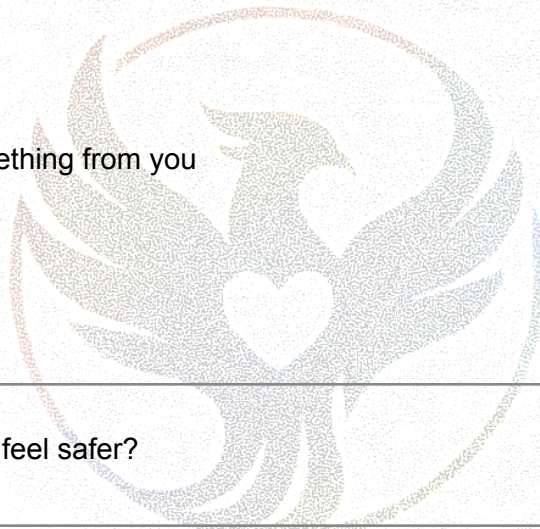
- Tone
- Silence
- Conflict
- Uncertainty
- Rejection
- Criticism
- Being ignored
- People being upset
- Sudden change
- Too much noise
- Too many demands
- Someone needing something from you
- Feeling trapped
- Feeling misunderstood

Other:

What cues help your body feel safer?

What does safety feel like in your body?

What does unsafety feel like?



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Action Tool: Safety Cue List

Create a list of cues that help your system feel safer.

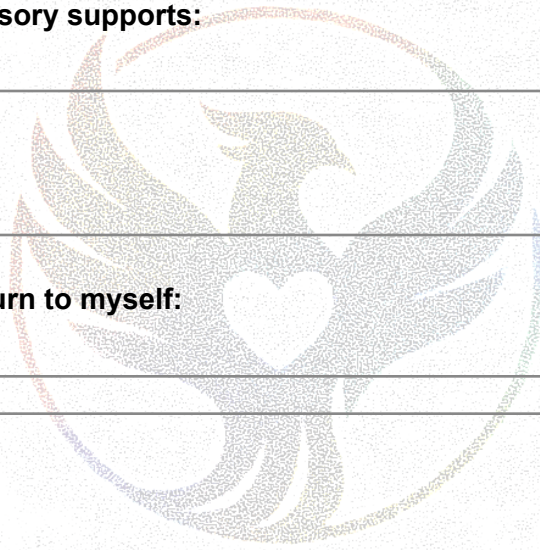
People who feel safe:

Places that feel safe:

Sounds, textures, or sensory supports:

Phrases that help me:

Actions that help me return to myself:



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Section 14: Adaptation — What Your Body Practiced

Psychoeducation

Your reactions were learned over time.

Your body practiced them until they became automatic.

You may have learned:

- To stay quiet
- To over-explain
- To avoid conflict
- To always be “on”
- To scan for mood shifts
- To say yes quickly
- To take care of others first
- To disconnect from your needs
- To handle everything yourself
- To become useful before asking for care

These patterns may have started as survival.

They may still show up automatically now.

This is why awareness matters.

You cannot shift what you do not yet recognize.

Awareness is not failure.

Awareness is the beginning of choice.

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Reflection

What did your body practice growing up?

Which responses became automatic?

Which response do you notice most now?

Where do you respond before you even realize you are activated?

Action Tool: Automatic Response Pause

When you notice an automatic response, try this:

Name it:

“I am noticing I want to _____.”

Normalize it:

“This makes sense because _____.”

Check current need:

“What do I need right now?”

Choose one small shift:

“Instead of reacting automatically, I can try _____.”

Section 15: Survival Responses in Real Life

Psychoeducation

Survival responses are not personality flaws.

They are ways the nervous system tries to protect you.

- **Fight** may look like:
Snapping, irritability, needing control, arguing, correcting, becoming sharp
- **Flight** may look like:
Staying busy, overworking, anxiety, leaving, avoiding stillness, constantly doing
- **Freeze** may look like:
Zoning out, shutting down, going blank, feeling stuck, losing words
- **Fawn** may look like:
People-pleasing, overgiving, avoiding conflict, saying yes when you mean no, trying to keep everyone calm

Real life examples:

- **Saying “it’s fine” when it is not**
- **Overcommitting and then feeling drained**
- **Avoiding a hard conversation for days**
- **Feeling like you disappear in stressful moments**
- **Snapping when you actually feel overwhelmed**
- **Cleaning or working instead of feeling**
- **Agreeing quickly so no one gets upset**

These are not flaws.

They are survival.

And survival deserves understanding.

Reflection

Which survival response do you notice most?

- Fight
- Flight
- Freeze
- Fawn
- A mix
- It depends on the situation

What does it look like in your real life?

What usually triggers it?

What does it protect you from?

What does it cost you now?

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Action Tool: Survival Response Decoder

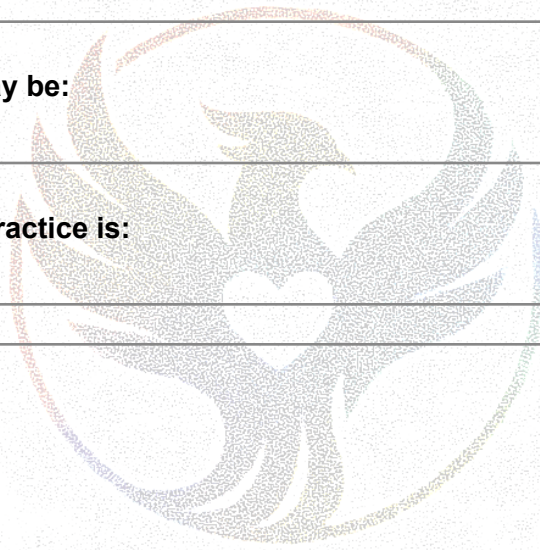
My response is:

It shows up as:

It may be protecting me from:

The need underneath may be:

A safer response I can practice is:



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Section 16: Neurodivergence — When the World Feels Louder

Psychoeducation

For some people, the world feels louder.

- More input.
- More emotion.
- More stimulation.
- More details to track.
- More sensory information.
- More emotional meaning.
- More recovery needed afterward.

For neurodivergent people, things may not just pass through.

They may stay.

- **A comment stays.**
- **A sound stays.**
- **A conflict stays.**
- **A facial expression stays.**
- **A mistake stays.**
- **A shift in tone stays.**
- **A crowded room stays in the body long after leaving.**

This can mean your system reaches overwhelm faster.

Not because you are failing.

Because your system may be processing a lot.

When trauma and neurodivergence intersect, the nervous system may already be scanning for safety while also processing more input.

That is a lot to hold.

Reflection

Where does the world feel loud for you?

- Sound
- Lights
- Emotions
- Expectations
- Conflict
- Social situations
- Transitions
- Tasks
- Touch
- Uncertainty
- Relationships
- Internal thoughts

Other:

What kind of input stays with you longer than others realize?

What recovery time do you need but often deny yourself?

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Action Tool: Input + Recovery Map

Input that overwhelms me:

How I know I am reaching capacity:

What helps reduce input:

What helps me recover:

What I can communicate to others:

Example:

“I need quiet time after social events, not because I did not enjoy myself, but because my system needs recovery.”

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Section 17: Misunderstood Reactions

Psychoeducation

You may have been told:

- “You’re too much.”
- “You’re overreacting.”
- “You need to calm down.”
- “You’re being dramatic.”
- “You’re too sensitive.”

But what may not have been seen was:

- How hard you were trying
- How much you were holding
- How alone you felt in it
- How quickly your system was overwhelmed
- How much sensory or emotional input you were processing
- How old the reaction may have been
- How deeply your body was trying to protect you

**Being misunderstood can become its own wound.
Especially when you begin misunderstanding yourself too.**

You may start believing:

- “Maybe I am too much.”

But what if the real story is:

- “I had too much happening inside with too little support around me.”

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Reflection

What reactions of yours have been misunderstood?

What did people call those reactions?

What was actually happening underneath?

What did you need in those moments?

What do you wish someone had understood?

Action Tool: What Wasn't Seen

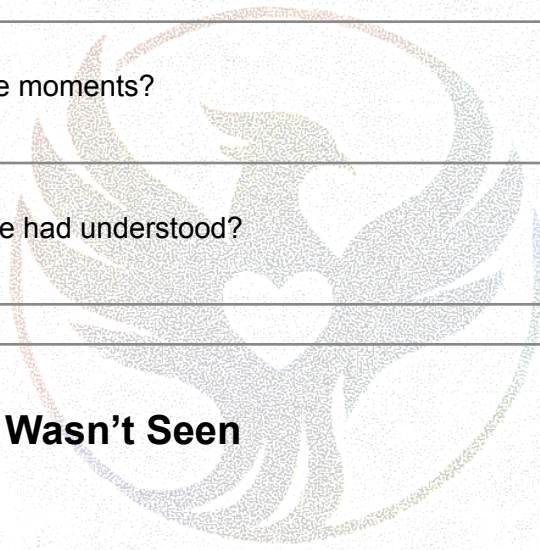
People saw:

They did not see:

They called it:

It may have actually been:

What I needed was:



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Section 18: Relationships and Old Safety Patterns

Psychoeducation

Early adversity, nervous system adaptation, and neurodivergence often show up in relationships.

This can look like:

- **Wanting closeness but pulling away**
- **Overgiving and feeling resentful**
- **Feeling anxious when someone's tone changes**
- **Thinking you did something wrong even when you did not**
- **Trying to be the "easy one" so people do not leave**
- **Apologizing quickly to reduce tension**
- **Shutting down during conflict**
- **Needing reassurance after small changes**
- **Feeling responsible for how others feel**
- **Reading silence as rejection**
- **Avoiding needs because needs once felt unsafe**

These patterns are not random.

**They are ways your nervous system tries to protect connection.
The pattern may have been learned in earlier environments.**

But it may still affect current relationships.

This is where understanding and accountability meet.

**The pattern makes sense.
And it still has impact.**

Reflection

Which relationship patterns feel familiar?

- Overgiving
- Pulling away
- People-pleasing
- Conflict avoidance
- Reassurance-seeking
- Over-explaining
- Shutting down
- Feeling responsible for others
- Fearing abandonment
- Trying to be easy
- Resentment after saying yes

Other:

What does this pattern protect you from?

What does it cost you in relationships now?

What would a safer relationship pattern look like?

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Action Tool: Relationship Pattern Translation

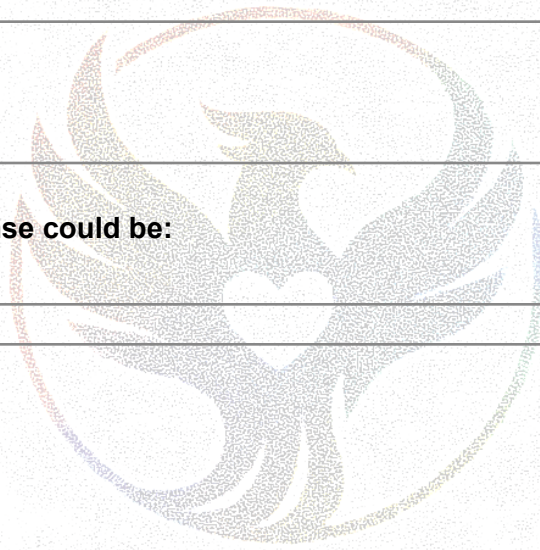
The pattern is:

It protects me from:

It may communicate the need for:

Its impact is:

One more honest response could be:



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Section 19: Triggers — When the Present Feels Bigger Than the Moment

Psychoeducation

A trigger is not always a dramatic moment.

A trigger can look like:

- A text not being answered
- Someone sounding different
- A small conflict
- A facial expression changing
- Someone seeming disappointed
- A plan changing
- Being corrected
- Feeling ignored
- A quiet room after tension
- Someone saying “we need to talk”

Part of you may know:

“This is small.”

But your body feels something bigger.

That is memory.

- Not always a clear memory.
- Sometimes a body memory.

Your nervous system is responding to what the present moment reminds it of.

This does not mean every reaction is accurate.

It means every reaction is information.

Reflection

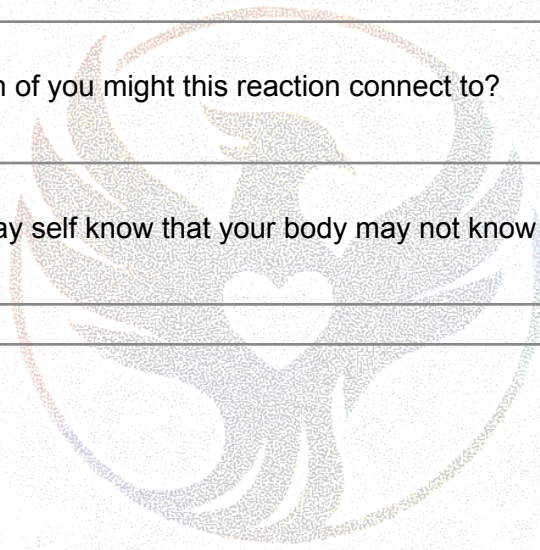
What are common triggers for you?

What does your body do when triggered?

What story does your nervous system tell you?

What age or earlier version of you might this reaction connect to?

What does your present-day self know that your body may not know yet?



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Action Tool: Trigger Translation

What happened in the present:

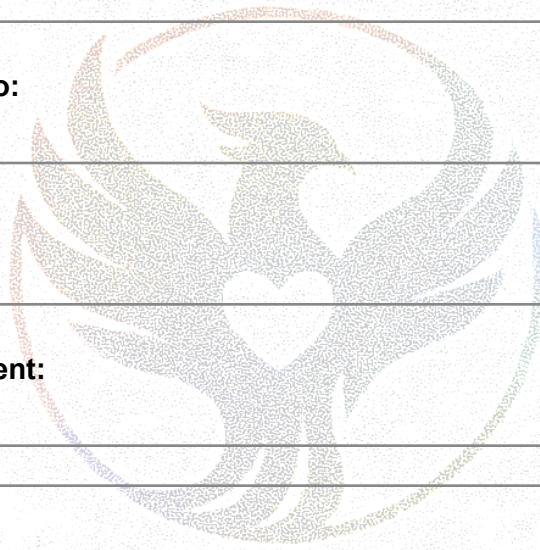
What my body felt:

What story came up:

What this may connect to:

What is true right now:

What I need in this moment:



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Section 20: Shift the Question

Psychoeducation

Instead of asking:

“What is wrong with me?”

Try asking:

- **“What did I go through that made this make sense?”**

That question changes everything.

- **It does not excuse every behavior.**
- **It does not remove accountability.**
- **It does not mean every reaction is helpful.**

But it replaces shame with context.

And context creates choice.

When you understand the reason underneath a pattern, you can begin to respond differently.

Not by force.

- By awareness.

Not by shame.

- By support.

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Reflection

What is one behavior you usually judge?

What did you go through that might make this behavior make sense?

What context have you been leaving out when you judge yourself?

What would change if you asked this question with compassion?

Action Tool: Question Shift

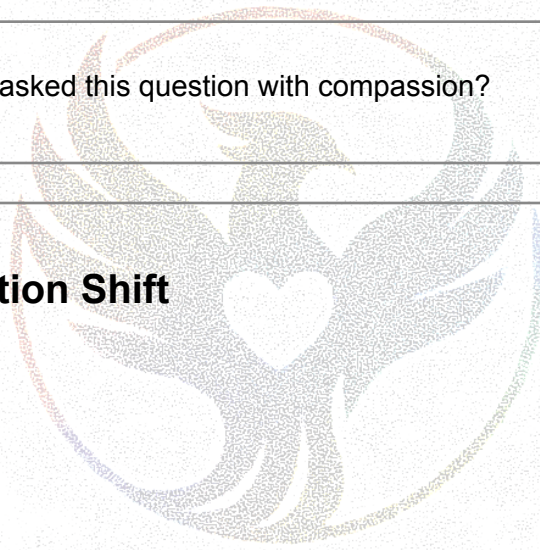
Old question:

“What is wrong with me?”

New question:

“What did I go through that made this make sense?”

Now answer gently:



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Section 21: Awareness Is Not Failure

Psychoeducation

You might start noticing:

- “I shut down right there.”
- “I got overwhelmed fast.”
- “I started people-pleasing again.”
- “I read that tone as danger.”
- “I said yes when I meant no.”
- “I tried to control the situation because uncertainty felt unsafe.”

That is not failure.

That is awareness.

At first, awareness may feel uncomfortable because you are noticing the pattern before you can fully change it.

That can feel frustrating.

But noticing is part of change.

You cannot shift what your nervous system has been doing automatically until you begin seeing it more clearly.

Awareness is not the final step.

But it is a powerful beginning.

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Reflection

What are you beginning to notice?

What pattern are you seeing more clearly?

What feelings come up when you notice it?

Do you judge yourself for noticing?

What would it sound like to respond with understanding instead?

Action Tool: Awareness Statement

Use this when you notice a pattern.

“I am noticing _____.”

“This makes sense because _____.”

“The need underneath may be _____.”

“One small choice I have now is _____.”

Write your version:

Section 22: Permission to Understand Without Reliving

Psychoeducation

You do not have to relive everything to understand yourself.

- You can understand in layers.
- You can notice patterns.
- You can build safety now.
- You can learn what your body is communicating.
- You can work with current responses.
- You can seek support if deeper processing is needed.

Not every reflection has to become a deep dive.

Not every memory has to be opened.

Not every wound has to be processed today.

Containment matters.

Your nervous system deserves pacing.

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Reflection

What do you need permission not to explore today?

What feels supportive to understand without entering too deeply?

What helps you feel contained?

Who or what supports you if something feels heavy?

Action Tool: Containment Plan

If this brings something up, I can:

- Stop
- Drink water
- Step outside
- Name 3 things I see
- Press feet into the ground
- Text/call someone safe
- Journal one sentence
- Put the guide away
- Return later
- Seek professional support

Other:

Section 23: Integration — What to Keep, What to Shift

Psychoeducation

Everything your body learned helped you survive.

And now, you get to begin asking:

- **What do I want to keep?**
- **What am I ready to shift?**

Some adaptations may still serve you.

- Your sensitivity may help you notice what others miss.
- Your awareness may help you protect yourself.
- Your deep care may help you connect.
- Your ability to read a room may have wisdom in it.

But some adaptations may be exhausting now.

- Overgiving.
- Over-alertness.
- Shutdown.
- People-pleasing.
- Self-abandonment.
- Constant scanning.
- Living as if danger is always about to happen.

The goal is not to reject every survival response.

The goal is to create more choice.

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Reflection

What adaptation still carries wisdom?

What adaptation feels exhausting now?

What do you want to keep?

What are you ready to soften or shift?

What new experience of safety do you want to build?

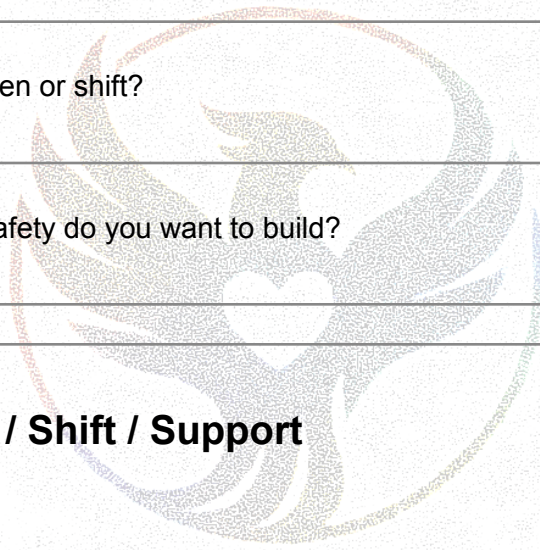
Action Tool: Keep / Shift / Support

I want to keep:

I am ready to shift:

The support I need is:

One small practice I can try is:



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Section 24: Creating New Experiences of Safety

Psychoeducation

Your nervous system adapted through repeated experiences.
It also learns through repeated experiences.

Not all at once.

In moments.

- **A moment of pausing instead of pushing.**
- **A moment of saying no and surviving the discomfort.**
- **A moment of asking for support.**
- **A moment of noticing your body sooner.**
- **A moment of resting before collapse.**
- **A moment of choosing a safer relationship.**
- **A moment of telling the truth gently.**
- **A moment of letting yourself need something.**

New safety is built in repetition.

Not perfection.

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Reflection

What is one new experience of safety you want to create?

Where can you practice this in a small way?

What might make it hard?

What support would help?

Action Tool: Safety Practice Plan

This week, I will practice:

When my body reacts, I will try:

When I feel overwhelmed, I will:

One support I can use:

One reminder I need:

Section 25: Closing Reflection

Reflection

What felt most important from this guide?

What do you understand differently about your reactions?

What pattern makes more sense now?

What need deserves more attention?

What support do you want to seek or build?

What do you want to carry with you?



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Final Grounding

Look around the room.

Name three things you can see.

Press your feet into the ground.

Take one slow exhale.

Say:

- **“There were always reasons.”**
- **“My body adapted to survive.”**
- **“I can understand myself without overwhelming myself.”**
- **“I can move forward without rushing.”**
- **“I can create safety in moments.”**

Final Reminder

You were never just “too much.”

You were responding to something that mattered.

There are reasons for how you respond.

Your nervous system adapted to survive.

And now—

you can begin to create new experiences of safety.

**Not all at once.
But in moments.**

— Phoenix Within REVAM Healing